

Jesus was soon to be betrayed and crucified. He had been teaching in the temple to large crowds. Our passage today is His final teachings within the temple, in the Court of the Women. As one would enter the temple, to the right were thirteen offering boxes. They were shaped like upside down trumpets -*shopharoth*. Each had a label identifying the way the offerings would be used. Six were marked 'Freewill-offerings.' The others were labeled 'New Shekel dues,' 'Old Shekel dues,' 'Bird offerings,' 'Young birds for whole offering,' 'Wood,' 'Frankincense,' and 'Gold for the Mercy-seat.' (Mishnah, Shekalim, 6,5) Since it was Passover, the lines to each offering box would be long. Jesus was sitting nearby in the crowd watching as wealthy people gave their offerings. <sup>1</sup> *Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box, <sup>2</sup> and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins.* Luke 21:1,2

The Greek of the parallel passage in Mark 12:41<sup>i</sup> tells us that the rich were also giving copper (brass) coins. The rich would be putting in a bag full of these coins. There was a rabbinic rule that a person could not put in less than two coins. The lepton which we call a widow's mite was about 1% of a day's wage. Today, if a person worked 8 hours at \$15 an hour that would make a lepton about a \$1.20.

<sup>3</sup> *And he said, "Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. <sup>4</sup> For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."* Luke 21:3,4 Does this mean giving anything less than everything will not please God, or is Jesus saying that God sees the heart of the giver? I have heard sermons on this passage and read commentaries that say that God sees not what is given but what is left. Well, God sees everything. The amount was not important, but the point was that in giving all she had she gave more than all the other rich people who had poured in their bags of coins. She gave more than all of them put together!

What was this woman doing in line with all these rich people? Something compelled her to give her last coins. Jesus' words tell us that God sees the heart of the giver. Whatever prompted her to take this extraordinary step, she obeyed. For the rich, their giving was but an infinitesimal tiny fraction of their wealth. But for the widow it was everything. The rich could do it without a second thought, but the widow had to count the cost (Luke 14:28<sup>ii</sup>).

I do not mean to demean the rich. They were supporting the temple and the rituals the Law required. The contrast illustrates how different man's perspective is from God's (1 Samuel 16:7<sup>iii</sup>). We can look to the Sermon on the Mount to condemn giving for the sake of man's respect, but this passage is not addressing that (Matthew 6:1,2<sup>iv</sup>).

In my opinion we should not use it as a lesson to give more to the church or try to bother the conscience of givers by asking how much they have left. I think the point is this: **if we realize that everything we have comes from God, do we live as if it does?** Are we willing to let go of money, possessions, time, energy, when the Spirit of God prompts us, or do we act as if it is our own to do with as we please?

One of my favorite commentators wrote that if we aren't giving until it hurts, we probably aren't giving enough. That While that may be generally true, it sounds like condemnation to me (Romans 8:1<sup>v</sup>). The idea can be used to guilt people into giving more. If a poor widow comes to a pastor and asks about tithing, when she can barely pay her property taxes and buy food to eat, should we advise her to mortgage her home?

Should we suggest that she will miraculously have more income if she does? That is the response I hear suggested by many, but should we make demands on her faith? I don't think that is the point of this last teaching in the temple. I do think **it illustrates that God sees and honors our sacrifices of faithful obedience.**

New Testament giving is not the Old Testament Law. New Testament giving is dictated by the compulsion of the heart, and God loves a cheerful giver, not a coerced one (2 Corinthians 9:7<sup>vi</sup>). The instruction of Paul in the New Testament is that each is to lay aside a sum according to their ability (Acts 11:29<sup>vii</sup>). He commended those who were barely able to get by and yet gave to those who were even needier (2 Corinthians 8:2-4<sup>viii</sup>). The impoverished villages of Guinea Bissau send in financial support for the radio station we sponsor. In God's eyes, their meager giving while struggling with malnutrition probably far surpasses our generous mission giving as a church.

