

CORONARY CHRISTIANITY - WHY AND HOW WE GIVE TO THE LORD - Part Three

Sunday, June 6th, 2010, 10:00 a.m. - Teaching #1376

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HOW WOULD JESUS TAKE UP AN OFFERING IN OUR CHURCH?

Mark 12:41-44 - "And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. [42] And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. [43] And he called his disciples to him and said to them, "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. [44] For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."

The central idea of this morning's teaching needs to be clearly stated and remembered. It is this. I will never grow in the grace of giving until I have Jesus' viewpoint on it. Giving involves the heart as much as the wallet. Jesus values gifts only as they reflect the state of the heart giving them. Or, stated more precisely, Jesus measures financial gifts by the *priorities* the offering demonstrates in the *rest* of my life. Giving isn't measured by the *amount* on my cheque. Jesus measures it by the *sacrifice* involved in giving the cheque.

I can honestly say I've thought a great deal about this text over the years. It's an uncomfortable account for many reasons. For example, I wonder how many pastors would have been comfortable praising this poor woman for her offering that Sabbath morning. Is it right for the church to take this woman's last cent? Was she being devout, just plain silly? In praising her gift was Jesus showing her compassion, or just being a slick fund-raiser?

This passage is important because it takes the guesswork out of the answers we might give to those questions. Fortunately, Jesus was right there to watch what this woman put into one of the thirteen vessels in the outer court for the gifts of the people. He was right there on purpose. Most of us think it impolite to watch what people put into the offering. We constantly hear that giving is just between the giver and God. But Jesus *is* God, and in this passage we learn that He doesn't look away like ushers do when we give our money. Jesus *watches* because, to Him, giving *matters*. My giving might not be *your* business, but it is *Jesus'* business. And this account reveals He watches it closely.

We know exactly what He thought of all the gifts given that day. The text *tells* us. He noticed the gifts of the rich, and He noticed the gifts of the poor. And Jesus didn't despise the gifts of the rich just because those givers were rich. Jesus never despised anyone just because they had money, anymore than he praised the woman in our account just because she was poor. That misses the whole point entirely.

This widow's gift probably didn't garner anyone else's attention, so we are pleased to notice it *did* catch the eye of our Lord. He not only *noticed*, but He singled her out. He called attention to her *gift* and even more to her *state of mind*. In fact, it must have made quite an impression on Jesus. He actually called all of the disciples over to point out what this woman had done.

One thing's for certain. When *Jesus* calls notice to something, we should take notice. If *He* thinks something is important, *I* should too. Here are some of the key principles in this incident:

- 1) **EVERYONE NEEDS TO GIVE TO GOD'S KINGDOM** - Most of us would feel this lady needed to *keep* the one cent more than the temple treasury needed to *receive* it. Most of us would have thought it cruel to even *take* her money, let alone *praise* her for giving it. What difference could her offering possibly make anyway? It wasn't the kind of amount most people would even write on the outside of their offering envelope. Yet Jesus praised the gift, and even more, the *giver*.

Perhaps we find here the very first insight into Jesus' perspective on giving. People *need* to give to the Lord. *All* people. We don't do a disservice to people when we *teach* and *encourage* them to give. All those wise cracks about fleecing the sheep are way off track. We're not *exploiting* the flock when we teach Biblical stewardship. I don't give because the church needs my cash. I give because I need to grow in the grace of giving. Rich and poor alike need to learn to give. It really is better to give than to receive, and that's not just a great fund-raising slogan. These words came from Jesus Himself - **Acts 20:35** - "...remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" And He meant it's more blessed for the *giver*, not the one *receiving* the gift.

2) **EVERYONE NEEDS TO BEGIN REGULAR PATTERNS OF GENEROUS STEWARDSHIP RIGHT WHERE THEY ARE WITH THE MONEY THEY HAVE**

We can all learn from this poor widow. Do you ever catch yourself dreaming what you would give to the Lord's work if only you had more money? Have you ever tried to comfort your own heart by telling yourself you don't have much to work with right now, but things will get better soon - and when they do, you'll really get serious about giving to the Lord? The lesson of this text is to **start where you are**. You can't give what you don't **have**, and God doesn't expect you to. But you have to begin giving where you **are** - with whatever resources God has placed into your hands.

This widow was praised by Jesus because she didn't **exclude** herself from giving. **Small deeds done are better than great deeds planned**. If you **practice** being faithful with little you will **grow** to be faithful and fruitful with much. More importantly, you build safeguards against **covetousness** into your life as you honour God with your present wealth. As you are faithful with whatever God has given, you will learn gradually to continue to love God supremely, even if you should come to possess more of this world's material goods. Seek first His Kingdom now. God will add blessing to your life as your soul continues to grow.

