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Mark 12:41-44      "A Widow's Mite Touches Jesus' Heart"      December 11, 2016

Let's open our Bibles this morning to Mark 12:41. We've come to the end of Mark 12 this morning.

Mark has been giving us all of the reports that really began in Mark 11, with the final week of Jesus' public ministry. It began with Palm Sunday as the Lord was presented as the Messiah to the nation. It was a fulfillment of a prophecy in Zechariah 9; also in Daniel 9, where Daniel told us the exact day that the Lord would actually arrive there on Palm Sunday. And so, as they sang, "If you had only known in this your day," and, "This is the day the Lord has made," the Lord presented Himself to the people.

The Temple was cleared on Monday. God, speaking to them, saying they had made the place of worship a den of thieves, and the fig tree that Jesus had cursed going into town on Monday had, by Tuesday morning, withered. And the Lord used it as an explanation to the disciples that were with Him of Israel setting Him aside, as a nation, and how the Lord had come to bring forgiveness through His sacrifice.

The rest of Tuesday is really filled with a bunch of confrontations. Jesus is accosted in the Temple by various groups that come to (hopefully) take Him down a few steps in terms of the crowd's perception of who He is. They were desperate, by this point. The crowds loved Him. They hoped maybe they could put Him in trouble with the Romans, maybe have Him arrested or worse. And Jesus speaks to these groups with great kindness and mercy. He reaches out to them with wisdom and understanding. And the full text of Jesus' words to the scribes and Pharisees (that we finished with last week) is found in Matthew 23.

But this morning we come, literally, to the last words that Jesus speaks in the Temple, before the cross. The Bible doesn't record anything else. Next week we will begin in chapter 13 with a very long sermon, and it's a long one for Mark. It is even longer in the book of Matthew. It's called the Olivet Discourse, where Jesus takes four of the disciples who had questions for Him, sits across the way on the Mount of Olives, and talks to them about the future of the city and of the nation, of the difficulty in waiting for the Lord that they will encounter. He speaks to us as well. And we will begin that next Sunday morning.

But suffice it to say for now, I can't imagine but that the Lord's heart wouldn't be very discouraged. If you read, just in one sitting, all that He went through these last few days, He had wept earlier in the week over the city, knowing of their refusal for life; and now all He's had is these little guys coming with their arguments and trying to discredit Him. So, it is encouraging that these last four verses here are of a different sort, if you will. This is late afternoon on Tuesday. Jesus is looking, it seems, for some refuge from the attacks. He goes to rest in the Court of the Women, outside the Court of the Gentiles in the Temple. It's a large area. It would have easily held 15,000 people standing around, if that's what they wanted. It was also where the treasury was located. But because He'd been dealing with this hypocrisy for the better part of the week, and the leaders vocally and publicly challenging Him, His ministry in the Temple area ends with this story. Heartwarming, life-changing, sincere. And it gives us great insight, not only in how God views our giving to Him but also how He knows our heart.

Back in the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 6:21, the Lord had said, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." And the Bible has a lot to say about how you handle what God gives you and stewardship when it comes to your finances. And how we view them and handle them is a pretty good indicator of where we are with Christ. Where your treasure is, that's your heart. That's where your heart is. How much you spend and on what you spend it will show what you truly value most of the time. Check your tithe receipts against your MasterCard bill. Look at yourself. And Jesus says that much of man's devotion to God is revealed in the way that he gives, and He makes that known here. The Lord knows the condition of man's heart. Usually your money is the last thing to be redeemed.

But I love this lesson. It is pure and clear and short. It is the final words that Jesus will speak in the Temple area, as He leaves this place for good; He won't be returning here, other than to be on trial. So, beautiful little interlude. It's kind of like, "Oh, good," and then He's able to sit with the disciples and tell them of the difficulties ahead; but also of the glory that waits.

