

# A Widow's Gift -- Mark 12:41-44

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Please bow your heads with me for prayer.

*Lord, we are about to open Your Word. As we read and reflect on this story in the book of Mark, may You become Someone very real to us. Help us to see Jesus, hear Jesus, touch Jesus, taste Jesus, and feel Him. May we be so moved by the power of Your Word and the Holy Spirit that our lives are changed forever. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Today we are going to try and enter into the experience of a first century Jewish widow. For some of you this may hit very close to home. Maybe you are a widow yourself and will be able to identify closely with the woman in our story today.

Before we look at this story, though, it would be helpful for us to look at the ways in which God provided for widows in the Jewish culture. In so doing we will discover a very significant aspect of this woman's experience.

Growing up as a girl in the Jewish culture, she was protected and provided for by her father. When she became married, this role was assumed by her husband. But when a Jewish woman lost her husband, she was left very vulnerable. And so God made provisions for her. First of all, she could go back to her father's house. Tamar, the daughter-in-law of Judah, was offered this option (Genesis 38:11). A second option was for her to be provided for by her deceased husband's brothers. Such was also the case for Tamar (Genesis 38:8) and God directed such in Deuteronomy 25:5. A third option was for the widow to be cared for by her son(s). We can see this in the life of Mary, Jesus' mother. Jesus assumed responsibility for His mother and on the cross He provided for her by assigning His disciple, John, to care for her (John 19:25-27). Paul also hints at this provision for a widow in his letter to Timothy and extends the responsibility even to her grandchildren (1 Timothy 5:4). A fourth option was for the widow to be cared for by an extended relative. Such was the case with Ruth. She had chosen not to return to her father's family in Moab. So another option for her was to be taken in by the closest relative in her husband's family. Boaz was such a one who agreed to become Ruth's husband. (Ruth 3, 4) A fifth provision for a widow was for her to be provided for through community gifts. Those who harvested a farmer's field, olive trees, or vineyards were instructed to leave behind some for the widows (Deuteronomy 24:19-22). Another example is found in Deuteronomy 26:12-15. Here God instructed some of the tithe to be given to the widows.

So, here is the critical discovery we can make from all of these provisions: the economic status of the widow in our story should never have occurred. We will find her in desperate circumstances. And this should never have happened according to the provisions God put in place for widows.

Let's now consider a summary of our story:

*While Jesus was watching many wealthy people bring their offerings to the temple, a poor widow caught His attention. Seeing her throw two small coins into the treasure chest, He summoned His disciples. He told them that this woman had given more than all the others, for she had given all that she had.*

We will now look at what Jesus experienced in this story. First of all, He experienced watching temple donors. Mark 12:41 states that Jesus "sat down opposite the treasury". Most scholars agree that the location being referred to here is the Court of the Women. This was a court not reserved for women only. It was given this name because women were not allowed to enter in past this area of the temple. It is believed by some that there were as many as 13 trumpet-shaped treasure chests in which people could deposit their tithes and offerings. Each of them would have been marked for their intended purpose. In the book, Desire of Ages, by Ellen White we find a description of Jesus' emotions at this time. As Jesus watched all this money being given for the use of the temple and its services, He was sad and quiet. I'm sure many of us would be praising the Lord if such an event occurred in our church. But Jesus didn't comment on any of the wealthy people's offerings. In Mark 12:42 we find a description which contrasts heavily with the events recorded in verse 41.

First, we had pictured "many rich people", but now we see "one poor widow". The offerings given in verse 41 are described as "much" (or "great") while the offering given in verse 42 is only "two mites".

Interestingly, this is the only place in Scripture where a widow is described as "poor". It seems that such a description was unnecessary. Most widows were inherently poor. But this widow, who entered the temple while Jesus was sitting and watching, seems to have been especially destitute. Clearly all of God's provisions for her had failed. This was certainly to the shame of the religious leaders in her day. The word that is translated "mites" in the New King James Version is the Greek word "lepton". It was the smallest copper coin in circulation in Israel and equaled 1/8 of a cent.

Second of all, Jesus experienced, revealing the enormity of the widow's gift. Mark 12:43 mentions that when Jesus saw what this poor widow had done, He summoned His disciples. He often did this when there was an opportunity to teach them an important lesson. Jesus told them that this widow had put in more than everyone else. Ellen White in the Desire of Ages again makes a revealing observation here. She says that Jesus' facial expression changed at this moment. His face lighted up. He became excited. And when He made His comment to the disciples, it was loud enough for the widow to hear Him. You may wonder, "How could this widow's two fractional pennies equal more than all that the rich people had put in?" Jesus did not consider the dollar value. He considered the percentage of the person's possessions. When you have millions of dollars, a donation of \$10,000 is a very small percentage. But when all you have is two fractional pennies, and you give them both away, that is the highest possible percentage.

In Mark 12:44 Jesus stated that this widow gave out of her poverty. In other words, she was already in great need and greatly lacking. She gave when she already didn't have enough. Again, Ellen White's insights are telling in the book, Desire of Ages. She says that this widow didn't know where her next meal would come from. She had absolutely nothing left! And this quote I just had to put on the screen: "She [the widow] believed her heavenly Father would not overlook her great need." In other words, she didn't think that she would go home and starve to death. She believed that God would see and intervene in her behalf.

