

We had technical difficulties on Sunday and the sermon did not record properly.  
Below are the “spark notes” of the message.

-----

Many of us remember the first time we became aware of money. Whether it was your first allowance as a kid, your first job, or the first time you wanted something at the store and realized you did not have that green stuff Mom and Dad use to buy things.

I don't need to tell you that finances play a big role in our society today, and so it is no surprise that our first exposure to money and financial accountability is something we often remember.

For me personally, my first memorable experience was when I was 4 years old. At the time my twin brother and I both received a \$2 allowance each week. We thought we were pretty hot stuff with all of our money and enjoyed saving it up to go to yard sales with our dad on the weekends. On one particular week, we each had saved a whopping \$3 each. We discovered a toy we both were interested in but it cost \$5. My brother, in his infinite wisdom, pronounced that he and I could buy the toy if we put our money together...my \$3 and two of his dollars would buy it. My parents stood by in silence as my own brother took financial advantage of me. To my own shame, I agreed to this “great deal.” He still owes me 50 cents!

Thankfully over the years my financial wisdom grew. I started working at my first job and learned to manage and save money. At the same time, I was also growing spiritually. The church I grew up at had a process of confirmation where young teenagers would attend classes to learn about the basics of our faith and at the end of two years were accepted as members of the church. At the end of this process, a meal was held in our honor and our family and church family all presented us with gifts. The church gifted us each with a new bible and...envelops – offering envelops! As a young teen, I was baffled by the “gift” of giving. Why should I give my hard earned (and extremely limited) income to the church?

The simply answer is giving is the highest form of living.

It seems strange to the world that we work 40 hours and then give it away. We all have 168 hours in any given week and we choose to give some of our time away. Why do we do this? It's because we're grateful!

This morning, we're going to take a look at a short, simple story of Jesus in the temple. He's not praying or teaching. Instead he's people watching as individuals give their gifts to God.

**Mark 12:41-44** - <sup>41</sup>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. <sup>42</sup>But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. <sup>43</sup>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. <sup>44</sup>They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on."

We meet a widow. She is poor and yet she gives all she has away. Why would she give it all away? As we look at her story, I believe she teaches us about what it means to give to God. The first thing she teaches us is...

### **We give because...giving of ourselves is an act of gratitude and an act of worship**

From the beginning, man has always offered God part of his livelihood. We see this in the beginning of Genesis. The first generation of children, Cain and Able, naturally offer God part of their livelihood.

**Genesis 4:2b-4a** - Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. <sup>3</sup> In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. <sup>4</sup> But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock.

Cain and Able are living their lives, starting careers, going about their day to day business and they naturally respond to God. There is no sense of force or mandate given for their offerings, only a desire to worship and give back to God. We see this all throughout the Old Testament. Look at Noah. Here's a guy who has extremely limited resources. He can't get more animals at Cattle'Rus or Sheepmart. He's on an ark and is limited to what he brought along. In this midst of his limitations, he still chooses to offer sacrifice to God. He responds in gratitude and worship.

From beginning of time, mankind has responded by giving something back to God. And we can do the same. We give in numerous ways...time, talent, resources, and finances.

We give out of a sense of gratitude but this can be a challenging thing to do. The widow in the temple understood that God deserved her best, even the little she had. She responded with a heart set on total surrender and worship and gave what she had to God.

And sometimes we think “that’s great but times are tough and I need all I make to survive” Of course, that’s not what the widow in the temple said. The second lesson she teaches us is that...

### **We give because...we trust that God will provide**

**Matthew 6:25-34** - <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 important than food, and the body more important 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>Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

<sup>28</sup>“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies 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, O 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.

We live this out when we trust in God’s provision and give back part of our financial resources. God is bigger than we can imagine and He can take care of our needs.

We don’t really talk about money openly much but most of us probably have stories of God “coming through” at just the right time to provide for our needs. Allison and I have experienced this multiple times in our marriage. The budget wouldn’t balance and the easy thing to do was to not give of our finances. We had to choose to trust in God’s provision and give. And you know what? He always came through. We never went without what we needed. In our giving, we

trusted God to provide. God is faithful! Do we trust Him with everything we have?

The widow teaches us one more valuable lesson in the temple. Even though she had nothing, she gave even that to God.

### **We give because...it shows where our hearts are and what we value**

The widow valued God and serving Him more than her own financial stability. The location of her heart was clear by where she placed her money. And we see this in the early church as well.

**Acts 4:32-35** - <sup>32</sup>All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. <sup>33</sup>With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. <sup>34</sup>There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales <sup>35</sup>and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

The believers' hearts were set on God, not their own wealth and prosperity. Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:24 that we can't serve two masters...we can't serve both God and money. Where is your heart?

We often get caught up in how **much** we are giving, but that is not the point of giving to God. It's about the quality of our giving not the quantity. It's not about how much you give, it's about where your heart is. Let's look at the story of Cain and Abel again.

**Genesis 4:2b-5a** - Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. <sup>3</sup> In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. <sup>4</sup> But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, <sup>5</sup> but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor.

Why did God like one gift and not the other? It would appear that the issue was not necessarily the specific item that was given but rather how each gift was given. Cain brought some of his fruits while Abel brought the fat portions (the best parts!) from the firstborn of his flock. As I visualize the story I see Cain just grabbing a few things at random to give to God while Able takes the time to pick

out his very best for God. It's not about how much they give or what they give as much as it's about the heart attitude behind the giving.

**2 Cor. 9:7** - Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver

Giving is not something we should do because we feel forced. We should give with a cheerful heart! It's not what "I have to do" but what "I want to do"! Where is your heart?

The widow in the temple teaches us that we give because it's an act of worship & gratitude, because it practices trust in God, and because it displays our hearts for Him. Ultimately we give because we're thankful! We recognize that nothing we have is really our own. It's all His! God blesses us with everything we have and then we choose to give it back to Him.

A life of gratitude is one where we give it all away. What we're truly thankful for isn't material but eternal! May we choose to give freely as we live a life of gratitude!