

The Widow's Might

Luke 21:1-4

Before anyone jumps up and runs for the door or grabs a tight hold on your wallet because of the topic of today's passage on giving I want to assure you that this is not a message pleading for money. I met a pastor who said that when he arrived at the church as the new pastor, it was a custom that if the church was behind budget the financial secretary would wear a red suit. If they were ahead of budget, he would wear a black or green suit.

I won't go there.

That said our passage does speak about giving, offering us the opportunity to examine what the Lord sees in our giving and the motivation behind the gift. Turn to Luke 21:1-4 in your Bible where we will discuss the widow's might, M-I-G-H-T.

Before we look at the passage I want each of you to have a penny. Now I know it's not much but I want it to serve as an object lesson. Take that penny and just roll it around your palm, rub it between your fingers, sniff the copper. Think for a moment what you can buy for a penny.

I was trying to think about what a penny will buy today and I was stumped because I could only think of one thing – the pony ride at Meijer's.

I think even the penny candy jars at some restaurants are now a nickel or dime or quarter.

Can you think of anything else a penny could buy?

Put pennies together and depending on how many you have can buy you any number of things. 99 pennies can buy you a soft pretzel at Sam's club. Add 129 and you can get a frozen coke. This past week a gallon of gas was 173 pennies. David is eyeing a Lego set for Christmas that costs 14,000 pennies.

Some took advantage of the Black Friday sale at Best Buy purchasing a 65" HDTV for 100,000. In the process they saved 70,000 pennies.

My Dad's first new truck, a 1966 Chevy cost him 160,000 pennies.

What's a penny worth today? There is talk about doing away with the penny because it costs the government more to make than its face value.

So when we come to our passage it's startling to consider the take Jesus has on a meager offering given by a poor widow compared to the vast sums contributed by the wealthy. From a monetary perspective her gift was insignificant.

Let's ponder three points today from the passage that is before us.

God sees what's in our hand as we give
God senses what's in our heart when we give
God smiles at our humility as we give

Oh, you may want to tuck that penny in your Bible somewhere to be a reminder to you of what we will discuss this morning.

Dr. John Barnett rightly states "Money is one of the cultural realities of life that affects us from the cradle to the grave."

I. GOD SEES WHAT'S IN OUR HAND AS WE GIVE – vs. 1-2

Now it may appear at first glance that this seems like an unusual place to discuss giving. Jesus just ended a discussion with the disciples about the hypocrisy of the religious leaders who would be judged for leading others astray with false teaching. The passage following this one is also about impending judgment on Jerusalem and then about judgment for the faithlessness of people who refuse to trust Christ.

But here is this passage on a widow sandwiched in between. It is an observation made by Jesus about what they gave, and yet we can learn important truth from it.

Jesus had by now separated Himself from the religious leaders and the crowd. We find out from the parallel passage in Mark 12 that He had taken a seat across from where people were giving their offerings at which time He called His disciples to Him.

Jesus has taken up a seat in the Temple in the place called the courtyard of the women. That's where the treasure boxes were located. When Jesus entered Jerusalem a few days earlier He passed through the eastern gate of the city, the gate through which you would approach the Temple. The first or outer area of the Temple was known as the Court of the Gentiles. It was open for anyone to enter and is the place where the dealers had set up shop to sell animals and exchange money. It was also known as the Outer or Lower Court. From this court the worshiper scaled stairs leading up to a terrace that was nine feet above the Court of the Gentiles. This area was surrounded by a five foot wall designed to keep the Gentiles out. Pillars were spaced at various distances with inscriptions in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew warning all Gentiles that they could go no further or they would receive the death penalty. One of the accusations against Paul was that he had taken a Greek beyond this point.

Going past the Court of Gentiles at the top of this terrace was a 15 foot platform with another wall. On the east side of this wall was the Beautiful Gate spoken of in Acts 3:2 about the beggar. This was the place of public worship for Jews during the morning and evening sacrifices.

