

Great Generosity
Luke 21:1-4
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In July of 2019, Warren Buffet made a donation to the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation. It consisted of stock shares worth \$3.6 billion...billion. According to Forbes Magazine this was the largest charitable contribution of the year. Incidentally, of the various billionaires, Buffet and Gates are two of the very few who can be described as generous. Of 15 tech billionaires, Gates is the only one who has contributed more than 10% of his wealth to charitable causes. Even Buffets \$3.6 billion gift is only 4.5% of \$79 billion net worth. And it really does pale in comparison to the generosity a woman displays in our text today. Friends, our journey through Luke brings us to Chapter 21:1-4. If you have your Bible turn there or the words will be on the screen. Let's pause and pray the Lord encourages and challenges us as He speaks through His word this morning.

Our setting is Jerusalem, Passover week, about 33 A.D., probably still Wednesday, in the courts of the Jewish temple. Jesus has been in discussion with His opponents, enemies who want to see Him executed. Luke, inspired by God's spirit, writes, **Luke 21:1 – Jesus looked up and saw the rich dropping their offerings into the temple treasury.**

He is in what was called "The Court of the Woman," just inside the East gate of the temple. Jewish women were allowed here, but no Gentiles. It was also the temple treasury. Thirteen wooden boxes were placed around the perimeter of the court. Each had a trumpet shaped-bronze funnel to guide the coins into the box. Some of the boxes were labeled for specific purposes-- with the money used to purchase everything from birds for sacrifices to gold for the most Holy place. Six of the boxes were labeled for general or free will offering. The bronze funnels meant the coins made noise as they went down into the box. The more coins and the bigger the coins, the more noise there would be. So even if someone did not talk about how much he was giving there was still a way to let others know about the size of the gift. They are kind of like the fellow who got up at the church business meeting and said, "I would like to give \$500 to that project – anonymously."

It is likely that none of the people realized Jesus was watching as they make their contributions.

Having just warned His followers about the Scribes and their hypocrisy, He probably found it ironic that many of the people received a sense of "self-satisfaction" in putting money in those boxes. Many of those able to give more than others think they are earning God's favor, somehow impressing Him. And they think they are specially superior to other people. Jesus does not find this arrogant, "self-focused" attitude, pleasing at all. But then Jesus sees something that brings joy

to His hurt. **Luke 21:2 – He also saw a poor widow dropping in two tiny coins.** All through history widows have usually struggled financially. Especially in the 1st Century, the death of one's husband meant almost certain poverty. That is this woman's situation. The coins, made of copper or bronze were called "Lepta." A Denari, the usual day's wage was worth about 130 Lepta. If we try to translate that into today's currency each coin might be worth 75 cents. So she maybe put like \$1.50 into the offering box. It was nothing as far as value. Yet, Jesus says, **Luke 21:3 – "Truly I tell you this poor widow has put in more than all of them."**

How can that be? Some of those people probably put in 5 Denari, maybe 10...over a thousand times as much. Why would Jesus say the widow *gave more* than all of them? Because **Luke 21:4 – All these people have put in gifts out of their surplus, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on.** Now, as we think about it, what this woman did, seems like a strange thing to do. After all her contribution doesn't do much for the temple treasury. They would not have really missed her gift. But is sure impacted the woman. She went from being very poor, to being very, very poor. Wouldn't it have been better if she would have given one coin and kept the other for herself? No. Her gift flowed out of love for the Lord. She was not trying to impress God or anyone else. She was likely a little embarrassed about how small her gift was. But love for and gratitude to God caused her to give *all that she had*. What happened to her that next week? Where did she get money to buy food? I am not sure. I have a feeling the Lord provided for her in a small way. What I do know is this. *Two thousand years later*, we are

talking about her in Chisholm, Minnesota. In fact millions upon millions of people know about this woman and her love for God. If somehow we could ask her, now in heaven, whether she is glad she put both coins in that treasury box that day, I have *no doubt* her answer would be an empathic *Yes, I am very glad!*

Ok, that is Luke's brief, but powerful account of a poor widow who gave all she had. Let's focus now on some lessons the Lord has for us through this portion of His word.

#1 Giving money to the Lord is a good thing to do.