Are we willing to give whatever and whenever the Holy Spirit prompts us to? Is there something we claim as our own and won't let God touch (1 Corinthians 4:7<sup>ix</sup>)? If God said to give it, would we be able to let go of it? This is about our surrender to the Holy Spirit. Laws are much easier and often less demanding. Obedience to the Holy Spirit requires a trusting relationship and continual communion with Him.

We live with many obligations: taxes, utilities, caring for family, saving for future expenses, health costs etc. It is prudent to consider all those issues and to be a good steward (Proverbs 6:6<sup>x</sup>). But when we know the Holy Spirit is prompting us to give, can we trust the Lord for all those needs? When God sees an obedient heart that trusts in Him, you know He is pleased (Hebrews 11:6<sup>xi</sup>). We should ask ourselves, "Is He pleased with the attitude of my heart?" Am I a living sacrifice on the altar today (Romans 12:1<sup>xii</sup>)? Do I trust in God's faithfulness?

Remember that in the previous passage Jesus had rebuked the scribes, the most honored people in the nation. He probably knew that pointing out their hypocrisy had sealed His fate. Maybe that is why He was sitting in the temple watching people give and contemplating giving His life for us. Then He saw the widow foreshadowing what He was about to do. She gave everything. What was that tiny gift among so many thousands of coins? But God can do great things with little things. Jesus was giving His life, just one life among millions, but it was the only one that could save us. Because the sinless heart of Jesus was willing to take the penalty for our sins, God did a great thing with that one sacrifice of all that Jesus had (Hebrews 10:12-14<sup>xiii</sup>).

*<sup>5</sup> And while some were speaking of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings, he said, <sup>6</sup> "As for these things that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."* Luke 21:5,6 Mark tells us that this conversation took place as Jesus was leaving the temple (Mark 13:1<sup>xiv</sup>). The temple was a standalone building in the court of the Gentiles. It was sectioned off from the rest of the area by a waist high wall called the balustrade. Inside the temple main gate looking to the right were those brass trumpet shaped offering boxes. Straight ahead one would see the enormous bronze altar. Smoke would be ascending from the continual fires burning inside. Behind it was the large brass water container like a giant bowl that held the water for the priests cleansing. Beyond the bowl were steps that led up to the beautifully adorned gate to the Holy Place. On that wall and surrounding that door was a solid gigantic gold grape vine with leaves and clusters of grapes the size of a man all made of gold. It represented the nation of Israel (Isaiah 5:1<sup>xv</sup>). Wealthy

people would donate a leaf or a grape to add to this work of art. If archeologists are correct, the floor of the whole area was tiled with geometric patterns, some of which have been discovered in the debris from the temple mount. The exterior walls were plated with gold and silver. What wasn't covered in plated metal was pure white stone. Josephus tells us some of the massive stones in the wall were close to seventy feet long, seven and a half feet high, and nine foot wide! The walls around the Court of the Gentiles had nine massive gates. It was one of the wonders of the Roman world.

Jesus knew His teaching in the temple was now finished. From this point forward, every moment the cross loomed before Him. Perhaps the disciples were trying to lift His spirits when they spoke of their admiration for the building and its adornment, the place Jesus called "my house" (Matthew 21:13<sup>xvi</sup>). They had not yet understood the message that Jesus is the new temple, the place where we meet with God.

Jesus shocked them when He prophesied that not one stone would be left on another. His heart was to prepare them for what lay ahead. Almost forty years later, the Jews revolted against Rome. At first the Jews had a few successful victories, but that was it. Titus led legions of Rome to conquer all the resistance. He then surrounded Jerusalem. The Jews were divided into factions that fought against one another. The Zealots burned the food supply, hoping to make the people desperate to fight. It only hastened their defeat. While Jerusalem starved, the Romans broke through. The final resistance was in the temple. Once it was taken, Titus first ordered it to be preserved, but an angry soldier set it afire. Then, typical in Roman conquests against a determined resistance, he ordered the city razed to the ground. Nothing, not even the temple was to be left standing. All that gold on the temple had melted down between the stones of the temple, which encouraged the soldiers to overturn every stone in search of more gold, fulfilling Jesus' prophecy.

