

Give Till' It Hurts

November 11, 2012

Mark 12: 38-44

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." 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."

Last week we studied Mark 12: 28-34 and heard Jesus say, **Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.** We studied that scripture and what it meant and how to apply it to our lives today. Today we read Mark 12: 38-44 and we hear two stories, one about the Scribes, and the other about a poor widow. I brought up last week's scripture because, in my opinion, it has a direct bearing on our lesson today.

At first glance, this scripture appears to be about how much money we give to the church. If this was pledge Sunday, if we were trying to raise funds or balance our budget, I may have chosen this section to preach from. I'm pretty sure we have all heard those sermons and had this scripture reference used. The board nor the finance committee has come to me and said, OK Guerry, it's time for the "Show Me The Money" sermon. Now, it is getting near the end of the year and I'm sure the finance committee is starting to look in that direction. So get ready, that one is probably coming fairly soon. But, today I'm not talking about money, I'm talking about giving of yourself. I'm talking about giving of your time, your talents, and your abilities. I'm talking about giving of yourself to others, to the church and to the community at large. Oh, yeah, and the other section of scripture I talked about last week, verse 31, **The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.'** Let me see, love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. Is it possible to do either of these commandments without giving of yourself? I don't think so.

Let's take a look at today's scripture lesson. Verses 38 – 40: **As he taught, Jesus said, "Watch out for the teachers of the law.** Let's stop here for just a second: teachers of the law, who were they. Last week we talked about the scribes, said that they were the teachers, the interpreters, and the judges of the law. It was actually a scribe who asked Jesus, of all the commandments, which one is the most important. We all remember Jesus' reply. He is well aware of the scribes, who they are, how they act and what they do. Back to this morning's scripture; **"Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely."** Do you get the feeling Jesus isn't too fond of the scribes? Does the word hypocrite come to mind? The scribes have worked their way into the hierarchy of the synagogue. They are taking advantage of their knowledge of the law to help make things suit themselves. Everything they do is for show, to gain themselves attention, wealth, and power. They aren't too concerned with God and his laws. Jesus does everything here but come right out and call them hypocrites. But he does tell what is going to happen to them, they will be punished most severely.

Then Mark moves on to another part of the story. He tells of a poor widow and of her gift, of her offering to the synagogue. Let's listen to verses 41 and 42: **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. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents.** Here again, we must remember the plight of widows in Jesus time. If a woman's husband died, by Jewish law, her

brother-in-law was required to marry her. That was her only way to take care of herself. What if she didn't have a brother-in-law? She was pretty much on her own. We can assume that this is what had happened to this woman. She was extremely poor. Yet she gave all she had, two small coins to the synagogue offering plate. Her coins were valued at less than what we know as a penny, yet, she gave them. This poor widow gave all she had to the Temple, trusting that God would provide for her.

Verses 43 and 44: **Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.”** I want you to notice something here. Jesus said that the widow gave more than the wealthy, but did He say that the wealthy didn't give enough? If you go back and study the scriptures, 10 percent is what you are supposed to give. The widow gave 100 percent. Nowhere in this piece of scripture does it tell us what percentage the wealthy gave. Nowhere in this scripture does Jesus say that the wealthy didn't give enough, that they didn't give what they were supposed to give. What he said was, **Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others.** What she gave was of herself. The widow gave herself, her complete trust to God. He will provide.

What is the hardest thing you've ever had to give up or to give away? I mean the hardest thing, not like giving away a favorite piece of furniture because you were downsizing, or not like giving up a trip to the beach or the mountains or to Disney World, but what is the hardest thing that you have had to give up, to let go of, or to give away? The widow in today's scripture lesson gave up all she had, as little as it may have seemed to us or those around her. It was all she had. And I guess this is remarkable since it seems she was someone who had already lost so much. She was a widow, which means she has had to live through the death of someone she loved. But this widow, who had so little, gives whatever she had left, two small coins. The widow, I suppose, is an example of what it means to **“give till' it hurts”**. Bible scholars would tell us that the story invites us to think about the places where we give in our life and whether we are generous with our abundance. I guess the scholars would want us to be thinking about money, but I have to honest, this week my mind wandered someplace very different when I thought about the widow. Actually, it went to two different places. The first place my mind went was what have we all had to give up not of our own accord. Let me give you a few examples. Let's start with the death of someone we loved, whether it was a parent, a spouse, a child, a sibling or even a very close friend. Yes, in that case we physically had to give up that person. Divorce can be another loss whether we wanted it to happen or not. Adult children leave the nest and move away. We are glad to see them reach adulthood and spread their wings, yet...to a degree we have to give them up. A change in our job or a transfer by our company can cause us to move to a different city, causing us to give up or leave behind friends, homes, and churches. Some of us have had to give up on our dreams. As we grow older, we have to give up the youth and vitality we used to have. We have to change the way we do things. At the ripe old age of 63, I can't do what I did at 23, or 33, or 43, or even 53. There are times when we may have had to give up things because of a physical ailment, sugar because of diabetes, or rich food because of high cholesterol. As we have made these sacrifices, and I'll use that word for lack of one better, as we have made these sacrifices, how have we gotten through the tough times. By leaning on the only One who can give us the strength necessary to do so, God. God is with us through the tough times and through the good times. The lesson the widow teaches us is that we can and should put our **trust** in God. By giving her last two coins, she was saying that she was giving herself to God for his care. What is the greatest commandment, love the lord your god with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. Isn't that what the widow did when she gave her last two coins? What **“coins”** are you willing to give to God.

The other place my mind went was what we are giving to and for others. Here again, I'm not talking about money, I'm talking about giving of yourself. And the second commandment is this, to love your neighbor as yourself. When is the last time you gave of yourself to someone else? People, there are so many different ways we can give of ourselves. Let's look at a few: Volunteer at an elementary school and help a child read; go to a day care facility to volunteer for an hour or two; serve meals on wheels, volunteer at the hospital or at an assisted living or nursing home; visit a sick friend; cook a meal for a shut-in; should I go on with the list? Are

we too busy with ourselves that we can't make time to do for someone else? Let me be the first one to raise my hand when I ask that question. Yes, guilty. Sometime I get so wrapped up in my own little day-to-day self, my activities, the little things I want to do, that I just don't slow down long enough to think about what I can do for someone else. Don't get me wrong, I'm not completely self centered, well, at least I don't think I am, but I have to ask the question again, do I spend enough time giving of myself for others? And here's the rub, that's a question I'm not sure I'm qualified to answer. If I ask myself the question, I'll come up with the answer so that I don't have to change what I'm doing. Sure I'm doing enough; I've done this and I've done that, and I'm just so busy with this and that, and this is happening at work and that is going on at home, I just really don't have time to do any more for anyone else. See how easy it is for me to answer the question the way it suits me. I guess in reality, it's a question I need to ask God. What do you think, God. Am I doing enough, am I giving enough of myself to others? And then, after I ask the question, I need to listen for His answer.

We're all good people. I don't think any of us do things on purpose to be mean or bad. I don't think any of us are selfish on purpose. It's just, well, ...each one of us has a lot going on in our day-to-day lives. Each one of us stays as busy, and sometime even busier, than we want to. How are we supposed to give to others when we don't have time for ourselves. What do we do? Maybe we need to start with a little prayer, God, what would you have me do for you today? How can I serve others in your stead?

The widow in today's story gave two small copper coins, all she had. She placed her trust in God. She gave everything she had to God. And God reciprocated for mankind; God gave all he had. He gave his only Son for us. And Christ, He willingly went to the cross for us. Jesus Christ gave all He had for each one of us; He gave his life. What are you willing to give for Him?