

CHRIST OVER AGAINST THE TREASURY

"And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living." Mark 12:41-44. Cf. Luke 21:1-4.

What a scene! It was laid in the temple in Jerusalem. Christ had gone to the worship service, which was His regular custom. The temple was not so much a building as a system of courts, mostly open and surrounded by massive walls, magnificent in the size of the stones and in their beauty. It was in the outer and greater court that Christ did much of His teaching while in Jerusalem. It was called the "Court of the Gentiles," because they were permitted to enter it. They were not permitted to go any farther. If they did so, death was the penalty.

If one ascended some fifteen feet, he came into a second series of courts. Here was located the "Court of the Women."

When the time arrived for the annual offering for the temple service, the Jews came from Jerusalem, Palestine and the ends of the known world to bring their offerings to the temple of their God. For the defraying of the expenses of divine worship and the maintenance of the temple every pious Jew was expected to contribute. The ancient Israelites came in great crowds and brought with them their splendid gifts. No Jew refused to bring a gift. Around that treasury chest the rich and poor met together and by their offerings acknowledged God as the Maker of them all.

I. The Story.

Christ was present when the people brought their offerings and watched the proceedings with keen interest. Being a close observer He sat down at a spot where He could see the people casting their contributions into the treasury. He was near enough to see exactly what each one gave. He was observing closely how the people cast money into the treasury. He is abidingly interested in our conduct when an offering is taken. He watches with deep concern what we do when we face the collection plate. Christ is interested in every phase of our worship--the songs that we sing, the prayers that we offer and the offerings that we bring.

II. The Sight.

As Christ sat over against the treasury, He saw much that was commendable. He saw a long procession of Jews depositing their gifts in the chests for the support of the work of the temple. He saw many rich men cast their gifts into the treasury. They were interested enough to be present and to support it with their means. They were liberal in their giving. "Many that were rich cast in much." It was a magnificent offering that was made for the Lord's cause on that day.

After the rich had ostentatiously thrown in their large contributions, thus acknowledging themselves to be stewards of their possessions, "there came a certain poor widow," who was the very opposite of these rich people. She was a woman who had suffered and had experienced sorrow. She knew what it was to be miserably poor. All she owned she had with her. That was so little she was perhaps half ashamed to give it. Timidly she walked by and dropped her offering in the treasury. As she did so, there was a gentle look on her face and in her eyes was the light of serene faith and exalted hope. She had come to the temple to worship God, and her offering was a vital part of that worship. As she moved to the treasury her soul was going out to God in adoration and thanksgiving. Modestly, joyously, sacrificially she made her offering. He knew that her offering was voluntary and sacrificial. It was all that she

had. What made her act so gracious was the spirit in which it was rendered, the purpose for which it was done and the relation it bore to her means and ability.

Christ looks at us as we make our gifts. He is either heartened to the point of commendation because of our gifts, or He is disappointed by our failure to give as we should.

1. Christ sees who gives.

He is interested in the person who gives. We think of His being interested in our personal problems, temptations, cares, sorrows, joys and responsibilities, but we do not always remember that He is interested in our personal gifts to Him and His work, but He is. He either commends us for the way we give, or condemns us for failure to give.

2. Christ sees what we give.

So many people do not give because they cannot give much. Had this pauper widow failed to give on this account, we would not have this blessed, inspiring story, and the world would never have received the blessing from her golden deed. There was not much gold in her gift, but her deed was golden.

3. Christ sees why we give.

People give from various motives. All should give because they love the Lord and His great work. The one great and transcendent reason for giving is that. This woman gave because she loved Him.

Our Saviour sits over against the treasury as we come to worship. He watches as we make our offerings. He sees what we bring and notes the spirit which prompts us. He knows the amounts given in His name and for His work. He knows, too, the sums kept for our own purposes. With heavenly mathematics He determines the proportions represented by each offering.

Christ sees the group in every church who do not come to the treasury at all. They claim Him as their Saviour. They look to Him for His blessings day by day. They sing hymns about Him. They pray in His name. Some day they hope to stand in His presence. But they will not meet Him at the treasury.

Christ also sees the group who give as a matter of respectability. There is no careful thought nor earnest prayer back of their offering. Grudgingly and reluctantly they dole out the minimum required by respectability. Coldly and without joy they bring their meager offerings as a stern duty demanded by respectability. And the Saviour watches.

Our Lord also sees the group, slowly but steadily increasing, of those who come up to the treasury with gladness in their hearts. They acknowledge themselves stewards of their possessions. Many of them are tithers. They believe and obey the Scriptures which say: "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse."

III. The Statement.

Our Lord knew what those two mites meant to that pauper widow. He made the most of that incident for illustration and instruction. Calling His disciples unto Him, He said: "Verily I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast more in than all they which have cast into the treasury." Then He proceeded to give His reasons for making that surprising statement: "For they all did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living." Her offering was the smallest cast into the treasury that day. In fact it was the smallest sum that the Rabbinical rules allowed one to offer. But, at the same time, it was the largest sum the widow could possibly offer for she had absolutely nothing left. Others gave out of their abundance; she gave out of her penury. They gave much and she gave little, and she gave much, for they gave their fragments and she gave her all. Their

gifts were large, while her's was liberal. Every one else put in something from what he or she had to spare, while she, in her need, put in everything she had on which to live. It was the greatest gift offered that day because there was more love in it. She gave because she loved.

