

# Widows *looking to the Lord*

Mark 12:38-44

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*based on messages by William Cwirla and James Douthwaite*

She was no stranger to death. She had seen her husband die. And now she watched, helplessly, as everything around her died. The grass dried up, the trees dropped their leaves, the cows were gaunt skeletons, and the goats bleated pitifully. Every day she scanned the cloudless sky, hoping against hope for a cloud and rain.

She had been rationing the flour and the oil in an attempt to make it stretch until the end of the drought. The little round, flat daily loaf was unevenly divided. Her son needed all the nourishment she could give him. It pained her to see the lad so thin and without energy. But her sacrifice seemed pointless, for she feared that both would soon starve to death. There was enough for one final meal. Holding her son's hand, the widow leaves the dusty town of Zarephath to scrounge for firewood in order to cook their final meal.

*And Elijah says to her, "Do not fear; go and do as you have said. But first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me ... And she went and did as Elijah said. And she and he and her household ate for many days. The jar of flour was not spent, neither did the jug of oil become empty, according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by Elijah. (1 Kings 17)*

One widow from the Old Testament, another from the New. Not from Zarephath, but from Jerusalem. And like the widow in Zarephath, she lived pretty much from day to day, trusting in the Lord and His provision for her. You can be certain that she knew the story of the prophet Elijah and the widow at Zarephath quite well. It was one she could relate to, an instant connection and application. And while she had no such promise from God as the widow at Zarephath, she knew that the widow was close to the Lord's heart. (Dt 10:18, Ps 146:9, Ps 68:5)

And this widow at Zarephath served as a reminder to her that God is faithful and true to His Word. That He would not abandon her, especially in her time of need. That she could trust in the Lord's fatherly care to supply what she needed. Somehow. And though she was down to her last penny, she came to the temple that day to make her offering. But what could she possibly give? The temple budget was enormous. The renovation work was ongoing. It all takes money, and I would imagine that the temple accountants really didn't pay much regard to this poor widow.

But still, she comes to the temple, with her two little copper coins. And she stands in line at the entrance to the temple's "court of women" where the money boxes were - thirteen metal boxes shaped like long horns, or trumpets, standing on their ends, with the bell sticking high up in the air. As the coins clanged their way into the coffer, they made a sound that could be heard throughout the courtyard.

So you can imagine the attention that was drawn when the rich came forward, and dumped their large quantities of coins into the treasury box. Clang, clang, clang, clang. You can only imagine the noise. And everyone stopped, and looked to see who it was, that made such a glorious contribution to the bottom line.

*As Jesus said, "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, who devour widows' houses and for a pretense [for a cover, a deception] make long prayers."*

And then comes our dear widow lady with her two copper coins. Plink, plink. Barely a sound, as they go down, to join the coins of the rich. Barely a blip, on the bottom line of the temple budget.

Sitting across the way, opposite the treasury box, is Jesus. Watching, observing, the whole thing, as people put their money into the treasury. Listening, to the clang, clang, clanging of the coins. And then, He hears something different, something beautiful, the plink, plink of the two copper coins. And as he listens, what does he hear in that plink, plink that he doesn't hear, in all the other coins clanging into the coffer?

He hears faith. He hears trust. And he calls His disciples to share the moment. "Did you hear that?" You know they didn't. *"Truly I say to you, this poor widow has put in more, than all those who are contributing to the offering box."*

More? What's he talking about? What kind of math is that? How are the bills going to get paid, Jesus, when you praise a couple of copper coins, over all the gold and silver that was contributed? Aren't we supposed to honor the

big givers? But the Lord is seeking something else. The gold and silver belong to Him anyway, along with the cattle on a thousand hills.

But the plink, plink of faith is music to the Lord's ears. A sweeter harmony, than all the excess coins of the rich clanging away and echoing in the temple courts. They gave out of their abundance. It takes no faith at all, to give out of surplus, does it? But to give out of poverty - that tiny little plink, plink of two copper coins was her entire livelihood. Everything she had to live on.

