

UNSUNG HEROES

Part 6

A POOR WIDOW

“The Call to Sacrificial Giving”

Mark 12:41-44

ENGAGING the Audience

In 1914, Sir Ernest Shackelton set sail on the now infamous **Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition** - better known as the *Endurance Expedition*. Traveling with him were twenty-eight sailors Shackelton handpicked from more than five thousands applicants.

The goal of the expedition was monumental. Shackelton wanted to lead the first transcontinental march across the Antarctic. To accomplish this amazing feat of endurance, Shackelton would sail deep into the treacherous waters of the Weddell Sea - getting as close as possible to the southern shoreline of Antarctica.

Unfortunately, Shackelton and the *Endurance* crew never reached their destination. While sailing through the frigid and ice-packed waters of the Weddell Sea, the *Endurance* became wedged in ice, ice that eventually crushed and sank the massive ship. Just before the *Endurance* sank, Shackelton and his crew abandoned the ship and took refuge by making a camp on the ice.

Several months later, Shackelton rescued his entire crew by performing one the most heroic acts in the history of nautical exploration.

Throughout his heroic journey, Shackelton kept a diary. In his diary, Shackelton tells of the time when the entire crew had exhausted their food supplies and men were down to their last ration - a biscuit called a *hardtack*. One night, Sir Shackelton was almost asleep when out of the corner of his eye; he noticed one of his most trusted men sitting up in his sleeping bag and looking around to see if anyone else was watching.

Initially, Shackelton’s heart sank as he watched this leader reach toward the food sack of the man next to him who was fast asleep. As Shackelton records in his diary, what the leader did next was nothing shy of heroic. Shackelton’s trusted leader opened the man’s food sack, took out his own last biscuit, and put it in his crewmate’s food sack.

Making the CONNECTION

What an incredible act of heroism!

Can you imagine being stranded on a polar ice cap in the middle of the Antarctic in 1914? There were no Gore Text lined boots and gloves. There were no North Face jackets. There were no modern camping supplies and gadgets that are enjoyed today.

This was truly EXTREME in every way!

Now...imagine being down to your final piece of food - a hockey puck-like biscuit. This is literally all you've got left in the form of nourishment. After this biscuit, all you've got left is snow and ice.

I asked myself this week - "If I was in that situation, what would I do?" Would I eat my biscuit? Would I secretly and sacrificially give it away to a crewmate and friend who needed it more than I did?

I'd like to think that I'd give it away - I really would. However, if I'm being truly honest, there's a good chance that I'm eating that biscuit. In such dire circumstances, and with a family back home, my first and foremost goal is to get home.

Yep...I'm pretty sure I'm eating my biscuit.

This heroic act of selflessness and sacrifice is staggering, isn't it? I mean really, who gives away their only piece of food when it represents your last meal - your final hope of survival?

The only thing that comes to mind is a HERO!

Exploring the SCRIPTURE

Today, as we explore the life of another UNSUNG HERO of the Bible, this is exactly what our hero did.

The unsung hero we're going to look at this morning only get's four verses worth of ink in the entire Bible. In fact, she's so "unsung" that we don't even know her name.

But, make no mistake about it; she performed one of the most heroic acts in the entire Bible. In fact, Jesus thought so highly of what this woman did that He used it as a teaching example with his disciples.

In Mark 12:41-44, we find the heroic story of a poor, unnamed widow who performs the unthinkable. Let's read it together.

The Bible says...

"And [Jesus] sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. And he called his disciples to Him and said to them,

'Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.'"

Can you imagine being down to your very last penny? How about your last dollar? How about your last \$20 dollars? How about your last \$100 dollars? Imagine knowing that after today, you will have absolutely no money - not a single penny - in your wallet or bank account?

A penny was all this poor widow had left. This single penny represented her final monetary hope for food and sustenance. Once she put her last penny in the offering box, she literally had nothing.

Just like Shackelton's trusted leader, the poor widow's heroic act of selflessness and sacrifice is staggering, isn't it? I mean really, who gives away their final penny when it represents literally everything you've got? Many people would call this poor money management. Others would simply call it foolish. Some might even say she was stupid.

Yet, in the eyes of Jesus, the poor widow's heroic act was far from foolish and stupid.

Now, some of you are already squirming in your seats thinking that I'm getting ready to ask you to give everything you've got left to the church?

Relax! Take a deep breathe! Stop hyperventilating! Put your head between your legs if you need to.

I'm not going to ask you to give everything you've got. In fact, I don't think this text, the Bible as a whole, or God asks you to do that.

However, God *is* going to ask us to give financially to His kingdom and His Church. In fact, financial giving is an expectation God has for every one of His redeemed, adopted children.

The heroic act of the poor widow and the meager gift of her two small copper coins teach us some timely, crucial, and possibly convicting truths about Christian financial giving. Let's take a closer look at our unsung hero and see what she teaches us about becoming a hero for the glory of God and His Kingdom.

