

8-117 Missing the Widow's Mite

Belcroft Bible Church

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Thank you, Church, for singing, great encouragement to my heart. Thank you, AV team, for all the work and ministry you do. Thank you for these new mics you put in that picks up the glorious sound of this congregation that is singing in amazing ways. I love it. I pray that comes across on the video. Your voices are beautiful, Church; your singing is so encouraging.

Please turn in your copy of God's Word to Mark 12:41-44, which will serve as our interesting passage for exposition this morning. It is an interesting passage on every level. It is not only interesting to hear and to learn about, but I will tell you it's an interesting passage to preach. We pick up right where we left off last week, as we saw Jesus give, don't miss it, the most blistering damnation concerning false teachers, most specifically the false religious teachers and leaders of Israel. Jesus clearly, last week we saw it, He clearly denounced the abusive tactics of the false teachers who would consume widows' houses, manipulating them as they rob them of all they had to live on. Now Jesus will validate His condemnation of false teachers through a very a clear and dramatic illustration of their exploitation. You follow along silently now as I read aloud. Hear the Word of the Lord:

And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. And the poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. 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. 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."

Amen.

This story is, without a doubt, one of the most well-known and oft repeated episodes in the life of Christ. If you have been around church, or listened to preaching for any length of time, you will have heard countless sermons or Sunday school lessons either taught or alluded to regarding the widow's mite. This passage is almost always taught that its primary meaning is a lesson on sacrificial giving. Most specifically this text is often explained as if the widow serves as a clear example of Christian giving. This means that we in the church today are meant to follow her example and give all that we have to the Lord financially just as she did. Without question this poor widow is almost always heralded as the hero of this story. This, what I stand before you and say, is no exaggeration. And you understand this, you've seen it, you've heard it, maybe you believe that. This is no exaggeration.

And I further substantiate this by sadly telling you that almost every commentary I own, supports and promotes that understanding. You could summarize the majority view of most people regarding this passage like this: This passage is a contrast between the religious hypocrites Jesus just pronounced and the faithful devotion of a poor widow. The rich gave so much, but they left behind so much more. But this poor widow, she gave everything and left nothing behind. Thus, she demonstrates for us what it means to love God with all your heart. As she did, so we must now go and do. That is the normal appeal from pulpits as this passage is passionately preached. But I ask you, and I ask you this humbly: What is the real point of this passage? What does God want us to see and learn from this text? What is Mark's reasoning for putting this story right here if he wants his audience to learn about sacrificial giving and stewardship? Is this passage really about sacrificial giving? Or is it really about ministerial taking? Is this poor widow to be seen as a hero to be followed or a victim of a very wicked religious system? These questions and many more must be answered honestly and rightly if we're going to interpret and apply this passage accurately to our lives.

Now, I said this passage is interesting because of what I'm giving to you now. And I want you to know, I have wrestled with this passage deeply. I mean, I can't get it out of my heart and my mind. I've been rolling in this passage for a while because it is perplexing on multiple levels, and I want to be transparent with you in every way, that I believe most people are missing the true meaning of the widow's mite. And I don't say that

judgmentally, I don't say that arrogantly, I say that humbly because I believe I've missed it, even in my own understanding early in my life. This has perplexed me in my study, not only as most commentators take this majority position of this passage being about sacrificial giving, but even a number of men who I highly respect, men who I regularly read in my own study of Scripture - dead men. And you know I like dead men most of the time better than living men. You know that now well, but men like J.C. Ryle, who I am so thankful for, William Hendriksen, who I am so thankful for, and even John Calvin, who I find so helpful so often, and yet all of these men, who I highly respect, all of them go in the direction of this passage being about giving.

So, you can see the consternation I've been facing in dealing with this passage. It's not easy. And I'll tell you what, it's far easier to preach this passage about sacrificial giving than to preach it about what I believe it really is talking. So, if we're going the easy route, I'd be talking to you all about how you're not given enough and you need to be like this widow. Because in some ways, that'll preach, won't it? That'll pull on heartstrings, right? That'll make for a good sermon, but I'm not up here to make for a good sermon. I'm up here to cut the Word of God straight. Right? And I'm not saying that, again, boastingly; I'm saying that phew, this is scary stuff! There are times in which you go to this passage and you think it's talking about something and it's talking about something totally different, and you must come circumspectly and humbly lest you fall prey to the false teacher that we heard about last week that resides in our own hearts.

So, I believe that this passage, and the primary point of it, is not at all about giving. Now, that is not to say, and again, I'm doing my best to come as humbly as I can before you this morning and that's why I'm belaboring this. What I'm saying is not that everyone who teaches this passage from what I would say, the incorrect direction, what they say is wrong. As a matter of fact, many of the giving principles that commentaries and pastors and teachers bring out of this passage, while not found in this passage, are found throughout Scripture. So, I'm not saying that many of the principles on leadership such as sacrificial giving is an unbiblical idea. Of course, it's not; we understand sacrificial giving and we understand the Bible talks about it. I'm not saying that the Bible does not teach that what matters most in monetary giving to God is not the size of the gift, but the heart. Of course, the Bible says that. Of course, it does; I'm not denying that. I'm not saying that

many of the stewardship principles from pastors and teachers who explained this passage from a stewardship giving perspective, that all that they say is wrong. That's not what I'm saying at all. I'm just saying that that is not what this passage is teaching when understood in its right context.

