

Week of April 1-7

BIGGEST BILL OFFERING

Scripture Reading: Read Luke chapter 21

When I was in college, I attended a Sunday evening service that featured a guest speaker from my college. While I can't remember his message, I do remember his conclusion. He asked everyone present to take out their wallets or purses. He then instructed us to reach in and take the biggest bill we had and give it to God as an offering when the plate went by. I opened my wallet and saw a \$20.00 bill and some ones. My heart sank. I was a poor college student and the thought of giving up my \$20.00, even for God, was not a pleasant thought. If I didn't do it, I would feel guilty as if I didn't love God enough. If I did do it, I would be angry, like I was pressured into giving it. I felt torn. I ended up giving the offering out of guilt but, then, never came to church again with more than a \$1.00 bill in my wallet so I wouldn't be manipulated like that again with an offering!

Our chapter reading today opens with an offering as well. It wasn't at a church service following a manipulative plea to give. Rather, it was at the temple where people were putting offerings in the temple treasury. Interestingly, according to Mark's gospel, Jesus sat down opposite the treasury and watched what people were giving. One by one, the worshippers came to give. Many rich people came and gave their "biggest bill" for the offering. Finally, a poor old widow came forward and placed two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a day's wage, into the contribution box.

While the crowds present may have been impressed with the "biggest bill" offerings of the rich. Jesus was impressed with the sacrificial giving of the poor widow. In fact, after calling his disciples to him, he announced the winner of the "biggest bill" offering contest: *"I tell you the truth," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."*

What? You can't be serious, Jesus? The poor widow won? And with only two small coins? But Jesus wasn't kidding. In the Lord's eyes, it's not the size of the gift that determines its worth but the motivation of the heart with which it is given. For this widow, it was sacrificial worship. It's not unlike what the apostle Paul noticed in the Macedonian church (2 Cor 8:2-3,5): *"Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity...they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. ... And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will."*

The widow's offering impressed Jesus. It flowed from the right heart and was given for the right reason. It was a sacrifice of worship and an expression of her faith in God's provision for her need. The next time you give your tithes and offerings to the Lord, follow the widow's example. Give your "biggest bill" to the Lord.

Action Step & Prayer Focus: Examine your giving practices to the Lord. Is it worship for you or work? Repent where necessary and resolve to give your best to the Lord.

Take-away: *The biggest "bill" isn't measured by the size of the offering but the amount of the sacrifice and the condition of the heart.*