

# Sermon Study

He Notices!

11/06/09

Mark 12:38-44

38 As he taught, Jesus said, “Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted in the marketplaces, 39 and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. 40 They devour widows’ houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely.”

41 Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. 42 But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny.

43 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. 44 They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.”

*It was a sabbath morning in Jerusalem. And people came to worship. Long lines formed to pass by 13 trumpet-shaped money receptacles provided for the offerings of worshippers who assembled at the temple.*

*We know that they were trumpet shaped from Jewish writings of that time. But there apparently is some confusion as to which way they were...with the bell of the trumpet up or down. The artist who drew the picture on the cover of the bulletin thought down. I disagree. I think they were bell side up, so that they were like funnels, designed to accommodate large numbers of worshippers and their offerings. They were probably made of brass, like many things about the temple were, so the metal on metal clanging of these bell shaped vessels must have made quite a clatter as well-to-do folks made their offerings of many coins*

*And on this day of worship in Jerusalem, Or Lord Jesus took a seat opposite the offering receptacles and watched as each person made his offering. His disciples probably took note of the wealthier types and the larger offerings. How could you not, what with all the noise!*

*But among the crowd, there was one worshipper who one could easily miss. She was an unassuming lady, dressed in well-worn clothes but still dignified. She reaches into her tiny purse and carefully draws out 2 insignificant copper coins, the smallest currency used by the Romans; about 1/2 the circumference of our pennies. She drops them both into the bell. There was no resounding clang for her offering, just a couple of faint “clicks”.*

*No one even noticed her offering; nobody except Jesus that is. He noticed her and found her offering to be most remarkable. He tells his disciples that this woman with her two little coins has put more into the treasury than all the others!*

*To us this whole narrative is rather confounding; on a any number of levels. We’ve all heard this story before, most of us have heard it in Sunday school a bunch of times or perhaps in a sermon here or there, which takes some of the edge off of it, but still, this whole account is really rather puzzling.*

*Right at the get go, we find ourselves scratching our heads. Jesus sat there and watched people giving their offerings? The very idea that someone would have the audacity to sit down and watch people give their offerings is most unsettling! I mean really, Giving is a private matter between each person and his Lord. Oh, wait a minute, Jesus is the Lord! And he’s the one to whom the offerings were given! Of course he pays attention! Of course he is deeply interested in the people who were bringing their gifts.*

- Why do people typically get really private when it comes to offerings? I can think of two possible reasons 1) They don’t want to make a show (See Matt. 6:2...for some Jesus humor on this). 2) They wish to keep hidden what they give because others would think ill if they knew how little they gave. Can you think of some

other reason why folks are so private about what they give. What are the plusses and minuses to privacy?

- Fund-raising in churches can sometimes get very practical: different funds for this or that. Copier funds, carpet funds, parking lot funds, etc. People then are encouraged to give to purchase various things. Some would argue that this “makes it more meaningful” for people. In some ways, that might be true, but in this text, we find that the meaning behind our offerings is something altogether different, what is that meaning?

*There's also other reasons why he felt free to watch these offerings be made, besides the fact that he was ultimately the recipient. Remember why Jesus came into this world? Jesus came into this world to forgive, to redeem and to restore us. In other words, He came with the ultimate goal to return us to what we were supposed to be had it not been for the sin that corrupts us. We were not supposed to be stingy or greedy; we were not supposed to be tight fisted, we were meant to be very giving! Giving of ourselves; giving of our time, giving of everything that is ours!*

*Need some proof? Look no further than your own life! Think back to when you gave some of your time to another person. Think of the time you helped someone change a tire on the road, or perhaps that time you watched a neighbors kids as they took care of another kid who had an emergency, or perhaps when you gave a nickel to someone who was 5 cents short at the cash register. Think about when you gave something of yourself to another without any strings attached. Do remember how it felt inside? It felt good! You were getting a sample of the way you're meant to be all the time. We were meant to love others; we were meant to behave charitably, and when, at last, we do, we feel like a breath of fresh air has blown into our lives.*

- So can you think of time when you provided an act of kindness to another? How'd you feel about it?
- Not all feel good when they do things for others. There was an episode of Jerry Seinfeld where Jerry, George, and Elaine each decided to start “helping” old people. It turned out horribly for them all. Why? Because Jerry Seinfeld's show was an ongoing poke at his generation for it's self-centeredness. It ended with all of them in prison for failure to help someone in trouble. Perfect. The strongly self-centered person is repulsed by the messiness of helping others (For more reading....read Luke 10:30-36)

