

What Remains? (Luke 21:1-4)

Summary:

- Jesus has criticized the leadership of Israel from the beginning of His ministry through the final days before His betrayal, arrest, flogging, crucifixion, and death:
 - He warned His disciples to be on guard against the leaven of the Pharisees (12:1-44).
 - Matthew front-loads the “woes” to the conclusion of Jesus’ ministry and includes the scribes (Matt. 23:1-36).
 - Luke has already commented on the interaction between Jesus and the scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, and chief elders (men) of the city (19:47-48; 20:1-2, 19-23, 27-33, 45-47). They do not believe that the baptism (message) of John the Baptist was from heaven (God), but from man, yet they feared the people (19:48; 20:6, 19).
- Jesus mainly criticized the scribes for their ostentatious lifestyle with pious pomposity, as they paraded around the place wearing clothes that projected success and opulence.
- Their tassels were for show, and a cloak for hypocrisy.
- They expected adulation and demanded it. When they went to a wedding or a celebration, they expected to be seated next to the host.
- The scribes loved to be seen by others and were driven by an external acknowledgment of a righteousness which in so many ways they did not possess.

Application/Observation:

1. The Content and Commentary in the Court of the Women (v.1-2)

A. The Content in the Court of the Women:

- Jesus is within “seeing” distance of the Court of the Women. What is that?
- It was a place of worship for women and children, who were not permitted to go beyond this point within the temple grounds (there were thirteen chests). It was 200 square feet.
- To arrive here, they would pass through the Eastern Gate (where Jesus entered as He descended from the Mount of Olives, 19:37), through the Court of the Gentiles (where Jesus overturned tables, drove out those who sold pigeons and animals, 19:45), through the Susan Gate/Gate Susan. They would finally arrive in the Court of Women.
- In the Court of Women, there were 13 chests (eleven of which were located there, and two near Gate Susan) that were designated for everyone (not just women) to deposit offerings.
- These offering containers consisted of thirteen brass treasure chests (shopharoths) called trumpets because they were shaped like an inverted horn, narrow at the top and enlarged at the bottom. According to the Mishnah, each of the chests bore inscriptions designated for the offerings.
- The chests (shopharoths) were divided into three categories of offerings, all with a Hebrew letter above them.
 - Categories of: mandated offerings were (chests 1 & 2) for the half-shekel tribute, (3) turtledove, (4) pigeon, (5) wood, (6) incense, and (7) golden vessels offerings; offerings left over from sacrifices for the (8) sin, (9) trespass, (10) bird, (11) Nazarite, and (12) cleansed leper offerings; and lastly (13) voluntary offerings.
- This location contributed to the temple treasury. The temple was a depository of immense wealth. During Passover, this was the busiest place of the year. A Levitical priest would often delegate offerings to the designated locations.

B. The Commentary in the Court of the Women:

- Mark informs the reader that Jesus sat down opposite the treasury and began observing how people were putting money into the treasury. Many rich people were putting in large sums (Mk. 12:41, 44). He also informs us that Jesus is speaking to His disciples.
- Luke informs us that Jesus “looked up.” Jesus “looking up” may: (1) be toward an elevated position in the Court of the Women, or (2) perhaps be that He is saddened by the behavior and heart attitude of Pharisees and scribes (Matthew 23).
 - In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus had rebuked the Pharisees and scribes. The Greek word is an interjection of grief or denunciation. It may be that His head is down, and His heart downcast.

Luke narrates that Jesus “saw:” (1) the rich putting (cast/placing) their gifts into the offering box (presumably free-will), and saw (2) the poor widow put in (cast/placed) two small copper coins:

- The Greek word for “gift” emphasizes the gratuitous nature of the gift. That is, the rich are giving to the temple. They may be giving a “free-will” offering, which would have been used (supposedly) for the upkeep of the temple and administrative duties of the priests.
- Free-will offering (Ex. 35:29; 36:3): it is also known as a praise offering or votive offering. It is not in fulfillment of any obligation, promise of vow, but a religious impulse of praise from the heart of the worshiper.
- Presumably, both the rich and the poor widow put their free-will offering into the same chest.
 - In cases where a contribution was made for priestly service, the attending priest would examine the currency for its genuineness, inquire about the purpose of the gift, and verify that it corresponded with the prescribed sacrifice. The priest then directed the worshiper to deposit the amount in the proper chest. All of this was spoken aloud to the bystanders. The tending priest would have verbalized what this woman gave.
- How does Jesus know what transpired (in particular, what the poor widow gave)?
 - (1) He heard the audible pronouncement of the tending priest on the offering, (2) He knew because He was given access by the Father and the Holy Spirit to the omniscience He had always necessarily possessed, or (3) He heard the light “clinking” of the two leptas.

