

## **Giving God Our Leftovers**

The Widows Offering

Mark 12:41-44

*(Show video of comedian Anthony Griffith talking about hand-me-downs)*

That's funny. Hand-me-downs, leftovers; those things are okay I guess if you're talking about old clothes or your mom's cooking. But there are other times when leftovers aren't such a good idea: handkerchiefs, motor oil, maybe your dad's cooking. There's one other area where leftovers aren't any good, stewardship.

I know we all desire to give God our best. That's why we are here today. You want to start your week off by giving God your best. That's why we serve in various ministries. We've got people who work two jobs, who put in 60-70 hours a week, and yet they find time to serve, and make the ministry of Son-Rise Christian Church possible. That's why you put money in the plate faithfully every week or every month, even though your budget is tight. That's why you talk to your neighbors about church. It's why you share your faith in Christ with those you work with. You want to give God your best.

But sometimes we get discouraged because it feels like we don't have much to give. Do you feel like sometimes you're just giving God your leftovers? I know I have days like that. I have weeks like that. I have months like that. I give my best everywhere else. Sometimes, it's going to good things, just not the best. Sometimes, though, I must confess it doesn't. I give my best to serve my own wants and desires, and I give God whatever crumbs are leftover at the end.

Do you find yourself giving God your leftovers? Do you find yourself giving God the leftovers of your money? There's just too much month left at the end of your money. Maybe you're giving God the leftovers of your time. Like me, you struggle distinguishing between good, better, and best. Maybe you'd like to do a better job sharing your faith, but you give God the leftovers of your relationships.

So how can we make sure we are giving God our best? This is the very core of stewardship. This is the issue that is uncovered in four short verses at the end of Mark 12. It's offering time at church. The praise band plays a peppy tune hoping to encourage generous giving. The plate is being passed, and Jesus is closely watching what each person puts in the

plate. Okay, that's a loose paraphrase, but that is what's happening, only 1<sup>st</sup> century style.

Around the courtyard of the temple were placed various collection boxes. Each one was designated for a specific purpose. Benevolence fund is here, and building fund is over there, payroll is along that wall, and over here is youth. Jewish worshippers would place their tithes and offerings in these collection boxes when they came to the temple for prayer. Jesus is doing some people watching. He's watching all of this take place, and he wants to use this as a teaching opportunity for the disciples. Jesus draws their attention to this scene to teach them, and ultimately us something very important about Kingdomnomics. When it comes to giving, God doesn't measure our gifts by their monetary worth.

Most in the temple made their way to the boxes, quietly and unassumingly dropped in their gift with a scripture quotation or a prayer of thanksgiving. Some of the wealthier worshippers, however, made a great show and display of their giving. All of this was a way of saying, "Look how spiritual I am, how generous. Look how much I give."

In marked contrast to these wealthy performers came a humble widow with her measly little gift. Only two coins! Two bronze coins. Worth only 1/100<sup>th</sup> of a denarii, valued at only 5 minutes of labor at the going rate.

Yet, Jesus when he gets out his giving calculator says that she gave more than all the others. Huh? What? Jesus do you need to get your eyes checked? Does your calculator need new batteries? Have you read the financial page of the Jerusalem Times lately? Those public schools up in Galilee must really be in bad shape if you think that she gave more.

No, Jesus was not mistaken. Jesus measures the widow's gift, not by the size of the amount, but by the size of her trust, and the size of her love.

The giving of the others came out of their excess. They will not miss it. It took no measure of love; no step of faith. In fact, their gift could be self-serving. It made a good impression; kept them in good standing in the public's eye. It satisfied any twinge of guilt in their seared consciences. They gave out of their leftovers.

The widow gives out of her need. She will miss it without God's provision. It took tremendous love. Love for God and love for others. It was an incredible step of faith. She was not going to trust her own ability, but in God. No one would notice her gift. No one

would applaud her. No one, that is, except for God. But when it comes to giving, is there really any other audience that matters?

Giving God our leftovers, isn't about our time, our money, or our relationships. It's about our heart. It's about keeping God first here (in our hearts), so that we keep him first here (in our hands). There are three important lessons about giving and kingdomnomics we can learn from this widow who gave more.

### **I. Giving is Directed Toward God**

I mentioned earlier how the others put on a big show. They timed their giving so as to insure the greatest audience. They brought money bags loaded with far more money than they intended to give, but all that money sure made an impression. As they reached into the bag they made sure to run their fingers through as many gold and silver coins as possible, all that clinking and jingling was music to their ears. Then with a handful of coins they dropped them in the box, but slowly so that each coin could be seen and from a sufficient altitude so that the ringing in the box was sure to be heard by all. Of course, they had to do all of this in such a way so that it didn't look like that's what they were doing. But Jesus, knowing their hearts, said that's exactly what they were doing.

That kind of giving isn't directed toward God. It is self-serving. They are unconcerned with what God thinks, but only about what others think of them. Their giving to gain the applause, recognition, and praise of people. That isn't giving. That is a purchase. It is trading money for notoriety.

Son-Rise, when it comes to true Christian giving, God is the only audience that matters. We don't care if nobody notices how much time we spent helping. We don't care if we get the credit. It is amazing how much can get done if you don't care about who gets the credit. It doesn't matter what the person to the right or the left thinks when the offering plate is passed. What matters is what God thinks.

