

SERMON: GENEROUS GIVING

“Coins and Candy”

Based on Mark 12:41-44

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 forward and put in two small copper coins, which makes a penny. And Jesus called his disciples to him and said to them, “Truly I tell 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.” (Mark 12:41-44)

The Bible is full of great heroes: Abraham, Moses, David, Rahab, Paul. And another great hero, we are still telling her story two thousand years later, a poor widow. We do not know her name, but we know her story. We can picture her stepping forward to the collection box. We tell her story still today and she continues to inspire us. We want to be like her, to have her faith, her commitment.

The point of the poor widow’s story is that the value of a gift is not measured by its size but by its sacrifice. She put in more than all the others, Jesus said. Not more in quantity, but more in sacrifice. The amount of your sacrifice

is an accurate measure of where your heart is.

It is astonishing how much Jesus teaches and preaches about money and what we do with money. Money is something Jesus was truly concerned about. Bible scholars say that 15 percent of everything Christ said relates to this topic, even more than his teachings on heaven and hell combined.

So, we have to wonder why Jesus expressed such a remarkable concern about what we do with our money. The reason is the basic principle that Jesus once explained: where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Mt 6:21, Lk 12:34)

In other words, the reason money is so crucial to Jesus is that what we do with it signals where our heart is. That means where our worship is. When our heart is set on something, it values it, cherishes it, treasures it. That is what worship means.

The reason money is so crucial for Jesus is that across all cultures and times, money represents an alternative to God being the treasure of our hearts.

Money can become the object of our worship. It becomes a threat to our obedience to God, especially to the first and last of the Ten Commandments: “You shall have no other god before

me” and “You shall not covet.”
(Exodus 20: 3, 17)

Money represents all the material things and securities and pleasures that it can buy. Therefore, it can represent any and all alternatives to God. This is why what we do with our money is so crucial to Jesus.

There is a saying, “You can’t outgive God.” This is bumper sticker theology. The saying, “You can’t outgive God” is not in the Bible, but there is some truth there.

So, does that mean that we can skip being generous because we can’t do it perfectly or we can never give enough or never give more than God gives?

Perhaps generous giving seems out of reach for you. You are afraid you won’t have enough for yourself or your family’s needs if you give too much.

Let me reassure you. When God calls you to share what you have with those in need, God is more than able to meet your needs in return. That is a matter of trust.

So here is how God’s generosity changes us. The magnitude of God’s gift is impossible to ignore. God died to save us from the consequences of our sin, not because of anything we did.

God did it while we were still sinners.
(Romans 5:8)

This is generosity beyond anything we could ever imagine and it deserves a response from us.

As a Christian and as a child of God, you are on a journey of faith that includes learning to trust God's provision more and more. According to Galatians 2:20, you have been crucified with Christ. So it is no longer you who lives, but Christ who lives in you. Generosity is one practical tangible real-life way you can demonstrate your trust in God and your desire to be part of God's kingdom work.

Of course, we are not trying to outgive God. We are not in competition with God or even with each other. As for earning God's favor, we already have it. It is called grace and it is not something we can ever earn. What we can do is offer grace to others. As it says in Ephesians 4:32: "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."

What about those who expect God to reward them for being generous? Do we give to get something from God? Do we expect to be rewarded with material success or monetary blessings when we are generous?

We do not give to get rewarded, expecting God to pay us back in this

life what we invest in the kingdom. We give without concern for some earthly reward. We give because we want to give, out of love and thankfulness. Our reward will be enough in heaven.

When we understand God's generosity towards us, it changes the understanding of our own generosity. It changes our attitude about money and possessions.

So, of course, we cannot outgive God but we can be the hands and feet of God in the world, as we mature in our faith, growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord. (2 Peter 3:8)

We want to respond to God's grace by being generous in return. Best of all, as we serve and give generously, we experience a closer walk with God. Generosity ties us with God as it gets us right to the heart of God.

Imagine this scene in a kitchen. A mom and dad are assembling a cardboard box for something their church is doing. The sight of her parents wrapping up a big cardboard box grabs their little daughter's attention on the off-chance that maybe this box was for her. So, she wants to get involved.

Mom explains that not everyone in their town has enough of what they need and this is a way for them to help. So, they start to fill the box with things mom has

bought for this appeal: cans of soup, bars of soap, breakfast cereal, sensible things.

But the daughter did not think this was good enough. She headed straight to the drawer here where the family stashed all of the sweets the little girl had been given at parties and birthdays. It is their sweet treat drawer that her parents allow her to occasionally pick one candy at a time. The daughter empties all of the candy into the box. All of it. The box can barely close shut.

So maybe their relief box was no longer going to be good for anyone's teeth, but it was going to be good for their hearts. Good to see such a little girl moved to such heartfelt generosity when confronted with a need.

Like the poor widow who gave her all, this child did not know who would get the box, but she knew that they did not have enough. Just like the poor widow, through her giving, she wanted to make someone happy.

God is a generous God, not a give them what they need kind of God, but a God who goes overboard, whose heart overflows with kindness, richness and a desire to please and bless us.

An offering box with two coins from a poor widow, a relief box with lots of candy, these things point right to the

heart of God. When God gives, God gives the best. And God gives all.

Friends, we live in a world dripping in variety, beauty, splendor and majesty because the One who made it is generous. God cut no corners. God's world is lavish and abundant. God richly provides us with everything for our needs and enjoyment. God's purpose in generosity is to bless us.

Be generous in response. In your heart, in your calendar, in your bank account, in your work, in your home. When we reflect upon the kindness of God in giving us all things, when we reflect upon the richness of our salvation through Jesus, we become generous. Generosity is the only logical response.

In giving, especially in giving away what is precious, whether it be two coins or a stash of candy or our time, talents and possessions, we become more like God.

Celebrate Generosity. Amen.