



Devouring Widows' Houses

Mark 12:41-44

1. The Gifts (verses 41-42).
2. The Comment (verses 43-44)
3. A Better Way (2 Corinthians 8-9)

In our exposition of the gospel of Mark, today we come to the last four verses of chapter 12, Mark 12:41-44. Before we read it together, I want to bring you back in history to the 1500's.

The days prior to the Protestant Reformation were dark days indeed. The Roman Catholic Church held a tremendous amount of power. They held political power. They held religious power. The pope held all power over the church. The priests held much power over the people. The people of the church were kept in darkness. They were prohibited from reading the word of God. Their religion was superstitious at best.

The abuses of the church at this time were abundant. Nowhere did this abuse show itself most clearly than it did in how the church exploited the poor. The church had developed an intricate system of giving and rewards called "indulgences." An indulgence is the remission of punishment for sins. They are granted by the Roman Catholic Church, often in exchange for some type of good deed, like the giving of money or the offering of a mass on behalf of an individual.

Prior to the Reformation, the Roman Catholic Church was working hard at building St. Peter's Basilica, a huge undertaking, costing much money. You can visit the structure today. It's "ginormous". Well, Pope Leo X, had set his heart to finish building the Basilica during his reign as pope.

Now, in order to fund this project, the Roman Catholic Church was offering indulgences. "Give money to the church, so that we can build this massive structure, and we will grant and indulgence. Your uncle will spend a few less years in purgatory. You give a big gift, and your uncle will get out of purgatory and enter heaven itself." Such was the message of the John Tetzel, who was chief fund-raiser in Germany. He promised, "As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs."

One of the results of this teaching was that many gave of their resources to this huge project. And despite the poverty all around them, the church was feasting in luxury. It was a clear abuse of power.

Martin Luther stood up to this abuse. On October 31, 1517, he nailed the Ninety-five Theses to the door of the castle church in Wittenberg. Several of them address the abuses of the church in granting these indulgences in exchange for money.

21. Those preachers of indulgences are in error, who say that by the pope's indulgences a man is freed from every penalty, and saved;
56. The "treasures of the Church," out of which the pope grants indulgences, are not sufficiently named or known among the people of Christ.
66. The treasures of the indulgences are nets with which they now fish for the riches of men.

Martin Luther was hoping that these Ninety-five Theses would set off a debate -- a discussion back and forth to get to the truth. He was hoping that the church might recognize the errors of her ways and repent. Instead, these Ninety-five Theses set off a firestorm, which led to the Protestant Reformation. It has well been argued that one of the core reasons behind the revolt against the church in the 1500's had to do with the economic abuse that the church was inflicting upon her members through the sale of their indulgences. [\[1\]](#)

As we dig into our text this morning, we see Jesus witnessing a similar economic exploitation that was taking place in the religious system that the Jews had established. My message is entitled, "Devouring Widows' Houses." My title comes from verse 40. Speaking of the scribes, Jesus said that they "devour widows' houses." We see it taking place in our text this morning:

Mark 12:41-44

And He sat down opposite the treasury, and began observing how the people were putting money into the treasury; and many rich people were putting in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which amount to a cent. Calling His disciples to Him, He said to them, "Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury; for they all put in out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on."

The text breaks down in half. The first two verses describe the gifts that people gave to the treasury. The last two verses give the perspective of Jesus on these gives. We'll spend most of our time right here in these verses. But, then, toward the end of my message, we'll look at a

better way. We will look at 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 to set our hearts straight in this matter of giving, that we might not be guilty of devouring widows' houses.

So, let's look at my first point, ...

1. The Gifts (verses 41-42).

In the days of Jesus, the religious leaders had placed money-boxes around the temple. These boxes were for people to place their contributions to support the work of the temple. From historical sources, we know that these boxes were placed in the court of the women. This was not because the women were the only ones to give their contributions. But, rather, because everyone (male and female and foreigner and slave) was allowed to enter into the court of the women. This was the big open space in the temple courtyard, where all could mingle freely. And so, all were able to place their contributions into these boxes.

We also know from historical sources that there were thirteen of these boxes in the court. And we also know that they were in the shape of a trumpet. In other words, they flared out on top, so no matter where you placed your coins, they would fall into the bottom of the container.

