

'This Poor Widow Cast in More Than All They That Are Casting Into the Treasury'- Mar 12:43

by G. Campbell Morgan

Jesus emphasizes the importance of giving with a pure heart and the value of small acts of kindness and generosity.

Scripture: Mark 12:43

Topics: "Faith and Sacrifice", "The Heart of Giving"

Description

G. Campbell Morgan emphasizes the profound significance of the poor widow's offering of two mites in the temple, contrasting her genuine faith and sacrifice with the ostentatious gifts of the wealthy. In a time of hostility towards Jesus, this widow exemplifies true worship and devotion, demonstrating that the value of a gift lies not in its monetary worth but in the heart behind it. Morgan highlights how Jesus observed the motives of the givers, affirming that the widow's offering was greater than all others because it represented her entire livelihood. This act of faith serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of giving from the heart, regardless of the amount. Ultimately, the sermon calls believers to reflect on their own giving and the spiritual significance behind it.

Transcript

Mar 11:27-33 - Mar 12:1-44.

THE paragraph from which the text is taken gives a condensed account of the events following upon the discovery by the disciples that the fig tree which Jesus had cursed, had withered away from the roots. Matthew gives the story of these events with more fullness. We shall now only glance at them in their relation to the incident in the treasury, which Matthew omits. That story gains much from the fact that it constitutes a picture of light and beauty, in the midst of a time of great darkness in the ministry of our Lord. In this hour, when the Son of man was the object of intense hostility, and when He was exercising His authority in the solemn and awful work of denouncing and rejecting a fruitless nation, there appeared one poor lonely widow woman, in whom faith in God was active and powerful. She stands in striking contrast to the men who were seeking to destroy the Son of man.

Let us first glance at this dark background of hostility, then observe the nameless woman; and finally consider our Lord's attitude toward her. The lines of consideration are: first, the Son of man and His foes; secondly, the woman worshipper; and finally, the Son of man and His friend, that one woman.

Throughout the whole of this survey, the Son of man is seen acting in judgment. The word judgment is full, gracious, significant. Judgment becomes condemnation and punishment, or commendation and reward, according to the attitude of the human soul in the presence of its inexorable exercise. Here, from beginning to end, from the moment when Jesus was challenged, first as to His authority, to this last scene in the temple, our Lord is seen as the Son of man, sitting in judgment, and exercising the right thereof.

First then, let us look at Him in the midst of His foes. The stories in this paragraph are all well known. We will mass them for the sake of the impression of the Lord which they convey in these last days of His earthly ministry. Four questions were asked of Jesus on this day when He went back into the city and to the temple, after the disciples had discovered the fig tree was withered away from the roots. There was first the question of unbelief: "By what authority doest Thou these things? or Who gave Thee this authority?" There was then a question of sinister intent, formed, fashioned, and framed in order to bring Him within the grasp of His foes: "Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?" There was then a question of flippant rationalism; the cynical and brutal question of the Sadducees, who, supposing a case, enquired who should be the wife of a man in the resurrection. Finally there was a question of pure casuistry, the question of a lawyer, about the relative values of laws. Throughout the whole scene Jesus is seen, not caught, trapped, or beaten; but sitting in judgment, and with quiet, calm dignity silencing His opponents; until at last it is finally declared, "No man after that durst ask Him any question." The whole scene ended with our Lord's asking a question, and uttering a denunciation of hypocrisy.

The first was the question of unbelief asked by the men who were in authority in the temple. They recognized the things He had done, but raised the question of His right to do them. They knew He had wrought things that were superlatively wonderful. Probably it is true that their enquiry related to the cleansing of the temple on the previous day. While they were compelled to admit that His action was something out of the common, for which they could not account, that some mysterious power had been at work under His control, which made money-changers flee, cleansing the temple for a brief hour from all its defilement; they nevertheless raised the question of His authority. Our Lord's method with them was twofold. He first revealed their unfitness to receive an answer, by showing that they had already been dishonest in the case of the ministry of His forerunner; and then He answered the very question He had declined to answer; answered it inferentially, as He gave them the parable of the vineyard, and of the sending of messengers by the proprietor, until at last the son was sent. At the close of the parable they discovered that He was speaking of them, and describing their national condition; and therefore that involved in His answer was an answer to their enquiry; His authority was that He was the Son of God.

