Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Religion and Its Victims
Scripture: Mark 12:38-44
Code: 41-65

For this morning, I want you to turn to the twelfth chapter of Mark and we'll wrap up the end of this twelfthchapter. Now if what I say to you sounds a little bit familiar, it's because in the year 2007, about March of that year, that would be four years ago exactly, we were at this same point in the ministry of Jesus in the gospel of Luke...in the gospel of Luke. So what we were reading and understanding in Luke, we now come to in Mark. We will remember, those of us who were here four years ago, this passage, Luke's version of it which is parallel to Mark's. You'll discover that when I read it to you.

Verse 38, in His teaching He was saying, "Beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes and like respectful greetings in the marketplaces and chief seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets, who devour widows' houses and for appearances sake who offer long prayers, these will receive greater condemnation. And He sat down opposite the treasury and began observing how the people were putting money into the treasury and many rich people were putting in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins which amount to a cent. Calling His disciples to Him, He said to them, 'Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury for they all put in out of their surplus, but she out of her poverty put in all she owned, all she had to live on.'"

Some of you will remember four years ago when we talked about the story of the widow who gave her last two cents and we're going to listen to that again and capture its true meaning. But first, we need to look at our Lord's warning about false teachers in verses 38 through 40.

Suffice it to say for all of us who are students of Scripture, we're very aware of the fact that there have always been and always will be false teachers, lying prophets, religious deceivers and corrupt preachers who claim to represent God but actually represent Satan who claim to bring the way of heaven and actually paved the way to hell, who claim to speak divine truth and actually speak satanic lies, doctrines of demons. Scripture warns us about this. Satan is a liar and the father of lies. He told his first lie in the Garden which led to the fall of the human race. He continues to perpetrate lies through demons and his agents, hypocritical liars, they are called by Paul in 1 Timothy chapter 4. They propagate all that is false and all that is not true is false, and all that is not of God is of Satan. There is no middle ground. All that is true is true and all that is not true is false. There is no middle ground.

So that, if a religious person is espousing anything that is not true, it is a satanic lie. It is intended to deceive and to damn the souls of its victims. So there have always been false teachers and always been liars and deceivers. And mark this out, they are all hypocrites. They are all hypocrites. They define the very concept of hypocrite, they are fakes. They claim to show the way of truth and the way of God and the way to heaven and the way to well-being and the way to blessing, but they lie. There is only one way, the true gospel. And every other way is a false way and a damning way, part of the broad way that leads to hell.

In the time of our Lord in Israel, the agents of hell were in charge of the religion of Judaism. It was an apostate form of Judaism as any form of Judaism is today, and that apostate form of Judaism was under the control of Satan and in the hands of hypocrites who were the pawns of Satan and the human representatives of demonic powers. They were not perceived to be so by the people, however. The people saw the Sadducees, the Pharisees, the scribes, the priests, the rabbis as the representatives of God, the agents of God, the divinely appointed and implanted arbiters of divine truth to the people. They were viewed as devout. They were viewed as respected and responsible. They were the shepherds of Israel from the perspective of the people and from their perspective they wanted to be sure that the people saw them that way because it satisfied their cravings for popularity, for power, for prestige and especially for money...especially for money, because false teachers always do what they do for money. The Bible says they're in it for filthy lucre's sake.

So you have the leaders of Israel who pretend to worship God. They pretend to serve God. They pretend to honor God with their lives. They pretend to lead people into the will of God and into the knowledge of God, when actually they are producing sons of hell because they themselves are sons of hell. And if there's any question about that, then you need only to know that while they are claiming to honor God, they are bent on murdering the Son of God. All false teachers, all purveyors of false religion are the enemies of Christ and the enemies of truth and enemies of the gospel and the enemies of souls.

Now the religious leaders of Israel were a conglomeration that composed a group called the Sanhedrin, the ruling council, 70 members plus the High Priest, that group was supposed to be representative and to some degree it was, made up of the Sadducees, the religious liberals, the Pharisees, the religious conservatives who basically dominated the religion of the day. There were among the Pharisees predominantly scribes who were experts in the Law, interpreters of the Law, appliers of the Law. And then there were assorted priests. There were also assorted teachers and rabbis and they were varying in their views. The rabbis and teachers would attach themselves to this rabbi or that rabbi in the past, so there were differences in the way they viewed things, so they were divided on many things, the Pharisees and the Sadducees were actually enemies, theologically, and they, however, with all their diversity and all their differences to get together in one universal, cohesive, united effort to kill Jesus. Whatever they disagreed on among themselves, they all agreed that Jesus was a threat to their power and their prominence and their prestige and their place.

