

Offerings to God

Luke 21:1-4 (New American Standard Bible)

*Now He looked up and saw the wealthy putting their **gifts** into the temple treasury.² And He saw a poor widow putting in two lepta coins.³ And He said, "Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all of them;⁴ for they all contributed to **the offering** from their surplus; but she, from her poverty, **put in** all that she had to live on."*

Introduction

Once a year, in November, I preach on giving, in particular, offerings to the Lord. Today is that day.

I am not just talking about any type of charitable giving such as your volunteer work and donations to hospitals, humane society or United Way. Rather, I will strictly limit my talk to church offerings that you drop in the offering plates every Sunday morning. In the Bible it is called, 'offering' or 'gift' to the Lord. Let me walk you through the Bible on offerings to the Lord.

The word 'offering' appears 710 times in the Scriptures (680 times in the Old Testament, and 30 times in the New Testament).

History: Did you know that the history of offering to the Lord practiced by God's people is as old as the creation? It dates all the way back to Genesis 4. Remember the story of Cain and Abel, the sons of Adam and Eve? Both of them brought their offerings to the Lord in due time. Noah also gave burnt offerings to the LORD after the Great Flood (Genesis 8:20).

What about God commanding Abraham to give his only son Isaac as a burnt offering on Mt. Moriah? (Genesis 22:1-2). During the time of Moses, in the books of Exodus and Leviticus, more types of offerings were added such as burnt offerings, grain offerings, peace offerings, sin offerings, purification offerings. The Book of Leviticus alone has a whopping entry of 204 times on offerings to the Lord!

How about King Solomon's offering? At the Temple dedication service, "⁶² Then the king, and all Israel with him, offered sacrifice before the Lord. ⁶³ Solomon offered as peace offerings to the Lord 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep. So the king and all the people of Israel dedicated the house of the Lord" (1 Kings 8:62-63).

Even in Jesus' time, people brought their offerings to the Lord to the Jerusalem Temple. Remember Jesus' cleansing the Temple court by turning the tables and chairs

upside down and driving out the money changers and sellers of doves from there? (Matthew 21:12). All practices of offerings to the Lord, particularly the sin offering, culminated in Christ's sacrificial offering on behalf of sinners (Ephesians 5:2, Romans 8:3, Hebrews 10:10). After Christ's atonement, the Church of God stopped the animal sacrifices and offerings. Now, God's people give their offerings in money.

Content

This morning, I would like to introduce to you a lavish giver, a poor widow, whose generosity was so great that it even impressed the Lord Jesus. Do you want to know how much she gave? Million dollars, or billion dollars? No, she just gave 2 dollars. You may argue, "Anyone can do that. That's not a lavish gift at all." Well, ask the Lord. He is the one who says so. Who are we to dispute His verdict? That's what we see in today's story.

That day, Jesus along with His disciples was seated in the temple court in Jerusalem watching lots of people come and go. Let me remind you of the temple structure at the time. Gentile's court, women's court, the Court of Israel, Priestly Court, and the Holy of Holies. Today's story happened in the Women's Court. Let me quote one article:

"The inner area of the Temple contained three courts. The easternmost court was the Court of the Women, and it contained the Temple treasury where people donated their money (Mk 12:41-44). Three gates led into this court, one on the north, one on the south, and a third on the east. This third gate on the east side is almost certainly the "Beautiful Gate" that was mentioned in Acts 3. A fourth gate, which was much larger and ornate led from the Court of the Women west into the Court of Israel (women could proceed no further), which was elevated 15 steps higher than the Court of Women.

According to the Mishnah (Middoth 2,5) the Women's Court was just over 200 feet square between bounding lines. Each court on the outside was 60 feet square. The colonnade ran around the court, and within it, against the wall, the thirteen chests, or 'trumpets,' for charitable contributions were placed.

These thirteen chests were narrow at the mouth and wide at the bottom, shaped like trumpets. There were actually eleven treasure chests of the Temple for the voluntary offerings of money, and then also two at the Gate of Susan, for the half-shekel tax.

Their specific objects were carefully marked on them. Nine were for the receipt of what was legally due by worshippers; the other four for strictly voluntary gifts"

(https://bible-history.com/court-of-women/the-temple-treasury#google_vignette).

That's where Jesus was seated. People would drop their offerings (coins) into the 'trumpets.' The Lord saw them all; the rich and the poor, the wealthy and the needy, women and men, dropping their voluntary offerings to the Lord into the treasury chests. Before I go on, let me remind you of one thing here. Everyone gave, even the poor widow.

In other words, no one is too poor to give. It is especially true with God's people. God commands His people to support His temple (Exodus 30:13-15). ¹³ *This is what everyone who is counted shall give: half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary (the shekel is twenty gerahs), half a shekel as a contribution to the Lord.* ¹⁴ *Everyone who is counted, from twenty years old and over, shall give the contribution to the Lord.* ¹⁵ *The rich shall not pay more, and the poor shall not pay less, than the half shekel, when you give the contribution to the Lord to make atonement for yourselves.*" This refers to the Temple tax—even Jesus and Peter gave (Matthew 17:25-27).

Offerings Are to the Lord.

A misconception on giving exists among the believers: *Giving is for the church.* In a sense, it is. The Church needs your support. However, your giving is first and foremost offered to the Lord, not to the church (note in today's text in Greek, εις **τα δωρα** του θεου, Luke 21:4—into the **offerings of/for God**, not offerings of/for the Temple). Every single dollar you put into offering is given to the Lord first, then the Lord uses it to keep the Church open. Whatever you give, the Lord first receives and blesses it, and He uses it through the Church to His glory and honor.

What is the Church, then? It is not just a charity organization. It is more than a non-profit organization. It is God's instrument to spread the gospel, to proclaim truth and love, and to practice justice and mercy. God separates the Church from the world to do His Kingdom work. And the Church relies on your offerings to the Lord. God calls the Church for His sacred work, commands His people to support His house and its workers, and holds the Church leadership accountable if the Church misuses the offerings.

Principles of Giving

First, Give Cheerfully. When you give to the Lord, do it cheerfully and with rejoicing, because He loves a cheerful giver. In every offering to the Lord, your heart counts before the dollar bills. Pay attention to the word "**gifts**—dora (in Greek)" in verse 1 and 4. You don't twist somebody's arm to get something that s/he doesn't want to give, neither does the Lord force anyone to give to the Lord. Offerings must be from the heart, given willingly, not reluctantly or under compulsion.

Remember the story of Cain and Abel? I always wondered why the LORD rejected Cain's offering. There can be some other reasons, but I believe Cain brought his gift rather reluctantly or under compulsion, while Abel brought his with gusto. ⁷ *Each one must do just as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver*" (2 Corinthians 9:7). That English word 'cheerful' and 'hilarious' comes from the Greek 'ιλαλος'. I doubt that the widow in the story grumbled when she gave to the Lord everything she had. She gave with rejoicing.

Check yourself what motivates your giving. Do you give because you love the Lord, or do you give because you feel obligated or to please someone else? E.g. Terry Basing's reason for tithing was "the love of the Lord, not as an obligation." Every time you give to the Lord, no matter what amount you give, always examine your heart and give willingly and cheerfully. The poor widow gave all she had to the Lord, not because she had to, but rather because she wanted to and because she loved the Lord. Give cheerfully.

