The Joy of Giving

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*As he taught, he said, "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, **39** and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! **40** They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation." **41** He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. **42** A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. **43** Then he called his disciples and said to them, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. **44** For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on*." (Mark 12:38-44)

1. What Makes You Happy?

"What makes you happy?" If someone asks you this question, how would you respond? Everyone is different, but the academic research tells us that many people have a few things in common. Research shows that the best indicator of a person's happiness is the intimate relationships with someone or something. People would be happy when they have romantic relationships, family dynamics, close friendships, and intimate relationships with God or pets.

We are also happy when we do meaningful work. When we do acts of kindness to others we experience a joy. You might ask, "what about money?" If we don't have any money, we might believe that lots of money would make us happy. But that is not what psychologists have found. Research has shown that people who put a lot of emphasis on money are not as happy as non-materialistic people.

What about the people in the Bible? There are instances throughout the Bible where joy and happiness are mentioned after people experienced a close relationship with God. When Moses and the Israelites went through the Red sea, they sang to the Lord. "***The Lord is my strength and my song. He has become my salvation. I will praise him***" (Exodus 15:2). Today's scripture also shows us one of these stories and illustrates the power of our relationship with God.

2. Two Different Worshippers

Today's passage tells us about a woman who has given everything that she has to the Temple treasury. But before we dig into the passage, let's take a look at the passage before this in Mark 12:38-40 first.

In this passage, Jesus calls his disciples' attention to the behavior of the scribes. Jesus warns his disciples of false piety and worship of the scribes. Jesus points out a series of scribal vanities: long robes, and want greetings, choice seats, and places of honor. The scribes make lengthy prayers to call people's attention to their piety. The biggest problem with the scribes is that instead of supporting widows, the scribes would often exploit them. The scribes were more concerned about themselves and tried to impress other people with their piety. Their religious life was not genuine. The purpose of their piety was to gain attention from other people.

In Mark 12:41-44, Jesus talks about the offerings of the worshippers in the court of the women. After Jesus finishes his teaching in the court of the Gentiles, he enters the court of the women. This court had a 13 trumpet-shaped receptacle collection for receiving worshippers' freewill offerings and contributions. There, Jesus observes how the worshippers put their money into the treasury. Jesus notices that the wealthy bring in large amounts. There is also a poor widow who puts in two very small copper coins, worth of fraction of a penny.

Jesus tells his disciples that the poor widow gave more than all the other wealthy. The wealthy gave out of abundance but the widow gave even in her poverty. Although the wealthy gave a larger amount, Jesus tells us that he is more concerned about the attitudes and motives of giving. How are their motivations different? The wealthy gave out of customary tradition and habit. These offerings would be made whenever a wealthy person would enter the temple.

Why then would a widow give everything that she has? We can find potentially two reasons for this giving. The first is that the widow gave out of gratitude to the Lord. The second is that the widow trusted the Lord even in her financial circumstances. The widow's heart of gratitude allowed her to give everything to God. She knew that everything she had really belonged to God. And her thankfulness allowed her to give everything that she had.

3. The Raising of the Widow's Son

The Bible does not tell us the details of what God does for the widow. However, we can see a potential parallel with the story in Luke Chapter 7 that gives us some insight into what God may have done for the widow. In Luke 7:11 and the following, Jesus raises a widow's son from the dead.

One day a large crowd follows Jesus as he travels from Capernaum to Nain. There is another crowd with a funeral procession carrying the coffin of a

dead young man. He is the only son of a widow. The woman is now completely alone without any protection from a male figure. Jesus says to the woman, “don’t cry.” Then he goes up and touches the coffin. And he says, “***young man, I say to you, get up***” (7:14). And “***the dead man sat up and began to talk.***” (7:15).

The people were filled with awe and praise. The widow must have been so happy and joyful in receiving her son from the dead. Jesus not only raised the young man but also gave the widow hope and happiness. The widow in today’s scripture might have a similar experience that the Lord has done something unthinkable.

4. Trusting the Lord

The second reason the widow was able to give everything is because she trusted in the Lord. Matthew 6:31-32 says, “***Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ 32 For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things… “So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today***.” The widow could only give everything to God because she knew that God would take care of her future. The circumstances would have dictated that the widow be concerned about her future, however, she did not worry but trusted in the Lord.

Last week, a Korean missionary couple visited us from China. The couple has 2 children, a daughter at Gordon College in Hamilton, MA and a son studying at the University of Rochester in New York. I was surprised to learn that both children received full scholarships to attend their schools. I learned from the parents that it is still rare for colleges in the US to offer full scholarships especially for foreign students.

The missionary couple has dedicated their lives to preaching the Gospel in China. Despite potentially challenging situations, God has taken care of their children, providing their needs for school. The couple is planning to return to the mission field. But Chinese government does not allow the mission works by foreign missionaries. When I talked with them last week, I was so moved by their confidence in the Lord. They did not worry about their future but trusted God in all circumstances. They are willing to go wherever God sends them. They were so happy to give their lives for God’s kingdom.

5. The Joy of Giving for Building the Temple

In the Bible we can find many people who have the joy of giving. 1 Chronicles 29:6-7 & 9 says, “***the leaders of ancestral houses made their freewill offerings, as did also the leaders of the tribes,… 7 They gave for***

the service of the house of God five thousand talents and ten thousand darics of gold, ten thousand talents of silver… [9] Then the people rejoiced because these had given willingly." In this passage, King David urges his people to build a Temple for the Lord. The leaders of Israel bring their freewill offerings for the temple with great joy. The people are overwhelmed with their love and thankfulness to God. And they are able to give far beyond any expectations.

6. Conclusion

I have been tithing since I was a teenager. However, as I was preparing this week's sermon, I was wondering how much I have experienced the joy of giving to the Lord like the widow in our passage. I think in many instances, my giving, even though well intentioned, has often been out of religious custom or duty. I can imagine that sometimes my giving has been motivated even by wanting to be well perceived by others just like the scribes.

Our giving can become less joyful and be a burden to us. We can go to church and give our offering or tithe out of religious habit. However, our giving is not meant to be a habit or a burden. Our giving reminds us of our gratitude toward God and our relationship with our Lord. Giving is a joyful response to the love of God. God does not need our money. The Lord wants us to have an intimate relationship with him and experience the joy of sharing.

7. Application

This Saturday, the Watoto African Children's Choir is coming to our church to sing at 5:30pm. We will enjoy an evening listening to their music and testimonies. Please come and also invite someone who might enjoy hearing the music and dance they will share with us.

Do you know who started this wonderful ministry? In 1980, Gary and Marilyn Skinner, a Canadian couple, moved to Uganda and planted the Watoto church to focus on the children and women in the community. They believed that God would use them to restore hope to the city and the people in Uganda. I have never met the Skinners, but I am sure that they are so happy to be used to give hope to many children in Africa.

God gives us our money, time, and talents to serve others and share the gospel of Jesus Christ with this world. We are reminded that everything that we have is from God. Our future and our families belong to Jesus and are in God's control. We don't need to worry about anything, but instead, we trust in the Lord and follow him as he guides us in everything that we do. I pray that all of us experience the joy of giving as the widow did. Amen.