

Teachings in the Temple: No Holding Back
Mark 12:41-44

Mark 12:41-44 (ESV) ⁴¹ *And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums.* ⁴² *And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny.* ⁴³ *And he called his disciples to him and said to them, “Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box.* ⁴⁴ *For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”*

What would you do with your last penny?

What would you do if the small copper coin I just put in your hand was all the money you have to feed yourself and your family? And what if it was Sunday, the Lord’s day, the day the people of God bring to God the offerings of thanksgivings for His blessings? Would you give your last and only penny to the Lord or would you feed your family, trusting God to understand why you’re making your family your immediate priority?

This is dilemma Jesus witnesses and points out to His disciples in the Temple that day. Most of us, I believe, would hold on to our meager assets and trust God to understand. Most of us, if we’re honest, would feed our families first and see if there is anything left over for giving to God. We would see our poverty and remind God of all the rich people who give to Him out of their abundance. Most of us would rationalize and justify keeping what little we have for ourselves since God already owns everything . . . else.

Jesus disciples His disciple’s hearts.

Jesus uses this woman’s sacrificial gift of limited personal resources to illustrate not a way of thinking about money or giving but more importantly to uncover our heart attitude toward God Himself.

The truth about God that we embrace most deeply, with our hearts, shows up in our actions. We express the truth we hold in our priorities, in our values, and in our personal pursuits. In this example, you can tell a great deal about how a person knows and loves God from how they handle a personal financial crisis.

Jesus does not criticize those faithful people who give out of their abundant wealth. Their motives and opportunities in this moment are not the point of the comparison Jesus draws. All He says is that they give out of their abundance. They have it, they give it freely, they give generously, and well they should, so let’s move on. It is the widow and her offering upon which Jesus draws our focus.

The Widow Commended by Jesus

A wife in ancient Israel was the responsibility of her husband. A faithful husband was to be her lifelong provider and caregiver. He was to love her and supply her needs. He was to do good to her and for her as best he could with the strength and opportunity he had. His care for her was to be a living example of God’s love and care for His people, Israel.

If the husband died, the family was obligated by God's Law to care for her. They were to return to her the love and nurture which she had invested in them throughout their lives. But, if the husband died and she had no family, or her faithless family refused to help, she was on her own in a world of closed, locked doors. She was at the mercy of strangers and the faithfulness of the community in which she lived, whatever that might look like.

This woman's husband had died. We don't know anything more about her context or circumstances except that Jesus recognized the two tiny coins that added up to a penny were all that she had. The others that day gave out of abundance. *She gave her all.*

Abundance. All. **Jesus, preparing His disciples for life in the kingdom of God, specifically commends those who give their all.**

Now, let's truly understand Jesus here. He is not commending the amount of one offering over another. He is not commending the fact of one offering over another. He is not commending the substance of one offering over another. Jesus commends the heart attitude of one kind over all the other commendable attitudes visible that day. Jesus commends the heart of faith that trusts God with their very life and death. Jesus says, "Look! See that faith, that attitude, that sacrifice? That's not dumb. That's not foolish. That's not impractical. That right there is a kingdom kind of heart!"

It is that "all-in-and-up-to-God" love for God that trusts Him implicitly that Jesus commends. It is the heart of faith that utterly relies on the providence and provision of God for daily bread or dying grace that gains Christ's attention. It is the heart of faith willing to lose its life, willing to give up everything in love for God's glory, the heart of faith counting God worthy of worship and obedience, worthy of our greatest, dearest sacrifice that Jesus points His disciples to and says, "This! This is how we roll in the kingdom."

I think there are at least two reasons Jesus points out this woman's sacrificial love to His disciples. Two reasons why He makes her attitude and actions an example of what their's ought to be. First, *in giving her all in love for God she demonstrates God's own character.*

Romans 8:32 (ESV) *He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?*

Paul points to God as the ultimate example of a sacrificial heart of love!

Out of love, God gave Christ up for us. He gave the best He had for our redemption! He did not hold back. He could have given out of His abundance but He gave His one and only Son. Jesus did not come on His own, He came because the Father sent Him, the Father gave Him, the Father sacrificed Him as an act of love. We know that love as a motivating factor for the Father. Listen to Paul's inspired, inerrant, infallible description of God's motivation in giving Christ as the sacrifice for our sin:

Romans 5:8 (ESV) *but God shows his love for us in that while we were still*

sinner, Christ died for us.

And, not only does the life and death of Christ demonstrate God's love for sinners, it comes with the promise that He Who gave His Son on our behalf will also "with Him, graciously give us all things!" Do you see that? God gives His Son, God sacrifices His Son, AND God gives to those who put their trust on Christ, "all things!"

God holds nothing back from those He loves. He even pours out grace upon grace for His enemies and those who reject Him. In Matthew 5:45 Jesus declares, "*For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.*" Paul, speaking to the people of Athens, says of God, "In Him we live and move and have our being." Everyone owes the very gift and continuation of life to God!

Peter tells us that God has given us all things necessary for life and godliness, Paul tells us that God has given us every spiritual blessing in Christ. It is the nature of God to give generously, lovingly, and sacrificially. **This woman's heart in her gift reflects the very nature of God Himself making her a prime example for the disciples of Jesus to follow.**

But there is another reason, I think, that Jesus uses this woman to disciple His disciples. In giving all she had to the glory of God this woman reflected the heart and love of Jesus Himself.