The poor woman gave two small copper coins (leptons):

- The word “lepta” meant “peeled” or “fine” and was worth very little. Some translations may say “mite,” which is derived from a French word, which signifies crumb, or small morsel.
- The lepta was the smallest denomination of money. It was light, and equivalent to 1/128th of a denarius (what an average male adult Hebrew worker earns in a day). This poor widow possesses two of them, which is comparable to 1/64th of a day’s labor, and places them into the free-will offering.

Application/Observation:

2. The Contrast and Commitment in the Court of the Women (v.3-4)

Jesus tells His disciples that the woman has put in more than the rich. He is stating this as a fact. There are two implications of the interpretation:

- A. *This poor widow has been deceived and is contributing, as a free-will offering, to the collusion between Rome and Jerusalem.* What evidence is there of this?
- Jesus does not comment positively on this woman. He is stating a fact that she put all that she had into the free-will (treasury) offering.
 - This account is “sandwiched” between Jesus’ conflict with the Sadducees, Pharisees, and scribes and the destruction of Jerusalem (v.5-7).
 - The Sadducees, scribes, and Pharisees have made the Court of the Gentiles a den of robbers, and here in the Court of the Women, this poor widow has been robbed of true religion with the worldview of the wicked and pagan leadership. As a result, she is acting blindly, or foolishly, contributing to the Jewish/Roman collusion of false worship.
 - Luke is progressing from the outside of the temple inward. Jesus had already dealt with the money changers outside the temple in the Court of the Gentiles, and now addressed money giving in the Court of the Women, which is located between the outer court, where Jesus had just judged, and the inner courtyard, which Jesus would shortly condemn.
 - Not only is the leadership compromised, but so is the poorest of the poor. This system needs to be dismantled.
 - Jesus does not command His disciples to imitate her, learn from her, or anything positive.

Summary: This widow has been swept into the same “worship” as the rich and those who associate with them. While you can give all that you possess to something you believe in, the act and motive of the giving are useless if the object of the affection is unworthy. This widow is one of the many whom the scribes have devoured. Look at what she is giving to!

- B. *This poor widow is worshipping YHWH with a free-will offering from her heart.*
- She stands in contrast with the scribes. That is, although she has been devoured and taken advantage of, she still worships YHWH through her free-will giving.
 - She is included to set in contrast that despite the hypocrisy of the leadership and showmanship of the rich (not all, but some), there are those within Israel who worship God.
 - Jesus does not rebuke the rich who are giving their gifts, as not all the rich are wicked.
 - Both the rich and this poor widow are worshipping God.
 - Jesus does not warn His disciples about her. He uses her as an example.

Summary: This poor widow is an example of someone who has been taken advantage of by the scribes, yet despite that, she can worship YHWH. Her gift, though it may appear to be small in the eyes of man, is more than all the gifts from the rich. Jesus is not rebuking the rich or this woman. He is stating a fact: her giving was at another level.

How do we make sense of the opposing interpretations? How has Luke portrayed widows in the third Gospel?

- This is the seventh and final mentioning of a widow in the Gospel according to Luke. Who were the others? (1) Anna (2:37), (2) the widows of Elijah (4:25), (3) the widow of Zarephath (4:26), (4) the widow of Nain (7:12), (5) the widow in the Parable of the Unjust Judge (18:3, 5), (6) defrauded widows (20:47), and (7) the widow who deposits two small coins (21:1-4).

- In all the mentions and examples of widows in Luke’s gospel, five are represented as models of faith.
- 21:1-4 forms a bookend of the Third Gospel. She is the counterpart to Anna, who is the first widow of the Gospel (2:36-37). Both she and Anna appear in the temple, both are characterized by what they lack (2:37; 21:4), and both worship God.
- Contextually, both episodes contain widows (20:45-47). The first is the victim of the rapacity of the scribes (20:47), and the second (21:2-4) is sacrificially giving. One group is taken from, while at least one widow gives.
- The temple is the arena of corrupt and genuine religion, for in the temple there is the self-aggrandizement of the scribes and the entrenchment of the Sanhedrin and the widows’ offering.

Summary: Jesus is using this poor widow as an object lesson of commitment, and demonstrates that despite the compromised leadership in Israel, and the devouring of widows, this widow still worships YHWH through her free-will offering. She is commended.

The poor widow put in more than all of them (the rich) combined. He doesn’t compare what each person gives. He compared it with what remains. **It is not necessarily what is presented that is meaningful before God, but what remains. Her participation in worshipping God is what is being honored. It was most costly for her, though she gave less.**

Application: