

Everything From Him
Everything For Him

Bible Reading:

1 Kings 17: 8-24

Mark 12: 38-44

Hebrews 9: 24-28

PREPARED BY
KEN GEHRELS
PASTOR
CALVIN CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH OF OTTAWA
ONTARIO, CANADA

Begin with reading from 1 Kings 17:8-24

Have you ever wanted to be one of those lucky people who go on a game show and win all kinds of money? I remember an interview on CBC radio some time back with a woman who had done that. Went through the whole routine, a week on the show, jumping up and down and yelling like a mad fool on hearing, "Congratulations - you have won \$100,000.00"..... or whatever the amount was. Big - that's all I remember.

She thought she was rich, and began to make plans for what to do with the winnings..... except that she never got a penny.

The game show company had gone broke.

Things,

sometimes,

aren't what they first appear to be.

The name Bre-ex still brings shudders to many investors, as does the phrase "Nortel stock."

Not what they first appeared to be.

It cuts both ways, actually.

The widow woman in Zarephath discovers that - twice.

Gives away the last of her flour and oil.

Hands over the cold body of her son.

Gives them both into the hands of a stranger from away.

First blush would suggest that her hands are now completely empty.

Reality shows itself to be very different.

She gives everything away.

Lets it all go.

And receives back far more than she could have dreamed.

It was a risk for her to give what she did to that stranger prophet man.

You need to understand that in Zarephath most people worshipped Baal.

Baal - well, he was believed to be the god of prosperity, fertility.

Pray to Baal for the seed to sprout.

Sacrifice to Baal for the rains to come.

Worship Baal for health, wealth and prosperity.

That's just what you did.

Except - that what seemed so right was shown to be so empty when the famine hit the land. Baal was proved impotent.

So she takes a risk, giving the prophet of God everything.

Crazy - it seemed.

But at the end of the day -

LOOK!!

She discovers the True One from whom all blessings flow.

When Baal was powerless, Jahweh's power still flowed.

Everything comes -

not from Baal.

but from the living Jahweh God.

Years later, another woman, also a widow shows that she, too, has learned to live on that truth.

It's another case of things not being as they all appear.

Read with me from:

Mark 12:38-44

Someone reaches over the offering bin at the temple in Jerusalem. From a hand falls a series of what may be equivalent to our \$100 bills. Ah! A generous contributor to the work of the Lord.

A widow approaches. Two wafer-thin coins fall from her hand to the bottom, their sound muffled by those \$100 bills.

Unnoticed.

And really, in the overall scheme of things, insignificant.

Right?

Well - once again, things aren't what they first seem to be.

While the temple treasurer is gratefully acknowledging the large receipts with appreciation dinners and letters of thanks, Jesus tells his disciples of a grateful acknowledgement that comes from God.....

an acknowledgement addressed to this solitary woman.

At God's banquet she will be a VIP.

To use the words of Psalm 113, with which we opened our service:

God will set her among princes.

He will treat her as royalty.

He will grant fulfilment and hope to her whose life is barren.

Some of the others...

....may have to be in general seating.

The Holy One, from whom all blessings flow, has accounting methods that are far different than ours.

For a start, God doesn't compare how I handle my financial and material resources

to how you do

to how our neighbor around the corner does.

In terms of how we handle the goods God has given to us, each of us stands individually before Him.

Being rich or being poor does not give one a handicap or a head start in God's eyes. Each person is measured by what she begins with, not simply by the bottom line of what she hands out.

As Jesus had watched people make their temple offerings, every one of them gave out of their leftovers.

Except this widow.

She gave everything she had.

How does God view her offering?

To quote John Calvin:

The offering of the poor, which appears to be worthless, is no less valuable than if she had presented all the contents of the royal treasury...

On the other hand, those who have far more, who have received from God larger quantities to be used and cared for on His behalf, are reminded that it is not enough if in the amount of their giving they greatly surpass the poor and common people:

because it is of less value in the sight of God if a rich person, out of a vast heap, should give over a moderate sum, than that a poor person, by giving very little, should stretch to the limit.... giving all they have got.

The giving of the rich was a contribution.

The giving of the widow was a sacrifice.

Someone once said:

*God doesn't measure our offering by how much we give,
but by how much we keep for ourselves.*

The widow whom Jesus watched understood that everything came from God.