At Rock Valley Bible Church, we have a similar arrangement. We have an offering box. It sits in the back of the auditorium. As you walk in the door, you pass right by it. It is for the same purpose as the boxes in the temple in Jesus' day. It is to receive the money needed to support the ministry of this church.

This is contrary to the practices of most churches today who pass an offering plate. We have decided not to pass an offering plate. Not that there is anything wrong with passing a plate; but, in our day and age of so many churches who are filled with greed and known by their desire for money, we have simply chosen to do what we can do to steer clear of all accusation of greed.

As a result, we don't talk a lot about money at Rock Valley Bible Church. Although you all know that we need your support in order to continue to exist. And from time to time, we publish our financial information. Just this past week, I posted a graphic giving an update on where we are financially. The Lord is graciously meeting all of our needs.

In our bulletin, we have a statement about giving, "We believe giving is an act of worship. If you are led to give, there is an offering box at the back of the auditorium." We believe that when you place funds in the box, you are giving to the Lord's work. And in so doing, your giving to the ministry of this church is an act of worship. By having a box in the back, it helps to divert our attention away from what's happening.

I believe that there is something very Biblical about this. Jesus said, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 6:1). And when an offering plate is passed, it is obvious who is giving and who isn't giving. All it takes is for someone in the back to watch and observe the plate passing by.

And when the offering plate comes by, you can play the game -- I have seen it played. A guy is sitting in one of the front rows. A plea is made to give. He leans to his side, so that he can pull out his wallet. He picks up his wallet for all behind him to see. He pulls out a few bills and drops it in the plate for all to see. That man received no reward for his giving.

Jesus said, "So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you." (Matthew 6:2-4).

Now, obviously, Jesus isn't being literal here. There is no way that you can prevent either of your hands from knowing what the other is doing. But, the idea is clear. When you give, let it be discretely. Don't draw attention to yourself. Give secretly if you can. Don't spend very much time thinking about it. Let your heavenly Father remember and reward you accordingly. I believe that an offering box helps us to do these things.

But having such a box isn't foolproof. You can have offering boxes and still encounter the same dangers as those who pass a plate in their worship services. That's what we see in verse 41.

Mark 12:41

And He sat down opposite the treasury, and began observing how the people were putting money into the treasury; and many rich people were putting in large sums.

When Jesus came into the temple area, He sat down in such a way that He could view all of those 13 trumpet-shaped offering containers. But, more than being able to see them, Jesus was able to see who gave. Jesus was able to see what they gave. Jesus was able to see how they gave. Verse 41, "[Jesus] began observing how the people were putting money into the treasury."

Verse 41 describes the rich placing money into these boxes. Somehow, Jesus could tell that they were rich people. Somehow, Jesus could tell that they were putting in large sums. Now, we don't know how Jesus could tell these things. But, I don't think that it has anything to do with His omniscience. Perhaps they were blowing trumpets to let everyone see that they were giving something (Matthew 6:2). Perhaps they were making a big show of what they putting in. If I were to place a few dollars in our offering box, I could do it in such a way that everyone would know. Literally, the text reads that Jesus watched them put "coins" into the treasury. Perhaps the coins that the rich put in were heavy and noisy as they clanked into the containers.

Take note here that Jesus was watching them. And just as Jesus was watching what they gave, so Jesus watches what you give. Don't think that anything you give escapes His eyes. That's why Jesus spoke of rewards in the Sermon on the Mount. If you go and parade your giving

before everyone, so that everyone knows what you give and how you give, Jesus said, "You already have your reward in full" (Matt. 6:2). But, if you give in secret, so nobody knows, Jesus said, "Your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you" (Matt. 6:4).

There is nothing wrong with giving with a future reward in mind. In fact, this ought to be one of the motives we have in giving. Jesus tells us to "store up our treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys; and where thieves do not break in or steal" (Matthew 6:19). One way that you do this is by giving in a way that pleases the Lord. So, don't bring fanfare to your giving. Don't give in order to get something in return. Don't give for recognition. Don't give for payback. Give with an eye to the reward from your heavenly Father.

Jesus said, ...

Luke 14:12-14

When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, otherwise they may also invite you in return and that will be your repayment. But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.