Is this whole episode really about giving or stewardship at all? That's what I'm asking. That's what I asked when I come to the text. And I'm not alone at all; I'm not standing up here saying, 'I'm the only one who gets it right.' Please do not hear that. Praise the Lord. That would be really scary. I don't know what I'd do if that happened. I'd be on the phone calling all of my friends. Thankfully, there are many who have gone before me - long before me - dead and alive who understand this passage much like I'm going to teach it to you. So, I am not alone, but this is a minority position for sure and I don't want you to go into this thinking anything otherwise, because it will likely be the first time that many of you will have heard this passage from this perspective. I believe an honest and fresh look at this text highlights that it is about a lot more than a lesson on finances and giving.

So, in this introduction, I want to give you, here you go, sermon number one for today. Because I'm trying to be as clear and helpful and objective as I can be. I'm not a magician, I'm not pulling this out of my hat. That's a false teacher. I'm pulling this out of the text - that's a faithful Exegete. I want to give you six objective reasons why I believe the point of this passage is not stewardship or giving. Okay? And really, this is the meat of the sermon that we will flesh out and we'll see as we walk through the passage, but I just want to start us off right from the very beginning and just get right to it, right to the heart, go right for the juggler here, give it all to you. Here you go:

Number one: Jesus never commends the widow as an example to follow. Again, you're going to hear me say this many times, a lot about this passage for us is assumed and presumed but not declared. Is there anything in this passage objectively clear, where Jesus commends this widow as an example to follow? Honest answer? There is not. Jesus just gives the facts in observing what is happening when the rich give, as compared to this poor widow. There is nothing in the text, really even alluded to, that we should follow her example. Jesus clearly gives an explanation, but not a commendation. Now, if you really want to see this starkly, compare this widow with the woman in Mark 14:3-9 who breaks

the alabaster jar over the feet of Jesus, which chronologically has already happened because that happened on Sunday, and we'll talk about that when we get to Mark 14. And when that woman does what she does, what does Jesus do? He commends her multiple times; He protects her, He proclaims her as an amazing woman about whom everyone will talk every time the Gospel is preached. It's a clear commendation, there's no question. Nobody walks away from that passage going, "What are we supposed to do with this lady?" But this passage, you won't find anything like that. And, by the way, you understand that most people, when they teach this passage, teach it that the widow is to be followed. That's an assumption made out of the text, not a declaration from the text.

Number two: The immediate, and even the broader context does not support the idea that the point of this passage is giving. As you have heard from me many times, and I repeat it again with joy, context is king when reading your Bible. Context always determines meaning. Looking at what came before this passage and what comes immediately after this passage, makes it very clear what is being taught *in* this passage. When dealing with context, you have to always ask, "What was Mark, the inspired original author, wanting to teach his audience, the God ordained original recipients?" If Mark, and ultimately the Holy Spirit, is wanting a lesson on stewardship from this episode, then this would have been a very unlikely place to put this story. Why? Because it simply does not fit the context at all. If you're taking this as stewardship and giving, it just kind of comes out of nowhere, and then it goes away. But the context on both ends of the story is identical, it's the same exact thing: Judgment, judgment, judgment. And in the middle of judgment, a story, and an episode to learn about stewardship and giving? It just doesn't fit. Something's wrong; something's not right.

Number three: The closest and only real referent to widows by Christ in Mark does not support seeing the point of this passage as giving. Jesus does not say a lot about widows in the Gospels, but what He does say is clear, and it is that caring for them as the Old Testament commanded is a priority. Jesus spoke directly about widows being abused by false teachers in verse 40, which is really the only time He's mentioned widows, it is just a few verses before. And what does He say about widows? That they are being devoured by false teacher. To understand that referent to widows, and now this example of a widow as being disconnected, as not being tethered together, within the same context really

defies normal grammatical rules of hermeneutics. For Mark, nor Christ gives us any explanation that this widow is anything other than one of those who has been and is being devoured by false teachers and the false religious system of that day that Jesus just condemned. Why not a poor man? Why not a poor woman? Why a poor widow, unless Jesus Himself is directly connecting this episode to what came before? Again, the only real times widows are mentioned in Mark is right here. Very important to not miss that.

Furthermore, it's worth noting that Matthew, in his parallel account of the condemnation of the false teachers, does not mention in the 39 verses in Matthew 23 that we talked about last week in the scathing, blistering damnation of these false teachers, he never mentions the reality of the false teachers devouring widows' houses. He doesn't bring it up. Nor does he mention the episode here of the widow's mite. I find that very interesting. Neither one of those are mentioned, I think in part because they're going together in both Mark and Luke because both Mark and Luke mentioned it in the condemnation and they give, what I believe to be, the illustration of what Jesus has just said.

Number four: The Bible is very clear that widows are to be cared for, never exploited. And we will look more at this as we work through the passage, but this woman should have been deeply and sacrificially cared for by the religious leaders as the Bible demands. She was to be a humble recipient of what was graciously given, not an active giver. Using a widow as an example of sacrificial giving does not fit what the Old Testament demanded of the people of God in regard to caring for widows. However, using a widow in giving all that she had is a clear example of how far from God's Word the religious system of Judaism in that day had gotten. Crystal clear example of the wickedness and the vile nature of this so-called religious system, that it would prey upon that which God had already commanded would be protected.

Number five: The Bible never commands anyone as a normal practice in monetary giving to offer all they have to live on. The Bible never commands that. This would clearly contradict all the other Scriptures about money and stewardship and how we are to handle our finances in a God-honoring way. If I give all that I have to live on, then what am I to do about my responsibilities before God to care for my family, of which God gives us money to fulfill that responsibility? If I give all that I have to live on, then how am I to

save money for the future of which we are commanded by God to do? The book of Proverbs is replete with commands of wisdom in storing away saving, and all of that. I will mention this, no doubt a couple times throughout this sermon, but 1 Corinthians 16:1-2, 2 Corinthians 8-9 are very clear that each one should give as he has decided in his heart before God. Furthermore, we are to give according to what God has given, not according, and 2 Corinthians 8-9 says it so clearly, to what we don't have. As a matter of fact, the text even goes on and says in 2 Corinthians 8 that even if we have a desire to give, but we don't have the ability in the moment, the desire is acceptable to God. What does that mean? We're never to go in debt to give to God. And is that not what this widow is really doing? Is she not further throwing herself back into the debt of others to care for her in her giving to God? Does it not contradict so much of what the Bible says about giving if we take her and this story as an example for how we should give?

Yet, what we see here - isn't it interesting - is not foreign to us, because we've learned about this already in Mark 7. These guys were financial hucksters, they were charlatans, they were evildoers, and they were stealing from those who needed it most. And we understand from their tradition of Corban - do you remember that sermon in Mark chapter 7? - where they develop this system called Corban, this tradition where a person could – listen, don't miss it. Go back and listen to the sermon; go back and read it. He could disobey the Fifth Commandment of honoring his father and mother if he cried out, “Corban” and gave his money, his inheritance, to the temple. The religious leaders said, “That's okay, that's all right. Don't worry about your parents, just give the money to the temple. It's devoted to God.”

Does God allow us, when it's in our responsibility and ability to fulfill the commands He's given, does He allow us to disobey one command to fulfill another? Is that ever right? Dishonor father and mother, not care for widows? First Timothy chapter 5 says that if a man has a widow in his own family and he doesn't care for her – scathing – he is worse than an infidel. So, to say, “Well, I'm going to give this money to the Lord, and the Lord will take care of my mom, or my dad, or my family.” Is that ever acceptable? No. No, we can't disobey one command to obey another command. Now, sometimes it's not in our ability. Sometimes a family member might not want it, sometimes we can't fulfill it. That's different. But to knowingly disobey one command in order to show deeper devotion to

God, that's what Corban was, and Jesus scathingly rebukes them. Remember? They replaced the Word of God with the traditions of men.

Lastly, number six, and this is big: The promises of Scripture regarding God's judgment on those who oppress widows does not support seeing this passage as a positive example of giving. More will be said about this at the end, but God repeated throughout the Old Testament, what would happen if Israel's leaders, don't miss it, if they abused widows, if they took care of themselves while not taking care of the widows, the orphans, the needy, the poor. God was crystal clear what he would do - Exodus 22:21-24, Isaiah 1:17, Isaiah 10:1-4, Jeremiah 22:1-5 (of which I had Brian read this morning for this reason), Ezekiel 22 (especially verse 7), Malachi 3:5, and the list goes on. God is very clear that if His people are marked by injustice, if they oppress the poor, if they overlook the needy, and if they abuse widows, judgment is coming. And isn't it interesting, even in Jeremiah 22, not just any judgment, but a specific judgment will come; He will make the temple a desolation. Is that not the context of this passage? Where do we turn next week? To the prophecy of making the temple a desolation. Do you see the flow, you see how that fits? That's just not parachuting into some awkward study on stewardship giving, of which many principles are true, but it just doesn't fit the context. What I'm giving to you just flows right along with what Mark has written. And I believe, most clearly as I've lined out for you already, it flows into the purpose of what Mark has written.

The evil leaders and the evil religious system of that day was centered in and around the temple, wasn't it? The temple was the seat of the authority, the temple was the place where they hid as thieves. And that temple, you know, by God's own doing is no more. And one of the reasons, and they're multiple, is because they oppressed widows. I believe that the primary point of this passage is not about stewardship or giving, but it serves as a vivid and dramatic illustration of religious exploitation. This passage demonstrates how far the religious system on Jesus' day was from what God demanded and why it must be judged. The divine judgment was already promised by Christ in the cursing of the fig tree. Just listen to the context; it all speaks towards this. We've seen this; Christ promised that He's going to judge this system and the temple itself and He declares that, He illustrates that, if you will, in the cursing of the fig tree. Remember that? Then he demonstrated the

judgment that was coming in what? The cleansing of the temple. And that reality of that coming judgment will be declared in great detail starting in chapter 13.

The term “exploitation” means to take advantage of, mistreat, or treat one unfairly so as to selfishly benefit from them and/or their resources. That's what these men were doing. That's what the system of the day did. The story of this widow is clearly part of Mark's flow in showing the religious hypocrisy that had infected Israel and her leaders in preparation for the divine judgment of God that is looming, of which chapter 13 is all about. That is what the context of all of this, not only points to, but if we're going to be honest, demands.

Therefore, with that clear introduction and explanation this morning, I want us to get a better understanding, now, of two aspects of the religious exploitation that Jesus condemned: two aspects. Here are two words to help you track with me through this familiar episode. Number one: Place. Number two: Picture. We're going to see the *place* of exploitation (verses 41-42) and then the *picture* of exploitation (verses 43-44).

The first aspect of religious exploitation we see in our text is the place of exploitation, (i.e., the temple). Look at the beginning of verse 41 and it reads: *And he sat down opposite the treasury*-. Stop right there. Here we can see that Jesus is still in the temple complex where He has been all day, teaching the people while verbally being attacked by the religious leaders. This long day all started back in Mark chapter 11, verse 20. It is, I remind you, still Tuesday, terrible Tuesday on multiple levels. And Jesus is still in the temple as our text here points out. Now let's get a better understanding of what's happening here in this place of exploitation as we consider where Jesus is exactly. Notice the text says that Jesus is sitting down which, I'm confident, He was tired. He had been teaching all day, but He is sitting down opposite, text says, the Treasury. What is that? Where is that? This tells us that Jesus is now in the part of the temple complex known as the Court of the Women, for that is where the Treasury was located. The Court of the Women was just inside what was known as and called the Beautiful Gate. And the Beautiful Gate was really the entrance from what was called the Court of the Gentiles - that massive, huge courtyard that kind of surrounded the temple complex proper. And then you went through the Beautiful Gate, and when you went through that, you entered another

courtyard, and that was known as and called the Court of the Women. So, you have this massive outer temple complex known as the Court of the Gentiles, and now you have the beginning of this inner temple complex court, known as the Court of the Women.

It was there that both - don't miss it, it wasn't just women, it was both men and women - would congregate. And it was there that they would give their offerings. It's called the Court of the Women because that was as far as the women were allowed to go. The women weren't allowed to go any further. They stopped there, then Jewish circumcised men could go further, further into the inner court where the sacrifices and the altar was. And then obviously, when you were there, then you could see the entrance to the holy place. And then inside the holy place, was the Holy of Holies. And again, this isn't lined out in the Scriptures by way of the layout of the temple in these specific ways; a lot of this we have to get from the Mishnah and the Jewish historian, Josephus, who detailed with great details this temple complex. In this treasury Josephus talks about that Jesus is now sitting opposite of, there were, don't miss it, 13 offering boxes. Okay? Thirteen, as described in the Mishnah, chests, big boxes. But these boxes were shaped in the form of a trumpet, or even probably better yet, the form of a shofar, like a ram's horn, to where they were tapered big at the bottom. And they went all the way up to a very narrow neck and opening at the top.

Many people, I think in conjecture, think that the narrowness at the top was, in large part, to protect people from putting their hands down inside. So, the hole was quite small to where you couldn't put your hand inside, and reach, and pull stuff out. But you had to meticulously put your money and your offerings in, about which the Mishnah talks. Therefore, it went broader at the bottom, which would be almost like a holding area for all the money, all the coins, all the offerings that were given. There's even reason to believe that these may have been protruding from a wall and then went back into a what was known as the storehouse. And Nehemiah even talks about the storehouse and the Temple of Zerubbabel. And you understand this, we'll talk more about the temple next week, but this is technically the third temple; you have the Temple of Solomon, the Temple of Zerubbabel, and this is the temple of Herod, of which Herod rebuilds Zerubbabel's temple and makes it a lot larger, and that's what we're talking about and that with which we are dealing.

Now, the Mishnah describes these 13 offering chests as being clearly marked for specific offerings. One for temple tax that was due. One for, here you go (maybe akin to the IRS), not only for the temple tax that was due, but also for the temple tax that was *past* due. They made sure that you didn't miss out on that. So, you had a box for due taxes, unpaid taxes, you had another one that's interestingly marked 'the bird offering.' And again, these weren't for people trying to stuff birds down in these little holes, this would have been for a monetary figure that was placed upon the bird, and, therefore, the person could just go in and pay as if he was offering up the bird and then that bird would be "offered up" on behalf of that person. And so, there's an offering that might have been paid for this or gone towards the cost of the birds. And so, it could have been a freewill offering where someone says, "I want to give towards the bird offerings, I've offered a bird offering, it's been a blessing. It's blessed me and I'm poor. And so, I want to give some money towards this to help others." That could have been another reason why. But then, you had another box that was for a whole young bird offering, which is interesting. You had another box that was titled "for wood" - the wood that would be used to be burned on the altar. Another box for frankincense that, no doubt, was used in the altar of incense. And then you had one for the gold on the mercy seat, which is interesting, because I'm not really sure you're doing much work on the mercy seats and only the high priest is allowed in there once a year. Not really sure what that one was for, but that's the way it was labeled. And then there were six remaining boxes that were all labeled "freewill offerings" and that's kind of what Jesus is looking at as He's watching people come.

Now, the Mishnah, I remind you, is referred to by the Jews as the second law. And that's where a lot of this detail comes from. It was, in many ways, that with which they replaced the first law, the Word of God. Though it started before Christ; it didn't get completed in 200 AD. And there are some writings in the Mishnah, and I was sifting through all of this this week, that talk about the gift being announced as the person came in and gave. So, they were supposed to announce their gift as they placed it in and there were priests, and their whole job was to oversee the offerings - guard them, protect them, help people, whatever. And so, you were supposed to announce your gift to the priests, explaining both how much the gift was worth, and where the gift was going (i.e., its designation). And so, you can begin to see just, again, the system is man-centered and manipulative on

every level. However, in the text, we don't have any clarification from Mark that Jesus heard that the woman gave only two pennies. It says that He observed. So very likely, He's able to see what she's giving because she's got to give it meticulously in the small hole, and He's able to pinpoint what she gave. That's the location and the action that's happening right now in the treasury.

Let's consider the description of verse 41. It continues, and the text says: *Many rich people put in large sums and a poor widow came and put it to small copper coins, which make a penny.* Mark describes that there were many rich people putting in a lot of money. No doubt, you could tell who the rich were, you could tell it by the amount of money they're putting in, by the clothes they're wearing, and maybe by the announcements that they're making, I don't know. But it was obvious, just as you can tell someone who's rich compared to someone who's a beggar. You could tell that almost instantaneously as you're walking downtown D.C., can't you? "Rich" being a general classification. And so it was here; it was obvious who these were. But notice the description of this lady. The text describes her not only as a widow, but also poor. Now the term "poor" here is interesting in the Greek because it literally means "destitute to the point of begging." So, it's just highlighting that she's not just poor to where she has a little bit but not enough. She has nothing. And that's the description that's given. She is a beggar; she is a destitute beggar who was dependent on others and that's what the word describing her means.