Look at Philippians 2:5-11.

⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

This ancient hymn from the early church lays out the heart attitude of Jesus. He was equal to God, in the form of God, and He let it go. He gave it up, took on the form of a servant, was born in the likeness of fallen, sinful humanity. He humbled Himself, He gave Himself to obedience to the will of God. He gave His life to death on a cross.

In love for God and in love for us, He held nothing back, even though giving cost Him His life. He held nothing back from accomplishing the salvation of man and the glory of God. It is to this willingness of faith and love and obedience that Jesus points His disciples.

We don't know what giving her last penny cost the widow that day. We do know what giving up the glory of heaven to dwell among us cost Jesus. It costs Him everything. It cost Him His life. They both gave their all. They sacrificed in love for the glory of God, and Jesus says to His

disciples that **a heart that holds nothing back from God is a kingdom heart.** It is the spirit of sacrificial love, the fully surrendered heart that holds nothing back from God that characterizes the citizens of the kingdom of God. They trust God with their lives down to the smallest measure, just as Jesus, and this widow, trust God with their lives.

Faith in Jesus Christ is faith that trusts Him with our lives, our deaths, our today and our tomorrow. Faith trusts God with abundance or poverty, joy or sorrow, hope or helplessness. Faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord holds nothing back. Sin and guilt are given over to the cross and the Blood. Pride and pain are abandoned to surrender and faith. Self is crucified. Service is offered. The mind, the will, the heart, and the body become fully the treasured possession of God. We belong by faith to Him. All that we are. All that we have. All in. Nothing held back.

God deserves all-in disciples. He is worthy of every sacrifice and worthy of the sacrifice of all.

I want to close this morning doing two things. First, I want to invite you, to urge you, in this moment, **to put your whole faith in Jesus Christ, to hold nothing back.** If you have never personally trusted Christ as your Savior, today is the day, this is your moment.

But I also want to speak to those who claim to have faith but in honesty might say, “I believe, but I’m not all in. Not like that. There are some things I just have to hold back.” **Today is the day to go all in.** To you I want to offer a warning about the consequences of holding back from God. Just three quick examples:

1. Achan held back truth about his greed. (Joshua 7)
 - a. **Joshua 7:11 (ESV) *Israel has sinned; they have transgressed my covenant that I commanded them; they have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen and lied and put them among their own belongings.***
 - i. Achan forced God to reveal his greed
 - ii. Achan destroyed himself and his family
 - b. Don’t hold back the truth from God.
 - i. Secret sins set up the heart for failure
 - ii. Confess sin and let Him forgive
2. Saul held back obedience.
 - a. 1 Samuel 15
 - b. ***But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep and of the oxen and of the fattened calves and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them. All that was despised and worthless they devoted to destruction.***
 - c. **1 Samuel 15:22–23 (ESV) ²² And Samuel said, “Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams. ²³ For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has also rejected you from being king.”**

- i. Because Saul rejected God by disobeying God and attempting to rationalize his disobedience, God removed him from his position
 - ii. God rejected him from being king
 - d. God never accepts human disobedience.
 - i. If we know that we are disobeying God and hoping He will adjust to our new plan, we are asking for God to exalt His sovereignty and claim the throne of our heart for Himself
 - ii. Disobedience gains God's discipline, not His blessing
- 3. **Joash held back faith.** (2 Kings 13:14-19)
 - a. Struck the arrows three times and stopped
 - b. Had he continued he would have completely destroyed his enemies (Syria)
 - c. Because he withheld faith he had to settle for limited victory

We sometimes convince ourselves that we can hold back from God and He will simply settle and adjust to us. We convince ourselves that since God does not immediately withhold blessing from us then we can safely withhold ourselves from Him. You do not know what spiritual blessing you have sacrificed because you have refused to sacrifice your self. You do not know what glory you have missed, what victory you have lost because you hold back from God.

My dear friends, a day is coming when Jesus will sit on the throne of eternity and judge between those who have held nothing back and those who have held something back. Jesus uses the shepherding terms of sheep and goats to describe that day. The goats will claim on that day that they were all in, that they did all kinds of wondrous things, but what they will hear from the lips of Jesus are these words, "Depart from me, you workers of iniquity. I never knew you."

Don't be the recipient of those words. It is not the fact of the offering but the heart of the offerer that Jesus commends. Jesus commends faith that sacrifices everything in love for God. Jesus commends faith that serves God, loves God, that holds nothing back from God. **If you are holding back today, then today is your today, now is your moment to surrender all to Christ.**

Have you heard about the Polar Plunge? So this organization raises money in Minnesota for Special Olympics athletes. They arrange events where people, in their otherwise right minds, jump into frozen lakes in the winter and other people pay them to do so. Do you know what their motto is? Plunge: All In. Jump, all in, for a cause. Today you have before you the greatest cause that exists in the universe: the glory of God and the love of Jesus Christ for lost sinners. Take the plunge. Go all in. Give your all. Hold nothing back. Do it now. Let's pray.