

The Widow's Mite: An Autobiography

Texts: Psalm 15; Mark 12:38-44 October 6, 2019

Good morning everyone and thank you for having me. It's not often that a mite like me gets to speak to people like you!

Yes, I am a mite. No, I'm not one of those annoying little insects that tunnel into your skin and live off your blood. No, not that kind of mite.

I'm better than that. Not much better, but definitely better than a parasitic bug.

As you can see, I am a piece of money, a coin, and a not very important one at that.

Mite isn't even my real name. It's just what those translators in England called me 400 years ago when they made the King James Version of the Bible.

England didn't even have such a piddly little coin at the time, so they had to borrow the name of a Dutch coin to find piece of money as worthless as me.

My real name is a lepton, but I don't mind people calling me a mite. It's kinda become a nickname of mine, and I wear it proudly. I call myself a mighty mite, though as money goes, I'm anything but mighty in buying power. It's like an in-joke.

Back in the day I was the smallest coin there was, kinda like your penny. And like a penny, I was made out of copper, pretty common stuff, certainly not silver or gold, or anything like that.

And, like a penny, I was treated with about as much respect!

If I fell on the ground, I might not even get picked up. There was no, "See a mite and pick it up and all day you'll have good luck!" rhyme for me, oh no, nothing like that to encourage people to expend the *enormous* effort of bending over and picking me up. "Ooh, I might hurt my back!"

It's things like that that make me almost envy your penny, that lucky dog. Has his own rhyme and everything. It's made him too big for his britches, if you ask me, though no one ever does.

I mean, you don't even like to keep pennies in your britches, though nowadays you call britches pants. Back in my day, people wore robes or togas. Only the barbarian Germans wore pants. Later on, when the Barbarians were invading the Roman Empire, the Romans called them sons of britches, or something like that.

Anyway, enough about the Romans, everyone talks about them. Back to me, and my pennies envy.

You find a penny in your pocket and you take it right out and put it in a glass jar! And a coin like that thinks he can look down on me! Pfft.

Glass jars! Humph! I was never treated like that. Such disrespect! No glass jars for me! No sir, people used to throw me in terracotta jars, just like a ... oh man, there goes that point! Okay penny, you got me, let it go!

All right, so people used to throw me in terracotta jars and have huge collections, not because I was so valuable, but because I was so useless. I was collected and collected and collected and never spent. It just wasn't worth the trouble.

Smarty pants penny over there wants me to mention that archaeologists have found a lot of coins like me in garbage dumps, just thrown away like I had no value at all, just because I was small and couldn't buy much!

What's that, penny? Not even a thought? Whaddaya mean? Oh, right. *Penny for your thoughts?* No one ever said "Mite for your meditations!"

Thanks for reminding me of that, penny! Now quiet down for a minute while I talk to these nice people!

So how much was I worth? Well, two of me made a quadrans, just like it says in the Bible, and four quadrans made an assarion, and sixteen assarions made a denarius, and a denarius was what an ordinary joe working 10 hours a day in a field might make.

Confusing? Yeah, I know. It's about how much you would have to pay an illegal immigrant for five minutes of work in your field, picking fruit and vegetables.

Yup, just five minutes worth of work ... okay, four and a half minutes ... but we can round up, right? ...

... so five minutes' work, so that's what you could buy with me.

But that's a little better than a penny, right? So what's he always going off on me for? Where does he get off, all high and mighty about everything just because *he's* still in circulation. Who knows how long that gig will last, right?

So why am I here today? It's because of a story I have to tell.

One time I found myself in a money bag along with all kinds of other coins, bigger ones, worth a lot more than me, but I did have one friend in there, another mite just like me.

We jingled and jangled around for a couple of weeks, unnoticed in this guy's money bag, and we heard him wheeling and dealing like nobody's business.

A denarius here, ten denarii there, he was always reaching in to take some money out or put some money back in.

He never wanted us, of course, just the bigger boys worth a lot more.

But no matter how often money went out, at the end of the day, he always had more than he started with. He was that good at making money.

It was beginning to get crowded in there ... not a lot of room for any of us to move about anymore.

So anyway, it's the Sabbath, this guy's off to the Temple and he's standing there talking with his buddies waiting their turn to put their money in, and they're all bragging about how much they're going to give. We can hear it through the leather of the pouch.

"Just watch me," he says, "just you watch. You think that guy gave a lot? I'm going to bury him. I'm just waiting until there are a few more people to see. I want everyone to know how pious and generous I am!"

And a minute later, he thinks he's got his moment!

He reaches in and takes out the big coins and throws them into the collection chest with a great clatter and clang, and we can hear the crowd go "Ooh" and "Ah" and a couple of "Wows".

And he was loving it, holding us above his head in triumph in that nearly empty money bag.

But then someone else came along and gave even more! The crowd was back on its feet cheering like mad, but my guy, he was *just plain* mad.

