

The Widow's Mite

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[0 : 0 0] money's a mickle max a muckle money's a mickle max a muckle or so my father used to say when we were out walking and he'd pick up a penny from the street in his old aberdeen accent he'd reach down he'd pick up the penny he'd shine it on his cuff he'd stick it in his pocket and he would say to me remember boy money's a mickle max a muckle it's it's an old scottish expression meaning that a lot of little things little things are mickles when put together make a big thing a muckle you know i feel really sorry for the poor stognars who having come here from the united states have had to learn almost a whole new language since they've been here and just to complicate things further i'd love to hear wendy stogner saying money's a mickle max a money 10 times really fast well let's bring it back to glasgow city free church many of us give relative mickles little things many of us give relative muckles big things but the question that we have to ask is this when it comes to god's perspective on our financial giving what is a muckle and what is a muckle what is a little and what constitutes a lot perhaps in the eyes of god it's not what we give whether muckle or muckle that's important it's what we've got left after we've given well the story of the of the poor widow's mite in in mark 12 41 44 it's just that it's a story it's not a parable with a with a made-up cast it is a real life story where jesus comments on the vast givings of the rich compared to the tiny giving of a poor widow woman and the message of tonight's sermon is this god can take our muckles and make muckles out of them or perhaps even more pointedly in god's eyes our muckles that is muckles when in faith we give all we can even though it should not be much compared to some others christ sees and takes pleasure in it all well during the this this lockdown our congregational leadership have had an opportunity to reflect upon our future and in particular on the ministries in which we as glasgow city free church want to invest the strap line of our vision remains an equipping church in that our goal is to equip you to be the best christians you can be at home in the workplace in school in university wherever you are and to do that we've highlighted different areas in which we want to invest so we're praying for and working toward a new resource center a new building where we can more effectively engage in mission but we do not want to exhaust our financial resources on a building we don't need to prove anything by getting a big building because after all the church is people not bricks and mortar rather we want to spend and be spent in other more profitable areas so over the next few weeks you're going to hear of our commitment as glasgow city free church to providing a training environment for prospective ministers what's called in the free church a minister and training program you'll hear about that next sunday evening as our american friends would call it an internship program you're also going to hear of

our challenge uh to young men to pursue the full-time ministry of the word you're going to hear about that in two sunday evenings time you're also going to hear that we're more committed than ever to local and overseas mission likewise we're going to renew our commitment to our covenant children as well of all as well as all these things over the next three sunday mornings led by phil stogner who is our resident expert on church planting you're going to hear of our determination as glasgow city free church to plant new churches among new people in new areas of glasgow but let's be clear about this in order to pursue these ambitious plans we need both your mickles and your muckles we need your pennies and your pounds your mites and your monies but perhaps not in the way you think and certainly not according to our perspectives on giving rather in terms of god's perspective for some of us our mickles really are muckles because they're all we can give for others of us our muckles are muckles because if we really did want to invest in the future of glasgow city free church we could be giving so much more than we presently are now don't get me wrong as with this morning this is not a hard sell sermon it's not a health and wealth ponzi scheme set up to get you healthy and wealthy i am no slick telly evangelist trying to fleece you i don't have good enough suits nor do i have shiny enough teeth rather it is an honest assessment of what happens when we selflessly give to the work of the gospel let's consider this passage in mark 12 in two stages three stages rather why we give what we give and how we give why we give what we give how we give i'm going to leave the fine details of our finances to the finance group who uh after i've spoken will lead us through their proposals and their findings but the main takeaway from this service this evening is this be honest with yourself are you giving a mickle or a muckle why is that first of all then why we give why we give in verse 41 we read and he that's jesus sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box now we may be secret secretive about our giving and rightly so we should be secretive about our giving but we cannot keep secrets from jesus because he sees how to whom and how much we give and in the first instance jesus sees rich people coming forward and placing large contributions into the offering box jesus could tell that they were giving gold he says of them in verse 44 they all contributed out of their abundance they were rich they were abundantly wealthy so they gave out of that wealth they had really deep pockets but let's ask the question why were they giving why were they giving it is no coincidence that mark 12 41 through 44 follows immediately on from a passage of scripture where jesus is condemning the scribes he says of them in verses 38 through 40 beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces and have the best seats in the synagogue and the places of honor at the feasts who devour widows houses and for a pretense make long prayers they will receive the greater condemnation it seems likely that these rich people who jesus saw depositing their large sums into the offering boxes

