

## THE WIDOW'S MITES (Lk. 21:1-4)

The Lord Jesus was in the part of the temple known as the Court of Women. It was the only place in the temple where males and females were allowed to congregate together. There, as He was teaching and preaching the Gospel to large inquisitive numbers, <sup>Lk. 20:1</sup> the chief priests and the scribes *came upon him* with the elders. This aggressive group of serious looking men circled Him with their barrage of insidious questions. However, Jesus answered them in a way which left them silent. He then addressed His disciples, <sup>46</sup> Beware of the scribes, which desire to walk in long robes, and love greetings in the markets, and the highest seats in the synagogues, and the chief rooms at feasts; <sup>47</sup> Which devour *widows'* houses, and for a shew make long prayers: the same shall receive greater damnation.

At that, He looked around Him at the calibre of the temple-goers these religious leaders were producing ... He watched the rich men making a public show of how much they were putting into the offering boxes. ... But, in a quiet out-of-the-way part of the temple where these characters would not frequent, there was a certain poor *widow* (v.2), - the kind of poor widow He had previously said the religionists would shamelessly 'devour' (20:47), - ... and this certain poor *widow* very privately dropped into the offering two coins ... hardly worth counting, they hardly made a noise. ... None but Jesus noticed for He described her using the indefinite pronoun, she was simply a certain poor widow, - one of the many in the temple, in the background, quietly and privately contributing to the Lord as best she could.

She had so very little but nonetheless Jesus pointed out, <sup>3</sup> Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor *widow* hath cast in more than they all. ... She had lost her husband. ... She had no children, - no sons or daughters, for there is no mention of anyone being with her. She entered the temple on her own, no one spoke to her while she was there, no one took her under their notice, and she left as she came, on her own. ... And she was a *poor* widow. Since her husband died, she had no one to look after her, and none to care. She was living from day-to-day with nothing to look forward to or give her any hope. She was alone in the world, at the bottom of the social ladder. Nothing in her circumstances could lift her out of the condition in which she was living. The word for *poor* is the same word [*πρωχός*] used to describe Lazarus the beggar lying at the gate, waiting for the crumbs to be thrown from the rich man's table (Lk. 16:20). ... She was *really* poor.

On that day leading up to the Feast of the Passover, Jerusalem would have been crowded, and the temple itself was so full of people. It included *many* widows, some were begging ... but out of them all the Lord Jesus drew the attention of His disciples to *this* poor widow (v.3). ... Out of all the widows, and out of all the poor men and women in the temple, the attention of the Lord Jesus was on *this*

woman. ... There is a hymn which describes how individually and particularly He loves His own, “He sought me and bought me with His redeeming blood, He loved me ere I knew Him, and all my love is due Him”. ... This woman did not notice Jesus ... but Jesus noticed her, and He showed His disciples the contrast in that holy place, <sup>4</sup> For all these *[other people]* have of their abundance cast in unto the offerings of God: but she *[this poor widow]* of her penury *[poverty]* hath cast in all the living that she had.

This is not a lesson in the immorality of the rich or about the unfairness of those who are wealthy. There is nothing wrong when the Lord blesses you financially, and if you acknowledge He has given it you. But what *is* wrong is when it becomes a matter for pride, and that is what was happening here. The Lord Jesus could see into the hearts of these rich and wealthy people, and he could see the falseness of their religion. On the other hand, this *[certain]* poor *widow*, commented Jesus, <sup>4</sup> hath cast in all the living *[everything]* that she had. ... In her simplicity and poverty, she entered the temple to worship God, with the sentiment in her heart, as she dropped her two coins in the offering box, “All to Thee, my blessed Saviour, I surrender all”.

**HER OFFERING DISPLAYED HER POVERTY.** On her way into the temple, she passed through the eastern gate, and through the Court of the Gentiles with its large open area paved with stones of various colours. She quietly walked through the Outer Court, and the Lower Court where the cattle men and the money changers were. ... Then she came to the stairs leading up to the terrace above the Court of the Gentiles, surrounded by another high wall to restrict the Gentiles. The pillars on the wall had an inscription in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin warning all Gentiles to come no further, under penalty of death. ... She made her way beyond the Court of the Gentiles and at the top of the terrace was another wall. On the east side of that wall was the magnificent gate called “Beautiful” (Acts 3:2,10). ... As she proceeded through that gate, she arrived in *The Court of the Women* ... and that was as far as she was allowed to go ... That was from where Jesus was watching her.

When He saw the rich men casting their gifts into the collection boxes ... what a ‘clatter’ they were making. ... Such a contrast to the sound the poor widow made when she dropped in her two mites ... you would not have heard it. ... In such a busy and noisy place, two little ‘clinks’, all she had in the world were those two small brass coins, hardly worth anything. ... To her it was everything she had, but to most of the people in the temple, it was nothing. ... **Her offering displayed her poverty** ... while at the same time ... **Her offering displayed her sincerity**, for Jesus said, <sup>3</sup> this poor widow hath cast in *more* than they all. ... The word

translated ‘more’ means ‘more in quantity, more in quality’ ... that was not how it looked to any other observer, but as far as Jesus was concerned, she was offering everything she had to God.

Two things determine the value of a gift. Firstly, the spirit in which it is given. If a gift is given unwillingly, you might as well keep it! If it is given half-heartedly, it’s not worth anything. If it is given so others can see how much you’re handing over, it defeats the purpose of giving. ... The real gift is the gift given because the giver wants to give, no matter how large or small.

The second thing which determines the value of any gift is the sacrifice it involves. Obviously, if the rich men had dropped two mites into the offering it would have been shameful. I’m sure, when the rich men were counting out their money, they would have calculated how much it was convenient for them to give, whereas when the poor widow entered the temple, she gave her life’s savings.