The foundation wall, referred to as the western wall or wailing wall, is where Jews gather to pray today. Why are these still standing? We might say that Jesus was referring to the temple building alone. Those temple stones cannot be found. There are others who believe the western wall and those walls connected to it are actually the Fortress of Antonia walls. They suggest the temple was 600 feet to the south. If that is the case, truly no stone of the entire temple was left in place.

*<sup>7</sup> And they asked him, "Teacher, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?"* Luke 21:7 Between verse six and seven Jesus and the disciples moved to the Mt. of Olives (Mark 13:3<sup>xvii</sup>). It was such a troubling prediction that Peter, James, and John wanted to privately ask Jesus when this would happen and if there would be any warning signs before it took place.

What Jesus said was hard for any Jew to grasp. The temple was the center of their religion. That is one reason the final resistance used it as their last stronghold. They couldn't believe God would let the temple fall again into Gentile hands. But it had been razed once before because of the nation's idolatry. **Now their idolatry of man's interpretations of Scripture was about to cause their rejection of their own Messiah.** The Shekinah glory, the manifest presence of God, had left the temple before (Ezekiel 11:22-24<sup>xviii</sup>), and now the physical presence of God in the Word made flesh was again preparing for His departure.

We can applaud the disciples for believing the words of Jesus against all expectations of their culture. While they seem to be in shock after the crucifixion, at least they believe the prediction that the temple system was finished.

One can imagine Jesus and the three looking down upon the temple from the higher elevation on the Mount of Olives as Jesus spoke. Where they stood must have been close to the place the Lord will one day return (Zechariah 14:4<sup>xix</sup>). <sup>8</sup> *And he said, "See that you are not led astray. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and, 'The time is at hand!' Do not go after them.* Luke 21:8

Jesus' first warning was false messiahs would come declaring "I Am!" "In my name" which is Savior (Acts 21:38<sup>xx</sup>).<sup>xxi</sup> If you hear, "Jesus is back – reincarnated," don't believe it (Matthew 24:27<sup>xxii</sup>)! Forty years later Jerusalem would be destroyed by Rome because false messiahs would vie for power. Eighty years later all Jews would be expelled from Jerusalem after the second revolt led by Bar Kochba, another false messiah. Since then we have had countless ones. Some of them even using the name Jesus or David<sup>xxiii</sup>.

Many have been and will be led astray. I was for a time in my youth led astray by a false prophet. God puts a desire in our hearts to seek a leader. We want a superman who is all-wise to be the voice of God for us, a prophet like those in the Old Testament. That hunger is what draws us to Jesus. Walking by faith rather than sight is challenging (2 Corinthians 5:7<sup>xxiv</sup>). We'd rather have someone we can see with our eyes and hear with our ears. That is easier than building a relationship by faith and the study of God's Word. We are often like the children of Israel who didn't want God to speak to them, but preferred that Moses go up the mountain and bring down God's words (Exodus 20:19<sup>xxv</sup>).

<sup>9</sup> *And when you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified, for these things must first take place, but the end will not be at once.* <sup>10</sup> *Then he said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.* Luke 21:9,10 Verses 10 through 19 seem to be an exhortation about what a follower of Christ should expect in this world. How many wars have been fought since? And the great wars of the last century have expanded the destructive power of man. But we are not to fear. It doesn't mean the end is at hand. It is often in these times of danger that people think the Lord's return must be close, but Jesus tells us not to think that way. His return won't be brought on by man's wars, rather it will come at the climax of a cosmic war.

