

MARK

Chapter 12

The Parable of the Tenants

He then began to speak to them in parables: “A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the winepress and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. ² At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. ³ But they seized him, beat him and sent him away empty-handed. ⁴ Then he sent another servant to them; they struck this man on the head and treated him shamefully. ⁵ He sent still another, and that one they killed. He sent many others; some of them they beat, others they killed. ⁶ “He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ ⁷ “But the tenants said to one another, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’ ⁸ So they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard. ⁹ “What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others. ¹⁰ Haven’t you read this scripture: ”‘The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; ¹¹ the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes?’” ¹² Then they looked for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken the parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd; so they left him and went away.

12:1–12 Most of Jesus’ parables make one main point. This one is rather complex, and the details fit the social situation in Jewish Galilee in the first century. Large estates, owned by absentee landlords, were put in the hands of local peasants who cultivated the land as tenant farmers. The parable exposed the planned attempt on Jesus’ life, and God’s judgment on the planners. See notes on Mt 21:35–37, 41. (CSB)

12:1 *parables*. See note on 4:2. (CSB)

A man planted a vineyard. The description reflects the language of Isa 5:1–2 where the vineyard clearly symbolizes Israel. (CSB)

watchtower. See note on Mt 21:33. (CSB)

tenants. Farm renters who paid the lease with either cash or a share of the crop. (TLSB)

12:2 *season*. Harvesttime, when the rent was due. The time of the year varied by crop. (TLSB)

some of the fruit. Agreed-upon portion of the harvest for payment. (TLSB)

12:3 Their actions toward the servant demonstrated disrespect for the owner. (TLSB)

12:6 The patient owner endured rebellious behavior in the hope the tenants would come to their senses. (TLSB)

12:7 *the inheritance will be ours.* Jewish law provided that a piece of property unclaimed by an heir would be declared “ownerless,” and could be claimed by anyone. The tenants assumed that the son came as heir to claim his property, and that if he were slain, they could claim the land.(CSB)

According to Jewish law, the tenants stood a good chance of inheriting the land when the owner died, if there was no heir. (TLSB)

12:9 *others.* See note on Mt 21:41.(CSB)

12:10-11 God chose the Messiah to rule His people. (TLSB)

12:10 *capstone.* See note on Ps 118:22. (CSB)

12:12 *against them.* The representatives of the Sanhedrin mentioned in 11:27. (CSB)

Jesus was taking direct aim at the leaders, who feared He had come to entice the people away (cf Jn 11:47–50). By seeking to kill Him, they would not inherit the kingdom they were trying to take from God. (TLSB)

12:1–12 Jesus tells how God deals patiently with people. But eventually, God’s patience runs out, and every person must face judgment. God planned the death of His Son for the sins of all people. Unlike the story here, His beloved Son rose from the dead on the third day, taking up again the life He had laid down for us, to give us the Kingdom as a gift. • “I trust in Him with all my heart; Now all my sorrow ceases. His words abiding peace impart; His blood from guilt releases.” Amen. (LSB 568:3) (TLSB)

Paying Taxes to Caesar

¹³ Later they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words. ¹⁴ They came to him and said, “Teacher, we know you are a man of integrity. You aren’t swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not? ¹⁵ Should we pay or shouldn’t we?” But Jesus knew their hypocrisy. “**Why are you trying to trap me?**” he asked. “**Bring me a denarius and let me look at it.**” ¹⁶ They brought the coin, and he asked them, “**Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?**” “Caesar’s,” they replied. ¹⁷ Then Jesus said to them, “**Give to**

Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." And they were amazed at him.

12:13–17 This incident probably took place on Tuesday of Passion Week in one of the temple courts (see chart on "Passion Week"). (CSB)

12:13 *Pharisees*. See note on 2:16. (CSB)

Herodians. See note on 3:6. The plan to destroy Jesus, which had originated early in his Galilean ministry, had now matured and was gaining momentum in Jerusalem. (CSB)

12:14 *Teacher*. Formal but insincere address. (TLSB)

not swayed by appearances. He judges truly, based on God's Law. (TLSB)

pay taxes to Caesar. Jews in Judea were required to pay tribute money to the emperor. The tax was highly unpopular, and some Jews flatly refused to pay it, believing that payment was an admission of Roman right to rule. See note on Mt 22:15–17. (CSB)

12:15 *denarius*. See notes on 6:37; Mt 22:19. (CSB)