It is Wednesday, as we pick up the story, of Passion Week, the final week of our Lord's life. On Friday they will manage to get Him crucified. They will do that only because it is the predetermined will of God. But from their viewpoint it is their will against God. So in going against God, they actually in their vile efforts accomplish the will of God. But this is still Wednesday and it's been a long day...a long day, starting very early in the morning when Jesus came into the city with His disciples and saw the cursed fig tree dead along the road which was a symbol of the cursing of the temple and the cursing of the people and the nation. Jesus went directly to the temple and spent the whole day Wednesday preaching the gospel according to Luke and teaching things concerning salvation and the kingdom. It was a long, long day.

As He moved, like rabbis do, kind of a floating classroom in the massive courtyards of the temple, He was confronted by the Sanhedrin in waves they came at Him. First a group of Pharisees with the Herodians came. Then the Sadducees came. And then it was a scribal question that confronted Him as they tried to trap Him in His words and get Him to say something that would cause the Jews to turn against Him, or even more importantly the Romans to arrest Him because He would present Himself as a threat to Roman peace.

Obviously the Romans knew He was drawing massive crowds. And if they could get Him to say something that might look like the beginning of an insurrection, the Romans would arrest Him and they would prevail upon the Romans to kill Him. That was the plan. However, He thwarted their plan every time, no matter what wave came, no matter what question was asked, He gave an answer that caused them to leave Him in silence and in shock. And so verse 34 says, "After that, no one would venture to ask Him any more questions." The questioning from the standpoint of the leaders was done, it was an unsuccessful series of traps. They would have to do it another way.

As it turned out, they would. They would bribe Judas and you know how the story unfolds from there. We'll see that as we go.

It is clear to our Lord, it is clear, I'm sure, to some of the people that their leaders were corrupt. I'm convinced that when Jesus wiped out the corrupt businesses in the temple on Tuesday of that week, that many of the people were attracted to Him because of that, because they knew the corruption. They knew they were paying ten times the price they should pay for a sacrificial animal. They knew they were...they were getting bilked in the exchange of coins when they brought their temple tax offering. They understood the charlatanism and the robbery that was going on there, and Jesus even said, "This is My Father's house, it's to be a house of prayer, you turned it into a robber's den.

I don't think that drove the people away. I think that drew the people to it. They could see some of the corruption of the system, even though they couldn't extract themselves from it, and they were bound to it by lifelong commitments to what they had been taught.

And now, as we approach our text, the people are listening. The end of verse 37 says, “The large crowd enjoyed listening to Him.” Luke 20 verse 45, the parallel passage says, “All the people were listening...all the people.” And then it says, “He said to His disciples...” so around Him are the disciples, but beyond them, that immediate group gathered around Him, the Apostles and whatever assorted disciples were there, the whole crowd, the massive crowd in the temple is listening to Him.

By the way, when Luke says all the people were listening, but He said this to His disciples...that’s a transition...that’s a transition, because after He says this in verses 38 to 40, to everybody, from here on out He speaks only to His disciples, as verse 43 indicates, calling His disciples to Him He said. So this is the final word to the crowds. The rest is going to be for the disciples. The sad note here, not only have the leaders gone away for the moment in shame and silence, thwarted in their efforts, but the people have never moved from their superficial interest in Him to a real and genuine faith in Him and so He is really through talking to them as well.

These are then His last words publicly...His last words publicly. Verse 38 to 44, very strong words and very, very condemning words. Our Lord’s final words to Israel, “Regard their religious leaders and expose their religious leaders for what they are. They are corrupt hypocrites. And He warns the people of their damning influence.”

It isn’t the first time He’s characterized them this way. If you go back to Matthew 15:14, you remember on that occasion Jesus basically described them as blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind are leading the blind, everybody ends up in the ditch. So they have been warned by Him about their leaders. And the main purveyors of religion in the land were the Pharisees and the scribes. And so they’re the ones who take the brunt of this attack.

