

GIVING FROM WHERE?

IF YOU EVER HAD NOTICED THERE ARE A NUMBER OF TIMES THAT IN THE SERMON A QUESTION IS ASKED. THE FAITH WE HAVE IS SOMETHING PERSONAL AND YET BY ACTIONS WE SHARE IT WITH OTHERS. **WHEN WE HAVE A “LIVING” FAITH IT CAN BE THOUGHT OF AS HAVING TWO PARTS – WHERE WE ARE IN OUR FAITH JOURNEY AND WHERE WE WANT TO BE.** I HAVE HEARD IT CALLED “*SPIRITUAL TENSION*”. IT IS OUR LIFE STRUGGLE, AND THAT IS WHAT IT REALLY IS. IN OUR HEARTS THE DESIRE TO BE MORE CHRIST-LIKE SHOULD ENCOURAGE US TO MOVE AHEAD.

ON THIS DAY WHEN WE ARE REMEMBERING VETERANS THERE ARE MANY STORIES OF COURAGE IN THE FACE OF OVERWHELMING ODDS, YET THE SOLDIER MOVED FORWARD. THERE ARE ALSO MANY STORIES OF STRUGGLES PEOPLE HAVE FACED DOWN THROUGH HISTORY, THE JEWISH PEOPLE, CHRISTIAN REFUGEES, AND MOTHERS PROTECTING THEIR CHILDREN TO A POINT OF DEATH. **ALL THESE PEOPLE POSSESSED SOMETHING INTANGIBLE THAT DROVE THEM TO MOVE FORWARD DESPITE THE CIRCUMSTANCES. OUR FAITH SHOULD DO NOTHING LESS.**

HAVE WE BECOME COMFORTABLE OF WHERE WE ARE OR THINK WE ARE? THEN WE ARE LOSING GROUND IN THE WORLD AROUND US. ANY ATHLETE THAT COMPETES IS TAUGHT TO NEVER LET UP. OUR WALK OF FAITH DESCRIBED IN I Corinthians 9:25-27 *“So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control...”*

THIS IS WHY WE STUDY THE SCRIPTURES, YEAR AFTER YEAR, SUNDAY AFTER SUNDAY AND HOPEFULLY DAY AFTER DAY. DEPENDING ON WHERE WE ARE IN OUR WALK OF FAITH THIS “LIVING WORD” HAS APPLICATION TO WHERE WE ARE RIGHT NOW IN OUR LIFE, NOT YESTERDAY OR TOMORROW BUT RIGHT NOW, TODAY. WHEN WE “TRAIN” WE ARE NOT IN THE SAME PLACE TODAY AS WE WERE YESTERDAY OR WE WILL BE TOMORROW. WHAT WE CAN LEARN AND HOW WE CAN APPLY IT WILL BE UNIQUELY DIFFERENT EACH TIME WE HEAR OR STUDY THE WORD OF GOD. THAT IS THE MYSTERY OF THE LIVING WORD AND OUR FAITH.

LET'S LOOK AT THIS SITUATION IN TODAY'S GOSPEL READING. WE CAN EXPECT GOD TO SAY SOMETHING TO US, RIGHT WHERE WE ARE TODAY. **JESUS SPOKE MANY TIMES ABOUT NOT LOOKING BACK, BUT TO LOOK FORWARD.** WE ARE A FORGIVEN PEOPLE AND GOD'S DESIRE IS FOR US TO GROW SPIRITUALLY AND WE CANNOT DO THAT IF WE ARE ALWAYS LOOKING BACK.

LET'S FOCUS ON THE WIDOW. YOU MAY SAY “HERE'S A WIDOW AND SHE GAVE IT ALL. JESUS PRAISES HER GIVING TO HIS DISCIPLES. WHAT AN EXAMPLE FOR US ALL!!! END OF STORY, SERMON OVER. NO, NOT BY A LONG SHOT!!!! **I LOVE HOW THE WORDS OF JESUS CAN SAY SO MUCH MORE TO US THAN IS WRITTEN.** THIS IS REALLY NOT SO MUCH AN EXAMPLE ABOUT GIVING AND THEREFORE CAN BE THIS

GREAT STEWARDSHIP MESSAGE TO GET UNDER PEOPLE'S SKIN, FEEL GUILT, AND REACH IN THEIR POCKETS DEEPER. NO! NO! AND AGAIN – HEAR ME -NO! GOD COULD HAVE ALL THE MONEY HE WANTED, JUST CREATE IT. **YOU KNOW WHAT GOD IS REALLY CONCERNED ABOUT, INTERESTED IN? GOD IS INTERESTED IN YOU.** THERE WAS A COMMERCIAL BACK A NUMBER OF YEARS AGO I THINK IT WAS ABOUT BEING IN THE ARMY AND HAD THE PUNCHLINE “*BE ALL YOU CAN BE*”. WE CAN “BE ALL WE CAN BE” IF WE TAKE TIME TO STUDY THE VERY WORDS GOD HAS GIVEN US IN THE BIBLE.

