

“When a Little is a Lot”
The Gospel According to Mark 12:41-44
November 4th, 2018

David Blair, the original second officer of the *Titanic*, was relieved of his duties shortly before the ship set off for New York City on April 10th, 1912.

In Blair’s haste to leave, he forgot to turn over all of his equipment to his replacement. One of the forgotten items was the key to the crow’s nest telephone. Blair had also left the crow’s nest binoculars in his cabin.

According to crew survivor testimony, if the lookouts had been given the binoculars, they would have seen the iceberg that sank the *Titanic* sooner. As it was, they were forced to look for hazards with only their eyes. And, if they had access to the phone, they could have alerted the bridge sooner. Either scenario might well have given the *Titanic* enough time to get out of the way. And, 1,522 people would not have lost their lives!

Little things mean a lot!

In the synoptic gospel accounts - **Matthew, Mark, & Luke** – 1 out of every 6 verses deals with money. Of the 29 parables that Jesus told, 16 of them deal with a person and his money.

Money – financial giving – reveals the state of the heart as few other things can. And, it is the topic our Lord and Master addresses today, as we conclude our study of the 12th chapter of Mark’s account of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And, we’ll see His assessment of financial giving as people brought their financial gifts to worship with them. As with the sinking of the *Titanic*, little things (from man’s perspective) mean a lot (God’s perspective).

The Gospel According to Mark 12:41-44:

“⁴¹Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many *who were* rich put in much. ⁴²Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans. ⁴³So He called His disciples to *Himself* and said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; ⁴⁴for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood.”

A mother gave her young daughter a quarter and a dollar before church. “Put whichever one you want in the collection plate during the offering and keep the other coin for yourself,” she told her girl. When they were coming out of the church building after worship, the mother asked her daughter whether she had put the dollar or the quarter in the offering plate.

“Well,” said the little girl, “I was going to give the dollar, but just before the collection the pastor said that we should all be cheerful givers. I knew I’d be a lot more cheerful if I gave the quarter, so I did.”

Before we explore the text further, we should contemplate why financial giving is necessary in the first place. There are several reasons. Practically speaking, your monetary contributions pay the bills. The presbytery doesn’t give money to us, nor does our denomination. In fact, it’s the opposite which is true – Trinity Church supports them, and not the other way around. We give money to the presbytery for planting churches, supporting mission churches, and establishing college campus ministries, all of which are very expensive. This congregation gives

money to our denomination to help pay the expenses of our seminary (Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis), our denominational college (Covenant College in Lookout Mountain, Georgia), as well as Ridge Haven and CONO camp and retreat centers. We support the work of our denomination's Administrative Committee which assists churches in various ways, from help finding pastors to staffing a bookstore and providing various means of administrative assistance. Trinity Church funds the operation and maintenance of this building and property; pays the pastor, secretary, custodians, and youth director; finances various ministries and outreach events and mercy ministry to those within the fold of membership, as well as those outside the church.

This has been the practice of God's people in both testaments, old and new. For instance, consider **2 Kings 12:4-5**, where we read, "4 And Jehoash said to the priests, 'All the money of the dedicated gifts that are brought into the house of the LORD—each man's census money, each man's assessment money—and all the money that a man purposes in his heart to bring into the house of the LORD, 5 let the priests take *it* themselves, each from his constituency; and let them repair the damages of the temple, wherever any dilapidation is found.'"

Congregation-wide giving continued through the New Testament. It was the practice each Sunday as they remembered the Sabbath and kept it holy. Consider this from the Apostle Paul's first letter to the Church at Corinth (**I Corinthians 16:1-2**), "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: 2 On the first *day* of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come."

Looking more closely at those verses from **I Corinthians**, we learn that giving is an act of worship, because it takes place when we gather for Sunday worship. You may give by automatic transfer or mail a check to the Church office, and that is well and good. But, you must also realize that on Sundays, God is glorified by the worship of the Church, which includes our giving of the monies He has given us to steward. You should be ready and eager to give when the Church gathers – while she worships. Additional offerings take place, and financial gifts are needed, over and above your normal giving amount on those Sundays. (Today's shoebox offering is an example). We always need funding for the missionaries who count on our funds. We also have a benevolence fund which gets regular use and requires funds be donated regularly. We also have a building fund that gets regular use.

Who is to give financially each Sunday? God's people are; we don't expect those people who aren't saved from their sins to contribute to the work of God's Church, nor do we expect our visitors/guests to contribute. As we dig deeper, we see that **all** of God's people are to give to the ministry of the church; every person is to give, not just those with lots of money. No one is too poor to give something to the work of the Lord's Church! You cannot afford **not** to give!

Today's text in **Mark 12:42** instructs that a poor widow gave two small coins – paper thin, and worth just a few cents, to the work of the church. Let that sink in - she was a widow, meaning she didn't have a husband to provide for her needs. She was poor. Yet, she gave what she had - two mites, and they were all she had!

