

Announcements:

- 1) Church Picnic Next Sunday
 - 1) Service @ 10:30am, NO SUNDAY SCHOOL for kids
 - 2) Potluck style
 - 3) Bring a chair, we will have some chairs there
 - 4) Slip n Slide for the kids
- 2) VBS—Prayer
- 3) Family Camp—September 10-12

Rich Faith Mark 12:41-44

Today's passage may be a familiar passage, but it is one for the record books. It's about a very poor widow who gives more than any rich person can. As a matter of fact, she gave so much, it not only got Jesus's attention, it welled up in Him such excitement that He called His disciples over to make mention of it and use it for a teaching moment.

I have a question to ask...When someone gives you a gift of \$100 does it mean much to you? Now let me ask it this way...If an obviously rich person gives you \$100 does it mean much to you? It would mean something, for sure. Now let me ask it this way...If an obviously poor person, who has trouble putting food on the table and making ends meet, gives you \$100, does it mean much to you? You bet! Because you know there was sacrifice, intention, and care.

In our passage, we will see a woman who sacrificially gives. We will see a woman who trusts God with her whole life. We will see a poor woman that gives little, but is rich in faith.

Before we get into our passage, I want to make some statements about money that are obvious, but not always thought about:

Money is essential: it pays bills, buys food, pays for services, buys shelter

Money is overrated: it makes us believe it buys happiness and security—and only God can give that

Money can be used for great good: helps the poor, helps to further the Kingdom of God, meets needs

Money can be used for great evil: sex trafficking, greed and willingness to do immoral things to get it, buy people off

Money can be used properly: investment, meet needs of family and friends, support local and foreign ministry, etc

Money can create great bondage: slavery of debt which often keeps us from fully being able to give of ourselves to the Lord, idolatry of material things, money can make us believe we have some control of our future. Nowhere in scripture is debt looked at in a positive way

Money is for the use of glorifying God: when it is given sacrificially and not just out of our abundance, when it is managed for today and for the future, when it is used for the good of mankind, when it is seen as a resource to further God's Kingdom, it has great power and it has great opportunity for growing our faith, knowing God, and seeing God do mighty things

One of the most misquoted verses in scripture has to do with money. Many people have heard it: "money is the root of all evil". This is what Satan does. It's what he did in the garden of Eden. He quotes only part of what God says, instead of hearing the fullness of it. The verse actually says, "the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil.". The issue isn't the money. The issue is the 'love of money'. Our love is to be given to God and others. Money is a resource to fulfill that love.

Grandich who was a successful Wall Street broker, author of "Confessions of a Wall Street Whiz Kid", and now co-founder of Trinity Financial Sports & Entertainment Management Co. was quoted by Forbes magazine in 2012 saying, "The writers of the Bible anticipated the problems we would have with money and possessions; there are more than 2,000 references," he says. "Our whole culture now is built on the premise that we have to have more money and more stuff to feel happy and secure. Public storage is the poster child for what's wrong with America. We have too much stuff because we've bought into the myth fabricated by Wall Street and Madison Avenue that more stuff equals more happiness." He adds,

“That’s the total opposite of the truth, and the opposite of what it says in The Bible.”

The Bible has much to say about money and it’s purpose. I read something that said there are over 800 verses that mention money, making it the second most talked about topic in the Bible. There are many topics in the Bible. Some of them are: meeting the needs of the poor, debt, saving, getting a loan, giving out a loan, paying bills, providing for your family, leaving an inheritance, the purchase of things, giving to the ministry of God, and more.

Money is a very touchy topic. Money can create a lot of emotion within people, and at times can bring out the ugliness of an individual or it can reveal the beauty of their heart. Money can divide. One person will have an opinion on how it should be used versus another person’s opinion. Money can lead to expectations and have string attached. When a person gives, they have an expectation it will be used a certain way or for a certain thing and when not used that way create hurt feelings and sometimes anger.

Money is part of a greater topic and that topic is stewardship. Stewardship is a hard topic to get our heads wrapped around and then even harder to live out. If we live with this premise as truth, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”, then we have to realize that we are stewards of all God created and it can be used for God’s glory and mankind’s good or it can be used for our glory and our personal gain. Jesus said “No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and be enslaved to money.” (Matthew 6:24) Eventually one of the two will win out.

I found this quote from 'gotquestions.org' and I thought it says it well: “Stewardship defines our practical obedience in the administration of everything under our control, everything entrusted to us. It is the consecration of one’s self and possessions to God’s service. Stewardship acknowledges in practice that we do not have the right of control over ourselves or our property—God has that control. It means as stewards of

God we are managers of that which belongs to God, and we are under His constant authority as we administer His affairs. Faithful stewardship means that we fully acknowledge we are not our own but belong to Christ, the Lord, who gave Himself for us.”

“It is the consecration of one’s self and possessions to God’s service.” In other words, we set out with intention and then carry out that intention to use all things at our disposal to honor God by serving Him with those things. Why? Because it brings Him honor. How? By obeying His commands about money. We are called to have faithful, sacrificial, and giving hearts.

The widow in our passage this morning was commended by Jesus for this. Let’s look at our passage. [READ Mark 12:41-44]

Verses 41 and 42 set the stage for understanding why Jesus made such a big deal out of a poor widow quietly giving her money. But really, we have to step back to verse 40 where it says “they [the religious teachers of the law] shamelessly cheat widows out of their property” to understand that Mark is revealing the corruption and the contrast that greed brings versus a giving heart.

