

10 for 10

TEN WEEKS OF ENHANCED GIVING: WEEK 8

From the Pulpit: Mark 12:41-44

Should Jesus Really Be Watching My Wealth?

This morning we hear that Jesus is WATCHING. Take comfort! The Lord who watches over us neither slumbers nor sleeps. Jesus is WATCHING. Take warning! 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! "Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury" (v.41). Obviously, Jesus hasn't learned a thing about a person's right to privacy! But, if Jesus watched the people giving their offerings, at the temple, then that means he is also watching us do the same. Should Jesus really be watching our wealth? Hmm...

If it surprises you that Jesus sat down to watch people give their offerings, then it should doubly surprise you that this occurred TUESDAY of Holy Week. On Friday, he would be hung on the cross to die. With the clock ticking and all that must be done in the balance, what did Jesus do? He SAT DOWN in the temple courts 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. The Greek word is explicit here: Jesus was studying the people as they gave their offerings and he did this for some time. For Lutherans, who are trained to be discrete when they put their envelopes into the plate, the thought of Jesus sitting there watching, staring, and studying makes us more than a bit uncomfortable.

Should Jesus really be watching wealth? If you and I were Jesus' personal advisors,

we would say, "Absolutely not. Jesus, you've got bigger fish to fry! You should be watching for a place to eat the Last Supper. You should be watching your step, because the Pharisees are trying to trip you up. You should be watching your back, because Judas is plotting to betray you. But watching what people do with their wealth? No way! Because you know Jesus, if you sit there watching people give their offerings, then you're going to give the impression that you're actually interested in what people give to you!"

So, what did Jesus see as he watched? He saw rich people throw in large amounts. This doesn't seem surprising. We sort of expect rich families to be big givers. After all, Jesus himself once 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 listen, there is another insight that the Greek gives us. It would seem that the wealthy were coming back to the offering line again and again. There was pomp and show to their offerings! It turns out that Jesus was not only watching the amount of their gifts, but was staring through their souls at their reasons for giving.

Jesus watched another person, a widow. 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. Jesus was watching the widow's wealth too! What surprises us about her? That she was poor? No, Social Security wouldn't be invented for another 1,900 years. The amount? She offered two tiny copper coins—the bare minimum that could be paid for the temple tax. Again, not surprising.

What should surprise us, even shock us, is what we never would have known if

Questions to Ask God about Giving

Q: How can I better communicate with and pray with my spouse so we can walk together down this exhilarating road of giving, leading each other and not leaving the other behind?

Q: What am I doing to train my children to be generous givers—not just donors, but disciples?

Q: What handful of people in my unique sphere of influence do you want me to pray for and talk with about generous giving? Have you called me to mentor others in giving, that they may end up giving more than I do?

Q: What simple reminder of God's call to stewardship and giving can I make for myself, then pass on to others?

(Adapted from Alcorn, p. 221)

QUOTABLE QUOTES

“Make as much as you can, save as much as you can, and give as much as you can.” - John Wesley

“Earthly goods are given to be used, not to be collected. Hoarding is idolatry.” - Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Adult Discipleship

There is no end of needs every congregation faces as they serve their members. What an encouragement that we do not have to face these challenges alone!

Together with believers throughout North America, our Congregation Mission Offerings support a vision to enhance greater gospel ministry with plans and resources to help congregations better meet these needs: keeping members connected to their church family, ways to better knit members together as Christian friends, enrichment in marriage, and enhancing how we live out our God-given role in life.

What a blessing we support together as we serve in love of one another and our synod-family!



Jesus hadn't pointed it out. 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, was the one our Lord really noticed! She had given more of what she had 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?" To the eyes of men, it didn't make an ounce of sense. But Jesus could see what the disciples couldn't; he could see her soul. "They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on" (v. 44).

As Jesus watched, he saw the rich give out of what they had left over. They gave their thousands, but had thousands more to live on. They went home to a warm house, a full fridge, and a cozy bed. They gave big gifts, but there was precious little personal sacrifice attached. They gave some of the frosting on the cake, but they still had both cake and frosting leftover.

The widow didn't give frosting off the cake because she didn't even have cake. Instead, she gave her daily bread! She gave everything—all she had to live on, a few cents. The amount of her offering was tiny, but her self-sacrifice was total. She gave until she had nothing left—and at that very moment she still had absolutely everything. She had her Lord. She had God's promises and God's gift of faith to

trust them. And today's point? She gave even beyond her ability, because she trusted her Lord's ability to care for her.

(Continued next week.)

Learning from the mistakes of others

How Not To Give

The Situation

Joe is a well-regarded leader in the church. He regularly speaks at meetings, encouraging members to raise called workers' salaries, support missions work more generously, and begin planning for a major building expansion. Joe often quotes Scripture to highlight his points. Both God and the financial secretary know that if everyone at church gave like Joe, the called workers would soon be cut, missions would cease, and the church would default on its current mortgage.

The Problem

Joe has lots to say, even biblical things, when it comes to other people's Christian lives. It is his personal relationship with the Lord that is struggling. He is quick to commit other people's money to the Lord's work, but clings tightly to his own. Saying one thing and secretly doing another is called hypocrisy. Joe doesn't need to start by giving. He needs to start by repenting, receiving the assurance of Christ's forgiveness, and bringing forth fruits of faith in keeping with repentance.

(Freely adapted from Alcorn, p. 192)

Psalm 146

God's Turn to Teach

¹ Praise the LORD. Praise the LORD, O my soul. ² I will praise the LORD all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live. ³ Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save. ⁴ When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing. ⁵ Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God, ⁶ the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them—the LORD, who remains faithful forever. ⁷ He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets prisoners free, ⁸ the LORD gives sight to the blind, the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down, the LORD loves the righteous. ⁹ The LORD watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked. ¹⁰ The LORD reigns forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the LORD. (NIV)