We'll come back to Jesus' assessment of this woman's giving. We also see from this text that there were people with much wealth who were giving to the work of the church, too. It's sad, but true that some people of means give to so many different causes – whether secular or Christian – that they short cut their giving to the work of God's people, the Church. No one is too rich to give much of the income God has blessed them back to the Church!

Verse 41 teaches us that many who were rich put much money in the treasury. **2 Kings 12:9** describes for us what a typical Old Testament treasury looked like. "...Jehoiada the priest took a chest, bored a hole in its lid, and set it beside the altar, on the right side as one comes into the house of the LORD; and the priests who kept the door put there all the money brought into the house of the LORD." People gave their tithes and offerings to a priest or placed them in a box upon entering or exiting the temple.

In his gospel account, Luke lays down a rule of giving we mustn't forget. Hear his words from **Luke 12:48**, "For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more." If we have great resources, then we should give much away. God gave those resources to you to give them away.

"If you give what you do not need, it isn't giving," said Mother Teresa once. Our giving is not measured by amount, but by sacrifice. That is the message we also get from the Apostle Paul's second letter to the church at Corinth, **2 Corinthians 8:1-5** – "Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: ²that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. ³For I bear witness that according to *their* ability, yes, and beyond *their* ability, *they were* freely willing, ⁴imploping us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. ⁵And not *only* as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and *then* to us by the will of God."

God judges what we give by what we keep. It all belongs to Him; we are merely stewards for what He give us. *How are you stewarding the income God has given you to manage, dear one?*

The story is told of a man who died and went to Heaven. He was met at the pearly gates by the Apostle Peter who led him down golden streets. They passed mansion after beautiful mansion until they finally came to the end of the street where they stopped in front of a dumpy, worn down shack.

The man asked Peter why he got such a hut when there were so many mansions he could live in. Peter replied, "I did the best I could with the money you sent us."

Now, back to the poor widow. Jesus called His disciples to consider that in giving her small amount, she actually gave more than the wealthy had. They gave out of their abundance, and she gave out of her poverty. "By human calculation what the widow gave was insignificant. Measured by divine standard, however, her contribution was priceless." (Hendriksen, 507) "In (Jesus') estimation the two copper coins were sparkling diamonds." (Hendriksen, 507)

An illustration of such giving in the face of great hardship is compelling, and should serve to motivate us to similar sacrificial giving.

In 1908, Irish explorer Ernest Shackleton headed an Antarctic expedition attempting to reach the South Pole. They came closer than any before but, 97 miles short of the pole, had to turn back.

In his diary Shackleton told of the time when their food supplies were exhausted except for one last ration of hardtack, a dried sort of biscuit that was distributed to each man. Some of the men took snow, melted it, and made tea while consuming their biscuit. Others, however, stowed the hardtack in their food sacks, saving it for a last moment of hungry desperation.

The fire was built up, and weary, exhausted men climbed into their sleeping bags to face a restless sleep, tossing and turning. Shackleton said that he was almost asleep when out of the corner of his eye, he noticed one of his most trusted men sitting up in his bag and looking about to see if anyone was watching. Shackleton's heart sank within him as this man began to reach toward the food sack of the man next to him. Shackleton watched as the man opened the food sack and took his own hardtack and put it in the other man's sack.

God is able to do great things with a little. Scripture is full of examples:

* Earlier in this gospel account, we learned how Jesus took a couple of fishes and loaves of bread to feed thousands...on two separate occasions! (**Mark 6:30-44 & Mark 8:1-10**).

* *And, who can forget young David toppling the Philistine giant Goliath with a single smooth rock cast at him by slingshot in I Samuel 17?*

* **In I Corinthians Chapter 1**, the Apostle Paul lists several categories of people who are "little" in the eyes of the world: not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called*. God has chosen foolish things...to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; ²⁸ and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are,"

"Let us each do our own duty, and give liberally and gladly to every Christian object while we can. There will be no giving when we are dead. Let us give as those who remember that the eyes of Christ are upon us. He still sees exactly what each gives, and knows exactly how much is left behind. Above all let us give as the disciples of a crucified Saviour, who gave Himself for us, body and soul, on the cross. Freely we have received. Let us freely give." (Ryle, 270)

There are three kinds of givers in the world. There are **Squirrels** - they don't really want to give anything. They just want to hide it all away, because who knows, they might need it later.

There are also **Lawyers** - they're always looking for loopholes: "*Do I have to tithe on my inheritance? My poor old mother already tithed on that. And what if I find \$50? Do I have to tithe on that?*" Lawyers are always looking for a way out. Essentially, there's no real difference between a squirrel and a lawyer. They'll give if they have to. But neither of them wants to give. They won't do anything more than they have to.

Then there's the third kind of giver - **Fountains**. They're not looking for a way out. They're looking for ways and reasons to give and keep on giving.

Which best describes your giving, dear one? Are you a squirrel, a lawyer, or a fountain? The measure of life is not its duration, but its donation. How are you spending yours?