

Discussion Notes

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Mark 12:41-44

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- It is still the same scene (Jesus just had this exchange with the leaders) – He is still in the temple in Jerusalem – and He moves over to the collection boxes.
- As we saw in the previous verses, religion is a bit of a show - Rich were known for making a big grand gesture of their giving (among other things).
- What would happen - People (both rich and poor) would be queued up to present their offerings to Jehovah. They go into a room - located in the Court of Women.
- This is where Jesus sits...most likely the priests are still there observing

⁴¹ Jesus sat down near the collection box in the Temple and watched as the crowds dropped in their money. Many rich people put in large amounts. ⁴² Then a poor widow came and dropped in two small coins. ⁴³ Jesus called his disciples to him and said, “I tell you the truth, this poor widow has given more than all the others who are making contributions. ⁴⁴ For they gave a tiny part of their surplus, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she had to live on.”

- The placement of this story is important - it would be easy to isolate it and preach on the subject of generosity, (which we will do today) but it is important to understand that it is linked to the previous passage – understanding the previous passage helps us understand this section
- (In v. 38 – 40) – Last week we saw a scathing rebuke of the scribes - Jesus was calling out the hypocrisy of the religious leaders – It is interesting because Jesus doesn't go after their teaching, He has a problem with their behavior – He is hard on them – go back and read that from last week...
- The Scribes has some side businesses going on – because of their position, they helped people with wills and transfer of property after sales etc. - People would leave all of their money to the temple, and a good deal of the temple-money went, in the end, to the Scribes and Pharisees – they were advising people, but personally benefitting from it – which we know is one of the biggest no-nos when it comes to legal matters.
- Mark writes that they cheat widows – it is difficult to pinpoint exactly what it means – it is safe to say that they have been abusing their influence with widows and taking advantage of their vulnerability in some way.
 - Life for a widow in ancient Palestine could be very cruel – when their husbands died, it usually meant the primary breadwinner had died and so the woman faced a life of uncertainty
 - She wouldn't have many job prospects...at least of the reputable kind– no pension, no social security, no life insurance.
 - She was vulnerable and prone to poverty and at risk of being taken advantage of by unsavoury characters

- There is something that is VERY CLEAR throughout the whole of scripture, - and that is God's heart for the marginalized: the widow, orphan and stranger.
- God's heart is for the powerless – that they would find Shalom – and that is a community responsibility (including the global community).

Why is Jesus pointing out this widow to His disciples?

- The obvious answer is that she **serves as this stark Contrast** – Lambasted the Greed of the scribes VS. the generosity of the widow.

Jesus said – “I tell you the truth, this poor widow has given more than all the others who are making contributions.” (than everybody else in the line!)

- That makes no sense if you can do simple math...so Jesus clearly is not measuring numbers.
 - One of the things we have consistently learned through Mark is that Jesus measures differently than the world.
- The world measures externals – that's why the scribes got such a buzz off of giving.
- But what is Jesus measuring here? He is measuring the heart!

This widow's heart was wide open – her giving was marked by:

Deep Sacrifice

- The rich with their long flowing gowns and big hats (I imagine them with big hats) – they are giving out of the surplus...won't even miss it - just for show – posturing.
 - Whereas the widow was going to feel it – the question in her mind was probably – now what am I going to do without this week? How is it all going to come together for me?
- So in thinking about measurement - maybe it is not about how much we give but rather how much is left over for personal use after the gift
- Jesus wants our giving to cost us something.
- Interesting – These are His very last words recorded at the temple. Now where is Jesus about to go? – Go to the cross – where He would give EVERYTHING – His life.

Deep Trust

- Hand in hand with deep sacrifice is a need for deep trust.
- The Rich gave out of their excess but the Widow gave out of her need – and her generosity put her in this place of needing to trust Jesus - – she had nothing left to fall back on – No plan B - Complete surrender.

But with it came - Deep Reward

- She realized that real freedom came not from making a way for yourself, but rather it came from abandoning yourself and trusting Jesus.
 - That is a place of great rest.
- When we are devoted to God first and foremost, and can be in that place of surrender, we find the life we were created for.
- This widow had nothing, but she held a key that the Scribes and Pharisees knew nothing about.
- We hold on to our “Life” with in everything in us, when the key to our Life is letting God have it – it is in Him we learn to truly live.

We’re called to Radical Generosity, not Careful Generosity

- At the heart of our careful generosity is CONTROL.
- We never want to be in a position of “lack” and so we do everything we can to be sure that we are taken care first...and we give out of our excess...who did that? The scribes!
- We are proud too. At our core, - we want to posture – making it look like we are doing something sacrificial – image crafting - something we need to fight against.
- All this counting and hoarding and image crafting makes us stingy...and our lives become small and our heart is atrophied – and we miss out on the very thing we want!
- Whereas the life of a disciple (which is what the widow modeled) is a life of total abandon – where we place our life in that spot where we have to trust...that place where it has to be God, there are no safety nets, no back up plans...just God and His glorious leading in our lives.
- The widow didn’t put two pennies into the plate...she put her whole self in...and sometimes we want to follow Jesus but keep bits of ourselves back and Jesus says that not how it works...I have something so good for you on the other side of your surrender!
- When was the last time you experienced the miraculous wonder of God? – It is only in letting go that we see and can testify of His faithfulness, His provision, - it is there that we are freed from the soul killing treadmill of SELF – it is there that our world expands and we get it.
- Jesus showed us how to truly live – you want to truly live, than die - it wasn’t through careful generosity...it was through giving everything He had...and He invites us to follow Him in that.
- If the widow teaches us anything it is this: those who trust Jesus with everything will not be forgotten by God!...will actually have everything they have always longed for.

There is another way to look at this story.

- When Jesus calls the disciples and says “take a look at this” – Some writers believe that He condemning a system so corrupt that it would demand the resources of those least able to offer them.
- Condemning a system that allowed widows to “barely get by” – so much poverty in Palestine – and yet it went on right under the noses of those who could do something about it and actually had the mandate from God to help and to demonstrate true justice – but they ignored it.
- What is our responsibility as disciples of Jesus? I believe we are to adopt the heart of God – caring for the widow, the poor and the orphan – the Shalom of the community.

So what then are we to do?

- **Put yourself in the plate** – a friend this week - Go all in – be like the widow – holding nothing back – What does it look like for you to all in? - We hesitate to let go...because we fear what it could mean (sent to Africa) – we are fearful that we won't have enough, that we won't be enough – this is control and control does not lead to life - TRUST HIM – Go All in – your life, your finances, your schedule, your future – He will not disappoint!
- **Give until it hurts** – it is fairly easy to give out of excess, quite another thing to give out of our need
 - Some of us find giving money quite easy...it is time that is difficult to sacrifice – other are the complete opposite
 - Do the thing that is hard and do it to a level that you feel it – let it be a sacrifice unto God – ask Him to show up in that sacrifice
 - While you are giving – do it in secret
 - Don't tell anyone – there you may have to fight the “inner scribe” -
 - Consider **Providing for the vulnerable** more radically than you have before – We need to ask God for His heart for people in need - not to just give “stuff” to but enter the lives of – demonstrating justice - How can I add to the peace and prosperity of those around me?