

The Story of Two Widows

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on November 10, 1991, the 25th Sunday after Pentecost (Stewardship Sunday) at Oxford Area High School. Scripture Lessons: 1 Kings 17:8-16, Psalm 146, Hebrews 9:24-28, Mark 12:38-44.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

1. "Beware!" The word warns us of danger, perhaps of being hurt or maybe even killed. Sometimes my mother would lean forward and place her finger in my face when I was a child and say, "Watch out!". "Beware!" The very warning frightened me. "Beware of strangers!" "Beware of people who want to give you candy or invite you to get into their car." "Beware of dogs that bite!" "Beware of who you run around with!" The world was filled with dangers that I had to beware of.

2. I can see Jesus, in our Scripture lesson, leaning forward and placing his finger in the faces of his disciples and saying, "Beware!" "Beware of the scribes." Beware of religious phonies! They're dangerous. They can hurt you. The scribes thought of themselves as the most spiritual people in all Israel. They were religious professionals. But Jesus warns his listeners to beware of them because...

- they're vain...
- they like to be flattered...
- they love the limelight...
- and they're greedy and hypocritical.

"They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers."

Beware of them. "They'll receive the greater judgment", Jesus said.

They'll receive greater judgment than those who've never heard of Jesus.

They'll receive greater judgment than those who're guilty of far more scandalous sins.

3. Then Jesus contrasted the religious phonies with the real thing. *... a woman contrasts those who are out to get all the coin with one who wants to give all that coin.*

4. Jesus was sitting in the Court of Women in the Temple in Jerusalem. In that court were 13 collection boxes shaped like trumpets into which people could place their free will offerings. "People would throw their contributions in with force in order to make a loud noise and attract the attention of those around them. The larger the coin, the bigger and better the sound (Ogilvie)."

5. Jesus carefully watched what everyone was giving. For Jesus, giving wasn't a private matter. He didn't glance away in embarrassment as we do when we know we're prying into someone's personal business. Rather, Jesus watched people as they put their money in the treasury. He saw that many put in large gifts of money. He noticed the poor widow when she dropped in her last two coins. Jesus has a way of poking his nose into our most private thoughts.

The Risen Christ notices also what we give. He notices what we keep and how we spend that money. He notices not just the big pledges and the big checks. He notices the sacrificial giving of people living on fixed incomes. He notices the sacrificial giving of those who are out of work and whose jobs and businesses are in trouble. *The giving which cannot be measured*

6. Jesus watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. Then a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Jesus called his disciples and said to them,

“Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all the rest. 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.”

Let's take a closer look at what Jesus noticed.

7, First, Jesus noticed that most people gave out of their abundance. They gave on the basis of what they had left over after they'd paid all their bills. How do you give? How will you pledge? Many people pay all their bills first and then try to decide how much to contribute to the church with what they have left over. They first pay their taxes, mortgage, groceries, utilities, clothing, and transportation costs. They contribute out of their abundance.

How we give indicates the priority that Christ has in our lives. If we base our pledge on what we have left over after all our other bills are paid it means that the work of Christ is pretty low on your list of priorities. Christ wants us to put him first in our lives because he knows that's the only way to live an abundant life. Whenever I get paid, the first thing I do is write a check out to this church. The first check, after my deposit, goes to the work of the church here and around the world. I do that as an act of faith. I do it as an act of defiance against the power that money has on me. I don't want to give, simply out of my abundance.

Before you fill out your pledge card this week, consider estimating your total yearly income. Recognize that all your money belongs to God. Consider that God has made you a steward of this money. God wants to be first in our lives. We need God to be first and foremost in our lives.

8. Jesus noticed not only the many people who gave out of their abundance, he noticed, second, a poor widow who put two thin copper coins in the treasury. "Do you see that woman?" Jesus said. Let me tell you about her - she put in all she had to live on. Hers is the greater gift."

9. Jesus relates this, for one thing, to encourage you who don't have much. I know that some of you are affected by the Luken's strike. Many are affected by the recession. Your business is hurting. People are being laid off. You feel badly that you can't give more. The Risen Christ wants you to know that God values your sacrificial giving no matter how small your contribution may be. Though the world values the big giver, and though the church needs the large contributions of the more wealthy, the Lord values more highly those poor people who give sacrificially out of their poverty.

Eugene Dorsey was the chief executive officer of the Gannett Foundation. Interviewed several years ago in USA Today, he quoted a study which showed that people who make less than \$5,000 contributed the most to charity.

10. Jesus wants us to know about this poor widow, not only to encourage us in our giving, but, for another thing, to commend her faith. Her total giving presupposed her total trust in the Lord. What she did was risky. She shows us that it's possible to be set free from the fear of losing everything.

Al Winn asked, "If we actually give God the priority, take God's share off the top, then we begin to live adventurously. Most of us can't see... how we're going to live off 100 percent of our income. If you give five percent away, can

you really make it on 95 percent? If you give 15 percent away, can you really make it on 85 percent? That's to begin to live on trust, and it brings a great deal of thrill and excitement into life."

17. Still another thing Jesus wants us to realize is that one person totally dedicated to God, like this poor widow, can accomplish far more for God's kingdom than many people who simply give out of their abundance.

The early church, poor as it was, conquered the Roman Empire. The church grew because men and women believed that the story of Jesus Christ was the power of God unto salvation for all who believed. Their primary purpose in life was to glorify God and enjoy God forever. Their primary motive was to proclaim the coming Kingdom of God and to call men and women to turn to Christ and trust in him. Just a few people, totally dedicated to that purpose will accomplish far more than those for whom Christ and the Gospel are peripheral.

The world has yet to see what a few people, totally dedicated to the Kingdom of God can do. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we all totally dedicated ourselves to the work of the Kingdom. Our lives would have to be reorganized. Our priorities would have to be turned upside down. But what a difference just a few people totally dedicated to Christ can make.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus Christ, you were rich, yet for our sake you became poor, so that through your poverty we might become rich. Accept the pledges that we make this week to the work of this particular church as a token of our gratitude for all you've done for us. Give us grace, first, to totally rededicate our lives, our families, and all that we have to you. Give us grace to give to you, not out of our abundance, but out of our poverty and to put you first and foremost in our lives. Encourage us when we have comparatively little to give you. Set us free from the fear of losing everything in the knowledge and trust that we belong to you and nothing can ever separate us from your love. Amen.

Andra

World - Social emini
Yugoslavia
Zaire
South Africa
Iraq
Middle East

Nation -

Community
- hoken
- school
5
- Business
2 PM.

Church - Bldg Comm
Contractor / architect
New members - sponsors
Elders / Deacons
St. High School / Donor
Holters anniversary
Andy - architect