

11/8/09

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY Almighty and ever-living God, You have given exceedingly great and precious promises to those who trust in You. You promise to love and care for us now and eternally. Help us to learn from the examples of your people in Scriptures. Grant that we may believe your promises and live our faith in actions of love and service; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

THE OLD TESTAMENT LESSON 1 Kings 17:8–16

(The widow trusts in God's promise.)

8 Then the word of the LORD came to him:

9 "Go at once to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there. I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food."

10 So he went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, "Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?"

11 As she was going to get it, he called, "And bring me, please, a piece of bread."

12 "As surely as the LORD your God lives," she replied, "I don't have any bread-- only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it-- and die."

13 Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small cake of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. 14 For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the LORD gives rain on the land.'"

15 She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. 16 For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the LORD spoken by Elijah.

THE EPISTLE LESSON Hebrews 9:24–28

(Christ is the greatest high priest because He died once to bear the sins of many)

24 For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. 25 Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. 26 Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. 27 Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, 28 so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

THE GOSPEL LESSON Mark 12: 41–44

(The widow gives an example of a total offering of faith and trust.)

41 Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. 42 But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. 43 Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. 44 They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything-- all she had to live on."

THE SERMON

“The Faith of a Widow teaches us!”

Mark 12

INTRO - I know the lady in the Gospel account assigned for today, or someone like her. Carolyn Jenkins was a widow, a poor one, living on her social security in St. Louis. In the early 1980's MY WIFE Kathy was a visiting nurse and Carolyn was a patient of my wife. Carolyn needed a visiting nurse because of heart trouble, so she couldn't work. Carolyn also wanted a pastor, and after a number of home visits she joined our church. Carolyn was living on about \$200.00 a month. But, the government decided she had been getting too much, so they cut it back to \$193.00 a month. Carolyn used to pay her house payment, her utilities, and then buy groceries when the check came. Most months she ran out of food and we tried to help. One day I went to visit her and she wanted to give me some money for our church, quite a bit of money actually, \$5.00. I refused to take it. She didn't like it, but I wouldn't take it from a poor lady like Carolyn.

I. Our Gospel Amazing story about a child of God. On the Tuesday before he is crucified Jesus is in the court of the temple sitting opposite the money box where people put their offerings. He has just finished a long day of being attacked verbally by one group of religious leaders after another. They tried to trick him, trap him, find something to use against him. These were the religious leaders. Then as he watches people give their offerings to God one lady, we are told another poor widow, put in two coins worth a Roman penny. Not much compared to what all the others had done. Obviously, by this lady's appearance you could tell she was a widow, and not well off. But Jesus tells us that while others put in more in dollars, she actually gave more to God. The others had given to God out of the abundance of their wealth. This lady, from her poverty, had put in all she had.

A. If you are reading the devotions we are doing together as a congregation, reading the Bible in two years, yesterday you read Hebrews 7.

1. It talked about tithing as a way ultimately to look at the priesthood of Jesus. Verse 5 says, **Now the law requires the descendants of Levi who become priests to collect a tenth from the people**
2. But this lady was Generous to a fault. She did not give a tithe, 10%, Jesus said, from her poverty she gave everything.
3. The Jewish leaders were arguing with Jesus at every turn, Trying to trap him. Rejecting God's plan and God's love.
4. But a poor widow caught His attention with her gift.

B. I don't know about you, but this verse leaves me with questions, Why did she do it? Why would she give everything she had? And then, what happened to the widow? This verse actually doesn't tell us what happened. Jesus goes on to talking about the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world, but we do have some places to turn.

1. In our Old Testament Lesson another widow gave her last food. In a famine, when there was no food to buy, she gave what she had to a prophet of God. But,

miraculously even though she gave away what she had, she always had food. God Provided.

2. In the sermon on the mount Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:26 **26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?**

3. In Jesus' time the government didn't take care of the poor, the church did. They were responsible to take care of widows and orphans. In a way, this lady knew God could and would care for her.

C. But why? Why give up everything she had?

1. Especially in the midst of loss of a spouse, in the midst of loneliness and grief, in the midst of poverty, what causes such generosity?

2. There is only one reason for such generosity; something in the widow's heart

3. Knowing the love of God, her heart was full of faith that His love was bigger than her tragedy.

4. In the midst of her poverty, her faith and love and thanks to God led her to put into the treasury all that she had. Everything.

5. The faith and thanks and love in her heart caused her EXTREME generosity.

II. You've heard the credit card commercial, 'What's in your wallet?' Today, as we gather as people of God, as this assigned reading causes us to think about the actions of this lady caused by her thanks and faith and love, please ask yourself, "What's in my heart?"

A. Before you go any further consider your actions. After all, the actions of the lady revealed the contents of her heart.

1. I know it is early, but, has anything made you angry, today even. Have you been rushed, disappointed, hurt?

2. When God calls for us to live for him with all that we are and have, are you like the lady who put in everything she had out of faith and trust? Or are you sometimes like the religious leaders who argue with God about His unrealistic expectations?

3. Today you'll have an opportunity to respond to God's love, not only His providing love, but also His undeserved forgiveness and eternal life? We have been talking for the last few weeks about God's financial stewardship principles. Does this seem like an opportunity or an imposition?

B. That is just the surface of the question, "What's in my heart?" Please turn with me in your Bibles to the book of Romans.

1. Romans 3:10-12 says, "**There is no one righteous, not even one; 11 there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. 12 All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.**" God tells us that our hearts are full of sin.

2. God describes our struggle with sin in Romans 7:19, **For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do-- this I keep on doing.**

3. What is in our hearts? It's not always faith, and thanks, and love!

III. Do you know what God says to people with hearts full, not of faith and thanks and love, but full of selfishness, rebellion, and sin?

A. Look at Romans 5:6-8. **6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. 7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**

When we deserve the lot of selfish rebels, God gives His love, His Son!

B. Stewardship is not about money, it's about hearts.

1. The widow knew that in the midst of her loss and grief and poverty, God loved her. This moved her heart.

2. God wants us to know that when our rebellion and sin deserve punishment, death, hell even, He gives his Son, so we have His love in life's trials. He gave His Son so we can live with Him forever in heaven. This is love from God, that changes our hearts.

3. Do you know God's love? What's in your heart? Is it full of thanks, or faith?

CONCLUSION - About a week after Carolyn tried to give me her offering and I said no, she called me and told her to come to her house right away. When I got there she showed me a letter from a family member with a check for \$50.00. Then she gave me the \$5.00 bill again and told me never to say no to her offering again. If she wanted to give to the Lord, I had no right to say no. Carolyn had known the Lord's love. He just used her to show me again reasons for faith, and love, and thanks.

What's in your heart? Do you know God's love? How do you want to respond to Him?