Jesus noticed this, and we see it in Mark’s account. Mark writes his Greek in very ordinary and straightforward language, - he does not use fancy words. He records, **Mk. 12:41** Jesus sat over against the treasury ... that was the part of the temple court where the collection boxes were kept ... and Jesus was sitting there and beheld how the people ... the word for people is more accurately translated ‘crowds’ ... the crowds were ‘milling’ about the place, looking round them and in no particular hurry for it was merely an ‘outing’ for them. ... It was not really ‘worship’ to the most of them. ... And as they were ambling through this area of the temple, they approached the offering boxes, and they reached into their pockets or bags, lifted out their money, ... the word Mark uses for ‘money’ is *χαλκός*, indicating how much they had *calculated* they were going to give so it would not ‘put themselves out’. ... And they would *throw*, ‘cast’, their coins into the collection boxes and make such a clatter everyone would hear. ... Instead of dropping in a ‘pound’, they would make a greater commotion dropping in a hundred pennies! ... And the word Mark used to describe how they *threw* their money into the offering box is the word *βάλλω*, which means to ‘cast’, without any thought. ... What *they* gave meant nothing to them. ... **Mk. 12:41** Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury.

He was watching how they gave ... Many of the rich had wealth by cheating and abusing the poor. ... *They* had prospered, *they* had accrued it. There was no gratitude to God for allowing them to have it. Their money was theirs, and anything they gave to God ... He should be glad He’s getting it!

What a contrast to this poor widow *[who]* hath cast in more than they all! ... The way she gave reminds us of how we should give for the more we have received from Him, the more we should return to Him. ... There is another important principle here, as the hymn says, “Without Him I could nothing, without Him I’d surely fail”. ... In her well-known hymn, Frances Havergal describes it, “Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee, Take my moments and my days ... Take my hands ... Take my feet ... my voice ... my lips” ... And referring to this widow, “Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold ... Take my intellect ... my will ... my heart ... Take my love, my Lord, I pour at Thy feet its treasure store. Take myself, and I will be ever, only, all for Thee”

I have my health because of Him ... I have my home because of Him ... I have my family and my loved ones and my friends because of Him ..., and everything I possess I have for He has blessed me ... and He has the right to it all for He’s my Master.

And something else this woman’s offering displayed was **her quality**, <sup>4</sup>she of her penury *[poverty]* hath cast in *all* the living that she had. ... This woman was going to do without because her heart led her to give to the Lord. I would reckon this woman had never shaken hands with Jesus, nor spoken with Him ... or even met Him ... and I reckon too she wouldn’t have known Jesus was watching her, - how surprised she would be if she knew the Holy Spirit included her in the Scriptures ... and we are talking about her thousands of years later! Yet what she did was so beautiful the Lord presents her as an example to us today. She is unnamed, but she didn’t go unnoticed. She has become one of the best-known characters in the New Testament ... and even secular people refer to ‘the widow’s mites’.

She speaks to us of the type of person who loves the Lord Jesus unselfishly, not for fame or reward. We cannot build a doctrine upon her, nor we wouldn’t build a church in her honour ... but she is the type of person God blesses any fellowship with. What a contrast to the priests and scribes, and all the selfish rich folk! ... They in their robes, and she in her rags. They were looking for praise, while she was looking for privacy to offer what she had to God. ... Probably few people ever spoke to her. When they came to the temple, they wouldn’t have noticed her. And in her local synagogue, she would have sat quietly at the back.

And something else that was very practical ... one of the purposes for the offerings in the temple was to meet the needs of widows and orphans. ... This offering was intended for people such as her, and the point is ... she was giving towards others in similar circumstances to her own. She knew what it was like,

and this was service to the Lord straight from her heart! And it is no wonder the Lord commended her because her two mites were more precious than diamonds.

I trust I haven't made it sound as if I'm appealing for money to be given to the church, - that is not why we are studying these verses. ... When your offering is given as the Lord lays upon your heart, He does far more with the 'mites' than if it were 'millions'.

It is also worth mentioning when she gave her two mites, she no longer had enough to buy a loaf of bread. Now, how could she give like that? She gave like that in obedience to the Word of God for she was giving, trusting in God's provision. ... She believed in His Word which personally reached into her circumstances, **Dt. 14:29** the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, which are within thy gates, shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied. ... The promises of God for His people are far beyond earthly value!

It is none of anyone's business what you give ... and you must not give to gain the applause of others, but like Jesus watching this poor widow in the temple, our Heavenly Father knows exactly what we give and how we give. ... As we shall shortly come to the Lord's Table, consider how He gave more than ever we can give to him ... when He thought it not robbery to be equal with God: *[He]* made himself of no reputation (Phil. 2:6,7). As far as the world was concerned, this widow was of no reputation among her peers ... she simply delighted to have a small part to play in the temple's supply of the needs of others, and she gave ... she of her penury *[poverty, extreme insufficiency]* hath cast in all the living that she had. ... Jesus gave everything when He entered this world, having taking nothing of Heaven's glory with Him, **Lk. 9:58** the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.

She's quite an example, isn't she?! Jesus thought so too! ... God is good. He looks after and cares for His people. Those who honour Him, He will honour. ... His Son exchanged the crown of Heaven for a cross on a hill, and when He had finished His work, **Phil. 2:9** God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: <sup>10</sup> That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow ... <sup>11</sup> And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Someday, when with the ransomed in Glory, His face we at last shall see, it will be our joy through the ages to stand alongside this widow and all the saints from every age, and we shall sing ...

How marvellous! How wonderful! ... Is my Saviour's love for me.