So, verse 41 down through verse 44, this morning, we read (in verse 41) "Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many people who were rich put in much." The treasury in the Court of the Women had an area called just that - the treasury - which had thirteen inverted (what looked like) brass trumpets. They had the wide side or the round side, the big side, down. There was a slit at the top, and the slit was (from all that we can

see in history) oftentimes worn down, shiny from hands passing over them. They were called, in Hebrew, "**Shopheroth**," and they received the offerings of the people. According to the Mishnah, the Jewish handbook, if you will, of life, they were marked for different purposes. They had new shekel dues on one of them, old shekel dues on another; there was one for the burnt offerings of the sanctuary; another one for the wood that was to be placed on the mercy seat. There were six that were just marked "freewill offerings." And because it was the Passover Feast, and there were so many people in town, this place would have been packed as well. And Jesus, notice in verse 41, just sat down across from that giving area in the Court of the Women to see how the people put their money in the treasury. Imagine Jesus, the people watcher, sitting there, observing everyone without really being observed. I don't know if you've ever sat in an airport or in a crowded mall - just go to the mall this week, sit around and watch - people are not so happy, I don't think.

But imagine you being in this crowd and the Lord watching you from the bench across the way, and you aren't aware of Him, but He's aware of you and your every move and your every thought because that's the way it is. He sees everything, doesn't He? The people weren't aware of it. We should be. It's kind of a life-changing awareness. And you find it in a couple of places. Hannah knew that God knew her heart. And as she prayed, there in 1 Samuel 2:3, she said, "The LORD is the God of knowledge. By Him actions have been weighed. So I can't be arrogant when I speak." And she was aware that the Lord was watching what she was saying. David was able to write that Psalm that we sing sometimes; Psalm 139:2 says, "You know my down-sitting and my up-rising. You're acquainted with my thoughts afar off. You comprehend my plans. You know my lying down. You know all of my ways."

Well, here, Jesus sits to watch. And I should tell you this morning - the Lord is watching you, even the attitude of your heart. You can hide it from us. You can't hide it from Him. Which is interesting that Mark would use the word "how." Notice, in verse 41, "Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many people who were rich put in much." Mark's focus is not on the amount; it's on the how. In this public place, you could find great opportunity, especially in the busyness of Passover, to draw a lot of attention to yourself and to your giving, especially if you had a lot to give. I don't know if you've ever watched telethons on television, but I remember seeing once a live audience, and a fellow stood up, and he literally said, "I want to give \$500 anonymously." (Laughing) Well, wait a minute. You just stood up on TV, for crying

out loud! But you wonder what would happen to our giving if there weren't celebrity benefits and published subscriber lists and bronze plaques and pictures of donors and society pages or people with 3-foot-long checks holding them. There's so much applause that can come to you in the way that you give, in the how. There are churches, and maybe you know some of them, that have walks of faith with people's names, and cornerstones, or contributors on the backs of chairs or pews. We don't have those. On hospital walls and college buildings. The glory for self just never stops. And so the Lord looks for how.

Notice He says here to us, in verse 41, that "many people who were rich put in much." We are told, historically, that at times of giving in the Temple, the rich would come with bags of coins too heavy to carry for themselves, so their servants would follow them, slowly parading them through this big treasury area and then loudly pouring out the coins. And you can imagine how that might sound, going into these big collection (brass, at that) chests. It would be like a Vegas jackpot. People would stop in their tracks and look back, "Oh, man! Did you hear all that?!" And the giver could leave with a "top-that" attitude, "See what I did," unfortunately having the ability to do a good deed on a scale that's impossible for most others to reproduce. And so their giving creates this delusion of superiority that you can find amongst the rich.

Jesus, when He spoke to the disciples early on in His ministry in the Sermon on the Mount, said in Matthew 6:1, "Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen of men because else you will have no reward with your Father in heaven. So don't sound the trumpet as the hypocrites do in the streets to get glory from men. I tell you, they have their reward. Instead, when you go to do something charitable, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing," (now, that's impossible, but it's a great hyperbole as an illustration) "that your charitable deeds may be in secret so your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly." Same issue. How we give. How we give. And the context of wearing your religion on your sleeve so that people will see you and applaud you - it's a dangerous thought.