But, these rich people in our text were losing their heavenly reward, as they desired their earthly reward, letting all know what generous sorts of people they were. The contrast comes in verse 42.

Mark 12:42

A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which amount to a cent.

These coins were "the smallest bronze Jewish coin in circulation in Palestine". ^[2] Together they were worth 1/64th of a Roman denarius, a laborer's wage for the day. In other words, it's the pay that you receive for working 10 minutes in the field -- a very small amount. The NIV translates it, "worth only a fraction of a penny."

The contrast between these gifts couldn't have been greater. On the one hand you have the rich people. There are "many" of them. They are putting in "large sums" into the pot. Being rich, they are powerful.

On the other hand you have this widow. Widows are the weak members of society. She had only "two small copper coins" to give. So, this solitary widow, placed in what she could.

There are The Gifts (verses 41-42). Let's look at my second point, ...
2. The Comment (verses 43-44)

It is here that we see Jesus' perspective of what was taking place. And it was decidedly different than what the Jews saw. In Mark 14, we will read of the woman who comes to Jesus to anoint Him. She comes into Simon, the leper's home and proceeds to break the vial of very costly perfume and pours it all over His head (Mark 14:3). When the disciples saw this, they were "indignant," thinking that the perfume was wasted (Mark 14:4-5). They began to scold her (Mark 14:5).

But, Jesus saw the events through a different lens. He said, "Let her alone; why do you bother her? She has done a good deed to Me. For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you wish you can do good to them; but you do not always have Me. She has done what she could; she has anointed My body beforehand for the burial. Truly I say to you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her." (Mark 14:6-9). The disciples thought that this woman had done a bad thing. But, Jesus said that she had done a good thing. In fact, it was so good, that what she did would be spoken of for thousands of years to come all around the world.

There is a similar disagreement as to what's taking place here as well. I do believe that the Jews thought that it all was going well. Everybody is giving their part to fund the temple! Look over to chapter 13. Look at how proud the disciples are about the temple. As He was going out of the temple, one of His disciples *said to Him, "Teacher, behold what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!" (Mark 13:1).

But, Jesus set the matter straight in Mark 13:2, "And Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another which will not be torn down." In other words, the building may well look impressive, but something is dreadfully wrong. The temple is coming down. Not one stone will be left unturned!

Such is the case with Jesus' comment in verses 43 and 44. Where everyone may be thrilled at the money collected in the temple, Jesus isn't so thrilled. This may easily happen in churches. Perhaps there is some great hoopla regarding some large building project at the church. There are fund raising drives. There are dinners and presentations, pushing everyone to give sacrificially.

And as there is a measure of success in the work. Everyone is rejoicing at the dollars being brought in. Everyone is excited about the new building that is being built. And yet, lost in the shuffle is the way that the poor are exploited in the process. Through great pressure of the leadership, they have been guilted into giving far beyond their ability to give.

Such is the case with our text this morning. The attention of the crowds was upon the rich and how much they gave. And their giving has (in part) allowed the great and beautiful temple to be built! But, Jesus focused His attention, not upon the rich who gave so much, but upon the poor widow. Verse 43, ...

Mark 12:43-44

Calling His disciples to Him, He said to them, "Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury; for they all put in out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on."

We find here some more information about the widow. When she put in the two copper coins, that was all that she had. It was "all she owned." It was "all she had to live on."

You say, "Why is this the case?" It is because her house had been systematically been devoured by the Jewish religious system, which was broken. We read of this last week, in Mark 12:40.

God has always expressed His heart for the poor and the needy and the weak and the helpless. Time and time again in the law, we read of the orphan, the widow and the stranger.

Exodus 22:21-22

You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. You shall not afflict any widow or orphan.

You say, "What will God do to the one who oppresses or affliction the weak in society. Continue on, ...

Exodus 22:23-44

If you afflict him at all, and if he does cry out to Me, I will surely hear his cry; and My anger will be kindled, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless.

Such is the heart of God.

Psalms 146:9

The LORD protects the strangers;
He supports the fatherless and the widow.

And He expects His people to do the same.

When Isaiah called Israel to repent of their sins, he said, ...

