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Money Matters!
Mark 12:41-45

Money is a funny thing isn't it? We are so sure we are not controlled by the love of money. We say it's just a tool for God. We affirm that everything we own and have in our wallet belongs to God...yet when the pastor begins preaching on money, we start to squirm in the pew. Why? Because it forces us to make a conscience evaluation of our priorities. Money really does matter. Why? Not because God needs our money...He doesn't, he could do his work and plan without us quite easily. No, money matters because it exposes our true heart attitude. It easily floats to the surface the things we really value. It does not matter whether you think your rich or you think your poor. What you spend your money on will tell you what you think is of great value.

The Los Angeles Convention Center was leased to display over 25,000 objects left behind from the estate of piano player entertainer, Wladziu Valentino, better known by his stage name, Liberace. Thousands of people lined up to view Liberace's staggering accumulation of wealth. Much like the recent Onassis auction, thousands paid thousands for a personal possession of Liberace's sickening overabundance. The only thing the auctioneer listened to that night was the sound of money. That was the only language that was listened to. The yells of money amounts provided a fitting eulogy to the entertainer and it spoke volumes of those who came to bid.

In the frenzy of our rich American lifestyle, there is a quiet voice calling out peaceful contentment. In our culture that spent 177 Billion dollars on gambling in 1984, 15 times what was given to churches, there is a quiet voice calling out a hope of peaceful contentment and freedom. In a land of the free and the brave where are hopes cling to winning millions in lotteries, only to win and have everything worth anything in our lives fall apart. In a land where our coinage says in God we trust, but our trust really lies in the coin itself...there comes a quiet voice calling out a hope of peaceful contentment and true freedom. Jesus says

in Matthew 6:24 "For where your money is, there your heart will be also" Where's your money? Where's your heart? Money really does matter because it exposes the real motives deep within you.

Since Jesus did not sidestep the issue of money, neither will I. I believe everything I have comes from God anyway so I look to Him to provide my needs. I would suggest if this topic hurts it's because there is something wrong between you and God...because God's pressing you in this area should not be a place where you should feel pain. If you feel pain in the money area, then today is a good time to start doing something about it. Lets see what Jesus's Word in the Bible has to say about the connection between ones money and ones devotion. Most folks are devoted to something...what is your devotion? My purpose this morning is to challenge you to look at your true priorities based on where you spend your money. What is really important to you? Turn with me in your Bibles to Mark 12. We are resuming our through the book study in Mark 12:41-45. Earlier in this chapter Jesus has answered a scribes question, What is the greatest commandment. The scribe asks, out of all the laws there are, on which one should we place our highest priority? Jesus answers with the Great Shema from Duet 6 and couples it with a passage in Leviticus. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind, and strength. and a second is like it, Love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus then gives an example for us as to what this is not and also a positive example of faith. What it truly means to love God with everything you have. Look for where Jesus sat; What Jesus saw; and What Jesus said. Let's (READ.)

Where Jesus sat: It is the final week of Jesus life. It's Passover time and the streets of Jerusalem are full, the temple is overflowing. Jesus and his disciples have left the porch area where He confronted the lavish religious leaders and ascended the steps into the temple building itself. On the steps leading down into the court of women or just within the gate Jesus sat down. For these would be the only places sitting was allowed in that court area. The text says that Jesus sat down opposite the treasury. The Court of Women was large enough to hold over 10,000 worshippers, it was big. Along one wall of colonnades in the Court of Women were 13 Trumpet shaped boxes where one could deposit a charitable contribution or offering. The trumpets were shaped with the

wide bell end on the ground and the smaller end to place ones offering. Each was inscribed with it's purpose, whether it was to make up for past neglect, to pay for certain sacrifices, to provide incense or wood for the priests and temple or make charitable contributions to the orphan children. Picture the scene. Jesus is sitting across the court on the ground. Sitting with a purpose. His disciples are near. They are far enough away to not be noticed by the givers...but close enough to see their actions. Jesus purpose this afternoon was to sit and watch.

