

Serm. Series: "Sowing for the Future – The Art of Godly Giving"—Lord of Life Lutheran, Westfield, IN—8/10/08

Title: "Upside-down Giving"

Text: Mark 12: 41-44

Theme: If in Christ we look at the "why" of giving before we consider the "what" of giving, all of the fog of misunderstanding will lift, and we will see the powerful joy God's upside-down giving plan for us.

In God's kingdom "WHY" we give is more significant than the "WHAT"

- God's upside-down giving in us demonstrates what our true **VIEW OF GOD** is (*out of her poverty – vs. 44*)
 1. God does not need my "gift," **HE WANTS MY HEART** (*I desire loyalty not sacrifice. Hosea 6: 6*)
 - a. Many who were giving that day were doing so out of obligation/duty not thanks
 - b. Giving is not to pay off God, like some persistent creditor, but to respond in thanks for what can't repay
 2. When I see myself as self-sufficient and complete and not as poor and in need, I have no need of God
 - a. Why do you think the rich could not/would not give with same reckless abandon as widow?
 - b. **Ills.: Limited Good—Mazatec Indians—S.W. Mexico – Eunice Pike**
 - c. When we must be provider for all our needs, we don't look to God's provision of our extreme generosity
 3. The widow "out of her poverty" returned a thank offering to One who made her rich beyond measure
 - a. Her gift was 1/64th of a days wage – more amazing: why did she not hold back half (one copper coin) for self
 - b. *The blessing of the Lord brings wealth, and he adds no trouble to it. Proverbs 10:22*
 - c. *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich. 2 Corinth. 8: 9*
- God's upside-down giving in us demonstrates where our true **TREASURE** is (*out of their surplus – vs. 44*)
 1. **Surplus giving** often betrays where our heart and our value in life are placed
 - a. *Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. Mat 6:19*
 - b. **Ills. Lloyd C. Douglas—Coppermine river—lightened load**
 2. **Sacrificial giving** underlies an attitude that we have a higher treasure which can't be touched
 - a. *Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. Colossians 3:2-3*
- God's upside-down giving in us is at the very core of what true **DISCIPLESHIP** is (*She gave all of her life –vs. 44*)
 1. *If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Luke 14:26*

In God's kingdom "WHAT" we give matters only to the extent of the trail of evidence it leave

- Understanding the simple Bible truth – **Faith without works is dead**
 1. *But someone may well say, "You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works." James 2:18*
 2. The widow did not just give liberally, she gave it all – that is what caught Jesus' eye – her unconditional devotion
 3. If you and I were put on trial for our Christian faith, would there be enough evidence to convict us?
- Asking myself spiritual check-up questions before my plan to give to **Sowing the Seed**
 1. Does it demonstrate **GOD-FOCUS** (*vs. 42 – a certain poor widow*)
 - a. Mark does not mention name — her obscurity (in the women's court of the temple) – is highlighted
 - b. Can I give so that my right hand does not know what my left hand is doing and God gets the glory? (**Matt. 5:16 & 6:3**)
 2. Does it demonstrate **COURAGEOUS FAITH** in what God can do, not me (*all she had to live on – Luke 21: 4*)
 - a. In these times when many are losing employment, investments are shrinking, times are tough, can you give with a trust that God is more than able to supply your generosity
 - b. *For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints. 2 Corinthians 8:3-4*
 - c. Point of this story: The **BIGNESS** of the gift does not necessarily define the **MIGHTINESS** of the gift
 - d. Are you willing to let God do a **GOD-SIZE THING** in your life?

Interesting and tell-tale statistics on giving

- According to a Gallup survey, almost half the total charitable contributions in the U.S. come from households with incomes of less than \$30,000
- The average charitable giving in the U.S. is 1.7% of adjusted gross income—the average among Christians is 2.5%
- In the U.S. in 1950 10% of all income was spent for luxuries, by 1980 it was 30%; today some projections are 40-45%.

Limited Good

For four decades Eunice Pike worked with the Mazatec Indians in south-western Mexico. During this time she discovered some interesting things about these beautiful people. For instance, the people seldom wish someone well. Not only that, they are hesitant to teach one another or to share the gospel with each other. If asked, “Wh taught you to back bread?” the village baker answers, “I just know,” meaning he or she has acquired the knowledge without anyone’s help. Eunice says this odd behavior stems from the Indian’s concept of “limited good.” They believe there is only so much good, so much knowledge, so much love to go around. To teach another means you might drain yourself of knowledge. To love a second child means you have to love the first child less. To wish someone well— “Have a good day”— means you have just given away some of your own happiness, which cannot be reacquired. Funny how we westerners and sometimes we western Christians think much the same way with regard to the good gifts which the Father has given to us.

Traveling light

Lloyd C. Douglas tells the story of Thomas Hearne, who, “in his journey to the mouth of the Coppermine River, wrote that a few days after they had started on their expedition, a party of Native Americans stole most of their supplies. His comment on the apparent misfortune was ‘The weight of our baggage being so much lightened, our next day’s journey was more swift and pleasant.’ Hearne was in route to something very interesting and important; and the loss of a few sides of bacon and a couple of bags of flour meant nothing more than an easing of the load. Had Hearne been holed up in some cabin, resolved to spend his last days eking out an existence, and living on capital previously collected, the loss of some of his stores by plunder would probably have worried him almost to death.” How we respond to “losing” some of our resources for God’s might work through us depend upon whether we are on the move or waiting for our last stand to take place.

Mark 12:41-44

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. ⁴²But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny.

⁴³Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. ⁴⁴They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything--all she had to live on." [NIV]

Luke 21:1-4

As he looked up, Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. ²He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. ³"I tell you the truth," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. ⁴All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on." [NIV]