Isaiah 1:16-17

"Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean;
Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight.
Cease to do evil,
Learn to do good;
Seek justice,
Reprove the ruthless,
Defend the orphan,
Plead for the widow.

And when James, the brother of our Lord, defined true religion, he said this, "Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world" (James 1:27). Orphans and widows have always been at the heart of God's care and compassion. And yet, the Jewish system was established in such a way as to exploit widows, like we see in our text.

Think about the situation of widows. They have lost their husband. They have lost their companion. They are lonely. They don't have any wages coming in. Instead, they have whatever was left to them by their husbands -- maybe a house, some business assets, possibly some land. And throughout the rest of their lives, they have to live off their possessions. Over time, their nest egg diminishes. It can diminish slowly, and their assets can outlast them. Or, it can diminish quickly until eventually, they have nothing left.

Jesus said that this widow put in everything that she owned -- two small copper coins. This wasn't a one-time event. Systematically, the scribes had been pilfering her resources to support their lifestyle. Perhaps this had been going on for years. And this day, we find the widow giving the last of her savings into the treasury. She will leave the temple hungry.

What a contrast this is to the rich. When they gave, it was "out of their surplus" (verse 44). But, when she gave, it was "out of her poverty" (verse 44).

Look what Jesus says, "This poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury" (verse 43). I think that means that she put in more than all of the rich people combined! The reason is simple, she put in everything she owned! Nobody else did that. And in God's eyes, her giving was more substantial than everyone else's giving.

At this point, there are some lessons to be learned. When God looks down upon our giving, He considers everything that's involved. He considers our wealth. He considers our attitudes. He considers our abilities to give. And it may be that the poorest among us are the greatest

givers in God's eyes.

However, I want for you to notice that there aren't any indications here of commendation to this widow. Jesus doesn't lift her up as an example for all to follow. As a result of this, I do believe that God sees so much of what's going on, that at times, God is filled with compassion toward those who are being compelled by their religious leaders to give.

See, I don't believe that the call of this text is a call to give away all of your money. I don't think that there is a special merit in giving everything that you have so that you become a burden to everyone else. This text isn't here to give a brief parenthesis upon giving. No, the text continues with the flow of the narrative. The religious leaders had rejected Jesus (Mark 12:1-12). They came, attempting to trap Him in His words (Mark 12:13). Jesus then, denounced the scribes as those, "who like to walk around in long robes, and like respectful greetings in the market places, and chief seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets, who devour widows' houses, and for appearance's sake offer long prayers; these will receive greater condemnation" (Mark 12:38-40). This woman demonstrates just how corrupt the system is.

Economic abuse has happened in the past. Ezekiel prophesied against the shepherds of Israel saying, "Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock? You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat sheep without feeding the flock" (Ezekiel 34:2-3). In other words, the shepherds were taking from the flock to feed themselves. Such is not genuine spiritual leadership. Genuine spiritual leadership will feed and care for the flock above all things. They will feed the flock, even to their own hunger.

And in Jesus day, the religious leaders were taking from the sick and needy sheep to feed themselves. Again, don't think that it doesn't happen today. Economic abuse happens today. There are plenty of preachers out there today on the airwaves who are asking for your money. They promise you great blessings if you would just send money to them. They quote from Jesus, "Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure--pressed down, shaken together and running over" (Luke 6:38). You are told to trust the Lord. You are told to demonstrate your trust by giving to their ministry.

And many will take this widow as the supreme example of sacrificial giving. And say, "Look, this widow gave everything. You can too. So, trust in the Lord and give! Give everything!"

Why did this woman give everything? Certainly, because she had been taught to do so. I'm not sure if she had been promised health, wealth and prosperity in her giving. But, something had brought her to the place that she felt that the right thing to do was to give all that she had.

Let me say this -- if we, as a church, ever require offerings from widows, instead of helping them, we will be guilty of oppressing the widow; if we, as a church, ever tell people to give when they cannot buy food or pay their bills, we are oppressing the poor. Those who are walking with the Lord will not oppress the widow or the poor. We are to give to the poor, not take away from them. [\[3\]](#)

As Jesus said, "you always have the poor with you, and whenever you wish you can do good to them" (Mark 14:7). And here, we see a broken system.

