



If God does not have your money, he most certainly does not have your heart. Here are some examples.

From 1991-1996, Christine Culver embezzled \$225,000 from her employer in a Portland suburb. She was sentenced to 18 months in prison and ordered to re-pay the money. In 2003 she was hired by Metropolitan Community Church in Northeast Portland and over the next 12 years she helped herself to \$75,000 from the church offerings.¹ I guess no one did a basic background check on her, did they?

Worse still, Pastor Willard Leonard Jones stole \$933,000 from a community center he started to help disadvantaged people in his neighborhood.² Apparently, he felt he was disadvantaged himself because he couldn't afford a Rolex watch on his pastor's salary, so he bought one for himself.

The Status of Global Mission 2013 estimates that out of the \$594 billion given to churches worldwide, \$37 billion will be embezzled by greedy people in the church.³ Saddest of all is the fact that the total amount of money given to global missions annually is \$32 billion, which means that more money is stolen from local churches than given to world missions.⁴ That's really disgusting and so sad.

Do you know what the first ever mission's fund was? It was the bag of money that the disciple carried with them. Paul was not the first missionary. The disciples were. Paul was the first missionary on a large scale, preaching the gospel and planting churches wherever he went. But the disciples were actually the first missionaries ministering alongside Jesus and sent out by Jesus to other towns. The bag of money that they carried with them was donated by wealthier followers of Jesus who wanted to support his ministry.⁵ This is the bag of money from which Judas stole. In other words, Judas stole from the offering plate.

Judas stole because money had his heart, not Jesus. Money was surely not Judas' only issue but money was the clearest symptom of the condition of his heart. You see, if God has your money, there's a good chance he has your heart as well. If God does not have your money, he most certainly does not have your heart. In John 12, Jesus does not say the famous line, "You cannot serve God and money." But money and possessions are clear examples of the heart and soul of two people. I've already spoken of Judas so let's read the passage and see the anti-Judas, whose name was Mary.

1 Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. 2 So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table. 3 Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. 4 But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, 5 "Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" 6 He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it. 7 Jesus said, "Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. 8 For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me." 9 When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was there, they came, not only on account of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. 10 So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, 11 because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.

So here we have an amazing contrast between an embezzler of money—Judas—and a giver and a worshipper—Mary. Both Judas and Mary spent lots of time with Jesus but one gave to Jesus and one took from him. one was filled with gratitude and one was filled with greed. One believed in Jesus and the other clearly did not.

This is a fascinating look into the life of Judas since we know very little about him otherwise. We know he was one of the twelve apostles. We know that he betrayed Jesus to the Sanhedrin for thirty pieces of silver. And this passage tells us that he stole from the disciple's money bag. Beyond that we know very little about Judas. Unlike some of the disciples about whom we know quite a bit, there is little information about Judas. But what we do know is that in every major role he did play, a love of riches was at the heart of who he was.

This scene is almost the perfect set up for Judas' greed because it is such a sharp contrast to Mary's gratitude. The event took place six days before the Passover. That means that it took place six days before Jesus' arrest. Remember from our timetable that Lazarus' resurrection was one to four months before the events in chapter twelve.

John 1	AD 26	
John 2	April, 27 AD	Jesus' baptism
John 7/8	October, 29 AD	
John 10	December, 29 AD	"it was winter"
John 11	Jan-April? 30 AD	Lazarus' resurrection
John 12	April, 30 AD	anointing/ triumphal entry
John 13-22	April/May, 30 AD	crucifixion

So when John wrote, *Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead*, know that Lazarus' resurrection had literally just happened. It was burned into the memory and emotions of everyone—especially for those who witnessed it. Jesus was back in the same town with the same family and the same man he had miraculously raised from the dead. So whatever happened next was going to be set within that glorious context. It was a set up for something amazing to happen.

Lazarus and his family prepared a dinner in honor of Jesus. That in itself was just a small way to thank Jesus for what they had done for them. Interestingly, we see Martha and Mary filling the same roles they did before. Martha is serving and Mary is occupied with Jesus.

Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:38-42).

Here in John 12 Martha was again busy serving. We have a friend named Martha from our former church. She was a missionary kid and people used to tease her all the time by saying with a disappointed tone, "Martha, Martha." Poor Martha—the sister of Mary I mean. She gets picked on a lot. But Jesus himself said that Mary had "chosen the good portion." But not here. We are just told that she was doing the serving but she is not rebuked for it. Of course Jesus did not rebuke her for serving but rather for her attitude about serving. She was playing the martyr and held a big pity party for herself. It just reminds us that attitude and motive is everything in the Christian life. I have said before that I don't think we ever do anything with a 100% pure motive, or if that is even possible. But if you do the right thing for the wrong reason—like Martha did in Luke 10—there's no reward in that.

So Mary took a pound of pure nard and anointed Jesus' feet. This was no ordinary gift. Mark and John both tell us that the value of the perfume at 300 denarii. Matthew records that it represented "a large sum."

John—But **Judas Iscariot**, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?"

