

The Desert Flower

Mark 13:41-44

***It soothes the small to know our God
Prefers the paltry, frail and flawed
(a donkey bone, a shepherd's rod,***

***A widow's mite, a leather sling),
We need to kneel at Harod Spring
To learn the lesson that our King***

***Once taught a boy fresh off the farm.
Our Sovereign Savior's strong right arm
is not empowered; it is harmed***

***By offerings imbued with pride.
In impotence our Savior died
And yet His victories abide.***

***That's why our Lord would have us seek
The wisdom of the mere and meek:
His power flows to those who're weak.***

There was sorrow in the Savior's eyes and a longing in His voice. He shook His head and spoke softly.

Jesus answered and said, "You unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you and put up with you?" Luke 9:41

The Master was not being hard and harsh that day at the foot of Mount Hermon. He spoke with a sad sigh. He was homesick.

Far from His heavenly home in a foul, foreign land, God's Son was surrounded by creatures twisted and tormented by wickedness. And it grieved Him to be among beings who preferred perversion over purity, death over life, darkness over light and lies over truth. Oh, how He longed for the light and life, the purity and perfection of Heaven! His home faraway.

This was Tuesday. Our Savior spent that day on the temple courtyards. And His homesickness deepened there. The temple reminded Him of His Father's celestial city. But even that model of Heaven was infected and afflicted by darkness and death.

He spent part of the day dealing with some young zealots sent by the Sanhedrin to trap Him. Their trap was easy to avoid. But it saddened Him to see young men so eager to act out a lie by pretending to be sincere seekers.

Then Jesus dealt with Sadducees and scribes. Their entire lives were lies. They hid hearts full of lust and greed behind masks of pretended purity and piety.

The Savior was a Man of sorrows. And His grief grew there on the temple courtyard.

Everywhere He looked He saw pride and pretense. Men chanted praise that was little more than empty words. Others prayed hollow prayers with neither faith nor hope.

It reminded our Redeemer of His days in the Judean Desert. The barren wastes and lifeless landscape all around Him added to His affliction there. But Oh, how it refreshed our Redeemer's heart to see a single blossom struggling up out of sterile sand to bloom beside bleached and barren boulders.

On the temple courtyard, our Savior was in a spiritual wasteland, surrounded by death and depravity. But there too, He saw a single desert flower: a bright blossom blooming with life and light.

And His heavy heart was made glad.

The Motive for Giving

Weary from warring against arrogant liars and pious pretenders, Jesus sat down in the Court of the Women. Beside some pillars there, thirteen trumpet-mouthed receptacles stood.

This was the temple treasury. And Passover pilgrims shuffled along in long lines to drop coins into the treasury.

And He sat down opposite the treasury, and began observing how the people were putting money into the treasury; and many rich people were putting in large sums. Verse 41

Some came wrapped in richly embroidered robes. Others walked by in silk slippers. Some clinked glittering coins into the treasury with a flourish. And others emptied out bags full of coins.

Somewhere, the greedy old men who ruled the temple grinned and rubbed their hands together. The gifts were a king's ransom. But those expensive offerings didn't make God's Son smile.

Others came bartering and bargaining for a blessing. And still others came in pretended poverty and dropped pocket change into one of the receptacles. The Savior could see the inner smirk in these men. They were sure no one saw and no one knew the truth.

But Someone did. And that grieved the Master all the more. But then He happened upon a desert flower.

Our Redeemer was refreshed on the temple courtyard that day by the sight of a woman in a ragged, threadbare cloak.

A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which amount to a cent. Verse 42

The woman's face was creased by sorrow and suffering. The word Mark used for *poor* means to crouch or cringe. Perhaps she was one of the widows the scribes swindled out of a humble home. So she struggled through life, working at whatever menial jobs she could find. And now she had nothing in all the world to buy a bit of food and some sticks of firewood but two copper coins.