In my house, we have a small whiteboard that hangs in the kitchen. On this whiteboard are all things pertinent to our home. Every Sunday night (or Monday morning), Yvonne dutifully writes down our master schedule for our family. She writes down what's going on in our family each day. She writes down the people we are having over. She writes down the events we are attending. She writes down various responsibilities we have. She writes down our plan for meals throughout the week. So, we can look at our little whiteboard and see what's going on in the lives of the Brandon family.

There's also another spot on our whiteboard of larger projects to be done. Right now, there are the following:

- Office storm door
- Outside sump drain cover
- Paint touch-up
- Black fence repair
- Paint kid's bath, master bedroom
- Kitchen counter
- Bathroom lights
- Stain play set

These projects can fall into one of two categories. Some of the projects fall into the cosmetic category -- things such as painting and staining or replacing the kitchen counter. But, other projects fall into the repair category -- my office door's storm door has some water damage. The outside sump pump drain cover needs replacing. We have a fence which is in pretty bad shape.

Well, as we come to our text this morning, we will see some things that are broken and in need of repair. They have to do with the religious system that the Jews had established. The manner in which they practiced their religion was so bad, that you would consider it broken. They didn't need to reform it, as if merely a cosmetic adjustment could fix everything. No, the system was broken and in need of an overhaul. The leaders were corrupt (Mark 38-40). The poor were being oppressed (Mark 12:41-44). It's no wonder that Jesus said that the buildings were coming down (Mark 13:2). It needed fixing.

Well, let's move quickly to my last point this morning. Let me show you ...

3. A Better Way (2 Corinthians 8-9)

It comes in 2 Corinthians, chapter 8 and 9. Here we see some of the same elements as our text. We see the topic of giving addressed. We see the poor giving of their meager finances. We see Paul commenting on the situation.

To understand these chapters, you need to know the historical context of what's taking place. There was a famine in throughout the world (Acts 11:27-29). This famine was hitting those who lived in Jerusalem the hardest. And so, it was determined that those in Antioch would take up a collection, that Barnabas and Saul might deliver the gift to the elders in Jerusalem, which they did.

However, it appears that the need continued on. And as Paul was on his third missionary journey, he was seeking to raise further support for those in need in Jerusalem. In 1 Corinthians 16:1-4, Paul told those in Corinth, ...

1 Corinthians 16:1-4

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come. When I arrive, whomever you may approve, I will send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem; and if it is fitting for me to go also, they will go with me.

In effect, Paul was saying this, "There is a great need for the saints in Jerusalem. I want to prepare you now to give to their relief. So, start giving now toward this work. So that when I come, we won't need to have a special collection taken up. We can simply gather the monies and take them to Jerusalem somehow. If you have someone that you want to send, that's great. If it's right and proper for me to go with them, that's great as well; I'm willing. But, start preparing for this work today."

Now, in 2 Corinthians, Paul is addressing the same topic. Only now, he speaks of his own experiences with the churches in Macedonia who have already given to this relief effort. He tells of how they were poor. He tells of their sacrificial giving. He tells of how they were so willing and ready to give. He tells of how the gospel has so impacted their lives to give.

2 Corinthians 8:1

Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia,

In writing these words to those in Corinth, Paul's aim is to put forth the "grace of God" (verse 1). Their giving displayed the grace of God! The gospel had come to those in Macedonia "in word ... and in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction" (1 Thess. 1:5). They were told of Jesus Christ and Him crucified. And they believed in the saving message of the gospel, that those who believe in Him will be forgiven of their sin. Through faith, God had changed these people.

Oh, their lives were still full of affliction and difficulty and yes, even poverty (verse 2). And yet, they gave sacrificially to the work of famine relief.

2 Corinthians 8:2-5

that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.

Notice how these people gave to the work of God. They were facing affliction (verse 2). They were deep in poverty (verse 2). Yet, they overflowed in generosity (verse 2).

Paul even says that they gave more than they were really able to give (verse 3). They extended themselves, perhaps even more than they were able. But, they did so willingly (verse 3). They did so joyfully (verse 2). They even begged to be involved in a greater way (verse 4). They were wholly given to the Lord (verse 5).