So Jesus sat and watched the rich, and many came with fanfare and applause and "Oohs" and "Aahs" and with lots of attention; but then a quiet turn of events as this approaching widow was about to bring Jesus to His feet with joy. And I just love the picture because it hasn't been a good week. He has to weep over the city on Sunday and clean the Temple on Monday and entertain the wicked plotters on

Tuesday; and things have not gone well. But they go well here. And after the charades and His dealings with the scribes and the Pharisees, Jesus was, I think, refreshed and rejoicing in what He observed, what He saw. How do you give? That's a good question. How do you give? With outward show or freely as you've received; with simplicity, as Paul wrote to the Romans in chapter 12, or with simplicity, as Paul wrote to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 16, or with cheerfulness, as we read this morning (in 2 Corinthians 9), or with grumbling, or with a sense of they-need-me superiority. To the Lord, how is far more important than what. It's always that way with God. You should know that. It's the intent of the heart, not the action. It is the intent of the heart that is the driving force.

Well here comes our hero in verse 42. It says, "Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans." On this late Tuesday afternoon of the week that Jesus would die, sitting and watching in the treasury area of the Court of the Women, comes a woman that is absolutely impoverished. She is dressed in the poverty of her widowhood. It was one of the hardest positions, I think, culturally or socially to have in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. And in her hand were two little coins, mites. They're called "**leptons**." The word "**lepton**" means to peel. They were called "**leptons**" because they were so thin that really that was the best way to describe them. It was the smallest coin made. It was the least valuable coin that you could get; it was worth 1/64<sup>th</sup> of a denarius, if you will, or about 1/8<sup>th</sup> of a penny; and the two in her hands would equal  $\frac{1}{4}$  cent. The word "quadrans" means 1/4<sup>th</sup>. It literally was nothing. It was the change that you might just drop on the floor and not even bother to pick up. Two small coins that were her earnings from which she had to live - hand to mouth - food for sustenance. That's all that she had. And she approached the treasury chests much quieter than the rich. She, I think, actually hoped to go unnoticed. Her only concern was that God would see her. I guarantee you that those two little "**leptons**" didn't make much noise hitting the bottom. No one looked up and said, "Ooh" and "Aah." There wasn't any jackpot. It was about as quiet as it could be. But here's the beautiful picture. Notice, Jesus is watching her. He's watched the rich come and go. But she had come solely out of a love for Him, not glory for herself. And the fact that she had two coins would tell you that she could have kept one. Who's going to argue with someone who says, "I gave 50% of all that I had to the Lord"? Who would've been angry with that? But she was going to throw it all in there. And the only One rejoicing was the God that she did not see. But He saw her.

And Mark tells us, in verse 43, "So He called His disciples to Himself," called them over to show them this jewel, to teach them that God sees the sacrifice more than the amount, the love more than the obligation, the heart more than the behavior. "Come here." "'Assuredly,' " (or, without doubt) " 'I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury.' " "More than all" in Greek literally reads "more than them all put together." Isn't that interesting? Jesus is really bad at math....or really good at value, His reasoning straightforward, very revealing. The rich had given out of their abundance, their overflow, their extra. It didn't require any sacrifice from them. It looked good on the tax sheets, on the discounts, on the deductions. They had more than they needed. She gave out of her poverty, her lack, her need. She has put in more than all, " 'for they,' " verse 44, " 'all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood.' " She put in everything she had - to choose between food for the body or satisfaction for the soul. She chose the soul. She needed sustenance, but she longed for worship. And it impressed Jesus to no end. And I imagine there was a smile on His face from ear to ear because, as ugly as this week had been, this was beautiful in His eyes. She chose the latter. And I am sure that God would have met her every need as she put Him first.

But you will find, in the Bible, when it comes to giving - and they're both here, although they're not as outspoken, maybe, here as in other places - there are only really two criteria for giving that God looks for from you and me. One is how we give - the attitude, the heart, the desire, the love that motivates. And then the second criterion - what it costs us. Notice that Jesus says here, "They have all just thrown in extra." Not her. She's thrown in what she needs. It is proportion, not portion. It is the proportion to what you have. It isn't the amount, but it's what costs you to give it. We have to give in such a way that it costs us something for the Lord to be pleased. Does that make sense? Buying someone lunch on the company credit card is not giving. Oh, it might make you look good. And David understood that. You know, when David went to buy that threshing floor from that fellow, Araunah, so he could stop the plague that had started, it was such a devastating time for the nation that the owner said, "Look, I'll give you everything you want, even the offering. Just go offer it so this can stop!" And it was David who said, "I can't give to the Lord that which costs me nothing" (2 Samuel 24:24). "I can't do that. God will never accept me giving Him something that doesn't cost me anything."

