

Oppressed by the Corrupt
Mark 12:38-44

Well, this morning as we finish up Mark chapter 12, I got to be honest with you and begin by issuing some type of warning. I think, as we get into this passage, the warning is directed at the fact that we have a part of our passage this morning with a little bit of familiarity in the content. In fact, because of its brevity, because it's so short in its content, it makes it so easy and pithy and able to be taught to others. And I remember being taught it when I was growing up in Sunday school in the church and hearing it being spoken of by others. And so, it is a familiar passage. Yet, this morning, it might be possible that our approach to it and as we work through it, you might hear a different conclusion and interpretation than what you've been accustomed to. So, I feel like that's only fair to try and give you some type of warning there and do my best to let you know and give you a heads-up, but also to grant me a little grace and try and see where we're coming from as we work through the text together this morning.

So, let's remind ourselves of this passage by looking at Mark 12, and we'll read right now, verses 38-44: "And in his teaching he said, 'Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.' 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 a 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." You'll recognize there, the end of our passage there, the second half of our text, with the familiarity there, with the widow and her offering, the meager offering that she brings, but we will not get to that immediately.

We'll begin in verse 38 and see how this flows into, then, that familiar passage of the widow. So, let's begin with verses 38-40 here where we see corruption condemned as Jesus speaks again about the religious leadership.

And just continue to remind ourselves of where we are in this portion of Christ's life in the gospel of Mark, a time where He's interacting over and over again with this group of religious leaders before Him. They make up different sects and different categories as they lead and attempt to have their influence of the Jewish people. In verse 38 though, we get to see the particularity of who we're talking about, the corrupt people, and in verse 38, we identify as the scribes, the scribes are who we're dealing with. We've seen lots of different groups come through as Jesus has interacted with these different groups of religious leaders and branches as they've come. But today, we focus in on the scribes as verse 38 states, "And in his teaching he said, 'Beware of the scribes...'" ... "Beware of the scribes..."

To remind you more, this is still Tuesday. We are in Passion Week, that final week of Christ's life. That final week of Christ's life, this week that will eventually lead up to and culminate in His crucifixion, His death on the cross on Friday as we know as Good Friday. And so, this is that week, and this is Tuesday, a busy day, an active day with so much taking place. Obviously, it all began on Sunday when the people paraded Him in, the Galilean Jews coming down in their pilgrimage, down to Jerusalem for Passover, this major festival, this major holiday, one of the major three that the Jews would celebrate by coming down to Jerusalem and coming to the temple. So, they came in, and they were declaring Him to be the Messiah as they welcomed Him into the city. And it didn't stop there of course because Jesus kind of took inventory and looked around to see what was happening. And He came back in the next day, on Monday, and He went to the temple and attacked. He attacked the temple, pronounced judgment on the system and the religious, basically, hypocrisy that was taking place, and He pronounced that judgment in attacking and cleansing the temple on Monday.

Well, by this point, we obviously recognize that the religious leaders were now awake and realizing what was happening. So, then the next day when Jesus enters in on Tuesday, we begin the series of controversies. We begin with them. The chief priests and the scribes and the experts in the Law and the elders, this kind of group of the Sanhedrin, the ruling Jewish authorities coming and challenging Jesus. What kind of authority do you have Jesus to come in here and act like this and let the people treat you as Messiah? Jesus obviously responded and put them to shame because of their own lack of leadership that they had and that's when Jesus went on the attack and used it as an opportunity to tell the parable and the story and identify Himself as

that neglected cornerstone. They themselves, the religious leaders, being the builders of the building and yet neglecting the most important part of the building, Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone. Jesus went on the attack in this, and as we remembered, they actually left Him at this moment. They temporarily withdrew and realized, okay, this man knows what he's doing.

