

The Widow' Mites (Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:1-4)

- According to the Matthew 23 account, Jesus had just completed a series of woes for the Jewish leadership. It wasn't that Jesus was mean-spirited, but honest and to the point concerning the matter of their spiritual life. Just on the tail of this and while still in the temple, the following account occurred.

Mark 12:41 And He sat down opposite the treasury, and {began} observing how the multitude were putting money into the treasury; and many rich people were putting in large sums.

- The location where Jesus sat down was known as the "Court of the Women". It was called this because it was as close as a woman could come to the Holy Place. Located on the east side of the Temple, it was the most accessible area for the overall Jewish population.
- This was also the location of the Temple treasury which housed 13 bronze, trumpet-shaped banks for people to pay their tithes, Temple tax and other fees. It would have functioned like a change catcher at a toll booth.
- From His seated position, Jesus could see many people walking up to the treasury banks and tossing in their coins, including the rich folks. The text states Jesus was observing "HOW" the people were giving because there are many different ways a person could give.
- The rich people were the first to catch Jesus' eye and they were giving much. The focus was not so much on "WHAT" they were giving, but as the text says he began observing "HOW" they were giving. Many of these rich individuals had a bad practice in their offerings.
 - The hypocritical rich of Jesus' day would often use the giving at the treasury as an opportunity draw attention to themselves. They would take large sums of coins and making a lot of noise while dropping the coins into the trumpet-shaped banks.
 - This is probably what Jesus was referring to in *Matt 6:2 "When therefore you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be honored by men."*

Mark 12:42-44 And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which amount to a cent. 43 And calling His disciples to Him, He said to them, "Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury; 44 for they all put in out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on."



- It is also in this account that we are introduced to a nameless widow in the grip of poverty. Out of her hand she released two small copper coins called mites. They are the tiniest of money used in that era, being nothing more than a smidgeon of copper. Together, these two coins were only worth about 1/64th of the average daily food for an Israelite. It would not

- have even been enough to buy a half-piece of bread much less a decent meal. This woman was destitute and in need of daily assistance for those two mites were all that she had.
- Jesus excitingly called over His disciples in what they might have thought was going to be some marvelous revelation, being all that they have already seen from Him thus far. “Look at that widow woman who put in two mites!!!”
 - Perhaps the disciples were a bit perplexed with Jesus taking notice of such a humble and quiet sight amidst such a stir of the large amounts being put in by the rich. Jesus reminded them that the rich were putting in from their surplus, but the widow was putting in all that she had.

What can we learn from this lesson?

1) We have an obligation to give corporately.

- Jesus sat across from the temple treasury, something that all the Jews were expected to support. It was not a strange thing to see everyone from the least to the greatest giving in the temple, whether widow or rich person. That was something that was never called into question by our Lord because it was expected. There has always been corporate giving among the people of God.
 - All the people provided for the furnishing of the tabernacle and the temple of the OT.
 - All the Christians gave towards the work of the church in the NT.
 - Many congregations funded missionaries, church plants and benevolent works together.
 - Paul refers to the “partnership in the gospel” when referring to the Philippians in chapter 1:5.
- We are no different, for God expects all of His people to be giving all of the time, not twice a year or whenever it is convenient. It is good to have a common structure to meet in, a common goal to help the needy and a common ambition to evangelize near and far as one. There is corporate giving as Christians.

2) We all have an obligation to give individually.

- In one of the “woes” of Matthew 23, Jesus said in verse 14 *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows’ houses..”* Mark, who does not cover the “woes”, does emphasize what Jesus said concerning this in *Mark 12:40 who devour widows’ houses, and for appearance’s sake offer long prayers; these will receive greater condemnation.* I am persuaded that Mark draws our attention to this because of this account and the upcoming dialogue of the destruction of Jerusalem. This text allows us to understand how a bankrupt religion can bankrupt widows.
- The rich were giving large sums before the people and to the temple when in fact they could have pulled this poor widow woman aside and fill her coffers. How would God have viewed one of these rich people had they

- spent a fraction of their blessings in life to make sure she was fed and sheltered? Would God not have rejoiced if one of these rich people would have bought a new change of clothes or some needed funds?
- It does not always take a meeting of an eldership or a vote from a committee to come to the aid of someone in need. It is okay when seeing a need to fill it yourself. We have an obligation to give individually.

