Mark Lesson 44 (2023)

**JESUS RECOGNIZES A HUMBLE WIDOW’S OFFERING**

Mark 12:41-44

Key Verse: 12:43

“Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, ‘Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others.’”

In the previous passage, we observed Jesus confronting the Jewish religious leaders regarding the nature of the Messiah. Through a reference to Psalm 110:1, Jesus clarified that the Messiah was not merely intended to be a human descendant of David but rather the Lord of David. He also cautioned his followers about the insincere conduct exhibited by the teachers of the law, which included exploiting vulnerable individuals such as widows and performing lengthy prayers for show rather than genuine devotion.

In today’s passage, Jesus highly recognizes the poor widow’s offering. This account comes immediately after his warnings against the hypocrisy among leaders. This sequence highlights the authentic and devout spirit of the poor widow in contrast to the insincere attitude of the wealthy. As we explore this passage this morning, may we be inspired to examine our attitudes toward giving and learn from the example of the widow who offered her two small coins.

Look at verse 41. “Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts.” Jesus had been giving his teachings in the court of the Gentiles, the outermost court. Now, he moved into the women’s court, where the temple treasury was placed. Along the wall were treasury boxes with mouths shaped like trumpets, and each of these treasure boxes had a specific designation (Pic#1). There, Jesus carefully observed how people gave their offerings at the temple treasury.

Mark’s description is significant. He said, “Many rich people ***threw*** in large amounts.” (Pic#2). It prompts a question, “*Why did they* *throw the coins into these boxes instead of just putting them quietly?”* I guess because the coins would make noise when hitting the bottom of the boxes. The heavier and more numerous the coins, the louder the sound for people to hear. Subsequently, the priest would announce how much money was given and often met with applause. This setup implies that the more substantial the donation, the greater the recognition received. These dynamics ultimately mislead individuals to give not solely for genuine devotion but for human praise.

Recently, I came across a sizable church that received a $150,000 gift from a corporate millionaire for a new organ in the sanctuary. The donor received lavish recognition during the organ’s dedication, including an honoring plaque and prominent coverage in the church newspaper. While we can’t definitively be sure of the donor’s motives for the gift, it’s undeniable that the human tendency to seek human recognition can influence acts of our charity. We are supposed to be genuine in all we do but are often tempted to seek human recognition.

This inclination aligns with Jesus’ warning against seeking human recognition for the actions of our services and devotion. In the [Sermon on the Mount](https://www.gotquestions.org/sermon-on-the-mount.html), Jesus said, “But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”([Mt. 6:3-4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt%206.3%E2%80%934)) The literal interpretation of “not letting your left hand know what your right hand is doing” is unlikely. However, Jesus’ warning highlights the importance of secret giving instead of drawing attention.

Undoubtedly, a lot of money came into the temple treasury during Passover. The increased crowds meant increased money. The religious leaders were happy and didn’t mind as long as more money came into their treasury. But Jesus was not pleased. He remains unimpressed by showy people who are eager for human recognition. In the eyes of Jesus, they were not genuine worshipers of God.

 Look at verse 42. “But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents.” Amid the showy displays of wealth by the rich people, Jesus directed his attention to a specific woman. The woman was not merely a widow but a poor one. It was evident from her appearance that she was both impoverished and bereaved, presumably reflected in her clothing. (Pic#3) Her small contribution, consisting of two small copper coins, held minimal financial value - far less than a day’s wage of an average laborer in Israel. Her presence went unnoticed by most people as she quietly placed two small copper coins. However, Jesus, the divine Son of God, didn’t overlook her presence. Instead, he singled her out and regarded her small offering above the lavish donations of wealthy individuals.

Read verses 43-44. “Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, ‘Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth, but she, out of her poverty, put in everything – all she had to live on.’” Mark, the author, highlights the importance of Jesus’ lesson for his disciples by noting that Jesus specifically called them to him before sharing his insight. He preceded his statement with the words, “Truly I tell you.”

He also told his disciples, “This poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth, but she, out of her poverty, put in everything – all she had to live on.” According to Jesus, the greatest doner was not those who gave large amounts of money but this poor widow. What a surprise! Jesus’ perspective contradicts the world’s standard of measuring value based on outward appearance and material abundance. Instead, Jesus’ valuation is rooted in the purity of intention and the heart behind actions.

While the disciples might have been impressed by the great sums thrown into the treasury by the wealthy people, Jesus challenged their conventional understanding of the value. Unlike the wealthy individuals who gave from their surplus, the widow’s offering embodies sacrifice and selflessness. Jesus recognized her small offering as genuine, resonating with God the Father because she gave **all she had** to live on. In other words, she gave her life as a living sacrifice. (Ro. 12:1-2) It is easy for us to fail to see such beautiful individuals like this lady.

We learn several essential lessons through the example of the poor widow’s offering.

