

Mark 12:38-13:2
September 5, 2010
Lynchburg, Virginia

EXHORDIUM

As we look at this new passage of Scripture we need to be reminded of the context. This is another one of those passages that is often pulled out of context to prove a point. But in proving that point, we often lose the center of what Jesus was trying to teach. There is no doubt that the widow gave her all to the Lord. But having said that, Jesus is not recommending giving everything to the church. This is most emphatically NOT a prooftext to throw in your very last farthing into the church offering box. In fact, it is exactly the opposite. Jesus is using her as an example as to why Israel is being judged. In the apocalyptic chapter that follows this event, we see what full judgment God was bringing on Israel for taking advantage of just such a woman.

But the Pharisees would wear her as a badge of honor just as some modern health and wealth guru might do the same. See, we have people that are totally committed to God. Our people give their very last cent to the church. And God condemns such an attitude by His ministers. So much so that He is willing to utterly destroy such forms of mock worship.

But this is not to condemn the idea that we are to give God our all. As I have often encouraged you to think, you must think about who you are in the story. Are you the widow who has the view that she has nothing left so she hazards her all on God? Or are you the Pharisees who only give enough so that others can see you give? Think of Ananias and Saphira.

EXEGESIS

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,

What were the scribes about? Earthly glory and honor. This was not an inexpensive habit of theirs. Long robes took money.

Salutations in the market place. They liked to be greeted as one who was distinguished and honored. The market place is also where the business men would be prominent. Ministers often face the temptation of being seen as professional and successful, like the other men in the market place. But being professional is not our calling. We are called to speak the oracles of God and that to the common people. It is interesting that Mark tells us explicitly that the common people heard Jesus gladly and that He spoke with authority and not as the scribes.

39 And the chief seats in the synagogues,

These men love the chief seats. Jesus does not say that we should refuse honor. He says that we should be those who do not love to be honored by men, thinking too highly of ourselves. But that if we are given an honor and asked to move up then we should not refuse. But how do you think of yourself? Are you glad to have others in the place of honor over you? Would you sit at the lowest seat? Or would you expect to be seated in the chief seat?

Also, Jesus does not condemn the idea of the chief seats. He does not say that all the seats have to be same with no honor given. Giving honor, even the chief honor at the table is not sin. But giving that honor through bribes or seeking that honor when it is undeserved is sin.

and the uppermost rooms at feasts: This the same thing, again seeking the place of honor instead of the place of service.

40 Which devour widows' houses,

The widows are the very ones the leaders of Israel are charged with protecting. If the protectors become the victimizers, the nation is in a grave state.

We should keep in mind that this is not only an accusation against the religious leaders. The line between civil and ecclesiastical authority was not as clear. The religious leaders of Israel also bore political clout.

The new devourers of widows includes the state. Think of welfare, the lottery, food stamps and now health care. These are all programs claimed at helping people but aimed at making them dependents. The poor

are kept poor by the powers that be and kept in power by their very dependents.

Religious leaders also devour the poor. Those who know better convince and deceive the poor to give over and above their tithe to the church. Just as the widow is commended for her faith and the religious leaders are condemned for their avarice, so is it in our day. Prayer lines are the worst. Call us for prayer and make a donation. The pretense of something religious in order to get money is the very thing God hates.

Widows are also devoured by men who have sexual ambitions. Sexual sins and financial sins often go hand in hand. This is true if the financial sin is the desire to gain great wealth, even if successful and also sin of gross mismanagement. Such sins are often connected at the hip.

and for a pretence make long prayers: these shall receive greater damnation.

Prayers are meant for salvation. What an abomination when the prayer is given for the sole purpose of impressing the listeners. Prayer should be directed at God not to those who are listening. Prayers are prayers and not sermons. The pretentious minister is despised by God.

We might say something like, “He may not be much of a Christian man but at least he prays like a great saint.” And when we say such a thing we attribute it to his benefit as if he at least has one small work to accrue to his benefit before the Lord. Likewise, I have heard such things said about preachers, preachers that run off with the secretary, have marriages and children that are an abomination, or are surly beyond defense. Well, he’s a great preacher. Is he now? What makes a great preacher? Is it his delivery in the pulpit? Or, his delivery in life?

The fact that such a man is great at prayers or great at sermons is not a benefit to him. Because of his personal apostasy, his prayers and sermons are more witnesses against him, not for him. Hypocrisy never commends us to the Lord.

It is greater damnation, not an indulgence to stave off some purgatory time.

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.

What is going on here? Why is this section in this place?

We need to be reminded again what is going on. We constantly tend to think of the Pharisees as some goody two shoes trying to work their way to heaven. They are really good men but being good won't get you to heaven. Well, I will tell you that being good WILL get you to heaven. The problem is that no man, except for Jesus, is good. At least, not good in the sense of being commended to God for his goodness. The fallen seed of Adam dwells in all of us and makes us fit for hell. Only the blood of Christ makes us fit for heaven. But even given that distinction, the Pharisaical leadership was not good. They were not trying to earn their way to heaven through works righteousness. They had fixed upon a plan to resist God by resisting the Messiah. They knew John the Baptist to be a good and righteous prophet and resisted him. They know that Jesus is recognized by the people as a godly man and yet they resist him.

In addition to this, Jesus gives a laundry list of their gross sins. Perhaps every living Pharisee was not guilty of these sins but they were so prevalent in their midst that Jesus could paint them all with a broad stroke. To be identified with the Pharisees means that you are identified with their sins, even if you were not in fact committing those particular sins.

Let's take a modern day example. The American Episcopal church has ordained both a homosexual and a lesbian bishop. They have done this in direct contradiction to God's Holy Word. They have sinned not only in embracing a sinful lifestyle but by promoting and elevating it within God's Church. Now, is it right to say that Episcopal bishops and pastors displease God by advancing an agenda that is not His? Is it right to say this even if you have certain Episcopal ministers that are faithful and true? Yes, it is. And God is bringing judgment upon them by the very leadership that they now possess.

This is the context of this and the following passage. The leadership in Israel is not good. They are bad. They are not only bad, they are wicked. They are committing sins that are now institutionalized. They are so

institutionalized that the sins they are committing are lauded as righteousness. How could things be so twisted?

The story of the widow's mite is in this context. It is a story of how God is displeased with the shepherds of Israel and what He is bringing judgment upon them for. They devour widow's houses. That is, they take advantage of the poorest and weakest in Israel, the very ones that they ought to protect.

It is interesting that Jesus and His disciples sat and watched who threw into the treasury. The box was in public and was a public event. The widow was not trying to get noticed. The other leaders were trying to get noticed. They probably had a hard time getting their money into the box.

We need to be careful about reading people's intentions into their actions but Jesus sets His disciples up to watch actions and makes proper inferences about intentions from them. The widow puts in all of her living, thus she is clearly giving out of her poverty. The other men, who come in flowing robes and other costly apparel cast small amounts into the treasury. Perhaps large amounts by the standard of the poor widow, but small amounts compared to their own wealth and ability. Why do they give so publicly? So, that they can be seen by men as doing their duty to the poor.

42 And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing.

This was a very small amount, but not so small that it meant absolutely nothing to her. In today's dollars, we would think of her offering as a few dollars, maybe 10. So, it was like a very poverty stricken worshipper throwing their last to five dollar bills into the plate. I say that so that we don't think it is throwing two of our modern pennies into the offering. Two pennies today would buy nothing. Two pennies in her day would have purchased enough bread to eat for a day or two.

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.

It is not wrong for us to pay attention to what is going on. The American Church is wealthy beyond imagination. And most churches, ours included, give a tremendous amount of money to the ministry of Christ's Church. But Jesus calls us to watch what is going on. Is there true heartfelt giving in the church? Are we giving because we have an abundance? And are we giving not only out of our abundance but also out of our living? The widow gave trusting God to provide for her. The rich gave, holding back, knowing they could get more.

Furthermore, we have this gross disparity in the midst of the church. We have a widow who is destitute and we have the rich being honored by men. The Pharisees and the Scribes identify with the rich man and despise the widow. But Jesus says that the widow is the righteous person in this story and the rich are those who are withholding themselves from trusting in God.

This ought not to be the case. The rich ought to be able to give enough so that the poor in their midst can be fed and clothed.

Incidentally, we are talking about the truly poor, here. In Bible terms, the widow, indeed. That is, a widow that has no surviving children to take care of her. And orphans, that is, no family members to take care of them. And those who are mentally or physically unable to work. The Bible calls all others to work and provide for themselves. So, the poor are not simply those who do not have any money right now.

We live in difficult times for the church. The federal government has seen itself as the replacement for the church. Part of the problem is a failure of the church to provide for the needs of the poor by giving them food, clothing and shelter. But another aspect of the failure of the church is a failure to call the so-called poor to accountability. The Bible says that if those in our midst will not work, assuming they can, then they shall not eat. But we have entire systems set up specifically to feed those who do not or will not work.

This happens in the Church without any accountability to a local body of believers and it happens with governmental institutions without any accountability to anybody at all.

Our current administration is making an attempt and bringing even more souls to suckle at the breast of the federal government, never to be weaned again.

I do not say that the way out of this is simple or that it can be done quickly. But we at least have to refuse the charity of the government where we can. Men, the Bible calls us to work and provide for our families to eat, to be clothed and for shelter. If God blesses you with abundant work, then you can share food, clothing and shelter with others who are in need.

Do not be proud when you are in need.

1. Wic for milk, juice, eggs. Etc.- didn't really think about implications. Fishing license, occasional splurges, etc. Family found out and offered to give enough for those items until we could afford them. I never even thought to ask the church. The fact was that we COULD have afforded them but it was easy to get a hand out for a pregnant mom.
2. Family in church with Dad having little work. They were getting food from the local government food bank and the Catholic food bank.

Be willing to be held accountable. If you are in need you need to be willing to be held accountable. Many in our society today take church or government charity but are able bodied souls, able to work hard and provide for their needs. Also, many get government charity when they don't really need it. Their idea of need is skewed. Do you need food, milk, food stamps when you are still buying cigarettes, beer and wine? Do you need food stamps at all when the church could provide for the amount that you are legitimately short on food?

But we do not want to ask our families for help. We do not want to ask the church for help because they might notice that are still smoking a lot or still drinking a lot or still eating out at restaurants, even while we claim to have no food. The government, or the food bank never asks those questions.

Folks, if you find yourself in any of these places of need, please do not feel condemned by what I am saying. I am not condemning you. I once

found myself in the same place. I hadn't even really thought about it. But having thought about it, with the help of some family members, I realized that what I was doing was not best and perhaps was even wrong. Having received some family help, it made me want to work harder so that that family member did not have to keep giving me their money. And in the future, it made me want to offer that sort of help to other family members. This is true of immediate family as well as to the family of God.

So, the church's failure in this area is two-fold. 1. We do not inquire as to pressing needs in our midst. 2. Having done so and finding a real pressing need, we are not willing to hold that family accountable.

EXHORTATION

We must fix both of these problems before the Lord's brings serious correction into our midst.

The state is not God but if we insist that Uncle Sam be worshipped and adored because he provides all of our earthly needs, then we should expect the One True God to topple that idol.

The Nanny State is counter to the Kingdom of God and shall come down like the Temple in Jerusalem.

13 And as he went out of the temple, one of his disciples saith unto him, Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here! 2 And Jesus answering said unto him, Seest thou these great buildings? there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.

All that the temple represented came crashing down. It was not just the Temple. It was the entire sacrificial system, that is Israel's form of worship. It was the nation of Israel. It was unbelieving Israel. Judgment fell on all Jews as they were once again completely and thoroughly overthrown. They were completely dispersed throughout the earth.

That sort of utter destruction will not happen to Christ's Church. The Church will continue to grow and prosper. However, God still disciplines His children and His Church. In the Church age we should expect God to make examples of His children to teach His other children how to behave. Remember Ananias and Saphira.