



Unassuming Heroes

Mark 12:38-44

February 24, 2019

In this passage, Jesus pointed out two major sins of the religious leaders of his day (vv. 38-40). First, they were preoccupied with looking good to others. Their dress, greetings, places they sat, and prayers were all calculated to make a good impression. Second, they devoured widow's houses, which apparently means took advantage of them financially. Jesus said this will lead to them being punished most severely.

Jesus warned us to "watch out" for people like this. We need to avoid seeking to look good to others. Instead, we are to focus on pleasing God, even if others don't like it. We must also make sure we don't use our power to oppress or take advantage of people with less power than us. If we do these things, we too will be punished most severely. Watching out for people who do these things also includes making sure we don't let them hurt or take advantage of us.

In contrast, the widow (vv. 41-44) was commended by Jesus for giving everything she had. Even though it was a small amount, Jesus said she gave more than the wealthy people who donated large sums of money. She denied herself and put God first. She must have had tremendous trust in Him as well.

Giving has been a part of worship and devotion to God from the very beginning, and Scripture regularly encourages us to give. Giving does not "buy our way out" of living right or serving. Rather,

it is an opportunity to sacrifice something important to us in order to elevate and honor God. If this widow could do it, so can we. I personally believe that if you are reaping spiritual benefits from NorthWest, some part of your giving should go to NorthWest (compare 1 Corinthians 9:11 and context). I also believe personally that we should give with no strings attached, placing all we give at the elders' feet and allowing them to be the stewards of how it is distributed (compare Acts 11:30).

The two accounts in Mark 12:38-44 both refer to widows and seem to go together. They present contrasting pictures of religious devotion. The essential message is clear: Don't be like the religious leaders; be like the widow.

When you read these two accounts in the context of Mark as a whole, they also underscore what Mark has been emphasizing all along. God is calling us to the way of the cross: humility, self-denial, sacrifice, serving, and suffering. For the most part, neither the religious leaders nor even the twelve disciples grasp this. Instead, the ones who best exemplify the way of Christ are women, children, and Gentiles. Some male, Jewish, leaders were exceptions to this (5:22ff; 12:28ff.). But for the most part, Mark seem to affirm unassuming heroes with little status, like this widow.

Because of this emphasis: 1) We should humble and deny ourselves and serve others (9:33-37). 2) We seek roles of humble service instead of wealth, greatness, and power. 3) We should look for role models among the unassuming more so than the prominent and powerful. 4) We should enter leadership roles with fear and trembling, being careful to avoid the temptations and pitfalls they contain. We especially need to avoid trying to make ourselves look good to others and using our power to take advantage of others. We should also fill the leadership responsibilities entrusted to us with the attitude of humility and the actions of a servant.

