

Two Small Coins; One Big Contribution

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Date: 27 April 2014

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[0 : 00] Well, let's turn again this evening to Luke's Gospel, chapter 21. We're going to look at verses 1 to 4, a very short passage. Luke's Gospel, chapter 21, verses 1 to 4.

Let's read from the end of the previous chapter at verse 45, because there is a connection between what's said there and the first four verses of chapter 21.

And in the hearing of all the people, he said to his disciples, Beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes and love greetings in the marketplaces, and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honour at feasts, who devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers, they will receive the greater condemnation.

Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box, and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. And he said, Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them, for they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.

It's not the kind of passage, perhaps, that we would really pick to preach on or to study, except that we're going through the Gospel of Luke in this way, and therefore it comes up in a usual way as we go through with our studies of this book.

[1 : 38] That's one of the advantages, as we've seen before, of coming to study a book in its entirety like that, that you come to take passages that maybe at other times you would kind of look at, but maybe go over all too quickly and think that there wasn't really all that much in it.

And anyway, we tend, perhaps, to focus almost entirely on what we would regard as the more theological or experiential passages of God's Word that have to do with theology, or have to do with Christian experience, or biographical details, and something to do with money and something to do with economics.

We wouldn't necessarily think of as all that important. But this time, Luke tells us that Jesus saw this as important.

So important that he actually looked very closely at what was happening in the treasury, as it was called, where there were 13 trumpet-shaped collecting boxes that people could actually put their contribution for the temple into as they went past.

And Jesus actually looked at what was being done and made a comment, or drew a very important lesson from what he had seen happening.

[2 : 57] He actually made a point of speaking about this to those that were listening around him. Now we're very much aware daily of how money is so important in people's lives.

It's important in all our lives. We can't live without money. We can't live without material things. And indeed, the Bible doesn't say in any way, anywhere at all, that actually being rich is of itself a sin or a crime.

There are many rich people in the Bible, such as the man we looked at this morning, who was a great man of God, and whose riches did not prevent him having the favor of God.

But of course we know that we live in days when riches, when money, when material things have come themselves to take the place of God for so many people.

We find so much given to the economy in the reports that you find on your news. Maybe other things that are happening in the world are really just relegated, and the economy or financial things, especially with an election pending, and things like that going on politically, that tends to be brought forward to the main news pieces of the day.

[4 : 20] There are many other ways in which you find an emphasis on money and on the importance of money to many people. You've only got to look at some of the top footballers.

They earn between £100,000-£300,000 a week for actually playing football. Maybe nothing wrong with playing football, but that amount of money is extreme.

Then you find many people made millionaires from winning the lottery. People whose minds are really given to reaching that goal and that pinnacle of having enough money to call themselves millionaires.

So many ways other than that that you could think of how money, how material things, have really become gods in this present generation.

And a passage like this in the Bible brings a sense of perspective, because as people of God, as believing people, we have a responsibility to show that our use of material things, our view of material things, our opinion of material things, is itself governed by God's word as much as anything else in our lives.

[5 : 37] And therefore, as you come to a passage like that, you're thankful that you have the kind of teaching that you have here, that Paul gave in 1 Timothy 6 that we read a few minutes ago, where he warned about the dangers of money, and certainly the danger of making material things the chief objective in life.

Paul actually said that in the early church of his day, many people were led away from the faith by that sort of priority, prioritizing material things.

That's why it was important to the apostle to actually give the directions that he gave. And that's why Jesus mentions this here, in terms of giving us a proper perspective on what it is really to be rich.

What are true riches? How do we compare money and material things with spiritual riches?

Let's look at the passage and the two things that we want to focus on tonight. First of all, we look at the Lord's observance of these offerings. Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box, and he saw a poor widow putting in two small copper coins.

[6 : 58] The first thing you see there is that Jesus actually took note of it. As we've said, this might have been thought of as something that was entirely beneath the attention of Jesus, that he would not, especially at this time in his own experience, as he's coming so near to his death on the cross, his examination by the authorities and his rejection, and then his death, he knows that's coming, he knows that's near.

He's already told the disciples about that. And you would have thought that this kind of thing, just watching people putting money into the collection box, would not really feature very largely in his opinions at all.

It would hardly, some people would think, be worth even mentioning. But that's not how it was. He looked up and saw the rich. And he saw a poor widow.

You see, that's mentioned twice that he saw these things. He saw the rich doing what they were doing. He saw the poor widow doing what he, what she did. And in other words, we're told here by Luke, that Jesus was closely observing these goings on.

That he had his focus upon the rich and upon this widow. That he really gave them his attention. It wasn't an unimportant thing to the Lord.

