

## **Sermon Reading: Mark 12:41-44**

*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. <sup>42</sup> But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents.*

*<sup>43</sup> Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. <sup>44</sup> They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.”*

### **Should Jesus Really Be Watching My Wealth?**

The fact that God is all-knowing assures us that He is always watching over us. It brings us comfort when life happens and peace of mind when we feel alone. But do we feel the same way when the coin is flipped? God is all-knowing which means the one who knows the number of hairs on my head also knows the thoughts in my head. The one who neither slumbers nor sleeps knows what’s going on behind closed doors, late at night, and what is done in secret. The one who knows exactly what I need before I need it also knows my giving and the attitude that goes with it. How does that make you feel; especially the part about giving? Should he? Should he be all that concerned with money?

But that’s what we see Jesus doing in Mark 12. If you were to catch a glance of Jesus in the temple court, you would see a guy intently watching people give their offerings. He’s not quickly glancing trying not to get caught looking. It’s almost like Jesus stares them down. And while he is people watching, Jesus sees the people who have a lot give a lot. Makes sense: they have a larger pot to give from in the first place. And what makes it all the more obvious that they give a lot is that—by the way Mark originally writes this—these people come two, three different times to give an offering. It would be like if you ask the ushers to pass the plate down a second time after you give your first offering. In Jesus’ day, that sort of action does not seem like it was out of the ordinary. At the same time it was something that people would notice. One might look at that and think, “At least they shouldn’t have money problems at that temple/church!” But Jesus doesn’t say, “Good job!” He simply notices it.

Jesus notices something else too; something that other people probably did not. After all, she’s just another poor widow paying her temple tax like she is supposed

to. She gives the very minimum of what the law allows; nothing flashy or exciting here. She puts the two small coins in the box and walks away.

Amazing. No? To Jesus it is. So much in fact he calls his disciples, “Get over here! This is something you need to pay attention to: **Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others.**” Really, math must not be his strong suit. I don’t know if those small copper coins would pay for the smallest sacrifice. I don’t know if it would have even purchased a stick of wood for the fire under the altar. They probably would not have even noticed if she gave anything at all. But here’s a guy who is trying to tell us that she gave more than all the others!

How often do we hear someone apologizing for what they give? How often do we hear or say things like, “I wish I could do more; but…” Then there’s the flip side where you might look at someone and can’t believe that’s what they give thinking, “They should! They have more than I do.” Or instead of encouraging every individual giving, we make excuses for them, “They don’t have much.” There may be times you wonder why you should give because you feel like it’s not really noticed—no one seems to care. Maybe you feel like it’s not as great as someone else’s offering and it’s hardly going to pay for anything. There are many ways we are tempted to be discouraged and even discourage others from their giving.

But Jesus encourages us. No, Jesus is not bad with math. He explains in v.44, **“They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.”** The rich people give because they trust they had enough to keep on giving. By their calculations, they figured out they were fine and could afford it—they gave from their wealth. What Jesus implies is that if those people did not have that wealth, they would not be giving so willingly. This woman, on the other hand, gives because she trusts God’s promises. She’s willing to give it—give beyond her means and what human reason would say she should—because she knows God will provide. Again, Jesus teaches us that it’s not about the amount, but the attitude behind the giving.

So why do you give whatever you decide to give? Whether it’s from this notion that people are motivated more with shame and guilt or it’s simply trust in the wrong place, there are all sorts of bad attitudes and wrong ideas when it comes to giving. You hear this in comments like, “We need to give otherwise the church doors are going to be closed.” “If I don’t, then no one else is going to step up.” One gives hoping that means God will give me something in return. Another might give

because then the church owes me and will do what I say and want. Instead of giving out of joy, one gives out of obligation and because you are supposed to. Another holds back because, “I don’t have as much as them, so I can’t be expected to give.” Whatever the reason might be, what they all have in common is that it holds us back from giving in a God-pleasing way.

Understand this: God is not a beggar on the street asking for our money; God doesn’t need your money. The one who promises that not even the gates of hell can overcome his church is not depending on you to keep Gospel ministry going. Jesus did say that, if need be, he could use rocks to sing his praise.

Between different statements that are not true, others that burden consciences, and false ideas of self-importance, we can’t be afraid or apologize for talking about how we use our gifts. First, God’s will is that we are faithful with what He gives us. It is our duty as God’s people to speak the truth when it comes to how we use God’s gifts with a proper God-pleasing attitude. Second: God is watching you. God knows whether or not you are being honest with yourself and with him when it comes to your giving.

Whether one has a little or a lot, there’s one reason why we hold back from giving God our firstfruits. Quite simply, he isn’t first in our hearts. There’s one overriding reason why we don’t practice proportionate giving: we forget that God is always the ultimate owner of all. There is one reason why we fail to have a proper attitude when giving: We don’t believe that God will truly take care us.

But Jesus doesn’t watch your wealth because he’s trying to get you into trouble. He’s interested in the health of our faith that binds us to him. It’s not just odd with how closely Jesus is watching all of this happen in the temple courts. It’s odd at what time he does it. Palm Sunday was two days before; this is Tuesday of Holy Week. In a few short days Judas, the one whose love for money is greater than his love for the Lord, will betray Jesus. While in that temple court Jesus looks ahead to when he would carry the heavy cross and the even heavier weight of your sins of greed and doubt. And still he stops and watches because he cares. For this is the grace of your Lord Jesus; this is his love that he freely gives and you cannot earn. Though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor. Though he lives in the glories of heaven, he comes to this sin-filled sin-stained world. Though he is the Almighty God, he allows himself to suffer our weaknesses and is tempted as I am. He knows the draw and temptation of greed, the devil offers him the riches of the world when he tempts Jesus in the wilderness. But Jesus didn’t come here to get

rich. He came to make you rich. So he resists all sin so that you would be given the wealth of full and free forgiveness. He pays the price of his blood so that your debt of sin is erased. He dies so that you are rich with life. This is the grace of your Savior Jesus: he didn't do it for himself. It's not for Jesus' own personal benefit. Jesus sacrifices himself on the altar of that cross, giving himself fully and completely for you. He does it all so that when he is raised from the dead three days later he gives you the guarantee that through his poverty you become rich with his grace.

Since God has given you his Son, will he not also give you every good thing? Of course he will! After the widow gives her last pennies and all she had to live on, do you think God left her to starve to death? She didn't know what tomorrow would bring. She didn't know what she would be living on the next day. But she trusts God's promise that he would take care of her every need.

This is the attitude that Jesus looks for: giving that comes from a heart of faith, bound to him, and trusting God's promises. It's giving that goes beyond our means and what human reason says makes sense. But that's what faith does. It puts your life in God's more-than-capable hands, leaning not on my own understanding, but relies on God. That faith desires to give because it knows that God will be faithful. It believes that when I give, I'm not missing out or losing something. It trusts that God will provide. Yes, your God knows whether or not you are being honest and being faithful with your gifts. That also means that you don't need to try and convince him or anyone that you are being faithful. You don't need to find the perfect excuse to ease your mind. Because Jesus lived perfectly for you, he removes all sin and guilt with it so that you live today guilt-free and sin-free. Don't let the devil's lies burden your conscience. Don't let your sinful nature hold you back and steal the joy in giving. You have been set free by God's Son Jesus—live in that freedom, trusting God's promises, giving to God's glory. Amen.