Here's what C.S. Lewis wrote. Now, it's not in the Bible, but it's a pretty good quote. He said this, "I don't believe one can settle how much we ought to give except to follow the safe rule that we must give more than we can spare before it is acceptable to the Lord. If our charities do not pinch or hamper us, they are too small, and they are unacceptable." I think that's biblically correct. For the rich, a great gift may be too little. For the poor, a little gift may be way too much.

God is interested in the heart and in the sacrifice, and if you'll remember that, you'll never go wrong. You'll biblically have the whole giving thing figured out. Forget these guys on TV. God's interest is only twofold - your heart (cheerful giver) and the proportion or the cost that it brings to you in your sacrifice to the Lord.

We read 2 Corinthians 9 (before Pastor Jack's message this morning). Here's what Paul wrote in chapter 8 for a few verses, "Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God." Same exact example. Serve the Lord, then serve others with what God provides for you.

The widow, here, certainly reveals her heart for the Lord. She gave all that she had. And Jesus honored her giving, even though the men in charge of the treasury were corrupt. The money that she dropped off would probably not go to the things that she hoped it would go to. And God makes that distinction. It doesn't seem to make any difference to Him. It was her giving to Him that moved His heart, to call His disciples and say, "Look at this!" And rather than arguing about the corruptness of the priesthood (and they were absolutely corrupt), that wasn't an interest to the Lord. It was her heart to Him. He knew of their ways. He said it in verse 40, didn't He? They "devour widows' houses." That's what He said of the leadership. But then here comes a widow.

It is our belief at church here that the best thing that we can do to see God provide for the church is to teach you the love of Jesus. Because if you love Him, you'll give yourself to Him. And giving is kind of the outflow of a love relationship.

So, our focus is not money or finances or budgets or thermometers on the stage or campaigns or whatever other nonsense people might reach for. I think our focus is on - we need to have you know Him, and the closer you get to Him the greater God will provide, as a church. That's just the way it works. So we're committed to teaching the Bible. If you've been here more than two weeks, you probably know that we don't talk about money. God's never failed us. And unless we run into it, like here, we bring it up, but God's been good to the church. We've never had to say "no" to any opportunity to serve. Every bill has always been paid. God moves the heart. He provides for His own. He's never failed us. I don't think that He ever will. But you will find the provision of God coming through people that are in love with Him. And when that love goes, so does the provision. When Moses, in Exodus 25, was told by the Lord to build this tabernacle that they would be carrying through the wilderness, he gathered the congregation together, and he said to them (in chapter 25:1), "The Lord told me to tell you that you should bring an offering from a willing heart because we've got to build this tabernacle." And that's all that he said. "That's what the Lord told us to do." Eleven chapters later, it is the priests that come to Moses and say, "Tell the people to quit giving. We can't use all this stuff. And the tabernacle is finished. Don't bring any more. They bring much more than enough for the service of the Lord." And Moses had to give them a commandment to not bring anything else. In fact, at the end of chapter 36, verse 6 says, "And the people were restrained from bringing" more.

Why? Because if you love the Lord, you'll give to the Lord. It's the natural consequence of relationship. So, we take offerings on Sunday mornings. We absolutely ignore it otherwise. We trust God will provide. And we find in the Bible that when the people do well spiritually, then financially the church does well. When Joash the king brought reforms to the land, there in 2 Chronicles, it was the people who returned in their giving to restore the tabernacle and to get the priests back to work. And it says in 2 Chronicles 24 that it rejoiced the LORD. The people were excited. When Ezra led a contingency of 2,000 priests back to begin to rebuild the Temple, the people gave according to their ability, and God marked it as so. They were interested in the things of God. Yet when folks are out of fellowship with God, the giving stops. It becomes a religious practice, and God isn't honored. Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 5 that "the sleep of a laboring man is sweet.....but riches kept for their owner are to their own hurt." That was his observation. So, I think that Haggai Scripture is pretty important too, when they were sent to build the Temple, and they began to serve themselves, and the thing just laid there for sixteen years; and the prophet Haggai showed up and said,

"How come you're putting your money into pockets with holes in them? You always want more, and you never have enough." Why? Because you've put the Lord second. It's a pretty interesting picture.