She gave everything back to Him.

And while the text doesn't tell us, we can count on the fact that God would have ensured that she was cared for....

.....somehow.

Just like the widow from Zaraphath.

It's an issue of stewardship that we witness in the Bible today.

We are told in v.44 of Mark 12 that the widow gave "*all she had to live on.*"

The very last line of the reading.

The word used for that phrase in the original Greek is *BIOS*.

You'll recognize in that *biology* - the study of life.

Bios means life.

The widow gave her whole life to God.

Contrast that with the scribes - the elite of the community.

Jesus says, "*You **DON'T** want to degenerate to become like that.*"

They had honorary titles.

They wore special clothes to be recognized.

They fed off the social recognition and prestige.

They were consumed with concern for their own welfare.

In the eyes of God, they've received all they're going to get.

The widow - she has a great reward coming.

It's not a slam against being rich.

Or a romanticizing of being poor.

Rather - it's about our attitude.

When our eyes roam over what we have, whom do we thank?

And what dictates how we handle it?

The Bible calls us today to an understanding that everything we have

absolutely everything

comes to us not by chance, but - as the Heidelberg Catechism puts it -

from His Fatherly hand.

He will provide whatever I need

for body and soul,

and He will turn to my good

whatever adversity He sends me

in this sad world.

*He is able to do this because He is almighty God.
He desires to do this because He is a faithful Father.*

(Q/A 26)

I seriously suspect that the widow of Mark 12 knew her Scripture.
At temple worship, or in the Synagogue, she would have heard, again and again, the account of the widow from Zaraphath.

And she lived by what was illustrated in the life of that person.
She knew and trusted in the One from whom all blessings flow.

Today, God asks:
Do we?

Do we recognize God as the primary giver and owner of all world resources?
How about of the resources that we use?

Do we see Him as the One to whom we each have to give account as responsible persons?

That's the challenge before us today.

Ed & Carol - for you it hits home in the life of your beautiful daughter, Danielle.
Her life is not some mere reproductive fact.
It is a gift - from God to you.
He holds you accountable for it.
As He holds accountable each person who publically vowed to support you.

Earlier in this service we celebrated Holy Baptism.
Water poured onto Danielle's head.
Water, symbolizing the blood of Jesus.
Jesus - who stood that day in the temple where many sacrifices were offered,
Hebrews 9 says of Him that He.....
appeared... to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself....Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him. (v.26-28)

When I said that everything we have comes from God, I meant it.
Our eternal destiny -
- **that** comes as a gift
a **huge** sacrifice on the part of God in the suffering and death of His Son.

He held
absolutely
nothing
back.

His own son's body went limp - dead.
Dead to pay for **our** sin.
Down into hell to fight death on **our** behalf.
Rising victorious for **our** eternal life.

And now, as we stand through pages of Scripture, beside the two widows, our sisters in faith -
we hear Him call - "*My child, what will you give to me?*"

In money - from the earliest days of recorded Bible history, far before the time of Israel, we read of believers dedicating and giving 10%. Right off the top. From gross.

Years ago someone challenged me to begin there. And said this, looking me in the eye, "*Gehrels - If you balk and squawk, better stop for a careful look. Good chance that the dollar has sunk roots too deep into your soul.*"

Funny thing, you know. In all the years since, I've never met someone who's gotten into financial trouble through tithing. But I've met many who got into trouble because of max'd out VISA cards, lines of credit and mortgages way beyond their means.

My child, what will you give me.....

In time - I think that's a harder one. Especially in our high stress society.

Time is an expensive commodity. But God gives us each second of the 24/7 time that we have. It doesn't come from us. It doesn't belong to us.

How much of that do we sacrifice back to God? What would the percentage be in your life?

In family - the kids aren't ours. The parents we have - God gave them to us. Do we treat them accordingly?

My child, what will you give me.....

St. Bernard is reported to have said this -

"Lord, I have but two very small coins.

A body.

And a soul.

I give them both to You."

Today, friends,

I am reminded that the same thing is true for me.

And I am challenged speak that prayer.

I'd like to invite you to join me in saying it -

"Lord, I have but two very small coins.

A body.

And a soul.

I give them both to You."