**Two Useless Coins**

*One day, as Jesus was teaching the people in the temple and preaching the gospel, the chief priests and the scribes with the elders came up and said to Him…Luke 20:1*

Cliff notes version:

         They challenged His authority to teach

         They sent spies to trap Him

o   Spies –  - people who lies in wait to ambush

o   Evil intent – to arrest Him

         They asked Him about paying taxes to Caesar and about marriage law

         Jesus answered wisely and so no one dared ask Him anymore questions, so He kept on teaching.

Sometime during His teaching: *Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box, and He saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. And He said, “Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.”*Luke 21:1-4

I’m sure His listeners were at best perplexed. Several people made substantial gifts and this woman gave but two small copper coins. Have you noticed how many people will not stoop down to pick up a penny? They’ll step over it, past it, on it, but they won’t bother to collect it. Why not? Because it’s really not worth much anymore.

This poor widow – , the word even sounds ugly. Calling her that would be “offensive” today. You can’t use words like that. She was “less-advantaged”. No! She was poor, destitute.

Anyway, this poor widow brought an offering of two each worth about 1/16 cent. Maybe she picked them up off the ground after others stepped over, past, or on them. They were useless coins. What can you buy with 1/8 of a cent? Why did she even give an offering if that’s all she was going to give?

Now I’m only speculating but seeing how Jesus praised her I’m thinking first that Jesus praised the spirit of her gift. It was the outflow of her heart. It wasn’t coerced or given with a grudge. Unquestionably it wasn’t to show off. As a loyal worshiper, she gave her fair share however small or large. Since that’s all she had, it was for sure more than 10%.

Jesus also praised the sacrifice of her gift. It may not have been much to you or me but it was everything to her. William Barclay, in his commentary on this passage wrote, *Giving does not begin to be giving until it hurts. A gift only shows our love when we ourselves have had to do without something, or have had to work doubly hard in order to give it*.

I don’t want to get wrapped up in numbers when we talk about giving or tithing. Whenever I preach about this people always ask: *Must I tithe from net or gross?*

*Do I have to tithe from gifts I receive or just what I earn?*

Friends if you’re giving out of “have to” and not out of a love response to God’s grace, you’re missing the point. If you’re giving out of love, the numbers won’t matter.

Remember the story we started this little series with, about the man whose land produced an exciting harvest so he started giving more money to his church and to people who were poor? **No** that’s not what he did. He decided to build bigger barns. He could only think about how to keep what he had. *Eat, drink, and be merry*.

Now contrast that guy with the poor widow. She had nothing but she demonstrated the heart of the tithe. Her gift didn’t end her financial trouble. She was still poor. Tithing isn’t magic.

You know, some people try tithing for a week or two, but when money doesn’t suddenly come pouring in they give up. *It doesn’t work for me,* they say. We’ll talk in a little while why they might not be see an immediate response, but for now understand, if you treat the tithe as an investment strategy, your heart’s not in it.

The poor widow didn’t give because she was afraid not to. There are folks who act like not tithing is the worst sin in the Bible. They faithfully bring their tithe but they do it grudgingly. If tithing isn’t from your heart it’s not a gift.

The poor widow didn’t earn anything by her gift. She didn’t earn money or salvation, but she knew that if she didn’t trust and obey God in such a way she would miss the blessings He wants to give her.

Last week we looked briefly at Malachi 3 where God said that not giving the tithe was stealing from Him. It sounds like God was simply criticizing them. While He was critical, His purpose was to remind them that He wanted to bless them.

*Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.* Malachi 3:10

God said that if they bring the whole tithe, *I will pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need*? What does God mean by that? Let’s keep reading:

*I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil, and your vine in the field shall not fail to bear, says the Lord of hosts. Then all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a land of delight, says the Lord of hosts.* Malachi 3:11f

He promised two blessings here. **One**, He will prevent pests from devouring their crops. This agricultural example may not resonate with us so let me suggest some alternative examples that probably will. Maybe:

         He will prevent your business from suffering loss.