How does Christ measure and evaluate a gift?

1. By the amount of sacrifice there is in it.
This widow's gift was a sacrificial one. She gave all she had, even her whole living. Many would say, "That was poor business," but let us remember that what may seem poor business may be good Christianity. Our gifts to the Lord should not be the leftovers. They should be the first fruits.
2. By the amount of love in it.
Love for Christ is the proper motive for giving. Do you give because you love the Lord? Do you give as if you were placing your gift in His nail-scarred hand?
3. By the amount of cheerfulness and liberality there is in it. "The Lord loveth a cheerful giver." When we give grudgingly and of necessity, He does not appreciate it, but He does appreciate the gift of the liberal, cheerful giver.

Too many of us are like the boy to whom his father gave a half-dollar and a dime on Saturday with the instruction for him to put one piece of the money in the offering plate at the church the next day. After church he inquired of the son if he had carried out his instructions, and when he said that he had, the father asked him which piece he had given. He answered, "I put in the dime. I started to put in the half-dollar, but I remembered that the Bible said, 'The Lord loveth a cheerful giver,' and I could give the dime much more cheerfully than I could the half-dollar, so I put it in." That boy, like so many of us, missed it in his interpretation of what is meant by cheerfulness.

This poor widow's gift was an expression of great devotion. She did not give because she was seeking the approval of other people. She gave because the love in her heart made it impossible for her to refrain from giving. Love is like that. It will do the big thing if it can. If it cannot, it will do the little thing in a grand way. Her gift was great because there was much love in it. Two mites are very insignificant in themselves, but when to them is added the love of a devoted heart the result is a treasure of unspeakable value. Because there was so much love back of this gift Christ could not but greet it with great enthusiasm. Moreover, her gift was great because it was shot through with the spirit of the cross. How did the Lord Jesus give? He gave with abandon. He gave His all. He gave till He had nothing left.

In a church in Wyoming, Pennsylvania, was a man rich in faith, charity and good works who cast five dollars into the church treasury every Lord's Day. A poor widow cast into the same treasury five cents each Sunday. She was very poor, and, to provide for her six fatherless children, took in washing every week. This brother asked the pastor to say to this widow that the church officers felt she ought not to pay anything for the support of the church, and he said he would give the five cents extra each week for her. Delicately the pastor performed his errand and as he told her the story tears came to her eyes, and she answered: "Do they want to take away from me the comfort I experience in giving to the Lord? Think how much I owe to Him. My health is good, my children keep well, and I receive so many blessings I feel that I could not live if I did not make my little offering to the Lord Jesus every week."

IV. The Suggestions.

1. The Master is interested in our giving.
Why is Christ interested in our giving? Because:

- (1) Giving, when rightly done, is an act of worship.
- (2) Giving is an index of character.

What one does with his money is a good indication of what he is. Your attitude toward giving is a revelation of your character. Tell me your reaction in the presence of an appeal for financial support, and I can tell you the type person you are. There is no truer touchstone of Christian profession than the collection plate. In the absence of the spirit of giving all pretensions to Christianity are self-deceptions or a vain effort to sponge off of others.

Christ realizes fully the tragedy of our failure to give. He knows that such failure indicates that we are selfish, and that selfishness is deadly. Christ was not selfish; neither are those who follow Him. He knows that giving not only enriches others, but the giver even more. That is what He meant when He said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." It is a great privilege to receive. We have enjoyed that privilege, all of us. But finer still is the privilege of giving. This is the case because giving enables us to do something that is Godlike and Christlike.

Go look on the Sea of Galilee today and you will see that its waters are bright, sparkling and alive. It receives a river on the one side, and it gives out a greater river on the other side.

Go look on the Dead Sea today and you will see that its waters are foul. No fish live in them, no fowl swim on them, and to the taste of man they are bitter indeed. The reason is that it is a receptacle of the Jordan River. It contributes nothing.

What the Sea of Galilee is as compared with the Dead Sea, so is the liberal Christian as compared with the covetous soul, and the sacrificial church as compared with the close-fisted one. The Dead Sea, fed by Hermon's snows, offers a very suggestive parable of life. It gets all it can, keeps all it can, pollutes all it takes, yields no life, radiates no joy, exemplifies abiding death and seals its own doom. The selfish, like the Dead Sea, get all they can, keep all they get, pollute all they take, radiate gloom and despair, yield no abiding light, exemplify living death and seal their own doom.

There is no part of our lives that more perfectly expresses our spiritual character and our love for the Lord than our gifts.

2. The motive for our giving.
The widow did not give because it was customary or necessary. She did not do so in order to secure the good opinion of others, for the purpose of display, in a spirit of pride or self-righteousness, or in any hope of remuneration. Her offering spoke the language of love. There was no advantage she hoped to gain thereby. She was swayed by an affection that befitted her for enrolment among the immortals. She could not withhold her gift. She gladly gave her all. That was love's way of being love.
3. The manner of our giving.
We should always give cheerfully, and never grudgingly.
4. The measure of our giving.
All of us are obligated to give just in proportion as God prospers us. The glorious thing about this is the fact that the very poorest of us are placed on an equal footing with the richest. We are taught that the largest giver in the eyes

of the Lord may be the one who has the least wealth. The ones who win the Lord's approval in this realm are those who are the most faithful and most sacrificing and most loving in the doing of what they can.