

Three blokes were discussing how they decide how much money they put in the offering.

- 1. “When I get my pay-packet, I put a bucket on the floor, and I throw all of the money up in the air, and what lands in the bucket, I put in the offering.”*
- 2. “I do something similar, but when I get my pay-packet, I throw it up in the air, and what **doesn’t** land in the bucket, I put in the offering.”*
- 3. “Who needs a bucket? I throw my entire pay-packet up in the air, and yell out “Take what you want!” ...*

It’s an oldie, but a goody.

We’ve been working our way through the Gospel of Luke. And whenever you work your way through a whole book of the Bible, it’s inevitable, that time to time, the topic that’s going to come up, is going to be on the subject of giving. And that’s where we’ve landed today.

And when it comes to how much we put in the offering, is it:

- a personal thing?
where each individual, makes a decision as to what **I** think **I** should do, and therefore (**whatever** I decide) that’s right for me?
2 Cor 9:7 Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for **God loves a cheerful giver.**
So, is it a personal thing? ; or

- an obedience thing?

After all, the giving of a tithe (10% of Gross Income) is **commanded** in the Old Testament.

And God said (through the Prophet Malachi), “Would man **rob** God? You are robbing me.” “How do we rob you?” “With your tithes and offerings, you are robbing me.”...

So, is it an obedience thing? And if I am **not** giving a tithe, am I robbing God of what is rightfully His? ;

But then again

- Is it a legal thing, that we are now free of?
“Tithes and offerings,,,, That’s all Old Testament stuff / Old Covenant stuff... We are free of those sorts of expectations now”, (some would say).

; or

- a blessing thing?

Where we put money into the offering, believing that “If I give, then God is going to bless me in return?”

And be in no doubt, there are a lot of offering messages out there, that present the offering as some kind of get-rich-quick-scheme, where if you give to God, He will give you more in return, and so you will be better off financially.

(BTW, that’s not what we teach here)

Or you could spiritualise it and say, “If you put more money in the offering, you’re going to have a nicer house in heaven....

What is **your** motivation for giving? How do **you** decide how much to give? Are you giving at all???

Not so long ago, Robyn had a conversation with a non-Christian colleague, and he knows I'm a pastor of a small independent church in St George, and he said,

- *“Does Michael get paid for what he does?”
Yeah, he's paid for 4 days / week.*
- *“Who pays him?”
The church does.*
- *How does the church get its money?
“People just make regular donations to the church.”*

And that just didn't compute for this bloke (I mean, he manages a lot of staff, and so he knows it costs a lot of money to pay wages) and he could not fathom this.

- *“Yeah, but surely donations don't cover the **whole** cost.”
“Yes they do”.*

*You see, he could not comprehend the fact that those who really love Jesus, are not living for today, and we **don't** cling to the things of today, and so we:*

- *Give; and*
- *Give generously;*
- *Sacrificially;*
- *Yes, some do tithe;*
- *Some give **more** than a tithe...*

And **non**-Christians find this hard to comprehend:– that there is such a thing as “a cheerful giver”...

They may be able to picture a person giving a one-off-gift, or a donation to a project if it pulls at your heart-strings (especially if it gives you a good tax deduction), but to sacrificially give, over and over again, that doesn't make sense to them.

But then again, some **Christians** haven't clicked onto this yet either... They have not yet discovered, the joyful worship of giving.

So, let's get into the reading.

Jesus is at the Temple, and they must have been in “The Court of the Women”, because that's where the offering boxes were. Apparently they were 13 trumpet-shaped offering boxes (small end at the top; big end at the bottom), and you'd put your money into the opening at the top.

And Jesus looked, and He saw the rich putting their gifts/offerings into the box. But what He really noticed, was a poor widow, who put in two of the smallest, **least** valuable coins that they had in their currency. Apparently it equated to about 1/100th of a denarii. (1/100th of a day's wage for a labourer) (so probably worth about \$2).

And Jesus said: "Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. [put together] ⁴ For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."

Now, what do we do with that? I mean, how do you feel about that? – how do you feel about a poor widow, giving all she has to the ministry of the temple/church???

You know, for those who are responsible for administering the finances of a church, this is one of the toughest things that one has to grapple with... When you see those, who might be the poorest members of the church,, and they're giving the most???

