



## “Changes the Way I Give”

**Idea:** When confronted with the glory and grace of Jesus it changes the way you give.

**Intro:** A first-century Jew walks alone on a hot afternoon, staff in hand. His shoulders are stooped, sandals covered with dirt, tunic soaked with sweat. But he doesn't stop to rest. He has pressing business in the city.

He veers off the road into a field, taking a shortcut. The owner of the land won't mind – travelers are permitted this courtesy. The field is uneven, so he thrusts his staff into the dirt to keep his balance.

*Think.* The staff strikes something hard.

He stops, wipes his brow, and pokes again.

*Think.* Something's under there, and it's not a rock.

The weary traveler tells himself that he can't afford to linger. But his curiosity won't let him go. He jabs at the ground, and something reflects a sliver of sunlight. He drops to his knees and starts digging.

A few minutes later, he's uncovered it – a case fringed in gold. By the looks of it, it's been there for decades. Heart racing, the man pries off the rusty lock and opens the lid.

Gold coins! Jewelry! Precious stones of every color! A treasure more valuable than anything he's ever imagined.

Hands shaking, the traveler inspects the coins, issued in Rome over seventy years ago. Some wealthy man must have buried the case and died suddenly, the secret of the treasure's location dying with him. There is no homestead nearby. Surely, the current landowner has no clue that the treasure is here.

The traveler closes the lid, buries the chest, and marks the spot. He turns around, heading home – only now he's not plodding. He's skipping like a little boy, with a giant grin on his face.

The traveler says to himself, "What an unbelievable discovery! I've got to have that treasure! But I can't take it – that would be stealing. Whoever owns the land owns what is in it. But how can I afford to buy the land? I'll sell my farm, crops, tools, and livestock. Yes, if I sell everything that should be enough.

From the moment he found the treasure, the traveler's life changes. The treasure captures his imagination, becomes the stuff of his dreams. It's his reference point, his new center of gravity. The traveler takes every new step with this treasure in mind. A radical paradigm shift takes place in his life.

This story Jesus captured in a single verse: *"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."* (Matt 13:44)

**Inquiry:** The parable of the hidden treasure is one of many references Jesus made to money and possessions. In fact, 15% of everything Christ said relates to this topic – more than His teachings on heaven and hell combined. Why?

Jesus spoke a lot about money because it says a lot about a you. It is a window to your heart. Therefore, we're concluding our series on stewardship by learning that when confronted with the glory and grace of Jesus it changes the way you give.

The story of our lives is told by how we live and what we do with what we have during our short time in this world. Stewardship, then, is something we must correctly understand and master in life. We have defined a steward as an estate manager. He or she is not the owner, but the one who manages the estate for the master. Therefore, a biblical understanding of stewardship recognizes that God is the master and we are His stewards.

If that is true, then we need to take seriously the responsibility and privilege we have been given to manage what the Lord has entrusted to us like our time, talents, and treasure. We've learned that when Jesus gets ahold of our hearts it changes the way we live and the way we serve. I think we can all agree that those two areas are surrendered easier than this third one...giving.

Perhaps that is why the Bible devotes twice as many verses to money (about 2,350) than to faith and prayer combined. And I'm sure that is why Jesus taught so extensively on it. Your stewardship over the money and possessions entrusted to you becomes the story of your life. Will the story your life tells describe a life lived for the money in your pocket and things that won't last or describe a life lived for a treasure that satisfies like gold never can?

We find in Mark 12 that the later type of life gets the attention of the Lord Jesus. Read Mark 12:41-44.

There is a fundamental connection between our spiritual lives and how we think about and handle money. We may try to divorce our faith and our finances, but God sees them as inseparable. When we, however, come face to face with the awesome glory and the amazing grace of Jesus, it changes our

perspective of money. We begin to see it not as something to live for but something to give away...to leverage for Kingdom purposes. When I live with palms up in changes the way I give in at least three ways.

### **1. I choose to give obediently.**

This poor widow gave all she had to the Lord, and He knew what she gave because He intently watches. She put two tiny copper coins in the temple-offering box. The penny was worth 1/64 of a denarius (a day's wage). Such a small gift, but the money was all she had. As Jesus watched her put the coins in the box, He called his disciples together to teach them a lesson. He didn't question the woman's gift like most would today. Instead, the Lord commended it, and He set her up as a model for His disciples to follow.

The widow gave obediently even though conventional wisdom would have told her to hang onto what she had. Conventional wisdom says, "God knows your heart, that you want to give. He also knows that you need money to buy food and pay your bills. He understands why you can't afford to give, so you should keep the money for yourself."

The problem with conventional wisdom is that it contradicts the Word of God. It doesn't take into consideration that God is owed first before anyone else. The Old Testament Law commanded God's people to give a tithe (a tenth) of everything from the land (Lev 27:30). In that agrarian society, everything was acquired from the land. The people were to give God not just a tenth of their income but also the first tenth. They were commanded to honor God with the firstfruits of their crops (Lev 19:23-25; Prov3:9). The giving of their firstfruits recognized that all good things came from the Lord.

Appl: I have heard many Christians argue against the concept of tithing, claiming it is an old covenant requirement.