[8 : 19] It was important enough for him to watch it very closely. And to bring out a verdict, as we'll see, over what he saw happening. And that's still how it is, with our support of the gospel as well.

The temple tax, the temple money, was used for the running of the temple. For the things that had to be done in regard to the temple as a place where God was worshipped.

Where God's people came to worship him. And whatever defects there were in the temple by Christ's day, and there were many in the practice of the people and of the religious authorities themselves, the Lord never denounced giving appropriately for the upkeep of the temple.

And as we give, not just our money, but other material things and our time, our contributions of various kinds that we give to the upholding of the gospel, the same thing in principle as was here being done for the upholding of the temple, we always have to remember that we are doing it under the watchful eye of our Lord.

That we are doing it under the observance of the Lord of the temple. That we are doing it in a way that he is constantly taking note of.

[9 : 45] There are record books kept in heaven, if you like to put it that way. And among the many things that are recorded there, is the Lord's observance of how we support his gospel, support his church, support his cause.

It's not our cause. It's not the minister's cause. It's not the congregation's own cause. It is Christ's cause. It is Christ's church. It is Christ's kingdom.

It is Christ's gospel. It is Christ's word. That's why we actually are conscious that Christ is himself watching us. And that's why there's a great contrast between this and the previous passage, the end of the previous chapter there.

Well, you find a reference there to those scribes, these important, in their own right at least, important people to do with the temple, with the teaching of the time, who like to walk around in long robes, and love greetings in the marketplaces, and the best seats in the synagogues, and the places of honor at least, who devour widows' houses.

What's meant by that is that in those days, it was very, very difficult indeed for a woman whose husband had died, and particularly if she didn't have a family to provide for her needs.

[11:10] It would be very rare indeed to meet a widow that wasn't poor. And that made them exploitable.

It meant that when it came to dealing with their situation, as they put things in the hands of the likes of the scribes, the scribes were not allowed to charge for their teaching.

It was completely against the rules for them to actually charge for teaching, in the role that they had as teacher. But that only made it all the more likely that they would exploit the likes of widows.

And when a widow came to seek help from the scribes, they would charge them heavily for the services. They devoured widows' houses.

And then he goes on to speak about this poor widow, and the contrast between her and those who exploited her likes.

[12:17] Jesus is taking note of everything that happens in regard to this as much as anything else. And the passage tells us that Jesus, as he observes these things that are being done, is as much against the scribes, rich though they may be, as he is for and in favour of this rich widow.

And that's why, as we'll see in a minute, that's why it is important how we regard the manner of our supporting of the gospel. So that's the first thing Christ took note.

Christ is always observing. Christ's eye is upon us. Secondly, Christ compared, as he observed these offerings, he made a comparison. And the comparison wasn't between the scribes and the widow put up between the rich.

He saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box, and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. We're not told here that the rich were condemned by Jesus for what they were doing. Maybe they weren't putting in as much as they should have been, but that's not the point. The comparison is not between the amount itself. The comparison really that Jesus is making is that they put their gifts into the treasury or into the offering out of their plenty.

[13:45] But she put her gift out of her poverty. She contributed out of poverty. And indeed she contributed everything she had. And they, the rich, contributed out of their plenty.

In other words, out of their abundance, the rich put their gifts into the offering box, out of her poverty. And it was dire poverty, because this word poor that's used here by Luke, it's the only place in the New Testament it occurs.

And it's a word that really captures the extreme poverty of this widow. She was a very poor widow indeed. And in fact so poor that these two tiny coins were all she had to live on for that day.

How much were they worth? How much were they worth in monetary terms? Well you read elsewhere that a denarius is mentioned frequently in the Gospels.

A denarius amounted to about the daily wage of a labourer in the days of Jesus. So a denarius would be a day's wage for a labourer, an average wage for a labourer.

[15:01] The coins that this woman put into the box were worth one hundredth of a denarius. So she had two one hundredths of a day's wages.

It was all she possessed in monetary terms. She put them both in the collection box. You see the thing is that the two coins, this verdict that Jesus actually came to speak about, to deliver, is a verdict not between the amounts themselves.

The rich put in maybe an awful lot, but they had an awful lot left. The woman didn't put in very much compared to the amount the rich put in, but she put in everything she had.

And the amount that she put in, in that sense, as Jesus said, was more than what everybody else of the rich had contributed.

That's what Jesus observed. These were the tiny little details that he observed. And this is how Luke records it for us, so that we can see that the teaching in the passage is, it's not how much you actually put in, it's not the amount of your contribution, it's the amount that is left over, it's the amount that is in proportion to what you've put in, that you used for yourself.

