

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. 42 But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents. 43 Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, 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.”*

Dear friends in Christ our Savior,

Lutheran theologians call them God’s attributes. They are the big “omni” words students learn in Catechism: Omni present. Omniscient. Omnipotent. These theological terms sound cerebral, but they make all the difference as you live out your everyday life. That God is omnipresent means he is with us wherever we go—even in the middle of the Taliban’s turf in Afghanistan. That God is omniscient means that he knows what we are going through—even when the doctor isn’t so certain. That God is omnipotent means that we can rest easy because the creator of life has complete control over the issues of life even though it feels like chaos is ruling around us.

But there is another side to these attributes that can leave us feeling a little uneasy about them. That God is everywhere also means that he’s at every party with you on Friday or Saturday night. That God knows everything means that he knows not only the number of hairs on your head but every unspoken thought inside of your head. That God is almighty means also that God has the power to judge us for the times that sin has made us an adversaries of the Almighty.

With the lesson before us today, we have the opportunity to focus on another aspect of our Savior Jesus—the fact that Jesus is watching us. This, too, has 2 sides to it. We take comfort over the fact that the Lord who watches over us neither slumbers nor sleeps and keeps his watch of care over us at all times. Yet we also might be a little uneasy to think that he is watching over every area of lives, even if we don’t think he has the right to and even when we don’t want him to do so. As a general rule, we don’t like people watching us. We find it a little creepy, a little invasive to know that someone is watching us. We’re afraid of being judged if people know too much about us. We want our privacy. We want to do our own thing without anyone, including Jesus, watching or knowing about it. But then we are told in our text this interesting fact: *“Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury.”* Jesus sat down to watch what the people were doing with their offerings. That means he not only watches over every aspect of our lives, but over the offerings we give too. That’s a sobering thought. Our offerings are very personal to us. We don’t want anyone to know what we give. We want to keep that private and to ourselves. In fact, it might lead you to ask: **Should Jesus Really Be Watching My Wealth?** This is the question that we want to answer in our time together today.

If it surprises you that Jesus sat down to watch people give their offerings, then it should surprise you twice as much to realize when he did this. It was Tuesday of Holy Week. On Friday, Jesus would be hung on the cross to die. With the clock ticking and his death quickly approaching, it might seem odd for Jesus to sit down at the place in the Temple where people gave their offerings and watch them. Jesus didn’t happen to sit here because he needed a breather. The Greek is specific here: Jesus was studying the people as they gave their offerings and he did this for some time. As people who have been trained to be discrete when we put our offerings in the plate, the thought of Jesus sitting there, watching, staring, studying makes us more than a little uneasy.

Should Jesus really be watching our wealth? Perhaps if you and I were Jesus’ personal advisors, we would say absolutely not. On Tuesday of Holy Week, we might advise Jesus that he had much more important things to do, like watch for a place to eat the Last Supper or watch his step because the Pharisees were trying to trip him up. Even more, we might encourage him to watch his back because Judas was plotting to destroy him. But watching what people are doing with their wealth at the Temple? No, we wouldn’t advise him to do that. I can hear us counseling him now: *“If you sit there watching people give their offerings, then you’re going to give the impression that you’re actually interested in what people give to you.”* The truth is, while Jesus doesn’t need your money, he is interested in what you give to him. He’s interested not because of the amount which you give per se, but because the percentage of what you give reflects the attitude in your heart.

Jesus saw this exact thing as he watched in the Temple that day. He saw many rich people throw in large amounts of money. That doesn’t seem at all surprising. We expect those who have been given much to be big givers. Jesus himself once said, *“From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked. (Luke 12:48).* The Greek here gives us another insight. It appears that the wealthy were coming back to get in the offering line again and again. There was a pomp and show to their offerings. In our day it would be like someone speaking up during the offering to say, “Excuse me! Mr. Usher, can you run the plate past me a second time? I forgot to put my OTHER envelop in!” Jesus was not only watching the amount of their gifts, but he was staring right through them to their heart and their reasons for giving them.

Then he saw another person. No one would have mistaken her for a big giver. We’re told, *“a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents.”* Jesus was watching her wealth too. There’s something surprising with this widow. It’s not surprising that she was poor as there was no such thing as Social Security at that time to help her. It’s not surprising that she offered two tiny copper coins—the bare minimum that could be paid for the temple tax. No, what’s surprising about this widow is something we probably wouldn’t have picked up on unless Jesus told us: *Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.”* What a surprising statement from Jesus: She gave more than all the others! Can you imagine the disciples scratching their heads at this? They had seen the rich people give their multiple gifts. They had seen her put in the bare minimum. What Jesus said didn’t make any sense! But Jesus could see what the disciples could not: She gave out of her poverty and gave all she had to live on.

When Jesus watched the givers, he noticed that the rich gave out of what was left over. Yes, they gave their thousands, but they weren’t hurting. They still had plenty of thousands left over. They went home to a warm house, a full fridge, and a cozy bed. They give big gifts, but there was precious little personal sacrifice behind those gifts. They could not have been classified as “sacrificial gifts” as they weren’t sacrificing anything to give them. This widow was different. She sacrificed everything to give. She gave her

bread money and her milk money. Her giving hurt her. She didn't give thousands...only a few cents. The amount of her offering was tiny, but her self-sacrifice was total. She gave until she had nothing left. Yet the reality was at that moment she had everything. She had her Lord. She had God's promises and God's gift of faith to trust them. This is the main point God would have us take away from this poor widow today: she gave beyond her ability because she trusted her Lord's promise and ability to take care of her.

