

Jesus Notices a Widow's Giving

Mark 12:41-44

At the beginning of this passage, Jesus does a peculiar thing: He sits down to watch people making their offerings. What was he thinking? These were freewill offerings, not the Temple tax required by Jewish law. Why did Jesus want to see what people were giving? We don't know all the reasons, but one was apparently to teach his disciples a lesson. Jesus had talked about money earlier, explaining the need to pay taxes and to give to God. Now he was ready to teach a visual lesson.

While Jesus—and presumably some of his disciples—sat watching, numerous rich people gave large amounts of money. The disciples, who were from the lower economic classes, were probably amazed at some of the fortunes offered by these wealthy Jews. They may not have even noticed the poor widow who dropped her two coins into the treasury box. These were the smallest coins in the Roman Empire. It took 40 of these to make up a day's wages. In terms of today's wages, they would have been worth no more than a couple of dollars each. Yet Jesus knew how big the widow's gift was.

As a symbol of their marriage, Jewish women in Jesus' day wore headpieces on which coins were sewn. Wealthy women displayed a number of large coins; poorer women displayed smaller coins. This woman may have given the last two coins from that headpiece to God. Wherever the coins came from, she gave all she had.

Some Christians today might consider the widow's giving foolish—she didn't have to give both coins; she didn't have to give even one coin. After all, she needed that money just

to stay alive. But that kind of thinking is precisely what Jesus was teaching against. If we give only part of what we have—of what we are—to Jesus, we're holding back. Jesus wants all of us. He wants us to give him all we have and all we are and to trust him for the results.

Which of the givers in this passage are you more like? Who are your class members more like? As you explore this passage, challenge people to examine what they're giving to God. Are they giving just a small portion of their time, money, talents, and commitment to God? Is God getting the leftovers after they've taken care of all their wants? Or are people giving as the poor widow gave, risking all they have on God? The widow's choice is not an easy one, but it is one that honors God.

Devotion for Teachers

The One Thing: Jesus isn't impressed by outward displays of wealth—he sees straight into the heart at the inward wealth of faith, commitment, generosity, and trust. He knows the *real you*.

Weaving Faith Into Your Life: What does Jesus see in your heart? Are you fully entrusting your needs, wants, and future to God? What are you holding back? Grab a penny, and hold it as you pray about areas of your life that you need to give over to God. Then give that penny in your church offering as a symbol to God of your commitment.