

“A WIDOW’S TWO CENTS’ WORTH.”

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Scripture Text: Mark 12:41-44

Introduction.

Do you ever do some people watching? At a mall or an airport or some other large public venue? I saw all kinds of people in four different airports this past week. People in a hurry, people bored, couples in love, parents struggling with little ones, business men trying to do business, elderly dealing with physical limitations. People in all sizes, shapes and colors. God is creative to say the least.

Our text is the final episode of Jesus’ public teaching ministry. He spends His last hour or so in the temple doing some people watching.

For Jesus this day had been in human terms a bad day. Perhaps weary from the constant debate, perhaps exhausted by the mental cat and mouse games, perhaps depressed by the sad state of spiritual affairs, He sat down to rest and watch the people go by.

Then something happened. Something so small and inconsequential that every one of us would have missed it. At that moment in what had otherwise been a dark, dreary day, a ray of light shined, like the sun shining through a break in the clouds after a storm.

Above the din of swelling Passover crowds, above the cacophony of sheep and goats and cows waiting to be slaughtered, above the clanging of handfuls of coins flung purposefully and noisily into the metal spouts of the treasury boxes, above all that Jesus hears the sound of two small thin copper coins about the size of dimes being imperceptibly placed as inconspicuously as possible into the treasury box.

A nameless, faceless poor widow perhaps dressed in black, her clothes maybe more like rags, carrying a small purse with only two small coins. What was she going to do? Should she just put in one? Wait, she took them both and put them in the offering box. Both of them. All she had. What was she going to do for supper that night?

Jesus sees the only beautiful thing in that temple that day and seizes the moment, “Did you see that, did you see what I just saw? I tell you the truth, that widow just gave more than all the rest.”

We know that Jesus always has a good reason for everything He does and He wants this to be a teachable moment for His disciples and for us. But before we get to the lesson, let’s set the background just a bit.

Mark 12:41-42.

The great Temple in Jerusalem consisted of a series of several courts separated by walls. The outermost court was the most accessible to the most people, Jews and Gentiles, men and women could all mingle here. It was called the Court of Gentiles.

The next court was the Court of Women where Jewish women and children could enter there and offer worship.

In this court were thirteen offering chests, called shofar-chests or trumpet chests because that had trumpet shaped openings, that fed the coins into the offering chests. This prevented theft, but also made quite a noise the more coins were dumped in.

The different treasury boxes were for different offerings. The Levites were the only tribe in Israel not given any land or territory. Their only means of support was from the temple offerings. With this money they administered all that was done in the temple

This poor widow put in two Greek lepta which were the smallest coins in circulation at that time. We know from some of the parables we considered this past summer that a denarius was the standard wage for a day’s labor. A lepton was one sixty-fourth of a denarius.

Several commentators think that the amount she gave was equal to the minimum amount needed to live for a day. This was her daily sustenance. On this day she gave all she had to the Lord and His Temple and His work.

If the widow only had two lepta the law only required here to give one, she could keep the other for her needs. But she doesn’t. Why not? What could possibly be her motive for giving all she had that day?

She didn't want to come to God's sanctuary with nothing. She counted worship a thing to be desired more than physical needs of the moment.

Mark 12:43-44.

But Jesus said it was more. More? How can this be? In pure financial terms her offering was completely insignificant. It would have made no difference on the bottom line of the temple profit and loss statement. Obviously Jesus can't mean more in quantity. So what does more mean? Jesus explains Himself, He gives us His reason for making this kind of value statement.

The rich gave out of their abundance, out of their superfluity.

There's a word we don't hear much these days. Superfluity. What does that mean? It means extra, excess, surplus, a super abundance, having too much.

It would be like me giving someone one of my books and trying to pass that off as a huge sacrifice. What's one book out of thousands?

It would be like one of you dairymen giving someone a gallon of milk and wanting the rest of us to be impressed by your sacrifice.

They gave out of their abundance, they gave out of what they really didn't need and wouldn't miss. Gold given out of one's abundance is nothing compared to copper given out of sacrifice.

On the temple ledger her offering was nothing, but in God's way of bookkeeping it was huge. She wasn't giving to impact the bottom line, she was giving to God the best she had to give.

She gave out of what she didn't have, out of what she couldn't afford, but she valued giving to God more than keeping it for herself. I am reminded of the praise Paul gave of the Macedonians when he was writing to the Corinthians.