But that lonely widow didn't buy food with those coins. Neither did she spend them on firewood. Instead, she dropped her two copper coins into the temple treasury.

That much we know. But why? That is the question. Why would this widow compound her grief by giving her meager day's wages in a temple that glittered with gold.

It couldn't have been out of some sense of duty or obligation. Sacrifice doesn't grow in such sterile gardens.

Neither was her gift given to dull the razor edge of grinding guilt or plant a seed that might grow into prosperity. No, the woman didn't give because she had to.

She gave because she was so full of love, she couldn't help herself. A life of grief and sorrow, of poverty and loneliness had not quenched the fires of love for her Lord.

She was shy and scared the moment the Savior saw her shuffle up to the temple treasure. She had so very little to give.

If anyone saw her, they would have sneered and shook their heads. After all, what good could even God do with two copper coins? But the woman simply had to give something to the Lord.

He was her only comfort and companion in life. So she gave what she had. And the Savior smiled.

Life was hard for new believers in Macedonia, too. Most of them were pitifully poor. And all of them faced the torture and torment of persecution.

But when Paul raised money to help poverty stricken saints at Jerusalem, those Macedonians begged the apostle for the honor and privilege of being allowed add to the offering.

Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. 2 Corinthians 8:4 (NIV)

It makes no difference if the gift we give is of time, talent or treasure. There can be but one acceptable motive for giving.

Godly giving grows only in a garden of love. We not to give to God because we feel He needs our gift. After all, our Lord has no needs. Certainly not that man could fill.

Neither are we give to purchase His grace or goodness. The rich favor of God is not for sale at any price.

No, if our giving is to please Christ, only one motive is acceptable. We are to be so filled and overflowing with love for the Lord who laid down His life for us that we simply have to give.

That is why the New Testament urges but never commands Christians to give to God. And both the widow and the Macedonians understood why.

Giving is not an obligation. It is an eternal honor.

The Means of Giving

Many comfortable Christians today would criticize the widow our Lord praised. After all, how advisable is it to give what little you have to God?

Piety and purity are fine things, but we must also be practical, they would counsel her. What are you going to eat now? How will you survive if you give everything you have to God?

Those questions might well have clouded the woman's mind, too. But they were frail and foolish arguments beside her love for God.

As Paul commanded, she did not labor with her hands that she might eat. But that she might have something to give.

God's Word promises glittering crowns to Christians who are faithful to Jesus Christ. But those crowns will not be worn.

They cast their crowns before the throne, Revelation 4:10 (ESV)

How tormenting; how terrible it would be to have nothing give the eternal Father who gave His Son that we might live! How tragic it would be to have nothing to give the Savior who sacrificed His body and His blood that we might have His life and love!

The woman had so very little. Nevertheless, she gave what she had. In fact, she gave all she had.

Her gift was much more than mere money. It was a sign and a symbol of her commitment to her Lord.

Like you and me, she had so very little to offer God. And fear whispered that she should withhold something for herself.

But she would not. And if we are really in love with the Lord Jesus, we will not withhold anything, either. No aim, ambition or affection can be kept back for ourselves.

Our commitment to Christ must be complete. Nothing else is worthy of so great and gracious a God.

The widow's gift came wrapped in the glittering gold foil of faith. Out of that faith, she willingly dropped into the trumpet shaped treasury everything she had to live on.

She did so because she understood what many of us are yet to learn. Yes, she worked at whatever menial tasks she could find. And she was paid for her back breaking work.

But never for a moment did she believe she was earning her living. She knew the Lord who love her was the One who supplied her needs.

So she was free to give everything she was and everything she had to gracious God. She knew beyond all doubt that was not giving away her supper.

She was simply expressing her love to her Lord. He was her Jehovah Jireh, her Lord Provider.

In the same way, we never need to fear giving our all to our Lord. We need not hide away or hoard up some diversions or desires for our own delight. God is our Jehovah Jireh, too.

