

Be Watchful and don't Miss the Picture

The gospel for this coming Sunday (Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost) is Mark 12:38-44. It includes two narratives: Be watch out for the teachers of the law; The Widow's Offering.

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.

In the Widow's Offering narrative we find a great contrast to that of his warning about the teachers of the law. 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.

The temple treasury was 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. Again, it showed the contrast between the powerful and the weak.

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 gives 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.

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.

Prayer: "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)