[16:38] That's what he's saying about the rich. They had plenty left for themselves after putting their contribution in the box. The widow didn't put much in compared to them, but she had nothing left.

She put in everything she had because she saw it as God's money. So what did Jesus actually say from this observance?

The Lord's verdict on the offerings. First of all, less is more. We've put it that way because this is what Jesus said. Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them, for they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.

And what Jesus meant by that here when he said she has put in more than all of them, he didn't actually say, mean, she has put in literally more than each of these rich persons.

what he's really saying is everything that these rich people put into the treasury, when you add it all up and total it all up, she actually put in more.

[17:46] Why? Because she put in everything she had. She put in all that she had to live on. They didn't have to do that. They didn't give away everything they had.

They still had plenty to live on. And that's something that's really important for ourselves too. How much do we keep for ourselves?

Remember, this is not just about money. This is not just about finance. This is not just about what you put in the collection plate every Lord's Day. This is about our time. This is about the use of our gifts.

Although it's primarily money here, the principle of it extends into how we support the Gospel, how we serve the Lord, how we give to the Lord, how we uphold His cause, how we actually seek to promote the Gospel that carries His name.

Let's ask ourselves, let's ask myself, I have to ask it, much as anybody else, how much am I actually keeping back for myself of my time, of the use of whatever God has given me, even of my money as well, compared to what I give to the Lord?

[18:57] Do I think about what I give to the Lord first, and then work out what I'm left with? Do I think of what belongs to Him first, and then think that the rest of it, I can say, belongs to me, and it's for me?

Or do I put it the other way around? Do I think, what do I need first of all? What do I need for this and for that? What's appropriate for this or for that? And then I give the rest to the Lord. And if you go back to the Old Testament, there's a very condemning reference there in the book of Malachi. And the book of Malachi was written for times that the people of Judah or Israel were really just, well, just giving to the Lord the things that were kind of left over, if you like, even the very things that they were using for the feast, the animal that they were using for the feast, instead of being the best of the animals, they were just keeping the best for themselves and actually giving what was really the poor end of things to the Lord.

And that's, in a sense, that's what Jesus is also saying here as we have to examine ourselves and what we contribute to the Lord's cause. You don't begin with yourself because it's the Lord's cause, it's the Lord's church, it's the Lord's gospel.

And when the Lord actually measures the amount that we contribute, as somebody put it, he actually weighs it. It's a comparison in the sense of weighing it up rather than just saying how much is there in it?

[20:43] How much money? How much is there in terms of hours? How much time do I give to my Bible to witnessing for him, to serving him, all that kind of thing?

He weighs it. He puts it in the balances. And he tells us, I'm looking at your contribution. I'm looking to see how you're prioritizing your time, your talents, your money, the things that you give to the cause of the Lord.

And that's why sometimes we think about the widow's might, you see, as something that's often described as the widow's might, this tiny amount that she put in.

And we use that phrase when we talk about something tiny. You think, you say, oh, it's the widow's might. We have to be careful using that term because the way that Jesus actually put things here,

the widow's might, because it was everything she had, was a lot more than what the rich put in, even when you added it all up.

Because she put in everything that she had to live on. There's a great challenge for you and for me tonight. There's a great challenge as to what we're giving to the cause of the Lord.

[21 : 58] There's a great challenge as to how much we're keeping for ourselves instead of giving to the Lord first and then thinking of what is properly left for ourselves.

Remember, that's not just money. We're talking about all the other things too, our time and our contributions in other ways to the Lord's cause. And these things are so important.

Yes, we know that things like justification and forgiveness and repentance and faith and all of these things are supremely important. Important on our spiritual life and our connection with God.

God, but our contribution to the cause of God is important or else there will not be a cause in this world. Yes, money is money, time is time, but the Lord claims the best of all of that for himself.

That's why you and I have to follow this perspective that this little passage gives us and say, what a great challenge that is there for me tonight as to how much and how I'm setting about contributing to support the Lord's cause, to support his church, to support his gospel, to make sure that it's undergirded by the contributions of God's people.

[23 : 22] Secondly, in the Lord's verdict, you find what we can call mind over matter. This widow had two coins. It wasn't worth much in monetary terms.

We said there were just one hundredth each of them of a day's wage for a labourer. But she could have said, I have the two, I need something to live on, I'll give one to the Lord, I'll give one to the treasury, I'll keep the other one for myself.

She didn't do that. She put them both into the treasury. She gave sacrificially. The rich didn't give sacrificially, or they wouldn't have had much left.

