

Pentwater Bible Church

Gospel of Mark

Message 49

March 29, 2015



The Widow's Mite by Joao Zeferino da Costa Cir 1876

Daniel E. Woodhead – Pastor Teacher

Pentwater Bible Church

The Book of Mark
Message Forty-Nine

THE PRIDE OF THE PHARISEES SCRIBES

Mark 29, 2015

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The Widow's Mite by Rembrandt Cir 1650-55

JESUS WARNS OF THE PRIDE OF THE SCRIBES OF THE PHARISEES

Mark 12:38-44

³⁸ And he said unto them in his doctrine, Beware of the scribes, which love to go in long clothing, and love salutations in the marketplaces, ³⁹ and the chief seats in the synagogues, and the uppermost rooms at feasts: ⁴⁰ which devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers: these shall receive greater damnation. ⁴¹ And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. ⁴² And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a [quarter of a penny]. ⁴³ And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: ⁴⁴ for all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living (KJV).

During the last week of His life the Lord Jesus had many strong criticisms of the powerful religious leaders in the Nation Israel. As Mark concludes this period of Jesus life he records the specific doctrine, which Jesus taught as He made His final break with the Jewish religious authorities before His crucifixion. In this section He will contrast the hypocrisy of the lawyers (Scribes) with genuine spiritual maturity. Here as in Matthew's account of the Sermon on the Mount the central issue is the true nature of the Law. It is spiritual and not a picky minute set of exact steps to follow to get to God (ceremony or

works). God provided the Law to lead us to Him. The following are the three principal reasons for the Mosaic Law.

1. The Mosaic Law Reveals God's Holiness

“The law of the LORD is perfect” (Psalm 19:7) because it is given by a perfect God. The stone tablets Moses received were “inscribed by the finger of God” (Exodus 31:18; Deuteronomy 9:10). The Law clearly reveals God's standard for His people living in a fallen world. The behavior it demands is righteousness in action. “The law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good” (Romans 7:12; Nehemiah 9:13). God's desire is for that holiness to be radiated out from His people (Leviticus 19:2; 1 Peter 1:16).

2. The Mosaic Law Defines Sin and Exposes its Wicked nature.

“Through the law we become conscious of our sin” (Romans 3:20). With the giving of the Ten Commandments, God once and for all codified morality. Ever since Sinai, there can be no question of God's opinion of adultery, murder, theft, etc.—they are wrong. And the severe penalties that befell transgressors underscore the serious nature of sin as rebellion against God. In defining sin and setting a divine standard, the Law indirectly discloses our need for a Savior.

3. The Mosaic Law Declares Our Need Separate From Sin.

Many of the Law's regulations were aimed at making Israel distinct from the surrounding nations. Not only was their worship different, but also they had different agricultural practices, a different diet, different clothing—their appearance was to be different even including their beards (Leviticus 19:27). Truly, the Israelites were set apart from the rest of the world. God's people today are still to be set apart—not in the same ways as the children of Israel—but morally, ethically, and spiritually. We are in the world but not of it (John 15:19; 17:14, 16). We are to let our light shine forth (Matthew 5:14–16).

In this short section of Mark Jesus makes a strong contrast between the prideful hypocrites and the truly spiritually mature who seek a relationship with the God of the Universe. Here Mark makes the transition from the last of Jesus's teachings as He moves to the future. Following His teaching the population here He will give the largest prophetic discourse given while on earth, The Olivet Discourse.

JESUS WARNS OF THE PRIDE OF THE SCRIBES

Mark 12:38-44

³⁸ And he said unto them in his doctrine, Beware of the scribes, which love to go in long clothing, and love salutations in the marketplaces, ³⁹ and the chief seats in the synagogues, and the uppermost rooms at feasts (KJV).

After attacking their corrupt doctrine He silenced the religious authorities in the Court of the Gentiles this week of Passover. He then turned to the crowd and began to warn them of these men in their influential positions. While they had a significant amount of education, position and religious authority their pride, and self adulation revealed their desire for attention and honor. They had lost all semblance of their true calling as teachers

of God's Law. Instead of following their God given calling they lusted over the position and all the perquisites or advantages that came with their position. Recognizing that the Scribes had a large following Jesus told His followers to beware of them.

These men *which love to go in long clothing* were putting on airs as they strutted around attired like kings or priests about to perform official functions. They *love salutations in the marketplaces* and to have the people address them as 'rabbi.' What the men who are here described were always longing for was not a mere token of friendliness but rather a demonstration of adulation, a public recognition of their prominence. They sought after *the chief seats in the synagogues*. Those were the seats in front of the raised platform on which stood the prayer leader and the reader of the Scriptures. Thus seated, a man had the double advantage of being near the person reading or leading in prayer, and of facing the congregation and thus being able to see everybody. When one was ushered to such a seat it was regarded as a mark of honor. They also demanded *the uppermost rooms at feasts*. Jesus had issued a warning against this very sin of seeking the best seat at a banquet or dinner (Luke 14:8). James condemned the sin of assigning the best seat to the rich, while telling the poor man to stand or else to sit on the floor near someone's footstool (James 2:2-4).

