

#220 “Two Pennies for Your Thoughts”

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Luke 21:1-4 says, speaking of Jesus, “And He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury. And He saw a poor widow putting in two small copper coins. And He said, ‘Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all of them; for they all out of their surplus put into the offering; but she out of her poverty put in all that she had to live on.’”

The western world is experiencing financial fraud and crime everywhere, from unfair monetary policy to reckless spending to liar loans, high frequency trading, and the list goes on and on. The end result is lower living standards and job losses for the average person, while the rich and affluent use their connections and influence to keep getting richer. Wall Street bonuses hit new record levels just this year; meanwhile, so did the number of Americans on food stamps. A funny thing happens to our brains for those of us who are average, sort of middle class, or poorer than most. We begin to think that we have nothing to offer, nothing to give. We hear the rich such as Warren Buffet or Bill Gates speaking of giving more to charity or perhaps leaving their wealth to advance social causes after they die. But let us understand that the giving that many of the rich speak of (I didn't say all but many) is most certainly out of their surplus, as Jesus referenced in Luke 21. Surely, people watched in Jesus' day as the rich paraded through the giving lines at the temple and poured gold, silver, and expensive jewelry into the coffers. Others scoffed to themselves as the poor, such as the widow Jesus saw, dropped in two copper coins (similar in many ways to the American penny). From a practical, pragmatic, business viewpoint, what possibly could two cents have done to advance social causes, to fund research for cures for diseases, to feed the hungry, or anything whatsoever for that matter? It would seem that the rich were the ones who were really making the work of the temple happen, not the poor widow who gave all that she had to live on. She sacrificed to the extent that she gave up any hope of having enough money even for a piece of bread, yet the wealthy could have bought her a feast of a meal, let alone a house and a decent life. But this is the way it tends to be, even in our day. The wealthy pat themselves on the back for their fractional percentage donations to generic causes, usually the ones that garner the biggest media attention. They fund their foundations and brag about how much money they have in their “not-for-profit” accounts. Yet in their very shadow people suffer, starve, and go homeless. So many could do so much to help so many more, but their love for money damns them to fail to sacrifice. Yet they do just enough to impress enough people and to make themselves look generous. But giving from a surplus or after they die is not necessarily sacrifice. In Jesus' mind, the widow gave more and did better. In Jesus' eyes, her gift garnered more eternal wealth even though it was so much smaller.

We are accountable for what we have been given. This includes not just money but time, positions of influence, health, opportunity, etc. God is interested in our hearts above all, and hearts that love His work more than anything this world can offer will find

themselves at some point or another giving in a way that costs something. For Warren Buffet to give a million dollars to something is nothing for him. He won't even know it is gone. For most of us, giving even a few hundred dollars means that we will have to go without something. If we gave it, we would feel it. It would have a cost to us. But even if all we have to give are a few pennies or a few minutes of our time, in Jesus' economy, that may well be a treasure trove. God remembers our gifts, our sacrifices, our labors, and our stewardship, and one day we will be recompensed with eternal riches that do not decay, get stolen, or lose value.

Jesus has ways of multiplying even the smallest gifts, sacrifices, and opportunities, just as He did with the fish and the loaves. Worldly wisdom scoffs at two pennies accomplishing anything eternal, but Jesus is not bound by the two pennies. With hearts that are open to His will, He can do great things. On the other hand, with hearts that give only to look good or only when it comes easily, how much can God really accomplish? **Giving has never ultimately been about money, for God is never short on cash (Psalm 50:10). It has always been an aspect of stewardship, one way among many ways that we demonstrate to God that our hearts are fully His.** That is what He is looking for. "For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His" (2 Chronicles 16:9). Giving is not about putting God to the test or putting our families in dire financial straits. It is about the state of our hearts, giving according to our ability, even if it hurts.

The call for us today as believers is simple. We cannot let the fact that we are hurting or struggling to make ends meet lead us to think that God cannot use us or is not interested in us. Just because we have lack doesn't mean that we can't still get great eternal rewards. We must be faithful with what we have. Peter and John didn't have silver or gold, but they had Jesus, Who was more than enough to do the work that they were given (Acts 3:6). Jesus said that the poor widow put in more than all of the rich people combined. **He viewed her two pennies as more eternally valuable than all of the rest of the wealth in the offering.** We need to grasp this reality. It is the state of our hearts that matter, and Christ delights in obedient stewardship of our time, money, and everything we are accountable for. A little sacrifice here is worth a lot to God because He can multiply it and because it demonstrates our allegiance to Him, which in and of itself is a fragrant aroma to Him.

In the end, it is not necessarily the dollar amount that counts; it is the heart of the one writing the check. Got real riches?