

# Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: [truthfortoday@aol.com](mailto:truthfortoday@aol.com)

**Broadcast Date:** 3 September 2006

**No.** T0434

**Speaker:** Mr. David Pulman

## What can I do?: The Widow's two mites

When our children were small, my wife and I encouraged them to save some of the money they received. We took them along to a building society and opened accounts for them. Our son who was pre-school age duly handed over to the person at the counter his one pound. The next day he wanted to go back to the building society to check that his pound was still there. It took a little while for him to realise that his money was safe, that he could access it at any time and that it was working for him – gaining interest. What we have from God - is it working for Him?

Our talk today is the last in a three part series under the title "What can I do?" The previous two weeks have covered the specific events of "The boy with the loaves and fishes" and "The cruse of oil and the flour". 'What can I do?' is a question which, as a Christian, I need to give serious thought to, concerning the activities I can be usefully employed in, for my Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.

Experience with Christians and in secular employment has identified to me the following types of people:-

1. Those who never seem to see what needs to be done
2. Those who see but wait to be asked and
3. Those who see and get on and do whatever is needed.

Our question turns things around and presents a challenge to all Christians. We need to take stock of ourselves: what are my qualities, abilities and primarily what do I think the Lord wants me to do. Next, we need to look at the situation in which we find ourselves, my local Christian fellowship. Are there things needing to be done?

Experience has shown that there is usually something waiting to be done. Now I have talked so far in general terms. The Bible clearly teaches that, as believers and members of the body of Christ, we all have a function, that is, a work to do. Remember the teaching in 1 Corinthians chapter 12 where Paul talks about the eye, the ear, the nose, the hand and the foot. Each is a useful member of the body and they are all needed. Therefore, we are assured that we are needed and we do have a role in which to act responsibly. Paul at the beginning of the chapter touches on gifts and in verse 11 shows that the giving of them is under the control of the Spirit of God. To understand what our gift might be requires much patient waiting upon the Lord Jesus. Chapter 13 teaches that whatever gift I might have; it is to be used in love. Love considers others before self and seeks their wellbeing. However, above all, when the gift is used it should bring honour and glory to our Lord Jesus Christ. We should be in the background!

Now, when we think of gifts we often immediately consider those that make us more prominent in the eyes of others. In verse 28, there is a gift which I believe everyone is given – helps. We should all exercise this gift to the full. If we were all helping one another then there would be fewer problems in our fellowships. Helps is positive. Helps brings encouragement, builds up, supports those in need, and looks out for each other. Keeping this gift of "helps" in mind will enable each of us to see "What can I do?"

Let us turn to our specific subject for today, "The widow's two mites".

Who live longer, men or women? Statistics dealing with this question show that women live longer than men! If you visit homes for the elderly, you will usually see more women than men. However, it is also true to say that individual experience may not agree with statistics. When we turn to the scriptures, we do find widows mentioned but not widowers as such. However, there are widowers in scripture even if the term is not used. What we do find, is that widows are singled out as worthy of special caring attention. However, in practice, they are often seen, not as recipients of care, but as caring for others.

In recent times, we have had two major natural disasters in the world. At the end of 2004 there was the Asian Tsunami and in the late summer of 2005 a massive earthquake in Pakistan. Both caused a huge amount of destruction and loss of life. As a result, there was a tremendous response by many millions of people in giving to the respective disaster funds.

When the Lord Jesus was here, one institution in the land of Judea expected people to give generously towards its daily running costs. This was the temple at Jerusalem. Our title "The Widow's Two Mites" has to do with the support of

the Temple. Now two mites is equivalent to a tenth of one new pence (UK). It was not a huge sum by any means. Let us read from Mark chapter 12 a few verses which include the story of the widow and her two mites.

Then Jesus said to them in His teaching, "Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces, the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts, who devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation." Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many who were rich put in much. Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans. 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; for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood." Mark 12:38-44.

