

First Serve

Studies in the Gospel of Mark

Text

Mark 12:41-44

Topic

Jesus asks His disciples to take special notice of the poor widow as she puts her last two mites in the offering

Title

"A Mite-y Heart"

Introduction

It's arguably not their best film, but my personal favorite from Pixar is *Monsters Inc.* There's just something about that whole monster-in-the-closet thing that resonates with my inner child.

Mike and Sully are great, but you gotta love Roz. She is a slug-like monster in the movie who is the administrator for Scare Floor F.

Or so you're made to believe. At the end of the film, it turns out that Roz is an agent of the Child Detection Agency (the CDA). She reveals that she was undercover for two and a half years at Monsters, Inc., and that Mike and Sully nearly ruined it all when Boo came through the door into the monster world.

All of her lines of dialog are classic, but the most infamous has to be when Roz says to Mike, *"I'm watching you, Wazowski. Always watching."*

I thought of that scene in particular because, in our Bible verses, we find Jesus **watching** as the worshippers in the Temple make their offerings. It's a reminder that Jesus is always watching us, too.

If we're not careful, we can think of Jesus' watching us as if it were Roz-like and creepy. It isn't; it's a blessing, a privilege, and something to get excited about.

Jesus draws our attention to one poor widow, who puts into the offering everything she has. In this short account, and in His brief commentary, Jesus will reveal what He watches to *see* and to *say* about our lives as His followers.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Jesus Watches To See What Your Treasure Is, and #2 Jesus Watches To Say Where Your Treasure Will Be.

#1 Jesus Watches To See What Your Treasure Is

(v41-42)

People-watching is something we all engage in from time-to-time. Our favorite place to do it is at Disneyland. There's that bench along Main Street, towards the upper end, recessed from the street, that provides the absolute best vantage point to people-watch.

Jesus has been teaching in the Temple. It's Passover week, probably Wednesday, and just days before the Last Supper and the Crucifixion. The Lord takes a break... *To watch people make their offerings.*

That fact alone is somewhat startling. Time is short, and therefore every moment is precious. **Yet Jesus determines that the best use of His time is to watch worshippers.**

Whether He knew it by omniscience or by a Word of Knowledge given to Him by the Holy Spirit, the Lord was watching for one particular worshipper: A widow, who would give her entire livelihood.

Mar 12:41 Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many who were rich put in much.

Jesus had been teaching in what was called the Court of the Gentiles. It was so-called because non-Jews were allowed to gather there. God intended the area to be a place of what we would call evangelism. Gentiles who were seeking God could meet Him there.

The Jews, in general, despised Gentiles. Think Jonah and you'll get the idea. They did not care to see them converted to Judaism.

They had turned the Court of the Gentiles into a marketplace, where they sold pre-approved sacrificial animals, and where they exchanged foreign currency into the currency necessary to make your monetary offering in the Temple.

The activities made it unwelcome to Gentiles, and impossible for them to learn about God.

That is why Jesus overturned the tables and drove-out the merchandisers. He sought to restore the Court of the Gentiles to its original purpose.

The action in our verses takes place in the next courtyard, The Court of the Women. It was so-called because Jewish women could go there, but no further.

In this court was the treasury, where free-will offerings could be made.

Today the church has a variety of means to receive offerings. Some fellowships restrict giving to the Agape Box (or the Offering Box). Others, like us, utilize the box but also receive an offering as an act of worship during the service.

There are a number of electronic or on-line options for your giving:

- You can have your bank send a check.
- You can make your offering via PayPal.
- Some churches have installed ATM's in their lobby, to encourage you to give.

In the first century Temple, in the treasury, there were thirteen receptacles for receiving contributions. They were chests, but were called Shôphâr because of their trumpet-like shape. Each bore an inscription indicating what the money would be used for. On six of them was the inscription, "Freewill-offerings."

The shape and the size and the material used for the opening necessitated putting in just a few coins at a time. Have you used those coin-counting machines? You can only feed so many coins at once; and they make a lot of noise as you do.

At Christmastime we watch the version of Scrooge that stars Mr. Magoo as Ebenezer Scrooge. Famously greedy, at one point he sings a song, saying, "Jingle, jangle, coins when they jingle make such a lovely sound."

