

Other than the love that Christ shows to us everyday... perhaps there is no better illustration of “**committed** love”... than a mother’s love for her child.

On August 16... 1987... Northwest Airlines flight 225 crashed just after taking off from the Detroit airport... killing 155 people. ... One survived... a four-year-old from Tempe, Arizona... named Cecelia.

News accounts say when rescuers found Cecelia... they did not believe she had been on the plane. ... Investigators first assumed Cecelia had been a passenger in one of the cars on the highway... onto which the airliner crashed. ... But when the passenger register for the flight was checked... **there** was Cecelia's name.

Cecelia survived because... even as the plane was falling... Cecelia's mother... Paula Chican... unbuckled her own seat belt... got down on her knees in front of her daughter... wrapped her arms and body around Cecelia... and then would not let her go.

Nothing could separate that child from her mother's love — neither tragedy nor death... .. Such is the love of our Savior for **us**. ... It is a committed love. ... He left heaven... lowered Himself to us... and covered us with the sacrifice of his own body to save us. But here is what often does not get mentioned in this equation. WE NEED TO BE **PROGRESSING** TOWARD THIS SAME KIND OF LOVE – IN WHICH WE ARE EXPRESSING TOWARD **HIM**. What is our level of commitment toward Him...? Has it been growing... or is it stagnant...?

Jesus... Himself... shows us in our passage today in Luke... that there is a **standard**... there is **criteria** of true commitment. ... Sure... His love is

unconditional... it is not dependent on our actions... But there are some expectations about a commitment that we need to make toward Him. ... Christ has criteria of true commitment... from us... as His followers... that we should be expressing more and more...

C.S. Lewis said it so well...

Christ says, "Give me all. I don't want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work: I want you. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half-measures are any good. I don't want to cut off a branch here and a branch there. I want to have the whole tree down. I don't want to drill the tooth, or crown it, or stop it, but to have it out. Hand over the whole natural self, all the desires which you think are innocent as well as the ones you think are wicked—the whole outfit. I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you myself: my own will shall become yours."

Dallas Willard... one of my favorite contemporary authors would add: "*The Lord is my Shepherd*" is written on many more tombstones than lives.

The litmus test of our commitment to Christ... the acid test of whether or not Jesus is our shepherd... is right here in our passage from Luke chapter 21... this morning.

In our study through Luke's Gospel... we have seen Jesus most recently in Jerusalem. For four days He has been in the Temple... teaching large crowds who were in town to celebrate Passover. ... The religious leaders have also been trying to use this opportunity to trip Jesus up... They wanted to embarrass Him... and show the people that He could not possibly be the Messiah. ... Well... Jesus has surpassed His being

examined by them Instead of their silencing Jesus... Jesus had shut the mouths of His opponents.

Jesus is just about to lay His life down as the ultimate sacrifice... He has declared in a direct manner that He is the Messiah... He has been examined (as every Passover lamb is to be examined for 4 days)... and He has been teaching.

In today's passage... we find Christ in the Temple... once again. This time He is not in the court of the Gentiles... where He had cleared out all the moneychangers and buyers and sellers... just a few days before. Our passage today has him in the Court of Women... where 13 brass receptacles were placed... for the people to pay either the Temple tax or a non-prescribed Free Will offering.

The receptacles were long and made out of brass. They were wide at the bottom... which was bell-shaped... and thin at the top... just like a trumpet. . . . And this is why they were called – “trumpets.” By throwing your loud coins into the receptacle... they would clang against the brass sides all the way to the bottom... announcing your righteous deed... for those nearby to hear it... turn their heads... and admire you! Some of the pious Jews carried their coins in a box that was so heavy... it took two people to pompously carry it up to the trumpet. Then the giver would stand there for quite a while and draw a lot of attention to himself... for all his giving. . . . I think Jesus was referring to this... where we read in Matthew 6...

Matthew 6:2 (ESV)

“Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may

be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

So Jesus and His disciples were in the Temple... and get this... they were doing something that in our culture we consider completely **taboo**! They were observing... or... as I see it... they were **entertaining** themselves by watching the worshippers put their money in the trumpets. ... They watched **multiple** people... So... in other words... this was not a sudden glance... it was at the very least a curiosity... where they were observing several rich contributors... and one destitute widow.