12:17 *Give to Caesar what is Caesar's*. See note on Mt 22:21. There are obligations to the state that do not infringe on our obligations to God (see Ro 13:1–7; 1Ti 2:1–6; Tit 3:1–2; 1Pe 2:13–17). (CSB)

12:13–17 Jesus challenges the hypocrites to examine their own hearts and repent. Human hearts naturally belong to their Maker, who stamped His image on them at creation (Gn 1:28). Though sin shattered that image in us, the Lord still wants us for His very own people and sent Jesus to make that possible (Rm 8:29; Eph 4:24; Col 3:10). • "We give Thee but Thine own, Whate'er the gift may be; All that we have is Thine alone, A trust, O Lord, from Thee." Amen. (LSB 781:1) (TLSB)

Marriage at the Resurrection

¹⁸ Then the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. ¹⁹ "Teacher," they said, "Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and have children for his brother. ²⁰ Now there were seven brothers. The first one married and died without leaving any children. ²¹ The second one married the widow, but he also died, leaving no child. It was the same with the third. ²² In fact, none of the seven left any children. Last of all, the woman died too. ²³ At the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?" ²⁴ Jesus replied, "Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God? ²⁵ When the dead rise,

they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. ²⁶ Now about the dead rising—have you not read in the book of Moses, in the account of the bush, how God said to him, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? ²⁷ He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!”

12:18 Sadducees. A Jewish party that represented the wealthy and sophisticated classes. They were located largely in Jerusalem and made the temple and its administration their primary interest. Though they were small in number, in Jesus’ time they exerted powerful political and religious influence. See notes on Mt 3:7; Lk 20:27; Ac 4:1. (CSB)

who say there is no resurrection. They denied the resurrection, accepted only the five books of Moses as authoritative and flatly rejected the oral tradition (see note on Mt 15:2). These beliefs set them against the Pharisees and common Jewish piety. (CSB)

12:19 See note on Mt 22:24. (CSB)

12:23 The Sadducees wrongly imagined that marriage would continue after death if there was a resurrection. (TLSB)

12:24 *you know neither the Scriptures.* The bond of marriage ends when a man dies, allowing his wife to remarry (cf the commands of Dt 25:5–10 with the prohibition of Lv 18:16; cf also Rm 7:1–3; 1Co 7:39). (TLSB)

nor the power of God? They denied the resurrection. (TLSB)

12:25 *are given.* A man married; a woman was given in marriage by her father. (TLSB)

like angels in heaven. Angels and resurrected believers would not marry. Procreation was designed for earthly existence. (TLSB)

12:26 *book of Moses.* The Pentateuch, the first five books of the OT. (CSB)

in the account of the bush. A common way of referring to Ex 3:1–6 (see Ro 11:2, where “about Elijah” refers to 1Ki 19:1–10). (CSB)

12:27 *God of.* This phraseology appears in passages about salvation or protection (cf Ex 3:15–16; 4:5). “God of the dead” would be a contradiction. God did not set time limits on His saving relationship with His people. The patriarchs, though dead physically, would dwell with Him (cf Mt 8:11). Luth: “When I behold a corpse carried out and buried, it is hard to go my way and believe and think that we will some day rise together. How so, or by what power? Not by myself or by virtue of any merit on earth, but by this one Christ. And that is indeed certain, far more certain than the fact that I will be buried and see someone else buried, which I know with certainty and behold with my eyes” (AE 28:117). (TLSB)

12:18–27 The Sadducees try to trap Jesus with a hypothetical question. Jesus turns their question upside down and shows them that they deny God’s power and reject His Word. Like the Sadducees, people today want to limit God to doing what makes sense to them, as if human limitations or reason could bind Him! Despite these things, God keeps His promises to us. He rescues His people even from death and raises all believers in Christ to eternal life. • “There shall we see in glory Our dear Redeemer’s face; The long-awaited story Of heav’nly joy takes place: The patriarchs shall meet us, The prophets’ holy band; Apostles, martyrs greet us In that celestial land.” Amen. (LSB 514:2) (TLSB)

The Greatest Commandment

28 One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?” **29** “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. **30** Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ **31** The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ **c** There is no commandment greater than these.” **32** “Well said, teacher,” the man replied. “You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. **33** To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.” **34** When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.

