



### Looking Inwards (15 mins) *Caring For Each Other*

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however, 'it's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



### Looking Outwards (15 mins) *Concern For Others*

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours; or church, which you would like to share (please be careful not to pass on anything that is **confidential** or which you think the person/people concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



## HG28: Commitment Sunday *The Widow's Mite*

**Mark 12:41-44**

### Home Group Study Notes

21st March 2010 - Revd Paul A. Carr



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN  
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION  
**BEFORE** THE MEETING!

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group  
with you, along with any previous notes and  
other resources that might be helpful.*



### Welcome/Ice Breaker (10 mins)

Spring is in the air and many folk have started planting their vegetables and tending to their gardens. What great plans do you have in place for your garden/allotment as you seek to enjoy the wonder of God's creation in spring/summer and in the coming seasons?



### Looking Upwards (10 mins) *Worship*

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise, or listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers; etc.





## Looking Upwards (40 mins) Bible Study

Read through the text for this study, Mark 12:41-44 and any references given below, alongside those in the sermon notes, then answer the following questions - you may find it helpful to read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss your answers with your Home Group.

**1:** In the introduction of his talk, Paul suggested: “... *if I were to take everything that Jesus said about money and summarize it in a sentence, it would be this: **money is a tool and a test.***” In what ways might you see money to be: a) a tool; b) a test?

**2:** Paul suggested that the widow gave: ‘sacrificially; recklessly and generously’ which offers a model for our giving to God’s work. Which of these would you agree or disagree. Why?

**3:** How, if at all, should the current financial upheaval in the world affect our giving? How should the principle of a tithe (10%) be affected by this?

**We may feel we do not have much to give:** We may look at the wealthy who give large sums of money to charities and think, “Well, I’ll never be able to match that kind of contribution.” We’re left to think about what we would do if we had large sums of money. We think, “I would give some to the kids’ school, the Red Cross, the church ...” and the list goes on. We think that we can’t do anything because we don’t have much. We may think that since we aren’t a large church we can’t do anything, but that’s not true. Last year we gave away ??? to mission organisations. We fulfilled our parish share. We may be tempted to say that our money doesn’t amount to much, but the pounds mount up and they make a significant difference somewhere in God’s world. We’ve supported the mission and ministry of the church in many different ways – but there is always more we can do and we need a regular income to ensure we can meet our current commitments, and a greater income, if we wish to plan new initiatives for the future.

**If we give what we have, God can do great things:** When we give what we have, and commit it all to God, great things happen. When we are contributing to something that is of God, no matter how much we give it will be multiplied for the benefit of God’s Kingdom. In Matthew 15, a young boy went to see Jesus and took a lunch of five loaves and two fish. When he heard they were looking for food, he approached one of Jesus’ disciples and offered his lunch. Who would believe that a little lunch could make a dent in the hunger of thousands of people? However, Jesus honoured the gift of that young boy. He multiplied what he gave and it fed a crowd of five thousand men plus the women and children. The twelve basketfuls that were leftover were more than what the boy had given to begin with. When we give our all to God, he multiplies it. It becomes bigger than what we had in the beginning.

### Conclusion

The Wall Street Journal quoted an anonymous wit who defined money as: *An article which may be used as a universal passport to everywhere except heaven, and as a universal provider for everything except happiness.* He might have wanted to add something about money being a wonderful servant but a terrible master.

We cannot serve two masters. We cannot serve both God and money. If God is our master then money will be our servant. But if money is our master then, then we become the servants of money and money is an unforgiving master. We start wasting our lives instead of investing in them. Creating wealth can, for some, become an all consuming passion that overshadows all that we do. It begins to take precedent: over our families; over our relationships; over church attendance; over our marriage; over our Christian faith; over God himself. We have seen through the widow’s offering that giving must be sacrificial and involves a certain amount of recklessness. It must also be generous. God takes what we give, when we give it in complete reliance on him, and multiplies it more than we can imagine. It all comes down to our surrender to God the control of every aspect of our life. Jesus didn’t commend anyone for giving large sums of money. It’s not the size of our gift that matters, but the size of our heart. Jesus commended the widow for relying on God to meet her needs. The widow’s coins weren’t much from the standpoint of the balance sheet, but they were huge from the standpoint of God’s balance sheet and, surely, that’s the most important thing of all.