         He will prevent your employer from losing an account that would have resulted in you being laid off or lose overtime opportunities.

         If you serve tables in a restaurant He will prevent you from being short tipped.

         If you’re a teacher He’ll prevent you from having parents who don’t support your efforts.

         He will prevent hurricanes from destroying your house.

I want to be clear, countless negative possibilities are out there. Tithing won’t make them go away, but God promises to make sure you’re not destroyed by them. There is this caveat, if you’re faithful to bring your tithe. Trust and obey God. Trust His faithfulness. Trust His love. Trust His power to make your life better.

The **second** blessing God promised is that instead of being defeated by the world, the world will see our victory. Israel was a defeated nation when Malachi preached. They had been unfaithful so God punished them by allowing their enemies to defeat them. God wanted to bless them in a way that all the nations of the world would can see.

I believe that God wants to bless His people today in a way that our unbelieving world will see. The tithe in the Old Testament supported God’s church and their ministry to the poor.

That’s one of the real practical applications of Malachi 3. When we tithe we release money to support ministry and ministry activities. I’m confident that *if every Christian in La Porte were to tithe, and if every church that received that tithe used it faithfully in ministry, we could take care of every poor person in our town* – except those who are poor by choice because they choose not to do anything for themselves.

Every study I’ve ever seen of how much Christians give says that the average giving of Christians to the Lord’s work is 2.5%. When you consider that many people give 10%, what does that say about the rest?

In one of Kregg Hood’s books he wrote, *One study calculated that if all the church members in America lost their jobs and tithed from their welfare payments, contributions would rise by 35%*. I can’t verify the accuracy of his numbers but I get his point.

God has a plan of how He wants to carry out ministry and take care of the needy, and it doesn’t involve the government taking from the rich to give to the poor. But since God’s people haven’t been and aren’t being faithful, governments have stepped in. Some governments don’t even try to take care of the poor.

God defined His standard or our “fair share” being 10% because it’s human nature to aim low when we determine what we should give and aim high in what we should get.

God doesn’t ask for a tithe because He needs it. He owns everything. He owns *the cattle on a thousand hills*(Psalm 50:10), all 93.5 million in America alone.

The reason there are poor in our midst isn’t that God doesn’t have enough. It’s that He has trusted it to people who haven’t been and are not being faithful.

When we decided to do this series we weren’t trying to raise more money. Nor are we hoping to coerce everyone into tithing. We know that 10% is God’s standard of my “fair share”. And we know that God wants to bless us. And we know that His blessings are connected to our giving.

         10% is a symbol of the whole. Tithing indicates that I accept God as Lord of my life, including my money.

         Giving 10% declares that I desire to partner with God in His ministry including areas of ministry that I can’t be personally involved.

         10% is a generous gift that releases God’s blessings. Jesus said…*with the measure you use it will be measured back to you. Luke 6:38*

o   The Apostle Paul wrote, *Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.*2 Corinthians 9:6

         Giving 10% is consistent with Biblical teaching such as…

o   *On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income.* 1 Corinthians 16:2

o   *Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.* 2 Corinthians 9:7

         Giving 10% expresses trust in God to fulfill His promises and provide for us. Concerning offerings Paul wrote, *I am not looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.* Philippians 4:17, 19

If we get tithing right, the important issue for us is not the 10% we give, it’s how we manage the entire 100%. Is that money mine or God’s? Tithing reminds me that God owns it all and allows me to manage some. When I get that right, my mind, my heart, and my life is positioned to receive His greatest blessings.

Now, we need to talk about a common experience. Sometimes, even when we’re faithful in tithing, we don’t immediately see what we interpret as positive response from God. In fact, sometimes it seems like He’s not listening at all. In these times our faith it tested like no other.

