

**Introduction:**

- A. *Illus.*: Perhaps you’ve traveled to another country where you had to exchange your dollars for another currency. The whole business can be baffling. You go up to the currency exchange in the airport, feeling very vulnerable, and slide a couple hundred dollars under the window. And the Indian guy behind the glass does some calculating. He counts out stacks of colored bills and a few odd coins. That’s 12,649 rupees, he says. You walk down the concourse and try to buy lunch and it costs you in the thousands! My folks taught me the value of a dollar, but I don’t know what this is! Then if you stop in Great Britain on your way home and slide another \$200 through the window, they give you 128 pounds. *But wait, I gave you 200 and you’re just giving me 128?*
- B. Did you know there’s a currency exchange right by the gates to the Kingdom of God? Not just for when you die, but for right now. If you want to do any transactions in God’s kingdom you’ll need the currency exchange. These things can be kind of nerve-wracking and confusing so I thought I should show you how it works. Turn to **Luke 20**. This is during Passover week, leading up to Jesus’ death. He spent time in the vast courts of the temple in Jerusalem. He’d overturned the tables of the money-changers there, so there was clearly an exchange issue! He’d told those trying to trick him on rates of exchange to “*give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and give to God what is God’s.*” Now this: **20:45-21:4...**
- C. Spread around the temple courts were 13 large trumpet-shaped receptacles for peoples’ offerings. Some of the rich would make **spectacle at the receptacle**, pouring their heavy coins in so everyone could hear the sound of money. Then there was this *poor widow*. You’ve likely never known anyone so poor as she. She had two tiny copper coins to her name, a fraction of a penny each. I have two similar coins, which it says are from 103-4 BC. No one would ever hear those fall into a receptacle!

- D. No one realized it at the time but that was a currency exchange story. One kind of currency was exchanged for another, the coin of one realm for that of another.

Even before we're introduced to the widow we meet the money men who preened in the temple courts like peacocks. These “teachers of the Law” were powerful, rich lawyers—the kind who give the profession a bad name. Nothing mattered more to them than **prestige**. They paid handsomely to be **honored; respected**. But they were sinister and treacherous. They were unscrupulous financiers who ate widows' houses for lunch. They'd crush widows and use God. Their sanctimonious prayers were nothing but theater; politics; P.R. **They turned their bags of money into the Kingdom currency exchange and they got an indictment back:** “*These men,*” Jesus ruled, “*will be punished most severely.*”

**I. GOD PROSECUTES SPIRITUAL SWINDLERS TO THE FULLEST EXTENT OF THE LAW**

- A. Of all the sins detailed in the Bible, none does so much widespread damage nor so infuriates the holy God as self-righteous pride. And for these guys, that was their business plan, their stock-in-trade. They'd capitalize widows poverty and God's holy name, all while maintaining a façade of spiritual superiority.
- B. But when they crossed paths with Jesus he saw their currency for what it was: worthless. They weren't actually giving anything to God. They'd already spent the money on themselves by the time it hit the bottom of the collection box. It was like they were trying to spend cancelled checks. **They were trying to swindle God!**
- C. If we have any hope of life and liberty in God's kingdom don't waste your money or time on being important. Invest in getting small, in being low. Put your resources into being a servant, into washing feet and putting others before yourself—especially those like that poor widow who have few defenders or helpers now. And above all, never try to leverage the Lord's name to make a name for yourself. Never make a show of your religion for profit. Peter told elders not to pursue dishonest gain but to be eager to serve.

Back to the currency exchange and the poor widow's coins. Jesus saw the "poor widow put in two very small copper coins. 'Truly I tell you,' he said, 'this poor widow has put in more than all the others.'" Wow! *More than all the others?! Something happened in the exchange!*

## II. GOD TREASURES WHAT WE SACRIFICE FOR HIM

The center of Jesus' response is that "*she put in more than all the others.*" So just what was it she put in!? What made her two tiny copper coins so valuable? We need to know that because we give to God, too. Our money, time, effort—so are our gifts valuable or not?

A. A gift is valuable when it is given to God alone. The point here in this story is not how the money in the temple was spent. The widow wasn't giving to one fund or another, whether her money went to temple repair or to the Mercy Fund. The point is that **she had no other intention for the money than to give it to God.** God didn't need it, of course. The temple treasury would hardly be helped by such a tiny gift. Not even the poor would be much better off. **Yet her gift was a treasure to the Lord.** You know why, of course. Any parent understands how a gift of little value can be a treasure.

Illus.: You might remember the Christian band, Sixpence None the Richer. They played on the David Letterman show one time and he asked them where they got their name. Their singer, Leigh Nash, said:

It comes from a book by C. S. Lewis called *Mere Christianity*. A little boy asks his father if he can get a sixpence—a very small amount of English currency—to go and get a gift for his father. The father gladly accepts the gift and he's really happy with it, but he also realizes that he's not any richer for the transaction. C.S. Lewis was comparing that to his belief that God has given him, and us, the gifts that we possess, and to serve Him the way we should, we should do it humbly—realizing how we got the gifts in the first place.

