

The Widow's Might

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'Tis the season for giving. My family and I have always celebrated this time of year as a family holiday, not a religious holy day. I enjoy the decorations, the weather, and the music of this season. But I especially enjoy the gifts.

Somewhere along the way, probably about the time my children were born, I started to learn why it is more blessed to give than to receive. There is something special about watching someone open a gift that you carefully picked out for them. And there's an even greater joy of hearing those three cherished words from the recipient: "Is that all?"

It's easy during this season to become so focused on what we are giving to others that we neglect giving to the Lord. When we do that, we rob ourselves of one of the greatest joys of life, regardless of the time of year. This giving is for every season.

Both Mark and Luke record an event in the life of Jesus that would have been easy to overlook. It is only four verses in each gospel account, but Mark says that Jesus called His disciples to Him to point out what He saw. It involved "a poor widow" (Mark 12:42) and her gift that she put into the treasury. Through her mighty example, she still speaks about the joy of giving to the Lord.

Giving is not just about the amount of money. Money is involved of course because money is a gift from God. He blesses us with jobs so that we can earn wages to support our families and provide the necessities of life. These funds also enable us to "have something to share with him who has need" (Eph. 4:28). When we return a portion of our money to the Lord, we are recognizing that "every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights" (James 1:17).

But what if you don't have a lot of money to give? Does that exclude you from this great joy? God forbid! Jesus saw "many rich people" putting in "large sums" of money into the treasury. He did not condemn them for doing such. But He also saw a poor widow put in "two small copper coins, which amount to a cent" (Mark 12:42). This coin, the Greek leptos, was the smallest denomination of money used by the Romans. Yet, Jesus said "she put in more than all the contributors" (12:43). It is not necessarily the monetary value of your gift that matters to God but the measure of your faith in Him.

Giving is something everyone can do. In Jesus' day, to be a widow was to be neglected. Just the verse before, the Lord warned about the scribes "who devour widows' houses" (Mark 12:40). Most of them had no one to protect them or to represent them in court. And if you think being a widow was bad, what about a poor widow? What could she possibly have to offer? Still, Jesus said that she gave "out of her poverty" (Mark 12:44).

From the youngest to the oldest, from the newborn babe in Christ to the seasoned saint, everyone has something they can contribute. You can give a handshake or hug. You can give an encouraging word. You can give a smile. You can give a warm welcome. You can give your time. You can give a lot. And when we do such things for one another, Jesus said, "to the extent you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me" (Matt. 25:40). Giving to your brethren is a way you give to the Lord.

Giving involves the greatest gift of all: yourself. Jesus saw a difference in the rich people who were putting in large sums of money and the poor widow who put in two small copper coins. She "put in all she owned, all she had to live on" (Mark 12:44). The selfish keep what they have from themselves. The selfless give it up for a higher purpose.

When we needed God the most, do you know what He gave? Himself. He so loved the world that He "gave His only begotten Son" (John 3:16). The Father did not withhold Him who was beloved and precious to Him. When we give to the Lord, we should not choose out of a pile of things we were going to get rid of anyway. We should not select from a surplus that we didn't need in the first place. We should give the most valuable thing we possess: our whole heart and soul. Such is the response of those who first give "themselves to the Lord" (2 Cor. 8:5).

Give to God what He wants most. It's the only time you won't have to worry with a gift receipt.