If you were paying attention, you could make a pretty good guess as to what type of coins, and how much money, a worshipper put in the Shôphâr. Thus the Lord noted that "many who were rich put in much."

We almost instinctively want to criticize the rich for not putting in more. There is no sense of that; not here, anyway. It's simply an observation. Nothing is said about these rich worshippers making a big show about their offering. It would seem that they were sincere in their desire to support the work of the Temple.

They weren't giving sacrificially, but they were contributing.

We're going to see that these verses are not about money; not really. But since they describe giving, I think a word or two about it is appropriate.

Don't worry; your wallet is safe. We are not going to take a second offering.

Giving ought to be a joyful, freely chosen activity, whose amount and regularity is determined between you and the Lord.

Don't get me wrong. We don't take giving lightly. Giving is an important spiritual discipline and an act of worship. In one of His talks, Jesus said "**when** you give," not "**if** you give." And He spoke of it as having similar priority as praying and fasting - so it is definitely something important and spiritual.

People have financial advisers. A good one will review your portfolio, and your investments, then suggest strategies for maximizing your money.

The Lord is a great financial adviser. It's a good idea to ask the Lord if your current strategy for giving is furthering God's Kingdom. One way you'll know you're giving is furthering the Kingdom is if it is sacrificial; because *sacrifice* is another principle of New Testament giving.

To summarize: Your giving should be joyful, freely chosen, regular, and in an amount determined between you and the Lord that requires some level of sacrifice.

Mar 12:42 Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans.

I'm terrible at converting foreign currency. I simply cannot do the math in my head.

The "mite" was a Greek copper coin, the smallest coin in use. Mark at once related it to the coinage with which his Roman readers were familiar. The quadrans, the smallest Roman coin in use, was one-fourth of the copper coins. Her gift therefore had the value of one-sixty-fourth of a common laborer's daily wage.

Please check my math, but I think that's about \$1.00 considering the current minimum wage in California.

This poor widow, at that precise moment, was what Jesus came to see. It's what He was watching to see. She was the greatest sight in the Temple that day.

Let's put that into perspective. In just two verses, at the beginning of chapter thirteen, we will read,

Mar 13:1 Then as He went out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, "Teacher, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!"

The disciples of Jesus were mostly simple, rural Galileans. Mainly fishermen. They weren't big-city boys. Jerusalem was a place of wonder for them, and especially the Temple.

The first century Temple is sometimes called Herod's Temple. King Solomon had built the first Temple, which was destroyed when Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians in 586BC. The second Temple was built by the Jews after they returned from their seventy-year exile. The person chiefly responsible for its construction was Zerubbabel. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah describe the building of Zerubbabel's Temple.

Herod the Great undertook the construction of a magnificent Temple on the same site, partly to win favor from the Jews and partly to further his already well-deserved reputation as the genius builder of outstanding public and private buildings.

It was still considered the second Temple, not a third, because it was a build-out.

I discovered something interesting, that I did not know. Construction was started in 20BC, but was not completed until 64AD. The work went on for 60 years after Herod died in about 4AD.

The Temple was still under construction when we read the New Testament Gospels.

I think the ongoing construction added to the disciples' excitement. Every year, when they pilgrimaged to Jerusalem for one of the three major feasts, the Temple would be further along, having some new feature they could marvel at.

It's like your anticipation watching them build the new Star Wars Land at Disneyland.

The Temple area measured about thirty-five acres, crowning the highest point in the city of Jerusalem.

They employed 10,000 skilled laborers and, according to the historian Josephus, since the laity could not enter certain parts of the building, 1000 Levites were specially trained as builders and masons. They carried out their work so efficiently and carefully that at no time was there any interruption in the sacrifices and other services.

Stones averaged 10 tons, but some weighed up to 400 tons. The walls were about the height of a twenty story building.

Although the entire structure was called the Temple, the true Temple was the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. A building of shining white marble and gold, with bronze entrance doors, it was said that you could not look at the Temple in daylight as it would blind you.

