

Don't Compare Godly Stewards to Judas

Predictably, some of the defenders of Creflo Dollar's appeal for donors to buy him a \$65 million private jet accused those of us who took issue with this unnecessary extravagance of having the same attitude as Judas. This is an absurd, ugly and even dangerous misuse of the words of Jesus.

The text they're referring to is John 12, where Judas was critical of Mary, who anointed Jesus with extremely costly ointment shortly before His betrayal and crucifixion.

Judas was upset with her actions, asking, "Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii [which was close to a year's wages] and given to the poor?" (John 12:5)

But there's more to the story, and John immediately tells us that Judas was not actually concerned with the poor. "He said this," John explains, "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" (John 12:6).

So the wrong attitude of Judas had nothing to do with being a good steward of ministry gifts. It had to do with him being a covetous thief, and to apply it to leaders who are grieved over the extremely carnal prosperity mindset is to twist and distort God's Word for fleshly purposes.

You might say, "Of course they're wrong to compare godly stewards with Judas, but what about the Lord's response to Judas? Look at the point He was making."

Let's take a careful look at His words: "Leave her alone," Jesus said, "so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me" (John 12:7-8).

Once again, this has nothing to do with ministers wanting to live in luxury, nor is it a justification to ignore the needs of the poor in order to satisfy an earthly indulgence.

Jesus is saying that in this case, as Mary anointed Him with oil in preparation for burial, this extravagant act was justifiable. As for the poor, they will always be here, meaning that we have the rest of our lives to care for them.

And that's exactly what we should be doing, carefully and prayerfully using the funds that are donated to our congregations and ministries, always remembering those in need.

But Jesus was not saying that, as leaders, we can call on large numbers of supporters to give sacrificially to satisfy our wildest dreams rather than using that money to help the poor, whom "you always have with you."

If you say to me, "Leaders are representatives of Jesus, and if believers do something for them, they do it for Him," I say in reply, "When you're ready to die for my sins and the sins of the world, we'll be sure to anoint you for burial."

It's totally clear from the Word that the apostles did not advocate a culture of extreme ministry indulgence, nor did they say, "Give to us rather than the poor, since you always have the poor with you."

To the contrary, it was a high priority for Peter and Paul and the other apostles to remember the poor (in particular, the poor Jewish believers in Jerusalem), and Paul spent long periods of time raising funds for them, not for himself (see Gal. 2:9-10; 2 Cor. 8:1-5).

You might say, "Don't limit God. He can supply exceedingly abundantly above all we can ask or think."

Amen! Get on your knees and pray and ask, and according to

your faith and His discretion, be abundantly blessed. I believe in His abundant provision as well.

Just don't appeal to the flock to support a luxury lifestyle or to finance travel fit for the richest of the rich.

On a recent trip, I met a number of my monthly supporters, called Torchbearers, who give \$30 or more per month to our ministry.

It means a lot to me that their funds are used wisely and frugally and that appeals that we make to support our work go to that very work, not to enhancing our lifestyles as leaders. And in speaking for myself, I believe I'm speaking for the vast majority of pastors and ministry leaders, even here in America. They are not living in extreme luxury through the gospel.

You say, "But God wants the very best for His children!"

First, can you give me the chapter and verse for that? I'm just wondering what text you have in mind.

Second, even if the Bible did say those very words, His very best often comes in unexpected packages.

Third, to the extent we view godliness as a means to financial gain, Paul says that we "are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth" (1 Tim. 6:5).

Perhaps we should listen to his warnings afresh?

He wrote, "But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs" (1 Tim. 6:9-10).

As for leaders, Paul said this: "But as for you, O man of God,

flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness" (1 Tim. 6:11).

In this same spirit, Jesus warned that, "No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money" (Luke 16:13).

That's why He exhorted us to lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven rather than on earth, since where our treasures are, our heart will be also (Matt. 6:19-21). As for His own mindset, He came to serve not to be served, and He is our example (Mark 10:45).

Again, the issue is not whether a ministry justifiably needs a private jet (I have colleagues who have their own jets, and if that's the wisest and best use of their funds, wonderful), and it is certainly not a matter of making poverty into a virtue. I do believe in God's abundant provision, and I have no problem receiving blessing from Him in this world.

The issue is stewardship, and one day, we who lead will have to give account to God for the funds that were entrusted to us by His people, especially the poor and needy.

God forbid we spend their sacrificial gifts on our own carnal indulgence.

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