Delight yourself in the Lord; and He will give you the desires of your heart. Psalm 37:4

Neither do we need to keep back some aims and ambitions or some dreams and designs. Our God has nothing but good in mind for us. And His plans are always better than ours.

"I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Jeremiah 29:11(NIV)

No, we need not fear giving God everything we are and everything we have. Our loving Lord is faithful.

He has never forsaken those who trust in His Word. So like the widow, we can be glad to give everything to Him.

Some might assume the widow slipped out of the temple courtyard that afternoon, wondering and worrying where she would find something to eat. But they would be wrong.

The widow knew exactly where her evening meal would come from. Her daily bread would come from the hand of her loving Lord. Just as it always had.

I doubt the widow realized the Redeemer was watching her that day. But He was. And I doubt she ever knew how she lightened her Lord's load of grief that day. But she did.

Our loving Lord was watching that woman. And He is just as surely watching us. But He keeps no account ledger.

He neither cares nor counts how much we give. No, He watches not so much what we give, but why we give and how we give.

And when He sees faith that is completely confident of God and trusting in His Holy Word, the Savior smiles. Our Master is made glad when He sees people like the widow.

She was full of faith. And that always pleases our Lord.

The Measure of Giving

The woman dropped her coins, then silently slipped away. And in a moment, she was lost in the press of Passover pilgrims.

But the satisfaction she gave the Savior still sparkled within Him. It so thrilled Him, He simply had to share it with His disciples. So He called the Twelve to His side.

Calling His disciples to Him, He said to them, "Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury; for they all put in out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on." Verses 43-44

Our Lord watched people giving that day. And He still does. Now our Savior sits at the right hand of God the Father. And still watches us as we give.

In fact, we never offer our Lord an hour's labor or a dime offering that He doesn't watch us. And His all-seeing eye still sees just as He told Samuel long ago.

God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. 1 Samuel 16:7

Jesus was watching more than the actions of worshipers that day. He was also weighing their hearts.

He saw many wealthy men give large sums of money. But He knew they left the temple to return to posh, hilltop mansions. And He knew their love for the Lord was partial at best.

The widow offered God more than two copper coins. She offered Him sacrifice. And no one knows better than the Savior that the measure of love is sacrifice.

In three short days, Jesus would be beaten until His back hung in bloody shreds. Then burly Roman soldiers would drive nails through His hands and feet.

Raised up between the earth and the sky, Christ would watch those same soldiers gamble for the only earthly possessions He had left. His clothes!

In the end, Jesus would cry out, "*It is finished!*" The penalty for sin was paid. He had purchased life for hideous, hateful creatures like you and me. But it cost Him absolutely everything He had.

That was the measure of our Master's love. He gave all He had to deliver us from darkness, death and despair. That was the real reason our Redeemer praised that ragged little woman on the temple courtyard. She modeled the love her Lord had for her.

And the Master is always our measure. The Savior's sacrifice is the standard for anything we offer might offer Him.

Just as Jesus did, if we are to offer God our time, our talent and our treasure, we are to give out of a heart that overflows with love for our Lord. Now as then, our Savior seeks such offerings.

But that is not all He treasures. He also looks for complete faith and full commitment. And when He sees such a gift, His great heart is made glad. He knows we have offered Him a gift He can use to work wonders, make miracles and light up lives.

Each evening, Levites emptied out the temple treasury. Then accountants counted out the coins and scratched numbers on scrolls.

But God does not keep accounts and measure gifts as men do. He who owns the earth and the entire universe does not smile when men give great sums of money or impressive talent out of their excess.

Neither does He admire those who give out of selfish motives. He knows such gifts are so soured and spoiled by sin they aren't worthy to work His wonders in lives still lost in sin.

No, our Savior's heart soars when He sees us give to Him out of great love, full faith and selfless sacrifice.

Those are the gifts He can use. In fact, they are the only gifts He can use.