EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS

ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,
*And Many Explanatory Notes*.

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LUKE XXI. 1–4.

1 And he looked up, and saw the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury.

2 And he saw also a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites.

3 And he said, Of a truth I say unto you,

that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all:

4 For all these have of their abun­dance cast in unto the offerings of God: but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had.

WE learn, for one thing, from these verses, *how keenly our Lord Jesus Christ observes the things that are done upon earth.* We read that “he looked up and saw the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury. And he saw also a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites.” We might well suppose that our Lord’s mind at this season would have been wholly occupied with the things immediately before Him. His betrayal, His un­just judgment, His cross, His passion, His death, were all close at hand; and He knew it.—The approaching de­struction of the temple, the scattering of the Jews, the long period of time before His second advent, were all things which were spread before His mind like a picture. It was but a few moments and He spoke of them.—And yet at a time like this we find Him taking note of all that is going on around Him! He thinks it not beneath Him to observe the conduct of a “certain poor widow.”

Let us remember, that the Lord Jesus never changes. The thing that we read of in the passage before us is the thing that is going on all over the world. “The eyes of the Lord are in every place.” (Prov. xv. 3.) Nothing is too little to escape His observation; no act is too trifling to be noted down in the book of His remem­brance. The same hand that formed the sun, moon, and stars, was the hand that formed the tongue of the gnat and the wing of the fly, with perfect wisdom; the same eye that sees the council-chambers of kings and emperors, is the eye that notices all that goes on in the labourer’s cottage. “All things are naked and opened to the eyes of him with whom we have to do.” (Heb. iv. 13.) He measures littleness and greatness by a very different measure from the measure of man. Events in our own daily life to which we attach no importance, are often very grave and serious matters in Christ’s sight. Actions and deeds in the weekly history of a poor man, which the great of this world think trivial and contemp­tible, are often registered as weighty and important in Christ’s books. He lives who marked the gift of one “poor widow” as attentively as the gifts of many rich men.

Let the believer of low degree take comfort in this mighty truth; let him remember daily that his Master in heaven takes account of everything that is done on earth, and that the lives of cottagers are noticed by Him as much as the lives of kings. The acts of a poor believer have as much dignity about them as the acts of a prince; the little contributions to religious objects which the labourer makes out of his scanty earnings, are as much valued in God’s sight as a ten thousand pound note from a peer. To know this thoroughly is one great secret of contentment. To feel that Christ looks at what a man *is,* and not at what a man *has,* will help to preserve us from envious and murmuring thoughts. Happy is he who has learned to say with David, “I am poor and needy; but the Lord thinketh upon me.” (Psalm xl. 17.)

We learn, for another thing, from these verses, *who they are whom Christ reckons most liberal in giving money to religious purposes.* We read that He said of her who cast in two mites into the treasury, “She hath cast in more than they all. All these of their abundance have cast in unto the offerings of God: but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had.” These words teach us that Christ looks at something more than the mere amount of men’s gifts in measuring their liberality. He looks at the proportion which their gifts bear to their property: He looks at the degree of self-denial which their giving entails upon them. He would have us know that some persons appear to give much to religious pur­poses who in God’s sight give very little, and that some appear to give very little who in God’s sight give very much.

The subject before us is peculiarly heart-searching. On no point perhaps do professing Christians come short so much as in the matter of giving money to God’s cause. Thousands, it may be feared, know nothing whatever of “giving” as a Christian duty: the little giving that there is, is confined entirely to a select few in the churches. Even among those who give, it may be boldly asserted that the poor generally give far more in proportion to their means than the rich. These are plain facts which cannot be denied. The experience of all who collect for religious societies and Christian charities, will testify that they are correct and true.