12:28 GIVEN THEM A GOOD ANSWER - The teacher of the law saw the interchange between Jesus and the Pharisees and Herodians (vv 13–17) and the Sadducees (vv 13–24) as they looked for a way to arrest Jesus (12:12) and catch him in his words (12:13). But this particular teacher considered Jesus to have spoken well, and wanted to see just how far above the other teachers Jesus was. The testing or further inquiry of rabbis was quite common. During these occasions, rabbis showed their true greatness by revealing the truths of God that were most basic but at the same time most profound. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

Unlike the other questioners (vv 13–27), this man asks sincerely, desiring Jesus’ interpretation. (TLSB)

which is the most important? Jewish rabbis counted 613 individual statutes in the law, and attempted to differentiate between “heavy” (or “great”) and “light” (or “little”) commands. (CSB)

A case in point is the famous example of Rabbi Hillel (b. Shabbath 31a; Walter W. Wessel, *Mark* in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, p. 737). Hillel was asked by a potential convert to Judaism to teach him all about the law while Hillel was

standing only on one foot. Hillel had to be brief and direct, and he was! He told him, “What you hate for yourself, do not do to your neighbor. This is the whole law—the rest is commentary.” Jesus was asked to teach with this kind of simplicity and depth. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

The teacher expected an excellent answer from the Master. He wanted Jesus to give him a foundational answer, the kind of direct and simple answer that would satisfy all present. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

12:29–31 A summary of the two tables of the Law. (TLSB)

12:29 The first quotation came to be known as the Shema, named after the first word of Dt 6:4 in Hebrew, which means “hear.” The Shema became the Jewish confession of faith, which was recited by pious Jews every morning and evening. To this day it begins every synagogue service. (CSB)

12:30 Jesus’ answer goes back to the basics of Old Testament theology. He answers with the Shema and its corollary, love for God (Deut 6:4–6). This important confession brings the people of God to confront what is important about their faith. Jesus’ words match the Hebrew text. This confession contains four important words: to *love* the Lord with all your *heart*, the seat of the mind and will in Hebrew thought; with all your *soul*, the vital principle of who we are as individuals; and with all your *mind*, our full reasoning powers, and with all your *strength*. God is to be loved on the basis of his prior love, and he is to be loved with every fiber of our being. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

12:31 To the Shema Jesus joined the commandment from Lev 19:18 to show that love for neighbor is a natural and logical outgrowth of love for God. (CSB)

Jesus then connects the Shema with Lev 19:18. The Pharisees and Sadducees had just pressed Jesus to promote the letter of the Torah over and against the spirit. The Pharisees and Sadducees used the Torah as a way of binding rather than as a first step in liberating a community of faith. Their legalism excluded others (the wretched, the foreigner) from the community of faith. Jesus preaches the Gospel from the Torah in an objective and specific manner by stressing God’s love and our response. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

Jesus’ insight here is powerful. He upholds Leviticus 19 as properly teaching sanctification based on God’s prior love. The commandment to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev 19:18, is more important than any form of sacrificial offering. Throughout the previous verses of Leviticus 19, we find a detailed catalog of how we are to treat our neighbor. Jesus promotes a love directed toward those we have difficulty in loving, those that according to our sinful nature we want to despise or ignore. We love our neighbor through Jesus Christ, who first loved us (1 John 4:19). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

neighbor. See Lk 10:25–37.(CSB)

12:32 The teacher of the law commended Jesus' answer on two points: (1) God is one and there is only one true God, Yahweh; and (2) love is more important than any rituals or sacrifices. He agrees with Jesus' teaching that the spirit of the Torah has precedence over the letter (as Jesus affirms also in Matt 12:1–14; Luke 13:10–17). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

12:33 *all burnt offerings and sacrifices.* The comparison was undoubtedly suggested by the fact that the discussion took place in the temple courtyard (see 11:27). (CSB)

Expressions of love for and faith in the one true God. Faith in God was far more important than external worship. (TLSB)

12:34 *not far.* The scribe understood God's OT revelation, though he did not yet confess Jesus as the Messiah. (TLSB)

kingdom of God. See note on Mt 3:2. (CSB)

Jesus noted the response of this teacher and said, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." The kingdom of God is the rule of God in the hearts of believers as both present reality and future promise. He was close to recognizing Jesus as the source of God's love, the love described in the Torah. He was close to being transformed by the Spirit of God that enables us to fulfill God's commandments (Ezek 36:26–27). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

no one dared to ask. Jesus had made the questioners look foolish. (TLSB)

12:28–34 Jesus challenges an expert in the Scriptures to consider the entire Law and to turn to the Lord in faith. Only Jesus has kept the entire Law perfectly. He did this for our salvation, due to His surpassing love for us. • "Thy love to me, O God, Not mine, O Lord, to Thee, Can rid me of this dark unrest And set my spirit free." Amen. (LSB 567:4) (TLSB)

Whose Son Is the Christ?