And at that point, they started to come after Him with more calculated attacks. And we started with the Pharisees and the Herodians coming, this unlikely team, coming and challenging Him on taxes and what to do with Caesar and Rome. Jesus obviously responded well by saying you honor God by paying taxes. That's what you do. You submit to the government, and thus, you submit to God. Then the Sadducees had their calculated attack by trying to promote their ideology and their thinking that there is no resurrection, and Jesus responded by putting them to shame in their lack of knowledge of the Torah, that they prided themselves on, by stating very clearly as God stated to Moses, there is in fact a resurrection because of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob who are alive in God's own eyes. And then, a scribe came, challenged Jesus, and gave Him the monumental task of summarizing the Old Testament. How do you even do that? What do you say it is, Jesus? And He did it perfectly by depicting what it is to love God and love neighbor as self. And even though the scribe agreed, we saw that he still fell short even in entering the kingdom as Jesus said, "You are not far from the kingdom of God," but not in the kingdom.

The knowledge was one thing, but living in accordance to what God has demanded and recognizing His Messiah as Lord overall, all that was what was lacking. And that's what we covered last time. Jesus coming and Him now having possession of the floor, the time and the ability to teach. Him now having everyone's attention, clearly stirring up the pot sufficiently enough because of these controversies with these Jewish leaders, drawing crowds being amazed at Jesus' teaching as they "...heard Him gladly" in His teaching. And so now, Jesus chooses to teach on something that the scribes had neglected. There was a major hole in their theology regarding the Messiah. They taught about the Messiah. They expected the Messiah, but they only saw Him as a man, the son of David. And Jesus had to correct that, that if you only leave it at that, then your life will not be changed because you do not bow down to Him as Lord. And Jesus taught that with authority from Scripture itself, from David's own words, that the Messiah would be Lord over all.

Jesus, last time, confronted the scribes and their teaching. Jesus, today, confronts the scribes and their living, their conduct. He confronted their teaching, and now, He's confronting their conduct as we see Him going after them in these verses that start off our passage this morning. He clearly secured the interest of everybody there, and He utilized this time to go after them. Just using the word, "Beware..." gets the people's attention. "Beware..." Heads up. These people that you think are protecting you are actually a great threat to you. You need to be on guard, be on the lookout for these men right here, these scribes. These ones that you think are your leaders are far from it. They are actually causing damage, and they are a threat to you. In fact, you can even see this, not just with Jesus beginning with that and pronouncing this condemnation, if you were to go to Matthew's parallel account in Matthew 23, you'll see this massive text, this massive chapter of Jesus laying into these Pharisees and scribes. He is saying woe after woe. He pronounces these seven woes upon the religious leaders in front of all the people, and to make it even more significant, these are really Jesus' last words recorded publicly. This is the last public teaching of Jesus, the last thing that He gets to say, with a massive captive audience. And what does He hone in on? The threat - the threat that they needed to hear, that these leaders are really not your leaders because they're not helping you, and they're not protecting you. They're doing you damage and harm. And so, Jesus uses this last moment that He has to talk and to hone in on this very necessary task of calling out and condemning these leaders that are posing as leaders of God's people.

Well, as we get into it, as we look in verses 38-40, we see the practices that He reveals of these corrupt leaders. They are in fact corrupt, and Jesus explains why in our verses right in front of us; "And in his teaching he said, 'Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers.'" He really keys in on three different reasons here, three things, three aspects of these scribes and why they are so corrupt. And the first thing He highlights, He highlights their corrupt desires. Look at their desires. He just goes on to describe it perfectly. They "...like to walk around in long robes..." This is what they desire. This is what they like to do. These long robes were not your everyday kind of garment or clothing for people in the city of Jerusalem. In fact these were actually... this idea of this word

He's using here of "...long robes..." is more in reference to what the priests would wear. And so, in imitating and trying to be like them, they'd wear these long robes to try and get people's attention, to get people to wake up and see them. One commentator writes, "These 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 to walk about in these robes probably to draw attention to themselves and to be associated with prestigious temple establishment. It's not an everyday garment but a festive or celebratory robe and suggests the idea of dressing up." This is them. They love their position of authority. They love the fact that they are leading the people. And they want to demonstrate it. They want people to notice it, and so they have to dress up and wear these long robes that people understand, like the equivalent of someone wearing a neon shirt so we all recognize and see him. Everyone is drawn to them. They like the attention. This is what they desire. They desire the attention of man.