*There was a time (**before** I became a Pastor), and the church we were in had an appeal, And this old lady made a generous donation, and I knew she didn't have much money... And I wanted to say, "No, No. There are others who are far better off than you. They're the ones who should be giving." But they weren't, you see. And this old lady loved God and had a generous heart; and so she gave.*

And I wanted to stop her. But did Jesus stop the poor widow from giving? No.

I think of another time, where a young couple (with a young family) (weren't wealthy – basic wage-earners), had outgrown their current home, and wanted to buy a bigger one. So they sold their current home and bought another one, and they

wanted to donate 10% of the sale price of the home that they'd sold.

It wasn't

- *10% of the capital gain;*
- *10% of what they'd managed to pay off of their home-loan.*

They decided to donate to the church 10% of the entire sale price of their family home...

Now for me, I wanted to say, "Please, don't do that. Other people are in the church, who are in a far better financial position than you are. Some of them own 2 or 3 houses and you're trying to pay off one house..." But they just said, "No, we want to do this. There will be things that the church can do, that it wouldn't be able to do, if it didn't have this money. And God has blessed us, and we want to share that blessing."

And they were right. That money was a real blessing to the church, and there were new ministries opened up through their offering....

These are the things I think of, when I think of the story of the poor widow, giving all she had. And I am reminded that there **are** people, who live this out, today.

1.

It's what we call, "Sacrificial giving". They live out, the New Testament principle, of sacrificial giving.

Why does the concept of “giving”, become so complicated for Christians? You know, for some folk, before settling on a figure for their offering, some may want to:

- study all of the Old Testament concepts of:
 - tithes;
 - offerings;
 - alms;
 - free-will offerings;
 - giving of the first-fruits;
 - how the various sacrifices were used....
- go outside of the Bible and learn how Jewish culture evolved and what giving meant for them.
- study it;
- Learn it;
- There are even whole websites and whole **conferences** devoted to learning about the concept of giving...

I just wonder why we make it so complicated? The New Testament principal for giving, is simple. Godly giving, is **sacrificial** giving...

A couple of months ago, we were in Luke 18 where Jesus said to the Rich Ruler, “Sell up everything you have and distribute it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. And then come, follow Me.” Do you know what Jesus was describing? Sacrificial giving. And it’s not only the rich who store up treasure in heaven...

You know, sometimes we might feel “I’m not able to give, because I don’t have enough to give.” But what we’re learning here, is we **always** have enough to give. (the poor widow settled that matter for us). We **always** have enough to give. It isn’t about how **much** we give – it’s about how much we keep for ourselves...

What do I mean by that? Well, to become a Christian, is (in faith), to give your whole self to God. And so, everything we have, already belongs to God. It’s not about how much we give to God, because it all belongs to Him anyway... It’s about how much of what belongs to God, am I going to claw away from Him, and lavish on myself?

The poor widow, she only had the tiniest amount of money – maybe enough for her to buy enough grain for a loaf of bread. But she loved God so much, she sacrificed that little bit she had, and gave it to God.

So, when it comes to giving, let’s stop making it so complicated. The offering that God requires, is simple. A practice of “sacrificial giving.”

2.

Secondly, **when** we give, we actually relinquish control. Something I learned a long time ago, is often the hardest part of giving, is to let go, of **what** I’ve given. And I’ve learned that: if I **haven’t** relinquished control, I haven’t really given it

away. If I expect to manage what I've given, I haven't given it.

When the widow put in her little bit; **And** when the rich put in their gifts, they were relinquishing control – handing it over to God. And from the point of the giving, other people would then administer it, on behalf of God.

3.

Thirdly, Sacrificial Giving, enables us to live by faith.

When I was thinking about this, I asked myself the question:
*Am I too poor to give? ; Or
am I too rich, to live by faith?*

Think about that for a moment:
*Am I too poor to give? ; Or
am I too rich, to live by faith?*

Well, the answer to the first question is always “No”. I am **never** too poor to give, and neither are you. The poor widow gave us the answer to that question. In the Greek, it says that she gave/threw away her *bios* (life/livelihood)...

You see, Jesus taught us to pray, “Give us this day, our **daily** bread”. In other words, “Lord, give me today, what I need to survive, today.” Let me tell you, that's living by faith.

