

## 2 Samuel 24:18-24 (New Revised Standard Version)

<sup>18</sup>That day Gad came to David and said to him, “Go up and erect an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.” <sup>19</sup>Following Gad’s instructions, David went up, as the Lord had commanded. <sup>20</sup>When Araunah looked down, he saw the king and his servants coming toward him; and Araunah went out and prostrated himself before the king with his face to the ground. <sup>21</sup>Araunah said, “Why has my lord the king come to his servant?” David said, “To buy the threshing floor from you in order to build an altar to the Lord, so that the plague may be averted from the people.” <sup>22</sup>Then Araunah said to David, “Let my lord the king take and offer up what seems good to him; here are the oxen for the burnt offering, and the threshing sledges and the yokes of the oxen for the wood. <sup>23</sup>All this, O king, Araunah gives to the king.” And Araunah said to the king, “May the Lord your God respond favorably to you.” <sup>24</sup>But the king said to Araunah, “No, but I will buy them from you for a price; I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God that cost me nothing.” So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver.

## Mark 12:38-44 (New Revised Standard Version)

<sup>38</sup>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, <sup>39</sup>and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! <sup>40</sup>They devour widows’ houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.” <sup>41</sup>He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. <sup>42</sup>A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. <sup>43</sup>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. <sup>44</sup>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.”

Several years ago the US Supreme Court reviewed a trial and verdict  
 in which a class action lawsuit was settled for millions of dollars,  
 and yet none of the settlement went to the actual victims,  
 because it was all taken up in legal fees and expenses...  
 ... which as Chief Justice Roberts noted, “**that sounds a bit fishy.**”

In this part of Mark’s Gospel, the religious teachers, the scribes  
 were trying to discredit Jesus with a series of trick questions  
 intending to make him look bad and lose support of the people.

But Jesus, being God, turned their play back on them each time,  
 then he warns how to recognize shady-corrupt characters, **vs. 38-40,**  
 As Jesus taught, he said, “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be  
 greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at  
 banquets! **They devour widows’ houses** and for the sake of appearance say long prayers.

Most of the scribes were wealthy, powerful, focused on appearances,  
 and noted for their knowledge of the Law, tradition and loftiness.  
 They wore impressive long robes that indicated their status,  
 were to be addressed respectfully as, “Rabbi” or teacher,  
 and their pride & corruption even contaminated the Temple.

Since normally, women could not own real property in that culture,  
for widows without a male relative, scribes often managed estates  
but rather than protecting the widows, some exploited them,  
**which Jesus found a bit fishy.**

Through archeology and the many surviving ancient documents,  
we have a pretty good picture of the scene described in Mark.

It was during the Passover celebration in the Temple courtyard  
where there would have been lots of people milling around,  
especially pilgrims gathered from other areas for Passover.

In the large public courtyard area near the temple entrance,  
along one wall, there were 13 curled brass receptacles  
that looked like metal ram's horns, called "shofars".

When people dropped the coins of their Temple-offering into them,  
they banged and clanged all the way down these trumpet-like spouts,  
and so that any one nearby could hear the offering,  
with the sound indicating how much they had given.

As Mark explains and describes the scene, vs. 41-42,

**He (Jesus) sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny.**

Compared to the clang of the large contributions,  
the widow's meager two coins made almost no sound.

With their attention and admiration focused on the rich,  
the crowd probably didn't even notice the widow's gift.

But in stark contrast, Jesus notices the poor widow and her offering.

The particular Greek word used for 'widow' in this text,  
indicates that she was entirely on her own and very poor,  
barely surviving with no one to help look after her.

That would be a very precarious existence - marginally surviving,  
the very least and lowest rung on the social status ladder,  
a seemingly insignificant person, hardly worth anyone's notice.

And, in contrast

to the large and impressive contributions of the wealthier,  
she quietly slips in her two tiny copper coins, two "lepta",  
roughly equivalent to 5 minutes pay at minimum wage.

Jesus must have stunned his startled listeners, vs. 43-44,

**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. 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."**

It is doubtful that the widow's insignificant contribution  
made any difference in covering the cost of Temple operations,  
so in what sense did Jesus say and understand  
that she had contributed more than all the others?

**What sort of formula did Jesus use in making his calculations?**

While the crowd was impressed by the amount of the larger gifts,  
Jesus is impressed by the amount of **this one impoverished giver,**  
**which reveals something of how God views true worth and value.**

We focus on the amount of the gift, Jesus, on the heart of the giver.

The tiny and insignificant offering made by this poor widow  
was an offering of trust, her total self, a sacrificial gift,  
for she gave ALL that she had - ALL she had to live on.  
totally trusting God to provide what she needed...

**... so her gift was given at great personal sacrifice and risk,**  
**and in fact by giving all she had, she become the gift.**

**The point is that the true measure of a gift, is not the amount,**  
**but what it costs the giver to give, the giver's trust in God,**  
**the giver's sense of gratitude and commitment to the Lord.**

The point Jesus is making is one of contrast, that even after  
the wealthier folks had made their far more substantial offerings  
they would still continue to be relatively wealthy people,  
for they were giving from their surplus and excess  
in amounts that would hardly be felt or missed at all.