Also, notice Mark translates for us what she gives, and he translates it in a very specific way. He gives us the worth, he gives us the value that these two small coins are worth a penny. That means, for us, a lot, but in the original, it's doesn't say "penny." In the original Greek, he actually uses a Roman equivalent, he uses a Roman term for coinage. And it was the smallest Roman coin they had, which would have been similar to our penny today, it was basically worth very little. As a matter of fact, these two copper coins came together to equal 1/64 of a day's wages. You do the math and figure that out. That's like nothing. Okay? But, it's interesting that he translates it to the Roman equivalent, which is, again, one of the reasons why we know Mark is writing to a Roman audience. Because the two copper coins are in Hebrew and he translates the value to Roman because the Romans wouldn't have understood Hebrew coinage. And that's what he's doing and that

happens throughout the book of Mark, and I've pointed that out to you many times to show you, again, why Mark is writing to a Roman audience and how we know that.

Now, before we move on, I need to remind you further, what is going on here. I need to remind you that this place has already been defined by Christ as a place of exploitation. What has happened less than 24 hours before he sits opposite the Treasury? What did Jesus do? It's Tuesday. What happened on Monday? He rolls into the temple, makes a whip of cords, drives everyone out, clearing everyone out. And He was in the Court of the Gentiles. He quotes from Jeremiah 7, and he declares emphatically that this place has become what? A den of what? A den of thieves; a home of exploitation. That is exactly what Jesus has labeled this whole place and the entire system that is being promoted out of it. That's what it was. It was a religious system of exploitation, of false teaching, of abuse. And if you think that in Jesus' divine power, of which he has ultimate, somehow Him cleansing the outer Court of the Gentile now has purified the whole temple, let's remember that this isn't the first time Jesus cleansed the temple. John 2:16-17 says that at the beginning of His ministry, He did the same thing, said the same thing, because that was the characteristic of the religion of the day. It was done. It was finished. They had gotten so far from God, and that's what is being depicted here in a very dramatic way.

The place was a place of religious exploitation, where the system was being used by its leaders to take advantage of people so as to financially pad their own pockets. That is what is meant by the term "den of thieves" or robbers. The temple had become a cave for carpetbaggers; a cave for religious carpetbaggers, where they would hide out and sell their wares as they abused unsuspecting people, all the while promoting themselves as holy. When Jesus says the temple, under the false teachers' leadership, has become a den of bandits and robbers, He's quoting again from Jeremiah 7:11. And the context is clear, don't miss it. God says that severe judgment is coming upon Israel, for they have turned God's temple into a place of injustice and hypocrisy. Just listen to what Jeremiah says in Jeremiah 7:3-15. This is the context of what Jesus now has already defined and described the temple to be. Listen to Jeremiah 7:

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place (i.e., the temple). Do not trust in these deceptive words: - this is what

they would say, you can even hear it in Jesus' day – *'This temple is of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.'* Is that not what they would promote? Is that not what they would say? Even keeping people out saying, "This temple is of the Lord, you're unworthy to come in." This is what Jeremiah is saying. *"For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly execute justice one with another, 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, then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever. Behold, you trust in the deceptive words to no avail. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name and say, 'We are delivered!' -- only to go on doing all these abominations? 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. Go now to my place that was in Shiloh, where I made my name dwell at first, and see what I did to it because of the evil of my people Israel. And now, because you have done all these things, declares the Lord, and when I spoke to you persistently you did not listen, and when I called you, you did not answer, therefore I will do to the house that is called by my name, and in which you trust, and to the place that I gave to you and to your father's as I did to Shiloh. Listen. And I will cast you out of my sight, as I cast out all your kinsmen, all the offspring of Ephraim.*

As he did to Israel, He's going to do to Judah, and that is what is being declared and even prophesied when Jesus points to that, and points to them, and is calling them to mend their ways. But they wouldn't. That is what Jesus has in mind as He sits here and watches what is going on at the Treasury. If you think Jesus is happy and he's high fiving his disciples here, you have missed the context. You have missed the context of the week, you have missed the context of the day, you have missed the context of the defiled temple. Interestingly, Matthew's account of this moment does not have anything, I said this earlier, and I repeat for emphasis, it does not have anything about the episode of the widow's mite. But it does have, don't miss it, it does have something that Mark and Luke don't have in this moment. It has Jesus deeply lamenting after He gives the blistering damnation of Israel's false teachers. In Matthew 23:37-39 at the end of the "Whoa, to the Scribes and Pharisees," Jesus laments over Jerusalem in sincere compassion for them and the judgment that He has coming upon them. Jesus refers to the temple. Notice it in Matthew 23; He refers to the temple at the end, not as God's house, but who? As *their* house. Their house, that will now be left desolate. That's the context. He is departing from

the temple and all the glory of that place is going with Him. The temple is devoid of anything honoring to the Lord for it is become a place of utter exploitation. And that is why God will bring utter devastation upon this place and the false religion it represents. That's the place of exploitation.

Now let's look at the picture. The text goes on and it says in verse 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."* Now, Jesus makes a clear comparison between the destitute widow and the many rich people who were giving. She gave more, without question, than they did. For, as verse 44 goes on to explain: *"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."* She, by way of clear comparison, has objectively given more by way of percentage as she gives 100% without question. She did not give more by way of quantity, and this is where many turn and speak about giving, that it is not about the size of the gift that matters, but the mode of the heart. And the Bible talks about that very clearly, very clearly. Better to obey God from the heart then even offer up sacrifices (Psalm 51; 1 Samuel 15). Many passages talk about the heart is what matters most, but not denying the gifts that we give. But again, is that what Jesus is teaching here? Let's be honest with the text. Let's look at the text objectively. Let's be clear, let's be honest, let's be right.

