



FIRST  
PRESBYTERIAN  
CHURCH  
SPARTANBURG

## THE PURPOSE OF WEALTH ... TO BLESS EVERYONE

2 Corinthians 9:11; Mark 12:41-44

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Throughout this month we have explored God's purpose for wealth from a Biblical perspective. We concluded there are two core reasons drawn from the Great Commandment: to love God and to love our neighbor. But this morning we will examine the motivation for giving, from a human perspective.

Last Sunday night, I had the chance to spend some time with our youth talking about the role of Stewardship. I asked them why we give. Their answers were right on the money (so to speak) and they began with the answer many of us would – to help other people.

Many of us put money in the offering plate because we want to help those struggling in life. As Paul wrote these words to the Galatians, *"They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do."* The Bible has dozens and dozens of commands calling us to do whatever we can to help the poor and needy. As a result this church has the Tuesday Neighborhood Meal Ministry, Mobile Meals, strong relations with those in Haiti and the Dominican Republic, and we have launched a poverty initiative to work toward eliminating child poverty in our town.

The youth also said that we give because we are thankful for everything that God has done. God gave us life and health. All that we have of lasting value and that is necessary for life comes to us as a gift: our bodies, our families, the earth, water, and the sun. None of it is our own doing. Especially the gift of eternal life. Jesus died and rose again for our sake, and the Bible makes it perfectly clear he did this out of gracious love and that it comes as a free gift. As a result, we give to God with grateful hearts. Psalm 35 declares, *"I will give you thanks in the great assembly; among the throngs I will praise you."* In worship, we praise God with our lips and we seal it with our offering.

But the widow in our story may have a different motivation than helping the poor or as an offer of thanksgiving. At first glance, such an act seems perplexing and almost upsetting. *She* is the poor. *She* will need those coins to eat and, in those days, without a husband, her financial security had evaporated.

Surely, God would not want her to place her last two coins out of thanksgiving. God does not want praise so desperately that it would lead to the pauperdom of elderly woman. Certainly, she could express her thanks in other ways.

The clue for the widow's motivation comes from another of Jesus' parables called *The Rich Young Fool* in Luke 12. He had a superabundant harvest and so he tore down his barns and built bigger ones and declared,

*I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry."*

This man believed ample wealth was the key to happiness, but in the next line God said to him, *"You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?"*

Jesus is making the clear point that nothing in this earth truly belongs to us. This man not only believed he owned this money, rather than God, but in death we discover that truth of that saying, "You can't take it with you."

There are three basic ways we relate to our finances. The first is that we own the wealth. It is mine to do with as I choose. I may choose to do good with it – to help the poor – or I may choose simply to bless myself. Either way, we are the one in control.

The second relationship is even more problematic. In Matthew 6:24 Jesus says, *"You*

*cannot serve both God and money.*" The word for money in this passage, *mammon*, refers to a Syrian deity that was the God of riches. In this instance, the wealth owns us. It is like a drug that controls our actions and leads us to corrupt and immoral deeds, all in the pursuit of the almighty dollar.

*The Rich Young Fool* of Jesus' parable not only believes he owns the wealth but, in treating it as the key to happiness, he has become a slave to it. The money is controlling his actions rather than the other way around.

The widow in our passage today is the antithesis of *The Rich Young Fool*. He has bountiful wealth and holds onto every penny. She has almost nothing and even gives that away. In this way, she has disclosed the third relationship we have to our money – it all belongs to God...down to the last penny!

The widow has utterly rejected the pursuit of wealth as a means of security and she has placed all that she has in the offering plate as a way of saying to God, "I place my life in your hands. I entrust everything to you."

We can give to help others. We can give to give thanks to God. And, as the widow has shown us, we can give to grow our faith, to entrust our life to God, and to acknowledge His Lordship over...everything.

Because it is a parable, we are free to imagine what this widow was thinking. Perhaps she dropped in these coins as a desperate act, looking to turn away from her hopeless dependence on those last pennies. But I like to think there was a different reason. Jesus held her up as an example, since she gave sacrificially.

I believe she sacrificed those last two coins because she understood the fundamental power of giving.

Here, and in other places, the Bible makes it clear that God has made the universe in such a way that, when we give freely and not under compulsion, our blessings multiply. In Malachi God declares, "*Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse,*

*...and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.*" These blessings are not necessarily material but something deeper and more fundamental to the human experience.

In that youth group meeting last Sunday there was one more reason cited for giving. One of the youths said, "It makes you feel good!" We have the promise that if we open our heart, the floodgates of heaven will overflow with blessings beyond our imagining.

