

Title: "All In"**[slide 1]****Text: Luke 21:1-4****Widows****A Poor Widow:****[Slide 2]**

Jesus and His disciples had finally come to Jerusalem. On Sunday He had ridden a donkey into town to the shouts of His followers. Now He was teaching in the part of the Temple reserved for Jewish men and women. It was a courtyard known as the Court of the Women, so named because it was as close to the temple sanctuary as a woman was permitted to go.

At the sides of the Court of the Women were 13 offering boxes, each with a trumpet-shaped opening. When a person came to make an offering, he or she would announce the amount and purpose of the offering to a priest. Then the offering would cascade down the brass mouth of the offering box.

Big offerings: big noise. Little offerings: tiny clink.

It was here that Jesus watched an unnamed widow make an offering that would become far more known than any of the extravagant offerings of the wealthy worshippers that day.

Marriage and Widowhood in Israel:

Then as now, women often outlived their husbands. Because of that, the marriage contract – called a *ketubba* – required that the money given to the husband by the bride's family be returned to her in the event that he divorced her or died before she did. This sum of money came to be called by the name of the contract: the *ketubba*.

So far, so good. But what do you think happened when a bereaved woman found herself all alone in the world with a substantial sum of money or a piece of property? Sadly, the vultures soon began circling, hoping to take from her as much as possible.

Jesus called out the lawyers as He taught that day in the Temple:

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Luke 20:47 NIV

"They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely."

Oppressing and robbing widows and orphans was a long-standing sin in Israel. Isaiah had called out the lawyers and judges of his day for doing just the same thing:

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Isaiah 1:23 NIV

*Your rulers are rebels,
Companions of thieves;
They all love bribes
And chase after gifts.*

*They do not defend the cause of the fatherless;
The widow's case does not come before them.*

What kind of Kingdom?

Why would Jesus take the time to single out a poor, needy widow on that particular day? Well, for one thing, she illustrated perfectly what He had just said about corrupt and rebellious leaders who chased after gifts and bribes instead of assuring that a woman received justice when her husband died.

But think about *where* He made His point: the Temple. The Temple was supposed to be God's House. Just a day or two before, He had chased the merchants and moneychangers out of the Temple, saying:

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Luke 19:46 NIV

"It is written," he said to them, "My house will be a house of prayer.' But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'"

Would Jesus' Kingdom function like the old one? Would it have the same value system, the same pecking order, the same façade of piety covering greed and corruption? Or would it be utterly different: God's New Creation breaking into a dark and corrupt world?

This is a question that reaches right to you and me. It challenges us at the very root of our values. It demands that we examine our deepest motivations. What kind of Kingdom do I want to belong to? Which kingdom is my true home? One that takes or one that gives? One that is true or one that is false?

The Widow's Offering**Two Cents:****[Slide 6]**

The *lepton* was the smallest and least valuable coin in circulation in Jesus' time. It was about the size of a pencil eraser. The widow that Jesus singled out that day in the Temple had only *two* of these coins to her name. Both of them went into the trumpet-box:

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Luke 21:1-2 NIV

As Jesus looked up, he saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins.

According to custom, she first told the priest at the offering box what she was going to give and what it was for. Then she dropped the tiny bronze coins into the trumpet and they clinked their way to the bottom.

Anyone standing by would have wondered what difference her offering would make in the grand scheme of things. Would the priests even find the two coins when they scooped the offerings out of the box?

The biggest offering:

But Jesus saw something that no one else would have seen. He saw the deeper reality of that tiny offering:

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Luke 21:3-4 NIV

"Truly I tell you," 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."

Imagine that you were one of the disciples standing there with Jesus. You've just seen a rich guy empty a sack of gold coins into the offering box. The roar of the coins cascading down the trumpet is deafening. Everyone in the Court of the Women turns to see who it was that gave *so much* to God. As the man walks away from the offering box bystanders box deferentially. The beggar at the gate extends his hand in hopes of a gift.

It's an impossibly tough act for a widow with two of the tiniest coins to follow. But follow she does, faithfully dropping her last 2 cents into the box. Clunk, clunk. Not a head turns her way. She leaves as she came, unnoticed and unseen, except by Jesus. He declares that her offering is worth more than all the others!

So what was Jesus saying?

The King's verdict:

The answer lies in what it meant for Jesus to come to the Temple as God's King. Remember, when He rode a donkey into the city on Palm Sunday He was fulfilling a prophecy which said that this is how God's long-awaited King would arrive.

A chief duty of God's Messiah was to restore the Temple as God's house. To do so, He would cleanse it from evil and corruption. And that is what Jesus did when He chased out the merchants and moneychangers.

Finally, the Messiah would re-establish the true worship of God. Listen to how the prophet Malachi puts it:

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Malachi 3:1-4 NIV

"I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty.

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*But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. **Then the LORD will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the LORD, as in days gone by, as in former years.***

Jesus had "suddenly" and unexpectedly come to His Temple. He had refined and purified the Temple. And now He announces that at long last someone has brought an "offering in righteousness," an offering "acceptable to the LORD, as in days gone by."

It wasn't the high and mighty, the rich and powerful, who brought the offering acceptable to the Lord. It was this unseen and unnoticed widow. She had come with a pure heart. She had come trusting that God would provide for her needs. She had given her whole self and all that she had to Him.

All In**"Acceptable offering"**

Paul challenges us to do what the widow did that day in the Temple: to give ourselves entirely to God:

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Romans 12:1-2 NIV

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

As the story of the widow's offering shows us, an offering that is "holy and pleasing to God" isn't about the money. In God's accounting, 2 cents given from the heart are vastly more than a small fortune given for show.

God doesn't want or need our stuff. He calls us to *offer* ourselves as our offering. When we do, we welcome His Spirit to transform our hearts and minds, making us anew in God's image.

The little people point the way:

Once again, it takes a marginalized member of society to show the way to the Kingdom of God. Luke has shown us a sinful woman who showed what it really means to love God. He has shown us a woman declared "unclean" by her chronic illness who showed what it means to really trust God. He showed us a rich woman who left her mansion to walk the dusty roads of Galilee following Jesus. And now, a widow's tiny offering becomes the star example of what it means to present an offering acceptable to the Lord when He comes to His Temple.

All In?

That 2 cent contribution challenges you and me to answer the simple question: Am I "all in"? Or do I have a "Plan B"?

It doesn't matter how much you give or how much you serve if God and His Kingdom are Plan B. Your offering will be lost and forgotten, just like those of the wealthy donors in the Temple. The only thing of value that you can really give to God is *you*.