were scribes we know from jewish history that they tended to be very rich individuals and from what jesus says in verse 40 they seem to have become wealthy by devouring widows houses or in other words they became rich off the back of the poor so so this is blood money being given and blood money is never and never will be acceptable to god money gained from unethical sources which involve taking advantage of the poor but the point is still relevant why are they giving jesus answers in verse 40 in the context of their prayers for a pretense for a pretense they're giving in order to be seen to be giving you know i use the mobile fitness app strava which records all your fitness activities and lets all your friends see what you've been doing the biggest buzz on strava is when one of your friends gives you kudos so you've done a long run and your friends give you kudos to tell you how impressed they are with you makes you feel good to get all these kudos from all your friends the scribes had strava on their wallets they gave to get kudos from others the reason why these rich people were giving was so that the people watching on would give them kudos they were giving in order to be seen to be giving and that's a real danger for us as christians not that we give so that others can see what we give and give us kudos but for an altogether more sinister reason that we give so that we can give ourselves kudos to give in order to tell ourselves how impressed we are with ourselves and our generosity and that you know is the giving motive of the legalist a giving motive which will always give out of its abundance but as far as god is concerned all the muckles are muckles because he's not impressed if the motive is wrong it's all a pretense but in the second instance jesus sees a poor widow coming forward not only is she a widow but the text expressly tells us she's a poor widow you can see it by the clothes she wears and by the general demeanor of her face as a widow living in a society without a social security system she has no way to provide for herself and so widows by and large were the poorest in society but this widow was extra poor she didn't have the long flowing robes of the scribes and to all intents and purposes she is a nobody and what she gave was tiny compared to what the scribes had given she gave two small copper coins which when put together make a penny now most of you are too young thankfully to remember half penny coins well that's what she put into the offering plate two half penny coins tiny pieces of copper perhaps the rest of her possessions perhaps the reason she was poor is because the scribes and their friends had had had stolen all her wealth that that's all she had to give two copper coins but she gave it anyway a muckle compared to their muckles but why was she giving listen to what jesus says he says she has given everything she had all she had to live on well if she's got nothing left to live on where does she expect her next meal to come from

that's the question if she's got nothing left to live on where is her next meal going to come from jesus inference is clear this is a woman who is living day to day by faith in god she has not got a back pocket strava for others to give her kudos rather she is not motivated by feel good but faith she knows that god's going to take care of her even if all her muckles are gone her faith is moving her hand to give and even though she's giving really rather little jesus says of her truly i say to you this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box she's motivated by faith and she's giving to god and that is truly remarkable that our faith in christ should move us to give in this way the world around us will never understand why we are giving so much away to god but then the world around us does not know jesus and does not have faith in jesus they have not seen jesus dying on the cross and rising from the dead they haven't experienced for themselves the joy of seeing god provide for them on a day-to-day basis they're living by sight whereas we as christians are living by faith in the god who supplies all our needs pennies or no pennies so the lesson is clear if you're motivated by faith in christ to give then it's then if it's a mickle if it's just a little bit it's a muckle to god it's a lot but if you're motivated by a back pocket strava to give then though it might be a muckle a really large sum it's it's a mickle to god why we give the first pillar of our giving our giving is to be motivated by the grace of christ in the gospel through faith second what we give what we give well according to jesus in verse 41 who was carefully watching the whole scene in front of him many of the rich people were putting large sums into the offering box yes and by contrast this poor widow places two half pennies a grand total of one pence try claim gift aid on that one donald the scribes put in their pounds and she put in her penny and yet jesus says of her truly i say to you this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box how does that work i can already see the mathematicians among us scratching their heads and the finance group are obviously worried about where i'm going with this because what jesus is saying is that he would rather have a poor widow in his church giving one pence than a rich scribe in his church giving one million pounds it seems for all the world to make no sense at all right should we all as a result of what jesus says here dial down our giving and start giving mickles rather than muckles start giving pennies rather than pounds well of course not i'm saying no because we're not asking jesus the right question here he is answering a different question from the one we're tempted to ask him you see we're thinking of giving to the church let's face it we're thinking of giving to the church in terms of this question how much should i give how much should i give that that's the way the rich people were thinking how much should i give do you notice that whereas jesus specifies what this woman gave two small copper coins he doesn't specify what the rich people gave

