

## THE WIDOW'S MITE

Mark 12:38-44 Text vs. 43 *“Calling His disciples to Him, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you; this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others.”*

Today, we delve into a passage from the Gospel of Mark that contrasts two quite different outlooks concerning faith and giving. While in the Temple in Jerusalem, Jesus gave a powerful lesson on the nature of true devotion along with having a heart of genuine giving. He began by warning people about the hypocrisy of the Scribes, an organization that began at the time of Ezra the prophet, and were men trained to write. At first, they were merely transcribers. When the Torah, the Hebrew bible was read, and a blessing was pronounced before the reading, it was written down by a Scribe to explain its meaning. They later became interpreters of God's law having responsibility for teaching the Torah.

Those religious leaders were known for wearing long robes and seeking recognition in the marketplaces. They were self-important men. They loved the public attention brought on them by their positions as holy men. They wanted to be given grand greetings of honor in public places. They enjoyed the title "Rabbi," that came with their status, meaning "teacher." It was a title of respect and affection for those men who taught Jewish law to the people. Now, titles by themselves aren't necessarily wrong. But putting too much emphasis on them—or insisting on them as some do even today—is arrogance and hypocrisy! Especially for followers of Jesus! And Jesus taught His disciples to avoid using names and titles in ways meant to elevate one person over another.

Those Scribes desired the best seats in the synagogue. The places of honor at banquets. They were experts in Mosaic law, like lawyers, but they didn't receive a salary for teaching it. However, they found a way to work around that. Instead of teaching the Hebrew Bible, the *Torah*, to earn a salary, Scribes encouraged people to believe they will be blessed by God if they support them financially, and reasonably. The rich could afford to be generous. But widows? They were often more tender-hearted than financially astute, and the Scribes took advantage of that. Widows who asked Scribes to manage their assets found the Scribes stole from them. It was foolish for the scribes to do that! God said He will judge those who abuse widows. It's in Isaiah! *“<sup>1</sup>Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, <sup>2</sup>to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people, making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless. <sup>3</sup>What will you do on the day of reckoning, when disaster comes from afar? To whom will you run for help? Where will you leave your riches? <sup>4</sup>Nothing will remain but to cringe among the captives or fall among the slain.”* (Isaiah 10:1–4).

And when Jesus said, *“They devour widows' houses”* it meant *seizing property*, or finances from helpless widows and leaving them drained. Widows were exceptionally vulnerable. They lacked the protection and support provided by a husband. And the Pharisees who had considerable influence over the common people and were respected for their piety and knowledge of the law, also took advantage of widows by using *their* influence to manipulate and abuse their financial resources. Jesus, also, condemned the Pharisees for their outward displays of piety while neglecting the more important aspects of the law, such as justice, mercy, and faithfulness. He accused the Pharisees of being more concerned with appearances than with genuine righteousness. And for a show, Pharisees made lengthy prayers that were not supported by their outward behavior. Jesus condemned all of them for their hypocrisy. And He warned them, they will receive even greater condemnation.

In glaring contrast, Jesus observed a poor widow who had just put two small coins into the Temple treasury. (Verses 41-44) Those coins had little financial value. The Bible tells us she put two mites into the Temple collection box. Two small coins. The Greek word translated for *mite* is *lepton*. (pronounced *lep-ton*) meaning a small coin, as the mite was the smallest coin used in New Testament time. At the time of Mark's writing this, a mite was worth 1/64 of a denarius, a denarius being a day's wage for a worker. Today, the estimated value of a mite is about 1/8 of a penny. Even in those days, two mites weren't a lot of money. But in comparison to those who had given before her, the poor widow had given everything she had! Jesus said, she had given more than all the others. The wealthy gave out of their abundance. She gave out of her poverty! All she had to live on. Her offering was a true sacrifice, and it showed her complete trust in God.

You see, sacrificial giving is *giving beyond your means*. It's no secret we're part of a generation known for living beyond our means. What would happen if we changed one letter in that phrase *living beyond our means*, to *giving beyond our means*? Put it this way! If your giving to the Lord doesn't hurt, or change the comfort level of your lifestyle, then it's not sacrificial. If your giving doesn't stretch you, and challenge your faith, then most likely it's *not* sacrificial. Think of faith as a muscle. If you never go to the gym, then don't expect to be able to bench press more than a few pounds. And if you're unwilling to take the risk of stretching what your faith requires, then your spiritual growth will be stunted. Eventually, your *faith muscle* will weaken. The widow's offering teaches that the value of a gift is not the amount. It's the heart and sacrifice behind it! God sees and treasures the intentions of our hearts.

