

The Widow's Mites

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What Tom mentioned about the financial situation in this country is a good lead-in to this message. We are experiencing tremendous economic problems which have been masked somewhat, but they can't forestall forever what's coming. The treasury of the United States is empty. We are a debtor nation, and we are deeply in debt. It's going to cause big problems down the road for us, and probably not very far down the road.

I want to start the message this morning by talking about something that happened at the temple treasury. It's a story that I'm sure you're all familiar with. It's the story of the widow's two mites. Jesus observed this woman coming and bringing an offering to the temple treasury. I want to read the account as it's recorded in Luke. It's also found in Mark chapter 12, but I'm going to read Luke's account in chapter 21.

Luke 21:1-2: "And he looked up, and saw the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury. And he saw also a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites."

Now, we've heard many times that two mites was a very, very small amount. It might be like a penny to us today, perhaps. An almost negligible amount.

Luke 21: 3-4: "And he said, Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all: For all these have of their abundance cast in unto the offerings of God: but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had."

Now, my question this morning is: what is the lesson that we are to learn from this? Why is this story preserved in the scriptures for us? Is it, as many of the churches have told us, a way of encouraging us to give more money to the church? This is how it's been used traditionally, but is this really why this is preserved in the scriptures? Or is it possible that there's another lesson for us? Is God trying to tell us something else here?

Which temple is God really concerned about? There's a lot of talk and speculation, various viewpoints about whether or not a physical temple is going to be constructed again before the return of Jesus Christ. I don't know the answer to that. But I do know that there is a spiritual temple being built. I don't know whether a physical temple will be rebuilt before the return of Jesus Christ, but I do know for a fact, because we have many scriptures that talk about this - there is a spiritual temple being built. Again I ask - which one is God concerned about?

If we continue reading the next couple of verses in Luke 21:

Luke 21:5-6: "And as some spake of the temple, how it was adorned with goodly stones and gifts, he said, As for these things which ye behold, the days will come, in the which there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down."

God allowed the physical temple to be destroyed, not once, but several times. But he said this about the spiritual temple: "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it". The church of course is the body of Christ, and the individual people that make up that body of Christ that God has worked with over the years and over the centuries. They've all died. As we read in Hebrews, "these all died in faith, not yet having received the promises". But Jesus says the gates of hell – that is, the grave – will not prevail, because they will be resurrected. As we read in 1 Corinthians chapter 15, when these people shall be resurrected, and those of us that are alive and remain are changed from physical to spirit, it says "then shall be brought to pass this saying: death is swallowed up in victory." So the gates of the grave will not prevail against his church.

He has allowed the physical temple to be destroyed, but he will not allow the spiritual temple to be destroyed.

Let's turn to Ephesians chapter 2. Again, this is a very familiar passage.

Ephesians 2:19-22: "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."

We are the temple, the spiritual temple that God is building.

So which temple is it that God is more concerned with? Clearly the spiritual temple. I'm going to read another passage that relates to this as well.

1 Peter 2:5: "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."

So the spiritual temple is the temple that God is most concerned with. The physical temple was only a type of the spiritual temple. The physical stones that made up that physical temple were only a type of us – the spiritual, living stones that make up the spiritual temple that God is building.

So when this woman came and cast her offering into the temple treasury, was Christ really pointing this out because he needed people to give more money for the maintenance and building of the temple? Or was there another lesson for us? God's treasury is first mentioned back in Joshua chapter 6, in the story of Jericho. God has never needed people to provide for the temple treasury. He has used people, and allowed people to contribute to it, but God provides for himself. Everything belongs to him.

In Joshua chapter 6, in the story of Jericho, we read about how God supernaturally caused the walls of Jericho to fall down, and destroyed that city. The Israelites were told to destroy every man, woman, child and animal – everything, except that the precious metal was kept and put into the treasury.

Joshua 6:19: “But all the silver, and gold, and vessels of brass and iron, are consecrated unto the LORD: they shall come into the treasury of the LORD.”

Joshua 6:24: “And they burnt the city with fire, and all that was therein: only the silver, and the gold, and the vessels of brass and of iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the LORD.”

I'd like for us to turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 3. I believe this really tells us what Jesus was talking about, and why this story of the widow's two mites is preserved for us. I think it tells us a little bit about what all this was a type of, that happened in Jericho with the precious metals being put into the treasury of the house of God.

1 Corinthians 3:8-9: “Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building.”

As we read just a little bit earlier, what God is building is a holy temple. We are working together with God to accomplish that.

1 Corinthians 3:10: “According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation – “

And as we read earlier, that foundation is the apostles and the prophets, Jesus Christ being that chief cornerstone of that foundation.

1 Corinthians 3:10-11: “According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

He is the chief cornerstone of the foundation, and everything in the foundation and in the building rests upon that chief cornerstone.

1 Corinthians 3:12-13: “Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it –“

“The day” is a reference to the Day of the Lord, which we read in 2 Peter 3. It says that God is going to come back with fire, and the earth and the works therein shall be burned up. Just as in the day of Jericho, they burned everything except the precious metal.

