

INTRODUCTION

We know our God to be a God of greatness and magnificence. When we consider who God has revealed Himself to be, we should be affected with awe and wonder. Listen to the Psalms:

For the LORD is the great God, and the great King above all gods. (Psalm 95:3)
Who is so great a God as our God? (Psalm 77:13)
You who have done great things; O God, who is like You? (Psalm 77:19)

God's greatness is seen in a number of ways, including His creation. We think of raging rivers, soaring mountains, the great variety of creatures. We consider the complexity of the human body, the complexity of a single cell...from the smallest things to the far flung stars and galaxies, God displays His greatness.

Seeing that God is so great, so magnificent, so breathtaking, we could easily draw the conclusion that God only takes notice of "great things", things that are themselves magnificent.

In this portion of Luke 21, we are corrected in our thinking to find that God takes notice of those things that are themselves unspectacular and unimpressive, and magnifies them to the point of significant.

EXPOSITION

I. JESUS' OBSERVATION – vv.1-2

We are still in the final week before Jesus is to be betrayed and crucified in Jerusalem. We are probably 2-3 days from those events, and Jesus is in the temple compound teaching his disciples as well as all who were gathered to hear Him during this time of popularity. The religious leadership have set themselves against Him, and thought they tried to discredit Him, they failed. In our last study we saw how Jesus warned against the errors of the Scribes who used religion for their own reputation and benefit, and if you read the parallel in Matthew 23 you know that there was a lengthy discourse against the Scribes and Pharisees themselves.

It appears Jesus is taking a break from speaking, and we can only imagine what is going on in His mind. He has already prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem, He realizes that He is to be betrayed by one of His own disciples and suffering the excruciating death of the cross. He will lay down His life as a sacrifice, and temporarily know the abandonment of God as an act of wrath against sin. The leaders are watching His every step, listening to His every word, trying to trap Him so that they can bring a charge against Him in the courts. The intensity and pressure of this present time can't be overstated, and yet we see Him doing something remarkable in this passage.

Perhaps in a seated position indicated by the term "He looked up" we are told that He watches the people bringing their offerings into the treasury in the temple. As people brought their monetary gifts as an act of worship and support of all the religious system established under the Law of Moses, they would place their offering in one of 13 large containers shaped something like a large bell of a trumpet in the top. They were marked, designated for various purposes within the temple. They had their offerings of animal sacrifice for the purpose of atonement for sin according to the law, and they then also gave money for the support of the priests, the care and maintenance of the temple structure, and other such things. These chests were located in the court of women, in between the men's court (which was closer to the actual temple building), and the court of the Gentiles (further out from the building).

As He is looking and watching, ***He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury,***. There were those who, as Jesus points out in Matthew 6:2, would make a spectacle of their giving and charity. They would do this by drawing attention to what they were doing so that people would take notice, and see their great generosity. We can imagine a man coming on a homeless person in downtown Nashville while people are standing at a bus stop. He calls out in a loud voice, "My friend, I see that you are very needy. Look, I give you \$10 so that you can go and have yourself a decent meal!" They do their deeds not out of a heart of generosity, but a desire that others would identify them as a generous person so that they would have that reputation. They were focused on their glory, and not God's.

But in this passage there is not an indication that this is primarily what Jesus is addressing (though it could be included). The observation He makes is much more benign than that. Rather, it says that He merely takes notice of them. Here they are, the rich, putting in gifts. I want to remind us of two things about the idea of being rich in Scripture. First, being is not set at some dollar value above average, but simply having more than what is necessarily for life. We see this in a passage like 1 Timothy 6:8-9, where contentment with necessities is compare to a desire to be rich. Second, being rich (i.e. more than necessity) it is not itself sinful nor condemned. We read about this in 1 Timothy 6:17ff, and rather than poverty, generosity is commanded.

How Jesus responds is not itself a criticism of those who were giving out of their riches. Many of them would do so out of a true desire to please and worship God, and it was good and right that they should do so. They loved the temple, because at that time God had said He would be there in a special way. It was a house of prayer, a house of sacrifice, and place reminding them that God is seated enthroned in the heavens. Many true worshippers appreciated and used the system given by God for good, and they desired to support what God had given.

But Jesus' observation doesn't stop there. In the midst of the multitude (and there would be a great many at this season of Passover), he notices one other person. This was a person easily overlooked, but by her very appearance would clearly be distinct from the others Jesus was watching. The one He notices is **a widow**. We don't know of her age, but by this term we know that she was once married, but now her husband has passed away. Perhaps she had been married for many years, and the delight of her life was lost. Perhaps she was younger, and her being a widow was a devastating blow of the loss of a young marriage. Whichever one, the reality of her losing her husband had become a grim daily reality. She knew the loss of a covenant bond sealed in days of brighter hope.

One of the things that happened as a result of her loss was that she had become **poor**. Again, we don't know the details, but either immediately or over time she got to the point of poverty. Poverty, as described in Scripture, is not what is often thought of in our day. There are many under the "poverty level" in our country who, compared to many in the world, are far above in what they have and enjoy. But real poverty is not having sufficient necessities of food and clothing and shelter. It is having so little that one's life is threatened, either from exposure or malnutrition. This woman was doubly afflicted, with the loss of her husband, and the daily struggle to eke out an existence. She apparently had no extended family who took care of her, and so she was poor.