Jesus does not tell us anything - don't miss it, please. Jesus does not tell us anything about the motive of the widow. There's nothing in here. We're reading into the text. He does not tell us anything about the motive of the rich people, does he? Do we have anything in the text that tells us the rich people were being prideful when they give their gifts, and she was being humble? There's nothing in the text that declares that. That is an assumption made by many, but not a declaration made by Christ. She could have been, and they could have been, we don't know. We're not given that information because we don't need it. Because that's not the point of the passage. Listen, if you're going to teach this on giving, you got a lot of extra things you got to add into the text. You would have a lot of exegetical hoops to jump through to make this widow an example. You got to jump through a lot, versus just following the flow. It flows and make sense. That's why it's perplexing because we're not really told a lot, are we? If we're honest with the text, it's a

story that leaves a lot to be desired by way of what were they giving? Why was she a widow? Why did she only have two mites? Why were the rich giving lots? Maybe they were good? Maybe they were bad? Maybe she was good? Maybe she was bad? I don't know. Again, because if that's not the point of the passage, we don't need that information. Does Jesus at all denounce the gift of the rich? Does he denounce it? Does he say, "Those poor rich people. Man, they gave everything." He's just comparing the two gifts. That's all He's doing. He's not saying one is necessarily better than the other. The widow gave all she had, but is He saying that her gift is more acceptable than the gift of the rich? Is that declared in the text clearly? Again, it can be assumed. It can be an extension that you might want to get there. But, that's not what Jesus is saying if we're honest with the text.

Again, I believe Jesus is simply making observations more than giving commendations. The rich contributed out of their abundance. Listen, how do the rich always contribute? Out of their abundance? Is there any other way for the rich to contribute? That's how *she* contributed - out of her abundance. However, hers was an abundance of poverty. She gave it all. So, if you're going to look at it and say, "But, they contributed out of there abundance, but that's a negative statement." No, it's not. Not at all. You gave, I pray, today, this week, or sometime this month, and you gave out of your abundance. Amen. Praise the Lord. Hallelujah. That's what 2 Corinthians 8-9 declares. *How* we should give, based upon the grace of God that has been given to us as we have prospered. So, we give.

So again, be careful of jumping to the conclusions that are not clear in the text. The rich cannot give out of poverty, for they are not in poverty. Again, so this is not a criticism of the rich here. Look at the text, here again, in verse 44 where it says she gave out of poverty, which means being destitute and having nothing, she gave anyway. This can be commendable, obviously. And as we see, this is why the Macedonian believers were commended in 2 Corinthians 8:2. The same phraseology is used there where it says that they were poor and yet they gave generously to Paul as he was collecting for the church in Jerusalem who was under financial struggle because of the famine. And he was going around to all the churches collecting money for the church in Jerusalem and the Macedonian believers gave generously despite their deep poverty and He praises them. We don't know how much they gave, because it's not about the size.

Poor people can give out of their poverty, and if we follow the Old Testament, of which the context is still an Old Testament law in this time, poor people were still expected to give of their tithes. They had a lower portion, obviously, and they had lesser size gifts. That's where the bird offering comes from, for a poor person to give a pigeon or a dove, of which Mary and Joseph gave. And so, we can see that there was still an expectation for those in poverty to give, but the expectation, obviously, was fair. Second Corinthians goes on and even uses that language of fairness, equality, and giving and how the one shouldn't be burdened by the other and vice versa and how they should help one another. That's how we give in the New Testament.

Where in the Bible does it ever command that a poor person or any person must financially give to God as an act of regular offering and worship to Him everything on which they have to live? Is there anything in the Scriptures? You say, "Well, what about the rich young ruler?" I'm glad you asked. Because that's the only passage that I can even come close to as I searched this out. And in the rich young ruler, if you want to use that as a substantiation for saying that's what we're supposed to give, is that really a context of financial giving as offering to the Lord? Or is that a context of the Gospel call, an invitation that we abandon ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Christ? Where we give, we turn our back on everything, everyone, everywhere to follow Christ. And I ask you, is there any mention of this widow following Christ? At all? Does she even know Christ? Again, I don't know. I can't make an assessment on that; I'm just going with what the text says. There are so many questions if we go down that road and make her an example. And for the rich young ruler, we know in context, what his issue was. He loved his money. And so, Christ calls him out. And what does he do? He goes away sorrowful. It's a gospel invitation text, not a text to be used as a pretext for how we should give.

Again, if you haven't figured it out yet, this passage, Dear Loved Ones, this passage is one of the most favorite passages of false teachers. This passage is paramount in the prosperity gospel, where they will preach this forward and backward. And listen to me, I know some of you, because you've told me, some of you have been saved out of that praise the Lord. Others of you don't get it like they get it. But they've lived this lie. They've been strapped to these kinds of teachers right here in our own community, where they

have preached this. And they have manipulated people, even within our own community. Even a neighbor of one of our own members gave everything they had and lost it all to a false teacher. Do you think that what we're looking at here has no bearing on us? Are you kidding me? It's as rampant and as active today as it ever was, especially where we live. We live in a mecca of false teaching and prosperity gospel. It's why, I've told you this before, the documentary *American Gospel: Christ Alone* that's all about the prosperity gospel, was filmed right here in our city, in part. Right here in Bowie because it's a mecca for false teaching: liars about God's Word who prey on people to get money. And this passage is paramount for that, it's used all the time.

Is that really what Jesus is saying? The Bible has a lot to say about money, it actually talks more about money than it does just about anything. And I am thankful for that. But I do not believe this passage is one of them. If you make this passage about money and giving, you got a lot of unanswered questions with which to deal, as we've already seen.

