

Money Hungry-Judas

HN/SS 13/11/05 am

Reading: Deuteronomy 14:22-15:11, II Corinthians 8

Study Text: John 12:4-8

Sing Psalms: 62:1-5, 62:6-10, 52:1-5, 52:6-9

Some time ago I sent a few dollars to a Christian aid organization, with the stipulation that part of the money be used to provide Bibles to the poor whom they were helping. I received a reply informing me that it was not the practice of this organization to provide Bibles or Christian literature. They only helped the poor with food, shelter, medicine and education. I wondered what was 'Christian' about this organisation. Many secular organisations were doing what they were doing. In many churches today people give freely to social welfare programmes but question every dollar sent to evangelists or preachers – if they give them anything at all! They follow in the footsteps of Judas rather than Mary.

Dazzled By Dollars

Out of thankfulness and devotion Mary poured a bottle of expensive perfume over Jesus as he reclined at the table in Bethany. The disciples were also at the table. Some of them were indignant when Mary did this and said '*why was this fragrant oil wasted. It might have been sold for more than 300 denarii and given to the poor*'. And they criticised her sharply (Mark 14:4-5). John identifies Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve disciples, as the one making this complaint.

In fact looking back, John noted this was the same man who would betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver (12:4). Judas was a man who kept a sharp eye on the money – he knew what everything was worth. He was like that cartoon character Uncle Scrooge, from the Donald Duck series, with dollar signs in both eyes. Judas knew the monetary value of this bottle of perfume that Mary poured on Jesus. It was not Mary who told how much it was worth but Judas! What is this worth? How much can I get for this? That was Judas.

The utilitarian attitude taken by Judas is a dangerous one to adopt. Have you seen it in people? Do you know people who find out the cost of every gift they receive? As they accept your bunch of flowers they are asking 'how much did this cost?' – generally to themselves or to their friends! And when they give a gift to you they make sure you know how much it cost. When you visit their beautiful house they will be sure to let slip the value of their real estate and the value of every piece of furniture in the place. They may even let you know how much they spent on the meal you are about to eat. Are you guilty of such an attitude? Do you reduce everything to its dollar value?

The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness and pierced themselves with many sorrows (I Timothy 6:10). Judas was incensed at what he saw as waste of valuable perfume. It was worth over 300 denarii – a whole year's wages. How he would have loved to have that sort of money in his hands. Love for money, this insidious root, grew very quickly in the heart of Judas.

Within days he was after money again. This time it was Jesus who was viewed with eager dollar – dazzled eyes. Judas went to the chief priests asking them what they would give him if he delivered Jesus to them (Matthew 26:15). He sold Jesus for thirty pieces of silver – equivalent to about 120 denarii. Even his own Rabbi had a price! It was not for any noble reason that Judas betrayed Jesus, as is often suggested. For him it was just that everything had a price, as we see in this incident.

Does serving the Lord seem a waste of time and money to you? With their eyes fixed upon money, many find it expedient to work rather than worship on the Lord's Day. And they have better use for their hard earned dollar than to give it to the spread of the gospel. Why this waste they say. I have much better things to do with my time and money than worship Jesus.

Judas started down this path, this path of loving money, and where did it end? He sold his Lord. Full of remorse but without repentance, he tried to return the thirty pieces of silver. Desperate to get rid of that blood money he threw it in the temple and went out and hanged himself (Matthew 27:5). Destruction is the end for all who follow in the footsteps of Judas.

Help the Poor

But Judas wanted to help the poor you say. Was not that an honourable thing to do? He said *why was this fragrant perfume not sold ... and given to the poor* (12:5). Well that is what he said and Jesus took him at his word (although he knew otherwise). Jews were supposed to give freely to the poor – *there should be no poor among you* said Moses (Deuteronomy 15:4, 11). Many poor people could have been fed or clothed with the proceeds of selling this perfume. Was it not more important to help the poor than engage in such extravagant worship of Jesus?

'If self-righteous piety sometimes snuffs out genuine compassion, it must be admitted, with shame, that social activism, even that which meets real needs, sometimes masks a spirit that knows nothing of worship and adoration' (D.A. Carson). No one could ever say Jesus did not show compassion for the poor. He helped beggars and widows more than anyone. But notice his concern was not for their physical well being alone. He called upon those he helped, as he did upon everyone else, to repent of their sin and believe in him. He ministered to the whole person, physical and spiritual.

Jesus sent his disciples out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick (Luke 9:2). He sent out seventy others two by two saying 'heal the sick and say the kingdom of God has come near you' (Luke 10:9). He sent his disciples, he sent seventy others, and he sends his followers out today to do the same thing, the same thing that he himself did (Matthew 9:35).

One day I was talking to a social worker in India. He did not like the fact that I was giving out tracts and Bibles as I helped poor villages people get clean water and establish vegetable gardens. I said to him I was not here to make poor sinners into rich sinners. I wanted poor sinners to become saved sinners.

At the table in Bethany was Lazarus, the man whom Jesus had raised from the dead and restored to his grieving sisters. Jesus was full of compassion for people suffering in this fallen world. He saved many from their physical ailments but he was about to bring full and eternal salvation for all mankind. He was contemplating the Cross and his own burial in just a few days time. Mary's anointing was most appropriate at this time.

Let her alone said Jesus in reply to Judas' complaint. *The poor you have with you always, but me you do not have always* (12:8). Jesus' claim to priority would have been arrogant coming from any other man – but Jesus Christ is not just any man. He is the only begotten Son of God whom the Father sent into this world to give life to all who believe in him.

Jesus was establishing priorities. The needs of the poor are important and God has commanded his people to help the poor. But something greater, something much more important for the world was happening in Jesus Christ. Jesus, the Lamb of God was about to lay down his life to take away the sin of the world. At last sin and all the horrible consequences of sin, including poverty, sickness and death, were about to be conquered once and for all. Was it not appropriate for Mary to worship Jesus as she did, with all she had? Judas knew nothing of this great salvation. He cared only for money.

Help Self

This concern for the poor was all one big lie. John informs us that Judas kept the money bag for Jesus and his disciples, and that he was not averse to helping himself from the kitty (12:6). Judas was keen to help the poor because they were making him rich! And sadly there are those in business and welfare today who have also discovered that helping the poor pays, and pays well.

The truth is that those motivated by a love for Christ are far more effective in helping the poor than those with other motivations. 'A cold heart and a stingy hand will generally go together' (Ryle). Beware of those who give with one hand and take with the other. Beware of those who give expecting something in return – even if that something is a big tick for good works in the book in heaven.

Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. This is what Mary did. This is what believers in the church of Macedonia did. Paul writes *they first gave themselves to the Lord and then to us by the will of God* (II Corinthians 8:5). Paul goes on to remind us – *for you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich yet for your sakes he became poor, that you though his poverty might become rich* (II Corinthians 8:9). Give yourself to the Lord, and all you have, that he might take you and all you have and use you for his eternal glory.

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