An interesting question that could be raised is whether this is one of the widows spoken of by Jesus in 20:47? Was she the one who, having lost her husband who had left behind sufficient for her to be cared for, had been cheated by one of the religious leaders? If so, the point is even more striking.

Jesus sees her also putting an offering into one of the treasury containers. He saw her **putting in two mites**. These copper coins were very small in size, and were the smallest denomination of money minted by the Jews. It is hard to know the equivalent monetary value today, but a mite was about 1/64 of a denarius. A denarius was about a day's wage for a laborer. In giving a general estimate of how much this was, we can estimate at a worker today making \$8 an hour. Assuming a 10 hour day, this is about \$80. 1/64 of this is \$1.25. Times this by two, and you have \$2.25. Not much money at all, enough to buy two soft tacos and a cup of water.

In the midst of the rich putting their money into these containers, Jesus notices this woman.

II. JESUS' COMMENT – v.3

In Mark 12:43, we are told that Jesus called His disciples to Himself. They were not all watching with Him, but He calls them and points out what she is doing. He wants them to take notice of something they may not notice otherwise. Though they don't see it, Jesus does. He prefaces what He says with **Truly I say to you**. We know that everything Jesus said was true, that He always said what was right. So when He prefaces something with this phrase, it has particular significance. It is said to affirm something that may be hard to believe, but is nevertheless true.

What Jesus says is **that this poor widow has put in more than all**. This woman, with her two mites, enough perhaps for small single meal (and that's all she had), has put in more than the others. Jesus mentally weighs out the offerings that are being given. On one side of the scale is not just one of the rich peoples' gifts, but all of them. On the other side are the two tiny copper coins which probably barely made a noise as they dropped in. The verdict is that hers is more than all the rest. You can see then why Jesus prefaces His statement in this way, because it is a hard thing to understand at first. No banker would work by those standards. We just don't think that way.

He calls His disciples, braces them for something shocking, points to her and says "what she has given is more than all. We must notice that God's ways are not our ways. His way of measuring things is not like our own. We must be careful when we evaluate the way God does things. It is clear here that God uses a standard and method of measurement is foreign to us.

III. JESUS' REASONING – v.4

How can this be? How can Jesus say such an apparently absurd statement. Weighed on any normal scale, this wouldn't be said. Gather the temple leaders together and ask them what is most precious, the pile of offerings from the rich, or the two mites of the widows, and you know what the answer will be.

So what is Jesus' reasoning? How can He make this estimate? He explains it by saying for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had. As He considers their offerings, He doesn't put the rich on one side and hers on the others. Rather, he takes the rich (singling out just one now) and puts all that they have by way of assets on one side, then what they give on the other. The measure is according to what they have and what they give.

Many of these folks probably did so according to the Law. Jesus isn't faulting them for that. But when they give, it is not a giving in such a way that is deeply sacrificial. By this I mean that when they gave, they certainly gave up something that they could have had otherwise. This could include (in modern day terms) new carpet, DVD's, a new Play Station, updated furniture, books, a night out to eat, a new lawnmower. They were giving up something, but I suggest that we trivialize the word "sacrifice" if we use it for these things.

In contrast, this woman gave out of her poverty all she had. Her giving meant sacrifice. It meant inconvenience. It meant real pain in her stomach by a missed meal. On one side of her scale was all she had, and on the other was all. In this sense, Jesus says, she has given more.

Let's think about this woman's giving in the context of the temple. She gets up that morning, either in her dilapidated hovel or even on the street, and she sees the many pilgrims making their way to the temple. She begins to make her way to the temple. As she feels in her pouch her two little coins, or as someone gives them to her in generosity, she makes

her way from the outer court of the Gentiles into the court of the women. Among the sounds in the temple there is the racket of animals, both living, and those who are in the midst of being slaughtered. There are the many voices and dialects of people who have made their way to Jerusalem for the special events of this week. Then there is the noise of the coins (for they didn't use paper money) being poured into the coffers, large money bags emptied into them by the rich. As they walk past her perhaps she feels a bit ashamed of her poverty. She makes her way up to the large container, and with probably almost no audible sound whatsoever, she lets the coins drop out of her hand.

And there, across the way, is the incarnate Son of God taking notice. He not only sees her deed, but He sees her heart. She gives out of gladness in service to the Lord. As she does so, think about her temptations. We see in v.5 a description of the temple in that day. It was adorned with beautiful stones. Many of the pieces were covered in gold. It was said that outside of Jerusalem on a sunny day, when you looked toward the temple it appeared as glass because of the amount of gold reflecting the sun. What would her offering mean? Even as she heard the coins dropping in before hers from the rich, what was what she was giving? What difference would it make. Then she could think about how all these people had plenty to eat, no financial worries, comfortable homes to live in. They did not know the difficulty of depending on others even to have bread to eat, hopefully at least once a day. Then there was the corruption of the temple. The wealth, extravagance, and opulence of the leaders as the consumed widows' houses was well known. Why should she give? But she did.

