

The Cost of Love

⁴¹ Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many who were rich put in much.

⁴² Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans.

⁴³ So He called His disciples to Himself and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury;

⁴⁴ "for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood."

(Mar 12:41- 44)

Perhaps you know the story behind the hymn "It Is Well With My Soul" Horatio Spafford was a wealthy lawyer, had four daughters and chose to take a holiday with his family in Europe. He was detained by business, and his wife and four daughter boarded the ship to take them to Europe. Mid-voyage, it was rammed by a British ship, and sank. Spafford's wife was found unconscious on some floating debris, but all four daughters had drowned. She telegraphed Horatio with the words "saved alone." Spafford broke down in tears, and collapsed to the ground. He would go on to write the hymn in response to his trial. But through those tears, he turned to a friend and said this, "I thank God that I can serve Him when it costs me."

When it costs. From the time of Cain and Abel, God has taught us that genuine faith and love for Him costs, it requires sacrifice. Whenever cost is removed from our walk with Him; whenever sacrifice turns into a controlled routine, love cools, and faith dies.

That's nowhere truer than in that area that tells us where our hearts are – our finances, and our giving. In this short account, we learn why giving that does not cost us doesn't shape us or really honour God.

The Lord had assumed full control over the Temple complex. He had come in on Sunday, cleansed it on Monday, and returned again on Tuesday, where he faced an examination from three different groups, passed their test, and confounded them with a test of his own.

Now, being in the Temple, Jesus was sitting in a place where He could observe the giving. In this Temple area, there were twelve trumpet shaped receptacles for people to give their money, for various reasons. Inscriptions were on each trumpet, stating the reason for giving into that one: paying for past neglect, paying for sacrifices, paying for incense and wood in the Temple, and other kinds of offering. Since the money given was in some form of coin, and since the receptacles were metal, each time a person gave, there was the tinkling, jangling, crashing sound of metal on metal. The more coins, the more noise. We remember the Lord teaching in Matthew 6 that giving was not to be a big public spectacle, but that's exactly what many had turned it into. They would approach, pull out their bag, and with the greatest possible clatter and clang, they would give a sonic announcement of how much they had just given. I'm sure some had found ways to allow the maximum amount of time elapse while their coins rang out in the treasury.

Some were able to give so much, that the Temple actually put a limit on how much could be given. Herod's temple had not only paid off every possible expense, they had stored up the equivalent of millions in today's money.

As Jesus observed, He saw some who put in huge amounts. We don't know how many of them were like those Pharisees mentioned a few verses earlier, whose sole motive was always honour, prestige, popularity, and the praise of man. There were many pious rich people in Jerusalem, we

meet one of them, Joseph of Arimathea, just a few chapters later. But certainly, among the wealthy, were the man-pleasers, who made a spectacle of their giving. Jesus did not say anything about them.

But then a quiet, forgettable character, made her way up to the treasury. The Saviour watched her, though she never knew that the Son of God was gazing upon her actions that day and what she had to give did not require a bag or a pouch to carry. She had only two mites. These two mites were equivalent to the smallest Roman coin, a quadrans. So small were these coins that one has estimated they were worth about six minutes of labour for a daily labourer.

We imagine her making her way up to one of those twelve receptacles. And without show, display, perhaps a silent prayer prayed while she gave, her two tiny coins were hardly even heard amongst the commotion and noise of all the gathered worshippers from all over Israel up for the Passover.

From the human point of view, an insignificant, powerless individual had just dropped the absolute minimum requirement into the Temple coffers. No one turned their heads, no one noticed, no one pointed and commented.

But one noticed. The One to whom and for whom all this giving was to be, He noticed. And in Heaven's eyes and Heaven's ears, she had done the equivalent of flooding the treasury with a priceless sum. Man heard hardly a tinkle, Heaven heard a gushing avalanche of treasure.