The Bible teaches that God knows the innermost thoughts and intentions of our hearts. That means He sees beyond our outward actions and appearances and understands the true motivations behind our words and deeds. This allows God to

judge us fairly and justly, based on our true character and intentions. Are we giving out of our abundance? Are we giving sacrificially and trusting God to provide for our needs? You see, true giving is an act of faith and devotion. Not a financial transaction! Sacrificial giving is not just about money. It's about giving of ourselves in ways that truly make a difference in the lives of others. It's about putting others' needs before our own and trusting God will provide for us as we provide for others

So, this passage of Scripture challenges us to reflect on the nature of our giving. Are we giving to be seen by others? Or are we giving out of love and devotion to God? The widow's offering reminds us, God values the *thought* behind the gift, more than the *gift* itself. True giving is an act of worship. It's a response to God's love and provision in our lives. The Scribes, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, all had shown by their actions that their hearts were in the wrong place. They were so focused on following the letter of the Law, in great detail, that they often missed God's heart. Not only that! They expected everyone else to interpret and live by the Law in the same way as they did. It's from that behavior that we get the word *legalism*.

According to Merriam-Webster, *legalism* is strict, literal, excessive obedience to the law, or to a religious or moral code, which restricts free choice. If any Scribe, Pharisee, or Sadducee had approached the offering box while Jesus was sitting there watching, they would have put in *exactly* what they should have put in, according to the Law. But that's the problem! They cared more about following the Law, or *appearing* to follow it, than they did about treating people with love and respect. They understood how to perform what the Law required. But they didn't realize the Law existed because God loved people. **All people.** They didn't get the fact that the Israelites were set apart to show the love of God to all the nations who would want to serve the one, *true* God. That poor widow understood sacrifice. She loved God enough to give Him all she had. Her heart was in the right place. And our lesson today is a reminder of how Jesus condemned the Scribes and Pharisees and Sadducees.

At the end of Matthew's Gospel in Matthew 23, there's an account of this. Jesus called those religious leaders vipers and monsters to be sentenced to hell. And He compared them to Cain, who killed his brother Abel out of jealousy for his relationship to God. (Matthew 23:33, 35) Jesus then grieved for Jerusalem and its people who killed the prophets that God had sent to draw them to Himself. (Matthew 23:37–39) So, as we reflect on this passage, let's try to move our hearts into genuine faith mode and sacrificial giving. Not to seek recognition or honor. But to seek and honor God in all that we do. Let our lives show humility, trust, and a deep commitment to serving God and others.

If we begin sacrificial giving, we will start a journey of spiritual transformation. It's the act of giving sacrificially that teaches us to trust in God's abundance, rather than relying solely on our own resources. Surrendering our possessions, our time, and our talents will help us let go of our attachments to material wealth and shift our focus towards eternal treasures. We must examine our own lives and ask ourselves, are we more concerned with outward appearances than with genuine faith? Are we seeking recognition and honor? Or are we humbly serving God and others? True faith is not about public displays. It's about a sincere heart that seeks to honor God in all things.

As Christians, we're called to behave and live in a certain manner. Not to deceive or pretend we're better than others. Because we have been set apart for a purpose. Christ called us to be His witnesses on earth. He was the Model. An example of behavior. And the heart God wanted in His people. So, we shouldn't have to guess what's expected. As children of God, we are called to make our lives living sacrifices to the Father who sent His Son to die in our place. Jesus saw the poor widow's sacrifice. And He sees yours as well. That's why we are called to faithfulness. God is more concerned with the motive of our hearts when we give, than He is with the amount that we offer. You see, God knows, that when your heart is in the right place, everything else will fall into place. May God bless you as you seek to live out these truths in your daily lives.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, we thank you for the example of the widow's offering. Help us to give with a sincere heart, trusting in your provision. Guard us against hypocrisy and self-seeking and teach us to serve you with humility and devotion. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.