he just says they put in large sums because they were thinking in terms of what they should give that is the mindset of the legalist limit oneself by propriety what one should give don't dare do anything reckless do the minimum of what i should give that's enough i find this passage deeply challenging and it's with great trepidation i try to interpret it according to jesus own agenda here you see this poor widow did not ask the question how much should i give she asked an altogether different question she asked the question how much can i give how much can i give and she discovered that though she had next to nothing left after it all because of her faith in god she gave it all up two small copper coins she went way beyond the the point of propriety and in the eyes of the world anyway was totally reckless of course through the eyes of faith she wasn't reckless at all because the god in whom she had placed her trust would care for her but she gave all she could not all she should this passage is not about poor people versus rich people and dialing back on our giving it is about ramping up our giving by stopping asking the question how much should i give a question largely motivated by the mentality of keeping up appearances to oneself and by giving oneself kudos and beginning to ask the question how much can i give a question which is motivated a liberating question motivated by the grace of christ and gratitude for the gospel if we soberly ask ourselves the question how much can i give the answer will always be exponentially higher than how much should i give and again this isn't a story designed to shame rich people into giving more or poor people into giving less it's a story designed to show how the grace of the gospel so transforms us so that what is given in faith though it may be relatively small in comparison to other donations really is a muckle it's a lot to god one thing is sure if we're to realize our vision as glasgow city free church we need everyone with the elders and the deacons showing practical leadership by example here to ask themselves the question not much not how much should i give but how much can i give don't shoot the messenger for the message why don't we try giving recklessly beyond the point of propriety even what we give and then lastly how we give why we give faith what we give as much as we can how we give now i want to say right now i am not privy donald said this this morning i'm saying it again i am not privy nor is any office bearer in this congregation privy to information detailing what each person and family in this congregation gives i have no right to know these things i don't want to know these things only laura knows these things and if i was ever foolish enough to ask her she is far too discreet and professional to divulge anything to me she'd probably slap me if i tried because what we give is a matter between ourselves and god and i'm not at all involved

[20 : 26] but as we close i want to draw your attention to something fascinating so i said this morning the first minister of the milton side of our congregation was the famous john rabbi duncan from aberdeen during a mission trip to budapest duncan rabbi duncan met with a jewish leader called alfred edersheim edersheim through duncan's witness became a believer in christ and proceeded to write many books detailing helping christians to understand how the buildings and the rituals and the laws of the old testament relate to us as christians and in particular he wrote a book called holding it up here the temple its ministry and services as they were at the time of christ he also wrote another book called the life and times of jesus the messiah but it's this book i want to refer to this evening alfred edersheim helps us to understand how we may give to the work of the gospel bear in mind the direct link between us and him rabbi john duncan first minister of the milton side of our connegation alfred edersheim so don't think i'm importing something new or alien into the life of glasgow city i'm not going back to roots well on page 48 of my edition of edersheim's temple he describes a courtyard in the temple in jerusalem called the court of the woman this is where jesus was sitting when he observed the rich giving large sums and the poor widow giving her her pennies the court of the woman was surrounded by a wall in which there were placed 13 offering holes behind each of which was a chest the idea was that you could place your offering in any one of the holes in the wall and it would go into an offering chest and the hole itself was was shaped rather like like a trumpet it was into one of these 13 holes or trumpets this poor widow woman gave her two half pennies and jesus saw her doing it the thing is that that these 13 trumpets all led to offering chests which were used for different purposes in the temple in other words all the money from the 13 wasn't clubbed together and then divvied out as it were among the different organizations in the temple rather worshipers had their opportunity to put their offering into whatever chest they wish to be used for a chosen purpose let me run through what these four these 13 chests were remember this is coming from alfred edersheim john rabbi duncan first minister of milton chests one and two were for the half yearly half for the yearly half shekel temple tax chests three and four were for the monetary equivalent uh for the offering of a dove or a pigeon so so mary and joseph the mother and father of our lord would have put money into chests three or four when he was taken to the temple chest five was devoted for the wooden furniture and the interior of the temple chest six was for was for offerings used for incense uh during sacrifices chest seven was was offerings for the golden vessels in the temple chest eight was for any money left over after the purchase of a sin offering uh a sheep or a goat chests nine through 13 were for money left over after the purchase of a trespass offering a bird offering a nazirite offering a cleansed leper

