

Pathological Generosity

Stewardship 101, Part 2

Mark 12:41-44

As many of you are aware, today culminates several months of planning, meeting, praying, writing, strategizing and dreaming about a way to multiply our giving to the Lord.

We will be pledging together at the end of this hour toward this multiply goal of 10 million dollars – a goal that will eliminate our current mortgage and free up hundreds of thousands of dollars every year which we will be able to invest back into the work of Christ in building His church locally, regionally, nationally and globally.

If you're visiting with us today, just sit this one out and next Lord's day, Lord willing, I'll be returning to our study on the life of Israel's singer – King David.

But for the family of Colonial – let me clarify something; if you're tempted to think my role today is to put some sort of capstone on some mountainous pressure for you to pledge . . . some kind of final motivational speech to get you to fill out a card . . . please think again.

This campaign has simply allowed me, last Lord's day and now today to preach on the subject our Lord taught on more often than any other subject – stewarding our financial resources.

And let me clarify something else for all of us: God doesn't need your money or mine to fulfill His purposes on planet earth.

He isn't wringing His hands in heaven, hoping I say just the right words so He can get some money He really needs to do the job.

Listen, God is self-sufficient. God is self-sustaining. God's program is on time and on track.

He has created everything there is and he already owns everything He needs to build His church and

He has already told us that in the end, even the gates – the strategies and plans of Hades – will not be able to overpower the church.

He isn't holding His breath as we tally up the results of our campaign . . . the truth is, He'll do just fine without us.

Listen, with this project or anything else, the issue is never that we've *got to* give . . . it's that we *get to* give.

It isn't that we've *got to have* serve Him . . . we *get to* serve Him.

It isn't that our local church *has to* give more to His global mission . . . it's that we *get to* give more.

What excites me about a campaign like this is that it gives us the opportunity to clarify that:

- we exist as a church for His glory
- that we find our greatest joy in pleasing Him
- that His gospel and global mission is actually something we're interested enough in to sacrifice something more
- that we simply and passionately want to have the privilege of being involved
- that our fruit might abound to His glory.

While I'm at it, let me clarify something else? We're not trying to pledge together to simply eliminate debt.

If that were our thinking, we could personally justify giving nothing to the Lord's church and put everything we could into our own house payments, car payment, school debt and retirement funds.

And that's why we're dedicating 10% of whatever we pledge to - go immediately on top of what we're already doing so that by the gracious

allowance of God we can accomplish even more in His name, locally, regionally, nationally and globally.

An article ran in a medical journal on neuroscience this past year about a Brazilian man who developed a rather confusing shift in personality – and it was a rather unwelcome, unsettling shift to his family.

He was a Brazilian executive and he was 49 years old when he suffered a stroke which nearly took his life. When he regained his health, he had, what his family – and later his doctors – called an urge to excessively and persistently give money and gifts to people – to people he didn't even know.

He would even be flown to North Carolina at the insistence of his family; he was evaluated at Duke University hospital where the neurologist in charge of his case eventually defined his disorder as “pathological generosity.” He had never been generous before . . . he had never given money or things away – certainly not to total strangers.

The doctor went on record in saying – and I quote – “Although the observation of a personality change is not that unusual, this particular one is apparently novel.” According to this Brazilian's wife, he would buy food for children he met on the street – he even quit his job as a manager to devote himself to giving to others. When asked by researchers if he wanted to return to his old way of life, he responded by saying that when he had his stroke, he'd seen death up close . . . and he simply wanted to make up for lost time.¹

Sounds like a modern day Ebenezer Scrooge, doesn't it?

This one actually happened in real life.

I couldn't help but think that this diagnosis would make a wonderful descriptor or the New Testament believer.

Pathologically generous – the word pathological means, excessive, extreme; remarkably abnormal.

Sounds like the Macedonian believers Paul wrote about – who out of *their great poverty excelled in the liberality of their generosity (2 Corinthians 8:2) . . . giving beyond their means.*

In other words, they really couldn't . . . and many would have said, they really shouldn't, but they gave beyond the normal boundaries which impacted their own needs.