It's also true that we need to be generous with our thanks and encouragement to others. While receiving encouragement and thanks from others is like fuel for our flame. It motivates us and reminds us that our giving and serving is worthwhile, we always need to strive to maintain the perspective that our giving is directed toward God. Your encouragement is

nice, but that's not why we do it. Your thanks means so much, but that is not the goal. It is an act of love and worship directed toward God.

## **II. Giving is More About Attitude than Amount**

Secondly, the generous widow shows us that giving is all about attitude. When we start focusing on the amount of money, or the amount of time, we are missing the target. The real reason that the amount of money or time that we give isn't what it should be, is because our attitude isn't what it should be.

Donald Whitney, points out that there are three kinds of attitudes we can have in our giving.<sup>i</sup> The first is grudge giving. It is giving that says "I have to." This is the kind of giving we do to the IRS after an audit or when we pay a traffic ticket.

Then there is duty giving. This is giving that says "I ought to." This is how we give to the electric company. It's a bill.

Finally, there is "Thanks" giving. Thanksgiving says, "I want to." It is with this kind of attitude that a young man saves several months of income, buys an engagement ring, and then gives it with great joy and enthusiasm. So how do we view God? Is He like the IRS? Is he like a electric company? Or is He the object of our love and desire? The widow exemplifies the attitude of "Thanks" giving in two important ways.

### **A. Greater Trust in God**

First, she has a greater trust in God. She could give what she had, because she trusted that God would provide what she needed. When she put those two coins in the box, she didn't know how she would eat the next day, but she also knew that God called her to give. Her obedience required trust. Without trust she could not obey God's call. There's an old hymn called trust and obey. The chorus goes, "Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey." Trust and obedience are not two separate things. They go together. You don't trust, if don't obey, and you can't obey unless you trust. The widow's gift was greater, because her trust was greater.

When we give out of our own resources, we are placing ourselves in a position where we must trust God. In giving, we are surrendering to some extent our own ability to supply our own needs, and proclaiming our trust and reliance upon God. So, in giving, we are putting

ourselves in a position to receive His blessings, His gifts, and His provisions.

### **B. Less Worry About Physical Concerns**

Secondly, her attitude of “Thanks” giving lessened her worry about life. “Thanks” giving increases our trust in God, and lessens our worry about physical concerns. Think of how much of our lives are consumed with worry and anxiety. More than 10% of us suffer from some form of anxiety disorder. Psychological health professionals fear anxiety is reaching epidemic proportions in our country. Despite our prosperity, our health, and all the conveniences and luxuries of modern life, we are more worried than ever. An article in Psychology Today states,

Anxiety is one of our modern plagues. Its effects are visible everywhere, interfering with our happiness and our ability to live productively. Anxiety limits our connections with other people, saps our energy, reduces our focus and our skillfulness and undermines our health.<sup>ii</sup>

If you were to compare your life with the life of this widow, who do you suppose has more to worry about? And yet whose life is filled with more anxiety? It is her attitude of “Thanks” giving, her abiding trust in God, that enables her to rise above the worries of life.

Listen to what Jesus says in Matthew 6 about the worries of life.

<sup>25</sup> “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?<sup>26</sup> Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?<sup>27</sup> Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?”

<sup>28</sup> “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin.<sup>29</sup> Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.<sup>30</sup> If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you— you of little faith?<sup>31</sup> So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’<sup>32</sup> For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.<sup>33</sup> But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.<sup>34</sup> Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

But as our trust in God grows, the shackles of worry are broken. The reward of God's blessing far outweighs life's worries.

### **III. No One Is Too Poor to Give**

There is one more lesson we can learn from the widow. That is simply this: No one is

too poor to give. We use bills, bank accounts, and budgets as a reason not to give. Yet, as we get more, that line moves. We've all been on the open highway in the summer. In the distance you see that mirage of water in the road. No matter how far or fast you travel, you never reach the water.

To some, Christian stewardship is like that mirage. They tell themselves that they are too financially strapped to give now, but once I finish my classes and start my career, once I get that raise, once the car is paid off, once the school loans are gone, once we get those credit cards paid down, once the kids are raised, once I retire, then I will start giving, then I will trust God with my resources, then I will start serving. Like the mirage, the point of giving keeps moving, because there is always one more thing that demands money and our time. Until we decide to put God first no matter what, everything in life won't let us put Him first.

The lesson of the poor widow is that everyone can give, even if only a little. Not only that, but here's the really cool part. Don't miss the lesson of grace here— everyone can experience the blessing and reward of God's provision no matter how much they are able to give. The person who gives two dollars can be blessed just as richly by God as the person who gives two thousand dollars. God's blessing isn't reserved for the wealthy. There isn't dollar amount threshold before heavenly reward kicks in.

The point of this sermon isn't just that God doesn't want your leftovers. It isn't even that God wants your first and your best. He doesn't look at your life as a pie where he wants so many pieces, or he wants a piece of a certain size. He wants the whole pie. What God wants is you. He isn't looking for you to give Him something. He doesn't need your gift. What He wants is you. Your life. Your heart. Your mind. Your soul. All of you. If God has you, then he has everything that you have. This is where our problem with giving starts. It's not about how much we give to God, but whether or not God has us.

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<sup>i</sup> Whitney, Donald S. *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*. Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, 1991. 141-142. Print.

<sup>ii</sup> Psychology Today,. 'Anxiety: A Modern Plague'. N.p., 2015. Web. 10 Nov. 2015.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/healing-possibility/201111/anxiety-modern-plague>