

Mark 12:41-44

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."

There are a bunch of really moving sermons that can be preached from this passage. We could talk about the value of sacrificial giving, about faith, about trusting God to take care of you, about how little we usually sacrifice when we give. But look at our text in its context. Do you see Jesus teaching about any of these things?

I was prepared to give a sermon about the proper attitude in giving. But that isn't what the context is saying. Which leads me to believe that Jesus was not singling out this woman for her virtue.

Look at our context:

This is the passage before our text-

Mark 12:38-40

³⁸ Then He said to them in His teaching, "Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, *love* greetings in the marketplaces, ³⁹ the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts, ⁴⁰ who devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation."

Look at what it says about how the scribes treat widows. They come up with spiritual reasons to exploit the widows.

Then look what comes after our text-

Mark 13:1-2

¹ Then as He went out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, "Teacher, see what manner of stones and what buildings *are here!*" ² And Jesus answered and said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not *one* stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down."

Given the context we can see that Jesus is talking about the condemnation that is soon to fall on this bankrupt religious system. The context is the corruption of a system and Jesus warning his disciples against it. The scribes are going to be judged and condemned because of their corruption, which is best displayed by how they treat the powerless.

Then he goes on to say after our text that the very building that this woman was giving money to support was going to be torn down stone from stone. It will be completely destroyed.

Do we really think that Christ would have wanted this woman trusting this corrupt system to the place where she was throwing into it everything that she needed to live off of? Do we think Christ would have advised her to do such a thing in support of a building that God Himself would oversee the destruction of in just a few short years?

Now look at our text.

Does Jesus make a single statement telling the disciples what a wonderful thing this woman did? Did He say anything about her faith? Did he tell them that they should follow her example? Did He even say it is a good example to follow? Christ doesn't even say that this woman is a follower of His. There is nothing in the context that tells us that what this woman did was good or wise or exemplary. All we know is that it was sacrificial. She gave everything she had. And who did she give it to? A self serving corrupt religious system that demanded much from people and gave little in return.

After looking at the text and the context I believe the topic is not how to be an exemplary giver. The topic is really how to avoid being a religious sucker. Another title for the sermon would be the danger of being an undiscerning follower.

I wanted to use this sermon to encourage sacrificial giving. After all, this church has bills to pay. It pays me. And we may need a small loan to finish construction on the building. And most of the sermons I have heard on this text make this woman a patron saint of giving. Now it is true that God loves a cheerful giver. And it is our obligation to pay for the services we receive from being part of the church. But this is not the passage that will preach this sermon.

Let's look at our text.

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.**

Jesus sat in the court of the women. This was open to everyone. Evidently there were thirteen trumpet-shaped receptacles into which people placed their offerings.

The New International Greek Testament tells us this about the use of gifts in the temple. **The objects for which the money was given (apart from two chests for the temple tax) are listed in the Mishnah as 'Bird offerings', 'Young birds for whole-offerings', 'Wood', 'Incense', 'Gold for the *kappōret* [perhaps sacred vessels?]', and 'Freewill offerings' (six chests being devoted to the last). All contributions were therefore for the work of the temple; charitable donations for the poor were made separately.**

John MacArthur says this-

It must have deeply grieved and angered Christ to see people sacrificing their money to this wretched, apostate, corrupt system of false religion, under the misguided assumption that doing so would please God and produce divine blessing.

I guess the most dangerous idea was that giving money to this system was somehow pleasing to God and maybe earning the giver something special with God. I have heard a lot of health and wealth preachers teach the same thing. They somehow make the point that giving money to **their ministry** wins some kind of special favor with God, some special blessing, some inside track. What a horrible lie. But it is commonly used to sucker people who have **bad theology** to give **hard earned money**.

One of the worst lies that our enemy has in his arsenal is that there are things we can do that will earn favor with God. The idea that **we can do something** that will create an obligation with God toward us is a deadly kind of evil that allows people to **exploit us in the name** of God. They will say **give this money** or **do this thing** or **pray this prayer** and now God is obligated to do something. And somehow the so-called minister always finds a way **to profit** from providing this power over God for us. Maybe this woman giving her last pennies believed that by doing this she was winning favor with God. Maybe the scribes had told her that if she hopes to have any chance for heaven she better put up some cash. We don't know. But not much has changed. Today we see that Ken Copeland needs a jet to minister for God. Where do you think the money came from to buy it? You can rest assured that some of the funds for the jet have come from some poor widow giving what she couldn't afford to give.

The same kind of exploitation is happening today as what happened in Jesus day. Undiscerning people are being fooled into thinking that they can get what they want from God by doing certain things, by giving certain gifts, by earning certain rewards. And it is just as evil as what the Sadducees were doing in Jesus's day.

