

### **Mark 12:41-44, 2 Corinthians 9:6-13**

Story of Strongest Man in the world tour. Squeezes all the juice out of an orange until completely dry, then challenges the audience to come and try to squeeze a drop out of it. If they do they win £1000 prize. Weedy skinny looking bloke takes up the challenge, everyone laughs at him. He takes the orange half in his hands and presses them together and lo and behold a drop of orange juice falls from the orange. Completely perplexed by this man's achievement the World's Strongest Man looks and the puny bloke and asks, 'How did you do that?' 'What on earth do you do for a living?' 'Oh' says the bloke 'I'm a church treasurer'

And of course we all laugh because we know it's true, our treasurers far too often have to get something from nothing! It would seem that the whole area of money and generosity with money is something that we as human beings have struggled with for years. It was Martin Luther who rather astutely observed that 'There are three conversions necessary: the conversion of the heart, mind and the purse!' Of these three the whole area of purse or money is spoken of very little and yet Jesus spoke about money more frequently than any other subject except the KOG. He gave an unusual amount of time and energy to the money question. And His careful attention to it I think is one of the truly amazing things about the Gospel accounts as we have them, the range of his concern is huge from the parable of the sower to the parable of the rich farmer from the encounter with the rich young man, to the one with Zacchaeus, from the teaching on trust in Matthew 6 to the teachings on the dangers of wealth in Luke 6 and of course in amongst all of these encounters and teaching we have the story we heard about this am, the widow's offering.

I've often wondered why Jesus should take a seat opposite the treasury, obviously he needed a bit of a break from the hostile questioning he had been subjected to just before this little bit of the story, but why sit right by where the offerings are collected? Maybe simply because this whole area of money, of what we give and how we give it was and is very important to Him. The treasury was located in the Court of Women in the temple, which had thirteen trumpet-shaped chests. By means of letters of the Hebrew alphabet each receptacle was marked, so that the people would know for what distinctive purpose the money it received would be used, whether for the temple tribute, for sacrifices, incense, for the needy, or whatever. As the metal coins were cast into these trumpets, they make a loud noise. The more money that was cast in, the louder the sound.

As Jesus sits by the treasury we read that 'He saw how people put money into the treasury' The word translated 'saw' is a word that means to view carefully, to examine. The tense indicates continuous action. He was not just giving a few passing glances at the people, but He kept looking intently, carefully observing how the people dropped their money into the treasury. He watched, he saw what the people gave, but also more than that, he saw how they gave as well. He noticed the wealthy depositing their large offerings, and He noticed a poor widow dropping in two small mites of money that were equivalent of about 1/64<sup>th</sup> of a days wage for a common labourer. And yet what she did was so beautiful in the eyes of Jesus that her actions have been memorialized to this very day in the pages of Scripture. This widow was unnamed, and probably unnoticed by everyone else, but she pleased Jesus, and that's what matters most.

In many ways you could say that if you wanted a picture to illustrate the reading from 2 Corinthians then this poor widow is what you need to look at.

Why?

Because she of what she gave.

**1. A generous gift** - She gives in a way that Paul was encouraging the Corinthians to. Sow bountifully he says. This widow may have only given a tiny amount, but it was all she had, it was a generous gift that's what Jesus says - she gave all, in fact Jesus says she gave more than all those who had put into the treasury. Based on what she had, she was incredibly generous in her giving. What this widow gave was priceless.

I wonder, if we all were to consider what we gave, offered to God from our own finances last month could the same be said of any of us here?

Are you generous or stingy in your giving? I have to say that I think that the stinginess of professing Christians is one of the crying sins of our day. Paul encourages generous giving, giving in the way this widow gave. What else do we see in this widow that provides an illustration for what Paul encourages - well we see that this widow gives sacrificially

**2. A sacrificial gift** - In v.44 Jesus said, 'For they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood.' Her gift showed more love and self-denial than all the gifts of the rich. They gave what they did not really need, but she gave to the point of sacrifice.

Sometimes people will excuse the smallness of their gift by saying that they are just giving their widow's mite. But that probably would not be a true statement in the fullest sense of the word. She gave all that she had to live on for the rest of that day or even week. So have you ever given the widow's mite? The rich were just making a comparatively small contribution, but the widow was making a major sacrifice.

It reminds me of the cartoon of the chicken & pig. They were discussing the upcoming charity breakfast consisting of bacon and eggs. The chicken asked the pig if he was going to participate in the charity breakfast. The pig replied, 'Oh no, for you chicken, it would just be a contribution. But for me, it would be a total sacrifice.'