***First, God prioritizes the motives and intentions of the heart over outward actions.*** External activities can often be deceptive and misleading. When a person performs virtuous acts, they can quickly gain confidence and trust from others. However, the individuals may engage in such acts to gain the approval and admiration of others. Beneath these outward actions, motivations might be self-serving or insincere due to their immaturity or self-centeredness. We are easily fooled and impressed by people’s outer looks, words, and behaviors. But while external appearances can sway human judgment, God is not convinced.

Jesus was incredibly pleased with this poor widow’s offering. How often do we ignore or forget that God places greater importance on the intentions and motives of the heart rather than outward actions? This teaching aligns with what was expressed by King David when he cried out, saying, "You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God will not despise.” (Ps. 51:16-17) We are reminded that God sees beyond what human eyes can see.

We can go one step further. The poor widow's story challenges us to examine the intentions and motives of our hearts behind our actions. It invites us to be purified and transformed into men and women of genuine hearts. It highlights that the nature of worship God recognizes is an internal transformation beyond external behaviors. This resonates with the essence of Romans 12:1-2, which affirms the notion of genuine worship. “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

***Secondly, the widow’s giving demonstrates her faith in God’s provision.*** One might wonder, *“What difference could two copper coins make in the temple’s budget?”*. Even if she had chosen not to give, God would have understood. Yet, she decided to give, demonstrating her unwavering trust in God’s ability to provide. She was willing to give up her last resources, confident that everything ultimately stems from God the Father and that God will take care of her needs.

Many of us are worried. It’s hard to overcome worries and anxieties. *“What if I fail the class? What if I lose my job? What if, what if?”* If anybody should worry, it was this poor widow. But she believed that God would provide. And her belief that God will provide liberated her from unnecessary worries and anxieties. That’s amazing. Trusting in God’s divine provision enabled her to release excessive stress and find confidence that things would work out as they should. She found peace in God in her own situation. Someone said, *“If you have money, you can be happy. If you don’t, you are free.”* It resonates with Philippians 4:6 and 7, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcendent all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Even though it may sound easy, trusting in God’s provision requires a lot of practice, discipline, and patience.

The poor widow's story compels us to examine our trust in God’s provision, especially in uncertain and challenging times. Just as the widow demonstrated trust amidst her limited circumstances, we are encouraged to anchor our faith in God’s care, even when circumstances seem dire. Trusting in God’s provision does not mean becoming passive and simply waiting for a miracle. It often goes hand in hand with responsible action and effort.

However, trusting in God’s provision requires letting go of our control over all things and acknowledging God’s control over them. Trusting in God’s provision can be comforting, especially during uncertain times. It provides a sense of stability and security, knowing that even in the face of challenges, there is a source of strength and support in God our Father. Challenges and difficulties can also become golden opportunities for growth and learning.

One of the prime examples of “trusting in God’s provision” is the story of Father Abraham, found in Genesis 22. This narrative exemplifies how Abraham exhibited unwavering trust in God’s provision and guidance, even when confronted with seemingly insurmountable challenges. As his son Isaac grew older, God commanded Abraham, probably in a dream, to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac as a burnt offering. This command posed a profound test of Abraham’s faith, as his affection for Isaac ran deep. Nevertheless, Abraham’s unwavering trust in God’s love and care was evident. While journeying to Mount Moriah, where the sacrifice was to take place, Isaac asked, “Dad, the fire and wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” (Gen. 22:7) To his, Abraham responded, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” (Ge. 22:8) When they reached their destination, Abraham was prepared to offer Isaac, but God intervened, providing a ram caught in a thicket. Abraham named the place **“Jehovah-Jireh,**” meaning **“The Lord Will Provide.”** (Ge. 22:14)

Let me close the sermon. Jesus admired the genuine devotion of a poor widow. The story of the poor widow’s offering teaches us that it’s not the size of our offering that matters most to God but the genuine hearts, sacrifice, and trust with which we give. May we reevaluate our giving. *“Am I giving from surplus or leftovers, or am I sacrificing?”* Our financial situation might differ, but what matters most is the authenticity of our giving. What people think of us is not what is essential. God sees the intentions and motives of our hearts.

May we also cultivate the spirit of genuineness and generosity, not only in our finances but also in our time, talents, and resources. May we prioritize God in our lives, living before him, not before people, and allow our giving, whether of material resources or our entire lives, to reflect our genuine love for God and our unwavering trust in his care.

Dear Heavenly Father, we come before you with grateful hearts, recognizing that you see beyond what the eyes can see. Just as you observed the widow’s offering in the temple, you also see the true nature of our hearts.

Help us to give with sincerity, and may our offerings reflect our love for you and our desire to honor you. Teach us to give sacrificially, not out of obligation, but out of genuine love and obedience to your will.

Lord, please also open our eyes to the needs of others, especially those who are vulnerable and marginalized. Give us the compassion to reach out and make a difference in their lives, just as you notice the widow’s need. Lord, purify our motives. Keep us from seeking recognition or praise for our acts of generosity. Instead, may everything we do be an offering of worship to you, and may you be glorified in all we give. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.