

STEWARDSHIP

November 7, 2021

I Kings 17:8-16; Hebrews 9:26b-28; St. Mark 12:41-44

“A Widow, Another Widow, and the Worth”

- I. The Widow of Zarephath.
- II. Another Widow.
- III. The Worth.

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Dear Friends in Christ,

This is a stewardship Sunday, a time when we consider what we do with what isn't ours in the first place; what we do with everything God has called us to manage. As the Lord impresses upon us through David, "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein, for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers." (Ps. 24:1-2) You see, when we take stock of all our stuff, not one particle of it is ours; not even these frail bodies.

And I found it interesting that the appointed Old Testament and New Testament lessons for this morning are the familiar accounts of two widows and God's activity in their lives. We're looking at . . .

A WIDOW, ANOTHER WIDOW, AND THE WORTH

I. The Widow of Zarephath.

I Kings, which gives the account of The Widow of Zarephath, takes us back to about 2,800 years ago. It takes us to the time after Israel was divided into two kingdoms: the Northern Kingdom which was called Israel and the Southern Kingdom which was called Judah. It takes us back to the time when God raised up and sent the prophet Elijah to the Northern Kingdom during a period of great drought. God spoke to Elijah, "Arise, go to Zarephath...Behold, I have commanded a widow there to feed you." (I Kings 17:9)

Elijah discovered that the widow was poor. After he had requested water and bread from her, she said, "As the Lord your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. And now I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die." (v.12) The fact is, the widow was destitute.

We recall the rest of the account, the miracle by which God provided her needs - her daily bread. Again, we recall the promise of God through Elijah, "For thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, "The jar of flour shall not be spent, and the jug of oil shall not be empty until the day that the Lord sends rain upon the earth."" (v.14)

We want to remember that God sent the drought. Again, the woman was a widow. God had taken her husband. She had a son. They were a step away from starving to death. God did not stop these events from taking place. However, since the Holy Spirit had David say, "...in your book were written, every one of them, all the days formed for me, when as yet there was none of them," we can say God allowed what happened to happen with purpose. (Ps.139:16) And even though she balked in using her remaining flour and oil, she did as God had commanded her conscience and heart.

I was thinking back over the years when I've expressed the hope of Jesus' return. I would often get a look of surprise, or the thought that while that would be good, the person hoped it would be a ways off. It's hard to want to look forward to Christ's return when the flesh has digested this world's allurements and shallow promises. We know these words, but can we apply them? These words: "...for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith...may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." (I Pt. 1:6-7) - that is, when Jesus suddenly returns, or when we're suddenly called out of this world!

Maybe you're wondering what all this has to do with Stewardship. It's this: We own nothing! God moves all things according to His will, and stewardship has everything to do with each of us examining our response to God's love in Christ - examining where He has placed us in this world so we could be witnesses to His eternal love, the fact that Jesus suffered hell, bled and died to win our forgiveness and an eternal Kingdom. And that takes us to . . .

II. Another Widow.

Another Widow:

And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. And he called his disciples to him and said to them, "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on." (Mk. 12:41-44)

So, here we go again. A poor widow. Jesus, God in the flesh, knew who she was. In His foreknowledge, He was perfectly aware of her walk of life through this world. He didn't stop it. Before this moment He could see, "a poor widow...put in two small copper coins, which make a penny." He foreknew that she would, "put in everything she had, all that she had to live on." All! And He didn't stop it, just as He didn't stop the drought at the time of the widow of Zarephath; just as didn't stop any other drought, or earthquake, or tornado, or hurricane, or whatever we don't want in our lives. It still applies: "various trials so that the tested genuineness of your faith...may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

But the question is, why did she "put in everything she had, all that she had to live on"? Well, evidently, she knew the value of God's saving grace; that it was of more value than anything of this world. The question is always the same: Do we?

Jesus didn't take away the fact that both women were poor widows who had almost nothing of this world's needs. Needs - not a lot of stuff. There has never been a promise of a prosperous, happy life with this fallen world. But there is always this promise: "... for those who love God all things work for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." (Rom.8:28) *His purpose!* That brings us to . . .

III. The Worth.

The worth, as in the worth of giving under all circumstances.

That worth is presented in our Epistle lesson, in which the Holy Spirit had the writer of Hebrews inform us that Jesus is the Great High Priest who gave Himself for the ultimate sacrifice for our sin. Here it is:

But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that come judgment, so Christ, having been offered for the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him. (Heb. 9:26b-28)

The greatest tragedy within the church today is the growing refusal to recognize Jesus words, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (Jn. 14:6) The other tragedy is that Jesus has been turned into the dispenser of earthly good times and success. Those are massive and damning errors in light of Jesus' word to Pilate: "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews." (Jn. 19:36) Fighting so He and those who follow Him would have good times and success...here. Fighting so He wouldn't have to suffer and die to pay the price for all sin.

It's called counting the cost of discipleship. Jesus said:

"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and children and brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple (this is not a vengeful hate, but a turning away from anything that jeopardizes eternal life. Kretzmann wrote, "the love of Christ must precede all other love"). Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. 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?....So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple." (Lk. 14:26-29,30)

It's a worn record, I guess, for some; Jesus's words, "The world...hates me because because I testify about it that its works are evil." (Jn. 7:7) The world doesn't want to confront its sin and Christ's love that would take Him to the cross to pay for all sin. And so, the consequence: "whoever does not believe is condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God." (Jn. 3:18b) On the other hand, whoever believes has eternal life.

It's a tough world, isn't it? And there they are: two widows who knew nothing but tough times, yet gave up everything because they understood the love of God and the Light He gives that shines the way to everlasting joy. The Light! The Messiah! Jesus! And God took care of their needs. And so, the question: What's that Light worth - to you - to me?

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott