

41 Jesus sat down opposite the treasury, and saw how the multitude cast money into the treasury. Many who were rich cast in much. 42 A poor widow came, and she cast in two small brass coins, which equal a quadrans coin.† 43 He called his disciples to himself, and said to them, “Most certainly I tell you, this poor widow gave more than all those who are giving into the treasury, 44 for they all gave out of their abundance, but she, out of her poverty, gave all that she had to live on.”
(WEB)

Most of you have kids or grandkids. Have you ever given a small child the job of dividing a candy bar or something like that with their brother or sister or cousin? They break it in two uneven pieces and then hold out the smaller piece, don't they? I know one mom who solved that by always letting one child do the breaking and the other do the choosing—she said that everything was always broken as fairly as possible.

The passage I just read has to do with giving and sharing and dividing. Maybe we can use these verses to look at our offerings and our gifts not by human standards but using God's yardstick.

As a bit of background—this happened during Jesus' last trip to Jerusalem. It had been a hard week. From the triumphant entry on a donkey colt to tossing out the money changers to healing and teaching in the temple every day—and being interrogated by the smartest and the best scholars. Finally Jesus and his followers had some time alone.

I assume he was tired, both mentally and physically. Teaching and answering questions designed to trip him up. Praying half the night for strength and for his disciples—working even to the end to set them on the right path.

On this day, he seems to have found some time when he and his disciples were being left alone in the temple. Maybe he was tired enough that he just sat or squatted to take a deep breath or two. They were near one of the 12 treasury boxes of the temple—probably the one that received the free-will offering, the offering that was over and above what was required by God.

Maybe the just sat quietly and maybe they didn't really pay attention for a while but Jesus watched the people come and go. Then Jesus noticed a pattern. The most wealthy may have walked in with a flourish and then dropped their money as loudly as possible—probably one coin at a time and

certainly only when someone was there to see. Jesus had already accused the religious leaders of doing what they in order to seek honor from men and often that seemed to be true.

When the widow came up, I'm imagining that she did so meekly and humbly and quietly. Maybe she waited until no one was near and no one seemed to be looking and then slipped over and dropped in two small coins. But Jesus and the disciples saw.

In verse 43 we see Jesus' usual set-up. Different translations say it differently but Jesus often used the words "Verily, I say to you..." or "Truly..." or "I tell you the truth..." when he was going to say something that he didn't want the disciples to miss. It was his way of saying, "listen up!" or even "this will be hard for you to understand..."

"Most certainly I tell you, this poor widow gave more than all those who are giving into the treasury..." Could the Son of God not count? MORE? How could those little coins be MORE? Those two coins were nearly nothing. Their exact value is not really clear these days—but probably about 1/100th of a days wages. I can almost hear the gears turning in Peter's head—the rest of them probably wouldn't have said anything, but Peter... [Ad-lib Peter's reaction.]

How could Jesus say that? Maybe because he was using a different yardstick that the disciples. Maybe he was using a different yardstick that the others that were giving. Maybe he was using a different yardstick that we do.

The first thing I want to do is widen this teaching out a bit. The passage is about money, specifically about free-will offerings, but I believe it can apply to anything of value in a Christian's life. It is about faithfulness in returning to God that which he has given—so I assume it applies just as well to time, talents, abilities, gifts, AND money.

As we look at this short passage I think we can find three things God DOESN'T care about—things that he DOESN'T use as a measure. Then we will look at God's yardstick.

The first thing God doesn't look at as a measure of our giving is our social status.

When the apostle Paul said that in God there is no male, no female, no Jew, and no Greek, social status was exactly what he was referring to.

I can just see the high and mighty coming to the box. Robes and long fringes and proud walk? Too bad they didn't have suspenders to hook their thumbs into. Making sure they didn't touch the common people, but making sure that they were seen by all. Maybe their noses turned up a bit—maybe a cloth with perfume on it to keep out the stink of common people...

Not only were the scribes and Pharisees and the priests and the levites “better” than this woman, so was almost everyone else who came by to give. She was the bottom of the bottom in social status. First of all, she was a woman and women had no social standing at all outside of her husband or possibly her sons. She was already a near non-person because of being a woman—but as a widow (presuming she had no sons) her status was even lower. She was literally less than nothing in their culture. Women like her were who Jesus talked about when he accused the Pharisee of “devouring” widow's houses while acting pious. She literally had no recourse if someone cheated her or hurt her in any way. She was like the homeless that we see but don't see. She was socially invisible.