“What are they cheering him for?” he asked. “I could have given a lot more. I’ve got enough at home to beat that guy coming and going ... and next week I will!”

With that he huffed off, still muttering under his breath.

As soon as he got home, he filled his money bag right back up with even more than before, all big coins except for us.

All week long he carried us around, cramped in there, almost bursting the seams.

That Friday, the day before the Sabbath came around again, we’re walking along the street in our bag and we hear this old lady calling out.

“Have mercy on a poor widow!” she says. “I have no husband and no son to take care of me! A little pity for a poor widow. You sir, can you spare something for a widow? Anything is good! I only have bread for tonight and nothing for tomorrow!”

Well, our guy, he usually just walked past people like that.

But there must have been something about that widow, or maybe it was something about all the other people watching to see what he would do, but anyway, the bag opened up and light poured in.

He rummaged around through all his coins, but all he could find were the denarii, the big boys. “Sorry,” he said, “I don’t have anything I can give you.”

That was when my buddy and I got tired of being in that bag. We pushed our way up past the other coins until we were right on top.

The other coins were glinting in the sun, but not us. Just plain old brown copper, no glint there. And that’s probably what made him spot us.

“Aha,” he said, “No, wait, here are a couple of mites! You can have them!”

In came his hand, out came us mites, and he chucked us in the direction of the old lady.

Suddenly we were flying through the air and then bouncing off the paving stones and finally rolling and rolling, my buddy one way, me the other.

The poor old lady had to scramble after us.

She was out of breath when she finally caught us, but she was laughing with joy. She squeezed us tightly like she was never going to let us go. I'd never felt so appreciated in my life.

I looked around, and I saw the money bag which had been my home all those long weeks walking away attached to the hand of a man in fancy robes.

"Well *that's* the last time I ever do that!" he was saying. "The ungrateful wretch! She didn't even thank me after all I did for her!"

And then he was gone, and his money bag, too. Just my friend and I were left, clutched in her little hand.

The old lady was saying her prayers, thanking God for that good man's generosity. I guess she was too busy praying to hear what he said.

"God, you're so good to me. You're always there for me when I need you. I know I can trust you to take care of me. Thank you, thank you, thank you! I love you, Lord."

After she finished praying, she begged for another hour or so, but no one gave her anything, so eventually she went home to her hovel of sticks and ate her last half-loaf of bread.

Another widow came by, a friend of my widow, and asked how she'd done.

"I got two mites," my widow said, "do you need one of them? How'd you do today?"

"I got an assarion, so I'm okay for a day or two," she said, "You keep your mites."

"Okay," said my widow, "I'm going to the Temple tomorrow to thank God for my two mites then."

"Oh I know you," said her friend, "You're going to put those mites into the collection, aren't you? You're just going to give them away, give away your food for tomorrow. That's so foolish, you know. You're going to give your whole life away one of these days!"

But my widow just laughed. "I have to thank God now, don't I? Without God I never would've even had that bread!"

Her friend tried to talk her out of it, but my old widow just said, "God's taken care of me all these years, God's not going to let me down now!"

I knew I wouldn't be staying with her for very long.

And sure enough, the next day we were off to the Temple, clutched in her hand, her life savings.

As the old widow was waiting her turn to put money in, I heard a voice I recognized – my old owner. And then I heard a clatter and a clanging the likes of which I'd never heard before.

Everyone cheered, and this time there was no one to come after with more—no one to come after at all, except my old widow, and she certainly didn't have more!

I could feel her hand letting me go and I tumbled into the collection chest with my buddy at my side, two little mites joining the big boys in the chest.

We barely made a noise when we hit. There was no cheering for us. A snicker or two, yes, but no cheering.

But then I heard another voice, a kind voice, but full of authority. I know it was Jesus' voice now, but I didn't know it then.

"That poor widow has given more than all the rest," he said, "They gave out of their abundance, but she gave all that she had to live on."

The same people who had laughed at us when the widow dropped us in laughed at Jesus, too.

"Idiot," they said, "doesn't know what he's talking about."

But, you know, he did. Because what that poor widow did that day, it made a difference. No one remembers that rich man, but we all remember her.

That Jesus, he went on to be someone, rising from the dead and all. And people remembered what he'd said about that widow, and about me and my buddy.

And over the years faithful people must have given billions to God because of what that widow did, because of me!

So I'm here to tell you today not to worry about feeling small and insignificant, like you can't make a difference.

I'm here to tell you today not to worry about whether other people think you are valuable or not, whether you personally or this great little church you worship in.

Jesus thinks you are valuable. Jesus thinks you are wonderful. Jesus thinks that you can be the difference maker in this world.

Jesus took me, a tiny little mite, and turned me into help for the poor for two thousand years.

And if he can do that with me, imagine what he can do with you?

... Thanks for having me out, folks. God bless! You can meet me in person after the service. But right now I have somewhere else to go.

(Mite goes into the collection plate. Sit down)