

Series: Mark

Title: Becoming a Cheerful Giver

Text: Mark 12:41-44

Date: April 18, 2021

Verse 41

Verse 41 transitioned to a different scene. After teaching about the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, Jesus took a seat in the temple complex, near the place where charitable contributions were made. Mark said, "Sitting across from the temple treasury, He watched how the crowd dropped money into the treasury. Many rich people were putting in large sums" (Mark 12:41). The original language of the text implemented imperfect indicative verbiage. It depicted one scrutinizing someone or something. Jesus repeatedly watched different people pass by and make their contributions.¹

People dropped off their financial gifts in the "court of women."² In that place, there were thirteen brass funnels fashioned in which pilgrims deposited their offerings.³ The temple was thriving with activity as Jesus sat and watched. Some estimate the normal population of Jerusalem (50,000) swelled to nearly 250,000 for Passover.⁴ Many of the travelers undoubtedly took great delight in being able to personally deposit their tithes and offerings at the temple complex.

Pilgrims were accustomed to zealous displays of charity at the Temple Complex. In Acts 8:27, Luke told of the Ethiopian eunuch who traveled to Jerusalem for worship. He was in charge of the entire treasury of Candace, the queen of the Ethiopians. Most likely, a man of his means Him would have made a huge financial contribution when he travelled to Jerusalem for worship.

The word translated "rich" in verse 41 appeared in the superlative form. It spoke of one who was "very rich."⁵ The word translated "putting in" uses language that could be translated "they were repeatedly casting."⁶ Numerous people were making numerous contributions. The noise and busyness were likely immense. Pilgrims rubbed shoulders, stood in line, and waited for the opportunity to offer their gifts. As coins fell into the thirteen brass receptacles, they made loud rattling and clanking noises. An onlooker could likely discern the size of contributions by the sounds they heard, since metals were used for currency in Jesus' day (Mark 12:16).

Mark's description instructs us regarding the way in which Jesus sees our charitable contributions. Though others may not see what we do for the kingdom, we can be assured the Lord sees. He takes delight in our offerings. He will reward us one day for our gifts to His kingdom. Remember, Scripture teaches us that "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

Verse 42

¹ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 95.

² Ferguson , 207.

³ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 95.

⁴ Ferguson, 207.

⁵ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 95.

⁶ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 95.

The clanging of coins was interrupted by the emergence of a lowly woman. Mark 12:42 said, “Then a poor widow came and dropped in two tiny coins worth very little.” The language of the text depicted one who was of “abject poverty.” It portrayed one who literally had nothing, one who was under threat of starvation.⁷ The woman in our text was of the poorest level of society.

As others donated hefty sums, she gave “two tiny coins.” The original language of the text referenced one of the smallest coins from the first century. Mark used a word that referred to a form of Roman coinage in order to give a valuation for his Gentile readership.⁸ The Greek word he used meant “peeled” or “stripped.” It referred to some thing that was very thin. It was a great descriptor for the coin, since it was made from a thin shaving of copper, and since it was of little value.⁹ The coin was only worth about one-eighth of a cent.¹⁰ In Jesus day, it was worth one-sixty-fourth of a denarius. A denarius was a day’s wages for the average laborer.¹¹

Verse 43

In verse 43, Jesus used the woman’s devotion as a teaching opportunity. Mark records, “Summoning his disciples, he said to them, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others” (Mark 12:43). The original language used an expression that emphasized divine certainty. It involved the Greek word from which we get our word “amen.” It was the equivalent to a famous Hebrew expression that meant “As I live, says the Lord.”¹² Mark meant to place great emphasis on what Jesus taught. The Lord’s words had profound meaning for disciples of all generations.

Most of the pilgrims at the Court of Women probably felt immense pity towards the poor woman. Jesus used the occasion for an important teaching lesson. The woman’s appearance recalled His teaching back in Mark 12:40.¹³ He intended to provide a comparison and contrast for His disciples. While the self-righteous religionists were known to extort widows, the widows themselves were often the best example of true godliness. If the Twelve wanted to see what true worship looked like, they needed to observe the lowly widow, not the pompous Pharisees.

Verse 44

Verse 44 continued Jesus’ teaching, saying: “For they all gave out of their surplus, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had—all she had to live on” (Mark 12:44). Jesus’ awareness of how much the woman gave proved that He was God. He was omniscience. Mark previously displayed Jesus’ ability to know all things in Mark 2:8. In our text, no one saw the amount the woman contributed, but Jesus knew what she gave, because He knew all things. Our Lord’s omniscience proved He was Divine. Mark’s emphasis on this aspect of our Lord’s nature supported Jesus’ teaching from Mark 12:35-37— teaching in which Jesus claimed He was the Son of God.

⁷ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 95.

⁸ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 95.

⁹ Robertson, 371-372.

¹⁰ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 95.

¹¹ Brooks, 203.

¹² Ferguson, 208.

¹³ Brooks, 202.

While verse 44 hinted at the Divine nature of Jesus, its main purpose was to promote genuine worship and faithful stewardship. Jesus commended the woman because she “put in everything she had.” Some assume He meant to say the woman deposited all she owned in the temple coffers. That was not His intent. The passage conveyed the idea that she gave the equivalent of her daily income.¹⁴ She made a great sacrifice. While the rich gave exorbitant amounts of money, their gifts didn’t involve the same level of sacrifice. The woman’s gift required her to forgo her daily provisions. Because of her sacrifice, she likely went without food.

There is a lesson for us in the woman’s gestures. Jesus did not mean to teach that disciples are required to give away all their possessions.¹⁵ We must avoid the temptation to interpret this passage in that way. A similar temptation existed when we studied the passage on the rich, young ruler (March 10:21-22). Jesus did not mean to teach that must give away their possessions for the kingdom; rather, He intended to emphasize the importance of true worship. Disciples are to avoid the pretentious displays of religion that characterized the Pharisees. They must also examine themselves constantly to make sure they are not in bondage to the love of money that keeps them from true devotion to the Lord (1 Timothy 6:10).

In commending the woman’s act of worship, Jesus revealed that the Lord evaluates our giving based on proportion, not amount. The Lord looks at what we do with what we have, not just how much we give. One has said, “Our giving is to be measured by proportion, not by addition.”¹⁶ Jesus upheld this principle in His parables (Luke 19:11-27). A relatively rich person can give much much more than a relatively poor person, but if his or her giving does not involve the same level of sacrifice, it is a poor offering in the eyes of God.

The woman’s offering upholds the importance of sacrifice in our worship and stewardship. Disciples should ask themselves whether or not their deeds of charity really cost them something. True worship often involves a degree of sacrifice. King David understood this to be true. When he offered a sacrifice to avert the wrath of God, he made sure it cost him something. Someone offered to provide a free piece of land for the king’s offering, but David replied, “No, I insist on paying the full price, for I will not take for the Lord what belongs to you or offer burnt offerings that cost me nothing” (1 Chronicles 21:24). The charity and worship God desires involves personal consecration and sacrifice.

Ultimately, such selfless generosity embodies the nature of our Creator. The widow in our text lived up to the image of God within her (Genesis 1:26-27). The Bible consistently teaches that our Lord is a generous God who has sacrificed much for His children. Paul said, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: Though he was rich, for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9).¹⁷

¹⁴ Ryle, 213.

¹⁵ Brooks, 204.

¹⁶ Ferguson, 209.

¹⁷ Brooks, 204.