You say, "How did all of this happen?" Paul said that it was "the grace of God" in their lives. If you would have seen the widow give, and if you would have seen those in Macedonia give, everything about their giving would have been different

I believe that this widow was under bondage of the law in her giving. I believe that she was feeling forced to give everything. I doubt that there was a smile on her face, as she returned home to empty cupboards. But, those in Macedonia were under God's grace in their giving. They gave of their own volition. They had a joy on their faces that they were able to help in the work of the Lord. They had an energy and an enthusiasm to help. Nothing will thwart the work of God more than a frowning countenance and a weariness in the work.

We had a salesman come to our door yesterday, selling phone, internet, and cable services. He had come a few days before and had quoted to us his rates. Yesterday he was following up with us. As we thought about it, we realized that he was bringing a better deal than we currently had. So, we invited him in to purchase his services.

When he stepped in the door, there was a lot going on in our home. May I even call it, "chaotic"? Mikko was there to practice music. But, we were in the midst of changing some things, so papers were all over our counter. We were under a time crunch, so we were trying to do things quickly. I was running up and down the stairs, copying certain things. I was out in my office and back, gathering music. Soon, the doorbell rang and our neighbor next door had some questions for us. Throw some kids and a dog who loves all sorts of strangers into the mix and you can imagine how loud and crazy it was at that moment.

But, I believe there was a joy in the craziness. As this salesman sat at the kitchen counter filling out the needed paperwork, we were talking about our service this morning and music that needed to be copied. I'm sure that he caught wind that we were engaged in some sort of religious ministry, as we talked openly about the songs and hymns that we needed to copy. Toward the end of our time together, he pushed

once more for us to bundle our cable with the phone and internet we were purchasing. But, I was able to tell him of my own temptations, and that cable television in our home would distract me because I'm weak and I love watching television. Soon, we engaged in some small talk about our children and his children.

As I was walking him out of the house, I thought to myself, I don't want to let this man go without giving him some light. So, I gave him a tract as he was leaving and said, "Here's a little something for you to read." He said, "Thanks" and left.

I'm trusting the Lord that what he saw in our home was a busyness, but a joyful busyness, as we were pre-occupied at the moment with things of the Lord. May the Lord use the tract to change His life as He reads of Jesus.

This is what those in Corinth were like. They were laboring and they were laboring hard for the Lord. They were extending themselves beyond their abilities. And yet, there was a joy and a delight in their labors. They begged to participate in the ministry through their giving. Their zeal came because of the grace of God in their lives (8:1).

Throughout chapters 8 and 9, Paul continues to speak of how God's grace in our lives should impact our giving. Everything flows from Christ. Regarding this collection, Paul writes (in verse 8), ...

2 Corinthians 8:8

I am not speaking this as a command, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also.

New Covenant giving doesn't come by way of command. New Covenant giving doesn't come by way of high pressure tactics. Rather, we give to the work of the Lord because we love. We give to the work of the Lord because of His grace. Verse 9, ...

2 Corinthians 8:9

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.

Isn't this the gospel? Jesus, was rich in heaven. He was with God. He was walking with God. The Father and the Son were enjoying one another in glory. And yet, Jesus became "poor." He took on flesh and blood and the weaknesses of being a man. He walked with men. He was surrounded by sin from all directions.

Eventually, He was poured out to death, even death on a cross. And yet, through His poverty, we are made rich. Through His death, He gives us life. And that changes everything.

Our heart's desire is to give! And there comes a blessing in giving.

2 Corinthians 9:6-8

Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed;

This is the better way. It's my hope that we at Rock Valley Bible Church are generous people. It's my hope that we sow bountifully, that God might allow us to reap bountifully (verse 6).

We have an offering box in the back of our auditorium, that you might give willingly (verse 7). We place little pressure of you to give. We want your giving to come from your heart (verse 7). We want your giving to come from your own joy in participating in God's work (verse 7). We want you to trust in the Lord to give you what only He can (verse 8).

I would contend that this approach is vastly different than what this poor widow faced. This is a better way.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on November 11, 2012 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] http://digital.library.okstate.edu/oas/oas_pdf/v50/p184_186.pdf

[2] Bible Knowledge Commentary, p. 166

[3] <http://heavenawaits.wordpress.com/making-money-off-the-widows-mite/>