³⁵ While Jesus was teaching in the temple courts, he asked, "How is it that the teachers of the law say that the Christ^a is the son of David? ³⁶ David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared: "The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet." ³⁷ David himself calls him 'Lord.' How then can he be his son?" The large crowd listened to him with delight. ³⁸ As he taught, Jesus said, "Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted in the marketplaces, ³⁹ and have the most important seats in the

synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. ⁴⁰ They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely."

12:35 *temple courts.* See note on 11:27. (CSB)

Christ. See NIV text note on Mt 1:17. (CSB)

son of David. See note on 10:47. Most of the people knew that the Messiah was to be from the family of David. (CSB)

The Messiah was to be a descendant of King David (cf 2Sm 7:13–14; Rm 1:3). (TLSB)

12:36 *The Lord said to my Lord.* God said to David's Lord, i.e., David's superior—ultimately the Messiah (see note on Ps 110:1). The purpose of the quotation was to show that the Messiah was more than a descendant of David—he was David's Lord. (CSB)

12:37 A highly respected ancestor would never have called a descendant "my lord." When David called his descendant "lord," he showed that the Messiah is more than merely human. The failure of the scribes to realize this showed how much of the Scriptures remained hidden to them. (TLSB)

12:35–37 Jesus challenges His audience to think about the Messiah and realize that He is more than a man. He is God as well. Unbelief blinds people so they do not see Christ in the OT (cf 2Co 3:12–18). God became man, born of Mary, born under the Law, to redeem sinners such as we (cf Gal 4:4–5). • "O come, Thou Key of David, come, And open wide our heav'nly home; Make safe the way that leads on high, And close the path to misery." Amen. (LSB 357:5) (TLSB)

12:38-40 Jesus warns against using self-serving religion to elevate ourselves above others. Clergy especially need to listen to Jesus at this point. Jesus shows all religious leaders and scholars the model for their leadership: humility, service, for His sacrifice has atoned for us all. (TLSB)

Besides the direct parallel of Lk 20:45–47, Jesus' words here recall Mt 6:1–8 and 23:1–7. The latter is probably in fact the more complete reporting of this same short discourse in Mark on the scribes (and, in Matthew, the Pharisees). Especially interesting, though, is a comparison with the former (Mt 6:1–8), which introduces the Lord's Prayer. There the hypocrisies include giving to the poor to be seen by men; here in Mark, the indictment includes devouring the small means of the poor ("widows' houses"). Both connect closely to the following story of the widow's mite—the hypocritical giving of Matthew 6 and the mention of widows here in Mark 12—and both are condemned with "Beware!" Could it be that some of the conspicuous contributions of the rich (v 41) were ill-gotten gains

at the expense of poor widows just like this one? (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 4)

12:38-39 “And in his teaching.” Jesus is always the teacher, the rabbi. Previously he had taught a large number of people, who heard him gladly. Here he begins to teach again (“and”). Jesus’ teaching is a contrast to that of the scribes, the “official” Jewish teachers of the law. The first word he speaks is against them: “beware” (in Greek, *blepete*). This is a serious warning against the scribes, because they are not what people think they are. The long robes, the public greetings, the best seats in the synagogue and at feasts are but a deception. Beware, lest you think they are what they pretend to be. Be on guard! (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 4)

12:38 *flowing robes*. The teachers of the law wore long, white linen robes that were fringed and almost reached to the ground. (CSB)

Mark of distinction, perhaps associated with holiness. (TLSB)

Mark gives only a very short section of the last woe of Jesus upon the scribes and Pharisees, but a passage which exhibits very well the hollowness and the mockery of their hypocrisy. Jesus warns the people against the scribes and their hypocritical ways. They should look, they should watch out for them. And now He characterizes them properly, He shows up their sham and deceit. Their desire, their one supreme wish is to wear garments which called men's attention to them; they take a childish pleasure in bedecking themselves. Long robes they affected, like persons of great distinction, with exceptionally large tassels trailing along the ground. In these they loved to walk about, with no other object than to attract the attention of the multitude. (Kretzmann)

The scribe was distinguished by his linen robe, a long white mantle reaching to the feet and provided with a long fringe. White line clothes were regarded as a mark of distinction, so that men of eminence (priests, Levites, scribes), or those who wished to parade their position, wore white and left bright colors to the common people. By the majority of the people the scribes were considered to possess sovereign authority. When a scribe passed by on the street or in the bazaar people rose respectfully. Only tradesmen as their work were exempted from this display of deference. (Lane)