Passing through the Beautiful gate you would enter into the Court of the Women. It was not named because only women could enter in, but because women could go no further into the Temple. Throughout this area there were columns and in front of these columns were 13 treasure chests where worshipers could put their offerings. Some were designated for the poor or for the sacrifices.

It is across from one of these treasure chests that Jesus had positioned Himself as He watched people give their offerings.

Pause and ponder what is taking place here. Jesus was observing the contributions of each person. He watched them step up and put coins or a money pouch into the chest. It may have been in their hand or in a pocket. They didn't know it, but He was watching them, watching them carefully. The word "rich" refers to those who have enough, to be fully supplied. They were the ones who didn't have to worry about where the next meal was coming from or whether they had enough to pay the mortgage or have to decide between buying groceries or paying for a prescription.

Jesus was watching them. Our text says He saw them put their gifts in the box. It's a word that means more than just see with the eyes. It means to see with the mind or to perceive. It speaks of being discerning or understanding.

There is a true story about a pastor who one Sunday as the ushers were taking the offering left the platform and walked down to where they were passing the collection plates. As it was handed from one person to the next down each row he watched every gift that was given and who had given it. Think for a moment how that might make you feel if I were to do that some Sunday. You can well imagine how people felt that day. Some were confused, some shamefaced, some amazed, upset, even angry. Who does the pastor think he is that he should watch what is given? Of all the nerve!

When the offering was over, the pastor addressed the congregation: "My people, if you take to heart that I have seen your offerings this day and know just what sacrifices you have made and what sacrifices you have not made, remember that the Son of God your Savior, goes about the aisles with every usher and sees with His sleepless eye every cent put into the collection by His people."

That's a rather sobering thought to consider, don't you think? From His omniscient vantage point He observes everything you put in the offering and what you withhold. What's more, He sees the heart when the gift is given. How does that make you feel? Ponder its implications.

On this occasion Jesus sat observing what people were giving. He noticed the rich passing by and putting their money bags into the treasury. Those gifts were certainly enough to care for the upkeep of the building and pay the bills or aid the needy.

But as He sat observing the rich put their offerings into the treasury He noticed another worshiper. It was a woman, but not just any woman. Luke describes her as a poor widow. Perhaps she tried to slip in without notice. Maybe she felt a bit self-conscious or embarrassed by such a small offering. The word "poor" is a general description of her condition and refers to someone who is needy but not destitute. In verse 3 Jesus will refer to her again as being poor using a different Greek word, a term that speaks of those who have nothing and are reduced to begging. You will understand the difference in a moment.

We have spoken about the care of widows in the past and noted that according to the Old Testament Law, the care of widows was commanded so that they wouldn't be neglected. But we saw in last week's passage that the religious leaders instead of assisting them in their need devoured the houses of widows. They fleeced them for all they had.

Here, though, is this poor widow who has come to put in her offering and Jesus has taken note of her. What we don't know is whether this was a voluntary offering or one that had to be given to a now very corrupt religious system that required more and more contributions from its people so that the religious leaders could pilfer from the treasury because of their insatiable greed. We don't know if this was voluntary or mandatory and neither do we

know her attitude in the giving.

I might look at like paying my taxes. For the purposes of taxes I am considered self-employed and so am required to pay them every quarter. From my perspective it's a big chunk. No matter how corrupt I may think the system is I am still required to pay them. So pay them I do. But what's my attitude when I write that check? Do I complain about the amount or what they might go for or do I pay them with gratitude because of what benefits I have from them, things like roads or the military?

That's the piece we don't know about the widow. We don't why she gave this offering. We don't know what kind of attitude she had in the giving. We only know four things for sure. She was a poor. She was a widow. She gave two mites or copper coins. She gave all she had and Jesus saw her.

The penny I gave you represents the least value in our currency. These copper coins represented the least amount in Jewish currency. Their face value was 1/8th of a cent in our currency and the passage says that the Lord observed her put those two coins in the treasury.

God sees what's in our hand as we give.
God senses what's in our heart when we give.