They were abnormally – excessively – generous.

What I want to do today is simply pull up a seat beside our Lord as he watches people give their

offerings in the temple – and a woman that He would make an example of giving for the next, nearly 2,000 years.

Let me show you where in the *Gospel by Mark and chapter 12.*

If this woman were alive today, she just might be diagnosed as pathologically generous.

Notice *verse 41 of chapter 12. And He sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. 42. And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. 43. And He – Jesus – called His disciples to Him and said to them, “Truly I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box.*

Now Jesus and the disciples would have recognized this woman as a widow, because widows in Israel wore distinctive clothing – and they would have known that she was a poor widow because her clothing would have been old and tattered.

And Jesus said – Men – look – *that woman put in more than everybody else.*

More? How did He come up with *more*?!

There is evidently a new kind of math from heaven's perspective . . . this is a divinely arranged calculation . . . this is God's new math.

From this event, let me draw out 2 or 3 observations about this strange new algorithm.

1. **First, new math understands that God's pleasure is the ultimate incentive in giving.**

Go back to v. 41a. And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. (one translation reads – and He was watching how the people were putting money in)

We know from biblical history that in the court of women were 13 trumpet shaped receptacles that fed down to 13 treasures or offering boxes.

They were named trumpets, simply because of their flared shape at the top – like a trumpet –

I used to think there were 13 – one for each tribe of Israel and then one more for Gentile proselytes; but in doing more research for this sermon I discovered I'd been wrong; the Mishnah spelled it out.

The Mishnah, by the way, is the official written record of Jewish traditions, dating back to the time of Christ.

And it clearly states that there were treasure boxes at the base of each trumpet shaped receptacle which bore inscriptions designating the type of offering that belonged in each box.

In other words, you could put your money in one treasure box designated for the purchasing of young birds for the whole offering; another box was engraved, Frankincense, for your purchase of offering incense; but six of these treasure boxes were simply engraved “Freewill offerings”.ⁱⁱ

And that was where she was giving her money.

In other words, all your vows and all your dues and all your offerings were paid, but if you wanted to give additionally to God you could place your money in any one of these 6 trumpets.

By the time of Christ – by the time he took a seat nearby to just watch – this area in the temple had become quite a production.

In fact, Jesus earlier had said in *Matthew 6*, “**Don’t give your offerings, to be seen.**” That Greek verb “to be seen” is theaomai from which we get our word, theatre.

In other words, don’t put on a show. And this court had become a theatrical stage where people were putting on public demonstrations of piety.

Somebody could come in and drop large valuable coins into the free will offering trumpet – or, more commonly, he could bring handfuls of less expensive coins and really rattle these brass receptacles; how those coins would echo around that court.

Sort of like you, in today’s economy, slipping a 20 dollar bill into that trumpet mouth, or instead – even better – bringing 20 dollars’ in quarters . . . 80 of them. You could stand there for quite a while . . . making a lot of noise.

I think this was what the Lord was referring to when he also said in *Matthew 6*, when you present your offerings, **don’t sound the trumpet.**” (*Matthew 6:2*).

In other words, don’t make a lot of noise . . . don’t put on a one-man show.

And can you imagine the implications of this scene . . . unknown to them, Jesus is just sitting there watching these people come and go.

Don’t you like to watch people? At the airport, at the State Fair – that’s a great place . . . you find a bench over by that huge water fountain and you sit

there with your deep fried snicker bar – eating slowly, savoring every bite and just watching people. It’s more fun than the zoo.

People are strange, aren’t they? They’re really funny . . . and odd . . . we’re not . . . what’s wrong with powdered sugar all over your face and chocolate dripping on your shirt?

Those other people are strange.

Can you imagine God incarnate watching people in the Temple?

Let’s make it even more personal . . . can you imagine God watching you as you gave your offering? Can you imagine Him sitting next to you as you wrote out that check or decided on a bill from your wallet or purse?

Can you imagine God watching? He does, by the way.

And new math means that if He is pleased and nobody else ever knows – there was no theatre – no show – no outward display . . . He was the object of your devotion . . . that’s what matters most.

