

## The Widow's Mites

Luke 21:1-4

Again, Jesus' teaching during the last week before the cross is profound and has guided the thinking of the Christian church ever since Jesus spoke these words. Today we will consider the story of the widow's mites. I might suggest that out of this series of teachings, this may be the one that is taken least seriously, not that Jesus meant for this to be the case but to hear the teaching of the widow's mites requires a rare humility. Such humility should not be rare but common among Jesus' followers for to truly follow, humility is a requirement rather than an option. So, the teaching of the widow's mites could be seen as one of Jesus' most difficult and important lessons.

There is an aura of spirituality attached to many of the widows in the Bible. Ruth and Naomi were widows and have a story of spiritual fidelity in the most challenging of circumstances. Naomi was a witness of the true God to her Moabite daughters-in-law. Ruth chose Naomi's God and threw in with her mother-in-law when she had no prospects of improving her life by doing so. Together, God blessed them when they were the least likely of all the women of their town to be perceived as significant or as having potential. The essence of their character was that of a humble faith in God.

The widow of Zarephath was approached by Elijah and asked to share her last meal ( the end of her food during the crisis of the famine) with him. Elijah added the promise that her flour and oil would not run out as long as the famine persisted but the widow had to exercise faith as expressed by giving away the last of her food in order to receive the miracle.

Anna was the aged widow who had given her entire life to prayer in the temple. She had been a widow for 84 years after 7 years of marriage. If she had married at 14 then at the time she greeted the baby Jesus she was 105. 105 and still praying... 84 years of spiritual devotion.

Add to these the widow of the gift of the two mites. We know less about her than the others, all we see of her is just this one thing. On particular Sabbath she gave an offering of two mites and that was all that she had. Naomi had lost her husband and both her sons. Having lost all that was important to her, she resolved to come back to God by returning to her homeland, the city of Bethlehem. Ruth, having lost her husband, gave up every tie to childhood and homeland to embrace Naomi and her God. The widow of Zarephath had lost her husband and as far as she could see her son was also about to die with her when she shared the last of all that she had. Anna lost her husband and consequently engaged in a devoted life of prayer for the next 84 years. The widow of the mites had also lost much and she also gave all.

So what is it about widows that would predispose them to be of the sort who are willing to give everything to God? This is not to say that all widows reach this place but it is significant that these five each gave all to God. And, they were all widows. Back to the question... widows share a deep experience of loss. You become a widow by losing your husband. For those who lived in Bible times the loss of your husband meant that you no longer had financial means. You would become an extra burden to be carried by a relative. You would no longer be the focus of another's attention. You might face the prospect of being destitute and homeless. Who do you turn to when you have nothing? When you have no hope and cannot imagine a means of obtaining any hope? Is there not just one answer to this question? God is our hope when there is no hope. Widows who have been thrown into a life of dependency and often hopelessness learn to depend upon the Lord. They experience His provision and care. It is when you have been cared for by the Lord that you learn a practical trust in the Lord. Such a trust says, "I know that God will take care of me because the last time I was desperate He provided for my need and so I know that somehow He will deliver the help that I need." When you have this kind of trust in the Lord and then He asks you to give up everything you have for Him, trust says give it all up. God will take care of me. And, it may be easier to give up everything when everything is not much.

On the day that Jesus and the disciples were watching the procession of givers at the temple, the rich apparently gave with some pomp and circumstance and in a

manner that displayed their generosity so that the curious could see the answer to the "how much?" question. The method of collection also allowed the amount of the widow's miniscule gift to be observed. But what could be observed was also the spirit with which each gift was given. There is no doubt that the rich presented their generous donations with pride. The widow was certainly humble and might have even felt some shame that all she had was so little. But, let's pay careful attention to exactly what Jesus did and did not say.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus was very critical of those who gave alms in order to gain the approval of men. Here, the method of giving was that of a public display. The givers were not responsible for the method and if you were going to give a gift to the temple then this was how it was done. The method was flawed. Spiritual giving would be secret giving done as that which is meant to please the Lord rather than to impress others. But this must be put aside because to give in support of the temple was in its essence a good thing to do. And, to give generously out of one's abundance is a normal approach to giving. Paul instructed the Corinthians, "On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper..." In other words Paul taught the Corinthians to gather weekly and to bring an offering that would represent a portion of the way that God had blessed them in the previous week. In other words they were to do what the rich were doing in the story of the widow's mites only without the pomp and circumstance. So it was not that the rich were in the wrong, Jesus never said that. What He did say was that what the rich gave (their generous offerings that were a portion of their abundance) was not as much as the widow had given for she had given all that she had.

It is not a usual thing to be asked to give all that you have. It's not going to happen every day. Abraham was asked to give up his son. Paul was asked to give up his freedom. Jesus told Peter that he would one day give up his life. Our son Steve with his wife Natalia are on a road trip to New York where they will be in a church planting program for the next year. In order to do this they have left everything behind. And they have arrived at this place by means of a path of humility and trust in God rather than any man. God will not always require them to give up everything but at this particular moment this is what He has asked.

The one who gives everything gives more than the one who just gives something. It does not matter that the something is more than the everything. Everything is still more than something. The rich who gave much had nothing to be proud of in that this was no great accomplishment. What they did was an act of obedience but a small act of obedience rather than a large one. The widow's two mites were also an offering of obedience but the obedience was greater since it represented her complete surrender to God. Let's be clear, for some reason God told her to give all she had and so she did. In the aftermath we can ask, what happened next? How did she eat? Where did she stay? What about the next day? But these questions do not really trouble you, do they? You know that God took care of the widow after she had trusted in Him so completely.

Those who give the most are those who trust in God the most. And God asks the most from those He trusts the most. Often, the ones so deeply trusted by God are widows.