Then perchance, in some pause, there came to Him that iniquitous and unholy coalition of opposing political parties in Jerusalem, of Pharisees and Herodians; the Herodians claiming that the Jewish nation at that time must be subservient to Rome, for Herod was a vassal of Rome; the Pharisees protesting against the yoke of Rome being laid upon the shoulders of God's ancient people. These two parties were always at war, always at strife. They now formed a coalition, and asked a question with sinister intent; so that if He should say it was lawful to pay tribute to Caesar, He would abrogate His own claim of Messiahship which He had made so patent by the provocation of demonstration on His arrival in the city but yesterday; or if perchance He should say it was not lawful to give tribute to Caesar, then He could be arrested for treason against the State. Mark the subtlety of the question, and the supremacy and finality of the answer as a philosophy of life: "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's." It was a condemnation of both the parties that stood confronting Him; first of the men who were against the domination of Rome, but who were not rendering to God the things that were

God's, the men who were tithing mint and anise and cummin, and neglecting the weightier things of man's soul; the condemnation also of the Herodians who claimed that it was lawful to give tribute to Caesar, and in their deepest hearts were with Herod prepared to rebel against Caesar, if they might but have escaped from his tyranny. They were both silenced.

Then, perhaps again after some interval, there came the Sadducees with the question of their flippant rationalism. The grotesqueness of their illustration constitutes its brutality. To read these stories with all naturalness is to be impressed by the unholy levity that linked the great questions of immortality, the resurrection, and the spiritual life, to such an illustration as they supposed. Our Lord answered first by sweeping away the possibility they suggested, as He declared that in heaven they neither marry, nor are given in marriage. Then immediately passing behind the illustration to the Sadducean philosophy that caused it, which denied the immortality of man the fact of resurrection, the existence of the spirit, and the very being of angels; He reminded them that in their own scriptures God declared Himself to be the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and settled the question when He said that God "is not the God of the dead, but of the living"; and thus in one word, assured men that they limit their vision if they forget that those "loved long since, and lost a while,

Then one man amid the crowd, having observed that Jesus had well answered these questioners, came to Him with his own peculiar question: Which is the greatest of the commandments? He did not ask Him to put commandment into comparison with commandment, but to reveal the principle of real greatness in law. It was an honest question, a sincere question. Our Lord immediately replied with nothing of sternness in His answer, with nothing of rebuke. Selecting, not from the Decalogue, but from other of the ancient laws of the Hebrew people, He showed the central principle of law, the true inspiration of the law, and of obedience to it: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. . . Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." The man was arrested and amazed. He admitted that the answer was final. Then from amid all the hostility, there came from the lips of Jesus the tender words, "Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God." The questions of His foes were over.

Then our Lord propounded one question, and we have no account of any answer made to Him. It was a question that suggested thought on their part concerning Himself in view of His Messianic claims. How is it, He asked, that David speaking by the Spirit, described his son as his Lord? There the question remains Christ's one arresting question waiting for the answer of all such as are perplexed in the presence of His personality, and demanding at least either that we declare that David was mistaken, and that Jesus was of our kith and kin alone; or that we recognize that David, as Jesus said, was inspired; and that while according to the flesh He was of the seed of David, according to the deeper mystery of His Being, He was the Son of the Eternal God. With the question He left them, warning those who listened, against the hypocrisy of the scribes.

That is a hurried survey, but it will bring us into the atmosphere of this last scene in the life of Jesus, in which He was present in the temple. How often He had been there. Remember the scenes that we have surveyed in our study of His life; those recent happenings, that marvellous hour when He cleansed the temple; the electric atmosphere of hostility, the awful impulses of hatred that were brooding, waiting to arrest and slay Him.

Now observe the last thing that Jesus did. Passing from those inner courts of the temple He came to the outer court, known as the court of the women, where the great chests stood to receive the offerings for the

priests and the poor. There He sat down, lingering in temple precincts, gazing with longing and love-lit eyes upon the desolate wilderness in the midst of which He found Himself, looking for some flower, some fruit, something that would satisfy His heart. The last stern and terrific word of denunciation uttered, He waited, in the treasury, in the place where people were bringing gifts, in which though man was constantly forgetting it, there was a sacramental symbolism. Where the heart is, there the treasure will go. That is not the quotation, I know. But the change is implicated. Where the treasure is, there will the heart be also; and, therefore, where the heart is, there the treasure will go. Upon all giving, there rests the light of a Divine scrutiny and appraisement.

So waiting and watching with the Son of man, we see what we should not perhaps have noticed, had He not drawn the attention of His disciples to it; a woman amid the crowd, a poor, lonely widow, dropping into the treasury two mites, a farthing. In the light of what happened He declared that when she dropped in those two mites, she dropped in "all her living." Do not be persuaded to doubt that. There have been many attempts made to prove that she did not give all her living, and that our Lord did not really mean that. For the moment, however, forget that final word, and look at her gift; two mites, equal to a farthing; two of the smallest current coin. We should never have seen it if attention had not been drawn to it. If a list of subscriptions that day had been published, these two mites would have been included in the final item, of amounts below a certain value! Yet out of the midst of all the gifts, the Son of man selected these two mites; and lifted them into the light of the centuries.