II. GOD SENSES WHAT'S IN OUR HEART WHEN WE GIVE – vs. 3-4

After a time of visual observation watching people give their offerings, Jesus made a verbal observation. In spite of the fact that the amount given by the widow was insignificant compared to the amount given by the wealthy, Jesus said that her gift was worth far more than theirs. They had given according to their wealth; she had given out of her poverty. We might say that she gave in spite of her poverty.

Jesus noted that she had given everything that she

had to live on. Again the word poor used here is a different Greek word than is used in verse 2.
 We know so very little about her.
 We don't know how long she had been a widow.
 We don't know how old she was.
 We don't know if she had any children.
 We do know she was a widow and we do know that she was poor.
 We also know from what Jesus says that she held nothing back. It wasn't much in the scheme of things, but she gave everything she had. She gave her all.

What stirs in your heart when you sing Frances Havergal's hymn Take My Life and Let It Be Consecrated? (Hymn #597)
 Take my silver and my gold,
 Not a mite would I withhold.

Do those words make us uneasy, guilty, ashamed?
 Do they compel us to answer whether or not we have truly given everything to the Lord? We cannot give all we have until we have first given all of self. If we hold something back from the Lord, we haven't really consecrated ourselves fully to Him.

About the widow's mite Warren Wiersbe writes: it "doesn't represent the least we can give, but the most, our very all. When we sing 'Take my silver, and my gold/Not a mite would I withhold,' we are telling God that everything we have belongs to Him."

We can look at the portion we give and think that it's a great amount, but here Jesus is saying that He looks at the proportion. We can look at what is given, but God looks at what is left and by that He measures the gift and the condition of the heart.

Throughout Scripture we see the idea of sacrificial giving. The question to ask then in our giving is whether or not it is given sacrificially. Abraham came to the point of a consecrated life to the Lord when he was willing to sacrifice Isaac on the altar.

It wasn't just his son he was willing to sacrifice that day, he also sacrificed his own will, himself, everything he had. He was willing to give his all.

At the encouragement of Elijah, the widow of Zarephath used up her last oil and flour to make him something to eat only to find that it never ran out during the three and a half years of drought. She was willing to give her all.

The widow had only two small coins which she gave to the Lord.

What might the Lord be asking you to give that will require your all?

Even though Scripture doesn't say, I want to believe that this widow gave all she had because she trusted that God would provide for her daily needs.

She may have walked home with a heavy heart not knowing where the money was going to come from to pay whatever bills she had hanging over.

She may have gone home with a light heart trusting that God would provide.

Have we come to the place where we completely agree with the words of Philippians 4:19 that "God will supply all our need according to His riches in Christ Jesus."

When we look at our resources we can wonder how those needs will be met. When we look at God's resources we come to realize that our need comes from the supply of His riches. John MacArthur notes that this passage reveals the extent to which God will supply our needs. It is according to His riches, not out of them. They flow from the infinite measure of His resources.

Are we convinced that we can trust the Lord with our whole heart and give Him everything?

A new pastor arrived in his very first church. His first sermon had three points.

Make all the money you can make to which there was a rousing Amen from the congregation.

His second point was save all the money you can

save to which another rousing Amen echoed through the sanctuary.

His third point was give all you can give after which came utter silence.

Afterwards an old Deacon came up and told the pastor he had preached a fine message until he got to the last point.

My point is not that this would in some way incite you to give more because we have a need. My prayer is that we might give more because we are being obedient to the Lord giving back what really belongs to Him in the first place. My prayer is that we learn to trust Him to meet our needs and to be thankful for His blessings. He knows our heart.

God knows what is in our hand to give and what we withhold when giving. He knows the heart condition of the giver whether it is with reluctance or with gratitude and trust.

When it comes to giving we can have clenched fists or open palms.

From our passage God sees what's in our hand to give.

God senses what's in our heart when we give.

I want to conclude with a final point.

God smiles as we humbly give.

III. GOD SMILES AT OUR HUMILITY AS WE GIVE

It is very clear from examples both in the Old and New Testament's that God uses monetary contributions for ministry. Yet Satan will do all he can to keep us from giving to God or from trusting in God.

