

10 for 10

TEN WEEKS OF ENHANCED GIVING: WEEK 9

From the Pulpit: Mark 12:41-44

Should Jesus Really Be Watching My Wealth?

(Continued from last week)

If you were sitting in Jesus' seat watching the widow give her offering, what would you have told her? "No, dearie! God knows your heart. He knows you don't have two dimes to rub together. He knows you'll give someday—if you've got it. Here's two more pennies. Go and buy yourself a cup of coffee." We would have done our best to talk the widow out of making her offering! In so doing, we would have talked her out of the very thing Jesus commended her for! The point? Could it be, every now and then, that we are far too eager to make pious sounding excuses NOT to give and not nearly eager enough in encouraging one another on toward godly generosity?

Why is that? We have this enduring suspicion that giving is done primarily with the wallet when Jesus is really watching the attitude of our hearts and the actions that follow. Simply put: *Do we trust God or not?* When is the last time we opened our hands and gave sacrificially—as if we really trusted in God and staked our future on his promises? Two examples:

Why is it easy to send thousands of dollars to Fidelity, Vanguard, or Charles Schwab every year? Because we trust they will make our money grow. But have you noticed Charles Schwab makes no promises to us? Seriously! "Past performance is no guarantee of future results." Charles Schwab makes no promises. God does! "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 Cor. 9:11). Why are we so tempted to trust Fidelity more than our faithful Father? Why do we take comfort in our investments, but fear giving as a net loss? Jesus is watching our attitude and actions. What does he see?

Let's be frank. Is it a great act of faith to pay a WE Energies bill? Even more, is it a great act of faith to pay for a gym membership every month? The answer is likely a resounding NO! There is no faith involved in paying for a gym membership. Do we offer God—the Creator of the atom—less than the amount on our WE Energies bill? Do we offer God—the Creator of the human body—less than the cost of our monthly gym membership? Does that even make sense? Jesus is watching. What does he see?

There is only one reason we fail to give God our firstfruits: He, simply put, isn't first in our hearts. There is one overriding reason we don't practice the principle of proportionate giving: We've forgotten that God is the Ultimate Owner of Everything. There are two major reasons we fail to practice sacrificial giving: We don't believe that God will truly care for us as reflected in Jesus ultimate sacrifice for us.

How do you think the widow's story ends? St. Mark doesn't tell us. But knowing what you know about the faithfulness of the Father and the sacrifice of the Son, do you think Jesus let her go home and starve to death? Do you get the impression that after commending the widow's gift, Jesus was ignorant of what she needed? The widow gave her all trusting in the God who gave his all, his everything, his Son for her.

And God offered his all, his everything, his Son for you. He didn't offer two coins for your salvation, but the double treasure of Jesus' perfect life lived for you and his innocent death died for you!

Jesus knows all about coins! When Satan tempted him with the wealth of the world, he told Satan to go away. When the money changers were fleecing the flock in the temple courts, he made a whip and drove them out. This was a house of prayer, not a place of profit! Days after sitting and watching the widow, Jesus would be kneeling and praying in Gethsemane—

Questions to Ask God about Giving

Q: How can I help my pastors encourage biblical training in stewardship and giving and assist them in creating an open church dialogue regarding lifestyle choices and kingdom investments?

(Alcorn, p. 222)

Q: How have I been blessed through my 10 for 10 giving?

Q: As I look back on ten weeks of tithing, what surprises me?

Q: What is my current financial situation after increasing my giving to God for almost three months?

Q: Has God kept his promises to bless me as I have prayerfully given to him?

Q: What do I want to do as I continue in my life of giving?

Q: How can I encourage my brothers and sisters to give generously and joyfully?

QUOTABLE QUOTES

“I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare... If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot do because our charitable expenditure excludes them.” – C. S. Lewis

Ministerial Education

Our congregation sends a portion of its weekly offerings our synod. Those gifts are used to lower the cost of education for people training to be our pastors, teachers, staff ministers, and missionaries.

The Lord has blessed us with training schools where every teacher believes that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant Word of God and the gospel is the only proper motive for serving as a called worker. Those schools are training the next generation to take the gospel not just to our own children and grandchildren, but also to people around the country and around the world who need to hear about Jesus.

In these ways, your mission offerings are a blessing to our synod and to the world.



sold for coins of silver by Judas. Jesus never once thought a greedy thought, but human greed led directly to his crucifixion. And on that cross, Jesus bled and died to forgive the very hearts that loved copper more than the Christ, silver more than the Savior!

And Jesus knows all about widows and their needs. Just three days after watching the widow give her gift at the temple, he looked down from the cross upon another widow—his mother. Even with his hands nailed to the cross, he opened them and took care of her future needs. And to this day, he opens his crucified hands and fills our desires with good things.

Jesus knows what it means to commend someone—as he commended the widow for her gift. He also knows what it means to be forsaken by someone—as he was by his Father for our greed, for our doubting his care, for our disregard of God’s words about worldly wealth. Jesus’ hands were poked with spikes so that our hands could be completely cleansed of their grip of steel on the copper coins of this world.

In him, both we and the widow have the forgiveness we crave and the motivation we desperately need to open our hands and give in a way that glorifies God and cares for our neighbor.

Jesus is still watching his people’s wealth. What will he see? A tip? God forbid! Or

deep-seated trust? God give it! Your Lord is faithful. He will do it!

Learning from the mistakes of others

How Not To Give

The Situation

Paula believes in giving but that Scripture says giving should be voluntary. After all, “God loves a cheerful giver.” With all of her financial obligations, Paula hasn’t been able to find “the cheer” in giving. Paula says, “If you can’t give cheerfully, you shouldn’t give at all.”

The Problem

Paula is right in saying that God wants us to give cheerfully. She is wrong in thinking that she should only give if she feels like it. Is “cheerful” a true standard for the Christian life? What would happen if spouses were faithful to their marriage vows or children obeyed their parents—but only if they could do so cheerfully? To give an “offering” without a heart of faith attached is sin. But to give nothing because your heart isn’t “cheerful” is also sin. (One is a sin of commission; the other a sin of omission.) After confessing her sin and receiving the Savior’s forgiveness, Paula should begin the biblical practice of firstfruits, proportionate giving as soon as she can. She will soon discover the “cheer” that she was missing!

(Freely adapted from Alcorn, p. 193)

The people give wholeheartedly for the building of the temple

God’s Turn to Teach

⁶ Then the leaders (of Israel)...gave willingly. ⁷ They gave toward the work on the temple of God... ⁹The people rejoiced at the willing response of their leaders, for they had given freely and wholeheartedly to the Lord. David the king also rejoiced greatly.

¹⁰ David praised the Lord in the presence of the whole assembly, saying,

“Praise be to you, Lord, the God of our father Israel, from everlasting to everlasting.

¹¹ Yours, Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, Lord, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all. ¹² Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all. ¹³ Now, our God, we give you thanks, and praise your glorious name.”

¹⁴ “But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.”

(1 Chronicles 29:6–14)