

Title: Mite offerings Mark 12:38-44

Today I have a question for you. How important is giving, that is, giving an offering to God? During our service we have the offering. How important is it to give an offering? Is the amount I give important? Will God be mad at me if I don't give enough? As we will see, it is not the amount but rather the willingness to give, the attitude, which is important. Our Gospel lesson from Mark 12 is the story of the Widow who makes offering to God. If you are familiar with the King James version of the story, it is called The Widow's Mite. What is the meaning of Mite offerings?

The LWML uses the term Mite Offerings to describe the money collected for mission work. People were encouraged to place the change in their pocket into the mite boxes and turn these in as offerings for mission work. While each mite offering may be small by itself, all together these Mite offerings combine into several million dollars. These offering have gone throughout the world to support missions sharing the Gospel with those dying to hear it. It is a testimony of how a lot of small change can have a big effect. Yet it is also the paradox which shows WHY something seemingly small can have a big effect. You see, it becomes a big effect because it can become a witness, a witness to others of faith and the power of faith.

The story goes that back in Jesus' time, it was an obligation to give a silver coin at church collections. Only the very poor could get away with giving something smaller, like a copper coin, the mite. In the story of the Widows mite Jesus is comparing the lavish donations made by the rich men, with the widow's two mites. Jesus observes, the mites were everything she had to her name. While the rich people may have given a lot, it was only a small portion of their wealth. But the widow had given everything she had. For this reason, Jesus was said their offering was dwarfed by the widow's offering. Now there is another significant point. Scripture records the fact that she gave two mites. What is the significance of two mites? In order to come to worship, the widow would have been obligated to only give one mite. The symbolism of the second mite was that it was her desire to share all she had with God. It was her desire to do this. Quoting scripture "she pleased God because she was a cheerful giver"

Now I want to make sure we understand the meaning of this. When I first read Mark 12 I thought it was telling us the importance of "giving to the church." Now, while it is very important to "give to the church" even more important is "the reason "why" you are giving." It is not just "we got to give to the church to

support the ministries of the church.” “Giving” has a more far-reaching purpose. It has a purpose not only for the church but for the giver as well. “Giving” is a reflection of the sincerity of your faith. “What you truly believe in, you will support.” One of the Christian financial planners I’ve used, challenged us to determine what our core values were, He challenged us to measure what was most important to us. One of the best ways to determine your core values is to look at your spending for the last 6 months. What percentage of things serve you and what percentage serves God?

Now I am not saying, “you got to give more” I am not saying that “if you don’t give more” that God will not be pleased with you. In fact, as our scripture lesson points out, the amount of giving is not the point at all. Early monks and hermits thought this. They thought that if they gave up all Earthly possessions their place in Heaven would be guaranteed. Some people think if they give that somehow it makes them a better person... that somehow it makes them more worthy of Heaven. But the problem with this kind of thinking, that is, if you think that somehow you earn the love of God by giving. the question is How do you know when “you have given enough?” There is no peace for those who believe that God’s love depends on giving up all Earthly possessions.

The real meaning of this scripture verse is far from that. What is important is your attitude towards giving. What do I mean by this? A person’s attitude toward giving is a reflection of the depth of their experience of God’s love. As Scripture says “Where your treasure is that’s where your heart will be.” And your heart guides your actions. Therefore, the place where you put your treasure is a reflection of “where your heart is.” That thing which you set your heart upon is the thing which you value most, that which you really worship, that which you place your faith upon. That is where your treasure will be. You can tell when a person’s heart is set upon earthly things. You can tell when a person has put their trust in earthly things. They will consistently act selfishly. There is a reason for this. They act selfishly because the treasures of this world are easily lost. Because the things of this Earth are so easily lost, stolen or broken, if our treasure, if our heart is upon the things of this Earth we must selfishly hoard them. In fact, selfishness is not the worst part of this sin. Those who treasure things of this Earth, do so because “they are blind to heavenly treasures.” They are blind to God. They are blind to the riches He offers. I’m sure you’ve seen homeless people occasionally standing on the corners or wandering around with shopping carts filled with junk. Because all they have is in their shopping carts, their shopping carts become precious to them. I’ve been told that many times people try to save them by bringing them to a home. But because the homeless person does not trust

you, they would rather stay by the trash that they have so painstakingly collected, their treasure. because they do not realize or do not believe in the greater treasure that you offer. So, they stay with their treasure and remain homeless. Putting faith in worldly things is like being a schizophrenic homeless person who has collected junk in their shopping cart, and being totally unaware of a greater gift being offered. Before we had faith in Christ, our sinfulness, like the homeless person's schizophrenia, blinded us to God and his kingdom. Sin instead forced us to value only the things of this world. Sin forced us to put our heart in "things that do not last, where thieves may steal or moths and rust destroy." And for this reason, people of this world are naturally selfish and self-centered.

But this is not limited to the people of this world. Even as Christians, sin tempts us to put our heart upon things of this world. For example, there are many types of treasure in this world. In today's world, the most common treasures are money and time. "Where we spend our money" "where we spend our time" is a strong indicator of where our heart is. If we were to log where we spent our money and where we spend our time for a year, I think we would be surprised at how much of our time and money has been spent on the non-important things of life, on things which have no eternal consequences. Also, notice this can be a problem for both the wealthy and the poor.

Having said that, thank God our salvation does not depend on "how good a steward we are of our earthly treasures: our time and our money." Thank you, Jesus! What is important is our attitude: how do we value earthly treasure vs. heavenly treasure. In faith, do we see the abundance of treasure, both earthly and heavenly which God already provides for us? In our scripture lesson Jesus is not telling us that the life of the disciple is marked by total disregard of material wealth, rather the life of a Christian is marked by the prioritizing heavenly things.

The life of a Christian is marked by the "treasuring of eternal things" more than earthly things. God asks us to do this, not because it makes us better people He asks us to do this because He wants our hearts. He wants our treasure to be with Him. We respond to God by trusting in him. This means, we trust Him. This means, we are content with whatever earthly riches we have. This means we use whatever material wealth we have to the glory of God. There are those who see material wealth as a sign that God is pleased with us. Material wealth is not necessarily a sign that we are being blessed by God. Rather, as Christians, material wealth is nothing more than a tool. Material wealth is a tool to be used to serve God. It is not how much wealth we have. What is important is how we use it, for that reveals our attitude toward earthly wealth. In that way, the way we use our

wealth becomes a witness to others. This is something both the wealthy and the poor can do equally. You can be a witness, rich or poor. When people see how you use your “treasures” it becomes a witness. How you use your treasures displays to others your core values, your priorities. It reveals “who is Lord of your heart.”

Those who have been touched by the generosity of God, are changed by it. It shapes them and brands them so that their lives are generously lived. Our giving habits reveal to the world, our priorities, our attitude toward God. It witnesses to the world that our faith has brought us beyond the materialism of this world. It witnesses to the world, that we believe we live in abundance. Though our resources may only be mites, God can do great things with them. Though we have only mites to work with, for those who put their trust in God, God will provide in ways they could not provide themselves. For those who put their faith in Christ, they see the abundance they really live in. Scripture has promised Seek first the kingdom of God, and all the rest will follow. When your treasure is in heavenly things, when your treasure is in eternal things there is no fear of loss. There is no fear of loss because it is God who provides. And if it is God who provides there is only abundance. This is the abundance that I live in. This is the abundance that you live in. Rejoice. Amen