and for any voluntary contributions so suppose the gold of the temple was really important to a particular worshiper he'd put his money into chest seven he'd go and find the trumpet for chest seven put his money in there supposing he wants to pay his temple tax half shekel he puts it into chests one or two the point is that these different chests or trumpets or collection boxes in the temple were devoted to different purposes we don't know what into what chest the the the this poor widow woman put her to be half pennies but we do know it was one of them and she had the right to say which one it was after the sermon the finance group are going to detail how we're going to follow the pattern set down in the temple of of different offerings designated for different purposes they're going to detail which each of these offering purposes are but they're going to include local mission overseas mission building etc because we want to introduce personal discretion into the whole system of offerings of offering our mickles and muckles to the lord recognizing that we live in days of unprecedented opportunity new enthusiasm and fresh vision in glasgow city free church we're on the cusp of purchasing a new building one of our funds is designated for that when investing in a minister in training internship one of our funds is designated to that and for other aspects of local mission including youth work local evangelism church planting one of our funds is going to pay the administrator who who fulfills that to which god has called her in serving him and us in our fellowship so professionally and so wonderfully and so lovingly one of our funds will be designated to overseas mission covering our offerings to katrina and and to many others and all the time we're going to keep keep supporting the wider work of the free church of scotland we have godly ambitions i trust so we need all these different funds to work together i don't want to steal the finance group thunders so i'm i'm going to be quiet in a minute and and and after we've sung the hymn donald can speak my role in all of this is to set before you the bible's teaching about mickles muckles and the gospel the strap line is clear whether it's mickles or muckles you're giving give it cheerfully not motivated by shame guilt or by kudos but purely out of a sense of gratitude for the grace of christ let it be an offering driven by faith and secondly whether it's muckles or muckles that you're giving don't ask the question how much should i give but as you process all i've said ask yourself the question how much can i give wouldn't it really be something if when jesus notices how much you give and perhaps even more importantly why you're giving it he says truly she put in far more than all of those okay i'll try and move through pretty quickly just uh the content uh that we covered this morning and you know accepting that we've got quite a few different folk and just uh on the call tonight so back in september 2018 at uh gcfc leadership and away day it was unanimously decided at that point that our future wasn't actually in our current st vincent street building and in fact it was actually a

distraction to the vision of the congregation we had a really good attempt at securing the town head building and probably 1824 months ago but probably most of us know that wasn't to be but we did learn quite a lot from that just as a quick reminder our vision as a congregation is really to be an equipping church and as colin's mentioned that a number of times over the last few weeks uh that analogy of us needing a new and much more sustainable fishing boat and so that we can really focus our mission to the city from a more attractive and suitable um location so hopefully everybody this week received a copy of the the funding our future document if you didn't um if you can reach out to laura and she'll get one out to you straight away we are probably going to make sure it comes around everybody this week just in a soft copy in the in the regular weekly email and that sets out the the goals our current financial position as a congregation hopefully relatively simply um but we're really happy to take any questions excepting everybody's understanding of the finances is quite different so hopefully in there and you can see um really clear reference to the pots and chests that colin talked about tonight and i wanted to just focus a little bit more on them tonight than i did this morning just so you everybody understands the the specifics of these so if you've got the document in front of you just know between pages seven and nine of that we um actually work through and the pots um now the prox we've put in some approximations of just how we anticipate the money will be spent uh or allocated rather um we you know we're you know proud to be part of a presbyterian denomination and it's really important that the strong support the weak so we want to be able to continue to support and the work of the overall denomination so about 50 of our of your um remittances will go to the cover the daily running costs of the congregation and support of our head office and remittances that pays salaries and you know the mission work of the church overall then um you know we're really trying to simplify a lot of our funds hopefully you're going to see this in the accounts this year and really uh give them the name that aligns to the purpose so 10 of your donations will then go to our local ministry fund that supports things like our youth workers the ministry and training program that colin talked about them tonight that will short start shortly and uh really keen that we have these programs and you know having a building that's much more suitable will help us really focus um our efforts much more on mission rather than on our maintaining a historic property 10 will then go to the missionary causes that we support as a congregation and so that's things like uh katrina and the work that she's involved with adam and his work the langham partnership and these causes that the kirk session changes from time to time but that we have we foster a real partnership with and 10 will go to um funding and laura's role and you know where would we be without laura it's probably the ultimate rhetorical question for most of us who are leaders in the congregation and you know so laura really provides a brilliant um support role for us and keeping us all right and organizing so much of what goes on and behind the scenes we want to put that in a much more sustainable footing 10 of your givings would then go towards the building fund so that's the loan element that we will have to pay off and back to the free church and we hope to get a loan from then