1 Corinthians 3:13-15: “Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.”

You see, fire will burn up wood, hay and stubble, but it won't burn up gold and silver and precious metal. It'll purify it but it won't burn it up.

1 Corinthians 3:16: "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?"

We are that temple, and the precious metals – the gold, the silver, the other things that were put into God's treasury in the days of Joshua – are a type of the righteous character that God is developing in us, which is going into the spiritual temple.

Going back now to the story of the widow's two mites, again I reiterate: God does not need our money. I'm not saying that we shouldn't give. Last week, Bill asked us to give so that the people in Africa could enjoy the Feast. That is a good thing to do. But God doesn't need our money. That's not what he's mostly interested in. It says that the earth and the fullness thereof are the Lord's. He owns everything already. All the gold and all the silver are his.

The lesson I believe that is to be drawn from the story of the widow's two mites that she cast into the temple treasury is: she gave everything that she had to the house of God. In order for us to be successful in this project that we are working together with God on, that we are a part of, we have to give it everything. We have to give everything that we have to the house of God, to this spiritual temple. I'm not talking about money. I'm talking about our very lives.

Matthew 16:24: "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."

A man that was carrying his cross was a man that was on his way to being crucified. A man who has taken up his cross was a man who is giving up his life.

Matthew 16:25: "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it."

This holy temple that God is building requires of us to give up our lives entirely – completely. That requires trust. That requires belief. It requires faith. "Trust" and "belief" are just two other ways of saying "faith". As it says in the scriptures, "he who comes to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him". It says that God works all things together for good to those that love him, and who are the called according to his purpose. We must believe these things, and we must give up our lives entirely to the building of this temple.

This widow that came gave everything that she had. Think about that, on a physical level. What was she going to buy her food with? How was she going to live? We don't know the rest of the story, as Paul Harvey would say, because it's not revealed to us in scripture. But we must, as this widow no doubt did, trust that God knows what he's doing and that he will provide for us. In the case of this widow, I believe that God did provide for her. But in our case, I'm not talking about just physical. I'm talking about spiritual. We have to be willing to give up those things that we hold near and dear in our heart, if they are things other than the kingdom of God and his righteousness, so that God can do what needs to be done in our lives. We have to be willing to, as this widow did, give everything. There are so many parables that Jesus gave that talk about this. The man who sold everything he had to buy the pearl of great price. The man who found a treasure hidden in a field and sold everything to buy that field.

There's another story in the New Testament that's quite familiar to us, but I want to bring it to our attention because I think there's a lesson there that we may not have considered in the past. It's a curious story - it's the story of Ananias and Saphira. You can read the story in Acts chapter 5. I'm not going to read it, I'm just going to paraphrase it. This was a time when the church was living communally. It says in the latter part of chapter 4 that "neither was there among them that lacked, for as many as were possessors of land or houses sold them and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostle's feet, and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need".

What's the lesson here? Why is this preserved in scriptures for us? Is God trying to tell us that we need to sell everything that we have and live communally? There may come a time when that's what we're supposed to do, but I don't believe that's the primary purpose of this being preserved. As the story continues in chapter 5, there was a man named Ananias and his wife Saphira, and they had some land, and they sold it. They came and brought money, and laid it down at the apostle's feet. But they didn't bring all of it. It says that they held back a certain part of it.

Acts 5:3: "But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back part of the price of the land?"

And Ananias died. God took his life. And then a little while later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened, and Peter asked her "did you sell the land for this much?" that is, the amount that was brought. And she lied also and said yes. God took her life as well.

Is it possible that what is being communicated here through the scriptures with this story is that we must not lie, to ourselves or to the Holy Spirit or to God, by holding back, but that we are to give everything? When we were baptized, we committed our lives to God. Have we been truthful and faithful since then in really giving everything? Or is there some part of us that we're holding back? Are there areas of our life where we haven't fully turned our lives over to God? In a way, that's a rhetorical question. I think that every person, at the time of baptism, if they're sincere, truly wants to and intends to completely turn their life over to God. But I think that the Christian life, this path that we're on, is one of God opening our eyes more and more. I think that each one of us probably has come to the realization from time to time that there's a part of our life where we have not completely given up our own life. We're holding on to parts of it. God brings us to crisis points in our life where he forces us to make a decision - are we going to turn this part of our life that we're holding back over to him? Are we going to give everything? Or not? And God in his mercy does not strike us dead. He gives us time and space to repent, and to change. But from time to time, I think we come to realize that there're things that we're holding back from God? We haven't, as the widow did, given everything into this spiritual temple.

There's another story in the scriptures that we're all very familiar with. This is also about a widow, and for the sake of time I'm not going to read that story either. I'm just going to paraphrase it. It's found in 1 Kings 17. This is a story of Elijah and the widow woman from Sidon. There was a great drought because Elijah had prayed that God would shut up the heavens, and there was going to be no rain. Elijah was being fed by a brook, and eventually the brook dried up because there was no water. God told him to go to Zarephath, a city of Sidon, and that there would be the widow woman there who would take care of him. He came to the city and he found the woman, and he asked her for some food. She said well, all I have is just a little bit of oil and a little bit of flour, and I was going to bake a little cake for me and my son, and then we're going to die. Perhaps to our human way of looking at it, it seemed quite insensitive to her situation when Elijah said well, make some food for me first. Again, think about what was required of this woman to do this - and she complied.