It would be easier for me to stand firm against someone threatening me because I love Jesus than to stand firm when God seems silent. That’s when I must remind myself of what I know and choose to obey His teaching rather than my own heart or emotions.

Proverbs 13:12 reads, *Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life.* When you’re consistently walking with God, trusting Him, and waiting for Him to respond, you fully understand this proverb. You’re messed up when you’re not seeing the response you expect. Sadly many Christians have turned away from God during such experiences.

We all understand that there’s a lapse in time between when you plant a seed and harvest a crop. You don’t get beans the day you plant your garden. You trust the law of the harvest, that if you faithfully sow you will eventually reap, according to God’s timing.

That same principle applies to our walk with God. We trust His faithfulness knowing that He’s working according to His plan. Kregg Hood prepared a list of reasons why God might delay from our tithing:

1.    Timing. Maybe you’re not prepared to receive His blessing. Many people can’t handle riches so maybe God is waiting for your heart to get right, that you would see your exciting harvest as an opportunity to help others instead of a time to build bigger barns to hold your wealth.

2.    Learning. Even people who faithfully obey God in tithing sometimes lack the skills to manage money. If we were all good money managers Jess wouldn’t need to lead Financial Peace University. More income usually comes with more expenses. Maybe God is waiting for you to learn how to manage money before blessing you.

You could easily become like the rich man who thought his blessings were just to satisfy himself.

3.    Motivation. The rich man in Jesus’ parable was motivated by greed. He saw blessing as intended for him to eat, drink, and be merry, without thinking about how he could care for anyone else. That may be an issue for you that holds back God’s blessings.

4.    Satan. The Bible tells us that Satan is active in our lives. He schemes and plans how to ruin our lives. He wants us to distrust God. As the prince of this world he interferes with God’s actions. He wants to stop us from trusting and obeying God.

     That’s why we’re told to…*Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes*, and, *so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.* Ephesians 6:11&13.

     Don’t ever forget that Satan is here trying to lead us away from faith in God.

5.    Perspective. Even people who are faithful to tithe sometimes lose perspective. Sometimes we need to wait on God a while in order to develop a sense of appreciation remembering that everything we have is a blessing from God.

Honestly, if you were that poor widow, would you think giving 1/8 of a penny was an important act of worship?

*6.*    Depth. Jesus once asked…*if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?* Luke 16:11 That’s a good question. If we’re shallow in handling what God has already given, should we expect that He will give us more? Sometimes God makes us wait until we are prepared to be humble about what we have.

When God makes us wait is when we really have to act on our faith. We know how much He loves us. We need to trust and obey even during those silent times.

If you doubt this teaching about tithing, listen to what God said: *Test me in this,” says the Lord Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.* Malachi 3:10

Think about that for a minute. God invites us to test His faithfulness. The word for test here “*be ha nu*” can mean to examine something, like as assayer tests the purity of gold. Or it can mean to prove something genuine or phony. In this context I think God is inviting us to take His faithfulness for a test drive. Does He do what He says or is He phony?

This stuff is the word of God. It’s not the word of Rod. I’m just iterating what God has shown us in His Word. God is ready to bless us **IF** we faithfully obey His commands and teaching.

Two more thoughts and I’ll stop.

First, I encourage you to learn to tithe as early as possible in life. If you’re a young couple, make this a priority in your marriage to establish tithing as part of your worship life. If you make it a habit of your family now it’ll be much easier to be faithful throughout your lives.

Second, I know many people think, *We can’t afford to tithe*. You can’t afford not to tithe. It’s the standard of “fair share” God designed for us. And since God’s blessings are tied to our faithfulness, ignoring His plan is spiritually and financially unhealthy.

If you don’t know how you can possibly tithe, we have people who can help you. If your heart is right, I assure you, you’ll never regret trusting and obeying God.

Honestly, I’d rather be a poor man praised by Jesus for my offering of two useless coins than a rich man criticized by Jesus for my selfishness.

God wants to bless you. You don’t have to trust me, but trust God.