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2 Corinthians 8:9*

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## The Essentials: Giving

Most of you are aware that Pastor Thomas had eye surgery and his recovery is taking a fair amount longer than anticipated. I know he will appreciate your prayers. He had hoped to preach today, but instead, you get me! Throughout these 40 days of prayer, we have been thinking through the distinguishing marks of a believing congregation. We've considered several characteristics including, the reading of scripture, prayer, and missions. And today we are going to talk about giving. I have two passages to focus on today. The first is from Mark 12. This is the word of the Lord.

*Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents.*

*Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on" (Mark 12: 41-44.)*

And continuing in 2 Corinthians, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake, he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9.) In both the Old and the New Testament people of God are commanded by Him to be a generous and giving people.

In the Old Testament, the first fruit of every crop was required. They are told to honor God with their wealth. So crucial is this truth that the prophet Malachi calls the refusal to give to the work of God, theft. We rob God when we do not give to the Lord what He requires. And moving into the New Testament much of the teaching on giving is found in 2 Corinthians 8-9. Here we

read that our giving is to be sacrificial and joyful. There is even a place in another book in the New Testament where we're told that we are to have ready an offering, that we can give on the Lord's Day. Through both testaments, we see a requirement of the Lord to be a people who are generous, sacrificial, and joyous in our giving. The story we just read of the poor widow who put \$0.02 into the offering because that was all she had, is a very crucial story for understanding our heart's attitude toward giving. In these verses, we can discern what Jesus sees. After we see what Jesus saw, then we can hear what Jesus says and understand how he evaluates the situation.

## What Jesus Saw

Jesus is sitting near the temple and looking into one of the larger courts inside the temple. This court can host from 9-10,000 people. Inside the treasury, along the wall, there are 13 receptacles for giving. They look like trumpets turned upside down. The people cast their coins into these as they walk by. Jesus sits watching. He sees rich people come and they are giving large amounts of money. They are giving out of their surplus. They're skimming off the top—giving what they don't need to sustain their existence. But the Lord Jesus focuses especially on a poor widow. She is enduring extreme poverty, but she has two coins, worth just a few cents. And she goes over to one of these trumpet receptacles, and she cast it in.

And Jesus tells us that this is everything she has to live on and that in reality, according to Jesus' mathematics, she gave more than all the rich added up. Let's step back from that story for a moment and ask ourselves, what can we learn about how we give and what we give? There are three clear principles.

*Jesus sees our giving.* Jesus watches the crowd putting money into the temple treasury. This poor widow, who put in two very small copper coins, has no idea that Jesus is there and watching everything. Certainly, she is in the temple because she loves God. And despite her extreme poverty, she is there to worship and give to the Lord. And Jesus is watching.

This is not only a physical reality in this narrative but a spiritual reality for us. Never forget who Jesus is. He is the Lord God Almighty; the omniscient One who knows all things. And being God the Son, he is present in this world. His eyes see everything and everywhere.

“The eyes of the Lord are everywhere, keeping watch on the wicked and on the good” (Proverbs 15:3.) And Jesus is that Lord! He is the incarnate deity who sees everything. He sees our generosity or greed. He sees if we are robbing God or joyfully giving. Jesus sees our sacrificial giving and our wasteful spending. People who are conscious of the abiding gaze of the Holy One are people who want to worship, please, and honor him.

We want Jesus to look over our lives and say, “well done.” We want to please the Lord. Kent Hughes puts it this way, “What a staggering moment it is for a worshiping soul when one first

awakens to this reality—Jesus really is watching.” The Old Testament presents Him as the Lord who sees me. Am I living and giving before the audience of One who is Christ?

## What Jesus Said

Jesus says to his disciples, “*Truly*, I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others.” Jesus uses this word *truly*, some translations read “truly, truly” or, “amen, amen.” It means, “listen carefully – pay close attention.” It means this is extremely important. And he tells them, “this woman’s gift of two thin coins, is greater in value, than all the gifts of the rich.” Jesus gives approval to the woman. The rich gave out of their surplus, but she gave all she had to live on. That tells us a lot about what was in this woman's heart, doesn't it?

*Jesus sees what's in our hearts as we give.* Jesus on one occasion says, “Where your treasure is, there your heart is also.” And he says, “You cannot worship both God and money.” This impoverished woman is willing to give all because her heart trusts God. Phil Ryken, president of Wheaton College, offers this insight into her life. “When this woman gave her two little coins, she was really putting her heart into the box, offering her whole self to God. She was living for God on the inside. This is what God wants from us. Not just our money, but ourselves. From the inside, all the way out.” The treasure of her heart is God Himself.

This narrative, of giving from extreme poverty, is not uncommon in the New Testament. One example is found in 2 Corinthians 8. The church in Macedonia is enduring a severe trial. The apostle Paul tells them not to give, because of their poverty. But instead, they gave generously and joyfully. “And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, *and even beyond their ability*. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord’s people. And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us.”

Did you see it? They gave generously. And they “*exceeded our expectations.*” The church in Macedonia is seeking first the kingdom and his righteousness. This freed them, in the midst of severe trial and extreme poverty to give generously and joyously. Have you ever seen that kind of giving?

Twenty-three years ago, four Alliance pastors, myself included, toured with the Alliance in the Philippines, Hong Kong, and even one day in China. During our visit to Manilla, the missionaries took us to a place that they said was going to be very difficult. And it was.

