

**A Sermon for Dayspring Baptist Church**  
**By Chris Fillingham**  
**“Wasting On Jesus”**  
**“Echoes of the Generations” series.**  
**Matthew 26:6-13**  
**October 25, 2015**

This month we’ve been talking about the echoes of the generations, echoes of laughter and faith, echoes of hope... and as we’re looking to replace the crumbling Delmar House, you’ve probably heard of the talk of the gift of past generations through our endowment.

It’s the past generations that paid for the building we’re in now, and the past generations that are making the largest pledge to our addition. And this week, I found myself inspired again by those past generations.

***We received a final gift from the Paul Write estate... another \$25,000.*** Again, I was just so moved by someone who would give their greatest gift with their last breath, simply by tithing their estate, not giving it all, but just tithing... giving 10% of their estate to a church that has meant so much to them along the way.

It’s a beautiful thing.

Of course, some people would say, that was just his generation. People now are not that generous.... the Millennials, Gen Y, Generation X, Baby boomers... people now days are just more selfish. I don’t know, maybe that’s true in some places, but here’s what I’m convinced of: ***It’s not true of those generations mingling about in this place.*** I’ve been your pastor now for 4.5 years and I have watched you time and time again be incredibly generous.

You might remember that in 2012, we decided to make some hard decisions to balance our budget. To do that required sacrifice on all our parts. As the staff took pay cuts, you all were challenged to increase your giving to get us in the black. And that’s exactly what you did. ***In fact, you did it so much so that we ended up 2013 with our first surplus in recent memory.***

We suddenly had a problem we weren’t used to: What should we do with the surpluses? The first idea I heard from you, was to give the staff a bonus equal to the 3% pay cut we received. The second idea I hear from you all was to give some of it away to support our missionaries. And so you decided to do both. That’s just your hearts! Those were all your ideas because you all are generous people.

At the same time we were stretching our giving, we decided to build a well in Malawi and so you talked to your friends, and you wrote checks, and you carried water up and down the frontage road, and you raised \$8,000 for a village in Malawi that needed clean water.

And you all keep doing it.  
You keep giving your money away.

Every month, you give hundreds of dollars to special offerings like, MO Energy Care, providing heating for the poor in the winter. Like CAC, helping the kids in East St. Louis get pulled out of poverty and know the love of Christ. You give your money away to places like the Covering House, in order to provide healing and wholeness to victims of human trafficking. And you give to the Circle of Concern, feeding the hungry in our community and helping them have the tools to get back on their feet... And the list just goes on.

I wish I could share with you all the private stories of individuals in our church that found themselves in a moment of need and this church rising up to meet that need.

There are so many examples of your generosity... like each spring when we ask you to put together a goofy act, bake a dessert, and come to the Variety Show... and I watch you all pay 2, 3, 4 times what that same dessert would cost at an upscale bakery... and sometimes it's the dessert your spouse made in your kitchen!

***That's just what you do. You always give!*** And so I hear about these greedy generations in America now, but apparently they don't go to church here, because I've gotten to know you, and you all are generous people.

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Of course, part of that is simply the ethos of this church that has been shaped here by the generations before us. But even more than that... ***I believe, it's the ethos shaped in you by the gospel.***

Because at the very heart of our faith, at the center of our story, the story that shapes our lives and our imaginations is the truth that Jesus taught and embodied: **"It is better to give than to receive."** That's what he said, and that's what he lived by giving his very life away. **"It is better to give than to receive."**

It is the truth at the very foundation of our faith.

I listened to a TED Talk earlier this week, where someone was interviewing Bill and Melinda Gates about the Gates Foundation and they were talking about their commitment to give away 95% of their wealth to making the world a better place.

Along with Warren Buffet, the Gates are challenging other billionaires to make a similar kind of commitment... to give at least half of it away. And the interviewer noted that there were likely billionaires in the audience, so he asked him, **"Why don't you go ahead and give us your pitch."**

Without missing a beat, Bill Gates said, **"It is the most fulfilling thing I have every done in my life."**

**"It is better to give than to receive."**

I think most of us know that... and truth be told, there are a lot of people that have discovered that too. Christians aren't the only generous people around. In the right moment, just about anybody can be generous.

It's why, as a society, we can raise millions of dollars over night to respond to a tragedy. The fact is, giving is kind of hip right now. It's in vogue. So preaching about the importance of generosity isn't all that risky.

The harder sermon for me to preach is not one about being a generous person, but one in which I tell **you I think you should be giving to Dayspring**. That's the risky sermon... and there's a lot of reasons for me to not preach it.