BE GREETED – Titles of honor and respect (e.g. Rabbi, Father, Teacher). (TLSB)

They also loved to be greeted in the market-place; they liked the salutation Master; it gratified their vanity and their self-importance. (Kretzmann)

The scribe was greeted with titles of deepest respect and there is evidence that in the first century A.D. the designation “Rabbi” was undergoing a transition from

its former status as a general title of honor to one reserved exclusively for ordained scribes. (Lane)

12:39 *most important seats in the synagogues.* A reference to the bench in front of the “ark” that contained the sacred scrolls. Those who sat there could be seen by all the worshipers in the synagogue. (CSB)

The place at the front of the synagogue or nearest the host at a banquet. (TLSB)

They also loved to be greeted in the market-place; they liked the salutation Master; it gratified their vanity and their self-importance. (Kretzmann)

In the synagogues the seat of honor was reserved for the scribe; he sat at the front with his back to the chest containing the Torah, in full view of the congregation. (Lane)

SEAT OF HONOR AT BANQUETS – When important men of Jerusalem gave a feast they considered it an ornament to the feast to have a distinguished scribe and his pupils there. The highest places were assigned to them, and scribe was given precedence in honor over the aged, and even over parents. (Lane)

When they were invited to dinner, they did not wait to be placed by the host, but chose the sofa of the honored guest, often usurping the place of guests more honorable than they. And to this vanity was added selfishness and greed. (Kretzmann)

12:40 *devour widows’ houses.* Since the teachers of the law were not paid a regular salary, they were dependent on the generosity of patrons for their livelihood. Such a system was open to abuses, and widows were especially vulnerable to exploitation. (CSB)

With no other source of income, scribes often lived off the generosity of benefactors. Abuses followed. (TLSB)

In the first century A.D. the scribes lived primarily on subsidies, since it was forbidden that they would be paid for exercising their profession. While few scribes were reduced to begging, an abundance of evidence shows that the Jerusalem scribes belonged to the poorer classes. The extension of hospitality to them was strongly encouraged as an act of piety; it was considered particularly meritorious to relieve a scribe of concern for his livelihood. Many well to-do persons placed their financial resources at the disposal of scribes, and it was inevitable that there should be abuses. The charge that the scribes “devoured widows’ houses” refers to the fact that they sponged on the hospitality of people of limited means. (Lane)

Jesus points out how the scribes pray at length and then devour widows' houses. They steal what is not theirs, and then as a pretense (insincere, make-believe), they make long prayers. It is helpful that the lectionary of *Lutheran Service Book* has added these initial verses (vv 38–40) to the former *Lutheran Worship* pericope, which began with v 41. One can see how this text is developing into a message contrasting deception and sincerity, with the scribes (vv 38–40) showing their deception, and the widow (beginning at v 41) showing her sincerity. We remember that widows at that time were without resources or help of any kind. Shocking, then, that the scribes took their homes by using deceit and treachery. Theirs is the greater condemnation, because of the multiple sins of theft, pride, and hypocrisy. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 4)

By promising prayers to widows, and then pompously delivering such intercessions for their welfare, they obtained money. For these prayers, purposely long and pompous, were only a blind to hide their real aim, namely, that of getting money, thus devouring the property, the houses, of the widows. This special form of avarice seems to be rampant in many parts of Christendom to this very hour, for the masses for the dead in the Roman Church certainly come under this heading, and the many prayers in the various cults are not one whit better. Christ's judgment upon them all is short and severe: They will receive the greater damnation. Their hypocrisy is open before the eyes of the Judge and will receive the punishment commensurate with its damnableness. (Kretzmann)

LENGTHY PRAYERS – Prayers offered to impress listeners, long in duration and short on faith. (TLSB)

BE PUNISHED MOST SEVERELY – With greater knowledge comes greater responsibility and accountability (cf Lk 12:47-48; James 3:1). Luther states, “In spiritual gifts we far surpass others; but because we acknowledge these as gifts of God, not our own, granted to us for building up the body of Christ (Eph 4:12), we do not become proud on their account. For we know that more is required of him of whom much is given than of him to whom little is given (Luke 12:48). In addition, we know that ‘God shows no partiality (Rom 2:11). Therefore a faithful sexton is no less pleasing to God with his gift than is a preacher of the Word, for he serves God in the same faith and spirit. And so we should not honor the lowest Christian any less than they honor us. In this way we remain free of the poison of vainglory and walk by the Spirit.” (AE 27:103) (TLSB)