She gave sacrificially because she had nothing left. Now, you don't do that sort of thing without thinking about it. You don't do that sort of thing without a particular mindset.

You don't actually give away the two coins, small as they are, in your hand to the Lord's cause when you could have kept one for yourself, without really thinking through what it is you're doing, without the kind of mind that says, this properly belongs to the Lord, the Lord needs this, the Lord requires this, the temple requires this, it's all that I've got, but I love the Lord and I'm giving it to him and I know that as I give it to him, he will return me as he sees fit.

[24 : 50] That's the kind of mindset she undoubtedly would have had as she made that contribution. And you know that's something that we too have to try and think through for ourselves.

Who are we giving our time or our money to when we support the gospel? Are we giving it to the church? Yes. Are we giving it to the congregation we belong to?

Yes. Are we giving it to support the ministry of the gospel in that congregation? Yes. But who are we giving it to? Who ultimately are we giving it to?

Whose money is it? Whose claim is upon it? Money and time and everything else. We're giving it to the Lord. It doesn't matter how you give, whether it's in terms of your time in the morning, your time through the day, your time in the evenings, whether it's in terms of monetary to standing order or cash or checks, whatever it is.

when we give our contribution to the gospel, we are giving primarily to the Lord of the church.

[26 : 05] We are saying in our minds, this is for you, Lord. This is for your cause. This is for your gospel. This is for your kingdom. It's not primarily for the minister.

It's not primarily for the congregation. It's not primarily for the church. It's not primarily for missions. It goes to all of that. It's dispensed to all of that. The church actually sees to the way that it uses the money that comes in.

But in the mindset that gives, the giving is first and foremost to the Lord. You put it in the plate, you have it in your bank account arranged by standing order or whatever, but in the mindset that looks at it, and this is so important, because it's only as we really see it in this light, just like this widow did, it's only then that we're really going to be in a position to really come to the conclusion, well, how much is the Lord worth?

What does he mean to me? How important is he to me? Where would my life be without him?

Where would I be without the gospel? Where would the world be without the gospel?

Where would these districts be without the gospel? The Lord is saying to us, mind over matter.

[27 : 29] It's not how much you give that really ultimately counts, though that's important. It's how you give. It's what you think of as you give. It's who you give it to.

It's what you prioritize in your thoughts as you give your contribution of money or time to the support of the Lord's cause. Less is more because she gave everything she had compared to the amount that all of these rich people gave when they had so much still left for themselves.

It doesn't mean, of course, that the Lord wants us literally just to take everything we possess tonight in monetary terms, put it all in the collection plate next week and make ourselves poor.

Leave ourselves without anything. It's not that sort of teaching we take from the passage. It's a matter of priorities we take from the passage. It's a matter of thinking it through properly.

It's a matter of actually not measuring ourselves against others, but measuring our contribution to the Lord against what we keep for ourselves.

[28 : 42] That's what Jesus is really intent on teaching. rich. And then, of course, you have from this, you could develop the teaching into the rest of the Bible, into the New Testament especially, and from that ask the question, what is God's definition of being rich?

rich? Was this widow rich? We know that these rich people are called rich, but are they richer than this widow?

How far does the word rich, how far does it extend when you think about the totality of its meaning? Am I rich, really, in every sense, just because I may have three million in the bank?

Is that all that makes me rich? Does that really exhaust the definition of the word rich? Well, not according to the Bible. In fact, it's not even the most important definition of what it means to be rich. Because back in chapter 12 of this very book of Luke, this gospel of Luke, Luke, you remember we saw a man described there as having so much from his land that produced so abundantly, and so much so that he had no buildings left to store his crops.

[30 : 02] He said, what will I do? I will tear down my barns and I will build larger ones. And there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years.

Relax, eat, drink, be merry. What he's saying to himself is, I'm now really rich, I don't have to work anymore. really, I can afford to live on what I've got. So I'll just relax and I'll just enjoy life.

God said to him, be fool. Tonight your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be? So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich towards God.

God? What's this poor widow? Was she rich? Not in monetary terms. She only had two tiny little coins. Was she rich in another sense?

Oh, yes. Far richer than these rich people who poured their money into the collection boxes. This widow was rich towards God.

[31 : 10] This widow understood what the most important thing in life was. This widow understood what really spiritual riches meant. This widow really appreciated that it was God and her relationship with God and all that she got from God that made her rich.

That's why she gave away what she gave away. Because she thought God is worth it for everything that he's given to me. The least I can do is give these coins my daily living in order to support his cause.

riches. The Bible's definition is far more than money. In fact, that's why when we read in 1 Timothy, as Paul warned Timothy there and instructed him to maintain this in his teaching.