So it seems that God is not concerned about social status and doesn't use that to measure our giving.

The second thing God doesn't use as a measure is money or property.

Just like with her social status—her financial status would have put her at the bottom. In her society, she could not own property—if she was not living on the street, she was living by the good graces of a friend or a relative or a generous stranger. Maybe someone had taken her in out of the goodness of their heart—but she would have had no property—probably not much more than the clothes she was wearing. The two small coins may have been all she owned besides her robe.

Ever since money was invented, we humans have been awed by it. I'm from Arkansas—arguably a poor state—and I was surprised to hear it the first time old Sam Walton was named as the richest man in the United States. Whatever his worth was at the time, I can remember that I couldn't even IMAGINE that much money. It would be hard not to let that much wealth go to your head—either if you had it or if you were in the presence of someone who did. Of course it is well-known that Sam

drove the same old pick-up for years and always ate at the same greasy-spoon restaurant every morning for breakfast. **BUT** if he wasn't awed by his money, others were.

Again—the others who came to the treasury box and dropped in money were not just richer, they were **MUCH** richer than this widow.

So—just like social status, it seems that God doesn't use wealth or our property to measure our giving. It wasn't important to Jesus how much money she had.

The last thing that doesn't matter to God—the last thing that isn't marked on his yardstick is even stranger than the other two. If Jesus is right in his assessment that this widow gave more than all the others, then God does not measure how much you give.

Let me say that again—according to these verses, **GOD DOES NOT MEASURE WHAT WE GIVE!**

[Go sit down in a pew and talk. "WAIT! Just a minute here—are you saying that when God measures how much we give—that he doesn't measure how much we give?!?!"]

I remember a movie where two men were walking at night in New York City. Two other guys came up and threatened them for money. The bigger of the two victims tried to resist—but the little guy pulled out a roll of bills, threw it on the ground, and they both backed away and then ran. **AS** they ran, the big guy said, "what a waste—we could have used that money to..." but the little guy said, "I kept the best part..." and produced an even bigger roll of twenties and fifties and hundreds—then they went on their way.

That story is a clue to the yardstick God **DOES** use to measure our giving—as we give back our talents and time and skills and our money. It seems that this story is telling us that God measures what we give by how much we hold back. Does this seem strange to you?

Not if you think about it. Our relationship to God did not come by works but by grace. Though it is priceless, it can't be bought. If it **COULD** be bought, it wouldn't be fair that those who had more money or more skills or more time could give more and win God's favor.

That day, those who had given so much had also held much in reserve. They had kept back much

from God. I believe it was done not only in the physical sense—that part is obvious—but that it was also withheld in the spiritual sense. It was theirs and they had control of it and they wanted to use it as they wished with no regard to God's kingdom and God's work.

Using God's yardstick changes the measure of things. It seems that God is the great equalizer and once again the Creator has put us humans on even footing. We all have the same status—no matter how rich we are and no matter how poor we are. There is no male nor female nor Jew nor Greek nor rich nor poor nor talented or not talented. Isn't that amazing? Isn't that comforting? We really are all the same in the eyes of God!

So, if the measure is "what we hold back" then what does God expect? What does God want? [Wait for some answers.] **EVERYTHING!**

Jesus wants to literally be Lord of our lives. Oh, we are free to use our time and our talents and our money—we can drive our cars and buy things and have food to eat. **BUT** as children of God, we are to eat it and drive it and spend it at his bidding and under his Lordship. This is the "cost" of following Jesus. **NOTHING** is our own. All we have and all we are belongs to him.

So, God's yardstick doesn't measure our social status or how much we have. Even stranger, God doesn't measure how much we give by how much we give.

I believe this passage tells us that God measures what we hold back. He measures our servanthood—based on his Lordship in our lives. I know each of you gives time and talent and money to the kingdom of God—even to the point of doing so sacrificially, but I must ask, how do you measure up? I confess that I find myself lacking sometimes—I want to control all of it, or I at least want to control **SOME** of it. But Jesus says, "No, I will be Lord!"

What are we holding back today? When we give ourselves and our things over to God, it literally sets us free. God will still let us use it, but what belongs to God won't have the same hold over us. As we come to a time of commitment, I encourage each of us to take Jesus' Lordship in our lives seriously. I know each of us gives and gives and gives—but that isn't what God is measuring. What he is measuring is what we are holding back.