

Mark 12: 38-44 (NIV)

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 with respect 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. These men will be punished most severely."

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 few cents.

43 Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, 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."

1. This is Jesus' last public message
 - a. He's answered His critics
 - b. He asks them a question they cannot answer
 - c. Every response He gave and the question He asked was intended to lead them back to the love of God
 - d. It was a gracious thing to be accused and respond with grace
 - e. This is our Lord
 - i. Filled with Grace & Truth
 - f. This is the setting
 - g. Along with Grace, He will speak the Truth as a strong statement to the scribes and Pharisees
2. This passage is a contrast between those who take and those who give

I. Taking
II. Giving

I. Taking

1. He begins by focusing on the teachers of the law and gives a direct warning; Watch out for the teachers of the law
 - a. It's described in more detail in **Matthew 23:1-36**
 - b. Mark is giving us the short version (also in **Luke 20:45-47**)
2. It's a warning about those in position of authority in religious settings
3. Beware of the teachers of the law: (Pharisees, scribes)
 - a. The scribes were the "Bible Scholars" of Jesus' day.
 - b. They were entrusted with preserving, learning, and teaching the Word of God to the world.
 - c. These were the men that the people of God should have been able to trust... (**Guzik**)
4. **They started off with great intentions**
 - a. Pharisee means separated ones (set apart ones)
 - b. They were highly respected among the people
 - c. The Jews even had a saying that Moses received the Law and gave it to Joshua. Joshua received the Law and gave it to the elders. The elders received the Law and gave it to the prophets. The prophets received the Law and gave it to the scribes. So they were the possessors of the Law, the gatekeepers of all that was supposed to be true about the Word of God. They were the experts in the Law. They were the lawyers of Israel. (**McArthur**)
 - d. Somewhere down the line they lost touch with the heart of the message & Author
 - e. When we lose sight of the heart of the message and are disconnected from the author, we continue in our own strength
 - f. That's dangerous

- a. It's impossible to live the Christian life or be a leader in your own strength
 - i. It's designed that we lean on God and His strength
 - g. This is serious business as people's lives are at stake
5. Anyone who is put in a position of [church] leadership with the responsibility to feed the sheep of Christ has an enormous...responsibility to watch their doctrine closely and teach only that which is true (**Sproul**)
- a. **James 3:1** "Let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment"

6. **The scribes were taking what did not belong to them**

- 7. They wanted honor, respect, recognition, wealth, VIP treatment...
- 8. Some of these things do come with being a servant of God,
 - a. but they can never be demanded or taken by force
 - b. One should never manipulate others into getting them.
- 9. **This is not a list for me to stand as a judge over those who practice these things**
 - a. This is a warning for us to see if any of these apply to us
 - i. **"Beware of the scribes,**
 - 1. who desire to go around in long robes,
 - 2. love greetings in the marketplaces,
 - 3. the best seats in the synagogues,
 - 4. and the best places at feasts,
 - 5. who devour widows' houses,
 - 6. and for a pretense make long prayers.
 - ii. **These will receive greater condemnation."**

1. **They like to wear long robes (*see with their eyes*)**
 - a. It was customary to wear a prayer shawl and recite prayers, but the scribes had special prayer shawls that touched the ground
 - b. It was the distinguishing robe that made people move when they arrived
 - c. It was an outward display of their title and position
 - d. They loved having all eyes on them

2. **They love greetings in the market places. (*hear w their ears*)**
 - a. They expected to be addressed then with titles of dignity
 - b. Matthew tells us they wanted to be called rabbi, which means teacher, doctor..., exalted teacher, Excellency, most knowledgeable one, great one.
 - c. And those are phrases you find in Jewish literature which were used to refer to rabbis, "O great one, O knowledgeable one, O excellent one, O exalted teacher."
 - d. **In our evangelical circles today**
 - i. People want to be recognized for their title and position
 1. Pastor, bishop, reverend, Doctor...
 - ii. This need to introduce myself as "pastor so & so" reveals a lack in me
 - i. People have a need to be recognized by others when they are lacking something (insecure)
 - ii. Secure people are genuinely humble
 2. Secure in God's Love
 3. Secure in their place in God

3. **They loved the best seats in the synagogue (*touch*)**
 - a. Synagogues had platforms for the honored guests to be seated and closest to the Torah

- b. So you looked important under the guise of spirituality
- c. All the common people sat on the floor
- d. Many today sit on the platform as the message is preached
 - i. Same idea

4. **They loved the best seats at feasts, (*taste*)**

- a. Showing they demanded the perks of status and privilege
- b. They want to be near the host and the place of honor
- c. Probably get the choice cuts of meat and get served first

5. **They devour widows' houses. (*smell of money*)**

- a. The Bible reveals that God has a special care for widows and orphans
- b. In that culture, they were the most vulnerable and the most dependant
- c. When the husband, father passed away, God gave special commands to the people of Israel to take care of them
 - i. **James 1:27** pure and faultless [religion] is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress
 - ii. Jesus said the scribes plundered them
 - 1. literally to eat them up
 - iii. If a widow had an estate she would want to make sure that it was secure and safe.
 - iv. And so she would bring in a scribe to take care of the legal work to protect her estate.
 - v. And while pretending to protect her estate, he would take it.
 - vi. They would mismanage the property of widows.
 - vii. They would abuse the hospitality of widows, living in their houses,