They had clearly changed their outer appearance in terms of their dress in order to draw attention to themselves, but it wasn't good enough. It wasn't enough just to be noticed by men and to be seen by men. They wanted to be publicly acknowledged by men. And that's what Jesus says next, not only do they like to walk about dressed like this to get the looks from men, but they "...like greetings in the marketplaces..." they "...like greetings in the marketplaces..." They like the acknowledgement. They like the feeling of people recognizing them and stating that as such. They wanted this public acknowledgment. In fact, from the Mishna which is their oral tradition that we can even still look into today, we find the custom was that of 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. So, there they were, the religious leaders, with more knowledge than the people, expecting to be acknowledged that way. All those that were lower than them, as they walked through the market places, would rise up and greet them and acknowledge them.

Matthew's account in Matthew 23 elaborates on this just for a little bit. In Matthew 23:6-13, "...and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others. But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called instructors, for you have one

instructor, the Christ. The greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.” They wanted the public acknowledgment and these titles that they got as people would rise up and greet them and call them appropriately rabbi. They loved it. They loved the way it felt. And Jesus has to not only condemn this, but say, instead you have to be humble. Don’t call anyone rabbi. It’s one of the things I love about our church. And once I started to interact more with the leadership of our church and recognizing how they conducted themselves and what they desired from others, it was not call me pastor, call me reverend, make sure that that is there. Alright? There weren’t name tags to let me know that, every day I saw them. Even in the office, when strangers would come by from time to time to interact with us as a church or we get phone calls from people, and as a very typical way of going about things and people trying to be respectful, they would often address Dale or Gerry as pastor Dale or Reverend Gerry. And I saw this over and over, but I loved the response that I continually saw, and that is, please just call me Dale. It’s okay. Spare it. Just Gerry’s fine. Gerry works. And I love that because it’s coming to this. It’s coming to Jesus’ own words. This was getting to their head clearly. They loved it. They were dressing accordingly, getting the attention, and then getting acknowledged, and they start believing their own press. They start believing that they are truly rabbi, and they know it all, and everyone must bow down to them. It’s pathetic. It’s terrible. It needs to be condemned because the reality is, as spiritual leaders, we’re nobody. We’re nobodies. We’re your servants. That’s what Jesus has made it a point to say over and over again and modeled in His own life.

What else do these men desire? They “...have the best seats in the synagogues...” They assume the seats that were closest to the front, closest to the speaker in the synagogue, closest to whoever was elevated on the platform and seated and then explaining the Torah that morning. And they too would be seated in the front, except facing everyone else. They’d be up there in front with their seats closest to the teacher, closest to the holy Torah scroll as they understood it, and they would face everyone else as if to say look at the divide between us. Look at the distinction here. Here we are, the rabbis, the scribes, the leaders, and there you all are, the rest of you that could only wish to be like us. They assume these seats. They love these seats like the long robes that they wore. This was really a desire for the scribes to be seen and also treated with honor among men. It’s what they wanted. They wanted to be seen this way. They wanted to be noticed this way. And then