and then finally 10 will go towards a fabric fund effectively maintaining whatever we buy so covering the insurance and the running costs of that new building so if my math's right i think that adds up to about 100 but they will have to flex because we are really keen that we you know definitely support the central cause of the church but really we see ourselves hopefully as a growing congregation and very keen that we put the you know the the funding and um the investment of our own congregation on a much more solid footing so that we can grow that in a sustainable way and then support the wider denomination at large so as a leadership group we would encourage everybody to allocate their givings in that way that's effectively what laura will do moving forwards um unless she hears from this she hears to the the contrary and from anybody so just quickly you know how can you maximize your givings as i said this morning and it's really important that for anybody who pays tax that they make that simple a gesture of actually signing up for gift aid is literally as simple as signing and a form that laura can get you there's more details of that on page 10 but that gift aid refund and to the congregation last year meant 28 000 pounds so that was 28 000 pounds we got back from the government just for individuals in the congregation of having signed money you can also give through using payroll giving if your employer runs that and i think most employers do now and then you know i'm sure virtually all of us probably buy stuff off amazon etc so there's also the easy fundraising route that we refer to on page 11 of the document but if you've got any questions on this and laura's running three zoom sessions this week and at different times you can see the details and on page 11 of the document and tomorrow from five to six o'clock a wednesday from three to four o'clock and then friday from 10 to 11 just the normal drop-in details or call laura directly on the new church number and she'll be really happy to help you out and as colin said earlier that's with absolute discretion so what do we need and you know we're looking to probably purchase a building around about a cost of 650 000 pounds and we believe there are hopefully some buildings uh in the market at that kind of level we're starting to see some come on there was a really interesting one this week um but we just that that one had moved quite quickly and but we're really ramping up the effort there and you know we we are really keen to get this fundraising effort off to a big start and you know hopefully fill the gap between the six about the 500 000 pounds that we've got we're going to get a loan of about 150 000 pounds from the free church so that leaves us with this gap of 300 000 we're really keen to see if we can quickly fill that gap you know as quickly as possible and to give us confidence going and forward with the project and you know we do commit to really communicating you know that that progress on the fundraising with you really regularly so i think two things finally from my perspective you know i think um if you go to the back of the document and we've put in that really simple checklist and you know as colin said at the end of the service tonight i think we've got a really personal challenge to each one of us that you know how much can we give towards this cause and i think as a leadership group we're really excited about the potential here and we've talked about this for so long and we believe that now is the time to move forwards with this and then finally and just a word of thanks and to laura who's put a

pile of work into the the document the the leaflet we put around this week and the distribution of that we were really keen to do it in hard copy just to give you some chance to read it and to you know understand it and hopefully assimilate it a bit more easily than just looking at it electronically and you know to colin and anticipation to phil for the preaching that we're going to get over the rest of this month and really and setting this up i am and you know looking forward to the future of the congregation and you know the the mission that we hope to do from this new property so i'll hand back to colin now