3 Truths About Christian Giving

The first truth I want us to see is found in verse 41.

Look at how our story begins...

“And He sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box.”

Now, let's make sure we know what's going on in this text. Jesus and his disciples are in the temple. The treasury, which is where our story is taking place, would have been located in an open area court (The Women's Court) where there would have been thirteen different offering boxes. Each of the thirteen offering boxes would have been designated for specific means used to build and maintain the temple and its ministries. The amount people gave, as well as the designation of their gift, was completely up to the giver.

I want you to notice the intentionality of Jesus. Jesus made a conscious effort to spend time in the treasury. Jesus intentionally sat down close enough to the thirteen different offering boxes that He could see the specific amount every person gave.

Can you imagine how our giving would change if we knew that when we exited the sanctuary this morning, Jesus was sitting beside the offering box?

The first truth about Christian giving is both obvious and convicting.

God is very interested in our giving!

This heroic story should remind us all that God watches our giving with great interest. God is very interested in **what** we give, knowing full well what we make. He sees what we give when there's an abundance of resources in our lives. He also sees what we give when there's a deficit of resources in our lives.

God is also very interested in **how** we give. He sees our heart. He sees our attitude. God sees when we give begrudgingly instead of cheerfully. He sees when we give out of obligation rather than pleasure. He sees when we give out of pride rather than humility and thanksgiving. And...He sees when we hold back out of fear, worry, or maybe even greed.

The second truth I want us to see is discovered in verse 43...

***“And he called his disciples to him and said to them, ‘Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box.*”**

Notice what Jesus does here. He calls His disciples and begins to teach them. The testimony of the widow's gift was so powerful that Jesus used it as a teaching opportunity with his disciples.

The second truth about Christian giving is...

Giving during seasons of need is a powerful testimony!

As we will see in a moment, although there is nothing wrong with it, giving when there's an abundance of resources is fairly easy. For most people, giving out of a surplus is not hard. However, giving during seasons of life when every penny literally counts is very hard. It's hard to give during seasons of great financial need.

There was no surplus for the poor widow. Financial security and abundance would have been a foreign concept for her. She was poor. She had no husband to provide and care for her needs. She was on her own. Yet, she gave in spite of a glaring financial deficit in her life. She gave in spite of the incredible financial need she had.

Listen carefully!

It was not the abundant giving of the rich that stirred the heart of Jesus. Rather, it was the gift of a poor widow who gave in the face of desperate circumstances. The poor widow's gift was a powerful testimony to the disciples of Jesus - a testimony I'm sure they never forgot.

Some of you are here today and when it comes to your finances, there's no surplus - there's no abundance. There's great financial need. You feel like the poor widow.

- Maybe you've lost or exhausted your retirement?
- Maybe you've lost your job?
- Maybe you've had your hours cut back at the plant?
- Maybe you're a single mother who's struggling month-to-month just hoping to pay the bills and put food on the table?
- Maybe you're a young couple with small kids and there's no margin in your finances - it takes every penny you both make just to survive?

Whatever the situation may be, know this - your sacrificial giving is a powerful testimony to Jesus Christ.

This leads us to a third truth.

Look at what Jesus goes on to say in verse 44...

‘Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.’”

Notice what Jesus emphasizes while he teaches his disciples. Does he emphasize amounts? How about percentages?

At first glance, you might answer “Yes!” But, when we really explore what Jesus is teaching, we quickly realize that He is emphasizing neither.

Jesus is far more interested in the attitude behind the gift, rather than the amount of the gift.

More specifically, Jesus is interested in the sacrificial nature of our giving. Although Jesus doesn’t condemn the rich for giving out of their abundance, he does make one thing clear - sacrificial giving is more valuable to Him than abundant giving.

Are you ready for our third truth regarding Christian giving? Here it is...

The value of our giving is not found in the amount - it’s found in the sacrifice!

Listen carefully...

- **Sacrificial giving that costs us much is more valuable to God than abundant giving that costs us nothing.**

Jesus doesn’t condemn the rich for their abundant giving - He just puts it in perspective for all of us to consider.

Costly gifts, regardless of the dollar amount, are far more valuable to God than abundant gifts that cost us little or nothing. The gifts of the rich, although abundant in amount, were not costly gifts. The gifts of the rich were not sacrificial. The gift of the poor widow, although it was a small fraction of what the rich gave, was very costly and thus of great value.

There’s a great story in 2 Samuel 24 that magnifies this principle. If you have your Bible, let’s turn there for a minute.

In 2 Samuel 24, we find King David preparing to offer a burnt offering to the Lord. Early in the chapter, King David disobeyed God’s clear command not to number the people of Israel. Instead, David performed a national census. As a result, God sent a plague upon Israel that killed 70,000 men.

After David repented, He was instructed by Gad to *“raise an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.”* When Araunah saw King David coming, he went to meet David and fell at his feet. When David made it clear that he was seeking Araunah’s threshing floor, Araunah offered to give it to David for free.