We went to the city dump outside Manila. To the trash heap. And this was not a small trash heap. It was an absolute mountain of trash, covering many acres! And the most heart-wrenching aspect was seeing the children and their families that lived here. The missionaries

took us through a little valley in this mountain of trash to an open room, about the size of this platform. Someone had dug into the trash and created a church. A cross stood at the entrance. There was no door. Inside were small makeshift, rugged pews. We walked in and sat, and we looked up—the ceiling was made of trash. And naturally, you start to think, *What if it collapses?* The walls were all made of trash and the floor was dirt. Their pastor stood up and preached a sermon. We heard a wonderful gospel message through an interpreter. And then those who had gathered began to worship and sing hymns.

And we sang with them in our own language. Finally, they took an offering. These people had no regular work. Just occasional makeshift jobs. But they put in what little they had, and they added what little food they may have found in the garbage heap. There was also food donated by another church.

I am not exaggerating when I tell you this is the most joyous worship service I have ever attended. They gave generously and counted it a privilege to do so. We, pastors, chose not to give because we did not want to bring attention or cause embarrassment to our brothers and sisters who were there. Later, we had opportunity to give generously and honor their profound joy and generosity. This is what God calls us to do.

God is not telling us in this story that we are to live with a zero balance. He is not telling us to live destitute lives. Jesus tells us to pay our bills, and in the parables, Jesus shows the wisdom of investing. We are called to honor God with our wealth. But the truth that's being taught here is this: Do not give out of your surplus. We are not giving God a “tip.” Give sacrificially and joyously.

*Jesus sees how He can use our giving.* The so-called “prosperity gospel,” or “health and wealth gospel,” is nowhere taught in this sacred book. What is taught is that when we give generously, our Lord will meet our needs and He will use what is given to advance the cause of His glory and grace in this world. But make no mistake, what we give sacrificially, he really can multiply. Think for a moment. This woman has no idea that Jesus is watching and no idea that he was affirming her love for him and her gift.

I sometimes like to imagine that perhaps this woman got to read Mark’s gospel. Did she read it and think, *I recognize that story?* I don't know. But I do know that for over 2000 years, people have been reading her story and preaching sermons on it. It is not possible to calculate the amount of money God has raised to finance the spread of his kingdom from her godly example. Her offering has been multiplied a significant number of times.

My father-in-law was a minister for 40 years and before that a missionary in the interior of Brazil. He tells the story of a missionary receiving a letter from a Sunday school teacher. The letter contained an offering of \$0.28. The teacher wrote that this money came from her

students—three little girls. And the reason the offering was so small was that she challenged the girls to give out of their own money and not from their parents.

Well, the missionary was a sensitive man. He prayed and asked the Lord how he might best use this \$0.28. He takes these few small coins and purchases a small Portuguese New Testament. And then puts this New Testament into the hands of the first stranger he sees. And he tells the stranger, “If you read this, it will show you the way God forgives us through Jesus.”

The missionary continues on to preach in other villages. Days later, when he finally arrives home, his wife meets him at the door and says, “There's a man camping on our property. He won't leave until he sees you.” And sure enough, it is the stranger to whom he gave the New Testament.

And the stranger says, “I have read your New Testament. I have believed on Christ for salvation. I am his and he is mine. Please come to my village and preach the gospel.” Now this village was closed to outsiders and no missionary was invited in. But the stranger was a man of influence. So, the missionary is invited in, and he preaches the gospel, and many people are converted. And within a matter of months, there is a new Christian church.

It cost three little girls \$0.28. God values your giving. God uses your giving. And if you are wealthy, don't give out of your abundance. Give sacrificially. And if you are in poverty, give to the Lord with a joyous heart. That's what the story is teaching.

But, you know, there is one more truth here, and it is this. Yes, the Macedonian church is a giving church. Yes, this poor widow is a giving widow, both giving out of extreme poverty. But there was no person to ever live in more extreme poverty than Jesus himself. The very one who is sitting and watching will in a few days, be outside that very same city. And He'll be on a cross.

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake, he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9.)

Interestingly, in 2 Corinthians 8-9, all the verses, *all the verses*, are about giving sacrificially and joyously. These are *the* New Testament passages on giving. And embedded in this text on giving is this verse of profound theology. “You know, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, though he was rich,” rich in heavenly glory, rich as the High King of Heaven, receiving the worship of angels. Rich in his greatness. He became poor. He came into our world, a human, who was put to rest his first night in a feeding trough. And the ultimate condescension, the ultimate humiliation, the ultimate expression of poverty is when he takes our sin upon himself and he goes to the cross to make us rich in grace, to make us rich in forgiveness.

He who was rich, yet for your sake, became poor so that you, through his poverty, might become rich. When we think about giving, the one who gave sacrificially was Jesus, and the one

who gave joyously was Jesus. “Who for the joy set before him, endured the cross and despised that shame.” And what was the joy set before him? The getting of us for himself through grace.

Let me conclude with these three quick points, that I’ve woven into my text,

- if necessary, repent of your sin of robbing God
- always keep the example of Jesus in mine
- start giving immediately—don’t postpone obedience / give sacrificially and joyously

Jason Meyers tells this story; “I remember that my daughter once taught me this lesson in a surprising way. She was going to put money in the offering plate. She decided to put in all of the money from her little purse. I told her, ‘Sweetheart, you do not have to put all of it in the offering plate. You can keep some of it back for yourself.’ I will never forget her response: ‘I don’t need money. I have a daddy.’ I found myself greatly rebuked. I want to be rich in faith in the same way. The fact that we have a Father should change the way we think about our need for money.”

*Father, Give us hearts that love to worship and praise you. And hearts who will withhold nothing from you. May we give generously, sacrificially, and joyously. May our giving be our testimony that we belong to you. And may we be generous not for the enriching of the church, but for the work of God. Make us wise stewards in how we use the Lord's people's money. Make us a generous people. Amen.*

Mitchell Gregory

Edited by CKG