Is it just me... or does anyone else think this is kind of a funny scene ...? (Dave Lawrence and I were laughing about this on Thursday evening... during the worship team's rehearsal.) Can't you just picture Jesus standing a few feet away with His disciples... and all of them are fixated on the receptacle...that was designated for free-will offerings... (In this church we carefully regard this as a private matter – between the worshipper and the Lord... One of the many reasons I don't sit up on the platform... before I preach each Sunday... is I don't want people to think that I am watching them as the offering is passed.) ... But here **they** were... **watching** the people who were making a big show of their piety... and righteous deeds above and beyond what was required. ... I wonder if this was a common 1st Century form of entertainment... How many others stood nearby... doing what Jesus and His disciples were doing... just watching the show? If this were today... maybe Peter and some of the others would hold up number signs to indicate how impressed they were... *“Wow! I give that guy a 9! The clanging of all those coins musta lasted a good 2 minutes...”*

(But then again... what would THEY think of what WE watch as entertainment...?)

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ANYWAY - there they were in the Temple... among the swelled crowds of this busy Passover week... watching the masses of visitors in Jerusalem... glorying in their giving and perhaps commenting... .. *“Impressive! Did you see how much **that** guy gave! ... I wonder where **he** is from and what **he** does for a living.”* ...

The huge Passover crowds... and the thirteen trumpets in the Temple Court of Women... created an opportunity for outrageous preening and posturing. ... Imagine the hush that came over the crowd of those who were standing around and observing... when a notable person approached... and imagine the audible gasp... as the shekels went clanging into the brass trumpets. ... Can you see the pious countenances of the rich givers... their satisfied... restrained *"see if you can top that"* expressions?

After the biggest showmen had sounded the trumpets... who... no doubt... as important persons... were placed at the head of the line... We can almost hear one of the disciples say... *“Well... I guess the show is over... All the wealthy folks have given... Who wants to stick around and watch the poor old lady at the back of the line in ragged clothes...? She can't impress us... Whatever she has is probably so thin... it won't even make a clang... Her shaved piece of copper will float like a feather and won't even be noticed among all the other fine pieces of precious metals... Common' Let's go... Ahh... Jesus... Are You coming?!”*

But Jesus would not have turned away. He would stay to see something FAR more spectacular...

Luke 21:1-4

Although He stood by as a willing member of the audience... Jesus saw much that displeased Him. ... Public giving... such as this setting required... promotes self-conscious ostentation.

The ability to give on a scale - that is not possible for others - can produce a delusion of superiority... and false-sense of spiritual safety ... *"I have done what others cannot — so my soul is superior and my eternity secure."* ... Such people can develop a wrongful- perception of goodness within themselves... when in actuality they are evil.

But as Jesus watched... He noticed something that made his heart applaud: "He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins". Jesus... and anyone else who happened to see her... knew she was a poverty-stricken widow... because widows wore distinctive clothing... in her case undoubtedly worn and tattered.

The life of widows in Biblical times was typically difficult. ... If they had no other family members... they were cut off from all source of income.

Her offering was two coins... so small they were called *lepta* (literally, "peeled" or "fine," the idea being a tiny thin coin). The miniature *lepton* was worth only one four-hundredth of a shekel... or about one-eighth of a cent. It represented... in terms of what a day laborer would earn... about 5 minutes of work. The two *lepta* represented barely anything — like today's pennies... that most of us do not even bother to pick up.

She undoubtedly approached the trumpets quietly... perhaps stealthily... head bowed... hoping to draw no attention to herself... now that the show of the wealthy was over... Though she did not know Jesus was watching... she knew God saw her... and that was who she came to please. ... Her motivation for such giving could only be love. - There is no other explanation. ... **She** (not the religious leaders) was loving God with all she **was** and **had**.

When she slipped the two coins into the mouth of the "trumpet"... they fell inaudibly against the shekels of the rich. ...

You know... looking at this from a **practical** stand-point... The temple was... in effect... **no** richer... because of the two slivers of copper that now hid (**un**apparent) among all the weightier coinage. It added practically nothing to the Temple treasury. ... She was immeasurably **poorer**...(she had given **all** of her finances)... and the Temple was by **no** means any richer for her sacrifice. If we look at this **ONLY** from a rational perspective... what she did was **foolish!** Perhaps you or I... if we gave **anything** to this un-forced... non-required... free-will... totally optional... offering... we would *not* have given **both** coins. Why wouldn't she only give **one** and keep the other for her obvious needs...?

Inwardly... Jesus must have been on His feet applauding... by what He saw her do. ... And as He commends her... let's draw some conclusions from this about the criteria of true commitment that Christ commends.

First, when it comes to giving... or serving His Kingdom in any way... the posture of our hearts makes all the difference.