Looking at those two mites, those little coins, and speaking of them in the singular number, as one gift, I see here first a gift of faith; secondly, a gift of sacrifice; thirdly, a gift of spiritual life; and finally a gift law-fulfilling. I see one lonely widow woman doing a thing out of the passion and inclination of her inner life, unobserved so far as she knew by any eyes, in all probability attempting to hide from everybody the thing she did. Yet I see this one lonely woman in the midst of that crowd that day, standing in contrast to all the men who had harassed the Lord. All the hostility massed in the questions that we have tried hurriedly to survey is ranked on one side; and over against it is the simple act of a woman who put two mites into the treasury.

It was a gift of faith. The temple was the house of God to that woman. Her gift was the sacramental symbol of her loyalty to God. She, as surely as the great lawgiver of her nation, "endured as seeing Him Who is invisible." We would never have seen those coins, if Jesus had not pointed them out, but what are they? A sacramental evidence of a woman's belief in God. When He cursed the fig tree, and the day came when it withered from the roots so that the disciples were amazed by the swift withering, He told them the secret of how the nation might escape a like withering as He said, "Have faith in God." He had just been in the temple, and the rulers of the temple who were the rulers of the city, had challenged Him as to His authority, and thereby had revealed their lack of faith in God. But behold, one woman among the crowds, the sacramental symbol of whose faith in God are the two mites which she drops into the treasury.

Again, it was a gift of sacrifice; "all her living," a tremendous dedication. I go back to the scene before it, and I see a coalition of Pharisees and Herodians who came to ask Jesus a question about tribute, about the things they were to give in recognition of right, authority, and benefit received. That is what taxation really is. We may object to it and quarrel with it, and may be perfectly right in our objection with regard to some of its methods. But in the payment of taxes we are making our personal gift to the well-being of the State, our acknowledgment of the benefits of the government under which we live. That matter lay behind this question whether they should pay to Rome, or whether they should not. They were in the region of gifts. Remember also, their question was one of selfishness. It was one of expedience, dealing with the

whole relation of a man to his fellow-men in the State; and the relation of a man to his fellow-men was degraded by the question they asked. Here, however, was a woman, probably knowing little about these Pharisees, or of the discussion of principles, of difference between Herodians and Pharisees, but recognizing her immediate relation to her God. Hers was a gift of sacrifice. She cast into the treasury "all her living."

Again, and this is the deeper note: it was a gift of spiritual life. It was the result of vision, and it was the expression of feeling. There are moments when one wishes one could draw aside the veil and know more. We would like to know where that woman lived, and how she lived, and how she suffered, and what her poverty meant; a lonely widow woman in the great metropolis, and she only had those two mites that day. They constituted "all her living." What made her find her way through those women's courts, and drop the whole of her living into the treasury? Vision! She saw finely, and her heart responded to what she saw. That act was a demonstration of the spiritual life, an argument against rationalism, a refusal to accept a Sadducean philosophy-that asked men to be content with the dust, and to live in the realm of the material. By that act, unknowingly, her whole soul responded with holy love, to the vision; and in the dedication of her living was her recognition of the vision which her eyes beheld.

Yet once again, it was a gift law-fulfilling. Hear the question: "What commandment is the first of all?" Hear the answer of Jesus: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God . . . thou shalt love thy neighbour." What relation had that to the gifts that were placed in the treasury in the temple? All gifts placed in those chests in the treasury of the temple were divided between the priests and the poor. Now, however much the priests were degraded, let us never forget that to the simple heart of this woman they stood as the representatives of God, they stood for relationship to God. And the poor? She was of the poorest of the poor, but they were her neighbours; and when she dropped her gifts into the treasury she was keeping the whole law. She was expressing her love to her God, and her love to her neighbour. So I repeat, that while Jesus waited and watched, He saw in that dark and desolate hour, one woman in whose life, ail unconsciously, Divine requirements were being fulfilled. The sacramental symbol of the beauty and glory of her life, in her gift of two mites, contradicted and corrected the atmosphere which was hostile to sacramental symbols.

Look finally, not at the foes of the Son of man, not at the woman worshipping alone, but at the Son of man Himself. He had claimed but recently to be the Son sent to the vineyard for fruit, when the husbandmen had ill-treated and murdered all that had preceded Him; but He knew that their fate would be His, for the husbandmen were saying ere He came, "Let us kill Him."

