

Mark 12:41-44 - March 22, 2015 - Jesus is Determined: about offerings

One of the complaints often heard about churches is: “They’re always talking about money.” I recently saw this survey of reasons people gave for why they don’t go to church. Among other reasons 40% stated that “churches ask for money too frequently.”

How many of the respondents are being fair in this assessment? That’s hard to say. Some undoubtedly are. Others are probably not. Regardless, don’t simply dismiss the findings. One thing is clear: the topic of money is often a touchy subject with people.

I witnessed this in person recently. I was asking a man the survey I gave in connection with the first sermon in our series on the Gospel of Mark. Money wasn’t a topic on the survey at all. But as the man went on to tell me about the church his family attends, he mentioned: he likes the pastor, but recently the pastor has been making mention of their financial offerings – asking for money – pretty much every week in the sermon. Somewhere in reply I shared: if a church talks about money all the time, the focus gets taken off of where it ought to be. Then everything is off center. We do want to talk about money. It is a topic on which God speaks. But we take our cue from Him how much time it gets, especially compared to the time given to the main thing: Jesus & the news of *what he has done for us*.

Let’s bring the topic home here to Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church. How often have you heard me talk about offerings in the sermon? [Anticipated answer:] Depending on how many Sundays you’ve been here, “not often, or none.” How about in Bible Study – how often have we talked about offerings? [Anticipated answer:] “Some, but not often.”

The way the question is worded, your mind might “trick” you. You might think less than we actually do. People often think exclusively “money” when they hear “offering.” But there’s much more we offer to the Lord here. What else? Answers: our time for roles of service, our abilities in carrying out such service; we offer Him thanks as we sing praises to him; we offer expressions of trust as we pray.

Keep this big picture in mind, as we go into our section of Mark today. We’re going to see Jesus teach about offerings. And it’s a money offering in this case that he is speaking about. So we’re going to talk some about such offerings. But I think you’ll find the discussion unique as we see Jesus teach: the amount of the offerings means nothing and everything.

Read vs.41. *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.*

Does this seem like a strange time for this? His enemies are plotting to kill him. If you or I had been there, we might have thought: “Jesus, watch your back, not the offering containers.” Jesus, over these past two days, had answered all the trick questions of the enemies trying to trap him. He had God’s truth to share. He wasn’t backing down. And he wasn’t through teaching; not quite yet. After the events in these verses are through, he’ll get up to leave the temple. Then will come “silent Wednesday.” And the next scenes we witness in the divine record of his life are: Jesus’ last meal, his arrest, his trial, his death and his resurrection.

Reasons for not going

- There is no value in attending 74%
- Churches have too many problems 61%
- I do not have the time 48%
- I am simply not interested 42%
- Churches ask for money too frequently 40%
- Church services are usually boring 36%
- Christian churches hold no relevance for the way I live 34%
- I do not believe in God, or I am unsure that God exists 12%

James Emery White — *Church & Culture Blog*

But first there is this lesson Jesus wants to teach. And it's on offerings. How does Jesus deal with this topic? He handles it in the flow of life. It's not the focus of life, but it is part of the life of a believer in Jesus. It's an important topic. It's worth devoting some time and attention to it; our Lord has guidance for us.

Mark sits us next to Jesus. We see the people coming like a train, until... it is as if everything halts as one individual steps up.

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

The widow drops her two small coins into the offering chamber. And Jesus stops the scene at this frame. He calls his disciples to himself. He uses the introductory words that say, "Listen up! I've got something important to tell you." Then he teaches them a principle – really, the foundational principle – about offerings to the Lord. The example in this case is monetary. But the principle really applies equally across all types of offerings to the Lord – time and talents too. Ok, let's listen to what Jesus teaches us:



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

Jesus doesn't say all the other people's gifts were unacceptable. But in singling out the widow he highlights a truth: the dollar amount isn't what makes an offering good, or not. What does Jesus highlight about the poor widow's gift? Certainly her offering is given out of thanks. Certainly there is love for the Lord. But there is an element that is specifically highlighted by Jesus' words.

Let's talk some "dollars & cents" for a moment to lead us on our way to seeing it. The NIV translation in vs.42 gives a faulty impression of the final calculation. Literally the 2 very small coins were lepta, and they were equivalent to 1 kodrantes. When you figure the value of that in relation to the average day laborer's wage of the time, a denarius, the buying power of what she offered was between 1/50th and 1/100th of an average day's wage. So in today's terms, if this were taking place in our setting with our currency, you'd be talking not "pennies," but maybe \$2 or \$3. In other words, she may have been able to afford some eggs, or some milk, or some bread. Dollars and cents wise this wasn't a "meaningless" amount. She was giving her last meal.

As you think about that, understand: This was neither foolish on her part, nor fatalistic. There is a different attitude at the heart of this act.

Another widow, on record in the Bible, gives us a glimpse of the same. She too gave her last meal. In her case she offered the bread made from the last of her ingredients to the prophet Elijah. But, you see, her oil and flour weren't the only things the widow had to hold onto. She had a word of promise from the Lord: "Your oil & flour will not run out. Trust me to provide for you each day through the drought" (see 1 Kings 17). And she did just that.