⁴³ *So He called His disciples to Himself and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury;*

Jesus, the Son of God, before whom there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we *must give* account, knew more than the casual observer could have known, and he summarises it this way: Her less was more, their more was less. Her amount, which was the Temple minimum was greater than some, who may have given close to the maximum amount as a proportion of their income.

So we are curious. We say, Lord, *More* in what way? *Less* in what way? She had not given more money from an accountant's point of view, that much is clear. The more is not the amount.

⁴⁴ *"for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood."*

It is not the portion that interests God, because He supplies it all anyway. The more is the proportion, the sacrifice. From the point of view of a lover, from the point of view of one counting love and faith, she had given far more than anyone there.

When it comes to portions, God supplies it all anyway.

For all things come from You, And of Your own we have given You. (1Ch 29:14)

He is not impressed by the size of the amounts, because that would mean He is somehow limited in resources, but He isn't.

¹⁰ *For every beast of the forest is Mine, And the cattle on a thousand hills.*

¹¹ *I know all the birds of the mountains, And the wild beasts of the field are Mine.*

¹² *"If I were hungry, I would not tell you; For the world is Mine, and all its fullness. (Psa 50:10-12 NKJ)*

God owns it all, and dispenses it as He pleases:

⁷ *The LORD makes poor and makes rich; He brings low and lifts up. (1Sa 2:7)*

What interests God is what happens after He has sovereignly dispensed. Of what He has given, how much do people keep for themselves, how much do they give What proportion is in their giving?

You could do this on a small scale in a family, or in a classroom of children. To some you give fifty cents, to another five rand, to another twenty, to another 200. Then you ask them to give freely, voluntarily. Since you gave all the money out, and since you have a lot more than the whole sum combined, you are not interested in who gives the largest portion. You are interested in proportions. The child that you gave two rand to, gives one rand – a whole fifty percent. The child you gave R200 to, gives R10, 5 percent. The child you gave R5 gives R4. This experiment is all about what's going on in the children's heart – how much do they trust, how much do they love you, how much do they see you as their supplier, do they spell 'mine' with a capital M, or a lower-case?

The proportion is an acid test for who you are trusting in, what you are relying on, who you really rely on, what you are prepared to live with, and what you are prepared to live without. Not the portion, but the proportion speaks volumes about your love and trust in God.

In the case of some of the wealthy that Jesus watched, they put in large sums. But as a proportion, it took little faith, and expressed little love. It did not really hurt, cost, or demand that they trust God to meet their need. Because of their abundance, it was just some extra fat on the side of their sirloin.

But for this widow, she gave what she was going to use to feed herself that day. Maybe someone had given her those two mites out of charity. And in an act that made the God of glory smile, she gave it all. Out of her poverty, she gave everything.

We saw this in our Scripture reading this morning. When David was offered a field for free, He insisted on paying for it. And when pressed, he said these immortal words which should be at the beating heart of our service for God:

nor will I offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God with that which costs me nothing." (2Sa 24:24 NKJ)

What wins hearts is sacrifice. It is the cost that displays the depth of the love. When lovers woo one another, they display their love with costliness, not with cold efficiency. You imagine a young man presenting his fiancée with a sparkling diamond. She sees it, and exclaims, "You shouldn't have!" He replies, "No, it was well within my budget, didn't hurt at all."

The Old Testament example of that kind of love were the priests in Malachi. They gave leftovers.

We see another example of this just a chapter later:

³ *And being in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, as He sat at the table, a woman came having an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard. Then she broke the flask and poured it on His head.*

⁴ *But there were some who were indignant among themselves, and said, "Why was this fragrant oil wasted?"*

⁵ *"For it might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor." And they criticized her sharply.*

⁶ *But Jesus said, "Let her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work for Me.*

⁷ *"For you have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good; but Me you do not have always.*

⁸ *"She has done what she could. She has come beforehand to anoint My body for burial.*

⁹ *"Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her." (Mar 14:3-9 NKJ)*

What I find interesting about this story is the false piety that was in the room. How could this extravagant waste of money take place? We need to meet practical needs around us! Look at the poor! Look at the ministry needs!

