

Sermon outline and notes:

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Mark 12:41-44 (read vv.38-44) “The Widow’s Mite”

Intro. In this context the Lord Jesus has been engaged in verbal battles with the leaders of Israel. The Lord came out of each battle with a victory by His divine wisdom. Near the end of the day I’m sure He was exhausted, and so He took a seat in the temple court for a season of rest. While doing so, He was noticing the people coming by, dropping in their offerings into the special receptacles in the court of women. He noticed the wealthy depositing their large offerings, and then He noticed a poor widow dropping in two small mites of money. What she did was so beautiful in the eyes of the Lord Jesus that her actions have been memorialized to this very day in the pages of Scripture. This widow was unnamed, and probably unnoticed by everyone else, but she pleased Jesus, and that’s what matters most. She became a part of the Bible’s Hall of Fame. She became the heroine of all those unnoticed, and often unnamed saints of God that keep our churches going.

Now I want you to notice the contrast between this modest, unnoticed woman, and the scribes that Jesus dealt with in vv.38-40. They loved to wear special clothing that set them off from others. They loved the attention and special greetings that people would give them in the market places. They desired the special places of honor reserved for them in the synagogues and special meals. They would pray long and flowery prayers, and soak in the compliments of the people who were impressed with them. But this widow didn’t have any nice clothes to wear. No one greeted her and took special note of her. No one would reserve a good seat for her, and she would never be invited as a guest of honor at anyone’s table. What a contrast! They were interested in all they could get out of life, but she was interested in what she could give to God and to others. Upon them Jesus pronounced condemnation, but upon the poor widow Jesus pronounced praise.

Now my main focus this morning will be upon the widow, but I must share a few words of application that we should draw from vv.38-40. I personally want to give heed to the words of Jesus here. I don’t want to be like the scribes. In good Baptist tradition, I do not wear a long robe. I dare not insist that you address me as “Reverend” or “Doctor.” I have not asked for a special seat in the church that is different from everyone else’s. I usually sit on the front row when I am not preaching. And I will not be offended if you do not reserve me the best & honored seat at the meals. And I hope that our deacons and other church leaders will have the same attitude. Furthermore, when we greet people, or honor people, let’s not limit such greetings and honor to those who are “important.” Don’t neglect the poor person, or the quiet & shy person. I hope there will never be a visitor to this church that doesn’t get a greeting from quite a few of our people, regardless of their social or economic standing.

Now let’s look at our main text, and consider together the meaning and lessons from the gifts of the widow and others. But we will do so primarily as a means of considering several truths about Jesus. Notice first of all:

I. WHERE JESUS SAT

V.41 says that “Jesus sat opposite the treasury.” This means that He was:

A. In the Temple Court - Jesus had been in the temple most of the day. He had been confronted & questioned by His enemies in the temple. It is tragic when the place of worship is turned into a battle zone for people to fight and fuss and argue.

Do you realize that Jesus is still present in a special way in houses of worship like this? Jesus said, "For where 2 or 3 are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst." When people visit our church, can they sense the presence of Jesus in this place? Furthermore, we ought to want to be where Jesus is, in a church dedicated to the worship of Jesus. I commend you for being in church today. The Scripture also says that He sat:

B. Opposite the Treasury – It is interesting that Jesus decided to sit in that particular location. The treasury was located in the Court of Women in the temple, which had thirteen trumpet-shaped chests. By means of letters of the Hebrew alphabet each receptacle was marked, so that the people would know for what distinctive purpose the money it received would be used, whether for the temple tribute, for sacrifices, incense, benevolence, or whatever. As the metal coins were cast into these trumpets, they make a loud noise. The more money that was cast in, the louder the sound.

Now notice what Jesus did while seated at the treasury. According to v.41 He "saw how the people put money into the treasury." The word translated "saw" (*theoreo*) is a word that means to view carefully, to examine. The tense indicates continuous action. He was not just giving a few passing glances at the people, but He kept looking intently, carefully observing how the people dropped their money into the treasury, that is, into its receptacles. He watched how the people gave.

Would you be surprised that the Lord Jesus is very interested in the offerings of God's people? I believe this story indicates that God cares about your giving habit. God is pleased with offerings made to Him and His cause. How people use their money says much about their relationship to God. He has the authority today to stand over the receiving of the offering. He's there to watch you friend. It is probable that when we had the offering a few moments ago, you did not consider the offering to be a very important part of the worship service. Your mind may have been on something else at the time. But Jesus sat at the place where the offering was being received. And I believe He is interested in our offerings today, and notices them.

Notice also that she & others brought their gifts *to the temple*. According to Mal. 3:10, we are to bring our tithes into the storehouse, also called the "Lord's house." In the book of Acts the people brought their offerings to the apostles, & distribution was made from the church treasury. We need to be carefully to follow this biblical pattern and give the vast majority of our offerings through the local church.

