

A Giving God

And He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury, and He saw also a certain poor widow putting in two mites. So He said, "Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all; "for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had." Luke 21:1-4



I want you to recall a time in your childhood when you received an unexpected gift. Maybe it was something you had wished for, but thought you would never get. Then lo & behold your wildest dream came true and you received that gift. What joy you experienced!

Our story is like that.

But there's also a twist to our story. At first glance it might appear quite simple to understand. But it's a bit like say the Lindy Chamberlain case with her baby, Azaria. It's a story with a real twist, there's a real mystery that surrounds it.

What do you mean you say? "A child could understand this simple story. It's as plain as the nose on your face. All you have to do is look at the facts."

They are; a poor widow in the temple puts into the collection plate her life savings.

Christ agrees we should do the same, end of story.

Now immediately there's a problem with this, if we really think about it. What's the problem with this understanding?

Well, let's take one. Christ says I should follow the example of this women and give away all I have.

Now traditionally this has been the way this passage has been understood.

If you give away the very income you need to live on. So you're out on the street.

So you see the problem if we take a literal interpretation of the passage. Not everyone can follow the example of these women. It's just not practical!

If this is not what the story means, then what does it mean?

There's another understanding of this passage that says. "It's all about the heart attitude of the women. She gave her all to God so should we. We need to have this giving attitude, a giving heart, that's what it's all about."

Again I want to challenge this, why? Well yes on the face of it, there can be no doubt that this poor widow had this giving spirit about her.

Now if this is all we see in our story I want to suggest we are poorer for having read it, because again there's a problem. What about those days, when I wake up & my attitude is not one of giving. In fact the opposite is the case. I don't feel in the least like giving anyone anything let alone God.

I want to be very brave and suggest that, if this is all we understand this story to teach then we have failed to understand it properly.

Let me see if with God's help we can unravel the twist behind this story.

We've got these pictures of the puzzle in our hand. How are we going to get them to make sense? Yes all right I see what you're saying, so what's your point.

Well we need to step back if you like from the crime scene.

We need to establish some parameters, some boundaries to make sense of it. Are there any clues around our story?

I want to suggest some clues to unlock the twist to our story.

The first is at the beginning of Luke's gospel.

Why is Luke writing his gospel?

Luke tells us in chapter 1:3 "It seemed good for me also, having perfect understanding from the very first to write to you an orderly account...why? That you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed..."

What I'm writing about is fact; you can have known doubts about it. These are the facts of the case. You can trust these for your salvation.

Apply that to our story. Luke could have left this story out of his gospel but he didn't. So we ask why he included it. Mark includes it, so does Matthew. So they must be important.

Well if we go to our crime scene and look around the area for clues, maybe there we will discover something.

And what do we discover? In Luke 19 we find Christ has entered Jerusalem, the people rejoice and praise God and say..."Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord..." This is His coronation as the King of the Jews.

The people acknowledge God has at last given them a King who is different from previous ones.

He weeps over Jerusalem, He says it's going to be destroyed, and then he goes into the temple.

Here, I suggest is another clue. Our stories got something to do with the Temple. What does he do in the temple? He cleanses and says, "My house shall be a house of pray, but you have made it a den of thieves." So hear is our second clue I suggest. There are people in our story how are not what they should be. Who are these thieves? Well they are the religious leaders, the chief priests, elders and scribes. cf. 20:1 They confront His Authority, they try to trick Christ. Then He tells them a parable cf. 20:9-18

Next the Pharisee's question Christ's authority. Then the Sadducees question Him about the resurrection.

Then He gives this warning to the disciples about the scribes.

What light, what clues does this shed on our story here?

Well Christ has talked about the temple and about the resurrection and given us a warning about religious impostors. Laying aside this

Our crime scene in the story focuses around the Temple; and here is this woman comes to worship and about new life.

So here is a woman who is a widow. Christ has just spoke about God who is the God of the Living, what is more Christ says he is Lord, King, king over the enemy of death & His enemies.

How does this relate to our story? Well here is a widow, one who has suffered loss because of the "wages of sin." She lives in a fallen world, Broken by sin, no longer perfect. But she worships a God who is alive. He is the source of life, all life but more importantly eternal life.

She lives in a world of false religion, v46-47.

But her God is not one who is false and takes, but he is true & real. He is the God who gives.

And as she stands in this great temple thoughts flood into her mind

wonderful thoughts...

He is the God who made this world and me. He is my creator, my maker. And she says in her widowhood...