### **Giving has a certain Recklessness to it**

Who would begrudge the woman keeping one of the coins? She would still have something, albeit not much, but would still have given half of all that she had. Half was still more, proportionally, than what the others gave. The widow, it seems to me, displayed a certain recklessness with her gift. She gave all that she had; there was nothing left to buy food. She displayed a faith that is rare in our culture. I doubt that many Christians have this type of faith. She gave every bit of what she owned to God. She gave her savings, retirement/rainy day fund – call it what you will. She gave it all to God and relied on God to supply her needs.

***Too often, we play it safe:*** We hedge our bets just in case God drops the ball! We want to stay in our comfort zone. We don't really believe that God will help us. It's easy to remain comfortable doing what we've always done or giving what we've always given. We don't take a step of faith. The truth is that we believe that we can manage our affairs better than God can.

***The truth is that our giving to God is not a financial issue; it's a spiritual issue:*** It seems like we regularly find some way to keep things from God. I have often heard the analogy of comparing the Christian life to a house. When we invite Jesus into our life, we allow him to come into the living room, but we keep all the other doors to the other rooms locked. Eventually we unlock a door here and there for him enter. We surrender different aspects of our life. There always seems like we are holding some part of our life back from God.

God wants complete control of our life, and that means surrendering our life to him. God doesn't want our commitment so long as it's comfortable for us. He wants complete control. That isn't a comfortable proposition. Jesus never promised a comfortable life for his followers. In fact, Jesus said it would be difficult. He said that we have to take up our cross and follow him. Surrender is never easy. It involves giving up control of our lives to God: that means finances, personal life, as well as our gifts and talents.

### **Giving should be Generous**

Jesus teaches that generosity is not measured by the size of the gift but by the motive and sacrifice behind the gift. Our giving must not be grudging. We shouldn't say: "Well, I guess I'd better put my offering in." It's something we shouldn't moan/groan about. The apostle Paul wrote in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 2:9: *"Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."*

I can see the poor widow with a smile on her face, as she drops her coins into the offering box. It meant the world to her that she was doing all she could to help advance the Kingdom of God. I can see the others giving with a great deal of reluctance. They may have thought, "Since I gave all this money, I'm going to have to wait another month to get that High Definition TV." I think it offers us a measure of comfort that Jesus would hold up this poor widow as the example of generosity. How? Because:

**4:** Should our giving be in response to the love of God or the demands of the parish budget? Which is most likely to help us in our giving? Why?

**5:** Which bible verse or passage or story speaks to you most helpfully about the giving of money to God's mission?

**6:** Whilst the main thrust of our thinking on Commitment Sunday has been finance, it is also about using our gifts and talents to serve God, through Emmanuel (see SHAPE leaflet). Are you using all that gifts and talents that you possess to serve? If not, what could you offer to support the mission and ministry of Emmanuel? If you are not sure of your SHAPE, ask your home group members to offer suggestions as to where they think you may be gifted to serve.



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



## HG28: Commitment Sunday *The Widow's Mite*

Mark 12:41-44

### Home Group Sermon Notes

21st March 2010 - Revd Paul A. Carr

#### Introduction

Commitment Sunday is a day when we reflect on the financial aspects of church life, and think about the responsibility we all share to support the mission and ministry of Emmanuel. Now, you may be surprised to learn that about 30% of Jesus' teaching had to do with money and material wealth. I wonder if that's because money, and how to deal with it, has messed up as many people's lives then, as it still does today. But if I were to take everything that Jesus said about money and summarize it in a sentence it would be this: ***money is a tool and a test.***

Just before our text from Mark 12:41-44, Jesus has just had a rather tense confrontation with some of the religious leaders regarding paying taxes to Caesar; resurrection and He goes to the Temple with his disciples and sits down near to where the offerings were received. Now, the offerings in the Temple were received in a different way than we are used to. They didn't pass a plate around the congregation! They had 13 offering boxes. Each of them was shaped like a trumpet and each one had a different purpose. There was a box for contributions to the building fund. One was for the priests' salary. One was for helping the poor. There was a box for a variety of ministries. When each individual went to put their tithe/offering into the box they would announce the amount of their gift and what it was to be used for. They might say: "£100 for a youth worker; £50 for Evangelism; £25 for a new chair; 50p for the vicar!"