A few weeks ago as we explored the passage where Jesus chases the money changers and other vendors out of the temple. I made the point that the church is not to be about making money. Plenty of folks have the attitude of "I want nothing to do with church because they are just after my money." I noted that this simply is not true about Chisholm Baptist Church. You can come here every Sunday morning and never put two pennies in the offering and no one *would ever know*. You can come to this church, attend all the picnics and dinners, be a Sunday School teacher, and never give one cent and I *would not know that*. Thus, it would not bother me. *However*, giving money to God, through the church, is something each of us *should do*. It really is. In the Old Testament, before Jesus came, God's people were commended to give 10% of their income to the Lord. That meant giving it to the priests at the tabernacle or temple. The practice is called tithing. In fact, those who failed to give 10% were said to be robbing the Lord. **Malachi 3:9 – "Should people cheat God? Yet you have cheated me! You have robbed me of the tithes and offerings due to me."**

Now, as I have said before, tithing is not commanded in the New Testament. Yet, even though it is not a requirement for believer's in Jesus today, many Christians find it a very helpful standard. They contribute 10% of whatever money they get to the church. For the most part, that is a wonderful thing. Yet, even with out a tithing mandate in the New Testament, it is still very clear that is is expected we will give some of the money God as entrusted to us back to Him. One verse that comes to mind is **1 Corinthians 16:2 – On the first day of every week each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your**

income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made. Here the Apostle Paul is collecting money to bring to Christians in Jerusalem. Indeed, the purpose of giving money is not just so churches can pay pastors (1 Timothy 5:17) and utility bills, but also to provide financial help for people in need, especially to Christians who are in need. Giving money to support missionaries is another way we give to the Lord. And it is good, to keep that in mind that even though you might write a check out to Chisholm Baptist Church, it is to be a gift to the Lord. But what strikes me in this verse is how financial giving seems to be a *normal expectation* of believer's in Jesus. Giving to the Lord is a good thing to do.

#2 Motives and attitudes matter far more than the size of a gift. This is very clear in our text today. Jesus is not impressed because the widow gave a lot of money. It was a *teeny, tiny* gift. But the gratitude and love reflected in her offering is what warms Jesus' heart! In the Old Testament the attitude of the person giving the tithe certainly mattered. I think that is clear in **1 Samuel 15:22 – Does the Lord take pleasure in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord? Look: to obey is better than sacrifice, to pay attention is better than the fat of rams.** In the New Testament we explicitly told that motives are what matter most. **2 Corinthians 9:7 – Each person should do as he has decided in his heart – not reluctantly or out of compulsion, since God loves a cheerful giver.** Folks, this is a warning to pastors and others to not try to manipulate and pressure people into giving. It is also a reminder to all of us: we should not give because we feel obligated or guilty. We are to give cheerfully, joyfully out of gratitude to the Lord and out of love for Him.

Folks, the reality is God does not need our money. He is the creator and sovereign of the universe, who (Psalm 115:1) does whatever He pleases and for whom (Genesis 18:14) nothing is ever too difficult. God *does not need us* to give Him money, or anything else. But *we need to give* money to the Lord, at least if we want to be spiritual healthy. The widows two coins remind us that a tiny amount of money, given in love is far more honoring to God than very large amounts given for the wrong reasons. Let's explore two wrong motives for giving.

1st Is giving money to bribe God, thinking our financial gifts somehow means the Lord owes us something. Folks, it doesn't work that way. Grace is the only reason anyone receives anything from God. Being a Christian, experiencing God's salvation, is always about what God had done for us, through Jesus Christ. So friends, if you ever think your faithfulness in tithing or financial generosity puts God in your debt, you are simply mistaken. Now, some insist that God promises financial blessings to those who are generous givers. My friend Joe, for example is working a couple of part time jobs and makes \$500 a week. Things are kind of tight, but he is going to put \$100...20% of his income in the offering plate each Sunday. Why, because he believes that is the key to God's blessing. He thinks if he gives \$100, God will give him \$200. Giving money is the way to get money. Now, there are times, and some of you can testify to this, when God does provide financial blessings to those faithful in giving. Someone may indeed end up with more money after a generous gift than he or she had before. But the Lord gives no guarantee it will work that way. In most cases if you have \$500 and give away a \$100....you will have \$400, not \$600.

Now, if you give generously to the Lord you will always be blessed by God. Always. Yet, our text reminds us that this blessing does not always lead to financial prosperity. Godly, generous people do not always have a lot of money. No, we do not know what happened to the widow after she put all that she had in the temple box. But we know those two coins were all the money she had. There is every reason to believe she was a godly, generous woman *before* she came to the temple that day. Yet, that had not brought her any financial prosperity. Again the motive for giving should be gratitude to and love for the Lord, not a belief that generosity is the path for financial gain.

A 2nd wrong motive for giving is seeking to impress other people with our generosity. That is what many of the folks were trying to do that in the temple that day...but Jesus was *not impressed all*. That is one reason your donations to Chisholm Baptist Church are all confidential. We do not know how much each other gives. We do not know who the biggest giver in the congregation is. And that is good. For one thing, it discourages people

from comparing and competing. Now, some groups and even some churches kind of encourage that competition. But I do not think that is what God desires.