THE FIRST THING WE NOTICE WHICH IS NOT SPOKEN IN WORDS IS THE WIDOW'S FAITH. SHE HAD THE TIME TO COME AND GIVE AT THE TEMPLE, EVEN THAT THAT SHE NEEDED TO LIVE ON. AGAIN, THIS IS NOT REALLY ABOUT HOW MUCH SHE GAVE, IT WAS VERY LITTLE, AND IT WAS NOT ABOUT THE FACT THAT SHE GAVE UNTIL THERE WAS NOTHING LEFT. **THE REAL POINT HERE IS HER FAITH AND DEPENDENCY ON GOD. HER FAITH WAS PUT INTO ACTION.**

WHO DO WE DEPEND ON? WHERE IS GOD ON OUR LIST OF WHO TO TURN TO IN TOUGH TIMES? THIS WIDOW LIVED HER FAITH THROUGH HER ACTIONS. I AM REMINDED OF MISSION TRIPS I TOOK WITH MY GIRLS' YOUTH GROUP TO MEXICO. THE PEOPLE WE MET DID NOT DEPEND ON THE GOVERNMENT BECAUSE IT WAS NEARLY NON-EXISTENT LOCALLY. THE OTHER NOTICEABLE THING IS THEY WERE READY TO SHARE WHATEVER THEY HAD, WHICH WAS NEXT TO NOTHING WITH YOU. **HOW WILLING ARE WE TO GIVE TO OTHERS OR IS OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH AND DEPENDENCY ON GOD DULLED BY WHAT WE HAVE ACCUMULATED? ANOTHER THING THAT CAN DULL THE RELATIONSHIP AND DEPENDENCY ON GOD IS KNOWLEDGE.** WE COME TO BELIEVE SO STRONGLY IN OURSELVES AND WHAT WE KNOW THERE IS NO ROOM FOR FAITH AND A RELIANCE ON GOD.

REMEMBER THE WARNINGS FROM GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT THAT OFFERINGS AND SACRIFICES WERE NOT WANTED BY GOD IF YOUR HEART WAS NOT IN IT. TODAY, WE TOO DO THINGS THAT APPEAR “GODLY” BUT ARE OUR HEARTS AND THOUGHTS ARE FAR FROM IT? WE SPEAK THE WORDS AS WE SAY “**TALK THE TALK, BUT DO WE WALK THE WALK?**” HOW DEEPLY ROOTED, HOW REAL, HOW FIRM OUR FAITH DETERMINES HOW WE PUT OUR FAITH INTO ACTION OR NOT. BELIEVE ME, THERE ARE MANY OBSTACLES THAT WE CAN ALLOW TO HINDER OR GET IN THE WAY OF PUTTING OUR FAITH INTO ACTION.

OUR OWN STUBBORNNESS, PRECONCEIVED IDEAS OF HOW SOMETHING SHOULD BE DONE OR A HURT WE WILL NOT LET GO OF. IN ALL THESE OBSTACLES I HAVE MENTIONED WE HAVE MADE A CHOICE NOT TO PUT OUR FAITH INTO POSITIVE ACTION!!! GOD NEEDS EACH AND EVERY ONE OF US TO PARTICIPATE IN THE BODY OF CHRIST. **IT IS THE WAY HE DESIRES FOR US TO DEMONSTRATE TO THE WORLD WHAT GOD, HIS LOVE, HIS GRACE AND HIS FORGIVENESS LOOK LIKE.** *WHEN I HEAR PEOPLE SAY “I CAN'T”, “I WON'T” OR “I 'M NOT UNTIL...”* I SAY “THAT IS BALONEY” **YOU HAVE MADE A CHOICE PLAIN AND SIMPLE!!! WHAT YOU ARE DOING IS SHORT-CIRCUITING YOUR FAITH AND SELLING GOD SHORT OF THAT WHICH HE CAN DO AND WILL IN YOUR LIFE IF YOU WILL ASK HIM AND LET HIM!!!!**

WE SIT THERE AND COMPLAIN TO OTHERS ABOUT THIS OR THAT OR SOMEBODY, YOU KNOW WHAT PEOPLE DON'T WANT TO HEAR IT AND TIRE OF IT. **GOD'S GRACE IS THERE FOR US 24/7 AND WE SHOULD "PLAY IT FORWARD", "PASS IT ON"** WHATEVER WAY YOU WANT TO EXPRESS IT BUT "JUST DO IT". YOU DON'T RECEIVE BECAUSE YOU DON'T ASK, BECAUSE WHEN YOU DO THOSE WORDS BECOME "I CAN", I WILL" I AM GOING TO".

