

## The Woman Who Gave Everything • Luke 21:1-4

When the nation of Israel was founded in 1948 it was designed as a homeland for any Jews from anywhere in the world. Every Jew would be welcomed to the new state of Israel and would immediately be granted citizenship. As you can imagine, this law immediately raised the legal question, “Who is a Jew?” The question was resolved by the Israeli Supreme Court which ruled that the definition of a Jew is anyone who has a Jewish mother.

While there have been more questions and more definitions over the following years, the ruling recognized the powerful influence of mothers. Whether Jew or Gentile, the reality is that your mother probably has enormous spiritual impact on your life. Even if your mother is no longer living she probably still has enormous spiritual impact. As important as fathers are in the lives of their children—and they are very important—the spiritual example and leadership of mothers is great beyond description. Perhaps that is why Jesus so often chose women as examples of the kind of persons we all should be.

One of the best examples is a woman whose name is not even given. All we know is that she was a widow. Her story is so brief that in reading Luke’s biography of Jesus you could quickly miss it. It is found in Luke 21:1-4:

*As he looked up, Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. “I tell you the truth,” he said, “this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.”*

The story took place one day when Jesus was teaching at the Temple in Jerusalem. His teachings had focused on warnings about corrupt religious leaders who were arrogant, proud and unjust. They

would use their authority to trick widows out of their homes while they prayed long prayers that made them look super pious and religious.

Perhaps Jesus was discouraged by the ungodliness of these religious leaders who should have been the godliest guys in town. Discouraged and downcast, Jesus looked up for a moment. When he did he saw some very rich people giving large contributions at the Temple treasury. He was probably sitting in the courtyard of the Temple, a place where there were thirteen containers lined up for people to put in their offerings. These containers were shaped like trumpets with the narrow end up. The people put in coins because they didn’t have paper currency as we do. Each container was designated to receive money for a different function: wood for burning sacrifices; incense for the altar; upkeep of the Temple or any one of the other causes.

Some critics have imagined that the rich donors were showing off. The picture is painted of them pompously and proudly putting big bucks into each of the thirteen containers while everyone watched and “oohed” and “ahhed”. The truth is that Jesus did not speak a word of criticism against those who were wealthy and generous. This is not a story about them. It is a story about the woman who came next.

*“(Jesus) also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins.”*

***We measure generosity by how much a person gives when it would probably be better to measure generosity by how much a person keeps.***

The two coins were called “leptas”. This is the only place in the entire New Testament where a Jewish coin is mentioned. This was a Roman country with Roman currency, so it’s peculiar that it would even be used. The lepton

was a very small thin copper coin estimated to be worth 1/8 of a United States penny. Her total contribution to God and Temple worship totaled one quarter of a cent.

If you worked for \$6 an hour, you would have to work 1.5 seconds to earn as much money as she

contributed. Or, if you earned \$100,000 a year, you would need to work 1/3 of a second to make the equivalent of her two leptas. It wasn't very much. It was very close to nothing. But it was all she had. She gave everything. This was her life savings.

She was a very generous woman. She gave sacrificially. She thought more about what she could give than what she could keep. It is interesting how we measure generosity by how much a person gives when it would probably be better to measure generosity by how much a person keeps. By this measure she was very generous.

Following an awful earthquake several years ago a mother and her baby were found in the rubble days after their home collapsed on top of them. The mother was dying but the child was okay. They discovered that the mother had intentionally cut open the tip of her finger and allowed her baby to suck the blood for nourishment. It cost her life but she saved her baby.

Just like Jesus! Just like so many moms. Just like the way Christians are supposed to be. Just like the widow in Jesus' story. Generosity—giving up all she had.

But this woman whom Jesus saw at the Temple wasn't just generous, she was godly. One of the clearest marks of godliness is that a person considers God more important than money, possessions or anything else. So, how do we know this about her? It is written between the lines of the story.

She was a widow at a time when widowhood was especially harsh. Most people didn't have estates and, even if they did, chances were that a woman would not receive an inheritance. There were almost no jobs available to women other than domestic duties in the households of their fathers or husbands. Widows were forced to beg, return to their fathers (if they were still alive), enter prostitution or just starve. In the best of cases, widowhood wasn't easy; in the worst of cases it was absolutely awful.