Mark 14—There were **some** who said to themselves indignantly, “Why was the ointment wasted like that? For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor.”

Matt 26—And when **the disciples** saw it, they were indignant, saying, “Why this waste? For this could have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor.”

It is interesting that Mark and Matthew put the complaints into the mouths of the disciples or at least some of the disciples. But John only mentions Judas. So which gospel writer is correct? The simple answer is all of them are correct. The answer is that some of the disciples complained and John chose to highlight only Judas.

By the way, this is how you reconcile any of the stories in the gospels where the details are not exactly the same. Skeptics and scoffers look at these differences and say, “See, the Bible can’t even agree with itself, so why should we trust what it says?!” In reality, these small differences actually highlight the trustworthiness of the Bible. Think about it like witnesses at a traffic accident. If the police interview five people they will get five slightly different stories. Each witness may have seen slightly different viewpoints of the accident and therefore tell a different story. The other small difference is that Matthew and Mark say that the perfume was poured on Jesus’ head and John says it was his feet. The answer is that it was both. John chose to highlight the feet of Jesus and perhaps especially the wiping of his feet with Mary’s hair.

I guarantee you that everyone who recorded this knew for a fact who complained about the cost of the ointment but they all had different reasons for telling us who said it. For Matthew it was sufficient that the disciples said it. For Mark it was enough to say that some people said it, and assumed we would fill in the blanks that it was the disciples. But John had a very specific purpose in mind. He wanted us to know not only that Judas was among the disciples that complained but he especially wanted us to know that Judas was a thief.

By giving us three slightly different stories of the same event, it shows that these were reliable eyewitnesses of the same event. Think about a detective who was interviewing suspects for a bank robbery. If the stories of these two men matched almost word for word, what would the detective conclude about their stories? The detective would assume that these two suspects had colluded on their story. No two people tell stories that are almost word for word, especially when you are trying to avoid a prison cell. So the fact that these stories as told by the three gospel writers are not just carbon copies of one another is evidence for the reliability of the Scriptures, not against the Scriptures.

An important point for all three authors was the value of the perfume—300 denarii. As you may know, a denarius was the wage for a day laborer so 300 denarii is roughly equivalent to a year’s worth of wages. To translate that to Wisconsin in 2016, the value of the perfume would be about \$40,000. Incidentally, there is a brand of Chanel perfume that sells for \$4200 per ounce which would make Mary’s eleven-ounce container almost exactly the same cost as the Chanel perfume.⁶

Why so much? Why so costly? Mary obviously could afford such an expensive gift. She didn't put it in her credit card and it may not have been her last 2 copper coins, like the poor widow. But why so extravagant? For part of that answer we turn to King David.

And Araunah said, "Why has my lord the king come to his servant?" David said, "To buy the threshing floor from you, in order to build an altar to the LORD, that the plague may be averted from the people." Then Araunah said to David, "Let my lord the king take and offer up what seems good to him. Here are the oxen for the burnt offering and the threshing sledges and the yokes of the oxen for the wood. All this, O king, Araunah gives to the king." And Araunah said to the king, "May the LORD your God accept you." But the king said to Araunah, "No, but I will buy it from you for a price. I will not offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God that cost me nothing." (2 Samuel 24:21-24)

There's part of our answer. "I will not offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God that cost me nothing." David was king and could certainly afford any price and as king he could have taken the land as eminent domain of ancient kings. But he wanted it to cost him. He wanted his worship to mean something, to be an actual sacrifice, not of his pocketbook, but of his heart. He wanted his heart to be fully wrapped up in worship of his Lord.

And so it was with Mary. Her brother was dead but was now was sitting with the rest of the family along with the honored dinner guest. She could not, not worship Jesus in this stunning fashion. I like to think about how she planned this display of gratitude. How long has she been planning it? Did she already have this much expensive perfume lying around or did she go to the market and purchase it? Did she have to sell any of her other possessions to afford this costly gift? Was she planning to let down her hair and wipe Jesus feet or was that just a spontaneous act of devotion and love?

Her worship was borderline reckless. And that's exactly what bothered Judas and the other disciples. They thought it was excessive and unnecessary. Mary's worship was grandiose and lavish—almost to the point of absurdity. But that was just a small reflection of her Savior. Jesus' love is reckless. It gives when there is no payment in return. Mary's worship was bathed in gratitude and humility for Jesus' love. A woman who let down her hair in public was considered to be a woman of ill repute, but that did not worry Mary in the slightest. She did not just *want* to worship Jesus with this gift, she *had* to do it. Her soul compelled her to do so.

And in so doing, she gave a sort of prophecy about Jesus' death. In response to Judas, *Jesus said, "Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial."*⁷ You wonder what Mary and the others thought about Jesus' words. They had no idea that Jesus' death was only a mere seven days from that moment. Who was the one person in that room who would have understood Jesus' statement about his burial? Judas. Judas knew. Immediately after this scene, Mark tells us something that John does not.

Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. And when they heard it, they were glad and promised to give him money. And he sought an opportunity to betray him. (Mark 14:10-11)

Money. There it is again. He dipped his hand into the disciples' money bag as often as he liked, but it was not enough. He needed more of it. So he devised a wicked plan with men just as wicked as himself. Thirty pieces of silver for the Savior of the world. Filthy lucre traded for the sovereign Lord. The thirty pieces of silver were probably 30 denarii. So that means that Judas betrayed Jesus for a sum that was only worth 10% of what Mary had just spent in worship. He got 30 denarii for betraying Jesus and Mary spent 300 denarii worshipping Jesus. His love of money revealed the condition of his heart.

The parable of the sower highlights the immense danger of riches.

As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful (Matthew 13:22).

The deceitfulness of riches. That's what captured the heart of Judas. Here's the thing about this third soil, where the seed was sown among thorns. People debate whether or not this soil represents an unbeliever or a very immature believer. Everyone agrees that the first two soils represent unbelievers. The birds eat the seed and the sun scorches the new plant. Neither of these soils are fruitful. But the third soil receives the word with gladness and sprouts but then is choked out by worries and riches, so it too is unfruitful. So is this person an unbeliever or an unfruitful, immature believer?

In John 15, Jesus said that any branch that does not bear fruit is broken off and thrown into the fire, which represents the fires of hell. So in John 15, a lack of fruit is evidence of a lack of saving faith. That is very clear. So I am inclined to believe that the thorny soil which does not produce fruit represents an unbeliever, though I am not dogmatic about my position. But here's my point—the deceitfulness of riches chokes out your spiritual life.

If God does not have your money, he most certainly does not have your heart. I'm not saying that money determines your salvation, but it does betray the condition of your heart. In other words, if you have not turned your money and possessions over to the Lord, it does not mean that you are an unbeliever, but it might. Unbelievers don't turn their money and possessions over to the Lord. But on the other hand, just because you give money to the church missions or some charity does not mean that you have given your money and possessions to the Lord. There are lots of reasons to give and not all of them are spiritual reasons. So it's possible to give lots of money but money and not Jesus, still possesses you. It's possible to give money and the Lord still does not have your heart but if God does not have your money—if giving and generosity are nearly non-existent—then you have a heart issue.

Money is not a financial issue. It's a worship issue. If God does not have your money, he most certainly does not have your heart. The love of money and the deceitfulness of riches comes in all shapes and sizes. I started by telling you the worst stories of church embezzlement. Of course those are wrong and no one in this room is guilty of such. That's stealing from the disciples' money bag. But stealing from the money bag starts with coveting—wanting something that you don't have. But back it up further and coveting begins with a lack of contentment and an absence of gratitude. All of these things are the spirit of Judas. A lack of generosity is a very serious spiritual issue.

Being generous with your money is also a spiritual issue, a form of true worship. David gave only what it cost him personally. Mary spent a year's wages to honor the Lord with her worship. She gave in order to magnify the Lord. She gave out of gratitude for her brother being raised from the dead.

But did you realize that that is also the source of our gratitude? Lazarus was raised from physical death but believers have been raised from spiritual death, which is an infinitely greater resurrection. Lazarus died again but spiritually, we will never die. Jesus said, "Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die." This is why we give. This is why we are to be generous. This is why we worship with our money and our possessions and our entire lives.

Some might think that this message is just the annual obligatory sermon on giving. All pastors do it because all churches need money, right? If anything, many people think I don't preach about money often enough. Listen, I don't need your money. God has not let me down yet and he is not about to start.

The church does not need your money. When I moved here in 2001, our annual budget was one-third the amount of our proposed 2017 budget. We survived then and God took care of us. So Grace Church does not need your money.

God does not need your money. He owns the cattle on a thousand hills. Everything you own is already his. He doesn't need your nickels or your thousand dollar checks. He doesn't need your money, but he wants your heart. Money is a worship issue, a matter of the heart. If God does not have your money, he most certainly does not have your heart. So is your heart more like that of Judas or of Mary? Do you covet, complain, lack contentment and generosity? Or does your heart overflow with gratitude for your new life and for the giver of life?

In Matthew's version, Jesus told us about Mary's legacy. "Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her." May we be like Mary.

Rich Maurer
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¹ <http://koin.com/2016/06/30/canby-woman-accused-of-embezzling-70k-from-church/>

² <https://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/financial-fraud>

³ <http://www.gordonconwell.edu/resources/documents/statusofglobalmission.pdf>

⁴ <http://www.forbes.com/sites/walterpavlo/2013/11/18/fraud-thriving-in-u-s-churches-but-you-wouldnt-know-it/#5ef78ce6feaf>

⁵ Q. Where did money come from?

Luke 8.1-3—And the twelve were with him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means.

⁶ <http://www.theRichest.com/luxury/most-expensive/worlds-10-most-expensive-perfumes/>

⁷ Compare Mary's 'prophecy' to the foolish 'prophecy' of Caiaphas. *Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.* (John 12:50) Both Mary and Caiaphas spoke or did more than they even imagined. But one was spoken out of love and gratitude and the other out of envy and malice.