

All Means All

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the one who gave everything he had for you, Jesus Christ our Savior and our Lord, amen.

Every time I read this story about the Widow and her sacrificial gift I'm confused, perplexed, and maybe even dumbfounded. Here's why... When I find out that a charitable organization I support doesn't follow the principles of good stewardship, I drop that organization from my list of charities that I give to. I mean why would I continue to give my hard earned dollars to an organization that fails the financial accountability test. (SLIDE) In 2016 the Wounded Warrior Project, one of the largest veteran charities in the country was rocked by a scandal where their two top executives were fired for allegedly throwing lavish parties at expensive all-inclusive hotels.. The accusations grew until these two executives had been found to have spent over \$800 million between 2012 and 2016. The "administrative" costs at that time were revealed to be north of 40% of their total donations received for the Wounded Warrior Project. When news of the scandal hit the news media, donations to Wounded Warrior Project rightfully plummeted. I believe Wounded Warrior Project has fixed their dismal record since 2016 when the allegations hit the news media.

In our scripture reading for today, Jesus and the disciples are sitting across the room from the offering collection receptacle of the temple treasury. (SLIDE) They're watching the people who came to the temple that day give their tithe to the

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Lord. As they watch, they see rich people coming by and making a loud show of how much money they put into the treasury. The receptacle for collecting the people's offering was designed to make loud clanking noises as the coins were dropped into the collection tube. (SLIDE) It was made of copper and shaped sort of like the opening of a tuba. There was no hiding how much or how little you gave. Everyone who was there could see you as you dropped in your coins. Even if they were in the back of the room and couldn't see how much you were giving they could hear the coins drop. Imagine one of those spiral Wishing Wells they have at places like the Mall where you put your coin in a slot and when you release it in goes around and around, faster and faster until it finally drops into the coin box below like it's being drawn into a black hole never to be seen again. They were made for show. They were made so people could show off how much they were giving to the temple. The society and culture back then was built on what scholars call the Honor-Shame system. (SLIDE) Among other things, the more you contributed to the temple, the higher your social standing was in the community. Oh how the rich loved to show off...

Now imagine you're at the bottom of the social system. You couldn't get much lower than being a poor widow. (SLIDE) After all, the rich people had given out of the abundance of their blessings, it's now your turn to approach the offering vessel. Your pockets are empty, except for your last two mites. What

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would you do with your last two coins? In our scripture reading the widowed woman approached the temple treasury. Carefully, she reached into her satchel and she pulled out two copper coins. They are so small and so insignificant nobody even notices the noise they made as they are dropped into the tuba. Nobody notices, that is, except Jesus.

Here's the part that confuses, perplexes, and dumbfounds me. Jesus, who just explained to his disciples how evil and corrupt the entire temple system was. This was the exact same temple system where the Scribes "devour widow's houses." Now Jesus praises this widow for giving, not out of her abundance as all the others had done, but she gave all she had to this very same evil, corrupt system. Jesus goes on to say she has contributed more than all the rest. Now, I never took a math class from Andy, but I did get all the way through a full year of Calculus in college many years ago. I'm certain even my brilliant Calculus professor could not have made that math add up. My experience has been that when I'm really studying and pondering a Bible story and it just doesn't add up, usually there's more going on than meets the eye.

This story about the widow's mite comes slightly after Jesus had been asked about paying taxes to Caesar. If you remember from last week, Jesus famously said we should give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, but give to God what belongs to God. This story isn't so much about how much we give to God but how

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we view our entire lives. Those rich givers probably never missed the 1 or 2 percent of their income they lavished on the temple treasury. It's like this past couple of weeks when the news cycle has focused on the \$450 million fine Donald Trump must pay for overestimating the value of his property when he applied for a loan. Now \$450 million is a lot of money, (SLIDE) but for the Donald, maybe not so much. I mean he'll probably have to cash in a few CDs or sell one of his properties, but it's certainly not going to bankrupt a man who's worth about \$10 Billion. On the other hand, when you think about the sacrifice the widow made, it was all she had. The rich donors held back in order to ensure they had enough to live on. They placed their trust in their large piles of cash and in their ability to leverage that cash by making large, showy donations to the Church Treasury, into being held in high esteem in their culture's social circles. They were much more concerned about how they appeared to other people than with their relationship with their heavenly Father. On the other hand, the poor widow didn't care about where she stood in the honor, shame game or with any of the others in the temple that day. (SLIDE) She already knew she was at the bottom of the heap. She had nowhere to go, but up. Our widow wasn't trusting in her reserve cash, but in the abundance of blessings she receives each and every day from the Lord our God. I don't know where she got those two mites, maybe someone gave them to her. Maybe she was a beggar and that was all she earned that day. Wherever she got

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them, she trusted God would provide for her needs that day and every other day for the rest of her life. She wanted to give all she had as a sign of how much she loved the Lord God. (SLIDE) Do you think she heard Jesus talking to the Scribe about the most important Command, to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength? Do you think she thought to herself, “All means all...”

The Old Testament standard for giving to the temple was a tithe of 10% of your gross earnings or first fruits of your labors. Most Christians today give more than ten percent, but they tithe to the credit card company instead of the church. Credit card companies today charge upwards of 12% to 27% interest. In the US today, 80% of Americans give less than 3% of their income to all charities, including to the Church. Listen again to what Jesus says in the greatest commandment, (SLIDE) “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with *all* your heart, and with *all* your soul, and with *all* your mind, and with *all* your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” Those words come from Jesus, not Mel Musser... I guess, if you’re looking for some wiggle room here you could say, “Well Jesus said all you heart, soul, mind and strength, but he never said all of your money...”

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I will tell you Jesus is concerned about *all* of your money. If you love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, you have to be concerned with how you spend every mite and every dollar. Not only how you spend every dollar, but how you earn every dollar as well. In these two commands, Jesus is saying it's more than just about money. When you love with all your heart, you love with all your emotions. When we love God with all our soul, you integrate your faith into everything you are and all you do. To love with all your mind means you're totally committed to Christ, searching for ways to bring God's reign into this lost world. Loving with all your strength means using every bit of your God given talent to make Christ known. God thought our physicality was important enough to become incarnate himself. Certainly this indicates our bodies should bear witness to God's love in every way possible. All means all...

May the love of God fill all your heart, all your soul, all your mind and all of your body. May Christ's sacrificial gift of his Body and Blood demonstrate the level of commitment God has to you and may your gratitude overflow into dedicating your *all* of your life to serving this God who gave His all for you.

Amen.