Let's be honest. Most of us do not give to the point of sacrifice. Our gifts are well within what we can afford to give. The Bible teaches proportionate giving doesn't it. God's ideal starting point for giving is 10%, this principle is called tithing, we read about it in Leviticus 27 and in Malachi, we should give in relation to what God has blessed us with. The more we receive, the more we give. And what about those who say they can't afford to give to the Lord's work? I wonder can anyone really say that in the light of this story? Personally I have to say that I'm aware I could give more on occasions myself, but I would have to say that I don't think I could afford not to tithe. I have tithed for years now and I do believe that God has blessed me with the money I need for the things I need along the way in remarkable ways. I would not want to withhold God's tithe from Him. So if 10% is the starting point sacrificial giving it would seem to me is above and beyond this.

So as we think about this today I wonder as you think about your giving do you tithe, give to God 10% of your money? Now I'm aware because when we have discussions about this at CtK there's always someone ready to point out to me that people can give in lots of different ways and of course they are completely right, the trouble is that often - not always - but often we can use this idea to try and get out of the clear call that giving can be done in many ways but it always includes our money. I have often replied to those who may not like the fact I seem to be quite hot on tithing and would like to point out all the other ways people can give, by asking whether they will therefore be giving 10% of their time, energy, skills, gifts, attention etc to God. I have reflected that in many ways the financial tithe may be the easiest one to give? Paul encourages generous, sacrificial giving just like we see the widow doing and he also encourages giving in faith

**3. A faith gift** - As we have seen in v.44, after this widow gave her two coins, she didn't have anything left, even to buy a loaf of bread. Now how could she give like that? Some would consider her rather foolish. Shall we say that she might at least have kept one of these small, thin copper coins for herself? But no, she gave both. She gave all the money that she had. How can you explain it? There's only one explanation: She was giving by faith in total dependence upon God to provide. After all, He promised to provide for the widow and the fatherless.

On the mite (the name of the coins she gave) it is thought that on one side was an image of the sun and its rays. On the other side was the image of a ship's anchor. Both images remind us of the faithfulness of God to keep His promises.

And so when she dropped in those two coins, she was trusting in the Son of Righteousness, and relying upon the steadfastness of the faithfulness of God.

I doubt that there would be one of us who would give to the point of draining our bank accounts and savings down to a zero balance! It would take great faith in God to do that! But God is worthy of our total and complete trust to provide if He directs you to give like this poor widow.

So this widow illustrates Paul's encouragement to the Corinthians to give as what we see her giving generously, sacrificially and in faith but he does go on to talk about how we give as well which I think is important for us today;

We are to give;

**1. from our hearts** - in verse 7 we must give what we have decided to give in our hearts. it seems to me that this is where we realise that our giving should be thought, and prayed about. I wonder have you ever spent time praying about what amount of money you should be giving to God? It shouldn't be well let's see what's left at the end of the month it should be the first thing to come out of the money pot the amount before anything else, its God's after all. i wonder if your giving has this priority? We should also be

**2. cheerfully** - you know not in the way that my kids used to attempt to give sweets to others, by taking them round and nipping the bottom of the bag so tight it was obvious they really didn't want to be giving anything at all. We should be those who desire to give to be open hearted and open handed with giving. We should give from our hearts, cheerfully and also

**3. with thanksgiving** - why? well simply because we have grasped the very truth that everything that we have comes to us as a gift from God. Everything is His in the first place - we are just here to steward the things we have, to bless others freely with all that we have been blessed with. Thinking about this maybe helps us to see why I believe what I said earlier, that the stinginess of professing Christians is one of the crying sins of our day, because when churches become full of people who are not giving as they should be, as they are called to be it is I think a symptom of un-thankfulness. What does it really say about what we really believe about this God who has given everything for us and has promised He would provide for our needs, when we will not, cannot part with at the very least a 10% portion of what He's given us?

So where does this leave you this am - I'm aware that this subject is awkward and difficult trust me I know, I've had to sit and really allow these scriptures to speak to me this week and then as I've plugged myself into my phone for my daily readings as I walk the dog - unbeknown to me the pray as you go site I use has had this 2 Corinthians passage on it this week as well. I'm aware it's a difficult topic for us to really wrestle with and get right but it's so important that we do.

What we give from our finances and how we give are important to Jesus, our giving is an important part of what it means to be a follower of Jesus so what do you need to do about it this am?

Maybe you need to go away and think seriously and pray about your giving. Maybe you need to start tithing if you're not already. Maybe you need to think about setting up a standing order for your giving- I personally find this the best way for me to make sure that the money goes from my account every month without fail.

Our giving when it's done in the way we are called to do it generously, sacrificially, in faith, cheerfully from our hearts, with thanksgiving, it glorifies God. When we give as Paul encourages us to, when we give as we see this widow giving, we glorify God.

Wouldn't it be good that here in Walton we would know that we don't need our treasures to be able to squeeze something out of nothing because as a generous hearted bunch of disciples we don't just talk about giving in the right way we actually start practising it and enjoy the adventure of generously serving our generous God together.