3) We all have an obligation to give sacrificially.

- The rich were giving out of their surplus, but the widow was giving all that she had. She literally did not have anything else to offer. This is called sacrificial giving because she did not have anything left over.
 - In no place does God say that the Christian has an obligation to give it all. We are expected on the other hand to be sacrificial.
 - David is quoted in 2 Sam 24:24 *"...I will not offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God which cost me nothing..."*
 - Barnabas understood sacrificial giving in Acts 4:37, for when the Christians were in desperate need he sold his tract of land and donated it to the church.
 - The Philippians understood this in 2 Cor 8:3, for they gave "beyond their ability" and of "their own accord".
- Illustration: The American industrialist, Henry Ford, was once asked to donate money for the construction of a new medical facility. The billionaire pledged to donate \$5,000. The next day in the newspaper, the headline read, "Henry Ford contributes \$50,000 to the local hospital." The irate Ford was on the phone immediately to complain to the fund-raiser that he had been misunderstood. The fund-raiser replied that they would print a retraction in the paper the following day to read, "Henry Ford reduces his donation by \$45,000." Realizing the poor publicity that would result, the industrialist agreed to the \$50,000 contribution in return for the following: That above the entrance to the hospital was to be carved the biblical inscription: "I came among you and you took me in."
- Giving sacrificially might mean giving up something that we do not need in our life. It is the type of giving that sends kids to Bible camp and other spiritual activities that will reap dividends later on. It means putting God first in the budget and US second. We all have an obligation to give sacrificially.

4) We all have an obligation to give anonymously.

- There were some there that day that gave in a way that was simply corrupt, for they did it to be seen of men. The average person in the day would have been impressed with such a display of giving, but God was not. Many gave in a way that desired glory from man and not God. How much better would have it been had they simply exchanged the large amount of coins for a few gold coins and then drop them in? They needed to be anonymous in their approach.

- Story about an anonymous giver: Charles Spurgeon, a famous preacher, and his wife, according to a story in the Chaplain magazine, would sell, but refused to give away, the eggs their chickens laid. Even close relatives were told, "You may have them if you pay for them." As a result some people labeled the Spurgeons greedy and grasping. They accepted the criticisms without defending themselves, and only after Mrs. Spurgeon died was the full story revealed. All the profits from the sale of eggs went to support two elderly widows. Because the Spurgeons were unwilling to let their left hand know what the right hand was doing (Matthew 6:3), they endured the attacks in silence.
- We also should give anonymously in our charity. This is not saying that we need not write out checks or claim it on our taxes. The text does not teach to sneak our monies into the offering dish for fear of being seen. It does not mean that nobody will ever know what you give. It does mean that we should avoid telling people what we give or make a scene when redistributing the blessings of God. Giving anonymously also says that it is okay to tell the treasurer not to give your name out when funding a special project. Giving anonymously is simply communicating our need to take all focus off ourselves and putting it on God. We have that obligation.

Take thought in meditating upon the widow and her two mites. Give corporately, individually, sacrificially and anonymously, whether it is two mites or two million dollars. That is our obligation concerning our charity.

Closing Story:

A man had a heart attack and was rushed to the hospital. He could receive little company and was not to be excited. While in the hospital a rich uncle died and left him a million dollars. His family wondered how to break the news to him with the least amount of excitement. It was decided to ask the preacher if he would go and break the news quietly to the man. The preacher went, and gradually led up to the question. The preacher asked the patient what he would do if he inherited a million dollars. He said, "I think I would give half of it to the church." The preacher dropped dead.