Do you enjoy doing some people watching? I think people are just fascinating. It's been a while since I've been able to spend any purposeful time people watching, but my favorite place to do this is in a mall. It's great fun. You can tell so much about people without ever talking to them. They can tell you volumes by the way they move, their dress, the way they wear their hair. People are telling us Hey, "This is who I am" Even the ones who don't want to be labeled are telling us a lot about themselves. Look at me, I'm a rebel...I'm hoping to attract the eye of some guys, look at my legs....I don't care about anything look at the way I care for myself. I have a low self image, they stoop their shoulders, avoid eye contact and move away from the crowds. Some say, "I'm sophisticated." I'm beautiful, wealthy and successful. Some are telling us, "I'm athletic and sporty." People watching is a lot of fun and I just bet Jesus who had a big hand in creating these people who walked before Him...had a great time watching them. His desire that afternoon was to sit and watch.

What did Jesus see? Verse 41 He began observing HOW the crowds were putting money into the treasure. Notice that Jesus was not focused on how much they put in the trumpet boxes. He was interested in "HOW!" they were putting their offerings in. He could see by their actions, how and that how revealed something about their hearts. When Jesus looks He looks for things we normally might miss. Jesus is an excellent observer.

Point #1 Jesus is watching our **How** more than our **how much**. Jesus was not be sitting right next to the offering box so that they would be influenced by his presence. He was sitting on the opposite side where they didn't even notice. It is interesting Jesus choice of where He sat. Close enough to watch but unnoticed enough so that the giving choice is

not due to His appearance but because of a heart for God. God is also watching us. And He's looking for something in particular....Not necessarily the size of the gift, but the size of the heart devoted to Him. He observes all things public and private. He can see whether we are ready or reluctant whether we as worshipping gift givers are prepared or negligent. He will observe things that most other people wouldn't even notice. In fact, some of the very things that catch other peoples eye would not excite Jesus at all. Jesus sits in interest at His creation and the motivation inside us that drive our actions.

What did Jesus see. End of verse 41. He observed that many rich people were putting in large sums. Most of the folks walking by the offering boxes were rich. Few of the poor wanted to walk by the offering trumpets and compete with the large sums placed their by the wealthy.

Matthew 6:2 "When you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do..so that they may be honored by men. Truly they have their reward in full." Trumpeting before the trumpets. Doo do dooo! Check me out. Look how much I'm giving to God. Look how wealthy and blessed I am. I wonder if the disciples were looking with Jesus and commenting. Man, did you see that guy? It took 4 slaves to bring in his donation. Look at the way he's dressed he must be loaded. Was it the amount of the gift that caused Jesus to get excited? NO. We get so easily impressed with large giving. But Jesus is easily impressed by big hearts for God. It is not how much you give...but how you give.

We are rich. We must stop denying the fact that we here in America are wealthy. Stop comparing ourselves with the Jones down the street so we can put a claim on relative poverty. Let's look at the large world perspective. We are in the top 95% of the world's wealthy if we own a car, a home. We are in the top part of the world upper class. As citizens of this world we are wealthy..this is not a guilt trip. Just an eye opener. Even King Henry the Eighth who was fabulously wealthy for his time did not have a microwave. He did not even own a compound miter saw. We keep pushing up our level of need above our level of desire and relative to the folks down the street. Were rich, don't be guilty, admit that God has greatly blessed us and quit trying to whine about it. Use it for God's purposes.

As people of wealth there are some cautions for us. WE must be careful not to use our wealth as a tool for buying power, especially in the church. Too often I hear of churches having problems in leadership because they have put a wealthy man in a position of power that does not have a heart for God...but like these wealthy donors in verse 41, they only want to buy the smiles of the people. They want to buy influence and respect. Do not think that God is displeased with the gifts of the wealthy, I'm sure there were those that day that had genuine hearts for God..but It's clear there were many that did not have a heart for God. Back up to verse 38 "Beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes, and like respectful greetings in the market places."

We also must not allow our wealth to breed a delusion of superiority and safety. In the final analysis it is foolish to trust in money for security and safety...it will bring not lasting satisfaction at least not in the areas that really matter. Charles Swindoll in his book, *Strengthening Your Grip* says "there are a lot of things that money just can't buy. Money can buy medicine, but not health. Money can buy a house, but not a home. Money can buy companionship, but not friends. Money can buy entertainment, but not happiness. Money can buy food, but not an appetite. Money can buy a bed, but not sleep. Money can buy a crucifix, but not a Savior. Money can buy the good life, but not eternal life." To allow our wealth to become a source of security will breed a delusion of safety and false security.

Look with me at verse 42 as Jesus continues to observe. He see a poor widow come in. The Greek text puts the word coming up front in the sentence structure for emphasis. "Coming, the poor widow put in two small copper coins." She didn't have much. It was intimidating to step up to the trumpet shaped offering boxes among all the rich and wealthy but she came.

