

WIDOWS OF THE BIBLE

WIDOW'S MITE: LESSON ONE

by Sandy Harber

"And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury...." Mark 12:41a

It's Tuesday of Passion Week. In three more days Jesus will be dead. Just yesterday He had cast the sellers and moneychangers out of the Court of Gentiles (Mk. 11:15-17). The 750 square foot outer enclosure of the sanctuary was called the "Court of Gentiles" because Gentiles were not allowed any farther into the Temple complex. Here animals could be purchased for sacrifice. In addition, foreign money could be exchanged for sacred coinage. Jewish males were required to pay a half-shekel Temple tribute every year. Foreign coins, which bore the likeness of human rulers, were disallowed because of the commandment against graven images (Ex. 20:4-5). The merchants charged exorbitant prices, which caused an angry Jesus to label the place "a Den of Thieves" (Mk. 11:17).

Today would be the last day that Jesus would visit the Temple. He sat quietly in the Court of Women (Jewish men and women were allowed in this court) observing the people as they cast their tithes and offerings into the treasury. The "Court of Women" was so called because Jewish women were not allowed to proceed any further into the Temple complex (Jewish men could proceed into the Court of Israel). It was located just beyond the Court of Gentiles. Thirteen treasure chests, or "trumpets," were placed against the walls around this 200 square foot court. These chests were shaped like trumpets, being narrow at the mouth and wide at the bottom. Trumpets 1 and 2 were designated for the half-shekel tribute money. Trumpets 3 through 9 were reserved for the receipt of what was legally due by worshippers. Trumpets 10 through 13 were there for voluntary offerings.

Does it seem strange that Jesus would care how much the people contributed to the Temple treasure? Especially today, three days before His crucifixion. Surely He had more important matters on His mind.

On Sunday, Jesus had ridden into Jerusalem amidst shouts of "Hosannah" (Mk. 11:9). "Hosannah" means "save now." The people wanted a political savior, a warrior, who would save them from Rome and restore Israel to its former glory, as it was in the days of Kings David and Solomon. The sad thing is that Jesus would have done that if the heart of Israel had been toward Him and if the people had repented of their sins. But they were not ready and Jesus wept for their loss (Lk. 19:41).

On Monday, He entered the Temple complex and found His Father's "House of Prayer" had been converted into a "Den of Thieves" (Mk. 11:17). Jesus overturned the tables and drove the merchants from the court. For the second time! Three years earlier, at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, He had cleansed the Temple in exactly the same manner (Jn. 2:13-16). Nothing had changed in the Temple, the center of the Jewish religion, in the three years. The same three years in which the Son of God taught daily in the cities and towns of Israel. Individuals believed in Him and were saved. Nationally, Israel was lost.

Today (Tuesday), Jesus walked past the same merchants at the same tables that he had overturned, where animals were sold and money was exchanged, as He headed into the Court of Women. How discouraging it must have been to know that the merchants were continuing to cheat the worshippers. And, so, He sat by the treasury and observed the worshippers paying their tithes and offerings. But, Jesus, the omniscient Son of God, saw more than just the worshipper casting his/her money into the treasury. He saw into their hearts. He knew their thoughts, motives, and attitudes. Were they giving out of a heart of love for and gratitude to the God of Israel? Or, was giving a duty, a part of a ritual strictly adhered to outwardly to be seen of others and thought "spiritual?"

What about you? Do you give your tithes and offerings to God because of your love for Him? Are you thankful for the blessings He had bestowed and happy to give back to Him? Or, is this a duty, a chore, that you are expected to perform? How do you give? Jesus is watching.

"Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver." II Corinthians 9:7