In His final question there was a further revelation concerning Himself. He was David's Lord. Offspring of David, yes; but Root of David also; the One from Whom David had come, the One Who after the flesh had come from David.

Here then, are three things to be observed. First let us observe His observing. Then let us hear His appraisalment of the things that He saw that day; and remind ourselves how He was, and is for ever vindicated in that appraisalment.

Observe first, His observing. Here Mark is very particular: "He sat down over against the treasury, and beheld how the multitude cast money into the treasury." He did not behold the multitude casting in. He was not watching them. He beheld how they did it. In the very simple and artless declaration of Mark something is revealed concerning Him that was peculiar to Him; in which He stood, and stands for ever

differentiated from all others. What was He watching? Oh! not the trick of the hand, or the poise of the head, although all these things may very often be suggestive. Christ was looking deeper. He was looking at the motive behind, the reason for the giving, the impulse of the donation, the inspiration of the offering. That is what He is always doing. He beheld how they gave.

In the Old Testament, in the dim twilight of that earlier dispensation, there is a great psalm. It is the song of a woman, Hannah. In the midst of her song, celebrating the government of God, she said, "By Him, actions are weighed." Here the Lord is seen weighing gifts, and when the gift is to be weighed, the important thing is the weight He puts in the other side of the balance. He was observing how they gave. That is what He always watches. The Lord of pity and compassion is watching to-day how this nation is giving. We see in our newspapers a list of names connected with large amounts. Then presently there is that remarkable group at the last, "Amounts Under-!" All the poetry is in the last item, and not in the first. The compassion of the human heart is finest and purest among the gifts where there is no record of a name. He is still observing how!

But He was observing, unobserved. We have no hint in the Gospel story that the woman knew she was watched, or that she was told. She is seen in her gift, and her passing. He called His disciples privately, and drew their attention to that which had happened; but He did not tell her. I do not think she ever knew. I think that she lived all her days, and never knew, until there came one sweet morning of the light that never fades, when He met her on the other side; and then she found that He had kissed the poor copper of her gift into the gold of the eternities.

Then note His appraisal of that offering. Drawing the special attention of His disciples to it, He said this to them, "This poor widow cast in more than all." It is an amazing thing, this! He did not say, This poor woman hath done splendidly. He did not say, This poor woman hath cast in very much. He did not say, She hath cast in as much as any one. He did not say, She hath cast in as much as the whole of them. He said, "More than all" I Presiding over the temple coffers that day, the Lord of the temple took the gifts and sifted them. On the one hand He put the gifts of wealth, and the gifts of ostentation; and on the other, two mites "more than all"! That we may not misunderstand it, He gave the reason: "They ... of their superfluity"! Oh! how the thing scorches, how it burns. Superfluity!

A little girl, during the war, wrote a letter to the Prince of Wales, a sweet letter, which was printed in all the papers at the time. She sent, I think it was seven-pence-halfpenny, and ended her letter by saying, "I am so glad I am an English girl, but I am sorry for those German children." That was an unveiling of the glory of the Christian heart in a little girl! I think that day Jesus took the seven-pence-halfpenny, and said, More than all! And why? Because His standard is quality; and the quality is life. When a gift has that quality, that gift is God's currency. God can do much more with small amounts that have that quality, than with all the gifts that come from superfluity

The gift that is not easy, that comes out of blood, out of penury, is current in the spiritual realm, and God can do infinitely more with it than with the gifts that come out of superfluity.

The last thing concerns the vindication of our Lord. Was He right? Business men will forgive me if I am commercial here. Those two mites, given in that way, so that He was able to commend the giving, have produced more for the Kingdom of God in two millenniums, than all the other gifts that day. Oh! the inspiration of this story! How it has helped lonely, poor, and sorrowing hearts to give. Running on, and running ever, these two mites are rolling up their dividends, and their results are great and mighty, inspired

by what that lonely woman did. May God help us to give to Him in the light of this story; and may He grant that the glory of it, and the beauty of it may be a transfiguring power upon our giving. I do not think a collection is ever taken but that somewhere He finds a copper coin, and kisses it into gold. Of course this is two-edged. He still writes across many a gift, superfluity!

It is not for me to measure the gifts to God, I cannot; but it is for us ever to remember that religion, politics, ethics, were all included in that gift, and are always included in our giving. Giving is still a sacramental symbol. The giving which is true is the outcome of vital religion, high politics; true philosophy, perfect ethics.

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