

Message #101

Luke 21:1-4

I will never forget a discussion I had years ago with Mr. Miles. I asked him this question: "Suppose a person came to you and asked you how much money they should give to God each week, what would you say?" Without so much as a pause, he said, "I would say to the individual before I can answer that question for you, you are going to have to tell me how much money you have and how much money you make. You will have to tell me everything about your finances." I asked him if he would give some percentage number like 10%, and he said, "no." He said, "I would have to analyze the total amount of money made as opposed to the amount of money needed to live." He said, "Let's say a person made \$100 per week. He said I would probably suggest to that person that they give \$10-\$12 per week. But if all of a sudden this person made \$10,000 per week, then 10% would be \$1,000 per week, but he probably would be in a position to give \$4,000 per week to the Lord. It would all depend on what he had and what he needed. He said for a person making \$100 per week, \$10-\$12 is a major sacrifice; but for a person who makes \$10,000 per week, \$1,000 per week is not as great a sacrifice.

In my years of ministry, I have never forgotten that discussion. I have had people come to me and ask "How much shall we give?" My answer is it is between you and God and in order for me to put a number on it; I would have to know everything about your finances and I don't want to know that and I don't want the responsibility. So you get alone with God and talk with Him about it.

A. T. Pierson, the Presbyterian Bible scholar of the 1800's, used to say, "God estimates what we give by what we keep." **It is very evident that in the calculation of God, it is not the size of the gift that is impressive; it is the sacrifice of the gift that is impressive.**

What is quite clear from this text is a critical theme:

WHEN IT COMES TO GIVING MONEY TO GOD'S WORK, THE GREATEST ETERNAL HONOR WILL NOT NECESSARILY BE GIVEN TO THOSE WHO GAVE THE BIGGEST AMOUNTS; BUT THOSE WHO MADE THE BIGGEST SACRIFICES.

We are to sacrificially give to the Lord. There are those who sacrificially give to the Lord week after week. Instead of stuffing more money in the bank; they give to God's church. There are others who give every week; but it really isn't at a high level of sacrifice. They put far more in the bank in one year than they will ever give to the Lord. God keeps the records of this. In God's mind, it is not the size of the gift that determines its value; it is the sacrifice behind the gift that determines the value.

Now this is quite a humiliating moment for Jesus Christ. He is in His Temple (19:46). He is watching people who are giving their offerings to the Lord's work. He knew the size of each offering and He knew the sacrifice behind each offering.

Think for a moment what it would be like to be Jesus Christ. This must have been very humiliating. He is in His temple (Luke 19:46). He is watching people who are giving their offerings to the Lord's work. He knew the size of each offering and He knew the sacrifice behind each offering. Think what it would be like for the Son of God to watch most people putting their offerings in one of the collection receptacles, knowing full well that for the most part there was very little sacrifice behind it. Here He was about to sacrifice His own life on the cross and most were not really sacrificially giving their money. This must have been very humiliating.

In this text there are two Christological actions that occurred in the Temple:

CHRISTOLOGICAL ACTION #1 – What Jesus Christ saw. 21:1-2

If you would have been there with Jesus Christ at this moment, you would have looked up and you would have seen all kinds of people giving their offerings. When Jesus Christ looked up, He saw much more than that. He saw the amount of every offering that was cast into the treasury and He saw the actual sacrifice behind the amount of the offering.

Now the treasury was a specific place inside the Temple of Jerusalem, located in the women's court. This is no coincidence because, typically speaking, women who love God are usually far more generous than men. This was a good place for the treasury.

According to the Talmud, the Jewish O.T. commentary, the treasury featured 13 trumpet shaped metal receptacles, each marked with a different Hebrew letter, which represented the specific designated use of each offering. Jesus saw all the people giving their offerings to God. But He specifically saw two types of people:

Type #1 - He saw the rich men giving their offerings. 21:1

The word "rich" means these people were very wealthy. In fact, they were at an abundant wealth level. These men made lots of money and, as we will demonstrate in a moment, they saved most of it. They put most of it in the bank. Compared to what they gave to God, their savings account was astronomical.

Let's do a little math on this and see where we are. In your own mind total up how much you have given to the Lord in the last ten years and compare that to what you have in the bank. Which number is the greatest? For these rich people, they had much more in the bank.

Type #2 - He saw the poor widow giving her offering. 21:2

The noun "widow" carries with it some very meager connotations in the word of God and in the first century. Widows did not live in nice protected places of residency. They did not have social security or pensions or life insurance policies. They had to fend for themselves. Life was very difficult for a widow woman.