12:38–40 Jesus warns against using self-serving religion to elevate ourselves above others. Clergy especially need to listen to Jesus at this point. Jesus shows all religious leaders and scholars the model for their leadership: humility, service, and sacrifice, for His sacrifice has atoned for us all. • Lord, grant us humble hearts and willing spirits to fulfill our callings faithfully. Amen. (TLSB)

The Widow's Offering

⁴¹ Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. ⁴² But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. ⁴³ Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, **“I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. ⁴⁴ They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.”**

12:41-44 Jesus uses the sacrifice of a widow to illustrate for His disciples the character of absolute dependence on God. Wealth and possession can pose a spiritual threat – wealth has a way of owning its possessor. Jesus’ love and sacrifice motivate us to offer our whole lives to Him as our daily offering of gratitude. He gave up everything, including His life, on the cross for us. (TLSB)

This little account, found only in Mark and Luke, is like a breath of fresh air in an environment which was hostile to Jesus. Look at Luke 21:1-4, a briefer version of the same incident. It happened on Tuesday of holy week. Fahling and Ylvisaker place John 12:20-50, which contains the account of the Greeks, after this incident. (Buls)

Ylvisaker: The poor (this widow) and the strangers (the Greeks) shall be His portion. The contemplation of this truth shall strengthen Him in His suffering which is now at hand. Jesus has spent the day thus far in the court of the Gentiles. Now He proceeds to the women’s court, one of the lesser courts within that of the Gentiles. Here were placed thirteen chests or boxes, the so-called temple treasure. These receptacles had apertures in the form of trumpets. In these chests gifts of charity were deposited for the temple and the temple worship. (Buls)

Fahling: After the great denunciation just related (Matthew 23:1-39; Mark 12:38-40) it is only too clear that the rupture of Jesus with the leaders of Israel was final. But before Jesus took His last leave of the Temple, and while He sat down for a moment to rest His sad heart, an incident occurred which made it possible for Him to leave His Father’s house with words of kindness and approval. (Buls)

Lenski: What a man! Directly after an address like the one just uttered he calmly sits down to note what a poor, lone widow does. He is never one-sided, never carried away by his emotions, always absolutely master of himself. (Buls)

Hendriksen: The same loving Savior, who has just now denounced the scribes for ‘devouring widows’ houses’(12:40), shows, by his own example, how widows should really be treated. One should help them, and, as here, praise them whenever such praise is in order. (Buls)

These were Jesus' last moments in the temple – He spent them reading the hearts of the worshipers. (PBC)

12:41 *the temple treasury*. Located in the court of the women. Both men and women were allowed in this court, but women could go no farther into the temple buildings. It contained 13 trumpet-shaped receptacles for contributions brought by worshipers. (CSB)

RSV, JB, NEB and NKJV place Jesus "opposite the treasure." "Crowd" is the public in general. "Money" denotes copper, brass or bronze money. It is implied that the general public did not give gifts of gold. The Jews did not use paper money. (Buls)

The second sentence of this verse is more limited than is the first. It speaks only of the wealthy. "Many wealthy people were depositing much money." Bengel remarks at this point that the state was prosperous. Evidently Jesus sat where He could watch everything for quite some time. (Buls)

In his commentary on Luke, L. T. Johnson states that the temple treasury served as a repository for gifts that would be distributed to the poor. "The devout used to put their gifts in secret," later to be distributed also "in secret" (L. T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, Sacra Pagina [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991], 315; cited in Arthur A. Just Jr., *Luke 9:51–24:53*, Concordia Commentary [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1997], 780, note 11), but in our text the giving by the rich was all quite conspicuous. What Jesus observed while watching this process is the subject of his teaching, as he speaks of the obvious contrast between the rich and the poor. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 4)

"offering box." Thirteen receptacles were located around the temple courtyard. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 4)

Jesus, being weary of His labors of teaching and arguing all day, sat down near these collection boxes, or repositories, the money of each of which was designated for special purposes,. and carefully watched the multitude as they cast money into the Temple treasury. (Kretzmann)

MANY RICH PEOPLE – Jesus did not say their gifts were not welcome or not needed. What He did want His disciples and us to note is that our gifts are acceptable only if they come from hearts filled with love and trust. (PBC)