If you were sitting in Jesus' seat watching this widow give her offering and you knew that this was all she had, what would you have said to her? I wonder if we might have done our best to talk her out of making her offering. It might have sounded something like this: "Oh, don't worry about it. God knows your heart. He knows you don't have 2 dimes to rub together. He knows you'll give someday—if you've got it. In fact, here's two more pennies. Go out and buy yourself a cup of coffee." Is it possible we might have been tempted to say something like that to her and in so doing, talked her out of doing exactly what Jesus commended her for? Could it be that just every now and then, we are far too eager to make pious sounding excuses not to give and are not nearly as eager enough in encouraging one another toward godly generosity?

Why is that? Perhaps this is because we've got this enduring suspicion that giving primarily has to do with our wallet rather than what Jesus is really watching which is the attitudes of our hearts and the actions that follow. Simply put: Do we trust God or don't we? That's a simple "yes" or "no" question. This is really main issue that confronts us: Do you trust that God will provide for you when you are generous to him? When was the last time it really hurt you to give to the Lord? When was the last time you opened up your hands and gave sacrificially—actually sacrificed something you wanted and gave as if you really trusted in God and staked your future on his promises? Let me ask the question another way. Why is it so easy for us to send thousands of dollars to Fidelity, Vanguard or Charles Schwab or any of the other investment brokers every year? We do it because we trust that these people will make our money grow. Yet none of these brokers make any promises. In fact, they do just the opposite. They guarantee nothing! They state right up front: "*Past performance does not guarantee future results.*" Yet God does make some awesome promises: "*You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. (2 Corinthians 9:11).*" Why do we trust Fidelity more than our faithful Father? Why do we take comfort in our investments but fear giving as a net loss? Jesus is watching our attitude and actions! What does he see?

Let me illustrate this another frank way. Would we say that it is a great act of faith to pay an electric bill every month? Even more, would we say that it is a great act of faith to pay for our gym membership every month? Of course we wouldn't. There is no faith whatsoever in paying an electric bill or a gym membership. Yet let's put this into perspective: 39% of our Northdale family has offered God—the Creator of all—less than they given to the electric company this year. 34% offered the God who created them less per month this year than a monthly membership at the gym. This might put our giving into perspective. While certainly we have some poor widows among us who need special love and care, I doubt sincerely that 39% or even 34% of our Northdale family fall into this category. Jesus is watching. What does he see?

We can sum up our series from today and the last two weeks this way: There is one reason we fail to give God our firstfruits: He isn't first in our hearts. There's one reason we don't practice the principle of proportionate giving: We've forgotten that God is the owner of everything. And there's one reason we fail to practice sacrificial giving: We don't believe God will truly provide for us as he promised.

So how do you think the widow's story ends? We don't know. Mark doesn't tell us. But knowing what you know about the faithfulness of the Father and the sacrifice made for us by his Son, do you really think that Jesus let the widow go home after giving everything and starve to death? Do you get the impression that after commending the widow's gift that Jesus was ignorant of what the widow needed? The widow gave her all trusting in the God who gave his all by giving his Son for her. We can be sure that Jesus didn't drop her and let her fall.

We can be equally sure he won't let us fall either when we confidently and trustingly give him our all. God give us his all, his everything, by sending his Son into this world to rescue us from sins. He didn't offer 2 coins for our salvation. He offered the double treasure of his perfect life lived for you and innocent death died for you. On Calvary's cross, Jesus bled and died to forgive the very hearts that love copper more than him! He forgives us our sins and promises that when we put him and his kingdom first, we can be sure that we will have all these other things as well.

Jesus knows all about what his people need. Just three days after watching the widow give her gift at the temple, he looked down from the cross upon another widow—his mother. Even with his hands nailed to the cross, exhausted and in terrible agony, he opened his hands and took care of her future needs. Our confidence is this: to this day he continues to open his crucified hands to satisfy the desires of every living thing—including you and me. The God who gave his everything for you, will continue in his goodness to provide for you all that you need to sustain your body and life.

This same Jesus continues to watch you and your wealth. What does he see? I hope that he sees more than just a tip or whatever's left over in your wallet after everything else is gone. I hope that he sees gifts of love that comes from hearts of faith founded firmly on a deep-seated trust in him to provide for your every need. God has promised you forgiveness and life through Jesus his Son. He has promised to provide generously for you when you are generous with him. My prayer is that this short, 3 week study will have a profound effect on all of us. While it is difficult to hear and at times makes us a bit uncomfortable, I pray that it has led us to see and appreciate how generous our God has been with all of us. I pray that we have been led to appreciate all the more the sacrifice our Savior Jesus made to bring about our salvation. And I pray that it opens our hearts and minds to be generous and sacrificial in our giving to him—confident of his promise to provide for us and sustain us, to bring him honor and praise and to spread his kingdom to the ends of the earth. May Jesus see this as he watches us. Amen.