*Jesus came to make the fresh air blow through our entire lives and make us completely new! And you know how he did it? By the giving of himself. Less than a week from this time that Jesus sat down and watched people making offerings, he himself would make the ultimate offering. He would counter a greedy, self-centered, sinful world with a singular, ultimate act of love and generosity at the cross. And he did this not merely as an example, but also to overpower our hearts so that we can become more charitable. He takes away our sins....this not only brings us forgiveness, but with the sins out of the way, we can begin to change and become more of what we were originally meant to be.*

*The reason Jesus was impressed by this woman in the Gospel lesson is because she got it. She understood. She was living the new life that Christ would bring about albeit from an old testament perspective. To see this woman was to see some early fruits of his work as the Savior. This cheered him, no doubt.*

*So yeah, it was Jesus' business to watch people give....and it still is. You may think that when you give some of your hard earned money that nobody knows and that it's not very meaningful, but Jesus knows. He's here. He sees. And it's not just your money, it's yourself too. Whenever you give of yourself to another, Jesus sees that too. Think of those friends in your life, whom you patiently stood by and helped, Jesus sees that. Or you who stay at home with small children. You think the world is passing you by and you think that what you are doing is not noteworthy, but Jesus notes it and notes it well.*

- I cannot help but think of the judgement scene Jesus speaks of in Matthew 25 (vv. 31-46). He says to those who believed in him. “When I was hungry, you gave me something to eat...when I was thirsty etc.” The righteous answer “When? When did we see you and help you.” Jesus said, “Whatever you have done to these others you have done to me.” So when we do acts of kindness for others Jesus not only sees it but considers it an act of kindness towards himself!”

*Lets move on to another confounding point in this account. It has to do with the amounts. How could Jesus say that the fraction of a penny that this woman gave was more than all the rest? What sort of fuzzy math is Jesus using here? He’s using the math of heaven.*

*The math of heaven is different in that it values the heart of the giver more than it values the gift itself. It’s funny how we, in the practice of our religion are always tempted to pull our hearts out of it and save hold them back for something else while at the same time we reduce God down to a few doable tasks: “Go to church regularly, get the kids through confirmation, and support the church with a certain amount and God will stay off my back.” Kind of an antiseptic approach if you ask me.*

- Everybody has had this mechanical, antiseptic approach to God at various times of their life. Why is it so common? Why do we gravitate towards it?

*However Jesus makes it clear that this is not the way it is. We must fear God. We must Love God. We must Trust God. We must live our lives in the presence of God! He tells us that we are to address his Father as our Father and that we are to consider ourselves his children. Jesus then compares our relationship to him as the closeness of a marriage! Is it not clear that he wants more than just the following of a few simple doable tasks? He wants us! And that’s why this woman gave more! With the giving of the last of her money, she went completely off the grid and fell into the arms of the Lord. She was now living on faith that the Lord would provide. Jesus found her offering remarkable because it expressed her faith.*

- Ever gone “completely off the Grid” or at least partially? How’d it work out for you?

*Let’s move on to one last thing that might easily confound us. We perhaps find it a bit unsettling that Jesus speaks of offerings of money so openly and approvingly. We’d actually like it very much if Jesus would use that whip out of chords he made and continue to cleanse the temple by throwing out these receptacles telling the people how God doesn’t need their money. I mean really, money is so very vulgar and has no place in our worship (or so we think). But money was always part of Jewish temple worship and part of Christian worship as well and Jesus here seems to approve of it!*

*Why? Because of what our money potentially represents in our hearts. It represents, for most of us, security, our future, and we hope also joy. And so it has been for human beings for as long as there has been money. With the giving of our money we are moving away from our former way of thinking and we’re saying, “Lord, You are my security, my future, my joy.” That’s what the widow was saying with her offering and Jesus praises her for it.*

*So do you think the Lord let her down? Jesus seemed to know everything about her...that she was a widow, that she gave all that she had to live on. Did he praise her for the act of giving all of her money away knowing that she was plunging herself deep into poverty and ultimately death by starvation? Does that sound like Jesus? Of course not. He know that her needs would be met! This is the same Jesus who said “Do not worry...your father in heaven knows you need these things.” This widow’s trust was not misplaced. And neither is ours when we give. AMEN*

- Is there anybody in the meeting tonight who has ever starved to death? :) Why would I ask this?