As Christ was watching the people putting their gifts into the receptacles in the temple He noticed this- **And many who were rich put in much**

Evidently there was a tradition of giving expensive items to the temple and then those things that were contributed would show up as monuments in the giver's honor. There were a lot of very valuable works of art that were contributed to the temple that were then displayed at the temple with the contributors name attached. The Romans looted all these things when they destroyed the temple. So the rich gave a lot because they probably thought they were buying favor with God. And at the same time they were gaining influence for themselves. There was a plaque honoring their spirituality. So when the rich give, they sort of give and get. They might be giving something up, but they are achieving something for

themselves in their gifts. They are lofting up their own names. The crime is not so great when the rich give of their abundance.

Something else we need to look at is the word for rich. It means someone who is fully supplied and has enough. Guess what. That is us. Now I assume that no one here would be regarded as being a rich American. I doubt we have any millionaires. But by this definition, most of us here are rich. When have any of us gone without a meal because we couldn't afford it? How much food do we have in our cupboards? We don't need to feel guilty for it. But we need to see ourselves in a biblical perspective. We are rich. We can give a lot and still not suffer for what we have given.

But look at verse 42.

⁴² Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans.

There is a lot contained in this one verse. This coin is one 64th of a days wages. So if \$88 is a days wage, this coin would be \$1.38. So this woman put in \$2.76 in our cultural equivalent.

The quadrans was a Roman coin. Now it is very interesting that Mark goes out of his way to put this into the Roman equivalent. This probably tells us that Mark was writing to Romans and not primarily to Jews.

So this is what moves Christ to motion. He sees this happen, and he does the next thing.

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."

Now, notice who the person is. She is a poor widow. These are the very people who the Scribes exploit.

The word for poor here means the poorest of the poor.

Why is Jesus pointing this out? My guess is that He was reorienting their thinking. They may well have thought that those who gave the most were the most impressive, maybe even the most spiritual. But Jesus is showing that when regarded from a heavenly perspective, a true perspective, the poor woman gave the most. Why? Because it is a matter of percentages. She gave 100%. She gave all she had to live on. The religious big shots, the ones making all the rules, the ones who are getting all the benefits, are only giving a small percentage of what they own. And they probably feel like they are the ones who are morally superior. But that isn't true. The most sincere follower, the most devoted follower, the most generous contributor is this poor woman who cannot even afford the gift she has given.

I think the point is, all these big shots haven't really given anything of significance. Yet they expect the demands of their religion to be fair. But those people who

accept the demands of the religion are the ones who suffer the most. Because the poor give up all they have and all they need in the vain hope that their sacrifice will please God.

When I was preparing this sermon I looked up Ken Copeland's ministry on the internet. I found a woman who was dying of cancer who was giving hundreds of thousands of dollars to Ken Copeland in the hopes that she would be cured of cancer. She ended up dying believing that she had not given enough. She felt like she had failed spiritually. And in the meantime Ken Copeland was using his newly acquired jet to fly to ski resorts. He swore to his supporters that his jets would never be used for anything but spiritual purposes. But he evidently redefined what spiritual purposes really are.

What we see in Jesus day was a corrupt religious system that was ripping off poor people with the false belief that financial sacrifice would earn them favor with God. What we have today are religious charlatans that are ripping off poor people with the false belief that financial gifts will earn them favor with God. Nothing has changed. And it is as wrong today as it was back 2000 years ago. We are warned over and over again in the New Testament about religious exploitation.

Look at the Galatians

Galatians 1:6-9

⁶ I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, ⁷ which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. ⁹ As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.

The Galatians were being seduced into a way of following Christ where they could earn merit with God, where they could earn their salvation. And look at what Paul tells them. Anyone who says such a thing should be accursed. They should be damned. This is exactly what would happen to the so called ministry that had the widow giving her last two coins to support that ministry. Coins won't win favor with God.

Paul goes on in the book of Galatians

Galatians 3:1-4

¹ O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? ² This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? ³ Are you so foolish? Having begun

in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? ⁴ Have you suffered so many things in vain--if indeed *it was* in vain?

Do you see the problem here? There are imposters sliding in with a message that says there is something needed **more than belief in Christ** for salvation. They are teaching that there are trinkets you can throw into some kind of altar that will enable you to gain favor with God. You can throw your mites into the temple coffers and earn salvation. Paul says "No". Those messages are bewitching. They are seductive. They are messages for fools and unbelievers. Those things will not save. And we can't allow ourselves to become victim to those lies.

Look at what Romans says about true Israel, and along with it true salvation.

Romans 9:6-8

⁶ But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they *are* not all Israel who *are* of Israel, ⁷ nor *are* they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac your seed shall be called." ⁸ That is, those who *are* the children of the flesh, these *are* not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.

Not everything that looks like it comes from God really comes from God. Not every cause **that says it is for God** is worth sacrificing for. There are a lot of seductions.

Matthew 7:15

¹⁵ "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.

Christ says again:

Matthew 24:11

¹¹ Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.

And again:

Matthew 24:24

²⁴ For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.