Now the words “regarding them” are brief in Mark, verses 38 to 40, just those three verses. They’re somewhat brief in Luke’s gospel, just a few verses there. But the full statement is given by Matthew in Matthew 23 and it goes on for 36 verses. So you have the full denunciation of these apostate hypocrites in Matthew. We’ll make a couple of references to Matthew’s account because that is where you get the full message.

Now suffice it to say that this is a warning because it begins, “Beware.” That’s the caution. This is a condemnation about to come on those who have a corrupt view of Scripture because they do, a corrupt view of Christ and therefore a corrupt view of the gospel. Worse, they not only hold wrong views, they propagate them...they propagate them. This is our Lord speaking to the people publicly about false teachers. This is Jesus’ take on false teachers and it is more than sufficient to let us know that there is a zero tolerance policy with Jesus for false teachers.

If someone denies the true meaning of Scripture, denies the true identity of Christ, and denies the true gospel, that is not a tolerable person. We do not get together with those kind of people to find out what we hold in common. We do not elevate them because even though they disagree with us, they are religious and they're spiritual, and they're good people and they're conscious of God and they believe in one God.

Quite the opposite. Our Lord indicates here that rather than welcome these people, we ought o flee from them because, as Jude put it, if you get too close to them, your garments will be singed. You need to be rescued from them. Jude says, "Like a branch snatched out of the burning." There is a trend and there has been for a number of years to have a conversation with people who hold different views, to get together with them and let's not condemn them, let's have a conversation with them. That led me to write two books years ago, one called *The Truth War*, and a follow up called *The Jesus You Can't Ignore*, just to let people know that when we engage people who teach lies, it is to make war, not peace. And the second one is, you can't ignore the Jesus who set the model in that direction. That's the Christ you can't ignore.

So let's look at the caution, "Beware of the scribes. Verse 38, "In His teaching He was saying, 'Beware of the scribes.'" I am pretty sure that this teaching was going on over and over again as He moved among the crowds and found different groups of people and repeated things, but one of His messages and the final one is to beware of the scribes. They are, for the most part, Pharisees. They belong to the Pharisees sect. The Pharisees, as you know, were very, very concerned about the Law, the Law of the Old Testament Law and the tradition that had grown up and become a kind of co-source, a co-revelation with the Bible and how all of that was to be interpreted. These were the legal experts. The Pharisees, of course, were the legalists and they had within them the scribes who studied the Law.

The Jews even had a saying that Moses received the Law and gave it to Joshua. Joshua received the Law and gave it to the elders. The elders received the Law and gave it to the prophets. The prophets received the Law and gave it to the scribes. So they were the possessors of the Law, the gatekeepers of all that was supposed to be true about the Word of God. They were the experts in the Law. They were the lawyers of Israel.

That was true in religious matters and that was true in civil matters, and that was true in social matters because they still viewed themselves as a theocratic kingdom. In other words, everything sort of came down from God and the way family life was structured and social life was structured and business life was structured, and worship was structured, all would go back to the Old Testament. So their responsibility was not only interpretation of the Law, but application of the Law. They were the dominant force then in Judaism, as lawyers play a dominant force in our life when it comes to all matters legal, so they did in even far-reaching fashion because they even reached into the religious area. They handled all legal matters for the people, no matter what kind of things they were, but they

all had overtones of spirituality and they would always convey that a right interpretation was the will of God.

The point would be that they were to be the protectors of the people. They were to show them what God wanted. They were to hold them to the Law of God so that they could be conformed to the promises of God for blessing upon obedience. That was their role. However, they did the opposite. Our Lord says, “Beware of them...” When you have to beware of your protectors, you’re in trouble. When you can’t trust the people who are supposed to show you the truth, and show you what is right, and show you what God wants, you are really in trouble.

They tended to trust those people because there was no other option, and so they were sucked in by their deception. As a result, in Matthew 23, it is recorded that Jesus says, “These men who are themselves sons of hell are making sons of hell out of you.” That’s what they were doing. People had been sucked in by them. So here our Lord warns them, guard against them, protect yourself against your protectors. Protect yourself against your shepherd. Protect yourself against your pastor. The last thing Jesus would do is encourage people to establish a dialogue with them. Why are they such a threat? Why are they such a threat? Because they are hypocrites. They are not what they appear to be. They’re sons of hell and they make sons of hell.