Let us judge ourselves in this matter of giving, that we may not be judged and condemned at the great day: let it be a settled principle with us to watch against stinginess, and whatever else we do with our money, to give regularly and habitually to the cause of God.—Let us remember, that although Christ’s work does not depend on our money, yet Christ is pleased to test the reality of our grace by allowing us to help Him: if we cannot find it in our hearts to give anything to Christ’s cause, we may well doubt the reality of our faith and charity.—Let us recollect that our use of the money God has given us, will have to be accounted for at the last day: the “Judge of all “will be He who noticed the widow’s mite. Our incomes and expenditures will be brought to light before an assembled world. If we prove in that day to have been rich towards ourselves, but poor towards God, it would be good if we had never been born.—Not least, let us look round the world and ask where are the men that were ever ruined by liberal giving to godly purposes, and who ever found himself really poorer by lending to the Lord? We shall find that the words of Solomon are strictly true: “There is that scattereth and yet increaseth: and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, and it tendeth to poverty.” (Prov. xi 24.)

Finally, let us pray for rich men, who as yet know nothing of the luxury of “giving,” that their riches may not be their ruin. Hundreds of charitable and religious movements are standing still continually for want of funds; great and effectual doors are open to the Church of Christ for doing good all over the world, but for want of money few can be sent to enter in by them. Let us pray for the Holy Ghost to come down on all our congregations, and to teach all our worshippers what to do with their money. Of all people on earth, none ought to be such liberal givers as Christians: all that they have they owe to the free gift of God. Christ, the Holy Ghost, the Gospel, the Bible, the means of grace, the hope of glory,—all are undeserved, incomparable *gifts,* which millions of heathen never heard of. The possessors of such gifts, ought surely to be “ready to distribute “and “willing to communicate.” A giving Saviour ought to have giving disciples. Freely we have received: freely we ought to give. (1 Tim. vi. 18. Matt. x. 8.)

NOTES. LUKE XXI. 1–4.

1*.—*[*Casting...gifts...treasury.*]Major says, “In the second court of the temple, in the court of the women, were fixed thirteen chests, with inscriptions, directing to what use the offerings in each were allotted. Into one of these the widow cast her two mites. This court was hence called occasionally “the treasury.” (John viii. 20.) These offerings were made at the three great feasts, to compound for tithes and dues, and to fulfil the precept, “Thou shalt not appear empty before the Lord.” (Exod. xxiii. 15. Deut. xvi. 16.) See 2 Kings xii. 9.

2*.—*[*Poor widow.*]Here, as in other places in the Bible, we must remember the exceedingly depressed and dependent condition of a poor man’s widow in the countries where our Lord was. The expression is almost proverbial for one very badly off, and most unlikely to contribute anything to a charitable purpose.

[*Two mites.*]A mite was the smallest coin in use among the Jews in our Saviour’s time. Major says that it was equal to about three-eighths of a farthing of our money.

3*.—*[*Hath cast in more.*] *“*More,” in this expression, does not of course mean a larger sum in reality, but more in God’s sight: a gift which God values more than one of far more value in man’s eyes;—more in the judgment of Him who looks at the motives of givers, and at the money they keep for themselves as well as the money they give;—more in proportion to her means.

4.—[*They have of their abundance cast in.*]This means that what the rich gave, they gave out of a large and abundant store, and hardly felt what they gave, because much was left behind.

[*She of her penury hath cast in.*]This means that what the widow gave, she gave out of a store so small that, after giving, nothing seemed to be left.

[*All* *her living.*]The meaning of this expression is dis­puted. Some think that it means that the widow gave the whole of her property. Others think that it means that she gave the whole amount of her daily income. The latter view seems the more probable one. A person so poor as the widow would necessarily live from hand to mouth, and possess no capital or property, except what she received from one source or another day after day.

Let it be noted, in leaving this passage, that our Lord says not a word here against the lawfulness and propriety of giving money to these treasuries in the temple, though He doubtless knew that the money was often ill applied, and the temple dispensation soon passing away. An excessive cen­soriousness about the failings and infirmities of religious societies which are sound in principle, is not to be praised. All institutions worked by man must needs be imperfect.

Finally, let us beware of lightly using the expression “giving our mite,” in reference to giving money to religious or charit­able causes. The phrase is often employed without thought or consideration. If people would “give their mite” really and literally as the widow gave her’s, many would have to give far more money than they ever give now. Her “mite” meant something that she gave with immense self-denial, and at great sacrifice. Most men’s “mite,” now-a-days, means something that is not felt, not missed, and makes no difference to their comfort. If all people gave their “mite” as the widow gave her’s, the world and the Church would soon be in a very different state.