<sup>11</sup> *There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven.* Luke 21:11 In just a few decades after Jesus' ascension Laodicea had a massive earthquake, Pompeii was buried in volcanic ash from Vesuvius, Rome experienced a severe food shortage, and the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed. When these things happen, false messiahs appear to deceive fearful people and give them a false hope. Jesus is the only reliable hope! (1 Peter 1:3<sup>xxvi</sup>)

Every time there is a major comet or alignment of the planets, out come the false prophets predicting doom is coming but claim that they have the answer. Cults like Children of God and Heaven's Gate seize these events to try to draw in new followers to follow their savior - and fleece them of their finances and extort their labor. Whatever disasters or signs in the heavens should come, do not fear. We have an unshakable hope.

<sup>12</sup> *But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake.* <sup>13</sup> *This will be your opportunity to bear witness.* Luke 21:12 But even before the wars, famines, and pestilence, and signs, believers will be persecuted with physical violence, be falsely judged in synagogues, put in prisons, and judged by civil leaders. We can see this clearly in the history of the early church and

especially the life of Paul, who before his conversion was one who put believers in prison and even had them stoned. Believers have experienced persecution ever since. But there is a reason for it. It is an opportunity to witness to those in high places both clerical and civil (Philippians 1:12-14<sup>xxvii</sup>). Our calm assurance and lack of fear during pandemics and riots is part of our witness. Our lack of fear testifies that we know death is not the end. We know that God has numbered our days (Job 14:5<sup>xxviii</sup>).

*<sup>14</sup> Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, <sup>15</sup> for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict.* Luke 21:14,15 When we are to be brought to trial, we must determine not to think about how we should answer. Instead, we should let the Holy Spirit give us His answer to each question as it comes. Jesus assures us that if we do, our adversaries will not be able to withstand or contradict us. He was speaking from experience. And He was about to face a trial by clergy and secular courts.

*<sup>16</sup> You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. <sup>17</sup> You will be hated by all for my name's sake.* Luke 21:16,17 Family and friends will turn on believers, even to the point of having them put to death. The world will hate us because we are not of the world. We can see this hatred building in our own nation. Public education is glad to talk about all religions except Christianity, unless it is to mock it. Watch how the crowd reacts in public forums when someone stands up for Biblical truth. People excuse this hatred by saying Christianity is exclusive, but when you get down to the facts, all religions claim to be the one way to God. So, what is behind this hatred? As Jesus said, we are not of this world (John 15:18,19<sup>xxix</sup>). It is a manifestation of the spiritual battle (Ephesians 6:12<sup>xxx</sup>).

*<sup>18</sup> But not a hair of your head will perish. <sup>19</sup> By your endurance you will gain your lives.* Luke 21:18,19 Jesus is not saying we will not be harmed. He just said some would be delivered up to death. He is saying He watches over us. Our endurance to the end is evidence of the eternal life we have been given (Philippians 1:28<sup>xxxi</sup>).

This description of what to expect is quite different from that of the average American Christian. We mostly experience social and so called "intellectual" rejection. But Jesus' description fits that of believers in much of the third world today. You would hardly know it from the news. But if you read the Voice of the Martyrs (copies in the narthex) or look deeper into international news, you will find that the physical war on Christians rages on in Arab nations, China, Nigeria, Indonesia, parts of Russia, and many other places. The majority of Christians live under daily threats. Many face a similar decision to that of the widow when she gave her all.

What Jesus described in this passage has been true since He ascended. He was preparing His followers to not expect the physical blessings promised in the Old Testament under the covenant at Sinai. Our passage today tells us that in yielding out lives in service to God, we will not be spared from persecution or hardships, but we are guaranteed a better resurrection (Hebrews 11:35<sup>xxxii</sup>). The call from this passage is to be fully committed, to trust God, to have a readiness to give our all, and to endure to the end (Matthew 24:13<sup>xxxiii</sup>), while realizing it will be more than worth it! We are laying up our treasures in heaven just as Jesus taught us in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:19,20<sup>xxxiv</sup>). We are to be like Moses who considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he sought a better reward (Hebrews 11:26<sup>xxxv</sup>).

