

She gave the most

- Mark 12:41-44
- It was Sunday morning, and the ushers passed the offering plates through the congregation. My great-grandmother, Jessie Hauser, reached for her pocketbook and searched for her offering envelope. She couldn't find it. Looking up and seeing the men with the plates getting closer to her pew, Grandma began to get 'frustrated,' as she would say. She rifled through the purse and finally began to dump its contents onto her lap while muttering, "Where *is* that offering? I know I brought it." Meanwhile, the elderly lady sitting next to her began to tap her on the arm and whisper, "Jessie! Jessie!" Grandma Hauser paid her a great no mind and continued to search for her offering, finally whispering loudly, "If I live long enough to get home, I am going to clean out this pocketbook!" That's when the lady next to her said, "Jessie, that's *my* pocketbook."
- It's offering time in the temple today, and the scene has moved to the Court of the Women, where where Jesus is watching people give their offerings. Let's look at this text today under three main points: the gift of the widow, the observation of the Lord, and the practical applications for us.
- **The gift of the widow (verses 41-42)**
- Remember, the outer court was for the Gentiles, but the sanctuary of the temple began with the Court of the Women, which is where the temple treasury was. This court was the first enclosure of the sanctuary, and along one wall there were thirteen shofar-shaped chests, made of gold or silver, each one dedicated to a special offering. A priest was there to ask the giver what the contribution was for, to examine the currency, and to direct them to the right offering basket, as it were. All of this was spoken aloud so that bystanders could hear how much each one was giving and for what offering. And of course, there was no paper currency, no Venmo, no Apple Pay, so the offering was not only visible but audible. One of the shofar-shaped chests would have been for "freewill offerings," and it is here that Jesus observes a poor widow drop in a couple of coins.
- Some believe that this part of the temple was a popular place for you to sit and watch people. We all like to do that, don't we? Jesus did as well, and we can learn from his people-watching skills, which were beyond compare. Here he sits and watches as people put money in the offering boxes. Many rich people were there, putting in large sums. Lots and lots of coins because, again, there was no paper money. You wonder if they put these coins in slowly, just a few at a time, so the noise would last longer. Or did they dump the whole wheelbarrow load at one time so the noise would be dramatic, but brief? Jesus sees it all and doesn't comment.
- Then along comes a poor widow, which is redundant because most widows in first century Palestine were poor. And certainly, we know she was, based on her offering. If

you are people watching in the temple that day, and you have just seen men in long robes giving buckets of money to the offering, do you even bother to watch a poor widow as she walks up in her rags, carrying nothing? Probably not. “Nothing to see here, people.” Mark tells us she put in small copper coins, two lepta, that together were worth a penny. Mark is writing to a Roman audience, so he breaks it down for them in their terms. Two lepta equal one quadrans, which was a Roman coin that was worth 1/64 of a denarius. Lots of math here, sorry, but remember a denarius was one day’s wage for a basic laborer. If a day laborer in our culture makes minimum wage, \$7.25 an hour in NC, then he makes \$58 for 8 hours work. If you divide that by 64, you get around 91 cents. Minimum wage was much lower then, but you get the idea. Her offering was much less than a dollar, and that was all she had to her name. She gave all that she owned. And no one noticed. Except the only one who matters when it comes to our giving. That leads us to...

- **The observation of the Lord (verses 43-44)**
- *Hey, Peter, James, John, Andrew...all of you guys, come here. Look at this!* Jesus calls the disciples to himself and when they get near, he says, “Truly I say to you.” I tell you the truth. This is important, he says, so listen carefully. Jesus points to the widow who has moved away from the offering basket and is shuffling along, and he says, “This poor widow has put in more than all those,” as he points to the robed rich men strutting away and enjoying the stares and admiration of the crowd. How can this be, that she gave more than they? Surely a wheelbarrow full of denarii is more than two tiny coins! Surely, Lord, 100 pounds of coins is worth much more than 2 ounces! This is where Jesus teaches them, and us, that even though by human standards what she gave was insignificant, by God’s standard, it was priceless.
- They gave out of their abundance. She gave out of her poverty. They gave a lot, but in relative terms, they will barely notice the difference in their account. She gave “all that she had to live on.” Do you see the stark contrast between the pretentiousness of the scribes and the humble faith of the widow? William Hendricksen writes, “In fact, she, knowing that God would not fail her, sacrificed everything.” Again, in contrast to the scribes, who were seeking to *take* Jesus’ life, she comes to the place of worship to *give* her life to Jesus. James Edwards writes that the sacrifice of “all she had” is “the keystone in Mark’s arch of faith. The initial call of Jesus to the fishermen to leave all and ‘Come, follow me,’ is perfectly fulfilled in the giving of two simple lepta, which symbolizes an undivided heart.”
- This whole scene is a picture of discipleship. Like the woman with the issue of blood who would do anything it took to get to Jesus, to touch him, to receive grace and healing from him, this poor widow is also a picture of faith that follows, no matter what. And we are reminded that no matter how small our gift of money, or time, or talent, it is precious when given to God. What spiritual gifts you have, and all who are born again

have them, are used to serve the body of Christ. They shine when we use them, and they grow mold and make us sick when we don't use them. It is the same with our time, and our money. They are gifts of God for use in serving the Lord and his people. That leads us to...

- **The practical applications for us**

1- God does not need your money. Notice that Jesus does not wring his hands, wondering how the temple would survive when people like this woman are putting a penny in the basket. Look at **Acts 17:24-25**. What do we have, Paul asks, that we did not receive? (1 Corinthians 4:7) We are like children whose father gives money out of his own pocket so that we can go buy him a birthday present with it. We give to God, not because he needs it but because we need him. We need to be like him, and he is a giver. The greatest of all givers, who gave his only Son so that we could be his sons and daughters.

2- Giving is measured by proportion not by addition. The woman gave more because she gave everything she had. Jesus did not measure her gift by the amount but by the sacrifice. In Mark 14, the same lesson is taught again when another woman gives a gift to Jesus, anointing him with an ointment that was worth 300 denarii! This poor widow could not dream of having anything that precious and that valuable, but these two women are equally praised by Jesus, though one gave a penny and one gave a huge amount. It is the sacrifice that matters. It is the heart of the giver that Jesus sees.

3- Giving is always in sight of Jesus Christ. It was in Acts 5, when Ananias and Sapphira lied to Peter and to the Holy Spirit about how much they had given, and each paid with their lives. Paul wrote a lot about giving to the church in Corinth, because they lacked in this act of "grace," even though they excelled in others. He wrote, "The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work." There it is. God sees the heart, which is where we decide to give before actually do it. We are to give bountifully, cheerfully, and with great hope that does not disappoint, because God is a bigger giver than we could ever imagine. And he is able to make all grace abound to us so that we will have what we need at all times. That's the grace the poor widow was depending on that made Jesus call his disciples to himself, along with us, to say, "Look at this woman. Believe and trust as she believes and trusts, and you will live, and you will give as she does."

- Prayer
- **Greet one another!**

