

### Give Your Offering From a Heart of Faith!

My Sunday School teacher (whose first name was Paul (But I never called him that)) once told me a story about a family in church. The mother had health problems and was in the hospital for an extended time. The father was struggling to care for his wife and children. Paul, who was also an elder at church, visited them to see how they were doing, to see if he could help, and to pray with them. During the conversation, the father held up a \$20 bill and said, “This is our last dollar. If I throw it at any of our medical bills, it won’t even make a dent. The best thing I can do is to give it to God.” Then he put the \$20 bill in his offering envelope, sealed it and handed it to Paul.

We have a somewhat similar story here in Mark 12. On Palm Sunday, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, boldly claiming to be the promised Messiah. The Jewish leaders did not like that. The next day, Jesus entered the courtyards around the temple and saw greedy vendors selling animals and exchanging money. That was wrong. Jesus put a stop to it by scattering the animals and turning over the tables as coins clinked against the stone pavement. The Jewish leaders REALLY did not like that. On Tuesday, the Jewish leaders continued to pummel Jesus with trick questions and Jesus continued to teach them. Then, Jesus walked over to where there was an offering box and sat down for the specific purpose of watching people give their offering. Purposely watching how much people gave to God as an offering might seem rude. How would you like it if someone scrutinized how much money you gave to God? But you see, Jesus was going to teach still another lesson. Jesus was teaching what is truly valuable to God.

Not surprisingly, Jesus saw that (:41), “**Many rich people threw in large amounts.**” When a widow got to the offering box, she only put in two very small copper coins. In nearly every picture I have seen of this Bible story, the widow is depicted as somewhat younger holding the hand of a little child. That might be accurate, but most widows are a little bit older. It does not matter how old she was. That she is called a widow tells us a lot. She was heartbroken. She was lonely. She was struggling. (Maybe you’ve felt that way even if you are not a widow.) I can not see into people’s hearts, of course, but from my perspective, I think that widows have the strongest faith. In the midst of their grieving they have had

to step up and take care of everything. It’s overwhelming. It’s as if God forced them to fall back into his arms, to lean on him even more. At the time of Jesus, there was no life insurance, or pension, or social security checks. Life was difficult, to say the least. The only money that widow could offer to God was two very small copper coins. From my research, those two very small copper coins were worth more than just 2 cents. It was probably closer to 2 or 3 dollars. You can’t buy much with 2 or 3 dollars, but you can buy some things. And she had TWO coins. She could have held on to one of them and maybe bought herself a snack. Instead, she gave both coins. That was sacrificial giving.

From a merely earthly perspective, the large offerings of the rich are much more valuable than two very small copper coins. But Jesus explained to his disciples, (:43), “**Truly I tell you** [He is being very emphatic.], **this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others.**” Maybe the disciples were scratching their heads wondering how two small copper coins could be more valuable than lots of gold and silver coins. Jesus explained (:44), “**They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything – all she had to live on.**”

What a study in contrasts! She was poor, probably not dressed so well, probably thin and frail. Yet her offering was more valuable than the large offering of the rich people who were probably dressed in fancy clothes and well fed. Jesus never says that the rich people’s offerings were wrong or that they were trying to show off by giving such a large offering. The point is that they could give a lot of money and still had a lot of money to live a comfortable life. When she gave her two very small copper coins, she gave everything she had. Clearly, it is not the amount of the offering that makes it valuable. It is the heart and attitude that makes any offering valuable to God.

With this story, Jesus is not making a law telling us to write a check for everything we have and give it to the church. No. That would be bad stewardship. The Lord also wants you to use your money to take care of your body and your family, to pay taxes, to help others, etc. Jesus is teaching us that a very small offering can be a very large expression of trust in God. It all depends on the attitude of the heart. God knows what expenses you have in your daily life. He knows how you manage your money. He knows that you often struggle to pay all of your obligations, just like that widow. He knows that managing money can cause a lot of stress. God also knows the offerings we place on his altar. He is not looking for an exact dollar amount, as if our offerings were some sort of tax

to pay. No matter what amount you give, it is a heart of faith which is truly valuable to God. God is looking for hearts that are “all in” with God, hearts that would be willing to give God every last penny if he asked for it, hearts that trust that the Lord will continue to provide daily bread.