But the tiny and insignificant offering made by this poor widow  
was **an offering of trust, her total self, a sacrificial gift,**  
**for she gave all that she had - all she had to live on.**

The poor widow was holding back nothing in reserve,  
but totally trusting God to provide what she needed...  
**... so her gift was given at great personal sacrifice and risk.**

The widow's sacrifice that seems so extravagant and over the top  
points ahead to the sacrifice Jesus will make in just a few days,  
**the extravagant gift of God's love, mercy and grace to us.**

This poor widow was entirely trusting God,  
she withheld nothing back in reserve

and so her sacrifice is the very model of faithful discipleship,  
she gave herself entirely to God, & not just a few of her things.

It's not that Jesus wants us to give away all we have to live on,  
**but at the same time, if there is no sacrifice on our part,**  
**then our discipleship may be quite a bit less than we think.**

In this passage Jesus is saying,  
**"no, I don't just want your time, your talent and your treasure.**  
**What I want is you – you're total commitment and your best."**

When I was a young boy, on the way to Sunday School each week,  
Dad would give me a dime to drop into the offering plate,  
and the offering was a fairly meaningless gesture to me.

Years later, when I earned my own money doing odd jobs for neighbors,

my offering became a joyful and meaningful part of worship,  
as an expression of commitment that helped me grow in my faith...  
... for my offering was a making choice not to buy something I wanted.

You see, I needed for my offering to come at **some personal cost**,  
to give of my own resources, to have **some sacrificial aspect**,  
and I **needed to make that choice to give at a cost to me.**

**So the question is, is there any real self-sacrifice involved?**  
**And, can I point to anything that I am willing to forgo,**  
**so that I can give that money, that time, that talent? ...**

... for if my giving is simply a little excess from my surplus,  
if there is no effort, creativity, or sacrifice on my part,  
**then I am missing out on the blessing that might have been mine.**

Suppose you decided to join a gym or health club.  
It would be a pointless unless you actually went regularly,  
and did exercise involving some sweat & heavy breathing...  
**... for it only works to your benefit if you put something into it.**

Meaning comes from living with a purpose, from serving usefully,  
in taking the risk of giving the best of ourselves generously,  
by touching the lives of others with God's love and grace,  
**and trying to make this world a better place, because we live.**

In the Second Samuel passage,  
David was commanded to construct an altar and offer a sacrifice  
at the threshing floor that belonged to Araunah the Jebusite.

When Araunah saw King David coming and heard what he wanted,  
he offered the threshing floor to David as gift, vs. 22-23,  
Then Araunah said to David, "Let my lord the king take and offer up what seems good to him; here are the oxen for the burnt offering, and the threshing sledges and the yokes of the oxen for the wood. All this, O king, Araunah gives to the king."

David recognized that it was not about the threshing floor,  
but that God wanted David to submit in obedience,  
and for David to offer up that sacrifice himself, vs. 24,  
But the king said to Araunah, "No, but I will buy them from you for a price; I will not offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God that cost me nothing."

**I will not make an offering to the Lord that cost me nothing.**  
**If I am not making some sacrifice, it's not really an offering.**

Since we will be presenting our stewardship pledge cards today  
**David's perspective is a helpful notion for our consideration.**

My pledge is an opportunity to refresh and renew that commitment,  
and to self-examine, to see **if my life is in synch with my faith.**

In Ghana, a favorite and most joyful part of the worship service  
is when the drums and music start, and the whole church stands  
with singing, dancing, swaying and waving handkerchiefs  
as with great flourish and joy they present the offering.

They didn't have much to give, but what they had, they gave with joy!

The whole congregation dances their way up to a big plastic washtub  
to drop in whatever money they can, and even those with nothing  
will with dance give themselves over to the divine joy.

You see, it's really isn't the money, certainly not the amount,  
but rather, the exuberant joy of giving, participating with God.

**By recognizing the Lordship of Jesus Christ over all we possess,  
including life itself – our time, our talents and our resources,  
we more faithfully live out the blessings of God as intended.**

Used appropriately, creatively, generously and wisely,  
our life's resources can all serve to honor and glorify God  
we can accomplish good and meaningful things in this world.

During our final hymn, I invite those who are able to come forward  
and perhaps even dance a bit as you present your pledge card,  
and even if you've already sent in your pledge,  
if you are able, please still come up to the front  
**as a sign of responding to God by offering yourself...**

... and let that symbolize gratefully-joyfully presenting to God,  
all that we have, all that we value, and all that we are.

... as a symbol of gratefully-joyfully presenting ourselves to God,  
declaring I want Jesus 1<sup>st</sup> in my life and to grow spiritually,  
and I want to participate in whatever God is up to in this place.

I want to be in on  
all the cool stuff that God is doing in and through this church,  
and for God's Spirit and gracious love and healing promise  
to fill and transform my whole life, values and being.

... and yes, you are welcome  
to sing, dance & wave your handkerchief with joy along the way,  
for we are blessed to be stewards of God's love and hope,  
fulfill God's purpose this world.

called to serve and to

So come, let us worship and celebrate our God and His blessings,  
by joyfully presenting ourselves during this final hymn,  
**as we pledge our lives, our tithes and our offerings.**

The Apostle Paul explains it this way, Romans 12:2 (The Message)  
Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him...  
You'll be changed from the inside out, **for God brings the best out of you.**