He could have whispered in Abraham's ear that to sacrifice Isaac would mean giving up the heir and the promise of God to become a mighty nation.

When Moses asked for contributions of gold and other items to build the tabernacle Satan could have whispered in their ear to consider all the brutality

they had experienced in Egypt and that they deserved some creature comforts for the centuries of going without. Yet Scripture tells us that they gave so much Moses had to tell them to stop giving.

He may whisper in our ear to spend it, after all we earned it.

He may tell us we need that upgrade for better speed or better service or better amenities.

He may tell us to wait and give when it's more convenient, think about those bills.

He may tell us to keep it for a rainy day because we never know what emergencies may come up.

He may tell us that we have to pay off debt, that we're overcommitted.

Satan wants to keep us from giving to the Lord instead of trusting Him to provide.

I want to close with four points about giving and reference a couple passages.

1. A gift to the Lord is truly a gift when it is given freely.
2. A gift to the Lord is truly a gift when it is given fully.
3. A gift to the Lord is truly a gift when it is given faithfully.
4. A gift to the Lord is truly a gift when it is given by faith.

II Corinthians 8:1-15

II Corinthians 9:6-7

When we give with humility that makes God smile, as we see in verse 5, it begins with *giving ourselves first to God*. Paul reminds us in Romans 12:1 that giving of ourselves to the Lord is an act of worship to Him. If we are not willing to give ourselves it will be difficult to give tangibly.

Paul wrote to the Corinthian church about a gift that they had promised to send, but had not yet taken. He challenged them by the example of the Macedonian church who had taken up a collection in spite of their own poverty. Paul stated that they

gave beyond their ability. In essence he was saying that they gave sacrificially. That is joyful giving. In spite of their own need, they gave willingly, freely, fully and by faith. Then he challenged them to excel in giving. It really boils down to a matter of trusting God. If the example of the Macedonian church wasn't enough Paul then challenged them to consider what true sacrificial giving is like what one author described as "the supreme and inescapable incentive of all genuine Christian generosity" in Christ who, though He was rich, for our sakes became poor, that we might become rich, not monetarily but eternally.

In the second passage Paul uses an agricultural analogy. If a farmer sows sparingly, his crop will be limited. If he sows generously, his crop will abound. This is not a prosperity passage that the more you give the more you'll get, just have faith.

Notice some important principles about giving.

a. Give what you have decided to give in your heart. That means it is something that you have predetermined in your heart. I am not saying that you should never be spontaneous in your giving. There is a time for that as well. It does mean you ought to pray about it first and trust God. Don't give what you think you can afford. If we give only what we can afford there is no trust and it's not sacrificial. Give what you believe God wants you to give and trust Him to meet your need.

b. Give without reluctance or don't give grudgingly. That means don't give with resistance or with unwillingness. It literally means sorrow, grief, or pain. Your giving should not be with regret or remorse.

c. Give without feeling compulsion. Don't give because you feel pressured or coerced. Carl is never going to where a red suit and I won't beg you.

d. Don't give so others will notice. In the

Sermon on the Mount Jesus said that when we give don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. The hypocrites would stand on the corner and blow a trumpet to announce their giving. I recently spoke with a missionary who had traveled to Africa. In one of the churches he attended they had two chairs up front reserved for the two biggest givers that day.

e. Give cheerfully or joyfully. It ought to be a delight for us to give. Giving with cheerfulness comes from a thankful heart that knows God will meet our needs. It stems from a heart that completely trusts God by faith to supply.

f. Give of the first fruits. (I Corinthians 16:1-4) In his first letter to Corinth Paul concluded with instructions on giving. It is to be set aside at the first day of each week in keeping with his income. Our offerings should be from the first of what we make. It is the firstfruits, not the leftovers.

In the end God doesn't really want your money, He wants you. Yet we can't give ourselves to Him apart from our money. It is true that money tells where our heart is and where our treasure is. I think the widow found might as she gave her two mites. As Jesus watches you give what would His opinion of your giving be?

Many threw in their offerings as Jesus watched. He noticed a widow who gave all she had. Cheerfully give thanks as you purposely give to the Lord.