Now, let's again think about what does the Bible say about widows? All right, what does the Bible say about widows? The Old Testament demanded and commanded that widows be what? Sacrificially cared for. And the God-ordained welfare system of the day was designed to care for the poor and the oppressed, and the widows. He had a whole system. It really is a welfare system, where there was a tithe given specifically every three years just for widows where they could be cared for, where they could be watched over. And there was a financial chest or bank, if you will, out of which the priest could draw money and give it to the widows to care for them. See Deuteronomy 14:28-29 where Israel was to tithe specifically every third year just for widows' sake. Deuteronomy 24:17-22 gives specific directions for how Israel ought not only tithe every three years, but harvest their grain, their fields, their crops in such a way that widows would benefit. They were told to not take the edges, or pick up what was dropped, or go back into the field. They were to leave it for the poor, the destitute and the widows. Do you remember Boaz? The righteous man who did what? One of the reasons he was displayed for us as being such a godly man was because he cared for those two widows, Naomi and Ruth, sacrificially patiently, lovingly just as God commanded.

Not only were there commands about caring for widows, but what about the clear curses? And there are numerous curses that would come down if widows were abused. How compassionate our Heavenly Father is to care for the oppressed, the orphan, and the widow. See Exodus 22:21-22, Deuteronomy 10:18-19, Deuteronomy 26:12, Deuteronomy 27:19. There are many passages throughout the Old and New Testament that point to the priority of caring for widows. Psalm 68:15, Psalm 146:9, Proverbs 15:25. In the New Testament, Acts 6. Do you see the priority right when the church begins? They're still caring for widows. The elders understand the priority of the preaching of the Word and say, "We're not going to stop the study of the Word and prayer to care for widows, but we're not going to neglect them either. Choose from among you seven men full of the Holy Spirit so that these widows can be cared for." Very clear. First Timothy 5: Scathing. There's a whole chapter, literally, in the epistles, 1 Timothy 5, that's literally given to the care of widows. How do you identify a widow? Who is a true widow? Who gets put on the widows' list? The widows' list being the marking of the true widow (i.e., they're not younger, they can't work, and can't get married and all of that). And Paul lines that out, no doubt, because the system was being abused in Ephesus. So, he lines out a whole chapter, really, on caring for widows. And he says so clearly that the church should not be burdened in the caring for widows when that widow still has family members because it's their responsibility to care for her first. And then, if she's the true widow who has no family, then the church has the responsibility before God to care for her and to care for her well and sacrificially. And that's where Paul says that if you don't care for the widows in your family, you are worse than an infidel. Serious, serious calls for this.

Now, Jesus just condemned the false teachers and the whole system of Israel for selfishly exploiting widows in verse 40. Now we watch as that happens in verse 44. What should the priests have done when they see this destitute, begging woman come up with her two copper coins? According to the Old Testament, what should have happened? "Excuse me, ma'am. Keep your coins. And here's a bag of coins for you." I mean, let's be honest. I'm not making that up. From the Old Testament. "Ma'am, can we meet? Can we talk about how we can help you? Have you been down to Boaz's field? Have you seen there's crops there on the edge? Have you gotten some of those? Have you come and taken from our widows' offering that gets replenished every three years?" We don't see any of that. None at all. She's allowed to put it in. She should have never been allowed to put it in.

She should have been stopped by the priests who were caring for her. That's the way it should have been. That's the way the system was designed. That's what God's people should have been doing.

Listen, if you come here and you are destitute and you have no money to live on and you put money in that offering box, tell me because I'll give it back to you with some more. That's the way it should be. Church, that's the way we're supposed to be, not like this. And as we've already seen, what did God say would happen if people abused widows? Exodus 22:21-24, Isaiah 1:17, Isaiah 10:1-4, Jeremiah 22:1-5, Ezekiel 22:7, Malachi 3:5. It's clear. All speak clearly that God will bring judgment on His people if they abuse people and are marked by injustice, especially to widows and orphans. What does James chapter one say? This is the pure religion, the caring for widows and orphans (James 1:27). This is serious to the Lord. Very serious. Listen to Jeremiah 22:1-5 once more for clarity. Listen to it. Listen to the Word of the Lord and the applicable, clear context that we are in.

Thus says the Lord: "Go down to the house to the king of Judah (Jerusalem) and speak there this word, and say, 'Hear the word of the Lord, O king of Judah, who sits on the throne of David, you, and your servants, and your people who enter these gates. Thus says the Lord: Do justice and righteousness and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the resident alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place (i.e., the temple). For if you will indeed obey this word, then there shall enter the gates of this house (i.e., the temple) kings who sit on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they and their servants and their people. But if you will not obey these words, I swear by myself - that's pretty clear - declares the Lord, that this house shall become a desolation.

That's what awaits us in chapter 13. Do you see the context? You see the clarity? So, how do we walk away from this sermon? What are the applications? What can we walk away from? Well, I think if we're honest, at least for me, it was a helpful reminder to constantly pursue faithful hermeneutics. Read your Bible contextually. Do not read your Bible flippantly and whimsically. Do not handle your Bible as if you've heard all of this. And don't we all fall into that prey? That's one of the reasons why I love studying the Hebrew and the Greek. Not because it's some magical box of which we learn all these nuances that we can't learn out of the English. There are some things, but that's not the point. You

know what I love about it? It slows me down. I'm not as good, not at all, at reading in Greek and Hebrew as I am English. I can do it, but it's hard. And so, it forces me to go slow so that I don't read whimsically. So I don't read flippantly. "I've heard this, I've heard this story. Yeah, I got this. I got that." How many times we sit and do that, don't we? "What's Pastor preaching? Oh, the widow's mite? Yeah, I'll shut down. Wonder what we're doing today? Where we going for lunch?" Right? That's listening, reading the Word flippantly. We need to be reminded of the importance of sound hermeneutics and we need to grow in that. And we need to grow in our understanding of it and our application of it. And I think this text is a reminder of that - a humble reminder, and yet a helpful reminder.