Every three months when Patti and I write a check to the I.R.S. for our quarterly estimate... We can write that check with a begrudging and most reluctant attitude... and guess what? ... That agency does not care **at all** about our heart's attitude! It does **not care** whether we give willingly or with the foulest of mood... lovingly or hatefully... joyfully or miserably. ... All the I.R.S. is interested in is the bottom line. ... That we pay the approximate amount... and that we pay it on time! The same thing is true with our mortgage company and our credit card companys.

But this is **not so** with the Lord! The posture of our heart will make all the difference – as to the Lord's being pleased with it. ... Commentator Darrell Bock writes: *"When God measures the life of service... He does not just count – He weighs!"* ... He weighs our heart as we give... and as we serve Him in any capacity. Our commitment is not commended when we rush home on Wednesday evening... throw something together for dinner and complain that we have to go serve at AWANA ... or any other ministry! *"Well... I guess I'll have to serve another year... because nobody else is stepping up to the plate..."*

God weighs our motivations. ... This truth is either a terror or a comfort. Which way does it strike you?

There is a humorous story of a preacher in a small town... who was having ministry finance shortfalls... The people were not giving to the Lord. ... So one Sunday he announced from the pulpit: *"Before we pass the offering plate today, I would like to request that the person who stole the chickens from Brother Smith's henhouse please refrain from giving any money to the Lord. The Lord doesn't want money from a thief."* ... The collection plate

was passed around... and for the first time in many months... everybody put something in the plate!

Many of the these folks gave... because they did not want anyone thinking **they** had stolen the chickens. ... I'm sure some gave with a grudge. God, however does not **want** us to give this way.

Here is how I know that the Lord looks at our hearts and motives... these are just two... of several verses...

1 Chronicles 28:9a (ESV)

“And you, Solomon my son, know the God of your father and serve him with a whole heart and with a willing mind, for the LORD searches all hearts and understands every plan and thought.

Jeremiah 17:10 (ESV)

“I the LORD search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.”

The first criteria of true commitment that Christ commends is the correct posture of our heart. If you are not joyful... ask the Lord to pinpoint the reason... and when He does... repent from it... and start serving Him with joyfulness.

You know... if our church was to fall upon hard financial times... (and we **could**... someday)... It is my hope that we... as leaders... would resist the temptation to appeal to the congregation to give **more**... or ask for larger gifts. ... Or manipulate you with some story about stolen chickens... Instead... I hope that we would make our strongest appeal for our people to give - **whatever** gifts they give – with the same heart that this godly widow had. But... having said that... let me also bring up the next point.

Second, when it comes to giving... or serving His Kingdom in any way... it ought to cost us something.

King David said in response to Araunah the Jebusite...who had offered David his threshing floor... as a site on which to build an altar to God... as well as the animals (thrown-in for free) to sacrifice there... "No, I insist on paying you for it. I will not sacrifice to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing" (2 Samuel 24:24). ... David knew that giving which costs us... is giving that pleases God.

C. S. Lewis (reflecting on this and other passages of Scripture) had the following conviction:

I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. In other words, if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusements, etc., is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little. If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot do because our charitable expenditure excludes them.

Thirdly, when it comes to giving... or serving His Kingdom in any way...God can do great things with tiny offerings.

(Think of it!) ... Those slivers of copper... by themselves – practically worthless – but given quietly... willingly... and humbly... have produced **more** for the Kingdom of God... over the past 2,000 years... than **all** the other coins of silver and gold that were pompously dumped into the trumpets that Passover week. ... (You see...) down through the ages those two little coins have been multiplied into billions and billions for God's work... because other humble servants of God have been liberated to give

from their little... or their much. The Lord has converted those two coins into persistent wealth and motivation for His Church.

Fourthly, when it comes to giving... or serving His Kingdom in any way... *God is marvelously "equal opportunity."* There is no advantage to the poor or the rich... to the one who only has an 8th grade education... or the highly educated... to the unknown or to the very famous. ... Billy Graham has no advantage over the humblest believer... and vice versa. The questions are: How do we give... and how do we serve...? ... Grudgingly or willingly? ... Does our giving and does our serving cost us anything?

God does not want our money. ... He wants **us**. ... But have you realized yet... that we cannot give ourselves to Him - **apart** from our money...? The way that we use our money... tells us where are hearts are.

A few minutes ago... I mused about Jesus and His disciples watching people as they put their money into the receptacles... But here is a new thought: - Jesus is **still** standing across from the treasury of every church... and He still watches. ... **This** image might not be so funny!

I am going to close with a quote from a well-known politician... a statesman... who encapsulates the teaching of Scripture... Winston Churchill:

"We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give."