But when faith in God and trust in His provision are set aside, then you're left to rely on pitches and fundraisers and teary-eyed pleas, and they never end because they should never have started. God provides for His own, doesn't He? He provides for you as you look to Him.

So, our policy in the church is we don't talk about money. We don't ask for it, we don't raise it, we're not interested. If God doesn't pay His bills, then we're going to change gods. Because if our God can't do those things, how is He going to take care of eternity? He's a faithful God. And if I can't give as this widow this morning, I would say to you just don't give it at all because God knows the difference. And He doesn't need it. Don't ever think God's in need. You don't think the Lord's sitting at the treasury going, "Man, I hope she throws in both of those!" He don't care. He cares about you, your heart. Right? One pleases Him, and it blesses the giver. The other just comes and goes, and God isn't moved.

And I love the picture of Jesus just sitting - Tuesday afternoon - just, "Aah." This is it. I mean, we don't know much about Wednesday. We'll cover the little that we have. We know a lot about Thursday - it's the last supper, it's the hours with the disciples, it's the Garden of Gethsemane, it's six trials through the night, it's six hours on a cross, it's three days in a grave. I mean, it's going to be a tough couple of weeks.

But this is like the jewel, right? The sun shines for a minute, as He finds this woman so in love with Him.

So it's the how and the cost. You know, it is tax time. You probably, if you own a house, have been writing your house taxes. I think they were due last week. But, when you pay the IRS, did you know that they don't care about your attitude? (Laughing) As long as the check arrives on time, they're thrilled. If not, then they have attitude. God seeks giving out of love. Paul wrote this to the Corinthians, "If I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:3). It's the way God sees it. Giving to God has to cost us something. Any gift given is not needed by the Lord. Know that. Put that in your understanding of God and giving. His focus is on

the sacrifice made to give it and the heart of love that drives it - that, He highly cherishes. He is not dependent upon you to make His program work. I was driving home last night and listening to a Christian radio station, and a guy came on, and he said, "Hey, it's Christmas, and the giving is down. If you want to keep us on the air, you've got to give us some money." And I thought what a bonehead this guy is. He obviously doesn't know the Lord because if he did, he wouldn't be making statements like that. God doesn't need our help.

How we give is important to God. Giving to God has to cost me something. And know this - God can do gloriously with tiny offerings. Let me illustrate it this way. Just think of all of the accomplishments that these two mites have accomplished from this widow's hand over the last 2,000 years. Right? Whoever this rich guy was that preceded her, we don't know anything about him. But we're still studying this little woman's labor of love - that Jesus was just thrilled with - 2,000 years later. The riches of others have come and gone. Her giving continues to bear fruit - hopefully in our hearts as well.

How do I give? Costs me something. The amount doesn't matter because God doesn't need it. In fact, God is an equal-opportunity God which means not having much to give doesn't lower your ability to serve Him because it's the proportion that God seeks from you. It all comes down to how you give in love and what it costs you - questions that you should really answer for yourself every time the tithe bag goes by. And if you can't say, "I'm giving out of joy," just keep it. How often are you going to hear that from a pulpit? Just keep it. Because God's not impressed, and He doesn't need your help. So how good is that?

Let me conclude this morning with a Kent Hughes story. Kent Hughes is a modern-day Bible commentator. He actually has retired now, lives up north. But he's a really wonderful writer. And I found this to be amusing, so I'm going to read it to you. "There is a disease," he said, "which is spreading the country and especially infectious in this part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It's called cirrhosis of the giver. It was first discovered in a couple who died from it - named Ananias and Sapphira - in 34 A.D. It is an acute condition that renders the patient's hands immobile when it tries to pass money from pocket or wallet to offering plate. Fortunately, the remedy is simple and instant. Remove the individual from the house of the Lord, for clinical studies have proven that those symptoms do not occur in alternative environments like shopping malls, amusement parks or the theater. Actually the disease is not a motor problem at all. It is an issue of the heart. And the best

remedy is to fall in love with Jesus. Then you will want to give Him, in love, all that you have - with great joy. After all, where your treasure is, there you will find that your heart is also. Money speaks. What does it say about you?" Wow! Go, Kent Hughes!

Well, know this. The Lord is still sitting across the way watching you, and I hope He's pleased with what He sees.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson  
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