Next, Give Sacrificially. What truly impressed the Lord Jesus that day was not the actual value of the two copper coins. Rather it was the simple fact that the widow gave sacrificially. She gave all she had, and nothing left afterwards. The lesson? What really counts in giving is how sacrificially we give, and how difficult to give, not how much we give: not the absolute amount, but how much the giving is in proportion to our income. In today's story, Jesus does not "*romanticize the small gift or strike out against the large*" (Fred B. Craddock, p. 242, Interpretation). Rather, He focuses on how sacrificial each giving is: the rich gave out of their abundance and surplus, Jesus says, which is not considered sacrificial. The poor widow gave all out of poverty, which not many can do. Such divine standard applies to our giving: "*How much does one have remaining after the offering is made?*" (Ibid.) E.g. Pig and chicken wanted to help the church. Chicken enthusiastically suggested to have a ham and egg dinner to support the church. Pig said, "easy for you to say!" E.g.2. Imagine Mr. Elon Musk giving \$100 million to Church vs. your giving \$100. You might have given more than he in God's eyes. Give sacrificially.

Thirdly, Put God First. E.g. Another widow would iron her one-dollar bills to put in the offering every Sunday. The whole purpose of our annual stewardship is not to ask for your money, but to help you to practice healthy giving in your walk with God.

Look at your own budget. You carefully spend your money based on priorities such as mortgage payment, food, insurance, medical bills, auto expenses, and so on. Check out where your giving stands. You may find it at the bottom of your budget. In fact, that's the reality among God's children. Many a believer give their offerings after spending all the money they have for their necessities. No wonder we can't give much to the Lord. Remember, it's not the absolute amount, rather the priority. Next time when you budget, put your giving on top as "number 1" priority regardless of the amount. Why? Because this practice determines, reveals, and reinforces your priorities in life. Each time we give to the Lord, we declare to ourselves and others that the Lord God is our number priority in life. Put God first.

Lastly, Tithe Challenge.

One of the first lessons God's people need to learn is that God is faithful, and that He keeps His promise of provision for His children. We must experience such a God who indeed takes care of our financial needs. Such a conviction only comes to those who put their trust

in Him. Imagine what happened to the widow after her visit to the temple. Do you think she starved to death after she had given everything she owned? No, rather, we know that God took care of her needs.

Many of us think it impossible to give tithes and live in America. Well, many others I know do just that and still live well provided. All tithers live with content and in abundance. I believe any child of God can tithe and should, because it is God's command and His promise. Tithing is a biblical command with promise for all God's children, not just a few individuals. Furthermore, when you tithe, the Lord blesses you financially. The sad reality is that a lot of God's children miss out God's blessing by opting out.

So, here's the challenge for you (by the way, it is not me, but the LORD who puts this challenge before you): Give ten percent of your income to the Lord for this coming year. God challenges you to take up this challenge of tithes in Malachi 3:10: "**Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and put Me to the test now in this,**" says the Lord of armies, "if I do not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you **a blessing until it overflows.**" Tithing is the only thing the LORD God allows us to test Him with. I myself took up that challenge and have been practicing tithes for almost 50 years till now. I testify solemnly that God's promise is true. He is faithful. Tithing works.

Folks, if you are struggling with finances, and if you desire financial freedom and security, do tithing. If you want to experience God in a way that you never experienced before, start tithing. I speak to those who are especially financially strained. Start trusting in God's promise and see what happens. E.g. Recently, I heard a testimony of a black lady who shared how much she was blessed with her tithing. This lady now owns three companies and serving God's Kingdom works in a mighty way. She gives credit to the Lord for her blessing and that began with her tithing.

Conclusion

In the wilderness, God commanded Moses to build a tabernacle, the sanctuary. So, Moses and his skillful workers started working. They asked people to bring their gifts and contributions to help the construction of the sanctuary. People brought their voluntary contribution every morning to the workers. One morning the skillful workers who performed the work of the sanctuary came to Moses saying, "*The people are bringing much more than enough for the construction work which the Lord commanded us to perform.*"⁶ So Moses issued a command, and circulated a proclamation throughout the camp, saying, "*No man or woman is to perform work any longer for the contributions of the sanctuary.*" So the people were restrained from bringing any more.⁷ For the material they had was sufficient and more than enough for all the work, to perform it" (Exodus 36:5-7).

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My pastoral vision for our congregation in giving is this: that we give cheerfully, willingly, and sacrificially to the point where the church says "stop bringing your offerings. We have plenty"—Amen.