It seems kind of preposterous that Jesus would say, as he did vs43: "... this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others ..." Two measly copper coins worth less than one penny, are said to be worth more than thousands of pounds. How can that be? What can you buy for a penny? I remember when I was a kid they still had those penny gumball machines, but I haven't seen one of those in years. In fact you can't even spend a penny nowadays! It will cost you 50p on the Embankment!

To fully understand what Jesus was teaching, we have to realign our thinking a little. Society today is enamoured with the size of wealth. The Sunday Times regularly produces lists of the wealthiest individuals and companies in the UK. We hear reports of the obscenely large salaries of professional athletes and of chief executives in the city. We hear about the great generosity of people who give thousands of pounds to charity. The bigger the gift the better, but that wasn't Jesus' view ...

God allows us to have money. It's all a gift from God. Even our ability to make it is a gift from God. He gives us money to use for the purposes. He put each of us on this planet to do. So, what can we learn from this story this morning?

#### Giving should be Sacrificial.

The first principle we can learn from this passage is that giving must be sacrificial. I remember reading about how Arnold Schwarzenegger, the Governor of California, was heavily criticized for some anti-Semitic comments and for hiding the involvement of his father with the SS during WWII. In his defence, it was noted that he'd given \$1 million to the Simon Wiesenthal Centre to support the Holocaust memorial fund. Schwarzenegger was praised for his generosity of spirit in giving \$1 million and, whilst it's great that he made that kind of contribution to such a worthy cause, it was no sacrifice for him. To us, \$1 million is a lot, but to Arnold it was small change, especially when we consider he was paid \$30 million for his role in 'Terminator 3' and, if we were to add up all the money he has made from his movie roles over the last 25 years, he's a multi-millionaire. The point I'm making is that giving \$1 million was something that was comfortable for Arnold. What Jesus was trying to teach his disciples, and us, is real giving must have an element of sacrifice. Jesus teaches us that:

***The amount of the gift does not matter:*** Mark 12:41 tells us that the rich people gave 'large amounts'. Amounts, which, to the average citizen would constitute a lot of money. I dare say some of those people in the Temple were probably rather proud of their 'large' contributions. I can imagine them trying to outdo each other, can't you! The priests were probably also very impressed and would be 'rubbing their hands' with glee planning what they could do with it! However, Jesus was not the least bit impressed by this, He noted: "*They all gave out of their wealth*" it was no sacrifice for them at all. God doesn't look at the amount given, He considers that it is:

***The sacrifice of the gift matters:*** Standing in sharp contrast to the wealthy folks who gave 'large amounts' stands a poor widow who has two virtually worthless copper coins to give. The word poor here literally means someone with few resources. At that time in history, being a widow usually meant that you were destitute, living at the mercy of someone else who may or may not help you out. There were no state handouts; no life insurance policies. The widow was left to make money and provide for herself anyway she could.

The Bible doesn't tell us how she obtained these two copper coins. Perhaps some kind person had pity on her and gave them to her. Perhaps she sold something she had made. Perhaps she found them on the side of the road. We don't know how she got this money, but the fact is that she gave everything she had. Jesus said of this widow's gift: "... *she, out of her poverty, put in everything – all she had to live on.*" The abundance of the rich folk means giving from their excess. The poverty of the widow means giving from her lack. She had next to nothing, and she gave every bit of it. Again we are confronted with a truth here. The sacrifice is what matters in our gift to God. We must ask ourselves: "Is my giving truly sacrificial?" We sacrifice for a new car or house that won't last forever, but we just can't bring ourselves to sacrifice for the eternal Kingdom of God.