the description; they love "... the places of honor at feasts..." They exalted themselves and expected others to treat them in that way. When they went somewhere for a meal, went into a person's house, or to some banquet of any sort, they expected the highest places of honor. They didn't ask. They didn't wait. They demanded it. Jesus noticed this in Luke 14:7; "Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honor..." This is what they naturally did. "...they chose the places of honor..." Of course, Jesus' teaching concludes in verse 11 of Luke 14; "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled..." Go ahead. Conduct yourself in this way now. This is all the exaltation you're going to get because you will be brought low. You will be humbled. "...and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Really, the desires of the scribes boil down to just being noticed and recognized, noticed and acknowledged. This is what they wanted. They wanted to be noticed through what they wore, in their long robes and where they sat, having the best seat in the house in synagogue, and they wanted to be recognized and acknowledged through the greetings that they would receive from people in the market places and through the seats that they would get when they went to meals. They were all just telltale signs of how corrupt they really were. Their hearts were corrupt, and it showed itself in such obvious ways that Jesus reveals. He doesn't just condemn them though for those desires, He further condemns them for devouring "...widow's houses..." As it goes on to say very clearly, these are the ones "...who devour widows' houses..." And speaking of the scribes conduct and affect upon certain people, it's interesting to note that Jesus hones in on their direct impact on one group of people. He could've talked about their impact, several different groups or all the different negative and pejorative things that they were doing, but instead, He hones in on one specific group of people that they were harming in what they were doing. Their corruption had harmed widows. They had devoured "...widows' houses..."

Widows have always been the object of God's compassion. God's always cared for the widow. I remind you of Psalm 68:5; "Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation." Or Psalm 146:9; "The Lord watches over the sojourners; he upholds the widow and the fatherless, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin." This is God's heart, and it's clearly even delineated and shown in the Law that He gave to His people. The very Law of Israel was requiring them to look out for widows,

to care for them. This was God's heart, and God has gone so far to always condemn the maltreatment of widows. He did this through the prophets like Isaiah 1:17; "...learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause." Or Ezekiel 22:7; "Father and mother are treated with contempt in you; the sojourner suffers extortion in your midst; the fatherless and the widow are wronged in you." And Zachariah 7:9-10; "Thus says the Lord of hosts, render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another, do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart." God has always had a heart for the widow, and God has always condemned any kind of neglect or maltreatment of the widow.

So, coming back to Jesus' condemnation of these scribes, they "...devour widows' houses..." What does that mean? How does that look? How are they devouring widows' houses exactly? And really, the short answer is we're just not sure. We're not certain exactly what this was looking like. There's a few different ideas that we can get, and a lot of commentators throw out several, around six. This one commentator says (and I'll just read a few of the options to you), there's one idea that "The scribes accepted payment for legal assistance though such payment was forbidden" Another idea is "Acting in the capacity of lawyers perhaps appointed to such office in the wills of the deceased husbands the scribes cheated widows out of their estates." Another view "Scribes freeloaded on the hospitality of widows." Or perhaps, "Scribes mismanaged the estates that entrusted to them." Or maybe, "Scribes took money from believing women in return for the supposed benefit of intercessory prayer." Whatever it was (it could be any of those things or some combination of them), they were entrusted with some responsibility. As scribes were the lawyers, they knew the law. They knew what God had said about treatment of people and property, that included widows and their property and what to do for them and how to treat them. So, people trusted these scribes. They trusted the lawyers to be able to handle this accurately and to do well with it, especially here even in the time of Jesus.

The clear fact is Jesus calls them out. He exposes them because they are not doing what ought to be done. Instead, they're devouring "...widow's houses..." They're doing something in mismanagement. They're taking advantage of a situation to give gain to themselves, and even worse, that situation involves someone that is helpless and an outcast, the widow. It's

terrible. It's absolutely ridiculous. And Jesus has to condemn it. God still cares for widow's 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..." This is God's heart, and if the leaders of God's people don't get this, then how far astray have they gone? It's a terrible despicable situation.

Jesus does not just condemn them for their desires and for the fact that they're devouring "...widow's houses..." Thirdly, we see Jesus condemns the scribes for their public displays of prayer as He goes on to say, "...and for a pretense make long prayers" ... "...for a pretense make long prayers." The NASB says, "...for appearance sake..." ... "...for appearance sake..." so that people can see. Or the NIV says "...as a show..." To put on a show, they make these long prayers. It's so obvious. And what world do you come from that you need people to hear you talk to God? But this is them. It's the habit. It's the norm. They actually need to make sure that someone's looking before they talk to God, someone's listening within earshot before they shout and talk to God about how holy they are. It's ridiculous. Further teaching on this from Jesus in 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. 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."

Jesus doesn't just let these words about the scribes end with a description here of them and condemning them for that, He presses on to communicate the inevitable destruction of these scribes. And that's what we find at the end of verse 40, the corrupt will be punished. They are punished, that statement at the end of the verse; "They will receive the greater condemnation." Picture the weight of that statement when Jesus is delivering this. The heroes of the people, the assumed leaders, the ones that everyone trusted, and now being condemned in a greater fashion, in a greater manner. It's one thing for people of God to be hypocrites, but it's another thing for the leaders of God's people to lead them in that hypocrisy. And that's what Jesus has such a hard time with, and that's why Jesus has to address this and has to speak in the manner in which He is speaking. This is not a soft rebuke. He turns this to a level that they need to hear and understand. He brings this to a point where they have to confront this. They have to deal with His words. He

bluntly asserts that “They will receive the greater condemnation,” these leaders, for their hypocrisy.

It's parallel to what Jesus teaches in other parables like in Luke 12:41-48 when He talks about the three different servants who all fail to do the will of God, and yet all of them received different punishments. The servant who knows God's will yet actively rebels against it receives the worst punishment. The servant who knows God's will yet fails to carry it out and just doesn't do it, he receives a severe beating yet not as bad as the first. And the servant who did not know God's will and failed to carry it out receives only a light beating. So, in the same way, those who are in charge of God's people that have been entrusted with this position of leadership and knowledge of His Word and yet have missed the boat by this much, “They will receive the greater condemnation.” Spiritual leadership is still massive in God's eyes as James 3:1 tells us; “Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.” Is spiritual leadership important to God? Absolutely! Look at Jesus' words here. Look at the teaching of the New Testament. This is not to be taken lightly. This is serious.

In the case of the scribes of Jesus' day, their corruption had in fact led to the oppression of certain individuals. Their corruption was so bad, it was so obvious, and Jesus has to call it out, and He makes it known with all these examples of what they desire and how they “...devour widows' houses...” and the displays of prayer. And their destruction is coming, but it's even more massive to see that their corruption has gone beyond them and affected others to a massive degree. It has been a means of oppression. And that's what we see in verses 41-44, oppression observed - oppression observed. You know, it really is a shame that in a passage like this or in Bibles that we have in modern day, we have paragraph breaks, or you might even have a title that comes in between verse 40 and 40 that kind of separates it for you. And so, you automatically think new passage, new thought completely unrelated, and that's just not the case here. This is a passage where Jesus has been in the midst of a harsh condemnation of the scribes, and then He gives that illustration. He gives the illustration of how corrupt they've been and the impact of that in the oppression that follows.

So, in verse 41, we see this illustration for us, the instance - the instance of this oppression, the very incident that takes place in verse 41; “And he sat

down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box.” We’ve changed the scene just a little bit. Jesus is no longer openly publicly teaching, but He’s in the same location. So, He’s finished saying His words. He’s finished His pronouncement of judgment upon these scribes, and now, He’s just there watching things take place in the temple complex. He’s there on the temple mount observing things that are happening. And more specifically, we see He’s watching the giving, the contributions. He’s sitting and observing the monetary offerings of the people to the temple system. One commentator states, “According to the Mishna, there were thirteen different trumpet-shaped receptacles into which people could cast money. Some of these receptacles were designated for specific purposes, others were used for freewill offerings.” So, these receptacles were there, around, probably even made of metal of some sort, so you heard the clinking and the tinging of coins as people tossed their offerings in, and you heard and saw as people were around the temple area giving their offerings there. And regardless of the receptacle, regardless of which place they put their offering, the fact was all the money went right back into supporting that temple system, that same temple system Jesus wasn’t too happy with not too long ago, that same temple system that Jesus attacked and called it “...a den of robbers.” But this is where the giving was going. This is where these contributions were going.