Reading between the lines of the scriptures, I believe that this woman knew that Elijah was a man of God, and that what Elijah was telling her to do was to trust God, and to give up everything that she had materially. She had nothing left. Once this food was gone, she and her son were going to starve to death, most likely. But just like the widow that Jesus saw casting two mites into the temple treasury, this widow was willing to trust and to give everything. And she did. She gave the food that she and her son were going to eat to Elijah. But then, as you know, the cruse of oil that she had didn't run out, and the barrel of meal, that is, the flour to make bread, didn't run out. I believe that the oil that continued flowing from that container is symbolic of the Holy Spirit, and that the bread that she was able to make with that flour that did not fail was representative of the bread of life. Because she trusted God with everything that she had, God then sustained her, just as he will sustain us with the Holy Spirit and with his word, if we will trust in him completely.

It's interesting to note that the next chapter in the book of 1 Kings is the story of Elijah and the prophets of Baal. Elijah makes a very interesting statement there.

1 Kings 18:21: "And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him."

What a profound statement. No man can serve two masters. We have to come to the place in our lives where we recognize that. If God be God, then serve him. God tells us to come out of this world, and so we are called upon to stop being on the fence. We're called upon to completely give up all those things which this world holds dear – the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. All these things are not of the father, they're of this world. And yet from time to time we find ourselves being pulled back into the world by these things.

As I said before, giving is a good thing. But it's not because God needs our money. God wants us to learn to give so that we can learn to become like him. Jesus came and set us an example of how to live life. And he lived life by giving his life. He gave everything. His sacrifice was complete. He didn't hold anything back. Humanly, he wanted to continue living. That prayer that he prayed in the garden is very telling. He said, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. He was a human being – he didn't want to die. But then he said, nevertheless, not my will, but your will be done. He willingly gave everything. That's the example for us, and he tells us to take up our cross and follow him.

The way that we view sacrifice giving, sometimes we focus on the negative part of it. There can be pain, and there often is pain associated with sacrifice giving and sacrifice. But that's not the real focus of it. Giving is not for the purpose of us suffering. Jesus giving his life was not for the purpose of him suffering. It was for the greater purpose of setting us an example of overcoming Satan and this world, of providing a way for us to have eternal life. It says that Jesus, for the joy that was set before him, endured the suffering, and despised the shame. It was as if the pain, the suffering, the shame – all that was as nothing compared to the joy that was set before him. One of the biggest lessons in life that we can learn is that giving brings joy. God says that he loves a cheerful giver. When we give up our lives for the right reason, for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, it brings great joy. It may seem difficult at the time. Herbert Armstrong put it this way: repentance and turning his life over to God and giving up everything he had held dear was the bitterest pill he had ever had to swallow, but it was the only one that ever brought any real healing. The sacrifice that God desires is the sacrifice of obedience, humility, and giving up of our lives in service to him and to our fellow man.

I want to read from Mark chapter twelve. Jesus had been asked a question by one of the scribes...

Mark 12:29-30: "And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment."

Notice that there's no holding back. With *all* your heart. With *all* your soul, with *all* your mind, with *all* your strength.

Mark 12:31-33: "And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these. And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he: And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices."

I don't care how much money you give to the church, or to charity. If you're not doing it for the right reasons, if you're not learning the lesson of giving up your life and yourself and loving God with all your heart and strength, it doesn't really mean anything. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13, though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profits me nothing.

In conclusion, I want to read from Haggai chapter two.

Haggai 2:6-7: "For thus saith the LORD of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; And I will shake all nations –"

As I started off with at the beginning of this message, referencing what Tom was talking about, there's coming a time and it's not too far off down the road I believe, that God is going to shake the heavens and the earth, and the foundations of this nation and the economic foundations of the world are going to be shaken. Of course, later there's going to be an actual shaking of the heavens and the earth. But we're coming up on hard, difficult times. I think we're going to, before the end of this age, find ourselves in a position, perhaps such as we never have before in our lives, where we're going to have to make some choices. We can't be halting between two opinions. We have to be willing to give everything, even perhaps our physical lives.

Haggai 2:7: "And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts."

Well, this house that he's talking about is the spiritual temple. It says in Malachi, "the messenger whom you delight in, he shall suddenly come to his temple". That's the body of Christ. That's the holy temple that God is building.

Haggai 2:8-9: "The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the LORD of hosts. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former –"

The physical temple that Solomon built was fabulous, but it will not compare to the spiritual temple and the glory of the spiritual temple.

Haggai 2:9: "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts."

The joy that is set before us is the opportunity to be a part of this spiritual temple, and it will be glorious. But in order for us to be a part of it, we have to be willing to give everything and not hold on to anything that stands between us and seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.