The evangelist states that many rich people, perhaps some of the merchants that came to Jerusalem only for the great festivals, threw in much. A few pieces of gold more or less made very little difference to them. It gave them the satisfied feeling of having done their duty when they dropped their superfluous money into the box. (Kretzmann)

12:42 POOR WIDOW - The poor widow (*chēra*, which means deficient, i.e., of a husband) also joined the line of those giving gifts. Her gift was two small copper coins. While this seems to be an insignificant gift, the contrast between her and the rich who gave large sums of money could not be greater. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 4)

Again, like the previous verse, we have a complex sentence, beginning with an adverbial temporal clause and ending with an adjectival clause. The "copper coins" were the smallest coin they had. The two coins amounted to about one half cent. (Buls)

Hendriksen: Due to constantly varying monetary values it is impossible to indicate with any degree of accuracy what such coins would be worth today. . . . By human calculation what the widow gave was insignificant. (Buls)

very small copper coins. The smallest coins then in circulation in Palestine. Though her offering was meager, the widow brought "all she had" (v. 44; see note on 2Co 8:12). (CSB)

lepta duo, ho estin kodrantēs, "two small copper coins, which make a penny." The coins, *lepta*, totaled one sixty-fourth of a denarius. Thus a laborer would earn sixty-four of these in a day; the widow's offering could be earned in just ten to twelve minutes of very ordinary work. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 4)

But suddenly a woman attracted the interest of the Lord. A poor widow she was, that probably had to support herself as best she could. Two mites she had in her possession, and, though she might have kept at least one of them, she threw them both into the treasury. "Another coin, translated 'mite,' is in Greek *lepton*, 'the small one, 'Or the 'bit' It was two of these that the widow cast into the treasury, where it is said that two of them equaled a *quadrans*. The 'mite' was, then, of the value of 1/8 of a cent. It was doubtless the smallest coin in circulation, but it has not yet been identified with certainty with any coin that archeology has discovered. (Kretzmann)

We have no equivalent in our currency. The copper coin was called a lepton, meaning "small, thin, light." The two were worth one half a kodrantes. This in turn was worth one sixty-fourth of a denarius, the daily wage of a laborer in those days. (PBC)

For the benefit of his Roman readers Mark computes their value in terms of Roma coinage. The fact that the woman gave two coins was significant, for she could easily have kept one for herself. (Lane)

12:43 *I tell you the truth.* See note on 3:28. (CSB)

WIDOW HAS PUT IN MORE – Unlike the rich, who had more than enough left, over, she gave all she had. This was an act of worship, of love, of faith and of absolute trust. (PBC)

Evidently the disciples were not sitting with Jesus at the moment, for we are told that He called them to Himself. Furthermore, the text seems to indicate that the disciples did not actually see the woman make her contribution. And we are not told that Jesus told them how much she threw into the treasury. If He did not tell them, they must have gathered that it was a small amount. The words "I tell you the truth" are used only of Jesus. They indicate His divinity. (Buls)

"More" does not denote amount but quality. This one widow is singled out as the highest giver. (Buls)

Stoeckhardt: In His last days of public teaching in the temple there was much that offended the Lord, causing Him to rebuke the people and their leaders, but He also observed that which was good, even though it seemed insignificant. (Buls)

In verse 42 it was mentioned that she gave *two* mites. Why two?

Bengel: One of which the widow might have retained. (Buls)

The point is that she was utterly selfless. How did Jesus know that she was poor? Perhaps by her dress. How did He know that she was a widow? Because of His omniscience. The same can be applied in verse 44 where we are told that the contribution was her entire living. The wealthy threw in much. There is nothing wrong with that. The widow threw in two mites. There is nothing meritorious about that. The explanation follows in the last verse. (Buls)

Now Jesus begins to teach his disciples about the use of money, and perhaps offers a wider teaching on our possessions and how we use them. He begins this teaching with the two words "Truly, I say." The Greek words *amēn legōn* are frequently used by Jesus at the start of an important saying. Jesus' hearers must have been startled to hear that the widow's offering was greater than all the offerings given by all the people. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 4)

The rabbinic literature contains a similar account: a priest rejected the offering of a handful of meal from a poor woman. That night in a dream he was commanded: "Do not despise her. It is as if she had offered her life." This account, like the evangelical narrative, serves to stress the qualitative difference between God's perspective and man's: "man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks upon the heart" (1 Sam 16:7). (Lane)