- 1) A widow was a woman who did not have a husband.
- 2) A widow was a woman who was prey for religious con men.
- 2) A widow was a woman who did not live in luxury.
- 3) A widow was a woman who had very little social status.
- 4) A widow was a woman who had very little joy.
- 5) A widow was a woman who had very little money.

Now Jesus saw a “poor widow” putting her money in the offering. That word “poor” means she was very poor at a destitute and desolate level financially. However, this woman was not destitute spiritually.

The word “poor” in **verse 2** (penicron) actually means to be very needy (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 353). The word “poor” in **verse 3** (ptwch) means to be so poor that one is at a destitute level of needing to beg (*Ibid.*, p. 393).

So combined, these two words mean that the widow Jesus saw was at the poorest financial level that one could be.

Now what Christ saw was this very poor woman put two small copper coins or mites into the offering. It equaled 1/8th of a penny. Two equaled 1/4 of a penny. If you compare the dollar amount between what the rich men gave and what this widow gave, there is no comparison.

Now let’s pause here for a moment to make an observation. Jesus Christ sees the amount of offering we give every time we give it. Whatever we give or didn’t give, Jesus Christ sees. Our offerings do not go unnoticed or unmonitored by Jesus Christ. If a person is holding out on God, He knows it and in many texts He makes it clear that He will withhold His blessings (Mal. 3:8-12; II Cor.9:6).

Perhaps you give and you wonder if your offering even matters to God. Well here is your answer. It is clear that it does matter. God sees every penny we give or did not give. Do not be deceived into thinking the only people who count your offerings are Deacons and Treasurers. Jesus Christ sees it and counts it.

Peter Marshall, a Presbyterian minister of a church in Washington D.C., in the 1930’s, used to say, “Be certain to give according to your income lest God make your income according to your giving.”

Christ keeps track of offerings.

CHRISTOLOGICAL ACTION #2 – What Jesus Christ said. 21:3-4

We are not left to speculate about what Jesus Christ saw and how He viewed it, for He gives us His own analysis of giving.

Carefully observe the first word He uses, it is the adverb “truly.” Christ chooses this word carefully. What He means is in view of all of the religious and theological thinking about offerings and giving, I will give you the dogmatic certainty of the matter. I will give you the truth of financial giving, from God’s perspective.

Christ’s assessment, which He stresses, “I am saying this to you” is that this poor widow woman put more in the offering basket than all of the rich men. God’s calculation of the offering was that this poor beggarly woman gave the most impressive and largest offering in the sight of God. Her ¼ cent contribution to the offering was astronomical and eternal in the mind of God.

Now someone might ask, how can that be? Well notice how **verse 4** begins with the conjunction “for.” In Greek we call this an explanatory “for” (gar). This explains why the poor woman gave more than all the rich men.

It is because of the level of sacrifice involved in the offering. The rich people gave out of their surplus, which means they gave from their over and above money. After they had everything they wanted, they gave some to God. They gave out of their abundance.

The rich people had lots of money. They had a great savings account; they had good investments; they lived in nice homes and they had plenty of food. After they took everything out for themselves, they gave out of their surplus to God.

If it came down to a choice between something they wanted or an offering to God, self would have won. This certainly prompts us to ask a question; “Have you ever refused yourself something because you knew it would hurt your giving to the Lord?” or “Is your giving a surplus giving?”

These rich people practiced surplus giving; but notice the widow; she gave “out of her poverty.” The widow gave to the Lord when she could have used the money for her own legitimate needs. She gave when she could have used that money, not on extras, but on real needs. She gave out of her personal deficiency and poverty.

Now the financial advisors of the world would laugh at this woman and view her as gullible and foolish. They would probably try to talk her out of giving and coming up with a financial plan to put her feet on solid stable ground. At minimum, she could have kept one of the two coins and used it to help meet her own needs. But that woman went to the Temple and gave both of those coins to the work of the Lord. Most in this world would try to talk her out of caring more for God than herself. But Jesus Christ says that woman gave more to God than all of the rich people.

Based on this text, we conclude that when we have our own needs where we could have used the money and still sacrificially give to God, we earn the eternal honor and praise of Jesus Christ and that offering stands forever on our account.

GOD IS NOT IMPRESSED BY THE NUMBERS OR THE DOLLARS; HE IS IMPRESSED WITH THE SACRIFICES BEHIND THE NUMBERS.

