

## **The Giving That Counts**

Luke 21:1-4

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I preach not from this text to lay some guilt trip on you for not giving financially as you should. It is the work of God's Spirit to teach you His will from His Word. My calling from Jesus is to preach the whole counsel of God. Nor do I preach from this text because I am in some financial crisis. We need to be reminded what giving to the Lord looks like.

Unlike churches that have ever expanding building programs where ministers become experts in raising money and promising financial rewards to those who support their never ending projects, we as a church do not even pass an offering plate in worship (since it is not appointed by God in His Word), but simply have an offering box where your offering to God may be placed when you arrive or when you leave. It has been my understanding that if God's people are being spiritually fed, they will voluntarily care for the minister and ministry of the church. And so you have faithfully done.

It is a duty to financially provide for a faithful ministry and to care for the needy within the church (1 Corinthians 9:13-14; Galatians 6:6)! But my concern in addressing this matter from our text this Lord's Day is to emphasize the heart that God desires to see in your giving even more than the gift itself. God is interested more in the heart of love and thanksgiving you have in your giving, than in the amount you give. Do you give begrudgingly out of mere duty or cheerfully out of gratitude for all that Jesus has graciously given to you? We need an attitude of gratitude in our giving. What a difference that makes in obeying and following the Lord Jesus in all of His commandments.

The main points from our text this Lord's Day are as follows: (1) Jesus Beholds the Giving of the Rich and the Poor (Luke 21:1-2); (2) Jesus Evaluates the Giving of the Rich and the Poor (Luke 21:3-4).

### **I. Jesus Beholds the Giving of the Rich and the Poor (Luke 21:1-2).**

A. It is no accident that the Lord focuses His attention upon a poor widow in the verses before us. For He had just taught the people concerning the gross hypocrisy of the scribes and the Pharisees (like so many preachers today) who "devour widows' houses, and for a shew make long prayers: the same shall receive greater damnation" (Luke 20:47). Jesus contrasts the blatant hypocrisy of the Pharisees with the true religion of perhaps one of those very widows from whom they had stolen. The Pharisees according to the Lord gave their alms to help the poor in order to be seen by men (Matthews 6:2), but this poor widow gave, and although not seen by men, was observed and commended by Jesus for her sincere and thankful act of worship to the Lord. No pretense, no show, but simply a sincere act of love and gratitude to God.

1. You who look at our gifts and abilities as so small in the sight of men are taught to look upon them as God looks upon them, namely as glorious gifts fit for the King of kings when offered and used for His honor and praise. In fact, you dishonor the Lord greatly when you belittle the gifts and abilities He has graciously given to you, for He is the Giver of all gifts whether great or small.

2. If your gift is relatively small in comparison to that of others, do not evaluate its significance in relation to the gifts of others and bury it in the ground by speaking against it. Rather use it (out of a sense of thankfulness to God) to His honor and watch Him bless that gift in amazing ways to the blessing of others. This the poor widow did.

B. Jesus was evaluating how people gave their offerings into the Temple treasury (Luke 21:1-2; Mark 12:41).

1. He beheld how some gave much and how some gave little by comparison. But the Lord could behold ways in which people gave which ordinary man could not behold, for He knew what was in the heart of man so that the very thoughts and intentions of men were laid bare before Him. He knew whether they gave in order to earn favor with God or the applause of men, whether they gave begrudgingly and out of mere duty, or whether they gave out of an obedient and cheerful heart for all the mercies bestowed upon them by the Lord.

2. The Lord still beholds and carefully scrutinizes the hearts of His people in their acts of giving whether for the support of the ministry or for the care of the needy. Does He see you give as if God was indebted to you or as if you are indebted to God? Does He see not only a desire to be obedient in giving to His kingdom, but also a cheerful heart in parting with that which all belongs to Him anyway (Psalm 24:1)?

C. After having watched how much the rich gave, the Lord's attention was focused upon this poor widow who gave two mites (Luke 21:2). There was quite a contrast in the amount of money given by the rich and by this poor widow. To the casual observer, there would be nothing at all that would draw one's attention to the gift of the widow for she gave only two mites (the smallest coin of monetary value in Israel at that time). A day's wage for a common laborer was one denarius (Matthew 20:2). A farthing (which was 2 mites) was 1/64<sup>th</sup> of denarius. If today's wage for a laborer in the USA is \$15 per hour, that comes to \$120 for an 8-hour day. At that rate, 1/64 of a day's wage is \$1.88. Round it up to \$2.00, and we could say that the widow dropped two dollars into the Temple treasury. Not exactly a spectacle which would draw the attention of men, but it did draw the attention of our Savior. Why? Let us see.

## **II. Christ Evaluates the Giving of the Rich and the Poor (Luke 21:3-4).**

A. The Lord considered this matter to be of such importance that He called His disciples to gather around Him in order that He might instruct them concerning the nature of true giving (Mark 12:43). In Luke 21:3, the Lord first states His conclusion about the nature of true giving, and then in Luke 21:4 He gives the reason for this conclusion.

