

Valley Bible Church
Sermon Notes for November 12, 2017

Mark 12:38-44
Oppressed by the Corrupt

I. Corruption condemned (12:38-40)

A. The corrupt people (12:38)

And in his teaching he said, "Beware of the scribes,

- We continue the broad setting of Jesus' several interactions on this Tuesday
- On Sunday, Jesus was paraded into Jerusalem primarily by Galilean Jews as they declared Jesus to be the blessed Messiah of God
- On Monday, Jesus attacked and cleansed the temple in Jerusalem
- Thus, Tuesday has been packed with several controversies
 - Chief priests, scribes, and elders challenged Jesus' authority
 - Jesus pronounced judgment on Jewish leaders while predicting His death as the murdered son and heir or the neglected cornerstone
 - This caused a retreat of the Jewish authorities followed by calculated challenges directed at Jesus
 - Pharisees and Herodians challenged Jesus about paying taxes to Rome and Caesar
 - Sadducees challenged Jesus about the validity of the resurrection
 - Scribe challenged Jesus' knowledge of the Old Testament
- Jesus has secured the interest of all the people in Jerusalem for this week of Passover
- Jesus has earned the rightful place to speak and teach in the Jerusalem temple complex
 - He challenged the scribes' (and therefore the people's) teaching and perception of the Messiah as Lord
- Now, Jesus challenges the conduct of the scribes
- Jesus could not have been more serious about this condemnation of the scribes
 - Jesus uses the word, "Beware" which is a command
 - Examining Matthew's parallel account, we see a much larger passage detailing the rebuke of the scribes and Pharisees in the form of 7 woes
 - These words are the final words of Jesus in public and they're aimed at the religious leaders

B. The corrupt practices (12:38-40)

who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces 39 and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, 40 who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers.

- Jesus condemns these scribes for three particular reasons
- First, He condemns the scribes for their desires
 - *Who like to walk around in long robes*

- “The στολαί, “long robes,” refer to those worn by priests and—probably in imitation of the priests—by religious men, especially on religious occasions. Jesus says that the scribes like περιπατεῖν, “to walk about,” in these robes, probably to draw attention to themselves and to be associated with the prestigious temple establishment.”¹
 - “A *stole* is not an everyday garment, but a festive or celebratory robe (cf. Lk. 15:22; Rev 6:11; 7:9) and suggests ‘dressing up’.” (R.T. France, 490)
 - Luke 15:22 “But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet.’”
 - They had clearly changed their outer appearance (in terms of dress) in order to draw attention to the themselves
 - *And like greetings in the marketplaces*
 - It was not enough for scribes to be noticed by men
 - They wanted to be publicly acknowledged by men
 - “The custom was that those of lower rank were expected to greet those of higher rank (‘a person must greet one who is greater than he in knowledge of Torah’).”²
 - In Matthew’s parallel account, we read of a more detailed rebuke on this subject
 - Matthew 23:6-12 “and they love the... greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others. 8 But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. 9 And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. 10 Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ. 11 The greatest among you shall be your servant. 12 Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”
 - *And have the best seats in the synagogues*
 - Assumed to be seats in the front, closest to the speaker and Torah scroll locked in a wooden chest in the front of the synagogue
 - Assumed to be seats facing everyone else in the synagogue
 - Like the long robes, this was a desire for the scribes to be seen and also treated with honor among men
 - *And the places of honor at feasts*
 - These scribes exalted themselves and expected others to treat them the same

¹ Craig A. Evans, Mark 8:27–16:20, vol. 34B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2001), 278.

² Craig A. Evans, Mark 8:27–16:20, vol. 34B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2001), 278.

entrusted to them. (e) Scribes took money from credulous women in return for the supposed benefit of intercessory prayer (as perhaps implied by the next clause in v 40). (f) Scribes took houses as pledges for debts that could not realistically be expected to be repaid. It is difficult to choose among these options, for Jesus' brief complaint supplies insufficient details. Fitzmyer appears to lean toward the second option."³

- God still cares for widows today unlike the scribes of Jesus' day
 - James 1:27 "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world."
- Third, Jesus condemns the scribes for their public displays of prayer
 - *And for a pretense make long prayers*
 - "For appearance's sake" NASB
 - "As a show" NET and NIV
 - Matthew 6:5-6 "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 6 But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

C. The corrupt punished (12:40)

They will receive the greater condemnation."

- One thing for the people of God to be hypocrites
- Another thing for the leaders of God's people to lead the people into hypocrisy
- For this reason, Jesus bluntly asserts that these leaders must face greater condemnation
 - Mark 12:41-48
 - The servant who knows God's will yet actively rebels against it
 - The servant who knows God's will yet fails to carry it out
 - The servant who did not know God's will and failed to carry it out
 - James 3:1 "Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness."

II. Oppression observed (12:41-44)

A. The instance of oppression (12:41)

41 And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box.

³ Craig A. Evans, Mark 8:27–16:20, vol. 34B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2001), 279.