Jesus watched a similar scene. This widow in the temple gave all the money she had – these two coins. How could she? She knew they weren't the only resource she had. She had the Lord: his presence with her, his care for her, his power at work in her behalf. He was her rescuer/Savior. She would rest this night and go back to her next day's labors knowing: He would provide her with all she needed for the day... and the next after that... right on to days without end.

She trusted the Lord's Word to her. She was in His keeping. As she walked through life, as she lived out her faith, here was an offering expressing trust.

It is not the amount of the offering that makes it acceptable to the Lord, but it is the _____ from which the offering is given. [Answer: faith & faith-worked attitudes]

It's not the amount of the offering that matters; it's the attitude: trust, love, thanks.

Moved by trust, love and thanks, the amount means everything. "What are you talking about, Pastor? You just made the point the dollar amount of our offering doesn't matter; the attitude is what matters. How can the amount mean both nothing and everything?" Ok, I've got your attention. That's good! This is such a unique, wonderful aspect to the life of a Christian, a child of God.

I heard an example recently that captures this truth [adapted from Pastor Jon Zabel].

A son wants to offer his mother some flowers, to thank her for all the kind things she does for him. He's not old enough to drive, so he can't get to a store or flower shop. Even if he could walk to one, he wouldn't have the money to buy even a single stem. This doesn't deter him. He walks his way inch-by-inch across his backyard. He stoops down to pick only the best dandelions. He continues until his hands can't hold any more. He comes bursting through the door, and says: "Mommy, I love you! Here!" She takes those flowers from his hand, fills a glass with water, sets the dandelions in, and places them out for everyone to see. The gift is acceptable. He offered his best.

Her husband on the drive home from work thinks: "I really ought to get some flowers to thank my wife for all she has done for me recently. But, if I stop at the store and pick up some – ah, look at the time! – as it is I'm barely going to be able to make it home to get the TV turned on for the tipoff of the big game. I don't want to miss the first 10 minutes. Besides I'll still have spent some time and I'll still have something to offer her if I just quickly grab some of those yellow flowers growing in the middle of the yard when I get home."

You see those two "offerings" are exactly the same in one way – what is in the hand. In the way that really matters though, they couldn't be more different. Right?

How often do our gifts to the Lord have similarities to - have more in common with - the husband's dandelion offering? In the thinking, in the attitude?

A quick grab for any amount thinking: "good enough."

Or the attitude: "I don't really want to miss out on _____ (fill in the blank with some activity or item important to you). I still want to do this and this and that, so I better make my offering fit with all I still want to do. Besides I'll still have given some offering."

Now those are very blunt ways to state it. And we in our minds would have more subtly worded reasoning. But at the heart, am I offering this (boy's flowers) or this (husband's offering)?

There's a trust issue connected: Do I trust the Lord's promise to provide all I need? Not all I want, but all I need. He teaches me to give cheerfully, generously, planning what I give to him - not leaving my decision of what to give him until only leftovers remain (and he gets that, or some of that).

It's not just offerings of money where there is the temptation to give leftovers. What about our time? One example, the most important... The Lord teaches us to give generous, planned time for daily devotion (in His Word) – before filling up our schedules with everything else (and grabbing a little piece of what's left for him).

There sat Jesus, on this day in the temple, watching the people give their offerings. We don't see Him here today. But he is just as present as he was in the temple on the day on record in Mark ch.12. And just like he knew everything about the widow, he knows everything about us. What does he see when we bring our offerings?

Our God certainly knows all our failures to give him our best, the way our selfishness has gotten in the way of giving him our first consideration. Thanks to his Word, we know those failures too, and we admit them as the sins they are. Right? That's important. Critical really. Why? Because the basis for our offerings being acceptable to Jesus isn't if they're perfect or not. We don't have perfect to offer – pretending that we do will never work. We come as sinners. We come as repentant people: sorry for our sins, and turning to Jesus as our rescuer, Savior.

How much was he willing to offer for us? How determined was he to save us from sin and hell? See your answer in the temple courts.

There, opposite the place where the offerings were put, sat the poorest man to ever live, and yet there is nothing any person could give him that he doesn't already own or have. What do I mean? For a moment in History – for a lifetime – God the Son became poor. He left the brilliance of heaven, the splendor, the perfect peace enjoyed there. He left hearing endless angelic praises. He left it for this (wave arm), a life in this sin-darkened world. He knew it would end in this (the cross), a death carrying the sins of the world, experiencing the hell of them there. He gave up everything (became poor), to take everything we deserved (every pain), so that we could have every good thing with him forever. *“You know the grace – the undeserved love – 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 Corinthians 8:9.

That is what makes us acceptable to God. He makes us acceptable. Our faith and our confidence are in him: his perfect life, his perfect payment to take away our sins. The Lord our God sees Him when he looks at us and our offerings. This is what moves us to bring our offerings to the Lord – offerings flowing from faith, expressing trust, love and thanks.

There's a note I wrote into the margin of my Bible. I underlined in vs.44: “She put in everything.” And I wrote beside it: “consider how these are a fitting last thought to Jesus' teaching in the temple... Jesus would soon give everything.” This was Jesus' last visit to the temple. He went on to give his everything for us, to save us. That means everything to us. In view of God's mercy offer yourselves to him (Romans 12:1). Amen.