B. His conclusion (simply stated) is that this poor widow with her two mites (2 dollars) had put more into the treasury than all the rich. Now to say that she had given more than even the rich had given is to imply that the Lord was not evaluating her gift on the basis of how much was given, but rather on the basis of how the gift was given. In the Lord's judgment, the true value of a gift is not measured according to the actual amount given, but according to the amount of loving sacrifice involved in voluntarily offering the gift unto the Lord for use in His kingdom.

C. This the Lord makes clear in Luke 21:4. All of the others placing their monetary gifts into the treasury gave out of their abundance where it did not involve any sacrifice at all, but this poor widow gave out of her extreme poverty all that she had that day. She only had two mites (2 dollars). She might have saved one of those coins for herself and given the other to the Lord. But she had such an attitude of gratitude for all of God's mercy to her (even in her poverty), that she gave what she had to His kingdom. To give even half of what she had unto her gracious Lord was not sufficient for this poor widow.

1. Here is a woman who exhibits great love to the Lord by giving all that she had. One gives financially in proportion to what they believe they have received freely from the Lord. Those who give nothing or give begrudgingly of what they own testify that they believe they have received nothing or very little from the Lord for which they are not thankful. Whereas those who give from hearts of gratitude testify that they have received much from the Lord and cannot hide their joy.

2. The giving of this poor widow was purely voluntary. There was no requirement that she give all that she had (this was a free will offering). She gave in response to God's gift to her.

3. Does the Lord call each of us to give all that we have into the treasury of the church? No, she gave this as a free will offering. But this example of the widow does call us to re-evaluate our manner and attitude in giving. Is it an honor and joy for you to give to your Savior in building His kingdom? If that is how you give, Jesus will take delight in it.

D. What principles should guide you in your giving to the Lord Jesus and the building of His kingdom?

1. **Give voluntarily and cheerfully, rather than grudgingly (2 Corinthians 9:7).** Yes, it is a duty to financially support faithful ministers and to provide as needed for the poor within the church, but do not give out of mere duty or obligation. Let your love for Christ, for His kingdom, for His faithful ministry, and for your needy brethren overflow the brim of the cup so that your duty becomes your great honor. A heart of thankfulness rather than a heart of murmuring must be cultivated if giving is ever to become an honor rather than a burden. For those who only see it as a burden, they have not come to understand the riches of God's grace in Jesus. They are not truly enjoying the feast set before them in the ordinances of Christ's loving kisses.

2. **Endeavor to give regularly and systematically rather than irregularly and sporadically (1 Corinthians 16:2).** Give as God gives to you and blesses you through your employer or business. Does the Lord only give to you once in a while, or do you receive from Him throughout the week and especially on the Lord's Day?

3. **Give bountifully, rather than sparingly (2 Corinthians 9:6).** God is not telling you here how much you are to give (the tithe was part of the ceremonial law). He is rather telling you the attitude you should have in giving to Him—a bountiful attitude, not a tight-fisted attitude. Dear ones, your giving reflects upon how highly you prize the ordinances of Jesus Christ with which He feeds you every Lord's Day.

4. **Never give financially believing that God thereby becomes a debtor to you.** To give with the mindset that God now owes you because of what you have given is to place yourself under the Covenant of Works where what you receive from the Lord is given on the basis of your own righteousness and obedience rather than on the basis of His free grace and mercy. The Lord promises in His grace to provide for your needs, but giving to the Lord's work is not an earthly investment program in which you can expect to receive so much % interest on your money (contrary to the heresy of the TV evangelists of today). The investment, dear ones, is of a spiritual nature in which the Lord will promote His kingdom by the faithful preaching of His Word and ministering to those who are in need.

5. **Always give believing you are a debtor to the Lord.** All that you have belongs to Him already, so that when you give you do not give of what is yours, but of what truly belongs to Him and is lent to you. You are not ultimately the owner of your own finances, but rather His steward or manager (Psalm 24:1). You are to give out of a sense of love, thankfulness, and indebtedness to Christ who gave His life for you that you might enjoy the riches of eternal life (2 Corinthians 9:15). Thus, we are to give as those who have been forgiven much, not as those who have been forgiven little.

6. **Remember it is not first and foremost to a man (a minister) to whom you give, but to the Lord Jesus.** Your offering is an act of worship to God. No man is to receive worship as belonging to him. That is reserved to God alone. Take your eyes off of me and look to Jesus as the one who receives your offering to the support of His ministry.

7. What a delight is mine (and how much more the Lord's) to see the children in the church voluntarily with cheerful hearts bring their coins as an offering to the Lord. How God takes pleasure in such gifts even though it is small in comparison to those who have more. God wants us to give cheerfully like these small children. The issue is not how much is given, but with what heart the gift is given. Mere duty or loving gratitude? An act to be seen by man or an act of worship to God?

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