Where does such giving come from? Maybe the widow had just returned from a seminar that taught her the top ten principles of giving? Not likely. Her giving flowed, not from ten principles, but from a heart of faith. A trust that seeks first, the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and trusts that all the things that are needed in this life will be added as well. (William Cwirla)

About a month ago, we heard the story of a rich man, who came to Jesus and asked: *Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?* And after some conversation, Jesus said: *You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me* (Mark 10:17-22). But the rich man couldn't do it. He couldn't let go of his wealth to follow Jesus. It was the one thing he couldn't let go of. He was willing to do anything and *everything* ... except that. And we considered that day: what is the one thing we have? The one thing we can't let go of?

Today's two stories are exact opposite of that one. The stories of two people who *did* let go of everything. And they weren't rich folks. The first widow who had nothing, except enough food for her and her son for one more meal, and then, she expected, they would starve to death.

And when a prophet from Israel comes and asks her for the little food she has, promising: *the Lord God of Israel will give you daily bread every day. He will take care of you and provide for you*, what does she do? Without any evidence to support his claim, the widow does it. She gives all that she has, clinging to the promise of God.

The second widow, the one in the temple, gives all she has, *everything she has to live on*. You could say, "*she put in her whole life.*" What that rich man couldn't do; wouldn't do, these two widows did. And I doubt it was any easier simply because they were poor. They put us to shame, don't they? But not because we don't give away all our possessions. This isn't a command from God to us. Jesus isn't saying you have to empty your wallet or your checking account into the offering plate today. You *can*, you're *free to*, but you don't have to to please God. This story's really not so much about money - as it is about faith. For in doing what they did, these two widows showed a *faith* that's rarely seen. A faith, that God *really will* provide all that we need.

And that's amazing, because judging by what could be *seen*, it certainly didn't appear that way. Both women were widows, deprived of their husbands. Both had become incredibly poor. It didn't seem as if God was taking care of them at all. And yet, both believe, both trust, both give all they have, all their life.

Does that describe your faith; my faith? How quickly instead, we tend to doubt, and disbelieve, when things start going south, when trials and troubles and difficulties come. How quick we are, to grumble and complain, when life doesn't go our way. How quick we can be, to accuse God of not coming through for us, of not caring, of not keeping His promises.

So the faith of these widows? It puts us to shame. *But even better, if it drives us to repent*. For how will we get the faith of these widows? How can we be like them? By forcing our self to give more? No. For if the giving isn't from a willing heart, it'll only breed resentment. Or it can lead to the spiritual pride of the scribes, who thought God owed them something for all they did.

How will we get the faith of these widows? Maybe if we just trying harder. If you want to get better at math, what do you do? You work hard at it, and do your homework. So too, with faith, right? No. You can't make yourself believe more. Faith is a gift, and the *building* of that faith, and the *strengthening* of that faith, is gift too. The gift of the Holy Spirit, working through His Word.

So it starts with repenting. Confessing that my faith is not what it should be, and neither are my thoughts and words and deeds and desires what they should be. And so repenting, and then *hearing* how God really did keep His promises - to Adam, to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob, to Moses, to David, and all the people we hear of in the Bible, including these two widows.

Repenting, and hearing again, the promise of God, and the reality, that your sins *are* forgiven. Repenting, and believing - these are things of faith, that build and strengthen faith, that we might be like these two widows. For all this, is not what we do, but what *God* does. For you. Gifts from Him, for you.

And with *that* as our focus - not how much we have to give, but how much we need to *repent* of; and not how much we do, but how much *God* has done for us, and is still doing, for us - with that as our focus, **God will make widows out of us yet**, more and more relying on Christ alone.

And that's okay. *More than okay*, actually. For the Scriptures are filled with the truth that those who have nothing, those who are in the greatest need - widows and orphans - are the special object of God's care and concern.

**Matthew 5:1** "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ... Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. ... "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

About 72 hours after this widow, in faith, gave all she had, Jesus would be the one giving everything He had, His whole life, for your life. Not gold or silver, but His holy, precious blood would be pouring into the heavenly treasury, for the forgiveness of our sins. (James Douthwaite)

**2 Corinthians 8** And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. ... And they gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us.

**Habakkuk 3:17-18** Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior.

**Psalms 146** Praise the Lord, my soul. I will praise the Lord all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live. Do not put your trust in princes, in human beings, who cannot save. ... Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God.