She did so out of a heart for God. She did so in faith. She did so believing God would see and be well pleased. It wasn't about giving in comparison with others, it was about giving in thankfulness to her God. At that moment Jesus calls His disciples and makes them take notice. This is the kind of service that is well pleasing to God. This is sacrifice. This is what it means to be in the Kingdom. She was not externally constrained, but inwardly willing and desirous to give whatever she had in service to the Lord. He tells these men, some of whom will preach to thousands of people, who will lay the foundation for the New Testament church, and some of whose words we still have 2,000 years later in the Bible, THIS is what God takes notice of. This is what catches the attention of Christ.

We don't know what happened to this woman in this life, but surely she evidences the faith of a true daughter of Abraham. She likely didn't become rich physically, but she was rich spiritually.

APPLICATION

We see clearly in this passage that our Lord Jesus, and thus our God, does not measure our works as the world measures works. The world, and especially our own culture, is infatuated with largeness, success, and numbers. Significance itself is measured in quantity. The local mom and pop general store is not impressive...Wall-Mart is. And rather than recognizing this, and thinking biblically about them, we breath this in constantly. This affects us in at least two ways as Christians.

Our Own "Personal" Ministry

By this I mean the exercise of our individual gifts and abilities. The Scripture tells us in passages like 1 Corinthians 12 and 1 Peter 4:10 that we all as Christians have been given spiritual gifts, and that we are to exercise them as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. We are familiar with the parables of the talents in Matthew 25. Each of the servants are given 5, 2, and 1, and expected to do business with them while the master is gone. It was the servant with the single talent that hid it, because he didn't have as much as others, and felt like the expectations of the master were just too much. The reasoning was "I don't have as much as others, so what can I really do?" He was responsible to do everything he could do with what he had, and be ready to give an account for it.

We can also so easily fall into a kind of "Christian celebrity-ism." What I mean by that is that we measure who important people are in the church by how much they do and what gifts they have. Again, we are influenced by the world's thinking in this. One way this can manifest itself is in thinking of people in "full time ministry" like missionaries and pastors as being more significant than the rest. Now there is no question that such people have an important task. Preaching and teaching the Word of God is important and necessary. But there can be a kind of over-esteeming of such, while at the same time denigrating the importance of the ministry of all the body.

One brother recently prayed at our prayer meeting for me and said to the Lord "we know that Stephen has a difficult job." I appreciate my brothers' prayers, and at times it is difficult. But I would never want for people to think that mine is more difficult than others. I hear of some of your work situations, the pressures you face, the hours you put in, the time away from your family, and I marvel. Mine is not nearly as difficult in that way as some of yours. And what you are doing in the process IS significant when you do it in the Name and for the glory of our God.

Please look with me to Ephesians 6:5-7. This is a call for bondservants to serve Christ in sincerity of heart. Now what were these servants doing? Were they going about preaching great sermons, writing Christian books, having their sermons broadcast on the Internet? No, but rather serving (in some cases non-Christian) masters in multitude of menial tasks. Yet, as they were doing this, they were to do this not as primarily as men-pleasers (though they certainly wanted their masters to be pleased), but as pleasing Christ. They were to do this from the heart, with goodwill, doing this service to the Lord. Paul considered His ministry only significant to the degree he was able to help the "common man" serve Christ in every area of life.

Is this how you view what God has given you to do. Whatever it is that God has called you to in this moment of your personal history, do you do so with a recognition of its significance before God? You may feel like you have almost

nothing to offer. Perhaps you think about what you can do related to others that you know, and you feel inadequate and insignificant. But I urge you to give what you may consider to be your widow's mites with full confidence that Jesus would have us stop, and look, and say that you have given all.

Our "Corporate" Life As A Church

Much of the Evangelical church, and especially the mega-church movement, has swallowed, hook-line-and-sinker, the mentality of our culture. It has become corporate big-business, and it is about size. Please don't misunderstand me to be saying that we shouldn't be earnest in our desires to see many to come to know the Lord. Nor am I saying that these churches aren't doing any good. It has certainly become a cliché, but there is still a mountain of truth in the saying "it is not about quantity, but quality."

But this mentality just doesn't happen "out there" among those other churches. What about ourselves? Is there more excitement about first-time visitors and the need of more chairs than the excitement over the deepening of the fellowship with the saints that are already here? Do we see significance merely in size? Or do we see significance in faithfulness to the relationships that we already have.

In the eyes of the world we may be a widow's mite of a church, but if we are doing so out of faithfulness to the Lord then He sees and is well pleased.

If you are not a Christian, then I especially want you to see the character of God displayed in this passage. You live in an entire world which tells you that significance is found in beauty, achievement, personal accomplishment. But here the Lord Jesus takes notice of someone whose heart is towards Him, and who gives all that they have, though others walk by and don't even notice. With this I would encourage you to likewise give all you have to Christ. You may not think you have anything to offer, but you have yourself. Give yourself to Him, to be His servant, to be His disciple. You may never do things that you consider "great", but you can do those things which in Him are accepted by God.