I think this widow knew that and she knew that what matters is not the size of the gift, but the size of the givers' heart. I believe she gave this money, these two coins, and then waited to see how God's blessings would pour forth – in ways far beyond that of the material.

This may sound like religious wishful thinking, two mere coins. What could they do? But these past months I have seen the profound power of a dollar bill (probably worth less than those two coins) and it is strong.

The dollar can go as far as the heart that gives it.

In August, the church gave the children a dollar bill during children's time. I asked them to give it away and share their stories. Six families responded. I literally wept at how powerful these stories were – each making the Bible come alive in fantastic ways...all because of a dollar.

Three of the children decided to use the dollars to thank their teachers.

*Hi! First, what a WONDERFUL IDEA! I can't tell you how much our daughter loves going to church for children's moment! It has made it impossible for us to miss a Sunday :)! She used her \$ to bless her teachers at FPCWDS with coffee on their first day!*

*Hi Tom,  
Thanks for the dollars! [Our children]  
decided to use theirs to bless their  
teachers with a treat from the vending  
machines tomorrow. They are busy  
making cards now that explain the  
blessing to their teachers.  
Thanks!*

Perhaps without knowing it, these gifts brought  
God joy. Galatians tells us,

*The one who receives instruction in the  
word should share all good things with  
their instructor!* (Galatians 6:6)

In other words, bless your teacher!

The next child used the dollar to help sick  
children. He wrote,

*Dear Pastor Tom,  
I used the \$1 you gave me for Kids in Lidz  
day at school. This money helps children  
fight cancer. Our school raised \$725 for  
the Children's Cancer Partners. Thank  
you for this dollar, it helped me learn to  
help people.*

This boy reminded me of 1 Peter 4:10,  
*As each has received a gift, use it to  
serve one another, as good stewards of  
God's varied grace.*

This boy was an amazing steward combatting a  
terrible disease.

The next story that brought the Bible to life  
came from a brother and sister,

*Good morning, Tom. I hope this email  
finds you well. I wanted to let you know  
how our children, ... used the \$1 bill you  
gave them to bless others.  
They came up with the idea to bake  
Halloween cookies and give them to our  
neighbors. We got to spend time with a  
neighbor who recently lost her husband,  
and you could tell that she really loved*

*spending time with the kids. Here is a  
picture of them enjoying the process.  
Thank you.*

James epistle tells us, "*Religion that is pure and  
undefiled is this...to care for widows and orphans in  
distress.*" (James 1:27)

The dollar led to cookies, which led to  
conversations. Imagine, the blessing this widow  
must have felt receiving the pure religion from two  
loving children.

The next child is a future entrepreneur, I am  
convinced. His mom wrote,

*He added two of his dollars to the dollar  
from the church, and his brothers and  
mom and dad each added a dollar to his.  
So he took \$7 to school to contribute to  
Children's Cancer Partners as part of a  
fundraiser Pine St. School is  
participating in this week.*

I immediately thought of the parable of the  
talents:

*"Master, you handed over to me five  
talents; see, I have made five more  
talents." His master said to him, "Well  
done, good and trustworthy slave; you  
have been trustworthy in a few things, I  
will put you in charge of many things;  
enter into the joy of your master."*

(Matthew 25:20b-21)

I am sure God will entrust a lot to this young  
man!

The final comes from a young girl. Here is what  
the parents wrote,

*{We} talked with our daughter after  
church about the message and what she  
thought we could do, to use that dollar  
in a loving, giving way to bless someone  
in God's name. We decided we would  
keep the envelope in the car and prayed*

*that God would put us in a situation to use that gift to further His Kingdom.*

*A couple of days later the August heat returned with a vengeance, and we were pulling into the Spinx on Pine and Rutledge. We noticed a group of homeless people gathered at the picnic tables. We went in, dollar in hand, which helped buy enough Gatorades for the group assembled outside.*

*Although hesitant and a little nervous, she approached the group with the shopping bags, and before she could even get out "Jesus loves you," a man said, "God bless you!" and helped her pass out the drinks. She told the group that Jesus loves them, and all expressed their gratitude.*

Two people blessings each other simultaneously – the girl giving and the man receiving. Glory! This is Revelation-level grace,

*They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.*

(Revelation 7:16-17)

The widow's mite disclosed a profound truth – it is the size of the giver's heart that counts. Eight children with eight dollars - look at all they did! Imagine the joy in heaven and the beaming smile on the face of God!

Amen!