She could have walked into that crowded temple and said, Good night. What am I doing here. I'm am way out of my league. This isn't my kind of place. Look at those rich people lining up to dump in their hordes of money. This isn't my kind of people. All I have are these two coins worth about 1/8th of a cent. It couldn't even buy a light bulb in this big old temple. God can't use it..it's nothing. She could have said that...but she didn't. She could have said. I deserve to be on the

temples benevolence fund. The temple should be giving me money to survive, and maybe she was receiving some funds. I have two of these coins to live on for today,...why don't I just put in one. She could have said that but she didn't. Because when it comes to money it's not the amount that matters to God, it's the heart attitude. We get easily impressed by large gifts...God gets easily impressed with large hearts for Him.

What's the point? We have seen where Jesus sat, What Jesus saw. Let's look at verse 43 and see what Jesus said. "The widow gave her ALL. Both coins and her whole heart to go with it. God doesn't look at the portion given, He looks at the proportion given based on how He's blessed. This woman didn't have much to give in our eyes but in God's eyes she had tons to give. She gave it all. Do not think your gift to God doesn't matter, because God can do great things with even small gifts. Look at the example this woman provided for the disciples and for Christians centuries later. God can take our devoted heart and small gifts and turn them into great blessing. She placed her trust and security wholly in god. She feared God not money. I wonder is fear of insecurity an obstacle to your worship in giving? Most of us are here. We want to give, but we are fearful of not being able to provide for our families, fearful of not being able to do the things we want to do. Jesus tells us take an example from this woman. Give your all. Put your trust in me.

Third, God looks at us and sees no advantages to the rich or poor. Jesus has over thrown the human systems of economy. This idea just blew them away. In God's eyes it doesn't matter whether your rich or poor. Both have all of God's love and blessing available to them. Both can share in worship of giving in the same way. Not the same amount, but the very same way. The nickels and dimes from the Sunday School kid or the larger gift from a wealthy Godly giver both demonstrate humble devotion and love for God.

I see in this passage that Jesus tends to stand up and applaud inside when gifts of love have a certain extravagance to them. Here was a widow who gave all she had to live on for that day. Many would fault here and say she had no business giving to God when she had little to

eat. The disciples scolded Mary Magdalene when she took a very expensive perfume and wasted on Jesus feet.

William Barclay "I love is true, there must always be a certain extravagance in it. It does not nicely calculate the less or more. It is not concerned to see how little it can decently give. If it gave all it had the gift would still be too little. There is a recklessness in love which refuses to count the cost." Wives, have you ever had your husband wildly, extravagantly give you a gift...Wow my husband gave this to me, it was incredible unpracticed, it was lavish, He did it because he loves me. What does that do for you? What does that do for your husband and your relationship? God was extravagant in his gift to us...are we tightfisted in our expression of love toward Him?

Don't walk out of here and allow this money thing to come between you and God. He doesn't want or need the money from a heart that's cold toward Him. Save it. Don't think you can buy God's favor with a buck. Don't be tempted to give to God so that you can feel better about yourself. Don't think that your money in the plate will wash away your sin. Only a lavish free gift from God does that...we can never begin to repay that debt, nor should we try. Don't allow money to come between you and God. This week I from my home I took two small dimes and placed them right up close to my eyes. I was able to shut out the entire view of the valley and surrounding mountains. The mountains were still there but I could not see them, because I had a couple of dimes shutting off my vision in each eye. It doesn't take a large quantity of money to come between God and us...just a little placed in the wrong position will effectively obscure our view.

Money matters, doesn't it...not because God needs it, but because it reveals our heart devotion to God. In business we give raises to show our appreciation for an employee. It tells them, we want you to stay around, you are of value to our company. What are we saying to God about our appreciation for all he's done for us?

Kent Hughes says there is a disease that is particularly virulent in this part of the twentieth century. It is called cirrhoses of the giver. It was actually discovered around 34 AD in a couple named Annanias and Saphira (Acts 5) It is an acute condition which renders the patient's hand immobile when it attempts to move from the billfold to the offering

plate. The remedy is to remove the afflict from the house of God since it is clinically observable that this condition disappears in alternative environments such as golf courses, clubs, restaurants or home base. The disease is really not a physical problem, but a heart problem and the best remedy is to fall in love with God with all your heart, soul and mind...for where your heart is there will be your money.