For one thing, Dayspring is a place that holds fragile and hurting people... people that have been hurt by churches over the years, people that are over-churched and people that have been under-churched. And suppose someone comes in for the first time and hears the preacher asking for money. It could be detrimental. And that gives me great pause.

The other obvious thing that I have simply have to name is that I'm a pastor, and of course I want you to give to Dayspring because the honest truth is I benefit from that. I've got to be honest about that. It's just how it works.

And yet, there are moments where I have to set those things aside... and simply say as humbly and as honestly as I can, **you do need to be giving to your church**.

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Earlier we heard this beautiful story from Matthew's Gospel and I really like the way my friend, Josh Carney frames that story. So, I'm adapting some of what he does for this sermon.

Imagine Jesus is hanging out in the apartment of an AIDS victim over in East St. Louis and a prostitute walks in. But let me back up a little bit and tell you about her.

About a month earlier, she read a story in the River Front Times about Jesus about how he'd supposedly healed this man up in North County whose hand had been withered for years.

A week later she heard that this Jesus guy was making his way down to the Arch grounds. So, she went to hear him and she got it. She could tell that he wasn't the crazy homeless man some were saying he was. No. There was something profound and unique about him. She was deeply moved by what he said and by his presence.

Now the thing about this prostitute was that she was more thrifty than most. For the last 10 years she's been scrimping and saving and has put away \$5,000. You see she has 4 kids, and she's pinned all her hopes on sending the oldest, DJ, to college.

DJ is in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade at Lincoln Middle School over there across the river, and his teachers say he has real potential. DJ's got it in his mind that he's going to grow up to be a doctor. And so, she's been saving, doing the best she can.

But then she get's word that Jesus is down the street from her... in an East St. Louis apartment, and she decides to do something crazy. She goes to her pimp, who she knows has connections with the black market on high value merchandise and asks him how much a bottle of Clive Christians #1 Pure Perfume would be.

He laughs at her and says, **"You're out of your league, sweetie. Those are \$2500 a pop."** And his jaw drops when she says **"I'll take two"**.

Then she walks down the street, and into this apartment where Jesus is and begins to pour both bottles on the head of Jesus. To be real honest, it was way too strong, but it was also better than that apartment had smelled in a long time.

The disciples on the couch across from Jesus start whispering to each other. **"Why this waste?! That could have been sold and given to the poor. That could have helped send DJ to college. I can't believe what she's doing. Why this waste?!"**

You all know the gospel.

You know what Jesus taught.

**Jesus taught us that this is a good question!**

In fact, it's just a few verses earlier in Matthew that Jesus was teaching the disciples and teaching us about the sheep and the goats. You remember that one. The sheep, the one's welcomed into the Kingdom of God, are the ones who feed the hungry, gave a drink to the thirsty, visited the prisoner, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, took care of the sick... and all those things take money.

That's what Jesus taught us to do. So, they see this woman pour this out and it's almost painful to watch. **"Why this waste?"**

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It reminds me of a story from 2 Samuel 23. David and his men are hiding out in a fortress. The Philistine army holds David's hometown, Bethlehem. And David longs for a drink from his hometown well.

If you've been gone from home a long time, you might know what that's like. You go to another country for months and your just crave a **good old fashion hamburger**. Or maybe you move away from St. Louis, and years go by and you haven't had a **piece of gooey butter cake** since... and everything in you longs for one really good bite because it tastes like home.

That's what David is thirsty for: Just one drink from Bethlehem's well. And so, unbeknownst to him, a few of his men sneak off in the middle of the night, break through the enemy lines, draw water out of the well and bring it to him as a gift.

He gets the water. And he says, **"I can't. The blood of my men have brought me this water and God forbid that I drink it myself."** So he pours the water out, onto

the ground. He pours it out as a sacrifice to God. You hear that story and you can't help but think, "**Ah! What a profound waste.**" It's almost offensive, isn't it?

But David thought a better use wasn't to drink the water himself. But to pour it out to God. ***Because for David and for the women in Matthew, there is direct connection between the gift and the worship of God.***

But to the onlookers, to the disciples, to the rest of us, you can't help but think, "**It's such a waste!**"

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Experts in philanthropy know that people are willing to give most generously when they can give to something specific they really care about. There was a period where this idea caught on with churches. Rather than inviting people to give generously to the over-all ministry of the church, everything the church did was laid out on pledge cards.

If you cared about Children's ministry, you'd pick up the card to pay for Manna. If the thing you cared about the most was music, you could pick up the card to pay for the choir.

And it seemed like a good idea, but churches don't do that as much any more because the reality is it's **theologically problematic, and in practice full of holes.**

Just think about it. No one wants to be the guy that pays for the toilet paper and the pastor's dental insurance, right?

