

10 for 10 Stewardship Emphasis Week 3 – February 16, 2020

Mark 12:41-44

41 Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. 42 But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents. 43 Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. 44 They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.”

In our confirmation and bible information classes we talk about God’s attributes, the various characteristics and qualities he has as God. Included are those three “omni” words, omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent. They are not words that we use in our everyday vocabulary, but they are words that have an everyday application. That God is omnipresent means that he is with us wherever we go—whether it’s across town or across the world. That God is omniscient means that he knows everything that we are going through—even when the doctor isn’t so certain or when we just don’t understand why. That God is omnipotent means that he is almighty and all powerful and so we can rest easy knowing that has complete control over everything in this life. There is, however, another side to that coin. That God is everywhere also means that he’s there when we think no one else is to see our sinful actions. That God knows everything also means that he knows not only the number of hairs on top of our heads but also the unspoken thoughts inside of our heads. That God is almighty also means that he has the power to judge us for the times that our sins have made us his enemies.

This morning/evening as we hear that Jesus is watching, we take comfort because the Lord who watches over us neither slumbers nor sleeps. At the same time we also take warning because the Lord is watching every area of our lives; even if we don’t think he has the right to, even when we don’t want him to. As we look at our text, we see Jesus watching. “Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury” (v. 41). Some might think, “Well Jesus hasn’t learned a thing about a person’s right to privacy.” And then we realize that if Jesus watched the widow give her offering, then he is watching our offerings too. And so today we ask ourselves this question, **Should Jesus really be watching my wealth?**

If we are surprised that Jesus sat down to watch people give their offerings, then we should be more surprised when we realize when he did this. This was Tuesday of Holy Week. On Friday, he would be hung on a cross to die. With the clock ticking down, what does Jesus do? Note the details: he *sat down* in the temple courts precisely at the very place where people gave *their offerings*. He didn’t sit there because he needed to take a breather. Jesus sat down specifically so that he could *watch* the people as they gave their offerings. Jesus was studying the people as they gave their offerings, and he did this for some time. While we may try to be discrete when we put our envelopes into the plate, the thought of Jesus sitting there, watching, staring, studying, may make us more than a bit uncomfortable.

Should Jesus really have been watching wealth on that day? Within the context of that week, it would seem he would have had better things to do. “Jesus, instead you should have

watched for a place to eat the Last Supper with your disciples. You should have watched your step because the Pharisees were trying to trip you up. Better yet, you should have watched your back, because Judas was plotting to betray you.” But watching what people were doing with their wealth at the temple? He should not have been doing that because if Jesus is sitting there watching people give their offerings, then he might give the impression that he’s interested in what people give to him.

So what did Jesus see? “Many rich people threw in large amounts” (v. 41). This doesn’t seem all that surprising. We would expect rich families to be big givers. After all, Jesus himself had said: “From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked” (Luke 12:48). But Jesus was not there just to watch the amount of their gifts; because he was all-knowing he would also know their reasons for giving.

Then Jesus saw another person. No one would have mistaken her for a big giver. Can you picture the scene? “But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents” (v. 42). Jesus was watching the widow’s wealth too. What is surprising about Jesus’ focus was not that she was poor, not that she offered two tiny copper coins—the bare minimum that could be paid for the temple tax. What is surprising is what Jesus said in verse 43: “Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, ‘I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others.’” This widow, this woman that no one else took notice of—she was the one our Lord really noticed. She had given more than all the others. Can you picture the disciples scratching their heads? “You mean to tell me, Jesus, that this widow with her two copper coins gave more than the rich who gave their thousands? That doesn’t even make sense!” To human eyes, it didn’t make a bit of sense. But Jesus could see what the disciples couldn’t see: “They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on” (v. 44).

When Jesus watched Jerusalem’s givers, he saw the rich give out of what was left over. They gave their thousands, but they had thousands left over. They went home to comfortable lives. They gave big gifts, but there was little personal sacrifice behind those gifts. They gave some of the frosting on the cake, but they still had both cake and extra frosting left over. The widow was different. She didn’t give some frosting off the cake, because she didn’t have any cake. Instead, she gave her daily bread. She gave her bread money, her milk money. She gave “everything—all she had to live on.” The amount of her offering may have been tiny, but her self-sacrifice was total. She gave until she had nothing left—and yet at the same time she still had absolutely everything. She had her Lord. She had his promises and his gift of faith to trust those promises. She gave beyond her ability, because she trusted her Lord’s ability to care for her.

If we had been sitting in Jesus’ seat, what would we have told the widow? “No, that’s okay; God’s knows what’s in your heart. You keep your coins, you need them and here are a few more to help you out.” And in doing so, we would have talked her out of doing the exact thing for which Jesus commended her. Why is that? Are we too quick at times to make pious-sounding excuses not to give than to give encouragement to godly generosity? Do we think giving primarily has to do with the amount in our wallets rather than the attitude of our hearts

and the actions that follow? Simply put, do we trust God or not? Like the woman, do we give beyond our ability because we trust the Lord's ability to care for us or not?

Admittedly this is a hard text. Does sacrificial giving mean that we give all that we have so that we have nothing left? Does sacrificial giving mean that we can't ever have anything nice for ourselves or that we have to struggle just to make ends meet? Sacrificial giving will look different for every person, is it not a specific number or percentage, so again only we can evaluate such things for ourselves. But there is a difference between giving out of the frosting on the cake and still have plenty of cake left over versus giving sacrificially so that maybe we don't have the same cake as everyone else around us in this world.

Finally when we talk about our giving it comes down to this. Why we do fail to give God our firstfruits? Because he is not always first in our hearts. Why do we fail to practice proportionate, percentage giving? Because we forget that he is the ultimate owner of everything. Why do we fail to practice sacrificial giving? Because we are afraid to trust that God will truly provide for us. We fail because of our sinful nature that will always want us to resent the fact that Jesus is watching our wealth.

To help us in our giving, we always go back to Jesus. Two days after watching the widow give her coins, Jesus would be done in by coins, betrayed by Judas for thirty pieces of silver. Human greed would start the process of his arrest and trial and crucifixion, where he would willingly give the ultimate sacrifice—his holy precious blood and innocent suffering and death to win forgiveness for all human hearts stained by greed and every other sin. When we see what great things Jesus has done for us, we know that there is nothing we have done to deserve it. But we can show our love and thanks in our lives, including with this gift of giving.

So what might sacrificial giving look like in our lives? What can we give up to give more to the Lord? It can start with something small—giving up the cost of our daily cup of coffee which can add up over time. It can be forgoing that next new purchase, that next upgrade or newer model and making due with what we have right now. It can be reevaluating our lifestyle and maybe cutting back in certain areas, living within or below our means rather than above and beyond. And that really is what this 10 for 10 challenge is all about. Try firstfruit, proportional, sacrificial giving for the next 10 weeks. No matter where your giving level is at right now, try giving more, giving generously and see what the Lord does. We always have his many promises, including this: "You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God" (2 Co 9:11). No matter what giving we do, no matter what sacrifices we make, we ask for the Lord's help in continuing to trust him to provide what we need in our lives. We give thanks that he is watching our wealth for us and that he will bless us in this way too. Amen.