1. taking up space in their houses, eating their food in a gluttonous fashion,

- viii. Making excessive demands like leeching off of them.
- ix. They would take money from older widows with deficient powers.
- x. As the older women lost the ability to reason and think what was going on, they would steal them blind.
- xi. Then they would take the house of a widow in pledge for the debt that they were owed for their legal services.
- xii. So when the widow died, they would own the house (**McArthur**)

d. Some are doing the same today

- i. By promising people health and healing
- ii. "Send us a check and God will bless you"
- iii. They're taking advantage of the weak and desperate

e. So they were living by their senses

- i. By what they saw
- ii. By what they heard
- iii. By being the most comfortable
- iv. By eating the best foods
- v. By the smell of money

f. That is what the Bible calls carnal living

g. Living by the senses and not by the Spirit

h. But being spiritual leaders, they had to seem spiritual, so they prayed long prayers

6. **And for a pretense make long prayers.**

- a. Their relationship with God was far more show than substance.
- b. The scribes thought they were more spiritual because of their long prayers.
- c. But G. Campbell Morgan wrote that when a man is away from his wife and the journey is short, the letters are short.
- d. The farther he is from his wife, the longer the letters become.
- e. Morgan said that some people must be a long way from God because their prayers are so long. (Guzik)

f. The lack of spirituality means the expansion of symbolism... The less reality, the more symbol. The more reality, the less symbol (**McArthur**)

7. These will receive a greater condemnation

8. **They wanted to take what didn't belong to them**

a. ...We [also] love the places of honor.

b. We love the greetings in public

c. We love to make long and impressive prayers for others to hear.

d. If it is not these examples, it may be

i. Impressing people by our godly talk,

ii. our knowledge of the Scripture,

iii. by our attendance at church,

iv. by various...religious performances,

v. and we want others to know about these things.

e. But in contrast:

II. Giving

10. By contrast to the taking, she is giving

11. Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many who were rich put in much. Then one poor widow came and threw [GAVE] in two mites, which make a quadrans.

12. Josephus tells us, that some of the Pharisees, before they made their contribution to the great collection ..., actually summoned a trumpeter to go before them to get everybody's attention. Then the Pharisees would come up and proudly deposit a bag of gold in the treasury chest. He wanted everybody to see his ample gift.

13. As Jesus looks, he calls the disciples to speak the truth about what she did

14. "Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood."
 - b. A quadran been a small percentage of a denarius
15. She gave more in the treasury than all the others
16. It's not about how much she gave
 - c. He is more interested in the motive behind the giving.
 - d. In seeing how the people gave ... He looks at motive of the heart.
17. **Is God calling us to give everything away?**
18. Certainly not
19. I don't believe God is calling us to live broke
 - f. Giving away everything we've got
 - g. Unless directed like the rich young ruler, that would be presumptuous and careless
20. I believe He is drawing our attention to the extreme opposite to contrast the scribes and Pharisees
21. There are those times when we are challenged to give much more than normal
22. Like those times when God will prompt someone to give away their only vehicle
 - e. Soon after, someone else hands them a nicer one
 - f. Because we can never give obediently and not be rewarded somehow
23. That is the rare occasion

24. He speaking of the law of the kingdom
- g. What you take, you lose
 - i. That is lustful and never satisfies
 - h. What you give away, is stored up for you
 - i. Here in this life
 - ii. Also in the next
 - f. **Acts 20:25** remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive
 - g. **Prov 11:25** The generous soul will be made rich,
And he who waters will also be watered himself
 - h. **Malachi 3:10** Bring all the tithes into the storehouse,
That there may be food in My house,
And try Me now in this,"
Says the Lord of hosts,
"If I will not open for you the windows of heaven
And pour out for you *such* blessing
That *there will not be room enough to receive it*
 - i. **Luke 6:38** Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you."
25. The principle has to do with every aspect of life
- i. Giving of my time to others
 - j. Giving of my talent to help others
 - k. Giving of my treasure to bless others
26. Our response to giving to God reveals our heart
- h. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also
 - i. If I'm not giving to God

27. The more common occasion of giving has to do with the local church that top portion of my income as a way of obeying and trusting God

28. Trusting God allows me to have a more gracious hand
 - a. This helps my heart not to be attached to the things of this world
 - b. It also helps by blessing those who are in need

29. **There is an accounting that happens in heaven**
 - a. **Others probably did not notice**
 - b. **The disciples did not notice**
 - c. **But Jesus sits and watches everything**

30. One day we'll stand to give an account on our stewardship

31. **Let's learn from this widow who**
 - a. Did things privately
 - b. She offered willingly
 - c. She trusted God will provide
 - d. It's impossible to believe that Jesus would see her, praise her obedience and let her starve