

- ***READ Mark 12:41-44*** All throughout the Bible we find stories of mighty and powerful men and women who did mighty deeds in the name of the Lord that brought about great results and successes. Men such as David and Daniel and women such Esther and Abigail stand out as people who were exceptional in their faith, bravery, and strength. We often enjoy looking at these types of individuals and their stories to find encouragement that we too can be mighty and powerful for the Lord. These stories get us excited and we like to put ourselves in the shoes of such people because we see them as being people that we would want to be. We see these people as being people that we can really learn something from.
- Did you happen to notice in the few verses we just read that Jesus found someone whom He wanted His disciples to learn from? Within these verses we read of regular people and even rich people. And yet it wasn't these people from whom Jesus wanted His disciples to learn. Instead, He wanted for them to learn from a poor widow who had come into the women's court of the temple to give of her means in support of the work of the temple.
- We might be quick to learn from great men such as Abraham, Moses, David, Peter, and Paul, but Jesus here in this text points out that there is much that can and should be learned from this poor widow who gave only a small amount of support to the work that was being done by those in the temple. This seemingly weak woman stood out to our Lord as an example of the proper way in which we ought to give of our means in support of the Lord, and we will use our time of study this morning considering this widow and her two small copper coins. Let's begin by looking at this small section of the Gospel narrative and the surrounding context, and then we will close with some considerations for us to contemplate within our own lives.

I. The Context:

A. Jesus has just finished rebuking the scribes for their wicked deeds.

1. This occasion of Jesus complementing the deed of this widow seems to be a contrast to what Mark mentions just prior concerning the deeds of the scribes. In **Mark 12:38-40**, a much shorter version of what can be found in **Matthew 23**, we find Jesus speaking a rebuke towards the scribes for their prideful actions of dressing in lavish clothes, demanding honor in the market places, and demanding the best seats at the banquets. He also mentions in **verse 40** that they would offer long prayers simply to be noticed by others. These actions stand in direct contradiction to the great sacrifice and humility of the widow. We will focus in on those sacrificial deeds here in a moment.
2. Before we get there, let's notice that one condemnation we left was that of them devouring the houses of widows. Not much is mentioned to elaborate on this point, but it could simply be that they took advantage of widows by robbing them of what little might have been left in their care. Regardless of what this actually looked like, we can easily see how such mistreatment of the helpless and need would greatly enflame the anger of our Lord. Mark seems to take this fiery passion of Jesus and contrast it with the great sacrifice that is praised so strongly by Jesus here in this text.

B. Jesus watches as all sorts of people give to the temple.

1. It very well might be the case that Jesus finds Himself in what was known as the Women's Court which was located within the temple compound. Within this area would've been thirteen receptacles that would've served as the means by which Jews would be able to offer monetary sacrifices to the temple. These receptacles were marked in such a way that indicated what the money given in each individual receptacles collections would be used for. They would've been labeled for temple tribute, wood, sacrifices, incense, and other materials that would've been used by those who were daily operating within the temple.
2. As Jesus is sitting in observation, he sees what we would expect. Those who were coming to give who He observed as being rich based upon their appearances were giving large sums as might have been expected. We'll note that Jesus gives no rebuke towards the rich for doing so. This giving would've been commendable and seems to have been done in the same way well-off Jews had been doing many many years. We can read of how generous the people were in the first givings for the tabernacle back in **Exodus 35:20-29;36:2-7**. There we find it recorded of people's hearts being stirred and spirits being moved to be a part of the Lord's work within the tabernacle. These peoples' givings were commendable, but Jesus has His attention very much elsewhere.

C. Jesus takes special notice of the effort put forth by the widow.

1. While the rich were giving large amounts, Jesus notices a poor widow who came and gave an extremely small amount to the work of the temple. Mark and the other Gospel writers tell us that she gave two small copper coins that would've amounted to a cent. **(Mark 16:42)** Looking at the side reference in my Bible, I see that this would've been a Greek "*lepta*" or "*quadrans*." A little more digging would tell us that this would've been worth 1/64th of a denarius which was a day's wage. To understand this better, as Copeland illustrates, if a day's wage was \$25, a "*quadrans*" would be worth around 75-80 cents with a single copper coin being worth around 40 cents. Basically this woman gave next to nothing.
2. However, Jesus was extremely impressed by this woman. He is so impressed that He refuses to keep His thoughts to Himself. Instead, we see Him calling His disciples to Him so that He might share the great deed done by this widow. His words are pretty impressive when considering what the widow actually gave. *"Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury; 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."* **(Mark 12:43,44)** Jesus was so impressed by this widow that He wanted His disciples to learn something, and the same would be true for us. He would want us to learn something from this widow, and we will spend the rest of our time doing that very thing.