Listen to this description of the activity in the Temple:

On their arrival pilgrims could hear the sounds of the Levites who sang and played musical instruments at the entrance. The pilgrims would circle around the Temple seven times and then watch the various rituals, sit under the columned porticos that surrounded the plaza and listen or talk to the rabbis.

This wasn't the first time the disciples had seen the Temple, but every time they did, it wowed them.

In the midst of all that opulence and activity, the most noteworthy thing, the most beautiful, the thing dearest to Jesus, was the offering of this poor widow. She and her two measly mites were greater to Jesus than the structure and its activities. All of Heaven paused as she dropped her two mites, while all on earth overlooked her.

We like to see magnificent sites. We travel great distances, at much expense, to see them. Some are genuinely breathtaking.

You know what takes away God's breath? (If I might use that expression).

You do. I do.

Or, at least, we can. We take God's breath away when He is our greatest treasure, and when He sees that expressed in and through our lives.

We're going to read, in verse forty-four, that this poor widow gave everything she had, her entire livelihood, holding nothing back. It was a physical representation of the spiritual reality that her life was a living sacrifice, offered totally to God.

Have you heard the story of the pig and the chicken? A pig and a chicken lived on a farm. The farmer was very good to them and they both wanted to do something good for him.

One day the chicken approached the pig and said, "I have a great idea for something we can do for the farmer! Would you like to help?"

The pig, quite intrigued by this, said, "Of course! What is it that you propose?"

The chicken knew how much the farmer enjoyed a good healthy breakfast. He also knew how little time the farmer had to make a good breakfast. "I think the farmer would be very happy if we made him breakfast."

"I'd be happy to help you make breakfast for the farmer! What do you suggest we make?"

The chicken answered, "The farmer loves bacon and eggs!"

The pig, very mindful of what this implied, said, "That's fine, but while you're making a contribution, ***I'm making a total commitment!***"

While others in the Temple made their contributions, the poor widow made her total commitment.

The apostle Paul told us to offer ourselves as living sacrifices. It must therefore be possible, along our way home, to do it.

Everyday I have opportunities to bear fruit by abiding in Jesus. As I do, I'm totally committed to Him, and my life is being offered as a living sacrifice. I simply yield to Him, and I am then enabled by Him to do His will.

Ah, but the world and the devil appeal to my flesh, and I don't always bring forth fruit. I sometimes yield to the flesh, not the Spirit.

No worries; I can repent, and Jesus gives me endless second chances from His boundless grace.

(BTW: If you've never read it, or if it's been a while since you have, make it a point to read *Why Grace Changes Everything*, by Pastor Chuck Smith).

Through all my ups and (mostly) downs, He is watching me. Not to clobber me, but to rejoice over me, as moment-by-moment and day-by-day He molds and shapes me into His own image.

The earth... Our solar system... Our galaxy... The universe... Only exist as an environment in which the Lord can watch me... Watch you... And take delight.

#2 Jesus Watches To Say What Your Treasure Will Be

(v43-44)

I said earlier that this account wasn't about the money. If it were, then what Jesus said next would make no sense. He's going to insist that the two mites were greater in value than all the other contributions combined.

Mar 12:43 So He called His disciples to Himself and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury;

We can't immediately criticize the boys for not being with Jesus. He may have given them assignments. We said, in a previous study, that Jesus, in addition to overturning tables, prohibited foot traffic in the Court of the Gentiles, and that His disciples may have been stationed at entrances as bouncers.

Nevertheless I think we can say that it is always good to be with Jesus, and to see what He sees, and to see it from His perspective. Jesus invited the twelve to look beneath the surface, to see the spiritual, in the widow's actions.

Two mites was not "more." It was far less. This must be some heavenly math.

Thanks to heavenly math, any one of us can out-give the richest man in the world. The amount you give, in one sense, is irrelevant. What is relevant is the condition of your heart, and it's motives for giving.

Think of it this way: If you made a contribution, today, of \$1.00, it can be more valuable to God than all of the other contributions combined. And, I suppose, that in some spiritual sense, that can be true for each one of us, regardless the amount we contributed.

Mar 12:44 for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood."

There is nothing wrong with giving out of your abundance. We get very excited about large offerings.

