

Consecration

Series: ABC's of Giving

Mark 12:41-44

December 4, 2016

Well, I have good news and bad news for you today. The good news is that this is the last Sunday of our stewardship series "ABC's of Giving." That's the good news. The bad news is that we still have 20 minutes more of our stewardship series "ABC's of Giving."

Some people get upset when we talk about stewardship. We typically don't like to be told to do something that we're not doing. Kind of like a 7 year old.

But we have learned that talking about stewardship each year is very important so that we can do ministry next year, so that we can learn to be less self-centered, and because it's important to God.

So far, we've learned that "A" is for "Attitude", that we need an attitude that says, "God, what's mine is Yours, and I'm going to share it." We learned that "B" is for "Belief" and we were challenged to believe what God says in Scripture about giving. And if you were here last week, I gave you a challenge – in fact, a money back guarantee (but more about that later). Today, we will conclude this "ABC's of Giving", and "C" is for "Consecration."

To consecrate something is to dedicate something to some service or goal.

We do a lot of consecrating of things in the church. We consecrated the pipe organ. We consecrate items in the sanctuary for God's use. This building was consecrated for the worship of God and the making of disciples for Jesus Christ. We consecrate things to God by giving them for His use and the use of His church.

Our offering is consecrated as well, and not just through a prayer but in the way we give it.

Today, I want us to look at an incredible passage of Scripture from Mark 12. Jesus has been teaching in the Temple, and after His teaching session, we find this passage:

Jesus sat down near the collection box in the Temple and watched as the crowds dropped in their money. Many rich people put in large amounts. Then a poor widow came and dropped in two small coins. Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has given more than all the others who are making contributions. For they gave a tiny part of their surplus, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she had to live on."¹

Here's the first point I want you to write down:

Our offering to God should be a priority.

What does the passage say? It says Jesus was watching people put their money in the offering. Isn't it interesting that Jesus sits Himself down by the collection box and watches the people giving? He's paying attention to peoples' giving to the work of the Lord.

I don't know if I like that! What I put in the plate, that's no one's business but my own, isn't it?

¹ Mark 12:41-44 (NLT)

Imagine if we changed up the way we do the offering, and I, your pastor, sat down beside a collection box and watched who gave and what you gave. No more ushers passing plates, no more little envelopes to hide your offering. Most people in the churches I've served would be a gassed if I knew what they gave.

But here in this passage, Jesus actually puts Himself in a place where He can see what people are giving. And notice that Jesus seems to know a great deal about the givers and the gifts. He knows who's rich and who give large amounts, and He knows not only that a poor woman gave two small coins, but that it was all she had.

If we believe that God knows everything, that God is everywhere, then we need to realize that when we give our offering, it isn't something secret. Jesus is watching. God knows what we are giving and what we are not giving. There is no hiding our stewardship from God. He is sitting right here watching.

When you are driving down the road and you see a patrolman, you slow down and make sure you are doing the speed limit and following the rules of the road. When you are in school taking notes and the teacher is standing right there beside you, you make sure the teacher sees you're paying attention. When you are liturgist and you have to lead the worship, you make sure that you know how to say all the words. Why? Because people are watching you.

When we give, God is watching us. He's sitting right here. He knows your attitude, your belief, and He's watching to see if you will give as He has required. Therefore, you should be sure that your giving is a priority. You can't hide from God when you give.

Mrs. Baughman was a 6th grade Sunday School teacher. One morning, she brought a pan of brownies to class. As the goodies sat tantalizingly by her chair, she gave each child a slip of paper marked with a household expense: house payment, phone bill, credit card bill, entertainment, and so forth. Then she picked up the tray of fresh brownies and began naming the expenses on the papers: car payment, cable bill, cell phone, etc. As the children gave her their expense slips, she redeemed each one for a brownie from the pan. Finally, the last brownie had disappeared. But one boy named Donald still held his unredeemed slip. Mrs. Baughman called out, "God!" Donald came forward, hoping the teacher had one more brownie hidden somewhere. With a knife, Mrs. Baughman scraped the crumbs from the bottom of the pan into Donald's napkin. He got a pretty raw deal – just the crumbs.

She explained, "The brownies represent your money. If you don't give God His share right away, He probably won't get anything at all... except maybe crumbs."

You probably would have never forgotten that illustration if it was your 6th grade Sunday School class. It was the day Donald got only brownie crumbs. The children learned that God should have first rights, priority, to everything they have. And when you struggle with giving and priorities, recall that "crummy Sunday morning lesson", and you will know who must come first in your life.

This story illustrates how God must feel with some offerings that He receives. Instead of God getting our first thought – He gets our last. He gets what's leftover; He gets the crumbs.