THE TRUTH BEHIND THE FAÇADE

Mark 12:40

⁴⁰ *which devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers: these shall receive greater damnation (KJV).*

It was for the purpose of drawing attention to themselves that the scribes offered these almost endless prayers, which is condemned in the Church (1 Thessalonians 2:5, 6). All they were seeking was honor from men so they could cover up the abuse of their positions. Matthew records Jesus' lengthily diatribe against them in eight woes, which exposes most of their wicked behavior. Chief among their actions was keeping people out of the Kingdom of God who would have gone in.

Matthew 23:13-33

¹³ *But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither [allow] ye them that are entering to go in.* ¹⁴ *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.* ¹⁵ *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye [search] sea and land to make one [convert], and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.* ¹⁶ *Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor.* ¹⁷ *Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold?* ¹⁸ *And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty.* ¹⁹ *Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift?* ²⁰ *Whoso therefore shall swear by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon.* ²¹ *And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by*

it, and by him that dwelleth therein. ²² *And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon.* ²³ *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.* ²⁴ *Ye blind guides, which strain out a gnat, and swallow a camel.* ²⁵ *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.* ²⁶ *Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.* ²⁷ *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.* ²⁸ *Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.* ²⁹ *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous,* ³⁰ *and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.* ³¹ *Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets.* ³² *Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers.* ³³ *Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell (KJV)?*

In doing so they *devour widows' houses* and to cover up their wickedness they make long prayers. The longer they pray for the widows (or at least in their presence), the more they can prey upon them!

The difficult situation of the widow was recognized in the number of laws designed for her protection and survival. God was her legal protector (Psalm 68:5), and saw that she was provided with the essentials of food and clothing (Deuteronomy 10:18). Those who denied her justice were cursed by God (Deuteronomy 27:19). At harvest time the widow might glean the grain in the fields as well as some grapes and olives (Deuteronomy 24:19; Ruth 2:2, 7, 15–19), and she was also eligible for some assistance from the third-year tithe. Nevertheless, the poverty of widows and the cruel treatment extended to them was so widespread that frequent reference is made to it (Job 24:21; Psalm, 94:6; Isaiah 1:23; Malachi 3:5). A special law provided that the widow's garment could not be used as security for a loan (Deuteronomy 24:17). The major difficulty in Jesus' exposure of these Scribes is they were responsible to teach the Law and its administration. So what was happening is those entrusted to provide for the helpless widow instead preyed upon them. The Scribes during this time did not get any pay for their services according to the Mishnah, a Jewish rewriting of the Jewish Law. ¹ They depended upon gifts and hospitality for sustenance and there were abuses. Just as Deuteronomy 27:19 declared denying justice to a widow would bring a curse of God Jesus Himself was making that declaration. He said that *these shall receive greater damnation*. The charge, *which devour widows' houses*, was a vivid figure of speech for exploiting the gifts from people of limited means, especially widows. Some widows would go so far as to entrust their inheritance to the Scribes as the lawyers. As the nation's lawyers these men were often employed to handle money a widow received in an inheritance. Some of them abused this trust by saying they gave the money to the Temple but actually kept it for themselves.

¹ Neusner, J. (1988). *The Mishnah : A new translation* (p. 674). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