How much does your offering mean to you? Does it reflect a heart of faith? It is very easy to slip into thinking, “My offering is good enough. I do not need to give any more. This 10-for-10 stuff is just an infomercial. I give more than others. They need to pay their fare share, too.” And suddenly our offering – no matter what the amount – is not a sweet-smelling gift to God, but stinky and disgusting garbage. It is very easy to mechanically write out our check for the Lord as if we are merely paying another bill, with no thought of faith or love for God. Isn't it frustrating how that sinful nature of ours continues to mess up our motivation? Are we “all in”? Sometimes. Maybe. Sometimes not. Not really. Every sin is proof that we are not all in. The same is true of that widow. She was not perfect either.

The offering boxes at the temple were in an area called “The Court of Women.” It was a courtyard right next to the area where the altar was. In other words, as that widow placed her offering into the box, she could see animals falling limp as their necks were slashed and warm blood gushed out. She could see and smell animals being burned up on the altar. Each sacrifice was a reminder of the payment for sins that the promised Messiah would make. I wonder if she knew that the Messiah was sitting just a few feet away from her. Jesus knew all about sacrificial giving. Just 3 days after watching the widow give her gift at the temple, Jesus looked down from the cross at another widow, his mother. He gave the gift of his lifeblood to the world. Jesus was “all in.” He gave everything he had in order to save you, as well as that widow, as well as every human being. That widow trusted in God's promise to send a Savior.

Centuries ago, debtors' prisons were somewhat common. If someone could not pay their debts, they did not get to file bankruptcy and keep on living in their homes. They were sent to prison until they paid back their debts. But if they were in prison, they could not earn any money. The only way they could get out of prison was if a friend or relative gave them the money they needed. Because of the debt of our sins, it's like we were in a prison. We were doomed to death in hell. It was impossible for us to pay the debt of our sin in order to get out of our debtors prison. The price was a perfect life. And that's what Jesus paid for you, for me, for

that widow, for the whole world. Your sins were forgiven when Jesus died on the cross. Your debt is erased. You are free from your sins. You are free to live in heaven forever.

In 1863, when our country was in the midst of a Civil War, Pastor Johannes Strieter was a circuit rider in northwest Wisconsin. Each month he rode his horse through a circuit of churches which did not have their own pastor. One day, someone told him about a family who would like to see him. He travelled way out of his way until he found their farm. The farmer had three young children who had not yet been baptized. Pastor Strieter had a Bible class and devotion with them and then baptized the three children. When he finished, the farmer counted out 37 cents into his hand. Pastor Strieter asked if that 37 cents was all the money the farmer had. He said it was. Pastor Strieter said he would give back the 37 cents and give him 37 cents more as a gift. The farmer started to cry. He said, “Ach, it is meant to be a thank offering that my children are now baptized, and you won't accept it, sir?” The pastor apologized and agreed to take the 37 cents as an expression of thanks to God for the gift of his grace in baptism. That farmer was “all in.” He had a heart of faith which moved him to give all the money he had. May the Lord grant each of us the same appreciation for the gospel as that farmer.

Jesus pointed to that widow at the temple as an example of loving dedication to God who first loved her. We do not hear that Jesus spoke to her or patted her on the back or even gave her enough money to buy lunch. As you give your offering to the Lord, you do not hear Jesus saying, “I appreciate that!” Nor does he give you an instant and tangible gift to help you buy groceries. But Jesus does see your offering. And he is pleased with it – no matter what the actual amount might be – because he sees your heart of faith which moved you to give your offering. Continue to focus on Jesus and his tremendous sacrifice for you. Rejoice that you are free from your guilt. Rejoice that you are going to spend eternity in the unending happiness of heaven. Rejoice that God loves you and give your offering from a heart of faith. Amen.