In the first few years of Bush Disciples, that was the first time that Robyn and I really had to live by faith. There were times

when we had bills coming due, and we just had to trust that God would provide. And He always did.

And when we live by faith, we experience the provision of God over and over again. And every time we experience the provision of God, our faith grows even more.

2 Corinthians 9:6-11 (ESV)

⁶ The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

(BTW, that's not about "You give money to God, and He'll give more money to you... It's talking about the harvest of souls, and the harvest of righteousness. If we invest into the Kingdom of God – if we sow our money into the Kingdom of God, by sacrificial giving, the harvest of souls/righteousness will be bountiful.)

⁷ Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.

(alright, so that's where he's saying, "I'll provide what you need – all sufficiency in all things at all times.)

⁹ As it is written,

"He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor;

his righteousness endures forever."

¹⁰ He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹ You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.

When we give sacrificially, God (in His Grace), provides our needs, so that we can be generous again..

Am I too poor to give? Absolutely not. And nor are you.
Am I too rich, to live by faith? Not if I begin to give sacrificially.

It wasn't sacrificial for the rich (that Jesus observed). They⁴ ...
all contributed out of their abundance

They still had oodles left over. **But** when we who are rich, begin to give sacrificially, wow, what a difference that makes.

What a difference it makes:

- for our own faith, as we trust in the Lord to carry us and to provide for our daily needs; and
- for the Kingdom (and we'll come to that shortly).

4.

Fourthly, What goes **un-**noticed by most, is **noted** by God.

Every giver; and every gift, (no matter how big and no matter how small) matters to God.

When it comes to storing up treasure in heaven, the rich may have a greater capacity to give but they do **not** have a greater capacity to store treasure in heaven. Are you with me? The Lord notices the **sacrifice** of giving, not the amount of the gift.

Jesus said **this poor widow has put in more than all of them.**

She probably didn't do it, to **be** noticed, but God always notices.

5.

Fifthly, sacrificial givers, are blessings to the Kingdom, and are blessed by God.

Every single love gift offering, that is made to our God, counts. I've been involved in church leadership for a lot of years. And in every single church that I've been involved in, things are not always as they appear.

There are some who give, out of their abundance. And there are others who give sacrificially. And whether it's a rich person who gives sacrificially, or whether it's a poor person who gives sacrificially, it makes no difference to God...

And when the people of God **are** giving sacrificially, **wow**, what a difference that makes for a church, and it makes a difference for the Kingdom of God.

I've been in churches at times, where the culture seemed to be (I'm not sure what it is, but "*We've gotta keep the church poor.*")... And some churches just always seem to be "doing it tough". And the topic of the AGM (most years), is going to be "How are we going to try and make ends meet this year?".

But then other churches have a culture of sacrificial giving... It's when we love the Lord with every part of our being, and we give Him our all...

And it is a blessing for a church to be in that space... Where you don't have to worry about money – you just do what God has called you to do...

But the **greatest** blessing, is the spiritual blessing – Storing treasure in heaven (if you like). It's a harvest of righteousness.

6.

Finally, we give what is temporary, for things of **eternal** value.

The reason we carried the Bible reading through to V9, was to serve as a reminder that things in this life are temporary. Even God's temple (with its fine stones and its offerings) would be destroyed. And it was. And there is a time that is coming, where things of this world, will pass away,, But in faith, we store treasure in heaven.

Let's conclude by reading that passage from 2 Corinthians again:

2 Corinthians 9:6-11 (ESV)

⁶ The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. ⁹ As it is written, "He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever."
¹⁰ He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹ You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father,
we want to thank You
for Your ceaseless provision.

Give us faith, to know that You
will always provide what we need.

And Lord,
Fill our hearts with a loving generosity.
To give generous offerings, for ministry and mission.
And on **top** of that, to be generous to the poor and the
needy.

Lord, may we embrace the way
of sacrificial giving...
Not just giving You the left overs
while we keep the abundance,
But giving You "the first"
Giving You "the all".

And Lord, we thank You,
for this Poor Widow, who was filled with faith,
And gave it all.
Thank You for her example;
and may we also,
give to You, our very bios – our very life/livelihood.

In Jesus' Name,
Amen.