II. Observations & Applications:

A. Jesus watches how we give.

1. We might often think that our giving to the work of the Lord is a very private matter, and that would be an accurate understanding in my observation. It could be very easy for us to give week in and week out and no one ever know how much we give. Giving a check would obviously make that a bit more difficult because those who count the money would be aware, but the reality is that our giving isn't something that is broadcasted for public consumption.
2. However, we must be aware that our giving is known by our Lord who's Apostles have established that this is something that we are to do as members of local disciples. We certainly recognize that there is nothing that is hidden from the sight of an all-knowing and all-seeing God and that would include the giving that we participate in every Lord's day. **Hebrews 4:13** reminds us, *"There is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do."*

3. This fact of our Lord watching our giving should especially be understood when we consider what we read in **Acts 5:1-11** concerning Ananias and Sapphira. In this text we are told of this couple who were disciples in the early church. They owned a piece of property and sold it for a certain amount of money. They decided to give a portion of that money to the church, but they spoke as if the amount they gave was the full amount it sold for. Ananias takes the money to the Apostle's and lays it at their feet. Peter, through the Holy Spirit, knows what has taken place and rebukes Ananias's actions. Ananias is struck dead on the spot.
4. About three hours later, Sapphira comes to Peter and he inquires as to the amount they sold the land for. Sapphira, like Ananias, states that the amount they gave was the amount the land brought. Also like her husband, Sapphira is rebuked by Peter and falls dead on the spot. In both instances, Peter made it well known that they had every right to give to the Lord the amount that they did. However, their trying to make themselves look greater through lying about what they had actually sold the land for caused for them to be immediately punished. This simply leads us to our next observation and lesson that God is much more concerned with our heart of giving than the actual amount given.

B. Jesus judges based upon our quality of giving, not our quantity given.

1. Just as this widow's small giving was noticed over the grand giving of the rich, Jesus continues to be more focused on the quality of our giving and not the quantity. This seems especially evident when Paul is writing to the Corinthians to commend the Macedonian Christians for their giving to disciples that were in need elsewhere in **II Corinthians 8:1-5 & 9:6,7**. The commendation wasn't necessarily because they gave massive amounts, but it was because they gave even beyond their ability when the need arose.
2. Paul goes on to state that is "*cheerful giver*" that God loves so much. Those who are excited and joyful about being able to participate in the work. This is what made the widow so great in the eyes of Jesus. No, she didn't give anything compared to what was given by those who were rich and giving large amounts, but they were giving out of their "*surplus*" (**Mark 12:44**) This is where they differ so much from the widow. She had no surplus! She only had this very little amount to live off of, and yet she was willing to give even that to the Lord. My question is...what made it possible for her to do such a thing?
3. My answer to that question is that she was willing to do true sacrificing in order to have a part in the work that was being done in the temple. This is what was done by this woman, and this was also what was being done by those in Macedonia who sought to help their brethren who were struggling in other places. Notice again that Paul states in **II Corinthians 8:2,3** that these brethren were themselves in deep poverty and yet they still gave according to their own ability. What's more, they were even willing to give beyond what they were able. They were willing to give that which they themselves would have been in need of.
4. This is what we mean when we speak of true sacrificial giving. Just as the widow gave all that she had to live on...just as the Macedonians gave beyond their means...so Jesus looks to us to imitate their example by seeking to practice giving that is truly sacrificial. Therefore, we must ask ourselves this question: When I give to the Lord, is what I am giving truly counted as a sacrifice? The answer to that question will vary person by person. It varies based upon what we have to our name. It varies based upon the needs that we have day to day. It varies based upon any number of factors, but what is common among each of us ought to be that desire to truly give in such a way that we can say we have sacrificed in our giving. Those who don't have much should never be ashamed with what they are able to give. Giving with their full hearts brings glory to God! Again, that amount will look different person to person, but the quality ought to all be excellent. The motivation behind it all will be our final point this morning.

C. Our giving to the Lord should be motivated by love for His purposes and our willingness to truly sacrifice for Him.

1. Some might look at our giving as a tax of some sort, but the reality is that our giving is participation in the work of this congregation. This is clearly seen in what Paul writes in **II Corinthians 8:4,5**. Speaking of the Macedonians Paul writes that they were, *"begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God."* This great desire to aid their fellow disciples was a direct result of their love that they had for God. That love for God and their fellow man was what led them to be willing to give in such a way.
2. It was truly a giving that Paul states was not given grudgingly or under compulsion. Instead, it was a giving that showed their deep abiding love for the Lord and those who shared the same faith. This giving might have made life a little more difficult for them from a stand point of their finances, but we know well Jesus's admonitions for us to be first concerned with the kingdom of God and those needs we had would be added to us as we have needs. **(Matthew 6:33)** Jesus Himself was certainly one who was able to say and teach such things because He Himself was not someone who had great wealth or means. We remember Him stating that *"foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."* **(Matthew 8:20)** Jesus was able to do such a thing because He truly trusted in His Father's ability to deliver those things He truly needed the most when the need arose.
3. Should we therefore take all of this to mean that we should give everything we have to live destitute lives like monks or nuns? No, no this doesn't seem to be Jesus's point at all. Remember that Jesus is contrasting the wicked scribes with this widow. He simply wants for us to make sure that our love for God and others is ever present in our lives and is evidenced in how we are willing to sacrifice of ourselves for God and others. The reality is that our giving should be a sacrifice, but that sacrifice is going to differ from person to person while the quality of our mindset and heart remains only excellent before God.

Sure there are many great individuals in the Bible who we might seek to emulate in different ways, but there are also lesser characters who might not even have names that we can learn so much from. This widow of the Gospel accounts would certainly qualify as such a person, and we would do well to learn from her sacrificial heart as we participate in the work of this church through giving of our means as we gather together on the Lord's Day. May our God be with us and give us courage to truly give sacrificially of ourselves so that others might be blessed and the church's work might be progressed.