Can you just see this poor widow . . . on this festival time of Passover slipping up to that free will trumpet and saying in her heart to God nothing less than, “Lord, I love you and all I have is Yours . . . here is my very existence . . . my future . . . my life.”ⁱⁱⁱ

How do we know that? Notice what she gave – verse 42 again; **And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny.**

She literally gave two lepton (λεπτον) which literally translated means, “a tiny thing”. It’s translated in Old English – a mite – this is the widow’s mite; the only Jewish coin mentioned in the New Testament. Since Mark is written to Roman/Gentile believers he defines the coin in Latin terms.^{iv}

I’ll whittle it down to tell you that in today’s economy, it would be worth around 1 penny or even less.

In fact, the Britons will later stop minting this tiny coin – it was so insignificant.^v

These two tiny coins, the size of shirt buttons wouldn’t have even made a sound as they slid down that brass receptacle and landed in the treasure box.

But she wasn’t giving to make noise . . . she was giving to please God.

And God’s new math records motives as much as amounts.

2. Secondly, new math tallies the amount left over rather than the amount given.

Look at verse 43. And he called his disciples to him and said to them, “Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. 44a. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty...

Jesus Christ was impressed with what the other people had left over, compared to how much they had given.

There wasn't anything wrong with the gifts of the wealthy; Jesus Christ is simply revealing His divine tabulation – the affluent gave out of their surplus; and they never missed a penny; she gave a penny and had nothing left in surplus.^{vi}

And Jesus comes off his seat to make sure the disciples didn't miss it . . .

It wasn't the size of the gift, but the sacrifice of the giver that brought Jesus Christ's applause.^{vii}

And to this day – and in this assembly, beloved – never apologize in your spirit to Christ as you give to Him – no matter how small . . . it isn't the *size* of the gift, it is the *sacrifice* of the giver that receives God's special commendation.

3. One more observation: new math displays a sense of recklessness in the providence of God while giving.

I took this idea directly from William Barclay's commentary, written decades ago by this scholarly historian – he wrote, “Real giving has a certain recklessness to it.”^{viii}

And this woman was! She was somewhat dangerous in her giving – in her total trusting of the future providence and care of God whom she loved.

Notice verse **44b**, *but she, out of her poverty has put in everything she had – all she had to live on.*

Have you ever thought about the fact that she gave both coins – both mites – to God?

This was a freewill offering . . . she had already paid all she owed on this festival season . . . “But I have two mites left . . . I don't have to give them to God . . . I get to give them to God.” “But it's all I have left!” . . . no, “I have something left that I can give Him.”

She was pathologically generous.

It was based on new math – a values system that summarizes the mission of the gospel and the glory of God as more important than our own comforts – our own nest egg – our own future concerns.

There isn't a financial planner on the planet who would endorse what she just did.

But something at this moment was compelling her to do something absolutely abnormal – she gave everything she had, to God.

All the others that Jesus watched on this afternoon made contributions. And by the way, He didn't rebuke any of them; their gifts weren't considered without any value.

Jesus just said, this woman's gift had the greatest value of all.

Why? Because everybody else made a contribution with their money; she made a consecration of her life in the way she sacrificially gave her money to the God she loved and trusted and followed.

No wonder she remains the premier example of giving to this day – a woman who deeply convicts the church at large and me personally . . . someone I'd love to grow up to become more like.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 5/4/2014 by Stephen Davey.

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i John Erickson, *Brazilian Man Can't Stop Giving* (Medical Daily (9-8-13)); citation: preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2013/October/1101413

ii R. Kent Hughes, *Mark: Volume II* (Crossway Books, 1989), p. 130

iii Adapted from Hughes, p. 131

iv Frank E. Gaebelien, gen. editor, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Volume 8* (Regency, 1984), p. 741

v Ivor Powell, *Mark's Superb Gospel* (Kregel, 1985), p. 326

vi Adapted from Powell, p. 327

vii Adapted from William Barclay, The Gospel of Mark (Westminster, 1975), p. 302

viii Ibid