"The Lord gave & the Lord took away, blessed be the name of the Lord...Job 1:21

She recalls this giving God provided a mighty deliverance to His people from Pharaoh's army and saved them in the great Exodus. And how He gave them the heavenly food so they would not go hungry.

She recalls this is the giving God of Ruth... Boaz comes to her as her Kinsman Redeemer; she gleans in his field so she doesn't go hungry.

Then we read this wonderful story in Ruth 3:6-13

"So she went down to the threshing floor and did according to all that her mother-in-law instructed her. And after Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was cheerful, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain; and she came softly, uncovered his feet, and lay down.

Now it happened at midnight that the man was startled, and turned himself; and there, a woman was lying at his feet. And he said, "Who are you?" So she answered, "I am Ruth, your maidservant. Take your maidservant under your wing, for you are a close relative."

Then he said, "Blessed are you of the LORD, my daughter! For you have shown more kindness at the end than at the beginning, in that you did not go after young men, whether poor or rich.

"And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you request, for all the people of my town know that you are a virtuous woman." Now it is true that I am a close relative; however, there is a relative closer than I.

"Stay this night, and in the morning it shall be that if he will perform the duty of a close relative for you--good; let him do it. But if he does not want to perform the duty for you, then I will perform the duty for you, as the LORD lives! Lie down until morning."

God gives, He gives us what we need, a Kinsman Redeemer, Christ is this person, our near relative.

And we could go on the promises made by the prophets how this giving God will provide a Saviour to redeem His people.

So what is Luke doing here? He is showing us that God is a God who gives and that here in our story we have an example not of the women giving but of God giving to her. So our story is about God, The God who is self-giving and it's only as we understand as this women does that our responses to him will follow and make him happy.

What is Christ saying in his commendation read v3 she out of her poverty but in all her income. How could he say that?

Here is the answer. She realises she had an abundant God, a giving God. This temple she worships at she knows is the place where God dwells with his people. He comes to presence Himself with her!

Now Christ is the Temple. He has promised His presence with us.

"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me." John 15:4

But why? For He is the abundant giving God. The apostle this John says this, "For God so love that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. John3:16

What a giving God! To give His Son so we may not be condemned but have new life if we will put our complete confidence in Him and not ourselves.

What did the apostle say "Though He was rich, yet he came poor." He gave Himself for our...what sins

Christ gave Himself. Did He need to? No God is also just and doesn't need us or need to redeem us from sin.

So our story is about God and Christ, God gives life through sending Christ His son who becomes poor, he is King, yet he lays aside his glory, What do we read in Philippians 2:5-11?

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men."

"And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross."

"Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

So in this dear women's heart is this crescendo of praise.

We don't know, if she understood about Christ, we are not told, but I believe we have a window into her heart.

She gives her all in response to The God of the Covenant,
The God of Abraham & Moses and David, the God of her Fathers.

Her heart bursts within her, and she says, "how can I not give Him my all?"

He has given me everything, my life; He is my God, My salvation. My Hope,
My peace, He is my righteousness.

Yes I'm a sinner. But oh our God has come to dwell amongst us, so I might know him by His spirit.

He has promised to give me a new heart and put a new spirit in me. Don't you dare praise me, praise my God.

But doesn't Christ give us the interpretation in his warning to the rich? Yes & No. Yes in that it is a rebuke to the rich her, but no in that what surrounds the passage and the whole of the Bible must interpret it. So where does that leave you and me this afternoon?

If you are not a Christian, you need to become one. Why?

Because Christ says you are a sinner; in other words you are living independently from God. You life in focused not on self-giving but on your self. In other words you believe in your self. Your goodness, your self worth.

God says because of your rebellion against Him your must be judged and punished for living this way. Why? Because He is this giving God who has provided a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Only He has lived a perfect life, free from sin. But there is more. He has given His life on the cross and taken the punishment of His Father's anger. This is so people no longer need to face God's wrath and judgement. He can forgive your rebellion and bring you into a new relationship with Himself and Christ. Giving you His Holy Spirit to empower you to be self-giving to God and others.

Respond to his life and death, He promises you life eternal life, but there is a cost. It will cost you your life. You must start trusting Him and living for Him.

But if you are a Christian what should your response be?

You say I'm old, I can't do much, give much.

Yes, but God calls you to live a life of worship to God; the reflex of your heart should be to continue to trust Christ for what He has done for you. He will give you the grace to live for Him and the grace to die well.

What did the apostle Paul say? For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain!

May our hearts give Him our all because He has given us His greatest gift; Christ and His salvation.