What we find the Old Testament is that the Law required three different tithes. Two were perpetual tithes that supported the Levites and sacred festivals. The third tithe was for the poor and was received every third year. Therefore, the Jews were required to pay 23% of their income annually. They repaid the Owner of all things.

On top of that the Old Testament emphasized freewill offerings (Lev 22:18-23; Num 15:3; Deut 12:6, 17). These were voluntary contributions beyond the tithe requirements such as the gifts given to construct the tabernacle and rebuild the temple (Ex 36; Ezra 1:4).

We learn then that the tithe was never meant to be a ceiling for giving, only a floor. It was a beginning point for God's people in the Old Testament, and I believe it is equally true of those in the New Testament and beyond. Nowhere in the New Testament are we told that tithing has been superseded. Instead we see that Jesus affirmed it (Matt 23:23). Like many teachings of the Old Testament (murder and adultery), the teaching of the New Testament expanded how God's people should view giving. We learn from church history that all the prominent early church fathers taught it as a requirement for Christian living.

Therefore, the tithe is not the finish line of giving; it is the starting blocks. It is God's historical method to get people on the path of giving. Why did the poor widow give those two copper coins to the Lord when she couldn't afford to do so? The woman gave them because she couldn't afford not to give. Disobeying the Lord's command would put her in a much more dangerous position than not having any money. She

gave because she lived her life with palms up, and when you live that way, you give obediently.

## **2. I choose to give faithfully.**

In making much of this poor widow's gift, Jesus told His disciples that she gave everything she had to the Lord. What she did thrilled His heart because she did it in faith. That is exactly how we are supposed to live our lives. Whatever is not of faith is sin (Rom 14:23).

Mark doesn't tell us why the widow gave all she had to the Lord. It would seem that she gave far beyond what was required. Apparently, she must have sensed that the Lord wanted her to give that specific amount above and beyond what was required by the Law. In doing so, she gave in faith, trusting the Lord to take care of her.

This is exactly what the Lord expects from us. Do a quick examination of your giving record this year. How much of it can be described as faith giving? How much can be explained only by the supernatural work of God? How much is better explain by logic and calculated planning?

Illust: I heard a story this week of a lady in another church who sensed the Lord leading her and her husband to give a certain amount to an offering. The problem was that the amount the Lord told her to give was an amount they didn't have. She asked her husband to pray and seek the Lord's direction but didn't tell him the number she had in her heart. He prayed and came back to his wife saying, "I hope the amount you're thinking is different than the one I have because we don't have that kind of money." God put in their hearts the same figure. They believed God had spoken clearly, so they pledged that amount to the offering not knowing where they would get the money. A few days later, the wife was cleaning out a closet in their

company office and found a bag of money she had set aside and forgot about years earlier. It was the exact amount of money God had told them to give to the offering.

Where God guides, He always provides! The widow gave faithfully to God because she believed God would provide for her needs. It was the safest thing to do.

“People that are not willing to trust God to do the impossible will not trust God to go beyond the brink of the Jordan. They'll never know the Promise Land or victorious Christian living. They will live with conventional wisdom.” – Johnny Hunt

A life lived with palms up is not a life lived by conventional wisdom. It is a life that believes God for the impossible. It believes God will make a way when there seems to be no way. It is a life that gives faithfully.

### **3. I choose to give joyfully.**

What do you think the widow's expression was when she gave at the temple that day? Do you think she had the same expression some of you have when the offering plate is passed?

Conversion and the filling of the Holy Spirit are supernatural experiences that produce supernatural responses. When you are filled with the Spirit there is joy. This widow supernaturally gave her all to God. I imagine there was a huge grin on her face as she dropped those coins in the box. She delighted in the fact that she got to see God miraculously provide for her. She didn't begrudgingly give. She joyfully gave. She saw her gift as a way to ascribe worth to the Lord, and she saw it as a way to bless others. When you view

giving from that perspective, you can't help but get excited about giving.

**Conclusion:** On the wall of President Lyndon Johnson's White House office hung a framed letter written by General Sam Houston to Johnson's great-grandfather, George W. Baines, more than a hundred years earlier. Baines had led Houston to Christ and the general was a changed man, no longer coarse and belligerent, but peaceful and content. After General Houston was baptized – an incredible event for those who knew him – he offered to pay half of the local minister's salary. When someone asked him why, he said, "My pocketbook was baptized too."

When you were baptized into Christ was your pocketbook baptized too? So many in our churches give nothing to the Lord. Some of you give nothing. Many only give occasionally. You may give to certain needs, but you're not tithing. The Bible teaches that the tithe is the Lord's. It is intended to train people to put God first in their lives. It is a duty but can become a delight, leading to joyful voluntary giving. Therefore, everyone who is in relationship with Christ ought to at least be giving his or her first 10% to God's local church to fund the budgetary needs.

Here are three practical applications derived from the poor widow's example:

- Obey God completely and leave the consequences to Him.
- Trusting God means looking beyond what we can see to what God sees.
- God assumes full responsibility for our needs when we obey Him.

When I've experienced the glory and grace of Jesus it will change the way I give.