Do you see what Christ is saying here? We cannot afford to just accept everyone's word for it when they say they stand for God, when they say giving them money is what God wants us to do. We need to be careful when people tell us that sacrificing our income to them is what God wants us to do.

This widow in our text had gotten money, somehow, to take care of her needs. That is probably what she should have used that money for. That is not selfish. It is just prudent. There is nothing in scripture that instructs us to give away money that we need to feed ourselves, to meet our basic needs. We might think that such a thing would be very spiritual. But in reality it **could be** just very stupid. It might be very foolish. Sacrifice for sacrifice's sake is not a virtue in scripture. It is only a virtue when it meets a need or is used in an act of praise to God.

Let's look at other swindlers who will be glad to take your money.

2 Corinthians 11:12-15

¹² But what I do, I will also continue to do, that I may cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast. ¹³ For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. ¹⁴ And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. ¹⁵ Therefore *it is* no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.

Do we really think there won't be people out there like this who aren't trying to rip us off? Of course there will be. There always are. And they will dress themselves up to look very spiritual. They will look legit. They are practiced in deception. They will know how to speak our language. They will know how to fit into religious environments. And they will claim to be true blue. But they are false. And if you listen very carefully you will find out that they are appealing to a motive other than our love for God. They are appealing to our flesh so they can get a piece of something we have. So we need to be very careful who we submit ourselves to, who we submit our lives to.

2 Peter 2:1-3

¹ But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, *and* bring on themselves swift destruction. ² And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. ³ By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.

I don't know how much we need this message. I don't know how many of us are on the verge of dumping resources **we need** into a project that is **not of God** and who **God does not require us** to sacrifice for. But I do know that there are lots of false prophets who are appealing to this all the time. This never slows down. We have very popular preachers today who are trying to suck you in. They want your resources. They want to exploit you. And their destruction is coming.

We do not need to be like the woman in this story. We don't need to be a sucker giving our last dollar. We don't need to be taken advantage of by a religious system in hopes that we can buy something from God.

Along with this, we should never give out of guilt. The only thing guilt feelings should do is drive us to repentance. It should drive us to make things right with God. But it should never motivate us to do anything else. If we are to give, it should be motivated by our love for God and our love for people.

As we continue to work on the church building it is important to remember that. There is always a danger that the leadership will lose perspective and start expecting or demanding work from people. But our leadership here understands that no one here at Ferndale is required by God to be out at the new building working. No one is earning anything from God by being there. And not everyone **can be** there or should be there. But it is evident to me, when I have been there, that you who are doing the work are doing it because **you want to do it**. You believe that it is a direction that we as a church should go, so you give of your time and energy accordingly and voluntarily. That is how it should be. The acts of service provided by us for anything should always be because we believe they are how we can best serve God, how we can best please our Father. And what service we **should do** is decided between us and God. The work at our building is nothing more than another opportunity to serve Christ. And we, as the leadership, trust the Lord's guidance in your lives. You are not required to do this work. We always assume that. But it is a wonderful thing to watch it being done because the Lord is leading it. If at any point you feel used or abused, please work that out before you do another thing. We don't want anyone feeling taken advantage of in this process. We don't want anyone feeling used so that we can have a building. Give to please God. When you can't do that, don't give. It is pretty simple. That will ensure that we are doing this project the right way. And it will ensure no one ends up like the widow in the story.

Now we were talking about how false teachers often use a hook in us by saying that we can earn something from God. It is important for us to really get this point.

The Gospel promises salvation full and free by belief.

We need to understand that favor with **God cannot be bought**. We cannot do a single thing to **make God love us** more than He does. We can't do a single thing to earn God's favor or His forgiveness or His acceptance. That is why what Christ did was so important. He won favor with God **FOR US**. We all have sinned. We all deserved the death penalty for that sin. Justice demanded that this penalty was paid. So Christ stepped in, came to this planet, was born of a virgin, and was crucified. He took upon **Himself** the wrath of God that **we deserved**. And He did that for every person who would ever come to Him. Only **He** could win God's favor.

Now we receive what Christ did for us **by faith**. We trust that **what He said He meant**. And we believe that what He did now **counts for us**. We surrender our selves to Him because He is worthy of all of our worship. And we know that since Christ was resurrected from the dead we not only have the power to be risen from the dead ourselves, but we have the power to live a victorious Christian life.

Once we are confident of our salvation, we can give our money gladly and willingly to those organizations who we know will use it for true spiritual priorities. Scripture says that God loves a cheerful giver. And we can give out of conviction, not out of guilt. And we can give it to please our Lord, knowing that there is nothing that we can earn by such a contribution that has not already been given to us freely by the blood of Christ.

When we get all of that straight, we will never be taken advantage of like the woman in our passage. No one can get their hooks in us. Because we know that it is the blood of Christ alone that we need for salvation. And we safely walk in that salvation now by grace alone by faith alone.