

# “Holding Out”

Mark 12:41-44

by Pastor Tim Dodson  
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**Mark 12:41** *Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many who were rich put in much. 42 Then one poor widow came and threw in*

*two mites, which make a quadrans. 43 So He called His disciples to Himself and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; 44 "for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood."*

A couple of weeks ago we covered a message entitled “All In”, where we dealt with the passage of Matthew 22:34-40. Mark’s account of that event lies just a few verses before our text today. In that passage Christ speaks of the all-encompassing and emphatic nature of the commitment and surrender that is asked of us as true believers...true *Christians*. Three times in the Matthew account of that text Jesus uses the word “*all*.” That scriptural ideal which... *as Christ did in so many of His teachings*, speaks of the true nature of Christianity as God designed it. A life that stands in stark contrast to our modern religious culture that has so watered down the power and dynamic of a disciples life that such is now nearly indistinguishable from the lives of those who wholly reject Christ, cross, and redemption.

Our passage today is historically presented as a tithing ‘proof text’...a scriptural “throw-down” for countless church building drives. While I understand and agree with the principle of financial giving and the support of the local fellowship in which we are involved in, I believe that what Jesus was trying to get across was more than just a tithing message. No, I think He was still on the same subject as He was back in verses 28 – 34, for I cannot miss the phrase “*she...put in all that she had...*” There is that little word again. It seems the topic of conversation is still whether or not we are truly “**all in...**” or whether we are still attempting a life negotiation with God over the control, the direction and the priorities of much of our lives.

Throughout scripture we are not only repeatedly called to emphatic positions, committed levels, and sold-out pursuits, but we are clearly warned of the alternatives. Haggai 1: 5 -6 says “... *Look at what’s happening to you! You have planted much but harvest little. You eat but are not satisfied. You drink but are still thirsty. You put on clothes but cannot keep warm. Your wages disappear as though you were putting them in pockets filled with holes!*”

Deut 28:38-42 “*You will plant much but harvest little, for locusts will eat your crops. You will plant vineyards and care for them, but you will not drink the wine or eat the grapes, for worms will destroy the vines. You will grow olive trees throughout your land, but you will never use the olive oil, for the fruit will drop before it ripens. You will have sons and daughters, but you will lose them, for they will be led away into captivity. Swarms of insects will destroy your trees and crops.*”



How many of us suffer because we are holding out on God? Often it is because we don't truly believe in His promises or His love, and thus we forever keep our "foot in the door." You know...in case things don't really work out with this Jesus thing! In case things get really tough we can step in and save the day. In case He does something with us that's just crazy we can fall back to "plan B."

We have all been so tempted. It's a good thing that temptation is not sin, for we all have mulled this over in our hearts and minds. Most of us have no problem giving *some* of ourselves to God: our time, our service, our emotional bond...even some of our money. But *all*? Well, therein lies the problem. Because the great majority of us want to be personally in control of our lives and futures. We want to ...*well*, do what WE want. Not on the bad stuff mind you! Just...*you know*, the plans for our lives. Our futures. The "non-sin" stuff. Where we live. What we do for a living. Who we date. How we spend our Friday nights! We at least want to keep an "emergency fund." Financially... relationally...hey, just hobbies really. Just a little something we keep back just for us, you know?

But now so often it seems like nothing falls into place in our lives. Nothing comes easily. Life is a wrestle...a strife...a fight. And we look up ahead and, *well* there's . . . *nothing*. That little voice inside us whispers that if God *really* loved me, and if He is *really* in control of the whole universe, then it would be easy for him to change my circumstances. It would take him no effort whatsoever to make a tweak here and there and *poof!* my life would be fixed. That voice takes clear and overt scripture—a *high view of God's power and sovereignty*—and comes to the very poor conclusions that God is holding out on *me!*

Who hasn't thought this way at some point? Like "God is the Creator of life + You are barren = He is withholding good from you. God is the Author of marriage + You are single = He is withholding good from you. God is Owner of universe + You are broke = He is withholding good from you. But that is often like complaining that "these cookies are terrible!" while failing to acknowledge that we only surrendered half the ingredients and yet we expected blue ribbon cookies! Further, we blatantly believe that if we surrender up those ingredients to God that He must or at least *should* make those cookies for us! If not...*then again, He is holding out on us*. If this is our heart, then who is in charge? Who is serving who?

We all know the promises on this subject. We know the Bible says "*seek FIRST the kingdom of God and ALL these things will be added unto you.*" But factually we *don't* and thus factually they *aren't*. What is mystifying is that we are then *surprised* when life becomes joyless, aimless, directionless, and *well*, just *less*. His word's echo in our heads and hearts... "*No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him.*" (1 Cor 2:9) But the truth us, we just don't really believe that.

We at some point come to the conclusion that we'll just have to make things happen for ourselves. Like Jesus' temptations in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-11), we're presented with an opportunity to believe the lies and to try and secure our desires *apart* from God's provision and perfect timing. Usually without abandoning Christ and church altogether (though sometimes that is the case), but simply "holding out" on God and operating in parallel. One life investing some in God over here while quietly stockpiling "can goods" of life over here *just in case*.

