

Sermon: Am I Giving Enough?
Text: Mark 12:38 – 44
Date: November 8, 2009 AM
Place: Jesup First UMC

It was early Monday morning, the day after Pledge Sunday, and I was sitting at my desk with my back to the door when suddenly, there was a knock at the door. I turned around and there was Mr. Sonny. Sonny Duncan was the Finance Chairperson at Buena Vista and a member of the Board of Trustees at Magnolia Manor in Americus. In fact, the recreation center at Magnolia Manor bears his name. Now, if anybody knew finance, Sonny Duncan did. For years, he had been the banker in town and he was the largest contributor to the church. So, I said: *“Good morning, Mr. Sonny.”* He said: *“Preacher, I need to get straight to the point. I need another pledge card.”* And my heart sank; I thought: *“Oh my goodness, I’ve made Mr. Sonny mad and he’s going to cut his pledge for next year”* and that was a scary thought. You see, I knew that every year, on the first Sunday of the year, Mr. Sonny put in his check for \$10,000 and I knew the church needed that money. So as I reached in my desk for a new pledge card, I said: *“Mr. Sonny, is everything okay?”* He said: *“Preacher, I’ve just been thinking about how blessed I am and I suddenly realized something: I just haven’t been giving enough.”*

I just haven’t been giving enough! Today, we come to one of my favorite stories in the Bible: the Story of the Widow’s Mite. As you entered the Temple Complex, amid all the people coming and going and all the sacrificial animals, there was a place where several tables were set up and on those tables

were 12 golden, trumpet-shaped receptacles where the people placed their financial gifts. Now, this money was used for several things over the span of Israel's history. Sometimes it was used to care for the widows and orphans and sometimes it was used to make necessary repairs on the Temple.

Well, one day, Jesus and His disciples were sitting near these receptacles, watching the people coming and going and somebody special caught His attention. Mark tells us she was a poor widow and she put two small coins into the offering plates. And Jesus called His disciples and said: *“Did you see that? Some of these people put in large amounts of money, but she gave more than any of them because she gave all she had.”*

I just haven't been giving enough! Brothers and sisters, few things are more sacred to us than our money. People used to fight you over their family; now, they'll cut your throat over a dollar. That's why Jesus spent so much time talking about money. In fact, many of His parables deal with money and a lot of His teaching deals with money and I think it's because money continually threatens to consume us. We're obsessed with it. Those who don't have it want it and those who have it want more of it. There's something so tempting about money.

First, we're tempted to make money our god. We've all heard stories about people who are so obsessed with making more money that they lose everything else. They're always working extra hours because they need the extra money. And in the

process of making more money, they lose everything else: their family and their friends. In fact, it is possible to become so obsessed with money and possessions that you forsake the faith. That's why Jesus said: "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate one and be devoted to the other, or he will love the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."ⁱ But it's tempting to try.

Second, we're tempted to believe it all belongs to us! And that's how we talk about money – my money, my IRA, my savings account, my house, my car, my property. But the last time I checked, the Bible says: "The earth is the Lord's and everything that is in it."ⁱⁱ Several of Jesus' parables deal the idea of stewardship. A master is going on a journey and he calls his servants together and divides his money between them. To one he gives five talents, to the second he gives two talents and to the third he gives one talent. And in the end, each is judged based on his stewardship of the master's money. Paul told the church at Corinth: "It is required of stewards that they should be found faithful."ⁱⁱⁱ

And so, with that in mind, we come to the Story of the Widow's Mite. What is Jesus trying to teach us through this story? Let me just mention three things.

First, Deep Pockets do not impressed God! Verse 41 says: "He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums." Can't you just imagine this scene? Jesus and the disciples are sitting over to the side as people made their way to

the offering plates. And here they come, Jerusalem's best, dressed in their finest robes and wearing their best turbans. And they come strutting up to the offering plates, because they really want to be seen and they reach into their pockets and pull out their offering and throw it into the plate so that it will make a lot of noise. Because after all, the louder the noise the bigger the offering, right?

And can't you just hear what the people are saying? "*Oh, just look at Brother James; he's so generous; he really cares about the poor and he really cares about the upkeep of the facility. What in the world would we do without him?*" But that doesn't impress Jesus! In fact, if anything that's the kind of thing that turned Jesus' stomach. Deep pockets do not impress God! But ...

Digging Deep does! Verse 43 says: Jesus "called His disciples and said to them, 'Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all who are contributing to the treasury.'" In the midst of all the coming and going, a little widow woman made her way to the offering plates. Oh, she didn't have much to give; and she really didn't care if anybody saw her. But she came and she took her little copper coins in her hand and just kinda dropped them in and turned to leave. Nobody even saw her and certainly nobody would have commended her for her offering, but Jesus ... Oh friends, she caught the eye of Jesus and she moved the heart of God.

And the thing that moved Jesus was her sacrifice. You see, the others gave out of their

abundance; they gave what was left over, but she dug deep. Her pockets weren't deep, but her reach was and she reached down and grabbed everything she had. Now, there are two truths we need to learn when it comes to our financial giving.

First, God doesn't expect equal giving; He expects equal sacrifice. Listen friends, there will always be somebody who gives more money than you do. But that doesn't matter to God; what matters is that we give sacrificially, that we give out tithe or that we at least learn to grow in our giving.

Bonnie and Gary came to see me during one of our stewardship campaigns. And they were concerned that they couldn't give as much as some other people gave. Gary said: "*Tucker, we've been thinking about it and we just can't afford to tithe.*" So, I said: "*Well, Gary, what percentage of your income do you give every year?*" He said: "*Oh, we're ashamed to tell you that we only give 4%.*" I said: "*Okay! Well, will you make a commitment to give 5% next year?*" He said: "*We'll try.*" And so they did. And a few years later, I got a card from Bonnie and Gary that said: "*Tucker, thank you so much. We're so blessed and we started tithing this year.*"

Not equal giving; equal sacrifice.

Second, what I leave at home is just as important as what I put in the plate. Since I'm just a steward of God's money, God cares how I spend all His money. How much of God's resources do we invest in the Kingdom and how much do we waste on ourselves? On our own pleasure? On our own wants and wishes? On our own agendas? You

see, the real truth behind tithing and Biblical giving is this: God blesses us. Is there anybody here this morning who would stand and say, “*Nope! God hasn’t blessed me*”? I don’t think so. God blesses us and in return, He asks us to give a tenth. God says: “**Bring the entire tithe into the storehouse.**” And then, He promises to help us be good stewards of the other 90%. He says: “**I will rebuke the devourer for you** so that those things that rob you and suck you dry won’t be a problem for you anymore.”

What I leave at home is just as important as what I put in the offering.

I just haven’t been giving enough! That’s what I think about when I think about the story of the Widow’s Mite. Jesus used the sacrifice of a poor widow to teach His disciples and to teach us a lesson about money. Now, brothers and sisters, the economy hasn’t been too good this year. Businesses have suffered; families have suffered; and the church has suffered. And honestly, some of us have given all we can give, all that we have to give. I just wonder though ... I wonder if this story doesn’t speak to many of us today. I wonder if our story is the same as Mr. Sonny’s story: “*I just haven’t been giving enough.*”

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen!

ⁱ Luke 16:13

ⁱⁱ Psalm 24:1

ⁱⁱⁱ I Corinthians 4:2