We know about her that she had lost her husband to death. She may have lost her home. She was poor. Yet she had not given up on God. She was there at the Temple to worship God. She worshipped with everything she had.

I know people who have abandoned God and faith because of an illness or a financial setback or

a broken relationship. They decided that God wasn't any good to them if they didn't get what they wanted in life. Not this widow! Even though she lost the most valuable things in her life she still loved and worshipped God with everything she had. She was a godly person!

A powerful paragraph written by St. Paul is recorded in Romans 8:35-39:

*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written:*

*"For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."*

*No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

This widow was godly . . . but she is not alone. I have known many Christian women who have put God first in their lives, no matter what. When asked to compromise their values, they will not. When forced to choose between God and family, God always comes first. When deciding whether God or money or possessions or anything else is most important in their lives, God is always Number One.

Blessed are those women and men who are both generous and godly! But that wasn't all for this widow Jesus saw. She also had faith. She was convinced God would take care of her. As little as her money was, she gave it all away. She couldn't buy a slice of bread or a bite of fish. She had to totally depend upon God to give her money, find her a job or provide her with food. She had no resources left. If God wouldn't help her, there was nowhere else to go. She had to entirely trust God.

There have been several TV reports on past lottery winners who have won hundreds of millions of dollars. The overall consensus was that loads of money was fun up front but it wasn't very satisfying over the long haul. Many lottery winners have bought houses, cars, boats and expensive vacations

until they have huge debts and no money left. Others have hung on to their wealth but admit they have not achieved the happiness they thought would be theirs.

One thing is for sure: the richer we are the less we feel we need God to take care of us. The sad part is missing out on the supernatural wonder of knowing that God is caring for you. Imagine realizing that today's lunch, next week's bed and next month's job were all provided for you directly by God himself. It's a wondrous thrill and joy. That's what this widow experienced.

Are you convinced that God will take care of you? If you lost every possession and asset you owned and gave away your last quarter of a cent, could you totally trust God? That would take a very special faith. That's what this widow had. Somehow she just knew that God would provide for her.

One of the marvels of mothers who live by faith is that they teach their families to live by faith. Their children discover that God is good and that God is always there and can always be trusted. And, it benefits husbands as well. I know because I am married to a woman of faith and I have learned a great deal about trusting God through simply watching and listening to her.

Great are those who are generous, godly and full of faith in God, convinced of his care. But, how great are they? Jesus said, *"I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put in more than all the others."* That is a stunning statement! He didn't say that she gave more than anyone else. Jesus said that she gave more than all the rest of them put together!

Apparently God doesn't count the way we count. Apparently he doesn't undergo external audit to make sure he complies with generally accepted accounting procedures. It doesn't take much to impress God. It takes everything.

One of America's large private western universities recently undertook a capital funds campaign to build a whole series of buildings. The first gift was for \$25,000,000. It was given by the new president of the university. Besides this huge generosity he also does not take any salary for his presidential

duties. He made his money in business and is now giving it away.

That is wonderfully generous, but not as much as the woman's generosity in Jesus' story. She gave more than all the others combined. She was a truly great woman, a truly great person.

So, why pick her story for Mothers' Day? Actually, there are many reasons. Most of all is that there are many mothers who belong to her league. Not because you are widows. Not because you are poor. Not because your story is the same. You do not live in ancient Israel or worship at the Jerusalem Temple. You are probably not Jewish. But, you belong to the league of this marvelous woman whom Jesus honored because you are generous—you give what you have to God and to your family and to others. You are not just generous, you are godly. God is more important to you than money

or possessions or anything else. You are not only generous and godly, but you also have faith. You are convinced that God has your best interest at heart and that he will take care of you. And you are great . . . not because you're rich or famous but because of your generosity and your godliness and your

faith. The truth is that you are greater than all the rich and famous celebrities combined.

And so I say, Thank you! Thank you for who you are and for all you do. May we all be like you and like this widow whom Jesus honored. Whether we are men or women, married or single, young or old, mothers or fathers or neither . . . may we all be generous, godly, full of faith and great in the eyes of Jesus Christ.

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6630 Shady Oak Road  
Eden Prairie MN 55344  
952-944-6300  
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