Next let's consider:

II. WHO JESUS SAW

Who did Jesus see that day as He sat at the treasury?

A. He Saw the Wealthy Giving Much – In the last of v.41 it says, "And many who were rich put in much." The rich gave generously, but they often made a big production out of their giving (see Matt.6:1-4). Oh my, how we love the big givers. But there was no word of condemnation about the rich giving much. They were doing right in giving much, because they had much to give. The Bible teaches proportionate giving. We should give as God has prospered us. The more we have received from the Lord, the more we should give. If you have been blessed

financially, you should give more abundantly in thanksgiving to God. God's ideal starting point for giving is 10%. This principle of giving is called the tithe and it is the Lord's (Mal. 3:10; Lev. 27:30). Another reason a wealthy person should give much is to demonstrate that they recognize that God is the source of their wealth. In Dt. 8:18 the Scripture says, "And you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth." Many people who have been blessed by God with money have been used of God in some marvelous ways by their giving. Many churches, Christian schools, and other ministries have been greatly helped by Christians who have been blessed financially, and who have given much to the Lord's work. So if God has blessed you with much money, then I would encourage you to allow God to use your giving in some wonderful ways, and be a blessing to your church and other Christian ministries.

I heard of the prayer of a certain Christian who said, "Lord, you have given me a large and liberal estate. Now, give me a heart to make use of it."

Does your giving reflect your income & wealth? Does your giving reflect your gratitude to God for your financial blessings? If not, you need to make a change in your giving. Otherwise, you will become enslaved to your money. Money can be a wonderful servant, but it is a terrible master. Some people will hoard their possessions, and do almost anything to keep as much of it as they can. They become selfish and hard hearted with their money. Learn instead to be generous in your giving. The human mind grows and develops by taking in. The human heart grows and develops by giving out.

B. He Saw the Widow Give Her Two Mites – In v.42 we read, "Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans." This poor widow just walked up to the treasury, dropped her coins in, and quietly moved on. Have you ever seen a mite? It is a little, thin copper coin. A mite was the smallest coin in use among the Jews. According to the original, 2 mites equaled a quadrans, which means a quarter. A quarter of what? An assarius. And an assarius was worth only one sixteenth of a denarius! The denarius was a laborer's average daily wage. So her two coins were worth 1/64th of a day's wage for a common laborer. By the world's standards, her gifts would be worth just a penny or so.

Now consider with me her gift:

1. It Was Not Important to Most People - The bystanders would have "Ooed and Ah'd" when the rich man emptied his big bag of silver coins into the treasury, but when this widow dropped in her two mites, they would have had no regard for her gift. They would count it as nothing, or even a bother to have to count it. No one noticed favorably what the widow gave that day.

2. It Was Important to Jesus! (v.43) - What this widow did was so important in the eyes of Jesus that he summoned His disciples, in order to rivet their attention upon it. In His estimation the two copper coins were sparkling diamonds. You see, Jesus looks not merely at the amount given, but at the ability of the giver—not merely at the quantity contributed, but at the motive and heart of the contributor. He knew the heart of this woman, and He considered the sacrifice that even two mites involved for her.

I heard about a church that was taking collections and pledges for their building program. One man stood up and announced a rather large gift, and the people applauded. But then a widow stood up and announced her gift, and there was silence. But then the pastor stood up and said, "Ladies and gentleman, I believe I hear the applause of the nail scared hands."

If you have little to give, don't think that your little offering isn't important. It may not be very important to man, but it is to God. Let us give as those who remember that the eyes of Christ

are upon us. He still sees exactly what each person gives, and knows exactly how much is left behind.

3. It Was Important to Her – She gave willingly, and she delighted to have some small part in the ministry of her Jewish faith.

I heard about a poor lady that gave \$1 per week to her church. The finance committee found out about her sacrifice and they felt that she could not afford to give even that much. So one of the wealthy members offered to give an extra dollar per week on her behalf. When they announced his generosity to her, she started crying. She said, “Oh please, don’t take away the blessing I receive by giving to Jesus. He has been good to me, and I want to give something to the Lord.”

C. He Even Saw the People’s Motives - Notice back in v.41 that Jesus saw “how” the people gave. He was not just noticing *what* people gave, but *how* they gave. Proverbs 16:2 says, “All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the spirits.” The Bible says, “Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks upon the heart.” Jesus, the Son of God, could see the motives of the rich people as they gave. They gave with fanfare. They would very publicly empty their bags of silver coins into the treasury. The sound would be heard over much of the temple. They loved the praise & recognition they received from their large gifts.

On the other hand, Jesus could see the motive of this widow’s heart. Her love and devotion were in the gift. I tell you, that is the way He measures.

What is your motive in giving to the Lord & His church? Do you do it just because you love the Lord? Or do you expect to receive some kind of praise & recognition for your gift? I hope your motive is pure when it comes to giving.