But Jesus has a heart bigger than a budget, and knows what she meant. She took that liquid, which cost the equivalent of a year's salary, and in one go, she pours it on Jesus. This is extravagant, lavish love. And Jesus rebukes their bean-counting. He says, you want practical results, this will anoint my body for burial. But more importantly, she has done what she could. She would not always have opportunity to express lavish love on the head of Jesus, and when she had the opportunity, she was extravagant.

Both these women, the poor widow who gave two mites, and this woman, who gave three hundred denarii, are now recorded forever in God's Word as a testimony to their lavish love.

So it follows that as God chooses to supply us with more, we become responsible to honour God with proportions that show, between us and God, that we are dependent, humble, trusting believers. The point is not that God calls us all to give 100% of our income. The point is that God is not impressed with jangling coins, or the amount of zeroes behind the bank transfer. The eternal God is looking through that at your soul, your heart, your loves, your desires. He looks to see, are you giving to yourself, to satisfy your own conscience, or are you giving to Me? Most people in the world don't know your income. You can fool everyone else that you are giving with a proportion that displays love, trust, and sacrifice but there is One who always knows how much you have, because He supplied it. And He is always watching to see what proportion you give? Has your heart shifted? Has your treasure moved?

Recently, one of the men in our church taught on giving. And he pointed out in that lesson that according to a 1988 Gallup poll, the more money Americans make, the less sacrificial their giving becomes. When they earn the equivalent of less than R100 000 they give typically 2.8% of income. When they earn between R100 000 and R300 000, it drops to 2.5% of income. When they get into the R300 000 to R500 000 range, it is down to 2%, and once in the R500 000 to R750 000 it drops to 1.5% of income. Probably because we deceive ourselves into thinking that larger amounts are what pleases God.

Also mentioned was R.G. Le Tourneau. Le Tourneau was a man who was a devoted believer. But he was an amazing inventor, and an incredibly successful businessman. Among his inventions were the first earthmover, the bulldozer, the airplane tow, and the first offshore oil drilling platform. During the years of the Great Depression, God still greatly blessed them. Year 1932 – Net Profit: \$52,055.61, 1934 – Net Profit: \$340,275.49, 1938 – Net Profit: \$1,412,465.68.

In 1935, with the gigantic profits pouring out of the manufacturing business, at the gentle suggestion of his wife Evelyn, they transitioned to a 90/10 split with the Lord. 90% went to the Lord and 10% went to RG and Evelyn. Le Tourneau was fond of remarking, “It’s not how much of my money I give to God, but how much of God’s money I keep for myself.”

Now Le Tourneau's story is not yours. Not everyone is called to, or is able to give away 90% of their income and have enough to comfortably live. But the point is, their needs were comfortably met, and they knew God had blessed them to be a blessing. For them to give even 10% of their income would have been fat off the sirloin.

They knew the principle, you can't take it with you, but you can send it ahead of you.

I suppose we can take the principle and extend it to that other resource which we all have, but which we don't all have the same amount of: time. What matters is not really just the amount of time you give to the Lord, but what proportion? When you could spend it on other things, other places, entertainment, leisure, or when you have no choice but you are forced to spend it on long hours at the office, non-stop demands from small children, a tight and pressed schedule; when you give God that hour, those two hours, that Wednesday night, that morning hour of prayer, Heaven smells a sweet fragrance.

Let me say to those of you for whom time is no longer sliced up as tightly as it used to be, perhaps you are retired, or have some situation where you have much more time on your hands: - it is the proportion that counts. Now that you have more, not the portion, but the proportion says to God, this much, I love you.

You have to ask, as she walked away from that treasury, what she was going to live on? What was going to be her supply? I wonder what was in her heart. Was she anxious? Was she afraid? Was she inwardly kicking herself? Was she grieved at having parted with her livelihood for the day?