Over the years we've received a few. Let's face it, money allows us to do more ministry.

The Lord is simply pointing-out that God values the giver more than the gift. The amount you give is secondary to your motivation.

That's why Jesus could say that the poor widow "put in more."

This poor widow had no idea that Jesus was watching her. As far as we can tell, she never heard His commendation of her giving. She didn't know she was the basis of a powerful teaching, that has endured through the centuries.

This is one reason we downplay recognition for giving. I don't think plaques on furniture in the church, or bricks with your name on them, are things that really honor God.

Can you imagine Jesus commissioning a plaque that said, "This is the Poor Widow's Shôphār?"

There's another sense of the phrase, "she put in more." We are told, in several places in the Bible, that we have the opportunity, while on the earth, to store up treasure, or rewards, in Heaven.

While the widow put her coins in the Shôphār, they were being put in her heavenly account as well, at a much greater valuation.

The widow's two mites may convert to a quadrans on the earth, but in Heaven they translate into a fortune, where there is no chance of deterioration or theft.

Many of you probably lost money in your investments this week due to the British deciding to leave the European Union. They're calling it Brexit. USA Today ran an article titled, *Dow Slammed Again on 'Brexit Blues,' Drops 260 Points*.

In Heaven, your investments can only gain.

What if I told you that some fund would only gain, and that it would gain astronomically? You'd put more in, wouldn't you?

"Put in more" is a great slogan for encouraging spiritual investing.

This widow put in her entire livelihood. But are we to suppose that she *always* gave every cent to the Lord's treasury?

I'm gonna go on record and say, "No," because, at some point, she needed to eat.

I'm not trying to take anything away from her commitment; it was extraordinary. I simply do not want us burdened thinking that we must take vows of poverty.

Jesus once told a rich young ruler to sell everything, give to the poor, and follow Him. He didn't tell everyone to do that.

Christianity does not demand we divest of everything we own and live day-by-day.

Somewhere between selling everything, and giving out of our abundance, is where we live, and where we give. I cannot set the bar for your lifestyle. We read in Romans 14:4, "Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall..."

While your giving is always to be sacrificial, there will be times in your Christian walk that you will have the opportunity to give above and beyond. To take a risk. To do something God is leading you to do, even though it makes no financial or logical sense.

You might give your grocery money for the week to someone who needs it... Or your house payment... Or your gas money.

There are thousands of scenarios where an investment opportunity will present itself; a heavenly investment opportunity.

Jesus is watching you to see where your treasure will be. He wants to heap reward upon reward upon treasure in Heaven, reserved for you.

God is not stingy. If anything, He is extravagant. Read the description of the city we are going to live in, the New Jerusalem. You can find it in the last two chapters of the last book of the Bible, The Revelation of Jesus Christ.

It is constructed from precious metals and gemstones. It features, for example, streets of transparent gold, and twelve humongous gates, each made from a single pearl.

God is a giver. "For God so loved the world that He **gave** His only begotten son..."

In his final address to the Ephesian elders, the apostle Paul reminds them one more time of his own example when he had been with them. Then Paul told them to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

These words are not contained anywhere else in the Bible. Apparently they were part of the oral tradition handed down from those who had been with Jesus during His earthly ministry. As such, this saying must have been a common one in Jesus' ministry.

By our fallen nature, we are takers, not givers. But by God's sanctifying grace, He wants us all to grow to be givers. As we do, not only will others be blessed, but so will we.

Are you a giver? Could you be described as generous? Jesus was and is. To be a Christian is to be like-Christ. If He is generous, so must we be.

I'll close with this story from the devotional, *Our Daily Bread*:

Years ago, a lady was filling a box for missionaries in India. A child came to her door to give her a penny, all that the child had, to be used for the Lord. With this coin, the missionary bought a tract and put it into the box. Eventually, this gospel leaflet came into the hands of a Burmese chief, and God used it to bring him to salvation. The chief told the story of his conversion to his friends, and many of them believed in Christ and threw away their idols. They built a church there, sent out a missionary, and at least 1,500 natives were converted. All this, and probably more, resulted from a little girl's gift of one penny for Jesus (Our Daily Bread, 12/70).