From the caution, we’ll call it, we go to the characterization. Go back to verse 38. He characterizes their hypocrisy in ways that would be very familiar to the people. By the way, anybody who has a corrupted view of Christ and the gospel, needs to be exposed in the way Jesus exposed these men. And that’s a merciful act, isn’t it? That’s a merciful act because these are wolves in sheep’s clothing. The Lord pulls no punches and the main element is that they are spiritual frauds.

What characterizes their false virtue? It’s all external. It’s all external. In Matthew 23 He says that you clean the outside of the dish and the inside is filthy. He says, “On the outside you’re a whitewashed tomb. On the inside you’re corrupt, rotting flesh.” So He talks about their fake outside. They like to walk around in long robes. They like to walk around in long robes.

These were special robes, scribal robes that went all the way to the ground, *stole* is the word from which you get the English word stole, sometimes referring to a cape that woman wears. But these robes went to the ground. They were fancy and unique and expensive and they had tassels. The Jews, according to the book of Numbers, long ago in history, Numbers chapter 15, were to put little blue tassels on the bottom of their robes to identify themselves as Jews and to identify themselves as those who gave their attention to God and gave their attention to God’s Word. And so they had those little reminders on the bottom of their robes that they belonged to God and were accountable to His Word.

Well as the centuries passed by, the people in religious positions decided that these could be the symbols of their glory. And so they enlarged all their tassels. They made them larger and larger, according to Matthew 23:5. One can only guess how ridiculously large they became. But it caused people to look at their robes and assume that they were holy. Their tassels were far larger than anyone else's. By the way, our Lord Himself had these tassels appropriately on His own robe, according to Matthew 9:20. But they had no true holiness of heart, as was indicated in the book of Numbers, and only symbolized on the outside. They gave no attention to God. They gave no attention to His truth. They were lying deceivers but they wanted to look the part of holy men and so they enlarged the tassels on their robes.

Mark also records for us, the second thing about they, they liked respectable greetings in the marketplace. Luke says they loved them...they loved them. As they moved about in public life with their special, fancy, unique, one-of-a-kind, belonging only to their particular sect robe with its fancy tassels, everybody knew who they were...everyone would know. They expected to be addressed then with titles of dignity. What were the greetings they expected? If you look at Matthew 23, the Lord even identified them. First they wanted to be called rabbi, which means teacher. It actually means like doctor...doctor, exalted teacher, excellency, most knowledgeable one, great one. And those are phrases you find in Jewish literature which were used to refer to rabbis, "O great one, O knowledgeable one, O excellent one, O exalted teacher."

In fact, they were so exalted in their own minds that it was more punishable to act against the words of a scribe than the words of Scripture. Scripture didn't fight back, but they did.

They also wanted to be called father...father. Source, that's what that was about. Not only exalted teacher, man of great wisdom, elevated one, but father, source. And they wanted to be called leader as if they were the determiners of direction and outcome. That's what they expected people to call them when they saw them. They didn't expect them to say, "Hello, Abraham." They expected them to say, "O exalted teacher, father, leader."

We still have a lot of that with us today. Dr. So-and-So, Dr. So-and-So. Father this...Father that...and then every once in a while someone calls me, Father MacArthur. No, I'm a father, but not in that sense. And then the new...the term leader, leader, I can see now one of the popular new concepts in the young movement in the young people in churches now is to be called Lead Pastor. You know, I run from titles. If people ask me what shall we call you? I say John. Jesus was good enough for Jesus, Paul was good enough for Paul, what do I expect? I'm the lowliest of the law. If I can get John, that's plenty.

But false teachers are never humble. They always need to be elevated. They live with guilty consciences because their false religion can't restrain the flesh and it can't restrain their pride and they're self-promoting. Religion is a horrible thing in that regard. We still have these religionists who

parade around in all kinds of crazy garb and wear clerical hats and demand to be called Father, and Doctor, and Reverend, and Most Holy, and Great Leader.

And then it says they love the chief seats in the synagogue. In the synagogue there was a platform like there is here, and they loved to sit on the platform. So now you know why I'm called John and I don't sit up here. There's something to be said for that. They wanted to be recognized as elevated above the people. They wanted to have the places of honor at banquets. They wanted to be near the host, to be the center of attention, the most honored, the most revered. In the fourteenth chapter of Luke, you might remember this, our Lord was very aware of this kind of behavior going on. "He began...verse 7...speaking a parable to the invited guest when He noticed how they had been picking out the places of honor at the table." Jesus went to a dinner and there was this mad fight to find the place of honor.

I just want to tell you something. That is directly related to spirituality. The lack of spirituality means the expansion of symbolism, okay? The less reality, the more symbol. The more reality, the less symbol. They're inverse. But when you have nothing on the inside and only what is on the outside, then symbols will expand and explode. Just watch the Catholic Church sometime. Void of reality, void of spiritual life, the symbols are just endless, the trappings inside the churches on the priests, the falderal, the ceremony, it is all inverse to the absence of real spiritual life.

That's the hypocrisy of them, but the key thing to note right now in verse 40 would be, "They devour widows' houses." File that in your mind...they devour widows houses. That's just awful. They're supposed to be the shepherds of the sheep and if there's anybody that needs to be protected, who would it be? Widows...widows. Pure religion, James says that you care for the widows and orphans, that's Old Testament command reiterated over and over in the Old Testament. I could take you to 25 or 30 Old Testament passages starting in Exodus 22 and moving right on through Deuteronomy all the way to Malachi chapter 3, and all in between and show you how much the Old Testament has to say about the people of God having responsibility to those who are widows in their midst, to care for them.

What do these men do? They consumed them. That means to plunder them. It means literally to eat them up. How did they do that?

Well a little bit of historical study will provide an answer for that. There are records about how they did it, their own records, by the way. These false leaders would take support, ask money from widows for themselves, though that was forbidden. They would cheat widows out of their estate while they were offering them legal protection.

In other words, a widow would have an estate. She would want to make sure that it was secure and safe. And so she would bring in a scribe to take care of the legal work to protect her estate. And while

pretending to protect her estate, he would take it. They would mismanage the property of widows. They would abuse the hospitality of widows, living in their houses, taking up space in their houses, eating their food in a gluttonous fashion, making excessive demands like leeching off of them. They would take money from older widows with deficient powers. As the older women lost the ability to reason and think what was going on, they would steal them blind. Then they would take the house of a widow in pledge for the debt that they were owed for their legal services. So when the widow died, they would own the house. Nothing would be left if she had children.

They demanded that the widows give to purchase blessing from God, as they demanded that from everybody in their system. Their whole system was built on the fact you had to bring your money to the temple. There were thirteen receptacles in the Court of the Women where you dropped your money. That's how you purchase your salvation. The rabbi said with alms you purchase your salvation. The money went in there, it came out the bottom into the pockets of these religious leaders. The more money that was given, the richer they got. And the money needed to be given because that's how you bought your salvation.

So people were literally pouring money into those places, those receptacles to buy redemption. That is why when our Lord came in He said, "This is My Father's house, a house of prayer, and you have made it a den of...what?...of robbers."

I see that and I wonder how many false evangelists are doing the very same thing today? Fleecing widows with promises of health and healing and prosperity and send me your money and God will pour out blessing to you, taking advantage of the weak, the desperate, the despairing, the lonely, the hopeless, the helpless.

And while they're such wretched thieves, verse 40 says, "For appearance sake, they offer long prayers." Huh, for appearance said, they offer long prayers. They don't want to really talk to God, they don't have anything to say to God. But they'll string out their prayers so they'll appear righteous and holy. Matthew 6, Jesus said their prayers are characterized by endless repetition, right?... vain repetition, just on and on and on and on and on and on, we have lots of illustrations of those things that still remain today. It's all a pretense. It's all fake. It's all a sham. It's all a show. And that is true, dear friends, of all people in false religion...all of them. That's what they do, they're hypocrites. They may do it in different ways, but they are hypocrites and they are destructive.

So our Lord cautions and characterizes. Then He condemns, end of verse 40, "These will receive greater condemnation." You know, there are people who think that if you're religious you'll receive less condemnation. Sometimes you hear people say, "Well, I'm sure...I'm sure that I'm going to go to heaven because I'm a very religious person."

Really! I think hell will be the hottest for religious people, especially religious false teachers, agents of Satan whose sons of hell themselves produce more sons of hell. They will receive a greater condemnation, not a lesser condemnation. Not because they were good or moral, or religious will they receive less judgment. They will receive more judgment. If you have the idea today that there's good in all religions and God loves all religions and we need to find God in all religions and find the good that is there...Jesus pronounces a greater condemnation on the religious leaders of Israel who are monotheists who believed in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the creator God of the Old Testament, but because they had apostatized from the true religion and come to a self-righteous work system, and because they had rejected Him and the gospel, they're hell will be hotter than everybody else. You don't want to get too close to the truth because if you're too close to the truth, the potential for judgment is even greater. How much greater judgment will the one feel...Hebrews says...who has trodden underfoot the Son of God and counted the blood of the Covenant an unholy thing? That's the greatest of all judgment, to reject Christ. Better you never know Him, hell will be less furious.

The idea is clear, those who are in the wrong religion will receive the far-greater suffering, the far-greater damnation because of that false religion and because they reject the true gospel, the true Christ, as I just quoted from Hebrews 10. Don't be fooled by them. Don't be drawn to them. Be warned. They are dangerous and they will be condemned.

Now you have to add to these three verses the whole of Matthew chapter 23. I can't do that, we don't have time. But let me just give you a taste of it. Go back to Matthew 23 to get a feeling for all the words that our Lord said. And I want you to notice the note of judgment that is here.

The word He uses is "Woe," which means to damn or to condemn. And you see it in verse 13 of Matthew 23, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites." Verse 15, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites." "Woe to you...verse 16...blind guides, fools," blind men, verse 17. Verse 23, here comes damnation, again, "Woe," meaning damnation, it's actually onomatopoetic word, it sounds like its meaning ohyeee, it's a groan in light of judgment.

Verse 25, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees." Verse 27, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees." Verse 29, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees." And then verse 33, "You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell?"

Can you imagine Jesus standing in the temple and this is what He's saying to them? And they already hate Him with a passion and want Him dead. And He does this because it's true and it's merciful to warn them and it's merciful to warn the people.

Then all of a sudden there's a seemingly strange turn and verse 41 pictures Jesus sitting down opposite the temple treasury where people gave their money, and watching people put money in. And along comes a poor widow and drops in two cents. And Jesus comments that she gave more than

everybody else because she put in everything she had.

Now the question comes, and we dealt with this question four years ago, some of you will remember this, what is this? What does this have to do with anything? Universally...and I say that with an informed mind...universally this woman is presented as a model of dutiful, faithful giving against the ugly backdrop of the corrupt thieves and robbers among the religious leaders of Israel. She's seen as a breath of fresh air, as a window in a dark room. She's seen as a contrasting person, a noble, godly woman who gives sacrificially.

That's really a stretch. That doesn't say anything about that in the Scripture. The only thing it says is a poor widow came...in verse 42...dropped in a couple of coins. That's all it says. We don't know anything about her, we certainly don't know what her motive was. We have the comment of Jesus that the two coins was it, and that was all she had.

No matter who you read on this, or what sermons you might hear on this, typically people will say this is how we ought to give, we ought to give till it hurts, we ought to give sacrificially, we ought to give in a surrendered fashion. We ought to give so that we completely demonstrate trust in God, and that's how this woman gave.

There isn't one word of support in this text for any of those perspectives. It doesn't say anything about her attitude at all. The fact of the matter is, it doesn't even tell us that she was a believer, it doesn't say that she knew the true God, that she believed in Christ. She is not a spiritual hero in the story. What is she in the story? I'll tell you what she is, she's a victim. She is a victim.

A victim of what? She is a victim of the system. She is the ultimate system of a victim that devours widows' houses...verse 40. That's the connection. This has nothing to do with Christian giving, unless you think Christian giving is give everything you have. Take a vow of poverty, go home and die. You think that's Christian giving?

Or maybe you can go to Plan B...give everything you have, take a vow of poverty, spend the rest of your life leeching on everybody else so you can survive. Where in the Bible is it a Christian principle of giving to give everything you have and go home and die? That is not in the Bible, not at all. It makes no sense.

And by the way, the people who gave other than the woman, there's no judgment rendered on them. Jesus doesn't condemn that. Why aren't they the model? Why don't we say, "Isn't it wonderful that rich people gave large sums?" That's great, isn't it? You wouldn't argue that, would you? In fact, if you wanted a model of Christian giving, you've got to go with the rich who gave large sums, not the woman who gave everything and went home to die. God has never asked that.