Something in me tells me that this was not the first time she had done this. Something in me says she had on more than one occasion given what she had, walking away, knowing that God alone saw her, and had joy in her heart as she went away, knowing the faithfulness of Jehovah Jireh. Like the farmer who said, "I keep shovelling into God's bin, and He keeps shovelling into mine, and he has the bigger shovel!"

Here I bring this to its most important point: what motivated her and others like her? What motivated the breaking of an alabaster box over the feet of Jesus? What motivated R.G. Le Tourneau to start Christian camps and Bible colleges, and send missionaries? What motivated John Wesley to keep his expenses to 30 pounds a year, and give 30 000 pounds away?

I'll tell you what it wasn't: It wasn't guilt. I have seen enough presentations that try to make people feel guilty for their wealth, and hope that if they shed some of it, it will atone for their guilt. Guilt gets some to give, but it is no biblical motive.

It wasn't fear. I have heard some people suggest that if you don't give, some kind of curse will come over your income, and so giving is done out of fear that the supply might dry up. Fear might motivate some giving, but not biblical giving.

It wasn't pity. I have seen some missionary presentations with starving children and people living in deep poverty. The emotion is something like: feel bad for those who don't have your money! You can't live without money, so how can they? No, that doesn't create this kind of giving.

I'll tell you what's behind this kind of giving, and it comes from the mouth of the Apostle Paul:

¹⁴ *For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died;*

¹⁵ *and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. (2Co 5:14-15 NKJ)*

The love of Christ. What sets you free to break open alabaster boxes on the head of Jesus. What sets you free to drop in the two mites you were going to live on? It is when the Gospel of Jesus Christ lives in you and motivates you.

You see, the good news is all about a God who is lavish and generous. The Gospel we preach is about the Creator who made us for Himself but instead of loving Him and enjoying Him forever, we turned away, and we turned inward, we wanted to love and worship ourselves. We took the gifts and spurned the giver.

And then, this God, who had already given us a world to enjoy, now gave us His most priceless gift: His Son, the Prince. His most beautiful expression of Himself, the Word of God, the eternal Son, He gave Him – not to be worshipped the first time, but to be rejected, spat upon, humiliated, and crucified.

There, on that cross, Jesus took what you owed God, and paid for it. He took your guilt, and your penalty, and your punishment, and satisfied God's wrath. He gave up His fellowship with God, He gave up His experience of perfect, spotless holiness, and bore your guilt.

If you come to God with empty hands, desire to turn away from your sin, and know God, and worship and love Him, then do you know what He gives you? He gives you the righteousness of Jesus. He gives you a new heart. He gives you status as His child. He gives you a reserved place in Heaven. He gives you His Holy Spirit. He gives you every spiritual blessing in Jesus Christ.

When you have been forgiven and given, when you have not paid for a single of the richest blessings, and when you look at your Lord Jesus with broken-hearted gladness, that's where this kind of giving comes from.

When Christ is exceedingly precious to you, and perfumes your life with free grace, free promises, free and full joy, you do not find yourself murmuring about Christ's time demands, or about the unfairness of giving to Him when prices are rising around us. It is only the wicked and slothful who say to the Lord,

“You are a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. (Mat 25:24 NKJ)

Those who have freely received, freely give. When John 3:16 is experienced within, you want to echo the heart of God. You want to display your trust in Him. You want to be as David, as Mary, as the widow. You want it to cost, so that it says to the only One who knows the proportion: I love you because you first loved Me.

A people who love the Gospel love fleshing that out. They don't let their left hand know what their right is doing, it is not for men and to men that they do it. They do it for the Christ who died for them.

This week I heard a pastor say, there are three kinds of people: Those with much treasure on earth, and no treasure in Heaven, those with no treasure on Earth, and much treasure in Heaven, and those with treasure on Earth, and treasure in Heaven. I trust you will be in that third group, who live joyfully with the earthly treasures God gives, but then you give in ways that display your extravagant love for God, your profound trust in Him.