

Mark: 12:41–44

From Catena Aurea:

41. And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much.

42. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing.

43. And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury:

44. For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.

THEOPHYLACT. Now there was a praiseworthy custom amongst the Jews, that those who were able and willing should put something into the treasury, for the maintenance of the priests, the poor, and the widows; wherefore there is added, And many that were rich cast in much. But whilst many people were so engaged, a poor widow came up, and shewed her love by offering money according to her ability; wherefore it is said, And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing.

THEOPHYLACT. Or else; That widow is the soul of man, which leaving Satan to which it had been joined, casts into the temple two mites, that is, the flesh and the mind, the flesh by abstinence, the mind by humility, that so it may be able to hear that it has cast away all its living, and has consecrated it, leaving nothing for the world of all that it possessed.

From Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture:

12:42 She Put in Two Copper Coins

The Kingdom Not for Sale.

Chrysostom: Do not despair. One cannot buy heavenly things with money.... If money could purchase such things, then the woman who deposited the two small copper coins would have received nothing very large. But since it was not money but rather her intention that prevailed, that woman received everything because she demonstrated firm conviction. Therefore, let us not say that the kingdom may be bought with money. It is not bought with money, but rather with an unsullied intention that may demonstrate itself by means of money. Therefore, one answers, is there no need for money? There is no need for money, but for a Christian disposition. If you have this, you will even be able to buy heaven with two small copper coins. Without this disposition, one will not be able to do with ten thousand talents of gold the very thing that the two coins can do. Why? Because whenever you have many things and deposit a lesser amount, you have given alms, but not the same kind of alms that the widow gave. For you were not depositing it with the same kind of eagerness that she did. For she robbed herself of everything, or rather did not rob but gave to herself a free gift. Homilies on Philippians.

Measuring the Value of Gifts.

Jerome: The poor widow cast only two pennies into the treasury; yet because she gave all she had it is said of her that she surpassed all the rich in offering gifts to God. Such gifts are valued not by their weight but by the good will with which they are made. Letter 118, To Julian 5.

The Song of Seraphim.

Jerome: I pass on to the widow in the Gospel who though she was but a poor widow was yet richer than all the people of Israel. She had but a grain of mustard seed, but she put her leaven in the measures of flour; and, tempering her confession of the Father and of the Son with the grace of the Holy Spirit, cast her two pennies into the treasury. All the substance that she had, all her possessions she offered in the two testaments of her faith. These are like the two seraphim which glorify the trinity with threefold song and are stored among the treasures of the church. They are like the two legs of the tongs by which live coal is caught up to cleanse the sinner's lips. Letter 54, To Furia 17.

12:43 More Than All Those

All Within Your Power.

Chrysostom: When alms are given, we attend to nothing else except the disposition required. And if you say that money is needed, and houses and clothes and shoes, read those words of Christ, which he spoke concerning the widow, and stop being anxious. For even if you are extremely poor, and among those that beg, if you cast in your two small coins, you have done all in your power. Though you offer only a barley cake, having only this, you will have arrived at the heart of the matter. The Gospel of St. Matthew, Homily 52.5.

The Share of the Poor in the Kingdom.

Augustine: But what, brethren, is more mighty than that not only Zacchaeus should acquire the kingdom of heaven by the half of his goods, but even the widow for two pennies, and that each should possess an equal share there? What is greater than that the same kingdom should be worth treasures to the rich man, and a cup of cold water to the poor? On the Psalms 112.3.

12:44a They All Contributed Out of Their Abundance

What the Miser Lacks.

Jerome: There is an old saying that a tightwad lacks as much what he has as what he has not. One may have a whole world of wealth, another not a single scrap. Let each one live “as having nothing and yet possessing all.” Letter 53, To Paulinus 11.

Traveling Step by Step.

Evagrius: It is better to begin from one’s feeble state and end up strong, to progress from small things to larger, than to set your heart from the very first on the perfect way of life, then only to abandon it later—or keep to it solely out of habit, because of what others will think—in which case all this labor will be in vain. It is the same with people who travel: if they tire themselves out on the very first day by rushing along, they will end up wasting many days as a result of sickness. But if they start out walking at a gentle pace until they have gotten accustomed to walking, in the end they will not get tired, even though they walk great distances. Likewise anyone who wishes to embark on the labors of the virtuous life should train himself gently, until he gradually reaches the full extent of his abilities. Do not be perplexed by the many paths walked by our fathers of old, each different from the other. Do not overzealously try to imitate them

all—this would only upset your way of life. Rather, choose a way of life that suits your feeble state; travel on that, and you will live, for your Lord is merciful and he will receive you, not because of your achievements, but because of your intention, just as he received the destitute woman's gift. Admonition on Prayer.

12:44b She Out of Her Poverty

Invest with the Lord What He Has Given.

Paulinus of Nola: We have been entrusted with the administration and use of temporal wealth for the common good, not with the everlasting ownership of private property. If you accept the fact that ownership on earth is only for a time, you can earn eternal possessions in heaven. Call to mind the widow who forgot herself in her concern for the poor and, thinking only of the life to come, gave away all her means of subsistence, as the judge himself bears witness. Others, he says, have given of their superfluous wealth; but she, possessed of only two small coins and more needy perhaps than many of the poor—though in spiritual riches she surpassed all the wealthy—she thought only of the world to come, and had such a longing for heavenly treasure that she gave away, all at once, whatever she had that was derived from the earth and destined to return there. Let us then invest with the Lord what he has given us, for we have nothing that does not come from him: we are dependent upon him for our very existence.... So let us give back to the Lord the gifts he has given us. Let us give to him who receives in the person of every poor man or woman. Let us give gladly, I say, and great joy will be ours when we receive his promised reward. Letters 34, 2–4.

Beyond What Moses Prescribed.

Hegemonius: In that offering truly something is exhibited that goes beyond what Moses prescribed on the subject of the receipt of moneys. For he received gifts from those who had; but Jesus receives them even from those who have not. The Disputation with Manes 42.

Generosity Seen in the Light of Intention.

Chrysostom: When the widow put into the collection box only two small coins, the master did not give her a recompense worth only two coins. Why was that? Because he paid no attention to the amount of the money. What he did heed was the wealth of her soul. If you calculate by the value of her money, her poverty is great. If you bring her intention into the light, you will see that her store of generosity defies description. On the Incomprehensible Nature of God 6.12.