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Message Series: The Generous Life**Message Title: The Generous Heart****Scripture: Mark 12:41-44**

Throughout this series, we are learning what generosity truly looks like through the life and teachings of Jesus. The story we're examining today is brief, consisting of just four verses, but it carries a profound truth. It's about a woman, whose name we don't even know, but whose heart Jesus said would be remembered forever.

Mark 12:41: The Setting

- The original hearers and readers of Mark's Gospel would have been familiar with the Temple's layout, but we're not familiar with this prominent location in the ancient city of Jerusalem. The Temple was configured around the Holy of Holies, and depending on one's role, gender, and ethnicity, access and proximity to the Holy of Holies were either restricted or granted. Several courts extended from the Holy of Holies, limiting proximity to God's presence.
- This scene in Mark 12 unfolds in what was called the Court of Women, not because only women were allowed there, but because it was the furthest point women could enter in the temple complex. It was a bustling and sacred space where Jewish men and women alike gathered for worship, prayer, and giving.
- Along its walls were thirteen trumpet-shaped offering chests, each made of bronze and designated for a different type of temple contribution. Jesus was people-watching as people dropped their offerings.
- How did Jesus know what people were giving? There are two theories because Mark does not tell us. Perhaps Jesus overheard an attending priest instructing people where to place their offerings. Or, the sound of their offering when dropped into the trumpet-shaped offering chest made a greater noise, indicating a greater gift. Mark wrote, "*Many rich people put in large amounts.*"

Mark 12:42: The Widow

- Mark describes this woman as a poor widow. In the first century, widows were among the most vulnerable people in society. Without a husband, they often had no legal standing, little access to income, and were largely dependent on the charity of family or the community for survival. There were no pensions, social services, social security, Medicare, or safety nets in place. Many widows lived day to day, relying on what they could glean, beg, or receive through almsgiving.
- The two coins the widow gave were called a *lepton* or a mite. The *lepton* was the smallest value coin in circulation in the Greek-speaking world and Judea during the Roman period. Ancient mites or lepton were extremely small, roughly the same diameter as a modern pencil eraser (about 6mm) and very thin. Two lepta were worth 1/64 of a day's wage, a Roman denarius.

- Suppose we translate that into our modern world here in Montana. According to the Montana Department of Labor and Industry, the average weekly wage is about \$1,136.67. This is the standard calculation used to determine unemployment wages. \$1,136.67 a week is roughly \$227 per day. Now divide that by 64. The widow's offering was worth about \$3.55.
- *A generous heart gives financially as an act of worship.*

Mark 12:43-44: The Generous Heart

- After his people-watching, Jesus called his disciples to him for a private teaching moment. Jesus compared the generosity of the rich people to the generosity of the widow, and what he concludes is staggering. Jesus concluded that the widow gave more than the others. While others gave some of their financial resources, the widow gave all her finances. She gave all she had to live on. She didn't give out of convenience, comfort, guilt, or obligation. She gave *everything* she had left.
- The widow only had two leptons (\$3.55). That's all she had to live on, and she gave *all of it*.
- Why would she do that? Why would anyone give all that they had to the Temple, to God? Why? Because this widow trusted that God would take care of her. She gave everything because she trusted God would provide for her. She believed her life didn't depend on those two coins. Her life depended on God. And that's the essence of generosity: it's not about resources. It's about trust.
- By any normal standard, her gift is an insufficient amount. In Jesus' eyes, however, it is an offering beyond ordinary measure. Giving like the widow would mean putting *every dollar* in the giving box: your lunch money, your gas money, your grocery money, your car payment, your mortgage, your subscriptions to streaming services, *everything*.
- *A generous heart gives sacrificially from its resources because it trusts God's provision.*
- No one in the Temple that day noticed this widow and her two small coins. But Jesus did. He called his disciples over and said, "Did you see that?" While everyone else was impressed by the large offerings, Jesus' eyes were on the one person no one valued.
- *Jesus sees the generous heart that sacrificially gives as an act of worship.*
- And that's still true today. Jesus sees your quiet generosity. Jesus sees when you give faithfully, even when it's hard. Jesus sees when you serve behind the scenes. Jesus sees when you sacrifice for others, when you give all that you have to others.
- The world cheers for the *big gifts of generosity*, but Jesus celebrated the small, *faithful, sacrificial gift*. Nothing you give in love goes unseen or unappreciated by God, because God sees your generosity when other people may not see it.
- This woman's gift points us straight to Jesus, because Jesus didn't just *teach* generosity. Jesus *embodied* it. He didn't give part of himself; he gave *everything*. Jesus left heaven, took on flesh, and gave his life, not out of surplus, but out of *love*. The widow gave all she had to live on. Jesus gave his very life so that we could live.

Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 8:9, *You know the generous grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty he could make you rich.*

Paul communicates the gospel message in financial language, riches, and poverty. Jesus was rich, yet he became poor for us that we might become rich through him. Jesus was rich in mercy and grace, rich because of access to God the Father, yet he gave that up to become a human who was crucified because of sin, so that our sins might be forgiven and his blood might make us rich because of his grace and mercy to have access to God the Father. Jesus, like the widow, became poor. The widow's two coins were small in the eyes of the world, but her act foreshadowed the greatest act of generosity in history: the cross.