

The Ripple Effect

Generosity: Giving Extravagantly

Mark 12:41-44
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John Little

This account is so short, so succinct and so poignant that one is almost afraid to “preach on it” lest the simple message get clouded by “sermonizing”. So this morning I hope to shed some light on the scenario Mark has written, then share some background that will place the event in a clearer context, and then finally, draw a conclusion and leave you with two questions.

The Scenario

Here in the U.S. in 2007 we are very far removed from first century Palestine. So I’d like to color in the picture that Mark has sketched here just to be sure we get the details.

The temple in Jerusalem had a place designated as “the court of the women” and in this court was the temple treasury. This treasury consisted of 13 collection boxes, each with a funnel attached to it shaped like an inverted trumpet. When people came to worship they would put their offerings into these funnels and the money would drop securely into the boxes. Each box had an inscription designating what the gifts in that box would be used for.

Jesus, sat down opposite these boxes and watched as the people walked by and put their offerings into the boxes. He was so taken with the widow’s gift that he called His disciples over to tell them about it.

Let’s look at the details as Mark wrote them...

- Many rich people gave large offerings and they “threw them in.” Why would Mark say they threw them in when in the next sentence he says the widow put hers in?
 - Imagine the noise all those heavy coins would make as they hit the metal funnels and slid down into the boxes. Especially if they were thrown in.
 - Maybe the “throwing” was to announce the size of the gift to those nearby.
- Then a poor widow put in two copper coins worth only 1/8th of a penny.
 - The word Mark uses for poor is from the same root as the word “cowering”. There was no pride here.
 - The coins she put in were Jewish coins and the Greek word for that type of coin was “lepta.” Which meant thin, like a fish’s scales.
 - Two of them together didn’t even equal a penny
 - One wonders if they even made a sound going in. Probably not since she put them in.

What a contrast.

What might we say about this widow’s gift if we had been there?

- **It was insignificant.** It would make no real difference to the purpose for which it was given. No one would have missed those two coins if she had just kept them.
- **It was impractical.** Wouldn’t it be better to buy food, stay alive so she could give more at another time once she was in better financial shape?
- **It was foolish.** She was left with nothing to live on and the gift would not make a real difference. What’s the point, really?

At this point, I would be asking, Why?

Why would a Jewish widow, who has nothing but two copper coins, give them to the Temple? Especially when her own need is dire and so many around her are giving so much, and her gift seems insignificant by comparison? But Jesus does not seem at all concerned with the question, “Why?”

Instead, as He calls his disciples around Him he explains the difference between how gifts are counted in the world and how gifts are counted in the Kingdom of God.

Jesus says, “Look at the rich people giving large gifts. Now look at the widow who gave the copper. In reality, she gave more than all the others combined because she gave all that she had.”

You see, in the World Accounting System the value of my gift is based on the dollar value I put into the offering box. But Jesus turns that upside down. And He makes it pretty clear doesn't He?

Jesus is saying, “**I tell you the truth...**In God's Accounting System, or the True Accounting System, the value of the gift is based on what is left in your pocket. The more you have left, the smaller your gift.”

That is the only way that your last two pennies, could be a greater gift than a \$100 bill.

It's almost as if God wasn't really interested in the money. It's almost as if God thought that the gift was really her heart, or her life. It's as though the fact that she held back nothing in her offering was an indication that she wasn't holding anything back in her heart either.

The Historical Context

Remember, this is a Jewish widow who comes to the temple to worship and gives an offering to Yahweh (or Jehovah), who is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Let's look back to the time when God, Jehovah, came to Abraham, called him away from his own family and promised to make a great nation from his descendants and to give them the Promised Land. Grab a Bible from the rack in front of you and turn to Genesis Chapter 22 (page 14). Here's a brief history of Abraham leading up to Chapter 22.

- When Abraham was 75 God came to him and called him to leave his family and travel to a new land that God was going to show him. God promised Abraham that he would make a great nation out of his family. Abraham's wife, Sarah, was barren but they didn't know that. God did. [Genesis 12]
- When Abraham was 85 he still did not have a son, so he tries to fulfill God's promise by himself and has a son with Sarah's maidservant who is not barren. He names the son Ishmael.
- When Abraham was 99 God visits him and Sarah and tells them that they will have a son within the next year and they both laugh since she not only had she been barren, but she is now past the age when she is able to bear children. Abraham asks that Ishmael might be the descendant. But God says no. He will be born of Sarah.
- When Abraham was 100 Sarah bears a son and they name him Isaac.

Imagine that. Twenty-five years after God made his first promise to Abraham, God himself fulfills his promise by giving a son to Abraham and his barren wife who has passed menopause. I have a notion of what that might be like, but there are others here at TVC who know exactly what it is like to wait on the Lord for years and years before having their first child. Just think of the ecstatic

joy at finally having a child. Imagine how they cherished him. Hold that thought.

The story of Abraham continues and Isaac grows up. But then in Genesis chapter 22 it says...

“Sometime later God tested Abraham.” In testing Him, God, is proving or demonstrating what kind of man Abraham really is. This is not temptation. This is the same testing or proving that is done to precious metals like gold and silver to show that they are pure. Here’s the test...

God, says to Abraham, “Take Isaac. Isaac who is your son – Isaac, who is your one and only son, the son that was miraculously given to you – Isaac, whom you love and cherish. Take Isaac. Go to Moriah and sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.”