And in this observation time, Jesus is drawn to a particular individual. And this is where we come to familiar territory for us in the life of Christ, this poor widow. And that’s what we find in verses 41-42, the individual of oppression. This individual, this poor widow who was the one being oppressed. The end of verse 41, “Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny.” It’s noted how many rich put in large amounts of money in this scene of these contributions and offerings that are being made, but in verse 42, we’re introduced to a poor widow, and this is the one that Jesus fixates on. Alright? This catches His attention. This astonishes Him as He sees this taking place. This poor widow comes and brings this meager offering, this meager offering of these “...two small copper coins...” More specifically, these were leptons. One commentator states, “These two copper coins were leptons the smallest and least valuable coins in circulation in Palestine, worth one half of a quadrans or one twenty-eighth of a denarius or about six minutes of an average daily wage.” Working for six minutes could get you that much money. This was next to nothing in value - next to nothing in

value, and that's why many of our modern translations as we have even here in the ESV compare it to a penny, a penny or less than a penny even at times. Many of our translations show it this way, just how little, how small this amount really was.

And it's at this moment when this poor widow shows up with this tiny offering that Jesus is drawn in, and this is where He rises up to identify oppression, to identify how the corrupt scribes have brought about such a terrible and tragic scene. This is 43-44 in our passage, the identification of oppression - the identification of oppression when this poor widow comes onto the scene and offers her tiny offering with maybe two little coins clinking and people noticing. Well, that was hardly anything. That's it? Jesus could not pass up such a moment as this. He could not let this go; "And he called his disciples to him..." He gathers them. He says to them you need to see this. You need to understand what I've just seen. Let us look at this widow. He actually begins by stating this important phrase; "Truly, I say to you..." as He has said occasionally throughout Mark's gospel. "Truly, I say to you..." Listen to Me. Mark My words. Behold what I'm making clear for you right now.

He uses this moment to compare the widow's offering to the contributions of others in the temple. And really, when we think about it, the point is simple. Jesus' point is very simple; proportionally speaking, this widow has given more than all the rich people gave in their offerings. It's simple. Of course, you could add up the dollars and cents, and you could say they gave more than she did, but Jesus just takes it from a different vantage point and says let's look at their bank accounts. Okay? Proportionately, who gave more? The widow wins. She gave more proportionately speaking to all that she had. That's the point, but there is still the outstanding question of why? Why draw attention to this? Why make this known? Why does Jesus call his disciples to Himself to point out this widow? Why? What's the point here?

And this is where I put forth something before you that you're maybe not as familiar with, but many people believe that Jesus engages in an opportunity to highlight the attitude and faith of this widow, of her tiny yet massive and sacrificial offering. And that's popular. That is no doubt a normal view of this passage, and there's absolutely nothing wrong with giving because we're commanded to give. However, we still need to ask, is that exactly what Jesus is doing here? Why is He calling attention to this scene, this

widow in this way? I would say it appears that when we take another look at the context and the content of this passage, we find Jesus to be lamenting this scene involving the poor widow. This is tragic. This is absolutely tragic. He's not emphasizing this widow's sacrificial giving, but identifying her sacrificial giving as an example of oppression. It's an example of oppression that came from these corrupt scribes. Jesus has to highlight the corruption of your leaders has brought this that we see on display on a pedestal right in front of us, this widow oppressed because of these corrupt scribes leading the people.

So, we have to ask the question, what about the context? What about the content? What about our passage here? What about these verses causes me to focus on the oppression of this widow rather than her sacrificial giving being highlighted? I've several reasons for you. First, in our immediate verses of just 41-44, Jesus has not made a clear commendation of the widow. He hasn't taken this opportunity to try and show that there's a moral to the story. He hasn't brought out the good thing that she has done. He has simply stated some facts; that's all. He's done. He's just given an observation. He's just thrown it out there, and He's compared her offering to the offerings of the rich, and He's saying, proportionately speaking, she gave away more. That's an observation, but He's not clearly stated any type of direct application for the disciples or for the church. He hasn't gone beyond that and said so also must you give sacrificially. He hasn't said, as He has at many other times in Mark's gospel, her faith has made her well. Her faith has saved her. It kind of abruptly stops in verse 44; "...all she had to live on." End of scene.