Diversify your investment portfolio! Don't put all your eggs in one basket! That's the way we attempt to live it and when our living falls short we conclude that God simply is not willing, or worse, *not able* to make life work for us. But again, this is life as WE have decided should be for us. All of this says we are clearly not surrendered...we are not "all in." We are "holding out."

What usually troubles us about this passage is that Jesus apparently praised this woman for giving every dime she had and she would seemingly now be destitute. Our natural reaction is “well, how would that work? Does Jesus want me to empty my bank account?” But was Jesus praising her for giving up all her money, or for giving her “all?” For it strikes me that the money thing was something deeply personal for *her*, and not necessarily meant to be a corporate mandate for the whole of the greater church. But it might be an issue for *you*.

This was an issue also for the guy on the other side of the spectrum...the “rich young ruler” to whom Jesus asked to go and sell everything he had, give it to the poor, and come and follow Him. We hear “*sell everything you have*” and fail to hear the “...*and come and follow Me.*” For that guy, what he had **not** surrendered was the control of His money, and perhaps it was the same for this widow? One does not have to be rich to let money and the chase of it control our lives. It was money and it’s chase that was keeping this guy on the edges of faith and out of the blessings.

It would be a grave mistake to pass this topic off as a small issue. Jesus said the greatest commandment of scripture and the whole of Christendom was this: “*You shall love the LORD with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might*” (Matthew 22:37). Such can only be understood that loving God means that I am to love him with everything that is in me and everything I have. God doesn’t simply want a day or even an act — God wants to be cherished and glorified in everything I do. Do any one of us want a marriage where our spouse loves us partially or even mostly?

Calvin considered this account stating “...*that whatever men offer to God ought to be estimated not by its apparent value, but only by the feeling of the heart, and that the holy affection of him who, according to his small means, offers to God the little that he has, is more worthy of esteem than that of him who offers a hundred times more out of his abundance.*”

On the surface we know God is sovereign, and God is good. There’s nothing in our experience that can change that. But then again, doubt and unbelief are rarely rational. But they sure are powerful! The more we focus on the lies and feed the doubts the more powerful that unbelief becomes. And the more powerful the unbelief becomes, the more convinced we get that we need to go out and make something happen for ourselves.

It is at that present moment when unbelief rears its ugly head and you and I have a choice to make. We can stand in God’s truth and allow it to strengthen our belief or listen to the lies and allow it to strengthen our unbelief. Either way, *something will grow stronger*. There’s no neutral ground. It’s not like we can just wait it out and see what happens. The path of passivity (“maybe tomorrow I will feel like God is good and gracious”) will only deepen unbelief. If we wait until tomorrow to believe God is good, upon waking up, we’ll discover that the unbelief has spread throughout our soul like terminal cancer.

As we’re progressively conformed to Jesus’ image, we can choose the path He chose. We’ve been set free from sin so we can pursue righteousness. We are not enslaved to unbelief anymore. *You don’t have to keep doing what you’ve always done.*

You can form new habits of belief that builds your confidence in God on a daily basis:

You can verbally refute lies (whether personal, demonic, or worldly) the minute they pop into your head.

You can cry out to the Spirit to help you when you feel weak and overwhelmed with unbelief.

You can read, meditate on, and memorize Scripture to renew your mind.

You can confess your doubts to a friend and ask them to pray for you.

You can meet with God’s people on a Sunday or mid-week gathering to hear the truth and worship God.

The point is *we have a choice*. The Spirit of God dwelling in us breaks the fatalistic patterns of sin in our lives and gives us supernatural power to battle unbelief. We don't have to be resigned to our unbelief. We can be different. We can be like Jesus!

How many of us are struggling with a life that seems to be more than the average struggle of humanity; *it seems to be simply broken*? It is just a fight and a struggle, and it is without joy or peace, and we are naturally tempted to believe that God is holding out on us, when the problem lies with *us*. We are holding out on **Him**. The Christian life is not just a matter of *what* we do, but scripture is replete with the idea that God cares *how* we do it.

Jeremiah 10:23 *"I know, LORD, that our lives are not our own. We are not able to plan our own course."*

Proverbs 16:9 *"We can make our plans, but the LORD determines our steps."*

This widow gave boldly in faith. Whatever the issue was that brought her to that point, she was trusting God on the other side of that act. Scripture tells us that it is "impossible to please God without faith." Heb 11:6 *"And it is impossible to please God without faith. **Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him.**"*

When we attempt to make our plans and seek our direction while attempting to enlist Christ to "get on board" we are sure to be disappointed. God is not a genie. Christianity, again, is a full surrender to Christ. Understanding that He loves us so perfectly and that He is fully aware of us as individuals. So much so, that it is as if we are His only follower on earth!

Ps 31:19 *"How great is the goodness you have stored up for those who fear you. You lavish it on those who come to you for protection, blessing them before the watching world."*

Are we able to believe and even *embrace* the passage Romans 8:28 *"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose?"*

**Thanks to material:** "God is Holding on To Me" by Whitney Woollard

- <http://gcdiscipleship.com/2016/08/14/god-is-holding-out-on-me/>