And as we learned last week - listen, we can't hear it enough - watch out for false teachers who exploit people, especially the weak and the poor, because that's who they're after most. Watch out for them because they're coming after you. Guard your heart against false teaching. Guard your heart from this idea that it's not really a big deal here. Oh, Dear Loved Ones, it's the biggest deal you and I will ever have to face: False teachers and false teaching. It comes up everywhere. Roman Catholicism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, prosperity gospel, word of faith movement, Buddhism, Hinduism. You're like, "Oh, yeah." Critical race theory, man-centered philosophies, therapeutic moralistic deism. That is actually what most young people believe today about God, a false teaching entitled therapeutic moralistic deism.

Listen, it comes up in so many forms and fashions you can't even label them all. We must be on the guard all the time, not only against false teaching, but against allowing false teachers in leadership in our midst and spreading their lies. Listen, some of you won't know anything about this and that's good, but there have been multiple times that false teachers have tried to come to this church and I have guarded you. There have been men, since I have come as your pastor, who have hounded me, *hounded* me on multiple directions to embrace false doctrine. And there's some of them I've run out. And I don't say that boastfully or arrogantly, I say that truthfully. That is reality. And you don't know about that, and you don't need to know. That's our job as Shepherds. There have even been men who have come in who have been womanizers. And we've caught them, and they're gone. Listen, Church, this is real. This is real. People coming in and trying to help our church embrace a reality that repentance is not part of the Gospel. That's a false

teaching. People have come in with adamant, adamant passion that we should teach only from the King James Version. Like, there's so many, so many of these things that have happened over the years that you know nothing about and you don't need to know, but you need to hear me when I say that's how prolific this is, even in our area. People decrying that we don't have women elders. Are you kidding me? No, we don't have it because the Bible doesn't sanction it. Not because women are less than men, but because that's not what the Bible sanctions. Period. You see how this comes up all the time. Guard against it.

And Dear Loved Ones, you can't go away from a text like this, and not be compassionately confronted with how important it is to care for widows. Right? We have to. We have to take it seriously. We have to love those who are widows and widowers in our midst, and we have numerous. And it is a joy and a privilege for us as a church to care for them, to love them, and to encourage them. And those of you who are widows and widowers, be encouraged. Look at the text and see how compassionate, how clear Christ is, how good God is in caring for his widows that He will not let those who oppress you go unpunished. "Vengeance is mine", God says. He will repay, He will care for you, He will watch over you. And He's given, not only His Holy Spirit to do that and His Word to fulfill it, but He's given His church to help. And what a privilege we have to be partners together in caring for the least of these among us. Because we've all been there in some form or fashion. Spiritually that's where we all started, but even financially, at times, we fall on hard times for various reasons. Let's be the kind of church that doesn't judge one another, but helps one another, shepherds one another, that we might be a model for what Christ has called the New Testament Church to be.

And then let's give. Let's give as 2 Corinthians 8:9 says with the utmost joy. God loves a cheerful giver who has already decided in his heart what he would give based upon the grace of God given to him. That's why tithing is a good place to start, but it's not the end. It's training wheels. Ten percent, that's good. It's really easy to compute that. It's a blessing. But that's not the summation of giving in the Bible. Not at all. As a matter of fact, if we really understand it correctly, that was the taxation system given to Israel. It was an almost 30% tithe that they had to give, *then* came their offerings. And so, in that sense, we don't practice tithing, we practice grace giving - we give out of the abundance of God's

grace poured out in our lives. Don't ever let anybody manipulate you in any other understanding of giving other than giving based upon what God has already given to you in Christ. Because there is no greater motivation to giving than the Gospel. I could come up here and pull as many strings as I could, and it will guilt you to nothing compared to when the grace of God grips your heart. One of the pastors who preached asked at Camp Wabanna, he said, "When do you guys take offering? Like, what's the deal with your giving?" It's like, "Oh, there's a box over there somewhere." That's what I told him. And giving is important, we're not minimizing it. But we're maximizing the Gospel, knowing that God will motivate the heart to give. And on September 11 you're going to hear, again, how the Lord has been motivating you to give so generously to the Lord. Not out of manipulation or false guilt, but out of the true motivation, which is Christ. And what a blessing that is.

I told you it was an interesting passage. So, I think a good way to end this sermon is with an announcement and a video that actually, believe it or not, is going to give you an opportunity to give. Here you go. And it's an amount that I would daresay most of us, if not all of us, could easily give out of the abundance, but be a blessing to those who have not a whole lot. Brian Fish is going to come up and he's going to play a video from one of our missionaries, Paul Schlelein, in Africa. Great brother in the Lord, great ministry. He has started a really neat camp for young boys in training them how to be godly men. And we have the opportunity to sponsor some boys to go to this camp. How exciting would that be? Boys that come, many of them from impoverished homes in Africa, who – listen, don't miss it - who have been riddled by the prosperity gospel. Paul's church is almost next door to a prosperity gospel church. It has infected the whole village, the whole area, and that's why he's there. We have an opportunity to have a special way of giving. We already give to their ministry, but this is a special way that the elders heard about and said, "You know what? This might be a great way for our church to be encouraged as another opportunity for us to give and be a blessing." Because giving is a joy when done from a joyful heart, based upon what God has done for us. Amen?