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# Would You Believe It?

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**Texts: 1 Kings 17:8–16; Mark 12:41–44**

Would you believe it? Were you Elijah, would you believe that what you said to that widow would indeed come true? Would you honestly believe that she needn't fear? Would you believe she could give the last of her wheat and oil to a total stranger and not suffer? Would you believe that in spite of drought and famine she would not lack food because God would miraculously supply it? Would you believe that in giving she would receive far more? Honestly, would you believe it?

Would you believe it? Would you believe that the widow Jesus watched as she brought her offering to the temple could be so trusting as to give all she possessed? Would you believe that in God's eyes those two farthings "cost" far more than hundreds of shekels others dropped in? Would you believe that someone's faith can be so great she can trust God to supply every need? Honestly, would you believe it?

There's no doubt it's hard to believe, both about the widow to whom Elijah was sent and the widow for whom Jesus was sent. If you have a hard time believing it, know this: There is a stewardship practice and lifestyle that will make it far easier for you to believe. It's a practice and lifestyle that will inevitably lead to a life of greater faith and trust; a lifestyle and practice which these widows' actions embraced. But I must warn you. To describe this I'll need to use a word that has become almost "unmentionable" in church circles and nearly obscene in secular parlance. It's politely known as the "T" word. If you don't want to hear it you might want to plug your ears now. The word, for all those brave enough to hear of it, is this: *TITHE*.

To tithe means to give at least ten percent of what you earn *and who you are* to others. Would you believe it? The tithe is a practice that is as old as the Old Testament and a lifestyle that was for centuries the norm in the Christian Church. Yet for some reason tithing doesn't seem to mean very much to very many nowadays. Actually, it's not for some reason. It's for a very simple, specific reason. We live in as spiritually deadly a time as ever there was, in which we are slowly poisoned by the notion that money and all it can buy means everything. Mammon, for millions, *is* Master!

The signs of these times are everywhere, from simple to sublime. I'm not that old, but I can remember a time when newspapers printed news and were not merely the outer wrapping for advertisements and flyers. But look. I saved the flyers from this past week's *Edmonton Journal* (a pile almost three centimetres thick). The store ads use as much newsprint as the news! I'm not that old, but I can remember a time when stores weren't open seven days a week because people didn't really care to shop seven days a week. I'm not that old, but I can remember a time when elections were fought over issues such as civil rights, foreign policy, and social issues. But look at many elections nowadays—municipal, provincial or federal. They are waged over the voter's back pocket and the candidate who appears to be the smaller "pain in the rear pocket" is most often the one who prevails, regardless of the candidate's ethical, social or moral qualifications or stance. The decade of the 80s in North America was labelled by one commentator as "The Decade of Greed". The 90s bode more of the same.

Given a culture and climate of extreme selfishness it's not surprising that tithe is a word largely unspoken and unrecognized. People are hesitant to "give up" one percent of what they have, earn or are—much less ten percent.

Yet if we claim to serve God and not Mammon it's high time to practise what we preach; to live out what we believe. The tithe can help us along that way. I'm convinced of that. For tithing teaches us that God is God. Tithing teaches us that we can live without some material things in order to enjoy things that endure for a lifetime and an eternity. Tithing teaches us what Psalm 23 says so simply, "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want." Tithing teaches us that it's not crazy and ridiculous to believe that God will provide. Tithing teaches us

that God works as many miracles and shows as much care in the twentieth century as in the first.

The widow at Zarephath gave not a mere 10 but a full 100 of her wheat and oil—her life's security in troubled times. She did so trusting that God would supply her every need. And God did! The widow at the temple gave not a mere 10 but a full 100 of her life's "wealth" all the while trusting God to supply what she lacked. Jesus called her blessed. Would you believe it?

Would you believe that a widow could have faith enough to believe that feeding a prophet of God with the last of her food made sense and was not stupidity? Would you believe that the widow in Jerusalem could actually drop in the last of her wealth while others tried to figure out what was the least they could get away with? If you can't believe it, but for Christ's sake you would like to, then know that the "T" word is the place to begin understanding what faithful stewardship and ultimate trust encompass. Once you set out on the road to tithing you will be more and more able to answer "Yes" when people ask you, "Would you believe it?"

Would you believe it? As members of the Body of Christ we are baptized into God's love and we are going to be cared for from day one on earth until life eternal in heaven. Would you believe it? We are going to be a part of doing God's will on earth by giving back what God first gave us. Would you believe it? It is in giving that we receive far more. If you believe it then show it by embarking upon the road of tithing in your stewardship. Should that road look too scary, remember the testimony of those who have set out upon it. It can lead you to joys unknown. Just ask the widow in Zarephath, and the widow in Jerusalem. They believe it!