3) **JESUS DOESN'T MEASURE YOUR GIVING BY YOUR CHARITABLE RECEIPT** - This may be the dominant lesson in this event. This key principle in Jesus' perspective on giving is framed in the words of the forty-third verse:

Mark 12:43 - "And he called his disciples to him and said to them, 'Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box.'"

Jesus is saying a mouthful here. Notice, she put in more than **all** of the others, not just more than **any one** of the others. She put in more than **all of them put together**. But how? In what real, down-to-earth sense can this be true? What could possibly have been that special about her gift? The answer to that question is at the very heart of Jesus' teaching on giving. I'm convinced this is the **most important thing you can ever learn about how God views your giving to Him and His work**. According to Jesus, she gave more because she gave out of her **poverty**, while they gave out of their **wealth**.

Jesus explains His amazing words from **verse 23** in the very next verse, and He makes Himself clear beyond any dispute: **Mark 12:44** - "For they all contributed **out of their abundance**, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, **all she had to live on**."

Did you catch it? My gifts are measured **not by the amount I give**. They are measured by **the amount I keep for my own use**. It's not the amount on the cheque that catches Jesus' notice. Gifts are measured by **sacrifice** - not **generosity** - but **sacrifice**. And those two things are not the same. **Generosity** measures the gift by the amount **given**. A fifty thousand dollar donation is generous by any reckoning. But for a billionaire it is not likely the donation is an enormous **sacrifice**.

This is the crucial kingdom distinction. This poor widow demonstrated both **supreme love for God** and **active faith in His care** when she put her offering in the plate. She proved she **loved God** more than anything else in life because she kept absolutely nothing back from His use. And she proved active **faith in His care** because she demonstrated her confidence that God would supply all her needs as she honoured Him with her gift. Where else would she get her next meal?

4) **JESUS WAS DRAWN TO THE SPIRIT IN WHICH THIS WOMAN GAVE HER GIFT** - It seems to be the selfless, passionate heart of this woman that caught Jesus' attention. Notice how Mark places this widow's story in the context of the whole twelfth chapter of his account:

Mark 12:38-40 - "And in his teaching he said, "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces [39] and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, [40] who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation."

The people described in these verses were the professionally religious people. They loved what their religion gave them in terms of recognition, reputation, influence, and prestige. They performed well in the spotlight, but with bad motives. Jesus saw through them right away. He still does. Tell yourself that every time you come into this

sanctuary.

Right after giving these words of warning Jesus sits down for a minute to watch the people as they entered the temple. Just at that moment, this poor widow comes by, noticed by no one. ***She doesn't even know Jesus is watching*** (wouldn't we all give big offerings then?). Suddenly, out of no other motive than a love for her God, she puts in everything she has in this world. No one else says a word. No one else notices. No bells ring. No receipt is issued. Quietly she folds up her moth-eaten purse and returns home.

And here's the point. ***Nothing sacrificed from a devoted heart is wasted.*** Her gift was gigantic when measured in terms of ***sacrifice*** rather than ***amount***. Such is the way it always is in God's Kingdom. Never allow fatigue or frustration with appeals, or the abuse of some religious organizations to distort or shrink the simple, God-filled passion this woman demonstrated. Jesus takes the time to make this woman the permanent measuring stick for giving to God.

This whole account deals with the issue we studied two weeks ago. This is how the New Testament lifts the ceiling of the tithe. It doesn't lower the floor. It just raises the ceiling. The tithe measures and limits my giving by a ***fixed percentage***. It is merely a ***help*** to governing personal covetousness, but only a ***small*** help. This widow's gift grabs hold of Jesus' heart. It ***embarrasses*** the mind-set that calculates the tithe. If you don't like talking about the tithe, then don't. That won't bother me at all as long as you replace the concept of the tithe with the example of this devout widow.

Many people can faithfully tithe without making any personal sacrifice at all. The tithe measures by the ***amount given***. This account shows us how Jesus raises the bar of stewardship. This precious account measures the gift, not by the amount given, but by the amount kept back for personal use.

Generosity is good for the beginner in spiritual life. Sacrifice is better for maturing in love for God and discipleship. Sacrifice reforms and reshapes the heart of the giver. It sharpens the image of a God who gave His only begotten Son to reach and teach our materialistic hearts with His supremely sacrificial love.