This was a snare to many people. That's why it's in the Bible. That's why Jesus mentioned this incident about the widow. That's why we have to sometimes preach from these passages.

as we come across them. Not necessarily at all with the same frequency as you would preach about forgiveness or justification or sanctification or hope or all of these wonderful spiritual things.

[32 : 27] But you can't neglect them. They're there for our attention. They're there in proportion to all the other passages in the Bible. And when Paul wrote to Timothy, it was a problem in the church.

Widows were being neglected. Just as you find in the gospel there in the time of Jesus. Shortly after that, after Jesus had gone to heaven and Paul and the apostles headed up the development of the church, these were the problems that they had to deal with.

The neglect of the poor. The exploitation of the poor. That's why Paul says, those who desire to be rich, he said to the apostle, teach these things and urge them.

And those who desire to be rich, those who make that their main aim in life, fall into temptation, into a snare, and plunge people into ruin and destruction for the love of money is the root of all kinds of

evil.

It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pans. And he goes on, following the teaching of Jesus himself, to define riches.

[33 : 47] As for you, man of God, as for the rich in this present age, charge them. That's a very strong word that he used there to say to Timothy as a preacher of the gospel, charge those who are rich.

What did he mean by that? Did he say, tell them that it's not right to have all these riches? That it's not right to be as rich as they are? No, that's not what he said. But charge them, warn them, not to be haughty, to be proud, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.

They are to do good. You see, he's using the word rich then in the rest of the little passage there. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure or riches for themselves as a good foundation for the future so that they may be able to take hold of that which is truly life.

Riches, spiritual riches, riches that are centered upon God himself. and that's why you find too in the likes of James, the other verses there that are mentioned in your notes, the epistle of James, again written in these early times.

You remember what he says in chapter 2. My brother, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. What if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, you sit here in a good place, while you say to the poor man, you stand over there.

[35 : 44] Have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brothers, has God not chosen those who are poor in this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom?

Are not the rich the ones who oppress you and the ones who drag you into court? There is the danger for the church all the way through history and it's there right up to the present day.

You show people favoritism, you show people a place of honor, you give them a place in the church because they happen to be well off or they happen to be well educated or really have made it in society.

Paul is saying you are despising the poor. Here is a rich widow, here is a poor widow rather compared to those rich people.

Here is a poor widow in terms of monetary, ordinary riches. she is poor. But here is a rich widow in terms of relationship with God.

[37 : 00] Tonight you and I may not have much in the bank. We may be worrying about where our income is going to come from in the year ahead.

We may be concerned about how little we have put aside for a rainy day. we may be saying about ourselves, whatever else people say about me, they can't say I'm rich.

But how rich are we? How poor are we? If we don't have Christ, we're poor. We're desperately poor.

We're bankrupt. nothing meaningful to live on in spiritual terms. But if we have Jesus, if we have God, if we are his, then like this poor widow, we're actually very rich spiritually.

We're compared well with the rich who live without God, we are actually superior to them. We have the favor of God.

[38 : 13] We have his approval. We have the riches of his grace. We have the riches of his kingdom. We have the riches of his inheritance laid up for us.

We have the riches of fellowship with him. We have the riches of fellowship with his people. We have the riches of belonging to a family of God, and so on, and so on.

How rich are we? How poor are we? What do we understand by riches? What does it mean to be rich?

Well, here's the answer. Here's the answer because God is telling us it's not about monetary riches. it's not about material gain or material plenty.

While there's nothing wrong with that in themselves, to be truly rich is to be spiritually rich. And to be spiritually rich is to have a treasure in Jesus Christ that is priceless.

[39 : 24] God is God to be blessed. Let's pray. Lord, we give thanks again for the teaching that your word contains.

So many things that we ordinarily use in life are themselves included in the teaching of your word. And we thank you that your word governs us in all aspects of our lives, even the most practical things.

help us to be willing supporters and upholders of your cause, of your church, of your gospel. Help us, Lord, to see these things as this widow did.

Help us to take the lesson from your word this evening that you have designed it for. And enable us, Lord, to not be envious of those who are rich in worldly terms.

help us, Lord, we pray, to rather see how poor they are if they live without you or against you. Grant that we may constantly go on seeking that your spiritual riches will be more and more fed into our lives.

[40 : 37] And we pray that you would give us that inner satisfaction that knows our heart to be satisfied in the riches of your grace. Be with us, then, we pray, go with us into this week and pardon our sin.

For Jesus' sake, amen.