I contribute to The Spirit Historical Society, of which my mother is a founder. Spirit, Wisconsin is a lovely little rural community in North Central, Wisconsin...kind of like Balkan, Minnesota. The society has five levels of membership, depending on how much one donates annually. All the categories are based on the old lumber camps...so, if you give over \$50 you are "Teamster," a \$100 or more you are a "Woods Boss," and over \$500, you are a "Homesteader." There are zero benefits for being in one category over the other, except at the end of the year, the newsletter lists the names of the donors in each of those categories. Does having one's name on a list motivate people to give more? Probably. I usually donate \$100 to the group. If Nancy said, "Well maybe this year we should just give \$90 and give the other \$10 to a missionary." How would I reply? Well, I might say, "No, we want to give \$100 so we can be "A Woods Boss, not just a Teamster." How ridiculous! But I think people do act that way, because I am tempted to act that way. That is why companies that churches often hire to help raise funds for a new building or something, usually want the church to recognize donors. If you give enough money they put your name on a brick or something. Yet, giving money because we will get recognition for doing so, is not a good motive. It is more about honoring ourselves, instead of honoring the Lord.

Remembering that motives, not the size of the gift is what really matters also prevents us from making the mistake of despising small gifts. I have noticed that a church offering plate often contains, along with cash and checks, coins, even pennies. A question has come to my mind. Why does someone put in five pennies? How is five pennies going to help the church's ministry. But then I remember our text today and the woman who put in two small coins. And the truth that it is not the size of the gift, but the motive or attitude. A six year old girl who puts in five pennies because she loves Jesus, is obviously honoring the Lord more than someone who makes a \$5000 contribution to the church building fund so he can get his name on a plaque in the church foyer. Gifts that are given out of love for the Lord...no matter

how small, are honoring to Him and we should never forget that.

#4 God expects proportional giving. Jesus' praise of the widows great generosity, she gave all that she had, does not establish a new standard of giving. He is not suggesting that everyone give 100% of their money to the Lord. Yes, 100% of everything we have should be used in a God honoring way, but that includes things like paying the rent and buying breakfast cereal for the kids. Groups that require members to hand over all of their money and assets and then provide food, clothing and shelter for these members are in reality labeled cults. As we have noted, each person (**2 Corinthians 9:7**) is to determine how much he or she is to give. Paul's encouragement (**1 Corinthians 16:2**) was for each person to give in proportion to their income. Paul sums this idea in **2 Corinthians 8:14 – Right now you have plenty and can help those who are in need. Later, they will have plenty and can share with you when you need it.** In other words when you have a lot of money, you should be generous and give a lot of money, when you do not have very much you are not expected to give very much. Now, tithing, giving 10% is one form of proportional giving. Yet, the reality is that some find it much harder to make that 10% contribution than others. Jim who makes \$500,00 a year may find it much easier to give away 20%, \$100,000 than Jane does to give 10% of her \$30,000 annual income, which would be \$3,000.

Most folks find that as their income increases, so do their living expenses. There are a variety of reasons for that, but I suspect it is not as inevitable as we may think. Some Christians have been very intentional about making as much money as possible, living on a modest budget, and then giving away the rest of the money. One of the first to do that was John Wesley, the man who founded the Methodist church in the late 1700s. In his first year of ministry Wesley earned 30 pounds – He was in England, lived on 28 pounds and gave just two to the church and the poor. He did not even tithe. The next year, however, his income doubled. He earned 60lbs, still lived on 28 and gave 32 lbs to the church and the poor. Eventually, through books sales, etc, Wesley became very wealthy. One year he earned 1400 pounds. That year he lived on 30 pounds and gave away 1370 pounds, about 98% of his income.

Now, I am not suggesting anyone should give away 98% of his or her income. I would suggest however, that limiting ones spending and coming up with a budget that allows you to give more money, even a greater percent of your money, can be honoring to the Lord. Perhaps your income has increased in recent years. That is great. You need to decide how much of that additional money will be spent on you, and how much will be given to the Lord. Maybe your children are grown, out of the house and done with college. So even though your income may not have changed much, your living expenses are down and there is some extra money. Again, you need to decide how much of that money will be spent on you, and how much you will give. You get to decide. It is not up to me to tell you how much you should give. But, I can tell you this: If you are a generous giver and if you give out of gratitude and love for God, the Lord will be honored and pleased. No, God does not need your money. But the blessing, the joy that God promises to those who are generous, cheerful givers, means that is someone you and I should want to be. By God's grace may we be that for His glory!