So, what's the point of the story? He doesn't give it. He doesn't give a moral to the story in terms of giving. That's not what He seems to be emphasizing. He's just stating an observation and the comparison, so our verses don't seem to make it clear that it is in fact commending the widow for her actions. Second, in our context of this morning's passage, verses 38-44, Jesus has already specifically identified the scribes' corruption in this manner. They are the ones "...who devour widows' houses..." ... "...devour widows' houses..." He only highlighted one way, one way in which these scribes and their corruption had affected other people. As we saw in the Old Testament, there's lots of different categories of the outcasts. There's the poor. There's the sojourner, the foreigner. There's the orphan, and then there's the widow. And yet, what does Jesus highlight? He doesn't talk

about all of them. He speaks of these scribes and their corruption and how it affects other people in verse 40. They are the ones "...who devour widows' houses..." He fixates on widows probably more than convenience, that He only spoke of the scribes' oppression of widows and then made this point regarding this very poor widow right in front of Him. It can't be just convenience that it happens to go from that to this scene. Third, in the greater context of Mark chapters 11-13, Jesus has been condemning the religious leaders and pronouncing judgment upon them and the temple system. This isn't a happy scene, and it hasn't been. You know, we've been going through this for some time.

He's been pronouncing judgment since He attacked the temple back in Mark 11. When you go back there, and you see Him show up, He's not happy. He's not happy with what's taking place there as He uses strong terminology and physically even demonstrates that. He's going to continue to pronounce judgment after this. It's been a constant wave after wave of Jesus confronting what is taking place there, and the beliefs of those people promoting that concept. And then, we go into chapter 13 next, and He is going to pronounce more judgment. "And as he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, 'Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!' And Jesus said to him, 'Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.' " This is a complete big-context here of judgment. Jesus keeps making this clear.

So, why would this be a time to kind of come up for air and talk about giving for His disciples? It seems odd. It doesn't fit the flow of just in general what's taking place. There was a time when Jesus was teaching and using examples and making this very clear, when He was doing His parables, and when He was in Galilee and traveling down in Pouria, but now, He's in Jerusalem, and His mission is one that is to confront what is taking place, that He might serve and obey His Father by going to the cross. That's what's before Him, so for Him to take a sidebar, a side note, and talk about giving is a little odd. It seems like it would not quite fit the greater picture of what's taking place, that there is a corrupt leadership that is oppressing these widows. 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's the fact that the widow has literally given everything she has. And when we look at

this, He has described it in three different ways. This is literally all that this widow has. So, if Jesus is teaching something about giving, He's teaching that when you give you need to give everything you've got because look at how He describes her giving, "...but she out of her poverty..." out of her nothingness, out of her lack. That's basically like saying she didn't have anything to give already, and yet here she is trying to give "...out of her poverty..." He goes on to say she "...has put in everything she had..." That sounds like that's everything she has. And then He concludes it with "... all she had to live on." So, this isn't, oh, but she had the emergency fund stashed away, or she had the retirement. She had the savings. She had other things. That's not what He's saying. This is, in three different ways, saying this is everything. This is all she's got - this is what she's given.

It's hard to think that a text that has already highlighted the way that scribes "...who devour widows' houses..." would shift to a lesson on sacrificial giving, on giving everything, everything you have, especially when we think about what Jesus has taught in the gospels about money. Jesus talks about being a good steward. Jesus talks about, actually, finances and investing, and saving and planning, and giving and paying taxes. We just saw that recently in this context of Him in Jerusalem, so it's a bit odd for us to consider He's endorsing a view of giving that is everything you have, clearing out your bank accounts and all your assets, when there are still other responsibilities for the believer according to not just Jesus's teaching but the whole of Scripture. Don't get me wrong. Sacrificial giving is a good thing, and it's commended by Paul in 11 Corinthians 8, but we're here asking the question about this passage. Is Jesus endorsing sacrificial giving? Is that what He's doing?

