

Encounters with Christ

Week 8 — **Widow's offering** — Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:1-4

Prepare...

As you begin, take a moment to pray and focus on the Lord as you come into his presence and study his word.

Let me hear of your unfailing love each morning, for I am trusting you. Show me where to walk, for I give myself to you. Psalm 143:8

Begin... by familiarizing yourself with the text. Read the passage two times.

Answer the questions: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?

Record in detail what you learn about the widow.

Record any other questions or thoughts you have about the text. Are there parts you don't understand? What spoke to you the most?

Memory Verse for the Week...

"But just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you also excel in this grace of giving."
2 Corinthians 8:7

God cares about widows

Deuteronomy 14

²⁸At the end of every three years, bring all the tithes of that year's produce and store it in your towns, ²⁹so that the Levites and the aliens, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns may come and eat and be satisfied, and so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.

Ezekiel 22:21-24

²¹You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. ²²You shall not abuse any widow or orphan. ²³If you do abuse them, when they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry; ²⁴my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children orphans.

Isaiah 10:1-2

¹Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, ²to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people, making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless.

The religious leaders knew better...

The following Rabbinic story may well have been known to the religious leaders: "Once a woman brought a handful of fine flour, and the priest despised her, saying 'see what she offers! What is there to offer up?' It was shown to him in a dream: 'Do not despise her! It is regarded as if she had sacrificed her own life.'"

The widow of Mark 12 contributes two *lepta*, which is just enough to buy a small amount of flour.

Widows in Jesus day

In first century Palestine, women were totally dependent on their male relatives for their livelihood. To be widowed meant not only losing someone you may have loved, but it also meant losing the one on whom you were totally dependent. Widows were forced to live off of the good graces of other male relatives and anyone in the community who might provide a meal or a little money.

Let's take a closer look...

1. Jesus was in Jerusalem, in the Temple. The triumphal entry had taken place. Soon he will face crucifixion. One after the other, religious leaders confronted him (Read Mark 11:27-12:27). They questioned his authority, his politics, his theology. What does Jesus have to say about these religious leaders in Mark 12:38-40?

2. The care of widow's and orphans is often mentioned in the Old Testament. God was serious about their care and welfare. Read "Caring for widows" in the sidebar. But what was really happening?

3. This widow had nothing extra; no surplus. Unlike the wealthy, whose contributions would not cause them any hardship or discomfort, her gift took food right out of her mouth. She may even have been one of the widows who were being exploited. Yet, she made a decision to put her last two coins in the offering. Why do you think she did this?

4. Suppose the religious leaders were also observing people dropping their money in the collection box. What might they have been thinking about the contributions of the rich men? Of the widow?

5. By the world's standards, this woman gave very little in the way of financial contributions. But according to Jesus she gave "more" than all the rest. What do you think he means by this?

6. Read the account of Ananias and Saphira in Acts 5:1-7. Why were they struck down?

7. What did God tell Samuel when he chose David as King? (1 Samuel 16: 7.)

8. There are three types of financial giving listed below. How would you describe each of them?

Surplus giving _____

Sacrificial giving _____

Faith-filled giving _____

9. Christians are not under any *obligation* to contribute financially to the needs of the church. Rather, we are *compelled* by the love of God to give freely, as he freely gave himself for us. On this basis, we are encouraged to give *generously* and *willingly*, in proportion to the blessings that we have

received. Note what the following verses have to say about giving:

2 Corinthians 8:1-5 _____

2 Corinthians 9:6-15 _____

10. What should our attitude be towards giving?

11. This lesson on financial giving can also apply to other areas of our lives—the giving of our time—in prayer, Bible study, service to others. The giving of our talents, relationships, resources, possessions, love, compassion, you name it. Prayerfully consider in what areas of your life God might be speaking to you about your “giving habits?”

12. Sometimes we may feel like our “two small coins” don’t amount to much in the church—they can’t really make a difference next to the “big contributions” of others. Not true! At least not in God’s economy! Let’s recap. What would you say is the reason that both Mark and Luke included the incident of the widow’s offering in their accounts?

13. Look back at your responses on page one. Are there questions you still have that are unanswered?

Something to think about... As this poor, seemingly insignificant widow gave her offering, certainly she did not realize that her simple act served as an object lesson for Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God. Nor could she have known that nearly 2,000 years later people would be reading about her act and learning from her example of giving. *Jesus notices everything we do.* Even the seemingly small things that we do for him. These small things—offering a kind word, helping out behind the scenes, etc.—might be serving as an object lesson for others; as an example. How should this affect the way in which we live out our Christian lives in front of others?

Yikes!

“Serving and giving are two verbs that describe the essence of the Christian life. Yikes. I wish this weren’t true because I’m in trouble. Serving is something I have expected others to do for me, and giving is something I often put off until I have more. When I have enough to spare, I will be more than happy to be a generous person. You will never have seen such a generous person. In fact, I will break the record on generosity, as long as I have enough left over for my needs—just you wait and see....

I’m just being honest. This idea of characterizing my life by giving and serving is hard. It’s not an easy thing to serve and give when you are thinking about yourself all the time.

I know I need to change the subject of my thinking, and I need to get into the habit of serving and giving even when I don’t think I have anything to give. A widow once brought a paltry little offering to the temple, but in Jesus’ economy, she out gave the wealthy, because she gave all she had.

Lord, make the subject of my thinking someone other than me for a change. Make me aware of others. Help me to think about those around me before I think of myself. And help me to learn to give, not like the philanthropists whose wealth I so often envy, but like the poor widow, who according to you, new the true measure of giving.”

<http://jesuschristblog.blog.com/2006/10/>

Isn’t it strange...

...how a 20 dollar bill seems like such a large amount when you donate it to church, but such a small amount when you go shopping?

...how 2 hours seem so long when you’re at church, and so short when you’re watching a good movie?

...how difficult and boring it is to read one chapter of the Bible, but how easy it is to read 100 pages of a popular novel?

...how everyone wants front-row-tickets to concerts or games, but they do whatever is possible to sit at the last row in church?

...how we need to know about an event for church 2-3 weeks before the day so we can include it in our agenda, but we can adjust it for other events at the last minute?