

*For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on. Mark 12: 44*

Today is Ascension Sunday. Today is the 7th Sunday of Easter-tide. During the days that followed Jesus' resurrection, we reflect again upon what Jesus did for all humanity, including us – you and me – that brought Easter and what followed into being.

This morning I want to talk with you about what is probably one of the least favourite topics that many people want to hear a sermon about. I am not going to centre in on financial gifts in the offering but they certainly are to be considered. Jesus did not shy away from this subject. Over the years, I have heard people say that they never heard a sermon on the subject; the minister never talked about it or that the minister talked too much about the need for money. This morning I want to try and keep it simple and think about the offering as a part of our worship.

The Old Testament encourages us to honour God by bringing the first fruits of our labours to him as an act of worship [Proverbs 3:9]. *Honour the Lord with your substance and with the first fruits of all your produce. (labours).*

In the New Testament, we find Jesus honouring a person who worshipped God by bringing her generous gift to the temple. He did not honour the quantity of her gift but the quality. Jesus sat across from the place where the people were making their gifts and he watched the people making their contributions. The only person Jesus honoured on this occasion was a very poor widow who demonstrated a good spirit in her giving. Jesus continues to honour those who give. The basis of this honour is not the size of the gift but the spirit of the gift.

Jesus wants to honour our giving. Many of you will rightly want to know how does he do this. This morning I want to consider six ways Jesus honours our gifts and our giving.

#### 1: JESUS HONOURS AN INTEREST IN THE OFFERTORY

Interest in the treasury represents an interest in the Lord himself. The widow did not go to the temple to pay a bill, but to honour God. All through the Bible people have expressed an interest in God through their giving. Cain and Abel made an offering to God. In the tabernacle, the temple and the synagogue, God was worshipped with and by intentional offerings.

#### 2: INTEREST IN THE OFFERING REPRESENTS OUR CONCERN FOR THE LORD'S WORK

The widow went to the temple. We do not know how often she went, perhaps periodically or maybe regularly, but when she did, she gave a gift. When she gave her gift, she knew that it was for the Lord's personal use, for the upkeep of the temple and for the provision of the sacrifices for the altar. One reason for an interest in the offering is for the advancement and continuation of the Lord's work. The Lord honours an interest in the offering, therefore we must periodically ask ourselves, ***how interested am I in the offering?*** Our record of giving usually discloses our interest. A few years ago, I shared some ministry events with a pastor from Ohio. One of his remarks has never left me. He said to the group that was gathered, if you want to prove to yourself in your private place how important the work of your offering is, read your month-end bank statement.

#### 3: JESUS HONOURS A PROPER MOTIVE TOWARD THE OFFERING

Jesus examines the motives of the giver. Jesus had a good position to observe the givers. He saw those who wanted to be seen giving their gifts. These people probably hit the trumpets so that others would know that a large contribution had just been made. Jesus saw those who gave but more than merely observing WHO gave, He saw WHY they gave. The Gospel record here is that a poor widow made a small but acceptable gift. Its acceptance was not based on its size but the spirit in which she presented her gift. She gave because she wanted to honour the Lord, not to be seen or heard by anyone else. Jesus continues to examine our motives for giving. He sees those who give out of guilt, self-

righteousness, or ostentation. He is not pleased in all he sees. The proper motive is to give out of love for the Lord. Some of you will remember one of the key reasons for the break up of the Church that brought the Reformation into being was over the subject of indulgences. Indulgences were a way of the church raising money at the same time satisfying the giver they were guaranteed a safe passage on their journey towards heaven upon their death.

#### 4: GIVING FROM THE PROPER MOTIVE SATISFIES THE GIVER

People who give for any other reason other than selflessness can never be satisfied. Those who think they can buy God never feel they have quite paid their bills. Those who parade their giving must work harder to have a bigger show next time. Jesus honours unselfish giving. The rich and the poor can give honestly and honourably. We are to remember that it is not the size of gift but the spirit of the gift. And in the Lord's sight, the old expression of earthly value might be said to still be true *that the pennies and the nickels all add up to make the dollars*. The smallest possible gift when given with genuine love is as important to the Lord as the biggest cheque that might ever be written.

#### 5: JESUS HONOURS A SACRIFICE FOR THE LORD'S TREASURY

Sacrificial giving originates with a great desire to give. No one prompted the lady in this story to put her mite in the plate. The thought of giving began in her heart. She had a giving spirit before she gave the gift. If you study sacrifice, you will learn that one who sacrifices has a genuine desire to help others. We need only look at the example of Jesus. He sacrificed his glory in heaven. Why? He had a deep desire to help others – to help you and me.

#### 6: SACRIFICIAL GIVING RESULTS IN PERSONAL RELINQUISHMENT

The woman gave to the Lord's treasury – the offering. Her giving was truly a costly gift, *...she out of her poverty has put in everything she had ...* And as if to emphasize the magnitude, remembering Mark was a writer who only used enough words to tell the story, continues, *...she gave everything she had to live on*. Sacrificial giving results in relinquishment. It means a costly sacrifice. If you are a tither and you can observe luxuries around you, then you can be assured that God knows if you are or are not an honourable giver. In other words, what is the cost to you when you give the gift. These are not my words, the teaching of Scripture uses words such as, *tithe, generous, thankful, and joyful*. The questions you and you alone must answer is between you and God: *What is the spirit with which this gift is given? How does giving this gift make ME feel? Is this the best gift I can give? Does this gift represent the degree of love that I have because my sins have been forgiven? Does this gift represent my happiness knowing that I have been promised the gift of eternal life?* I have not prepared this message to raise or meet a budget, increase the missions, or increase the finances of the congregation. I pray you will receive my message as Scriptural encouragement to help you develop and become honourable givers to God's ministry and His treasury. I invite you today to resolve in your heart and mind that you, as a Christian will want to follow the example of the widow in the Gospel lesson. You may begin by taking an interest in the treasury – the offering. Develop a right spirit in each gift you give. Make the spirit of sacrifice in the giving of the gift. Remember that God wants all of us to be honourable givers, and we must remember also that God only wants our gifts if we are cheerful givers.

Amen.