Fifth, and lastly, I would say this lament over the oppression of this widow due to the corruption of the religious establishment better parallels the Old Testament scenes of similar corruption. This is just a parallel to what was taking place in the time of Israel. It's the same thing that was happening in Jeremiah's day. You'll recall, if you go back to Mark 11:17, when He did enter and decided to attack the temple, "And he was teaching them and saying to them, 'Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers.'" This is what Jesus said, and He's quoting from Jeremiah there by calling it a "...den of robbers." And when we look at Jeremiah's day and what he was encountering, we find some very keen similarities. Jeremiah 7:11 says, "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.” God is not fooled. You can’t hide from Him. And so in Jeremiah’s day, He spoke through him to tell the people. You come to the temple. You think that that’s your security. You think that you’re pleasing Me in your worship here at the temple. Yet, you go out and do all your deeds and conduct. That is completely against what I would have.

So, the question is, what were their deeds? What was their conduct? What was their conduct that God abhorred and hated? What was it that God has such issue with in Jeremiah’s day? Jeremiah 7:4-6, the same chapter that Jesus quotes from; “Do not trust in these deceptive words: ‘This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.’ 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 [God would act] ...” This is the same exact scene, the people corrupt in the day of Jeremiah, the leadership nonexistent spiritually speaking and oppressing people like the widow. And God says I see what you’re doing. This is not pleasing to Me at all. And yet, you think the temple is some security to you. It’s pathetic. It’s wrong. And so, in similar fashion, Jesus is exposing the “...den of robbers.” in the current temple of His day. This is what’s taking place, and Jesus laments that He’s seeing it. He’s watching it in front of Him, a widow coming in, giving everything she has, and very probably leaving that place and thinking about what’s next, and there’s nothing on the horizon, thus potentially going to her death. This is devastating. It’s terrible that Jesus is witnessing it. Just as it was for Jeremiah in his day, so it is, too, here with Jesus as He laments this fact.

The religious system, though there was glory and honor being offered to God, they were clearly oppressing widows like the one that Jesus is highlighting in front of us. It’s disgusting. It’s sick. It’s terrible. Their eyes were somehow blind to this fact. They called themselves the leaders. They thought they were honoring God. They thought they were doing everything He wanted, yet here were people, right in front of them, oppressed. Even when the Scripture they memorized told them to not let that happen, this was taking place. And so, Jesus condemns them for their corruption. And He gives the perfect illustration of what that’s done; your corrupt leadership has

done this. This poor widow, this poor widow, she's a victim. She's a victim to terrible leadership. She's a victim to this terrible corruption. It's sad. It's tragic. It's a lament. Is leadership important in God's eyes? Absolutely! Again, this is why Jesus is reserving the strongest language for the leadership of His people and their failings and how far they have fallen short. They had not measured up to what God had designed and desired from His leaders.

And so, you can quickly think, well, it's too bad for them - good thing we're not like them - good thing that's not us. Right? This concept of leadership is all around us. All of us are in positions of influence. All of us have opportunities to actually exercise some form of leadership. If you're a husband leading your wife, if you're a parent leading your children in these fields that God has placed you, in these opportunities to lead, you have responsibility now, and you will give an account to God for how you handled those things. So, just because you're not in this scene, just because you think, well, I'm not that bad, don't let that somehow allow you an out, an escape from all this. This is a time to reflect, a time to consider, where are the corruptions in my heart that are potentially not pleasing God, offending Him and oppressing others in my life? How is it that I'm failing other people because I'm not first and foremost devoted unto God? He must be my Lord. He must be my Savior for only then can I actually be any type of leader that He would have me to be.

This is a massive lesson that Jesus gives in these last public words that He gives to the people and this particular illustration that He gives to His disciples. Do not let this be you as you go out from here and as you begin the church in the book of Acts, and as you go forth. Do not let this happen. Take care of the oppressed. Take care of the fatherless. Take care of the widow, the sojourner. Take care of these people. May that be true of us, that we would take leadership seriously as God does and as Jesus has demonstrated today.