Let’s be honest. This is very strange to us. It sounds evil. It sounds ridiculous, but let’s review it so we get the picture and see how ridiculous it really is:

God called Abraham to leave his family and move to a foreign land that God showed him. At that time he promised Abraham that his own descendents would be numerous as the stars. Which of course means he must have a son. Twenty-five years later God miraculously gives Abraham a son in fulfillment of His promise, but now God is telling Abraham to sacrifice this only son that is the fulfillment of God’s promise.

Read Genesis Chapter 22.

V5 When he left his servants, Abraham said, “We will worship and then we will come back to you.”

V6 Here we see a son born through a miraculous birth, a son through whom, God has promised to bless all nations on earth. This son is climbing up a mountain in obedience to his father. His father placed wood on his back and will use that wood for the burnt offering – to sacrifice his son – his only son. Does this sound familiar?

v7 As they continued up the mountain, Isaac asked his father, “Where is the lamb for the offering?” Abraham responded, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son”

v10 The knife is poised. In the next breath, Isaac is as good as dead. Abraham knows this. Abraham also knows that God Jehovah has made a covenant with him - a promise to bless all nations through Isaac. And Abraham, at this point, has absolute trust in God to keep His promise.

There was a time when Abraham didn’t trust God to keep His promise. Ten years after God made the promise Abraham took matters into his own hands. Through his own efforts he tried to provide for himself. As a result he became the father of Ishmael, the ancestor of the tribes and nations that antagonized Israel. [Genesis 16]

But Abraham has changed. He has seen the power of God in the miraculous birth of Isaac. Abraham now trusts God Jehovah so completely that he believes that God will not break His covenant. He believes that God will still bless all nations through the son that he is about to offer to God. Abraham believes without a shadow of a doubt that God, Jehovah, is able to raise his son Isaac from the dead once he is offered and keep his promise. Abraham does not know how, but he is absolutely sure that Jehovah is the God who can and who does provide.

Read Ch 22:10 – 19

Abraham called the place “The Lord Will Provide” or Jehovah-Jireh

This turned into a proverb: “On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided.”

They were still saying it about 500 years later when Moses wrote this down.

The Lord will provide... Remember the widow?

This story of Abraham offering Isaac is the backdrop for what is happening here in the Temple. In fact it is the backdrop for all that happened to God's Chosen People.

We were sitting with Jesus in the Temple looking at a widow who was giving an offering to Yahweh, Jehovah, you know, "The God Who Provides." She knew the stories. All the Jews knew the stories. After all, they worshipped the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They knew the proverb, "On the mountain of the Lord it shall be provided."

All that Abraham had in the world to fulfill his hopes of having descendants as numerous as the stars and to fulfill the promise of God, was his son, Isaac. But he offered him to God. It was everything.

All the widow had in the world to buy her next meal was two thin coins. But she offered both to God. It was everything.

Conclusion

Why was she willing to give everything?

This widow, wanted to be a blessing to others, she wanted to have a part in what God was doing, and she was willing to make a sacrifice to do so even if it seemed insignificant. She kept nothing back. She didn't need to because she trusted God to provide for her own needs.

Reading the story of Abraham, we all could breath a sigh of relief on behalf of Abraham and Isaac, when the angel spoke and there was a ram in the thicket. We were relieved that the Lord provided the offering in place of Isaac. We could almost cheer with Abraham knowing that through Isaac, now indeed all nations of the earth would be blessed.

But here in the Temple Treasury, 2000 years after Abraham, a just a short time before Passover, watching a widow offer all she has to God, sits the Lamb of God - the Son of Jehovah - the Son of the God who provides. You see, the ram in the thicket was only a fore shadow of the real sacrificial offering. The real sacrifice would only ever take place once in history.

In a few days the Son of Jehovah-Jireh, The Son of The God Who Provides who would walk up a hill to be offered as a sacrifice, His Father would place the on his back the wood used for the sacrifice, and there on a cross the promise would become historical fact as Jehovah, the God Who Provides shows the world that he can be trusted to keep His promises. He will provide even if it means He has to give everything to rescue us. To make us His own. To bring you and me into His chosen family. This is the promised blessing that came through Abraham's son. But it came through God's son also.

Jesus was excited about the widow's gift because she gave everything. He recognized in her, the heart of God. Very soon He too would be offering everything He had to God His Father and like her, He would have to completely trust that His Father would keep His promise to provide for Him even as He laid down His life for us. He had absolute trust that His Father would bring Him back from the dead. And you know what? He did.

Let me leave you with two questions:

First: Do you really trust God to provide for everything you need?

Do you really believe that Jehovah is the God Who Provides?

Do you believe that he will keep His promise to bless you through His one and only beloved Son?

Second: Do you have the heart of God?

As you look at your life. As you look at your spouse, your children, your home, your work, your wallet, your calendar your schedule. As you look at all this are you looking for ways to sacrificially give of yourself so that others will be blessed?

The God Who Provides does not need our money. He already owns everything.

He wants children who love Him and trust Him to provide for their needs as they provide for the needs of others. If you are His child, you are one of Abraham's descendants, one of the countless stars promised to Abraham. He will expects us to offer ourselves, everything we have, so that his blessings ripple through us to others.

That's what He did.