NOW JESUS SAT DOWN AND OBSERVED THE PEOPLE PUTTING THE MONEY IN THE COLLECTION BOX. OUR FIRST REACTION MIGHT BE A NEGATIVE ONE. AFTER ALL IF I WENT AROUND WITH AN OFFERING PLATE AND WATCHED YOU PUT SOMETHING IN THAT MAY NOT GO OVER VERY WELL!!! WE KEEP MONETARY MATTERS AS SOMETHING VERY PERSONAL. STUDY THE BIBLE AND YOU WILL DISCOVER THAT MONEY AND MATTERS RELATED TO IT ARE DISCUSSED MORE THAN HEAVEN AND HELL, EVEN PRAYER! WHY? I BELIEVE GOD KNOWS THAT "POWER" OF MONEY AND IF NOT HELD IN THE PROPER PERSPECTIVE IT CAN DESTROY OUR FAITH AND RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AND JUST AS IMPORTANT, DESTROY PEOPLE AROUND US.

HERE IS SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT – AREN'T ALL OUR ACTIONS, WHAT WE DO OR DON'T DO, DONE IN FRONT OF HIS EYES? EVEN MORE SO, JUST LIKE JESUS SITTING IN THE TEMPLE WATCHING HE KNEW THEIR MOTIVES FOR THEIR GIVING AND IT IS SO WITH US TOO AND THAT IS BETWEEN YOU AND GOD.

IN THE EARLIER VERSES OF THE READING JESUS REALLY CHASTISED THE PHARISEES FOR THEIR ACTIONS AS WELL AS THEIR MOTIVES. HE KNEW THEIR HEARTS TO BE EMPTY AND THEIR MOTIVES TO BE SELF-SERVING. NOW WE ARE NOT TO SIT HERE AND JUDGE PEOPLE AND THEIR MOTIVES, BUT WE CAN KNOW OUR OWN MOTIVES AND CHECK THEM TO MAKE SURE THEY ARE NOT SELF-SERVING OR EMPTY. **OUR MOTIVES ARE THE ONLY ONES WE CAN DO SOMETHING ABOUT !!** WE MUST BE HONEST WITH OURSELVES AS TO WHY OR WHY NOT WE DO SOMETHING . REMEMBER WE ARE **NOT** IN A COMPETITION TO OUTDO OTHERS. **WHEN WE DO WHAT IN OUR HEARTS WE KNOW TO BE THAT WHICH GOD DESIRES US TO DO – THAT WILL BE ENOUGH.**

AS I MAY HAVE HINTED EARLIER IN THE MESSAGE, **THIS STORY OF THE WIDOW AND THE COINS IS NOT REALLY ABOUT MONEY.** JESUS SAID IN VERSE 43 IN PART "WIDOW HAS PUT IN MORE THAN EVERYONE" IT CERTAINLY WAS NOT A REFERENCE TO THE AMOUNT OF THE MONEY FOR IT WAS FAR, FAR LESS THAN ANYONE ELSE. **THIS WAS THE INTANGIBLE THAT SHE WAS GIVING. IT WAS AN ATTITUDE - THAT WHATEVER SHE HAD IT HAD BEEN GIVEN BY GOD AND SHE WAS GIVING BACK, DEPENDING ON GOD TO PROVIDE THAT WHICH SHE NEEDED.**

GOD WILL PROVIDE WHAT WE NEED. THERE ARE NUMEROUS VERSES THROUGHOUT THE BIBLE, PROMISES HE WILL PROVIDE ALL OUR NEEDS, NOT NECESSARILY WANTS. IN 2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-5 PAUL ENCOURAGES THE PEOPLE CORINTH TO GIVE AS THOSE IN MACEDONIA WITH AN ABUNDANCE OF JOY. IT GOES ON IN CHAPTER 9 VERSES 6 AND 7 "*Now [remember] this: he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows [a]generously [that blessings may come to others] will also reap[b]generously [and be blessed]. Let each one give [thoughtfully and with purpose] just as he has decided in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver [and delights in the one whose heart is in his gift].*

WE CAN CLEARLY SEE THE DEPENDENCY THE WIDOW HAS ON GOD. HOW MUCH DO WE MISS OUT ON BECAUSE WE DO NOT DEPEND ON GOD AND IN NOT DEPENDING ON HIM MAKE BAD CHOICES FOR OURSELVES WHEN GOD DESIRES NOTHING BUT THE BEST FOR US!!!

GOD BLESSES US IN ORDER THAT WE CAN BLESS OTHERS!!! IN PROVERBS 3:9 IT TALKS OF HONORING THE LORD FROM YOUR WEALTH AND FROM THE FIRST OF YOUR PRODUCE. THIS IS EXACTLY WHAT THE WIDOW IS DOING HERE BY HER ACTIONS IN TODAY'S READING.

FAITH, MOTIVES, AND ATTITUDES, AND THE RESULTING ACTIONS WHETHER IT CONCERNS MONEY, LOVE OR WHATEVER, GOD DESIRES THOSE THINGS TO BE BASED ON, AND GROW OUT OF OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM. WHEN WE HAVE THAT RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM WE WILL HOLD EVERYTHING WITH AN OPEN HAND. THEN WE WILL KNOW WHERE OUR GIVING IS COMING FROM. AMEN.