

*Stewardship*

*November 8, 2015*

*St. Mark 12:41-44:* **“Another Stewardship Sermon  
On the Widow’s Offering”**

- I. Assorted Thoughts.*
- II. The Widow.*
- III. Us.*

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St. Mark 12:41-44

Dear Friends in Christ,

Normally, we use what we call "free texts" for the Sundays of stewardship. That is, the pastors select a text they want to use. You can't imagine how shocked I was when I looked up the appointed Gospel lesson for this morning - **appointed** Gospel lesson - only to discover it was the account of the widow's offering. Some remember it as the widow's mite. We've preached on this text many times during stewardship Sundays, but I can't recall when it was an appointed text for this time.

It was at that moment when I started to get a fuzzy feeling that the Lord had purposely designed this to happen. Some might argue the point, but, well, you never know. Therefore, we'll simply take it for what it's worth, and it's worth a lot since our Lord Jesus uses the incident for teaching purposes. So, here we go, and without a speck of originality . . .

## **ANOTHER STEWARDSHIP SERMON ON THE WIDOW'S OFFERING**

### I. Assorted Thoughts.

I'm calling this part of the sermon "Assorted Thoughts". My first thought is from the early church father, Augustine. You've heard the name here plenty of times over the years. Augustine lived from 354 to 430 A.D. and is considered one of the most influential, if not the most influential, theologians of the early church. He was the Bishop of Hippo Regius, which is now Annaba, Algeria. Here's his statement for our thinking:

Our forefathers abounded in plenty because they gave God the tithe and to Caesar tribute. But now, because our devotion has receded, the imposition of taxes has advanced. We are unwilling to share with God, giving Him the tenth, and now, behold...a tax-gatherer takes from us that which God receives not."

Bluntly speaking, we have too much. All of us have lived with the thinking that the object of life is to get and have certain things and to be able to do certain things and travel certain places. Some believe this is what we deserve. We call it "entitlement". For many, these activities become the chief pursuits of life.

We waste food, We throw out things that have a little age on them. We feel awful if we're not fashionable. We murder unborn children because they interfere with life's self-pursuits. We have to have bigger and better and newer. And most of us have grown-up, or are growing up, with the thinking that the object of life is to retire as soon as possible in order to have some fun, because, evidently, what's on the other side of the grave really isn't all that much "fun". It has been stated:

It is a spiritual tragedy when God's stewards feel free to lavish what has been entrusted to them on needless and even harmful luxuries, while the interests of God's kingdom in many lands are declining for lack of means. (Presbyterian Journal, Dec. 17, 1975, p. 13)

That statement was made 40 years ago. I'm telling you: the interests of God's kingdom have declined dramatically, and will continue to decline, **in this land**. *Churchy* fun and games and toning down the clarity of God's Word so it won't offend people leave absolutely no alternative. It isn't a situation where most "church people" don't have that much money. It's a case of having and wanting and accumulating too much. "Church people" people are grossly distracted while a government edges its way into freedom of speech and freedom of religion.

Finally, this from Scripture: "Keep your life free from the love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'" (Heb. 13:5) And someone will probably ask, "What exactly does that mean?" Well, it means this: "Keep your life free from the love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'"

## II. The Widow.

And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. (v. 41,42) [A footnote in the ESV translation says of the coins, "...a Roman copper coin worth about 1/64 of a *denarius* (which was a day's wage for a laborer)."]

And there she is: the widow. No spouse to help. No retirement benefits. No social security. No insurance policies. No investments in gold or silver. No winter home. And, possibly, no family or friends to help her. But more . . .

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. (vs. 43)

You know the story about the offering box. She was putting money into the Temple which had been corrupted by its leaders. Jesus did not stop her. On the contrary, he teaches that her small amount was more than everyone else. He said, "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." (vs. 44)

I've always noted that Jesus - God in the flesh - did not make His goal that of elevating those who were proud in their own eyes, or those elevated by humanity for their humanitarian achievements. Celebrity. And why would He? After all, sinful humans are simply that: sinful humans. Most like to think God loves them because there are qualities and demonstrations of qualities worthy of His love. But remember: Nobody has ever entered heaven because they won an Academy Award, because they discovered a cure, because they worked among the lepers, because they composed a great piece of music, because they were faithful in their work at the factory, the business, the school, the church, the...whatever.

In fact, Scriptures spell it out clearly:

But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. (I Cor. 1:27-29)

We love the account of the poor widow because - well - realistically - we love the account because the poor widow is.....us. Nothing of importance to this world, but important to Him. And that not because we earned His love but simply because...well...because He loved and loves us. That's it!

## III. Us.

It is as David said, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." (Ps. 51:17) That's where we live, daily; the place the world despises; the place that reminds us that we are broken by sin and guilt and look to Jesus for forgiveness and eternal life.

Paul writes, "While we were sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom. 5:8b) That says it all, doesn't it? It is the incomprehensible love of God in Christ that entered our lives and lifted us to the hope and comfort of forgiveness and eternal life.

I want to put something else in front of you that we have considered here before. It's from Psalm 73, a Psalm of Asaph. It's a couple of statements about those who mock, hate and reject God's love in Christ. It's this: "How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors! Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when you rouse yourself, you despise them as phantoms." (Ps. 73:19,20)

Think about that; the terms of what God had Asaph write concerning those without a covering for their sin. "Swept away utterly by terrors!" Those terrors will never end. Never. Forever! No time off. No vacations. And, again: God will "despise them as phantoms." A phantom! Webster defines phantom as "something...apparent to sense but with no substantial existence." God will see them as something that really doesn't exist. No love. No hope. Never. Forever.

Christ saved us from that. Scriptures say, "The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. 6:23b) Beaten, bloodied, nailed to a Cross, facing the depths of hell, Jesus did everything to make sure we would have eternal life. If you believe in Christ, God grants you something which infinitely surpasses anything of this world we crave. God will never despise us as fantasies. That's got to be worth something. Something far more than anything of this world! More than a few bucks once-in-while.

It was for the widow. The love of God was everything!

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott