**“Put In Everything”**

Mark 12:38-44

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Certain stories in the New Testament have become so well known throughout history that some of the phrases associated with these passages are still used today. Every once in a while, you’ll still hear someone talk about a Good Samaritan or Lost Sheep type of person. Or you’ll hear a phrase about an athlete who can walk on water.

We’re going to look at a text from which we use a phrase in our conversations still going on today. The passage we’re going to look at is Mark 12: 38-44. This little story is traditionally known as “The Widow’s Mite.” Even today, if someone makes a sacrificial gift of some kind, we would say he or she gave a widow’s mite kind of offering. Let’s read the passage but I want to start in the middle at verse 40 and then we’ll work our way back

Mark 12:41 He (that is Jesus) sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums.

Mark 12:42 A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny.

Mark 12:43 Then He called His disciples and said to them, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. Mark 12:44 For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

You are probably a step ahead of me now with regard to this sermon, and you could write this message yourself. I mean, who doesn’t know why Jesus noticed and commented on this sacrificial and trust-filled offering of the widow who gave her last two coins? And who doesn’t understand that when the poor give their offerings to God, it is a bigger deal to God than when rich people write checks that don’t even change their standard of living? We all get this; it’s pretty simple, isn’t it?

Well, it might be, unless you look at the passages that precede the section we just read. Previously, the Pharisees—the Scripture teachers, the ruling elite of the temple— have a target on Jesus. They’re going after Him publicly. They’re asking Him trick questions and they’re hoping against hope that they can trip Him up in a conversation, that they can discredit Him somehow, because His popularity is rapidly growing and He’s making them nervous about their positions as religious leaders.

We see this kind of thing happen in the media today like when Jessie Jones runs after someone and there’s a camera person along. They follow someone to their car and ask them very, very difficult questions… ones which are hard to answer under pressure, right? Well, with Jesus, this has been going on all afternoon on a number of different subjects. Jesus is just getting drilled. But they could not trip Him up. And at the end of all of this grilling, Jesus looks at all these leaders—and, of course, His disciples are around Him—and He says something starting in verse 38. And this is kind of a straight on shot to the jaw of these religious leaders.

He says, *“Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes,”* the idea here is that they love the fashion and all the attention these special robes bring— *“and they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces,”* —make a big splash there— *“and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets!”—*front rows, head tables. Jesus is saying that these religious leaders crave the spotlight. They ache for fame. They love the celebrity treatment.

And then there are two more statements that come from the lips of Jesus: *They devour widows’ houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.”*Have you ever wrapped your head around the little phrase in that text that these religious leaders *devour widows’ houses*?

I was reading on this phenomenon this past week. Robert Gundry shares that the word *devour* could also be translated ‘misappropriate’ and a group of other rather unseemly words. He along with many other scholars think what was going on in Jesus’ day is that the religious leaders would possibly perform a funeral for a married man and then, as a part of the grief counseling, these religious temple leaders would try to talk the widow, in the middle of all her grieving, to turning over title of her house to the religious leaders, telling her what a God-honoring thing that would be.

Then the Pharisees would auction off the house and split the money amongst themselves. And that’s what gave them the money to buy these flowing robes that Jesus noticed. And that’s what gave them money to be able to afford the courtside seats at the right social events and at the banquets they all wanted to attend. It’s just sick isn’t it? And doesn’t it make you understand why Jesus said in verse 40 that these people would receive greater *condemnation?*

Jesus always had special affinity for widows. Many of you might have read that Jesus’ mother, Mary, probably lost her husband, Joseph, when she was still quite a young woman. There’s not much said of Joseph later on, and maybe that’s what gave Jesus some of His sensitivity towards widows as He grew up in a home led by a mom who was a widow for a long, long time.

So back to verse 41, Jesus is standing by the temple treasury and He’s watching people walk by and make their gifts. All sizes of gifts are being made, and Jesus just noticed two kinds. He notices the two copper coins from the widow—He’s sensitive to widows; and, secondly, He notices the large gifts from wealthy people.

About the offering made by the widow, He simply says she “put in everything” she had. She put in everything. The wealthy people gave out of their wealth, but she gave out of her poverty and put in all that she had to live on.

This brings to my mind a story which you may have heard. It’s about a little girl who was quite sick and needed a blood transfusion. She had a blood type that was rare. Her brother, who was about 6 years old or so, was tested and found to have the same blood type. He was asked if he would be willing to donate his blood to her. He was thoughtful for some time. The nurse explained the needle in the arm, squeezing the sponge, and the bag to collect the blood. He was reluctant but gave his consent. After he was hooked up to the bag and he started to squeeze, the blood began to fill the bag and he began to cry softly. The nurse asked him if he was OK, if something hurt. With a quiver in his voice, he asked the nurse when he was going to die. This little guy didn’t really understand what the consequences were for giving blood. He thought that it meant he’d have to *put in everything* so that his sister would live. He was hesitant but willing. He just didn’t understand that his body would restore what he was going to give up.

Jesus says that she put in everything. Did she have faith that God would restore what she would give up? I wonder, I wonder what if—and this is truly just a ‘what if?’—what if the widow in this story, the widow that Jesus was watching by the treasury box ... what if that widow was one of those widows whose home had been devoured by the very temple leaders who were standing around watching the offering being taken that day? What if the widow who Jesus is commending was one who had had her home or much of her money taken away from her through the deceitfulness of the religious leaders? What if she’s been living in the basement with a relative and she’s just been doing something for minimum wage? And because she still has some earnings, she feels prompted by God to be a giver.

And so she walks to the very institution that was led by the people who had swindled her out of her home. She takes this little money out of handbag and she says: God took care of me ever since this terrible thing happened with the house and these religious leaders. God took care of me today. And I’ll bet my final two cents that He’ll take care of me tomorrow. And she drops in those two coins.

Now that would redefine the giving of an offering, wouldn’t it? I mean, the giving of those two cents would say a lot about the heart of that woman. It would say something about her faith in God. It would say something about her ability to distinguish between the abuses of bad leaders in the church and the God whom the church seeks to glorify. It would say something about fear or the lack of it. It would say something about forgiveness. It would say something about generosity. She put in *everything*.

This is just a what if… by which we can see why Jesus let everybody know what an extraordinary person this widow was and what an extraordinary offering in the overall scheme of things that she had given?

Now the only thing that Jesus says about the rich givers is that they gave out of their wealth. It’s not a bad thing. He doesn’t rebuke anyone for that. Their gifts were larger. But perhaps they required not so much reflection, or prayer, and almost no heroic acts of trust or spiritual work having been done.

As followers of Christ, most if not all of us must recognize that anyway you cut it; we are the wealthy ones in this story. Maybe you can identify with the widow… but by the global realities of our time we are immeasurably wealthy. Where are we called in our faith to “put in everything” and trust God and believe God will meet our need. Amen.