Greed leads us to do things that are opposite of loving others and loving God. Greed is about the self. Greed comes in many forms: hoarding money, making riches and things the driving factor of life, the need for self-sufficiency. Greed is the opposite of a giving heart. Which, if that is a true statement, not giving when you can and should, when God’s Spirit is nudging you to give is a form of greed. Every single one of us is called to give. That is one of the underlying themes of this passage, and is seen throughout scripture.

Some sobering and embarrassing stats of the Church in the world that I found in *Relevant* magazine’s June 2021 issue, so this year:

*Tithers make up only 10-25% of a normal congregation

*Only 5% of the U.S. tithes, with 80% of Americans only giving 2% of their income

*Christians are only giving at 2.5% per capita, while during the Great Depression they gave at a 3.3% rate

If believers were to give a minimum of 10%, there would be an estimated additional \$165 billion for churches to use. What could this mean globally?

*\$25 billion could relieve global hunger, starvation and deaths from preventable diseases in five years

*\$12 billion could eliminate illiteracy in five years

*\$15 billion could solve the world's water and sanitation issues, specifically at places in the world where 1 billion people live on less than a \$1 per day

*\$1 billion could fully fund all overseas mission work

*Over \$100 billion would still be left over or additional ministry expansion

2 Corinthians 8:7-8 says, "Since you excel in so many ways—in your faith, your gifted speakers, your knowledge, your enthusiasm, and your love from us—I want you to excel also in this gracious act of giving. I am not commanding you to do this. But I am testing how genuine your love is by comparing it with the eagerness of the other churches." Catch that Paul didn't say he was commanding them into the "gracious act of giving".

The issue of giving is a heart issue. The issue of greed is a heart issue. Where one stands in relation to money, stewardship, and giving is an issue of poor faith versus rich faith.

I want to stop here and mention that I am trying to walk a fine line of the importance of giving and the obedience to give in relation to our faith. I don't want this to be a message of guilt, but one of provoking thought, exhortation, and movement towards seeking God's heart on the issue of money and faith. What this all really comes down to is your belief system. How you view money and your use of it affects the depth of faith...and I am not talking give more so you will get more. I am talking about dependence upon God and His leadership of your life. The poor widow in our passage was rich. She was rich in faith. She understood a principle of God, had great faith in God and Jesus saw it and it was so moved by it that He used it as a teaching point for His disciples.

Let's look at verses 43 and 44 now.

Jesus was so moved by this poor widow's gift that He said, "I tell you the truth." Jesus is using this as a teaching moment to get a truth across to the disciples, and us. I believe the truth is this: It doesn't matter how much you give, God sees the heart of the giver and responds to that motive found within the heart.

Matthew 6:2-4 says, "Watch out! Don't do your good deeds publicly, to be admired by others, for you will lose the reward from your Father in heaven. When you give to someone in need, don't do as the hypocrites do—blowing trumpets in the synagogues and streets to call attention to their acts of charity! I tell you the truth, they have received all the reward they will ever get. But when you give to someone in need, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. Give your gifts in private, and your Father, who sees everything, will reward you."

The 'blowing trumpets in the synagogues' was not speaking of actual trumpets, like instruments. It was talking about the chests they used to collect money for the temple, priests, census, and giving to others. These chests were in the shape of a trumpet and made of metal. So, you could really easily make your coins make a loud sound against the metal trumpet as you put your coins in the chest. Some people did this to get noticed, to say, "look at what good I am doing, look how much I give." It was a look at me, self-building, pride-filled act and the reward is earthly gain. It wasn't a humble, God-honoring, eternal act. That is the point of 'don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.'

When the motive of our heart is to respond to God's leading to use what He has given us to manage for His glory and not ours, it will have spiritual power behind it. God will use it. It now has opportunity to be used for eternity. It was done in faith. It now has opportunity to build faith, because it was sacrificial. Because it was sacrificial, there was a cost. Because there was a cost, there is value. Because there is value there is motive.

Catch what Jesus says in verse 43, "this poor widow has given more than all the others who are making contributions." How has she given more?

Two lepta, or copper coins were worth about 1/64th of a daily wage. She didn't have much.

Verse 44 makes it clearer as to what Jesus is saying. He said, "For they gave a tiny part of their surplus, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she had to live on."

They gave out of their surplus. Here is what Jesus was saying, "They gave out of their left-overs. They made sure they had enough to be secure in this life and they gave to feel good. They gave to get something out of it."

The poor widow gave everything. Here is what Jesus is saying, "She gave from her heart and has such faith in God that He will take care of her needs. This woman is willing to be a sacrifice so that God's ministry can take place.

The portion is not as important to God as the proportion. The amount of sacrifice matters. The cost to the giver adds value to the receiver. The motive for giving matters. God pays attention to our giving...all of it. The giving that happens in here, and the giving that happens out there.

Jesus gave all. He didn't give some, or most. His life was a life marked by giving. He was a servant to all. As John 3:16 says, "He gave".

Sacrificial faith is a growing faith. If the sacrifice is small, if the sacrifice is large. Faith that gives is a faith that grows in its riches. I am not talking about material things. I am talking about growing in the understanding of God and His love, gaining understanding and really grasping Jesus's time on the earth, His death on the cross. Our faith is made rich when we surrender all to God. When we surrender all to God, He empowers us with His unlimited resources, our roots grow down deep into God's love, and He keeps us strong. We gain power to understand God's deep, deep love.