He doesn’t say that the rich gave too little. He doesn’t say the widow gave exactly the right amount. He doesn’t say the rich had too much left and the widow had the right amount left, none. He doesn’t say the rich had a bad attitude when they gave a lot, and the woman had a good attitude when she gave everything. He doesn’t say anything about any motivations or any attitudes at all.

Her outward action is simply an evidence of what that system did to widows. You want blessing of God, you give your money. She’s destitute. She’s got two cents left. She says to herself, “Either I take my two cents and buy my last meal, or I do what they tell me, send them the money and God will bless me.” Does that sound like a TV preacher to you? That’s the system. Send me your money. If you’re down to your last penny, send me your money, open the floodgates, God will bless you if you send me your money.

It was a den of robbers and they were stealing it from the worst, the lowest, the most destitute, the worst off. This isn’t to teach us about attitudes in giving, or amounts in giving. This is to teach us about corrupt religion. Beware of the false shepherds, the false teachers who take the last coins out of the widows’ purse to fill their coffers on the pretense that that kind of giving is the path to blessing. That’s the prosperity gospel.

There’s nothing in her about the Lord loved her, she was in the Kingdom. There’s nothing here about...Okay, you disciples, you need to follow her example. So take the bag with all the money we’ve got in there and go in and give it.

That’s the last thing He would have told them. Why would you put your money in a robbers’ den. You wouldn’t commend that. She was a victim. There’s no invitation for the disciples to imitate what she did, empty their pockets, empty the little purse that they carried. It would have been a perfect time to do that, right? Jesus is going on the cross, this would be a great time to test your faith, dump it all in.

No. This is not any place for the Lord to inject a lesson on giving. This isn’t about giving, this is about taking. This is all in a judgment context, judgment, verses 38 to 40, and judgment starting in chapter 13, the whole section as He talks about what’s coming is judgment, judgment, judgment, judgment, judgment. The context all along is judgment, and certainly the rest of His message recorded in Matthew 23 is judgment, judgment, judgment, judgment.

And all those woes pronounced on the leaders are literally justified and validated by this one woman’s act. She is a poor, dear woman who is nothing but a son of hell captive to a false religious system, dumping her last two coins into that system under the promise that somehow this is the path to blessing. She gave everything she had.

Let's look at the text a little more closely, that's the overview. Verse 41, "He was seated there, opposite the treasury." The treasury was in the Court of the Women, it was called, and Jesus had taught there before, John 8...that's a great chapter to read what went on when He was teaching there on that occasion. It was open to everybody.

So they put the money receptacles in the Court of the Women where everybody could come. It was called the Treasury because there were those thirteen trumpet-shaped receptacles where the people gave their money. There were all kinds of different things that were supposed to elicit gifts from them, new shekel dues, old shekel dues, there were various offerings and there was money for wood money for incense, money for gold for the temple, there were all kinds of things. Each of those trumpets had a certain purpose and they were going around putting all their money in. This was the real...get it, folks...heartbeat of false religion. Mark it, when you see people telling you that if you send them your money, God will bless you...that's the heartbeat of a false teacher. Always false leaders are moved by greed. The Pharisees and scribes, Jesus said in Luke 16:14, were lovers of money...lovers of money.

So Jesus lifts His head up after a wearying day, having sat down probably the first time that day, and He began observing how the people were putting money into the treasury. Just must have caused Him immense pain, giving their money to this wretched apostate, corrupt system, under the assumption that they were doing something for God that was going to produce blessing. And He comments, "Many rich people were putting in large sums." They weren't being stingy. They were putting in large sums. They had a lot and they gave a lot. That was the system. They were putting in literally large sums, *pollo*, much. The religious system demanded that.

And then over against that, a poor widow came and He watched her and put in two small copper coins which amount to a cent. Poor widow, the word...is a word from which we get the English word penurious, destitute, basically. And this is one of the widows who has been devoured by the system. Severe, severe abuse...she puts in two cents, just to put that into perspective, the amount would have been one-sixty-fourth of a denarius which was a day's wage. That's all she had left. The smallest coin used by the Jews and she put two of them in...that was it, dropped them in the shofar-like receptacle. And then He called His disciples, in verse 43 to Him, and He said to them, "Truly I say to you," I love that when He says that. It's not like everything else was false, but it's so against the grain. "Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury, for they all put in out of their surplus, but she out of her poverty put in all she owned, all she had to live on...this poor woman.