- This is a moment after He concluded teaching in the Temple complex
- Notice that Jesus is still on the Temple Mount in this next scene
- He is sitting and observing the monetary offerings of the people to the Temple system
- “According to the Mishnah there were thirteen trumpet-shaped receptacles into which people could cast money. Some of these receptacles were designated for specific purposes; others were used for ‘freewill offerings.’”⁴
 - Regardless of the receptacle in which people offered their money, it all went to support the temple system in one way or another

B. The individual of oppression (12:41-42)

Many rich people put in large sums. 42 And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny.

- It is noted how many rich people put in large amounts of money in this scene of contributions and offerings
- However, in verse 42 we are introduced to a “poor widow”
- She came and brought a meager offering—two small copper coins
 - More specifically, these were *leptons*
 - “These two small copper coins were lepta (sing. ‘lepton’), the smallest and least valuable coins in circulation in Palestine, worth one-half of a quadrans or 1/128 of a denarius, or about six minutes of an average daily wage. This was next to nothing in value.”⁵
 - Of course, many of our translations value the offering at about a penny in order to communicate how little this amount really was

C. The identification of oppression (12:43-44)

43 And he called his disciples to him and said to them, “Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. 44 For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

- Jesus could not pass up such a moment as this
- Jesus calls His disciples to Himself to draw attention to this widow
- Jesus actually begins by stating His important phrase, “Truly, I say to you”
- He uses this moment to compare the widow’s offering to the contributions of the others in the temple
- Jesus’ point is simple—Proportionally speaking this widow has given more than all the rich people gave in their offerings
- Question: However, the question is outstanding—Why does Jesus call His disciples to Himself to point out this widow?

⁴ Craig A. Evans, Mark 8:27–16:20, vol. 34B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2001), 283.

⁵ Biblical Studies Press, The NET Bible First Edition; Bible. English. NET Bible.; The NET Bible (Biblical Studies Press, 2005).

- Many believe that Jesus engages in an opportunity to highlight the attitude and faith of this widow in her tiny (yet massive and sacrificial) offering
 - Of course taken all by itself, it is understandable to see that perspective
- However, it appears when we take another look at the context and content of these verses, we find Jesus to be lamenting this scene involving the poor widow
- Jesus is not emphasizing this widow's sacrificial giving but identifying her sacrificial giving as an example of oppression coming from the scribes
- Question: What about the context and content causes me to focus on the oppression of this widow?
 - First, in our immediate verses of 41-44, Jesus has not made a clear commendation of the widow
 - He has compared her offering as greater in proportion than the rich
 - But, Jesus has not clearly stated a direct application from such an example
 - There is no: so also must you, her faith has saved her, etc.
 - Second, in our context of this morning's passage (vv. 38-44), Jesus has already specifically identified the scribes' corruption in "devouring widows' houses"
 - Jesus only highlighted one way in which the scribes' corruption had impacted others
 - Probably more than convenience that He only spoke of the scribes' oppression of widows and then made this point regarding this poor widow
 - Third, in the greater context of Mark 11-13, Jesus has been condemning the religious leaders and pronouncing judgment upon them and the temple system
 - He has been pronouncing judgment since He attacked the temple (11:15-19)
 - He will continue to pronounce judgment after this (Mark 13)
 - Why would this be a time to talk about giving?
 - Rather, it would fit to use the widow as a picture of the oppression that has resulted from the corruption of the leadership
 - Fourth, to emphasize sacrificial giving to the extent of everything that one has appears to contradict what Jesus has already taught about money
 - If Jesus has emphasized anything, it is the fact that the widow has literally given everything she has
 - "But she out of her poverty" or lack or nothingness
 - "Has put in everything she had"
 - "All she had to live on"
 - It's hard to think that a text that has already highlighted the way that scribes devour widow's houses would shift to a lesson on sacrificial giving
 - Additionally, it's hard to believe that Jesus would use these words as a teachable moment for giving when it seems to contradict other things that Jesus, Himself, says about money in the gospels
 - Be a good steward, invest, save, pay taxes, etc.

- Fifth, a lament over the oppression of this widow is due to the corruption of the religious establishment better parallels the Old Testament scenes of similar corruption
 - In attacking the temple, Jesus quoted from Jeremiah 7
 - Jeremiah 7:11 “Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, declares the LORD.”
 - The Lord revealed through Jeremiah that He had seen through their deceptive and corrupt ways
 - Jeremiah 7:4-6 “Do not trust in these deceptive words: ‘This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.’ 5 ‘For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly execute justice one with another, 6 if you do not oppress the sojourner, the fatherless, or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own harm.’”
 - In a similar fashion, Jesus is exposing the den of robbers in the current temple of His day
 - The religious system taught that there was glory and honor being offered to God while they were clearly oppressing widows like the one that Jesus is highlighting