

## The Scribes, The Widow and Disciples

Mk. 12:38-44; Lk. 20:45-21:4

### Introduction:

1. People are not always what they seem.
  - a. Outwardly they may be respected, religious, people of status, occupying places of honor and yet in reality they are disrespectful pretenders who take advantage of the disadvantaged.
  - b. On the other hand, some have no status, no position and seem insignificant, but are genuine, self-sacrificing and real contributors.
2. Jesus notes that the scribes are examples of this first group, and this widow represents those of the second group.
3. He calls on the disciples to beware the difference.
4. What is the setting for what Jesus says in these texts? What did He intend for the disciples to take away from what He said? What is the message to us?
5. These are some of the things to be addressed in this study.

### Discussion:

- I. These two events take place in the last week of the Lord's life, after the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Jesus is going in and out of Jerusalem. His evenings are spent in Bethany; His days in Jerusalem teaching in the temple.
  - A. While the crowds enjoyed listening to him (Mk. 12:37), Luke says that "while all the people were listening, He said to the disciples, 'Beware of the scribes'" (Lk. 20:45-46).
    1. The scribes were copyists of the Law. Not having printing presses, of course, they copied the Law by hand. As such, this implied that they were well acquainted with it. The NIV translates that they were "teachers" of the law.
    2. They enjoyed distinguishing themselves with special clothing. They liked respectful greetings in the market places, the chief seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets.
  - B. Jesus proceeded to sit down opposite the treasury.
    1. This was in the Court of Women.
    2. Apparently, there were 13 separate trumpet shaped boxes located here. The Mishnaic tractate on the half-shekel dues mentions that they were labeled for different kinds of offerings. The amount the widow gave suggests that it went into the box for the building of the temple.
  - C. Widows were generally numbered among the poor and vulnerable, often coupled with the fatherless (cf. Acts 6:1; 1 Tim. 5:3ff).
- II. There are ethical expectations inherent in the comparison between the scribes and the widow.

- A. God wants people to show mercy, not just practice religious exercises (Hos. 6:6).
    - 1. Pure and undefiled religion involves care for the vulnerable (James 1:27).
    - 2. A forgotten sheaf was to be left for widows, orphans, stranger (Deut. 24:19).
    - 3. Specifically forbidden to mistreat the fatherless and widows (Ex. 22:22).
    - 4. God is the father of the fatherless and protector of widows (Psa. 68:5).
  - B. Leaders should not use their position as an excuse to exercise power over others or to enhance their personal worth (1 Cor. 1:10-11; 3:3b-7).
    - 1. These scribes saw themselves as powerful and used their power to trample those already crushed. They devoured widows' houses.
    - 2. They saw these widows as pawns to be used to advance themselves.
    - 3. There is no place for such condescending attitudes.
  - C. Elevation by others can contribute to seeking the praise of men.
    - 1. While it is appropriate to honor leaders (1 Tim. 5:17) the heaping of respect creates subtle temptations to elevate oneself.
    - 2. These scribes hungered for honor and distinction. They flaunted their learning and position in the clothes they wore, in loving respectful greetings, the chief seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets.
    - 3. Have you felt this desire to be honored? It is not wrong to show respect, nor to be respected, but carnality by the one showing respect or by the one receiving the respect creates problems (1 Cor. 1:10, 3:1-7). Often the one showing respect is looking for what they can get. Often the one who is being respected is loving the praise of men.
    - 4. Jesus took the worst seat on the cross (Heb. 12:2).
  - D. It is better to seek God than the benefits from men (Matt. 6:1-8).
  - E. "Smaller gifts" which count as nothing to men, may be "large" to God (Lk. 16:14-15). The issue is not the amount but the participating (2 Cor. 8:4).
- III. Jesus is teaching that disciples need to be aware of those like the scribes.
- A. We need to examine ourselves. Are we more like the scribes or more like the widow?
    - 1. It is easy for us to get caught up in the desire for praise, status and power to the neglect of our relationship with God and our relationship to others.
    - 2. The scribes had the appearance of religion, but theirs was not pure and undefiled.
    - 3. Our personal self-diminishing can lead to attempts to bolster ourselves with self-elevation.
  - B. We need to beware in our response to others that we are not honoring the wrong ones? James 2:1-7 warns against this. Again it is often our self-centeredness that prompts such actions. We may favor the wealthy for what they can do for us. Are we honoring those who stand condemnable?
  - C. It would be better if we honored self-sacrificing widows more than sports figures. Who we honor may be more of a reflection on us, our deficits and our values than on who we honor.

## Conclusion:

1. The Lord honors those who genuinely give their hearts to Him.
2. Satan uses subtle means to massage our feelings about ourselves. If we are feeling less than He uses that to tempt us to self-exaltation. The rewards are there when people honor us. It makes us feel good and we rejoice in the exaltation, the power, the status. We may even take advantage of the vulnerable and pray for appearance's sake and find in the end condemnation.
3. Instead of aspiring to position, power, wealth and status better we aspire to being poor widows, contributors, giving all to the Lord.