II Corinthians 8:1-4 We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, 2 for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. 3 For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, 4 begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints

All she had.

She was a widow, she was poor, all she had was two small copper coins. She was surrounded by wealthy, powerful, influential people who were being noticed. Yet Jesus described her with the words “*more*” and “*all that she had.*”

Jesus is God, He sees into our hearts and our wallets and purses. He knows how much we have and how much we give. He knows why we give, He knows the attitude of our hearts. Jesus measures the gift not by the amount given, but by the cost to the giver.

She no doubt lived hand to mouth, she lived from day to day. So on this day she gave all she had to live on for that day. Her sacrifice was real and great.

“All she had” is the mark of true discipleship and faith. This is the mark of a heart in complete devotion to Jesus. This is a life given to His service for His glory.

What do we have that we have not received from Him? What will we dare to withhold? If we put all we have and all we are at God’s disposal, He will do things in us and through us that are beyond all we could ask or imagine.

Application and Conclusion.

First, there is a great lesson here for all who really are poor. Jesus encourages and blesses the poor by telling them that their small gifts are just as great and valuable as the abundant gifts of the rich. In fact, their small gifts are greater than theirs.

The same eye that saw the creation of the stars and galaxies, the mountains and oceans, that same eye sees the smallest action of kindness, the smallest act of compassion and mercy, the smallest gift of grace.

Whatever you offer to God, no gift of money, or time, or talent is too small or too insignificant to God if it’s offered in humble gratitude and worship. And whatever is given, no matter how small, is transformed by God into a pearl of great price.

Looks are deceiving. Some of the greatest gifts given are nothing, and some of the smallest gifts given are monumental.

Second, Real giving is sacrificial.

The chief thing God asks of all of us is to deny ourselves. Real giving is self-denying. Very few Christians give to the point that it costs them their pleasures.

Real sacrificial giving means that we give to the point that there are other things we can't do because of what we have given to the Lord's work. Of course we pay our bills and fulfill our obligations to our family. Our sacrifice is to be ours and not the bank's or those we owe.

C.S. Lewis had this wisdom on the matter:

"I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. In other words, if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusements, etc., is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little. If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot do because our charities expenditure excludes them." (C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, part 3, "Social Morality").

Third, Real giving has a certain recklessness to it.

I hesitate to say it that way because of the risk of being misunderstood but where are the Christians today who are extravagant in their giving, who are excessive in their generosity, who go above and beyond? Why do we think moderation is a virtue when it comes to giving to Jesus?

Where is that woman among us who would break a vial of \$300 perfume on the feet of Jesus? Where is that man who would intentionally sell a field and bring the money to the deacons to give to anyone who is in need?

Where is that person who actually gives so much that they miss it, they notice what they can't do now because of what they gave? Most of us get along just fine even after the offering bag goes by.

Today many would consider the widow's actions foolish. Some might criticize her actions as rash, overzealous.

"Isn't that just like women, no sense about money."

"That's why those poor people stay poor, they throw their money away."

"If only they showed more fiscal responsibility."

"Why is she giving to charity when she is probably on welfare?"

She wasn't motivated by foolishness, and certainly not by fear. She was moved by faith and her actions received the praise of God not of man. We are most like God when we give. And when we give we feel His pleasure.

Proverbs 11:24 One gives freely, yet grows all the richer;
another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want.

Finally, What does it mean to be rich toward God? It means to give gladly, joyfully, and generously to God out of a deep and sincere love for God and gratitude for God for all He has done for us. We cannot ever out give God.

Gifts given out of love reflect the words of the hymn *When I Survey The Cross*:

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

Our giving is a reflection of how deeply the reality of God's grace toward us has gotten into our souls. The most generous people on this planet should be Christians, they know more than anyone else how much they have received from God. A Savior who has given so much should have followers who do the same.

We don't give because God needs our money or because the church needs our money. We give to show our gratitude and our faith and our love.

As we go downstairs to enjoy a great feast that has been prepared for us, let us receive it as an expression of God's gracious abundance to us. It's a gift. As we receive it let's take the Word of God to heart and examine how we give and why we give and ask for the Holy Spirit to change our hearts and enlarge our hearts and enable us to give with glad and generous hearts for His glory and for all He has done for us.

Don't follow the example of the rich young ruler, rather follow the example of the poor old widow. Seek to be rich toward God and not rich toward yourselves.

What sound will your gift make? Will Jesus hear it?