I read the earlier verses as both a background and a contrast to the giving by this poor widow. Widows were easy prey to unscrupulous scribes. Instead of being godly and looking after the poor and the widows, the scribes saw them as easy prey in order to accumulate wealth. This was certainly not in the spirit of the gift of "helps" mentioned earlier. At the same time, those same scribes liked to be held in high esteem; they sought out the best places in society and liked to be publicly greeted as they walked about town. It made them feel good and important and, because of their wealth, they dressed well to match the place in society they aspired to. We have the same kind of attitude today by some, that their wealth implies somehow that they are superior to the not so well off. This is contrary to Christian teaching and should not be a quality found in believers.

One day the Lord Jesus is sitting near the treasury where people brought their temple gifts and offerings and He observes the people as they gave and how much they gave. As an object lesson, the Lord Jesus contrasts the giving of the wealthy with a poor widow woman to teach the disciples, not solely about giving but also about attitudes. In absolute value, the widow probably gave the least. However, the widow by percentage gave 100% and the wealthy probably considerably less!

The Lord Jesus, being God, knew all about the people as they came to give, the amount they gave and their unspoken motives. Nothing is hidden from God. What therefore do we learn from this observation? We are told three things about the woman;

- she was a widow
- she was poor
- and she possessed a positive godly attitude.

In the Bible there are a number of widows mentioned: Tamar in Genesis who was taken advantage of, ignored and denied her rights. Ruth the Moabitess was both a widow and a foreigner but, through various circumstances, God provided an answer to her need. The widow of Zarephath who looked after Elijah the prophet was a most unlikely candidate to take in a non-paying lodger. Through Elijah God provides sustenance for His servant, the widow and her son. In addition, the people of Israel were reminded to care for widows and others at harvest time. Gleanings from the fields were to be left for the poor, fatherless and widows. Finally, throughout the Scriptures, God has taught His people not to oppress the widow but to care and provide for them. In 1 Timothy, we are reminded that the primary care for widows lies with the members of her own family but, where there are none, then the assembly of God's people were to take on that responsibility. In a similar way, the poor were to be cared for and looked after. It was not God's intention that the poor suffer. God's people were to provide and help as necessary.

The widow's poverty is highlighted by the very small sum of money that she places into the temple treasury collection. We might think that on a practical level this woman could be excused giving, and that would be a very logical conclusion. Now, although faith is not mentioned in this story, we see faith in action and it is a direct result of the woman's commitment. The commitment being demonstrated in the two mites is huge in comparison to the value of the gift.

In verse 42 it states "a certain poor widow". Now, when we have the word "certain" used it is often to bring to our attention specific teaching. In Luke chapter 10 we have a situation where the Lord Jesus is asked the question, "Who is my neighbour?" Then Jesus answered and said: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.' So which of these three do you think was neighbour to him who fell among the thieves?" And he said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise." Luke 10:29-37.

The Lord Jesus expands on the definition of neighbour and highlights what our response should be to those in desperate need. Widows fall into this category. In Luke chapter 7, we have a different situation when the Lord Jesus is confronted with a second hand request! "A certain centurion's servant, who was dear to him, was sick and ready to die. So when he heard about Jesus, he sent elders of the Jews to Him, pleading with Him to come and heal his servant. And when they came to Jesus, they begged Him earnestly, saying that the one for whom He should do this was deserving, 'for he loves our nation, and has built us a synagogue.' Then Jesus went with them. And when He was already not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to Him, saying to Him, 'Lord, do not trouble Yourself, for I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof. Therefore, I did not even think myself worthy to come to You. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man placed under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it.' When Jesus heard these things, He marvelled at him, and turned around and said to the crowd that followed Him, 'I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!' And those who were sent, returning to the house, found the servant well who had been sick." Luke 7:2-10.