## Questions:

- 1 What did Jesus observe?
- 2 What was He teaching?
- 3 How is it speaking to your heart?
- 4 What were the disciples observing?
- 5 What was Jesus' response? Why was it shocking?
- 6 How was Jesus' first prophecy fulfilled?
- 7 How was His second prophecy fulfilled?
- 8 What is His ongoing prediction?
- 9 How are we seeing it in our day?
- 10 How should this affect our expectations and affections?

---

### <sup>i</sup> **Mark 12:41 (ESV)**

<sup>41</sup> And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums.

### <sup>ii</sup> **Luke 14:28 (ESV)**

<sup>28</sup> For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?

### <sup>iii</sup> **1 Samuel 16:7 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart."

### <sup>iv</sup> **Matthew 6:1-2 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. <sup>2</sup> "Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

### <sup>v</sup> **Romans 8:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

### <sup>vi</sup> **2 Corinthians 9:7 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

### <sup>vii</sup> **Acts 11:29 (ESV)**

<sup>29</sup> So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea.

### <sup>viii</sup> **2 Corinthians 8:2-4 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. <sup>3</sup> For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, <sup>4</sup> begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints—

### <sup>ix</sup> **1 Corinthians 4:7 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

### <sup>x</sup> **Proverbs 6:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise.

### <sup>xi</sup> **Hebrews 11:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

### <sup>xii</sup> **Romans 12:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

### <sup>xiii</sup> **Hebrews 10:12-14 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God,

---

<sup>13</sup> waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. <sup>14</sup> For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

<sup>xiv</sup> **Mark 13:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> And as he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!"

<sup>xv</sup> **Isaiah 5:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill.

<sup>xvi</sup> **Matthew 21:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers."

<sup>xvii</sup> **Mark 13:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> And as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately,

<sup>xviii</sup> **Ezekiel 11:22-24 (ESV)**

<sup>22</sup> Then the cherubim lifted up their wings, with the wheels beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel was over them. <sup>23</sup> And the glory of the LORD went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain that is on the east side of the city. <sup>24</sup> And the Spirit lifted me up and brought me in the vision by the Spirit of God into Chaldea, to the exiles. Then the vision that I had seen went up from me.

<sup>xix</sup> **Zechariah 14:4 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley, so that one half of the Mount shall move northward, and the other half southward.

<sup>xx</sup> **Acts 21:38 (ESV)**

<sup>38</sup> Are you not the Egyptian, then, who recently stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?"

<sup>xxi</sup> Josephus mentions a number of them in Antiquities xx.

<sup>xxii</sup> **Matthew 24:27 (ESV)**

<sup>27</sup> For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

<sup>xxiii</sup> David is another title of Jesus meaning 'the beloved.'

<sup>xxiv</sup> **2 Corinthians 5:7 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> for we walk by faith, not by sight.

<sup>xxv</sup> **Exodus 20:19 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die."

<sup>xxvi</sup> **1 Peter 1:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

<sup>xxvii</sup> **Philippians 1:12-14 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, <sup>13</sup> so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ.

<sup>14</sup> And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

<sup>xxviii</sup> **Job 14:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> Since his days are determined, and the number of his months is with you, and you have appointed his limits that he cannot pass,

<sup>xxix</sup> **John 15:18-19 (ESV)**

<sup>18</sup> "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. <sup>19</sup> If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

<sup>xxx</sup> **Ephesians 6:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

<sup>xxxi</sup> **Philippians 1:28 (ESV)**

<sup>28</sup> and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.

---

<sup>xxxii</sup> **Hebrews 11:35 (ESV)**

<sup>35</sup> Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> **Matthew 24:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> **Matthew 6:19-20 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal,<sup>20</sup> but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

<sup>xxxv</sup> **Hebrews 11:26 (ESV)**

<sup>26</sup> He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.