If you can imagine how Donald felt, you've a fair idea of how God must feel if we don't make giving a priority. He's watching.

Second, Our offering to God should be quality.

Notice that in the story, Jesus watches everyone and their gifts. He sees some people give large amounts, and then He sees a widow give two small coins. And who is He impressed with? What is He impressed with?

Jesus is more impressed with the widow than with the wealthy. He is more impressed with the quality of the offering than the quantity.

This is poor woman. Her offering may have been a day's wages. It was a sacrifice for her. It was all she had.

This tells me God is more impressed with the quality of our gift than with quantity.

Now, don't misunderstand here. Jesus isn't saying that we should give everything we have all the time. The Bible requires a tithe, 10%, as an offering to God. The rest is for us to use and manage and be good stewards of in a way that honors God.

And don't misunderstand that we shouldn't give big gifts. That's not what Jesus is saying either. It is the quality of the gift that matters. Quality is honoring God with the gift.

So, if you have an income of \$10,000, an offering that is honoring God, that is quality, is 10% or \$1,000. If you have an income of \$100,000, an offering that is honoring God, that is quality, is 10% or \$10,000. Both gifts are quality gifts. God is not more impressed with the \$10,000 because it's bigger; He's impressed with both when they are quality gifts.

Now why is that? Because our giving matters to Him.

Did you know that in the Bible, prayer is mentioned 371 times, love 714 times, and giving 2,162 times? Where does the Bible put greater emphasis?

Giving matters to God, and the gift that impresses Him is the quality gift.

Finally, Our offering to God should please Him.

We don't think of our offerings today like the Israelites did in the days of sacrifices at the Tabernacle or the Temple. Back then, that which is consecrated to God should taste good. They should smell good.

Leviticus 1:9 talks about the Burnt Offering that was to be offered to God. When properly prepared, this burnt offering would offer up an "aroma pleasing to the Lord."

Leviticus 2:2 describes the Grain Offering. When properly prepared, this grain offering would offer up an "aroma pleasing to the Lord."

Leviticus 3:5 tells us about the Fellowship Offering. When properly prepared, this fellowship offering would offer up an "aroma pleasing to the Lord."

Leviticus 4:31 introduces the Sin Offering. You got it: when properly prepared this sin offering would offer up an "aroma pleasing to the Lord."

That which is consecrated to God, that which is sacrificed to Him, should taste good, it should smell good.

Paul Harvey once told the story that the Butterball Turkey company set up a hotline to answer consumer questions about preparing holiday turkeys. One woman called to inquire about cooking a turkey that had been in her freezer for 23 years. The operator told her it might be safe if the freezer had been kept below 0 degrees the entire time. But the operator warned the woman that, even if it were safe, the flavor had probably deteriorated, and she wouldn't recommend eating it. The caller replied, "That's what we thought. We'll just give it to the church."

Why does that strike us as funny? She was consecrating that turkey to God, wasn't she? What she was offering was still good, wasn't it? Though it may have been "consecrated," though it still was "good," it wasn't going to taste good or smell good.

So what can make an offering to God "smell good?" Why should it matter to God what we give? It's the thought that counts, isn't it? He doesn't even need my money. And He shouldn't need my money to know how much I love Him, should He?

In Leviticus, that which gave the offerings to God "an aroma pleasing to the LORD" was that it was a sacrifice. The rich, putting in their offering in front of Jesus, were not sacrificing anything. That was what Jesus was pointing out here.

What is it about sacrifice that pleases God? God knows that I will sacrifice for that which is important to me. If something is not important to me, I won't sacrifice.

Write this down:

When we get to the point where God's kingdom and His righteousness are valuable enough for you and I to sacrifice something for, God will give us the power to change our world.

Last week, I presented you a challenge. I asked you to bring the full tithe to the house of the Lord this Sunday, just one Sunday. And then test God this week – He tells you to. Test God this week, and see if He does not bless you. Test Him and believe.

And if you actually decide to give a tithe today, we're going to give you a money back guarantee. If you tithe and you believe that God hasn't supplied for you He promises, you just march up to me and you tell me how much you put in, and we'll refund your gift. I'm serious about this. If you don't see God's blessings this week, come to me and we'll refund your gift.

When our offerings to God are a priority, are quality, are pleasing, then the church has the power to change our world. This building gets built and supplied and paid for. There is plenty for those in need. Our apportionments are paid 100%. We do missions that we haven't even thought of yet. We make a difference in families, in marriages, in lives for all eternity.

Don't you want to give and know that because everyone is giving, we are changing the world? Don't you want to give so that God will not only be pleased with you – because He's watching – but because of your faith, bless you and "open the windows of heaven for you and pour out all the blessings you need"?²

² Malachi 3:10 (NCV)