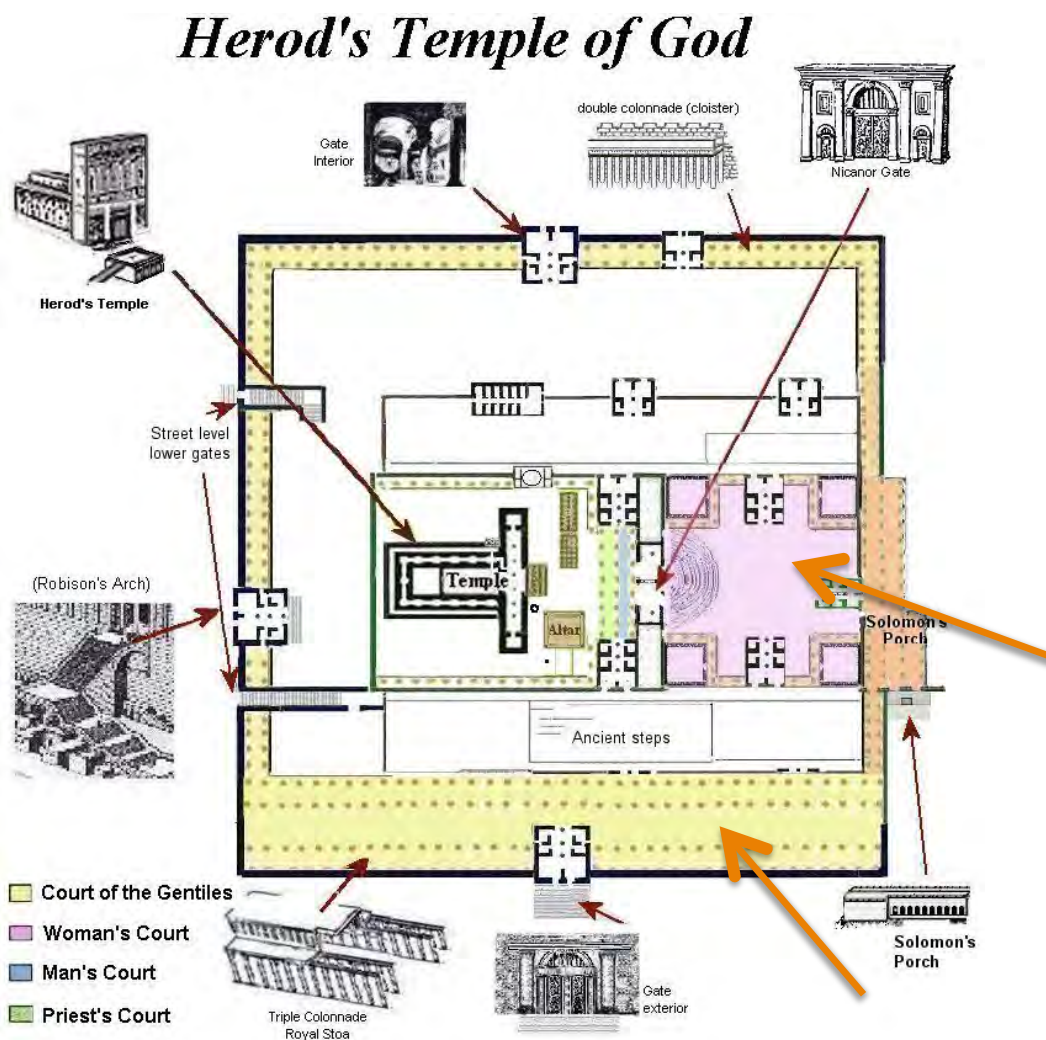
They cheated the poor and the rich alike in vulnerable situations. They unethically took other people's property. All the while they covered their behavior with lengthy prayers in order to impress people with their piety and gain their confidence. The evil here condemned was scandalous. Such behavior represents the hypocrisy of the religious elite who were concerned only with external appearance and sought to look good in the eyes of others. Jesus is saying do not be fooled, things are not always as they seem. On the outside the Scribes demanded respect and had a façade of superior piety. Yet underneath the beautifully dressed exterior is hypocrisy and deceit. They would be judged because God knew their hearts and at the Great White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20:11-15) they would receive their punishment.

JESUS CONTRASTS THEIR DESPICABLE BEHAVIOR WITH A GOD FEARING WIDOW

Mark 12:41

41 And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much (KJV).

Jesus now moves from the Court of the Gentiles to the Court of the Women.



Herod's Temple from: <http://templemountlocation.com/herodTempleCourts.html>

Against the wall of this court were thirteen shofar (trumpet) shaped collection receptacles for receiving offerings.² Temple taxes would go into six of these boxes and the other offerings went into the remaining seven. Jesus still had the crowd with Him as He watched the people come and dropped their money into the boxes.



Collection Boxes from: <https://regenerationandrepentance.wordpress.com/tag/alfred-edersheim/>

Since thousands of faithful Jews were in Jerusalem for the Passover, which was in just a few days, many were putting money in the boxes. The wealthy gave large amounts and some like the Scribes did it in an ostentatious manner so as to be seen. This again is in direct contrast with Jesus teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. In that sermon He was pointing out the religious authorities practices contrasted with what the genuine believers in God should do. In terms of giving He says the following:

Matthew 6:5-6

¹ *“Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.”* ² *“Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.”* ³ *“But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,”* ⁴ *so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you (ESV).*

Mark 12:42

⁴² *And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a |quarter of a penny| (KJV).*

² Ibid (p. 261).

Then one unnamed poor widow gave two minas (Greek *lepta*). A *lepton* was the smallest bronze Jewish coin in circulation in Israel. Two *lepta* were worth 1/64 of a Roman denarius, a day's wage for a laborer. Using a Greek word Mark states the value in Roman terms for his intended audience. It was a quarter of a penny. This was a freewill offering for her, that is she was not paying a Temple tax, just a gift. She had very little resources for making gifts. As a widow she was in a very vulnerable position with no protector and probably destitute. Jesus knowing her heart saw what she had done and commended her to the crowd as a contrast to the greedy scandalous Scribes.

Mark 12:43-44

⁴³ And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: ⁴⁴ for all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living (KJV).

This is the essence of what Jesus was teaching. It was the contrast between the attitude of the people who did not care about God and those that did. It was not a matter of power, position or wealth. The widow *hath cast more in, than all they, which have cast into the treasury*. In other words she gave the most because it was the greatest sacrifice of all. The others gave more but they were insignificant in terms of value to God compared to her small but sacrificial offering. The spirit in which it is given determines the value of a gift. In giving to God sacrificially she completely entrusted herself to Him to provide her needs.

NEXT MESSAGE: THE OLIVET DISCOURSE

Please call or e-mail with any questions or comments

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