Well we have seen where Jesus sat, and who He saw giving at the temple. Now, based on what He had just witnessed, notice with me:

III. WHAT JESUS TAUGHT

While the people were impressed with the large gifts of the rich, Jesus was moved by the gift of the widow. And so Jesus calls His disciples to Himself and congratulates the widow & uses her example as a teaching moment. Now based on what Jesus said, I see three principles about giving here these verses. First of all:

A. Give Liberally – In the last of v.43 Jesus said, “Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury.” Based on what she had, she was liberal in her giving. What Jesus said here was not true on human scales, but God uses a different type of scale. What this widow gave was priceless. How many times has the example of this widow caused millions of dollars more to be given than would otherwise be giving?

Consider what you gave to the Lord last month. Are you liberal in your giving, or stingy in your giving? The stinginess of professing Christians is one of the crying sins of the day. Let us each do our own duty, and give liberally and gladly to support the Lord’s work.

Furthermore, we should:

B. Give Sacrificially - In v.44 Jesus said, “For they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood.” Her gift showed more love &

self-denial to the sacred cause that all the gifts of the rich. They gave what they did not really need, but she gave to the point of sacrifice.

Sometimes people will excuse the smallness of their gift by saying that they are just giving their widow's mite. But that probably would not be a true statement in the fullest sense of the word. She gave all that she had to live on for the rest of that day or even week. So have you ever given the widow's mite? The rich were just making a comparatively small contribution, but the widow was making a major sacrifice.

That reminds me of the cartoon of the chicken & pig. They were discussing the upcoming charity breakfast consisting of ham and eggs. The chicken asked the pig if he was going to participate in the charity breakfast. The pig replied, "Oh no, for you chicken, it would just be a contribution. But for me, it would be a total sacrifice."

Let's be honest. Most of us do not give to the point of sacrifice. Our gifts are well within what we can afford to give. Many of us did give an extra offering to support our building program. Those extra gifts were the beginning point of sacrifice.

And what about those who say they can't afford to give to the Lord's work? Can they say that in light of this story? The truth is, you cannot afford *not* to give! I have tithed ever since my first job bagging groceries at a grocery store. Cheryl & I have tithed when we lived on a very meager income, & we have tithed a much larger income. I believe God has blessed me financially, and I would not want to withhold from God His tithe.

Finally, the last principle we see from this story is this:

C. Give by Faith – As we have seen in v.44, after she gave her two mites, she didn't have anything left, even to buy a loaf of bread. Now how could she give like that? Some would consider her rather foolish. Shall we say that she might at least have kept one of these small, thin copper coins for herself? But no, she gave both. She gave all the money that she had. How can you explain it? There's only one explanation: She was giving by faith in total dependence upon God to provide. After all, He promised to provide for the widow and the fatherless.

On the mite there is on one side an image of the sun and its rays. On the other side was the image of a ship's anchor. Both images remind us of the faithfulness of God to keep His promises. And so when she dropped in those two coins, she was trusting in the Son of Righteousness, and relying upon the steadfastness of the faithfulness of God. David said, "I have been young, and now I am old, and I have never seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread" (Psalm 37:25). I am confident that God took care of her needs.

Do you remember the story of Elijah, when during a famine God sent him to Sidon, to the widow of Zarephath? (I Kings 17:8-16). When he met her she was gathering what she had for her last meal. Yet she gave the prophet a meal based on God's promise that her flour & oil would not fail. Sure enough, God kept providing more and more flour & oil. It never ran out. God provided for the widow, her son, & the prophet throughout the famine. [Illus.#C-1458].

I doubt that there would be a one of us who would give to the point of draining our checking and savings down to a zero balance! It would take great faith in God to do that! But God is worthy of your total & complete trust to provide if He directs you to give like this poor widow.

Conclusion: Do you want to please God? Do you want to move the heart of God? Then follow the example of this widow. Give liberally & sacrificially to the Lord's work. Let your gift express faith in the Lord to provide, & resupply what you need. When I think about the sacrificial love of Jesus for me, my response should be to join in the hymn writer in saying, "Love so amazing, so

divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.” Let us give as the disciples of a crucified Savior, who gave Himself for us. Freely we have received. Let us freely give. No sacrifice that I make for Jesus is too much or too great.

Now the first thing Jesus wants from any person is for you to give your heart and life to Him. Have you done that? If not, give your heart to Christ today!

Sources: Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the New Testament* (accessed through *Online Bible*); Alan Carr, www.sermonnotebook.org; W.A. Criswell (notes from his sermon on this text from wacriswell.org); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); J.C. Ryle (1816-1900), *Mark: Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993); Jerry Vines (notes from sermon tape of 4/8/84); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Diligent: Mark* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1987). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982). Robertson read, but nothing else added.

For further study, see sources for Luke 21:1-4.