Look at what King David said in response to Araunah's generous offer...

“No, but I will buy it from you for a price. I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God that cost me nothing.”

David refused to make an offering to God that did not require financial sacrifice. Instead of focusing on amounts and percentages, it would serve us all well to refocus on the sacrificial nature of our giving.

Why did Jesus value so highly the meager gift of the poor widow? Her gift was costly. Her gift exemplified a sacrificial attitude - the attitude of Christ.

- **Sacrificial giving that demands great faith is more valuable to God than abundant giving that requires little faith.**

Giving when there is abundance - when there's a surplus - is easy and requires very little faith. On the other hand, giving when there is a shortfall - when there's a great need or a glaring deficit - is hard and requires great faith.

The meager gift of the poor widow was a gift that revealed a great faith in God.

Why did Jesus value so highly the meager gift of the poor widow? Her gift was one of tremendous faith.

- **Sacrificial giving that requires total dependence on God is more valuable than abundant giving that requires little or no dependence on God.**

Giving when there is abundance doesn't force us to be completely and utterly dependent on God as our Provider. Giving during seasons of great need forces us to trust God completely and depend on His promise to provide perfectly for our every need.

Why did Jesus value so highly the meager gift of the poor widow? Her gift exhibited total dependence on God.

Wrapping It Up

What made the poor widow a hero?

Her gift was costly. Her gift displayed great faith in God. Her gift required total dependence on God.

Would you like to be a spiritual hero for the glory of God? Then give like the poor widow gave.

- Give financial offerings to God that are sacrificial and costly.
- Give financial offerings that display great faith in God.
- Give financial offerings that require total dependence on God to meet your every need.

As we wrap things up, if you don't remember anything else I want you to remember this...

Our most valuable gifts to God come during our greatest seasons of need!

Why?

Because giving when we have great financial need reveals who the object of our faith really is. Is the object of our faith God and His promise to provide perfectly for our needs? Or, is the object of our faith ourselves?

It's easy to give during seasons of surplus and abundance. Rarely does this giving require sacrifice, faith, and complete dependence on God.

It's hard to give during seasons of need and deficit. Such giving requires great sacrifice, great faith, and child-like dependence on God.

Friends, let me be honest with you as your pastor. I know that many of you are walking through seasons of great need right now. Quite frankly, giving to God's Kingdom through the Church may seem impossible to you right now. Yet, if a widow can give out of extreme poverty, we can give during our season of need. Remember this, God is far more interested in the attitude behind your gift than the amount of your gift.

In 2 Corinthians 9:7-8, Christians are given their giving mandate under the new covenant of grace. Listen carefully...

“Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.”

Notice something here.

There is no mention of amounts or percentages. Under the new covenant of grace, Christians are not commanded to give a certain percentage like the Israelites were. By the way, if you're going to strictly adhere to the giving law's God gave the Israelites under the Law, be forewarned - the Israelites were required to give far more than 10% on an annual basis. That's right! When you add up the annual giving requirements God gave the Israelites under the Law, the percentage is 23 ½%.

Under the new covenant of grace, we are commanded to determine what we want to give and then give our gift with a cheerful heart. In the Old Testament, the Law focused on an amount. In the New Testament, grace focuses on our attitude. We are commanded to further the kingdom of God through the Church by giving cheerfully and bountifully of our financial resources.

Friends, Christ Community Church is walking through a season of great need right now. Many of you received our budget update this week and are aware of just how great our need really is. After the first half of our fiscal year, we are 30% behind in our operating budget. At the end of June, we had an operating deficit of \$97,000 dollars.

For Christ Community Church to operate and fulfill the vision we believe God has given us, we need to receive \$57,000 per month in operating funds. Through the first six months, we averaged \$41,000 per month. That's an average monthly deficit of \$16,000.

There has never been a greater financial need in the life of Christ Community Church than right now. If our giving doesn't improve significantly over the next two months, our leaders are going to be forced to make some drastic cutbacks - cutbacks that we don't want to make. These cutbacks will greatly hinder our ability to minister to the people of our church as well as our community.

As your pastor, I am asking each of us to prayerfully explore our financial giving and ask ourselves some very important questions.

1. Is our financial giving costly and sacrificial?
2. Is our financial giving displaying great faith in God?
3. Is our financial giving requiring complete dependence on God?
4. Is our financial giving generous and cheerful?
5. For those of us who are rich and have been blessed with financial abundance, are we giving financial offerings that cost us nothing?

Be a spiritual hero for the glory of God! Advance God's Kingdom and His Church by...

- Giving financial offerings that are costly and sacrificial.
- Giving financial offerings that display great faith in God.
- Giving financial offerings that require complete dependence on God.
- Giving financial offerings that are cheerful and generous.

Christ Community Church needs you and me to be spiritual heroes.