We have a centurion soldier who was unsure of his reception by the Lord Jesus – he was a foreigner! However, he was also a person of compassion who valued even his slave servant. As the story unfolds, he also demonstrates great faith in the Lord Jesus – just say the words of healing. No one needs to be at a distance away from God. The Lord Jesus came to make God accessible. The Lord Jesus invites everyone to come to Him. God desires our blessing. The centurion was also demonstrating responsibility towards those who were under his care. This impacts all walks of society today - family life, business life and social life. We have a responsibility of care towards others. Even though our responsibility is greater towards our family than in other spheres, every life is precious in the eyes of God. We are told in the book of Genesis that people are made in the image of God. Let us be careful how we handle the "image of God"!

Likewise, with our "certain poor widow" in this story of the two mites, the Lord Jesus honours this woman by saying that her donation was greater than all the others. They gave a percentage of what they had. The widow gave all she had!

There is a reverse story in Acts 5 where Ananias (a different Ananias to the one in Acts 9) and his wife Sapphira, seeking to impress the apostles, sold some land. Ananias and Sapphira were like the scribes in our story of the widow. But, they kept part of the proceeds for themselves and pretended to give the whole amount for the relief of the poor. God's judgment on them through the apostle Peter was severe – they both died!

Seeking to make a good impression, which is not a reflection of our heart, is deception and not a Christian virtue. Deception is a lie and that does not please God. God is looking for reality from what is in our hearts through to our actions and words. This is living out our Christianity.

The Lord Jesus was concerned with the detail and two mites from this woman was extremely important. So what lesson do we learn from the story of the poor widow? In 1 Timothy 5:5, we learn one of the hallmarks of a Christian widow. "Now she who is really a widow, and left alone, trusts in God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day." Such people are worthy of our care and as believers we are responsible to meet the needs of such people in our congregations. In verse 4 there are specific exceptions. Family responsibilities come before local church responsibilities. In addition, a widow should live a godly life, not living in pleasure, verse 6. Finally, the widow needs to be of a certain age, presumably beyond working age and not remarried, verse 9.

Let us go back to the commitment of this widow and see what lessons we can learn. The widow could have said, "I have not much, not even enough to live on. I will not bother giving!" Christians in western countries are often able to give out of their abundance and dubbed "cheque book" givers! There is no challenge to give out of our abundance especially when giving does not cause us pain!

A parallel to the widow's giving is the support of our own "church" buildings and the associated costs. As you go around the places where Christians meet, the majority of places are old and the associated maintenance costs are large. Nevertheless, this is not the only area of giving that impact upon believers. There is the need to support full or part time Christian workers. There are a vast number of Christian organisations operating in almost all countries around this world, providing hospital services, education, food and shelter, orphanages, aircraft services and the list could go on. There are the missionaries working in other countries depending upon free will giving by their supporters in the home country. Yet it is probably fair to say that if we give to the kind of things mentioned, we probably only give a percentage - not like the widow!

I am reminded of what Job said when the various disasters came upon him, "The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD", Job 1:21. Here was a man who understood who really owns what we have, and in those, distressing circumstances does not blame God but rather blesses the name of the Lord. When we read about the widow, there is no indication that she blamed God for her circumstances but rather, by her actions, she blessed His name.

How do we achieve the same attitude as Job and this poor widow? I believe it is more than making the commitment to give more of our wealth - it has to be a total life change. This I believe is illustrated in Romans 12:1-2, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world: but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." If we are totally given over to God we will present our bodies as a living sacrifice, this is the result of commitment of mind – a change, which, considers every aspect of this world from God's point of view. Verse 2 states, "Be not conformed to this world". This affects interests, conversation, fashion, habits, hobbies and a whole host of other things that are associated with life and living.

I believe the challenges from the "Widow's two mites" are as follows:-

1. commitment to the Lord Jesus
2. a changed life style
3. what I do is to be with a 100% attitude
4. each believer is a valuable asset in the body of Christ.

We all have at least one gift. Let us each use that gift as the widow used hers!

I came across the following verse recently:

*Go on, go on: there's all eternity to rest in,  
And far too few are on the active service list.  
No labour for the Lord is risky to invest in;  
But nothing will make up, should His "Well done" be missed.*

---

**Please Note:**

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1. Large Print copies of this document are also available upon request.