There was a lesson for the disciples in this act of the poor widow, and therefore Jesus called them over quickly and pointed out the greatness of the sacrifice. In proportion, she had given more than all the rest that had cast money into the treasury. For, though many of them may have given money equal to thousands of dollars, it was all given from their surplus; these amounts they would never miss; theirs was no sacrifice in any sense. But how different the gift of the widow! She had, out of the depth of her want, in her destitute state, given all that she possessed, her whole means of living; she had sacrificed the last necessities of life to the Lord, and apparently out of a heart filled with free love for the God of Israel, since Jesus in no way censures her manner of giving. That is, in truth, cheerful giving, and such givers the Lord loveth. A special warning is in place here, since many people try to excuse their infinitesimal gifts for the Lord with a reference to the widow's mite. If cases like hers would actually happen in our days, the treasuries of the Church would be filled to the bursting point, so that the disposal of the money would become a real problem. Let the Christians of the present time learn to be only one tenth as liberal and sacrificing in their gifts to the Lord as this poor widow, and there would never be need of any more cries for help. (Kretzmann)

12:44 OUT OF THEIR WEALTH – This verse is the explanation. Note the contrasts. "Out of their wealth" means "from that which they didn't need anyway." "From her poverty" means "from her destitution." "To live on" means "living, livelihood, the means by which life is sustained." We quote several translation to bring out the meaning: (Buls)

- AAT: All the others took some of what they had left over and dropped it in, but she put in what she needed herself, all she had -- all she had to live on. (Buls)
- NEB: Those others who have given had more than enough, but she, with less than enough, has given all that she had to live on. (Buls)
- JB: They have all put in money they had over, but she from the little she had has put in everything she possessed, all she had to live on. (Buls)
- TEV: The others put in what they had to spare of their riches; but she, poor as she is, put in all she had -- she gave all she had to live on. (Buls)

Ylvisaker: The poor widow proves to the Lord that not all have been beguiled by the corrupt leaders who devoured the houses of widows, that not all were imbued with the same carnal mind -- there are yet a few who are willing in the fervor of their devotion to the holy place of God to sacrifice all. (Buls)

Lenski: Poverty may be made a great curse as well as a great blessing. It becomes a curse when it fills the heart with anxious care and worry, with murmuring and complaint, or leads to unbelief and dishonesty. It becomes a

blessing when it compels the poor man to cast himself upon God who has promised to care for his children.(Buls)

By analogy we might say that wealth may be a curse as well as a blessing. If the wealthy man becomes a miser who hoards and gives only that which he won't miss anyway, his wealth becomes a curse. But if the wealthy man gives his all back to the Lord, then it is a blessing. (Buls)

Stoeckhardt: The Lord was greatly pleased with this sacrifice of the widow because it showed that it was given out of the right motive in deep love and trust to God. These willing and cheerful givers are loved by God. (Buls)

Lenski: To give her last cent as she did means that by this act she placed herself completely into the keeping of God, who could and would provide for her far better and more surely than any two 'mites,' or a million times any number of 'mites.' (Buls)

The rich in this case gave from a lack of faith. She gave by faith. What did she eat that evening? The Lord took care of that. (Buls)

PUT IN EVERYTHING – *holon ton bion autēs*, literally, “all her life.” The widow now literally did not know where her next meal was coming from. It is significant to note that neither Mark nor Luke tells us how she made out; both narratives immediately move on with no further mention of the woman. If the accounts had given us an earthly “happy ending,” such as Jesus and the disciples providing for her henceforth, we might miss the point of the story. The woman did not give because she knew she would have a next meal; she gave in faith that God would take care of her even if she starved to death. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 4)

Jesus points out that the amount one has after his or her contribution has been made is an important teaching. The rich gave much, but had much left over. The widow gave a small amount, and is left with nothing. She gave, out of her poverty, “all she had to live on.” Like the widow at Zarephath in the Old Testament Reading, this New Testament widow trusted in the Lord and his Word. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 4)

The widow kept nothing for herself (cf 10:21; Rm 12:1–2). (TLSB)

12:41–44 Jesus uses the sacrifice of a widow to illustrate for His disciples the character of absolute dependence on God. Wealth and possession can pose a spiritual threat—wealth has a way of owning its possessor. Jesus’ love and sacrifice motivate us to offer our whole lives to Him as our daily offering of gratitude. He gave up everything, including His life, on the cross for us. • “Take my life and let it be Consecrated, Lord, to Thee; Take my moments and my days, Let them flow in ceaseless praise.” Amen. (LSB 783:1) (TLSB)