The value of our giving is not in the amount, it is in the sacrifice behind the amount.

To the Pharisees and Scribes, the important gifts were the big dollar gifts. To God, the important gifts were the big sacrifice gifts.

When we come to this passage, it is one that discusses money and giving to God. We have a legitimate exegetical right to think through New Testament principles of giving to God. When it comes to giving in the church age, there are at least ten Biblical principles to consider:

Biblical Principle #1 - Give yourself first to God. **II Cor. 8:5; III John 7**

Giving is a stewardship for the believer so the first thing one must do before even thinking about money as it relates to God is to give yourself to the Lord. One could give great sums of money to a church and end up in hell.

Biblical Principle #2 - Giving should be systematic giving, not sporadic giving. **I Cor.16:2a**

Giving to the Lord should not be some feeling or emotion, although both are involved. One should purpose and calculate to give to the Lord's word on the "first day of the week."

Biblical Principle #3 - Giving should be proportionate giving, not percentage giving.
I Cor. 16:2b

Our giving should be based on how God has prospered us. Some are in a position to give a greater amount than others, which turns out to be a greater percentage than others. Some giving would be very generous if it was 12% but someone else might be very generous if the giving were at 50%. It is all proportionate to what God has given to us.

Biblical Principle #4 - Giving should be sacrificial giving not surplus giving. **II Cor.8:2-3; Luke 21:4**

Each must determine what is the actual sacrificial level is of our giving. When we give to God sacrificially, we are actually demonstrating to God that He is more important to us than anything else.

Biblical Principle #5 - Giving should be reality giving, not wishful giving. **II Cor. 8:12**

People are to give based on what they have, not based on what they don't have. I am totally convinced faith pledges are not Biblical. There are leaders to try to get people to pledge what they hope to give based on what they hope to have. That is not right. Giving is to be based on what we do have, not what we wish to have.

Biblical Principle #6 - Giving should be willful giving, not grudge giving. **II Cor. 8:11; 9:7**

Our giving should be based on what we desire to give. Our giving should be based on what we purpose to give. Our offering should be given willfully to God not because we begrudge it.

Biblical Principle #7 - Giving should be purposed and promised giving, not renege giving.
II Cor. 9:5

If we have promised to give something to God, we need to give it and not be affected by some covetous thing that would cause us to renege on what we promised. Let's say that you promised God that you were going to give 20% of any money that was additional money. Well then give it when it comes. Don't get the money and then decide you want to do something else with it. God considers that covetous.

A good example is Ananias and Saphira. They promised if they sold some property they were going to give all the money to God. Well they decided not to give it all but to keep some and they both were killed by God (Acts 5:1-5).

Biblical Principle #8 - Giving should be liberal giving, not stingy giving. **II Cor.9:6**

We have found this principle to be absolutely true in every way, if one gives bountifully one reaps bountifully; if one gives sparingly one reaps sparingly. A right attitude to have about giving to the Lord is I want to give as much as I possibly can. We should not think how little can I give, but how generous can I give to the work of the Lord.

Biblical Principle #9 - Giving should be cheerful giving, not bitter giving. **II Cor. 9:7**

God loves people who joyfully and cheerfully give to Him. God does not want us coming to Him and giving our money in bitter or angry way. If you are going to resent giving money to God, then keep it and don't give it.

Biblical Principle #10 - Giving should be thankful giving. **II Cor. 9:15**

We should give with a thankful spirit because of the great gift God has given to us of His Son and salvation and of the wonderful things He has given to us in life.

When we give applying these principles there are five promised results:

(Result #1) - God is glorified. II Cor. 9:13

(Result #2) - God will bountifully bless us. II Cor. 9:6-8

(Result #3) - God will supply our needs. II Cor. 9:10a

(Result #4) - God will increase our righteousness. II Cor. 9:10b

(Result #5) - God will enrich us in everything. II Cor. 9:11

God not only sees how much we give, He sees the sacrifice and our heart's attitude when we give. He doesn't just monitor the size of the offering.

I am not teaching this to beg for money.

I am not teaching this to tell people how much they should give.

I am not teaching this to see if we can get bigger offerings.

I am not teaching this to manipulate anyone in any way.

This is God's truth. I get what Mr. Miles was saying. God not only monitors the amount we give, He monitors the sacrifice behind the gift. Those who will be eternally honored will have been like the widow woman.

When people give at the cutting edge of their own need, that is giving that truly touches the heart of God.