Relatively speaking, comparatively speaking, her gift was greater, right? Because it was a hundred percent. You know, that system can't be more corrupt. It cannot be more corrupt...devouring widows like that. Scripture is full of commands, by the way, as I told you earlier, to care for the widows. False religion has no interest in that at all. They abuse widows and they do it in the name of God. They do it in the name of Christ. This is a tragedy and the Lord will not tolerate it.

So, come to chapter 13. “As He was going out of the temple, one of His disciples...He’s got something else on His mind, He’s got this woman on His mind, this system...and one of His disciples said to Him, ‘Teacher, behold what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings.’” This guy’s not real deep. He seems to have missed a lot. He’s stuck on the architecture and it was something wonderful, the whole Eastern side was covered in gold. So they said when the morning sun came up over the Mount of Olives and bounced off of that, you couldn’t look at it, it would be like looking in the sun, it would blind you. Even in the evening when the sun was going down, it was now evening, the sun was going down on the other side, the glory of that temple would be only slightly diminished. And it was covered all over everywhere with votive offerings. Luke tells us about that. Votive offerings were offerings given as a part of a prayer, a dedication to God and they would be pieces of art that would be hanging places, magnificent places, even given by very wealthy people. It was a sight to see, it was one of the wonders of the ancient world. Some say it was the most magnificent building in the ancient world.

And this guy was impressed with the building, and Jesus was not impressed with the system. And Jesus said to him, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another which will not be torn down.” This thing is coming down. Any system of religion that misrepresents God and abuses widows is coming down. All the robbers, all the thieves, all the fakes, all the phony teachers and preachers, all the prosperity preachers who get rich on the gifts of desperate people looking for wealth and health, you will be judged. Sometimes judgment lingers. It lingered 40 years after this, didn’t it? Till 70 A.D. and that place was smashed and not one stone was left on another.

This should be a warning passage to those contemporary preachers who prey on single older women who are the main constituency of people who send money to these TV evangelists. “Woe to you who sell your miracle water and miracle waters to promise to heal the desperate if they send you their money. Woe to you wealthy, self-indulgent TV preachers who become rich on the backs of the lonely, poor, disillusioned, diseased and desperate. Woe to you who indulge in your ten thousand dollar a night hotel rooms and claim revelations from God and spend a hundred thousand a month on your private jet, taking money for all of that from the most desperate people and doing it in the name of Christ. You will not escape judgment.”

And so, the judgment fell on them and so it always falls because God is always the same. They thought they were going to judge Jesus. The truth was, He went to the cross and out the tomb the third day and 40 years later, their nation, their temple, their religious system was completely destroyed and it has never recovered. This is to be a house of prayer, He said.

Aren’t you thankful that you’re a part of the truth? Aren’t you thankful that you’re a part of the true church, that you know and love the Lord Jesus Christ, believe the gospel, are in the place of blessing and not the place of judgment? God is gracious.

Father, we thank You for this scriptural record. Thank You for the truth that it bears to our hearts and minds. Thank You for loving us when we were unlovely, saving us when we were sinners. Thank You for making the unrighteous righteous by grace alone. Thank You for the gift of salvation. Thank You for the truth of true understanding of Your Word. Help us to hold to the truth and to make no truce and no alliance and no peace with error, but to be protectors of the truth and protectors of Your church. Help us even to be protectors of people who are victimized by these systems and boldly confront them in proclaiming what Your Word says. It's been so wonderful to worship You this morning, but we know the work is not done when the service ends because it's heart work, soul work that You do. So we pray, Lord, if there are those here who do not know Christ, who are on the judgment side still, who will be condemned for rejecting the Son of God and the gospel of grace. I pray today, Lord, that they would turn from their sin and rejection, they would repent and embrace Christ as Lord and Savior. We pray, Lord, that You will give us a renewed commitment to walk with Christ in obedience, those of us who know You, to be faithful, to love You with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, to love one another, to be servants in every sense, slaves of Christ who will proclaim the glories of the gospel far and wide. Lord, we're so blessed and not due to anything of our own, for before the foundation of the world, You chose us and set Your love upon us. And Your Son died to pay for our sins and You granted us the righteousness that can only be a gift. May in gratitude for that we set our lives in the course of obedience and service to You with all our might.

We thank You for the wonderful privilege of praising You. We look forward of our time together tonight. In Your Son's name. Amen.

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