Just imagine that conversation in Sunday School.

**"So, what did you give this year?"**

**"I'm giving the toilet paper!"**

**"Oh that's awesome!"**

No, we'd much rather be able to say, **"I'm giving to rescue a girl from the sex slave trade by paying for her to live at the Covering House."**

That's inspiring. That's what we all want to give for. But the guy who gave to pay for toilet paper? ***Man, what a waste!***

You see, here's the really challenging thing about being part of a community that costs money. The toilet paper and the girl being rescued out of the sex trade are connected. ***And the way they are connected is through the worship of God.***

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Your gifts are first and foremost alabasters jars, Clive Christians #1Pure Perfume, being poured out over the head of Jesus. In giving we are pouring ourselves out before God... and apparently Jesus thought that was pretty important.

Did you catch what he said at the end there? The same One who taught us the parable of the sheep and goats said that **the act of this woman would be remembered wherever the gospel is told.**

That's not said about anything else...  
not about the feeding of the 5,000  
or the walking on water.

But by God, you're going to hear about this *because there is something beautiful about wasting your money on Jesus.*

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Now I know that hearing me say that makes some of us uncomfortable. I get that. And I also know what Jesus says about not letting your left hand know what your right hand is doing when it comes to giving. But at the same time I think it's important for you to know where I am as I stand up here and talk about this.

I grew up in a family that taught me to tithe. If I got a dollar, I knew I was supposed to give a dime to the church. Now, let me be the first to say, I don't think tithing is a New Testament rule. Paul is much more concerned about how our giving shapes us spiritually. **"God loves a cheerful giving,"** he writes.

I don't think tithing is *required* by scripture. But it is what Jessi and I have always committed to doing, whether I was serving in a church or not. The first 10 % of what comes home in our paychecks goes to our church. That's been our practice.

We do that because it's something we think we can do and it's something we want to do and because we think it's an important spiritual practice for us and because we care deeply about the church.

We've also spent the last several months re-examining some of our spending habits and our plans for our money over the next three years so we can put together a pledge for the capital campaign, a pledge that a few months ago, we could have never imagined was possible.

Now, I know that as Americans we don't like talking about our money. And I'm not telling you this to brag. But I do think it is extremely important for you to know *that I'm leading in an area I'm asking you to follow me in, and if I wasn't it wouldn't be right.*

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I also think you should know that we give to Dayspring not just because I'm the pastor here, but because we believe in Dayspring and it's ministry.

No, Dayspring is not the most popular church in town... and never will be.

Obviously, Dayspring's not the biggest church around.

You could go somewhere else to have more elaborate children's programs and a more vibrant youth ministry.

You could go somewhere else to hear better preaching,

and to have better worship

and find churches that are more organized with better systems.

But the thing is, those churches don't hold faith the way this church does, and even more importantly, those churches don't hold people like you. And if that sounds a little arrogant, so be it. Because the very best thing about this place is you all. You are the gift of this church.

I know that from my own experience and I know that from people who move away and tell me they have such a hard time finding a church, because there simply aren't other churches out there like this one.

Dayspring has carved out a small but incredibly important space that is for people... some fragile people, some hopeful people... people who need a warm community, people who long for peace, and people who need a place that holds faith the way this church does... with open hearts and minds.

And I believe in that and give to that.

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The reality is, it takes money for us to do what we do... Money helps us to go and fulfill our mission, and be the church God has called to be.

Money... keeps employed those we'd like to employ.

Money... can help us replace the crumbling Delmar House with long overdue youth space, and children's space, and effective administrative space.

Money... can help us reach out into our community, so that they can know there is a unique church like this in their neighborhood.

*And let's just dream a little bit here...*

Money...could help us send more of our people on mission trips... which I would love to do.

Money...could allow us to hire a Social Worker part time to help us do the missional thing better.

And you know there are all kinds of talent and creative people in this congregation. What if we could partner with one of our local universities and start a community art gallery?

Or what if we could connect with the college students over at Missouri Baptist across the highway from us... and help them find a different way of being Baptist.

What if we could help build and staff a second residential home for the Covering House?

What if we could build one clean water well a year in Malawi.

Wouldn't that be amazing?

Just know that the college student, and the social worker, and the mission trips, and the outreach, and the art gallery, and clean water in Malawi, and the new building,

and the toilet paper and the rescuing the girl out of human trafficking, all of it takes money, and all if it is beautiful, because all of it is worship of God.

So no, disciples. It's not a waste to pour out the perfume... because that's the one story they will be talking about for generations.

Amen.