Let's now consider how Jesus is revealed as our Example in this story. We learn how we should live as Christians by watching how Jesus lived. So, first of all, Jesus is revealed as our example in that He endured watching arrogant donors. Why, do you suppose, did Jesus choose to sit and watch all these rich people drop in their extravagant offerings? We already learned that this was not an enjoyable activity for Jesus. These people were parading themselves as being devout and generous when inwardly they were filled with pride and selfishness. Well, let's review Jesus' life motto in John 5:30. I invite you to turn there with me. (Read) So, the short of it is that Jesus sat down and watched these arrogant givers because those were His Father's directions. And here's the clincher: Jesus was rewarded for His faithful surrender to His Father's will with a "divine-appointment" that brought Him joy. It's like the Father said to Jesus, "Sit here for a while. I have something extraordinary I want to show You." And when Jesus saw this woman's sacrificial offering, it filled Him with such joy that He called His disciples over and said, "Come check this out! That poor widow just gave God her last penny!"

There's a great story in John chapter 20. It was Sunday morning and Mary Magdalene went to Jesus' tomb. When she saw that someone had rolled the stone away from the opening, she ran and Peter and John. The two men and Mary ran back to the tomb together. The men, being faster runners, got there first. But after they had gone into the tomb and looked around, they went back home. But notice what Mary did. Let's read verses 11-13. (Read) She lingered and looked one more time into the tomb. And what did she see? Two angels. She even conversed with them. This would not have happened if she hadn't waited around in a very depressing place. Let's read verses 14-16 from John 20 as well. Let's see what else Mary encountered. (Read) Who did she get to see? The risen Lord! She, like Jesus, was rewarded for waiting and lingering.

I would like to share an experience I have had in my own life. A couple months ago I was waiting in line at ALDI's. There was an older lady at the front who seemed to be taking forever. I started to feel impatient. Then the Lord prompted me to wait on Him. Not long afterwards I overheard the conversation between the lady and the cashier. It seemed that the woman was not all there. The Lord put compassion in my heart. Perhaps this

woman was a widow, suffering from the early stages of dementia. So, when I heard that the lady was going to have to leave her groceries, unable to provide the proper method of payment, the Lord immediately put an idea in my mind. So I spoke to the cashier from the back of the line: "Excuse me... I'll pay for them." I stepped forward, swiped my debit card and paid for the lady's groceries. She didn't seem to comprehend what was happening. But the repeated words of the cashier to this lady still ring in my ears, "It's all taken care of." That was a moment I'm sure not unlike the moment which Jesus and Mary experienced. I left ALDI completely fulfilled. It was a great feeling. I thanked God for the privilege of waiting on Him.

A second way in which Jesus is revealed as our example in this story is that He blessed devotion not dollars. The large amounts of money being given that day in the temple did not thrill Jesus. God owns all the gold and silver. Money does not impress Him. But a heart filled with love and devotion really gets Him excited. He did not call out a blessing on all those coins dropped into the treasure chest. But He did call out a blessing on the woman, revealing the enormity of her gift.

What about us? What would get us more excited - an offering today of one million dollars or one person coming forward and giving their life over to the Lord? If we were to follow our Lord's example in this story, we would invest in people more than possessions or a bank account. What might that look like? Well, I made a list of things entitled, "Dollars or Devotion?" See what you think: (1) An extra side job or extra time with my kids? Both could be appropriate. There's nothing wrong with either one. But what would be more important - some extra cash or an opportunity to build your legacy? (2) Buying lottery tickets or supporting an orphan? You might get rich winning the lottery or the sweepstakes. But what if you had the opportunity to provide for a child's education in a third world country for only a few dollars a month? Which would you choose? (3) Budgeting for cable/TV or a monthly date with your wife? You might like to have both. But what if you only had enough for one of the other? Which would you choose? (4) Using your free time for a do-it-yourself project or to volunteer at the hospital? Again both are completely acceptable. But which one would you do if you could only pick one?

Jesus has left us an example. He spent His life investing in people. Nothing got Him more excited than seeing someone's heart filled with love and devotion to God.

This widow had many reasons to not drop her last two coins into that treasure-chest. First of all, it was relatively minute in comparison with the large donations of the rich. Surely it would be lost sight of when mixed in with all the other coins. Secondly, she was already in great need, while the treasure-chests were already being filled. Didn't she need those coins more than anyone? A third reason why this widow could have kept her gift was the men in charge of the temple services were clearly corrupt. It was run by those who devoured widows' houses (Mark 12:40). Those who would be collecting her coins were also the ones responsible for her own poverty.

Notice this closing quote from the book, *Desire of Ages*, by Ellen White:

*"Man's abuse of the gift could not turn God's blessing from the giver."* (page 614)

What excuses have you used for not giving a tithe or offering at church? Your own poverty? The seeming insignificance of what you have to give? Your dissatisfaction with the leadership of the church?

Here's the legacy this woman has left us: The more you've had taken away from you, the greater the opportunity for God to bless your resolve to give anyway.

What kind of legacy are you going to leave?