- B. Another reason the poor widow's gift was so valuable was that she gave it freely. This wasn't her tithe. Ten percent of nothing is nothing. And she could have given one coin rather than two. No one expected anything of her, not even God himself. But it seems she would have preferred to risk going hungry so that she could give something to the Lord.

I believe that it is right and necessary for Christians to give to the Lord. Susan and I believe in giving a tithe as a minimum. God says in Malachi that to not give to God is to rob him. The religious lawyers gave, but with corrupt motives. But *not* giving to God at all is hardly better. It's a kind of spiritual freeloading.

Yet God won't cut you off if you're a miser. **He will still shower you with his graces because *he* is generous whether we are or not.** But you will still be a miser, with the grasping heart of a miser. So give freely and generously to God so that you might actually enjoy his rich gifts to you.

- C. I don't know if the widow realized this or not, but Jesus makes it clear that it is sacrifice that makes a gift a treasure. The poor widow's two little coins became priceless incense to God, a timeless psalm, more precious than gold. *Illus.:* A couple of months ago my friend Christine found something from her childhood, back when her family attended Village Church. It is her offering envelope, which she misplaced. She was 7. Her name is printed on the bottom and inside was a dime, a nickel and a penny—16 cents. What was the value of that offering? Priceless.



- D. We know, of course, that not every sincere gift is a great sacrifice. Most of our giving is freely and gratefully given to God alone, yet it still is a gift from our wealth. But God treasures every real sacrifice given freely to him alone. To him, it is priceless. And that's saying something for the Lord who owns all things.

There's one other thing that happens in the Kingdom currency exchange.

### III. THE LORD ALWAYS SHOWS HIS DELIGHT WITH OUR GIVING

- A. I doubt anyone in that vast temple court paid much attention to the widow's quiet, miniscule offering. Except Jesus. Jesus saw it. And the Lord God had seen every time she'd given in the past. And while the scoundrels "devoured widow's houses," I think it is safe to say that Almighty God took special interest in this generous, trusting daughter. I suspect she was a regular donor.
- B. God promises to respond to our giving. He doesn't repay us; he rewards us. In **Mal. 3:10**, God all but pleads with his people to tithe, (let alone give sacrificially): *"Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it."* And in **2 Cor 9**, where Paul is urging the Corinthians to give a generous offering to Christians in need, he reminds them, *"Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work."* 2 Cor 9:6-8
- C. For the widow to give her last two cents meant she believed two things:
1. She trusted that even such a tiny amount mattered to God.
  2. She trusted that God would take care of her even if she was penniless.
- D. Our faith expands at the frontier of our sacrifice. Jesus met this poor widow at the intersection of sacrifice and trust. This woman not only won the Lord's admiration, **she grew in godliness**. While those around her were committing crimes against God she grew closer to him. She grew more confident in his love. His promises became more precious.

Her treasure in heaven grew and, whether she ever thought of it or not, she made the people of God richer, endowing them with the blessings of her quiet faith.

**What's more, she grew in faith.** I have no doubt that God took care of her, penniless though she was. I have no doubt that God had carried her through the death of her husband and the daily pressure of poverty. In all the sea of people in the temple courts that day I suspect there was no one, other than Jesus, who worried less about money than she did.

- E. We don't all give to the Lord out of our poverty. Most of us can afford to give generously and still buy groceries and pay the mortgage. And that's good. But if you want to grow in your faith find some empty pocket of poverty in your life and give to God from there. If you can't imagine how you'd manage if you gave 10% of your income to God, try it! Test him in that. If you can't imagine how you'd find the emotional resources for some needed person who is often on your mind, try it! Depend on the Lord's resources. What pocket of poverty would you like to sacrifice from to show your love for the Lord?

*Illus.:* I've been reading a book by Mike McIntyre, *The Kindness of Strangers: Penniless Across America*. He's a reporter who confesses how fearful he is of so many things. So he sets out to hitchhike across America, from San Francisco to his final symbolic destination, Cape Fear, in North Carolina, and to do it all without taking any money. He draws his title from the line in the play, *Streetcar Named Desire*, where the batty Blanch Dubois says, "I've always been dependent on the kindness of strangers."

Mike tells about stopping one afternoon at a church and asks if he can sleep there. Pastor Larry, an ex-biker. Mike tells him, "I've got to be perfectly honest with you. I put myself in this position. I'm on a sort of spiritual journey."

Pastor Larry calls a family who take in needy people from time to time. Turns out they're desperately needed themselves. He writes,

Tim dropped out of high school to work in a Northern California lumber mill. When he got laid off, he moved his family to Lakeview. ... He recently got hired at a Lakeview lumber mill, where he works six days a week, from four in the morning until eight at night. He and his family live around the corner from the church in a two-story duplex. They used to sublet one side, but had to evict the tenants because they trashed the place. Tim and his wife, Diane, don't plan to re-rent, though it's obvious they can use the money. They want to keep the unit open for people who need emergency shelter. Tim calls it their ministry. "Just showing up at church on Sunday and putting a few shekels in the plate isn't enough," he says. "If you're gonna be a Christian, be a Christian."