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TEACHING THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD

Mark - Lesson 12F

Chapter 12:38-44

P.O. Box 702107
San Antonio, Texas, 78270
210.319.5055

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- We are coming to the close of Chapter 12 and the conclusion of Jesus' public ministry.
 - Over the past few hours of Jesus' intense questioning and testing, He has been inspected to the fullest by the religious leaders of Israel.
 - Their testing of the lamb on Tuesday in the temple was solely aimed at discrediting Jesus, His Person, and His ministry.
 - Except Jesus has, yet again, emerged victorious despite the intense questioning.
 - Now, almost 48 hours or so away from His coming death, Jesus will conclude His public ministry by announcing great judgement upon Israel's leaders.
 - He has officially proven to these men that He is Israel's spotless lamb, the sacrifice to be given on their behalf and for those who place faith in Him.
 - However, Israel's very leaders have failed to recognize Him as their Messiah.
 - Tonight we will see Jesus, once again call out the religious hypocrisy and failure of Israel's leadership and Torah teachers.
 - And at the same time, contrast their ways and wicked hearts with that of a poor widow who will give all she has to be sustained by God.
 - To outline our flow of teaching tonight, we will see the following:
 - 1. Religiosity Exposed – Internal corruption (v.38-40)
 - 2. A Widow's Heart Revealed – (v.41-44)
 - If I were to put a tag on tonight's text it would simply be: "The Measure of the Heart".
 - With that being said, I invite you to open your copy of the scriptures and meet me in Mark 12:38-44.

Mark 12:38 In His teaching He was saying: "Beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes, and like respectful greetings in the market places,

Mark 12:39 and chief seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets,

Mark 12:40 who devour widows' houses, and for appearance's sake offer long prayers; these will receive greater condemnation."

Mark 12:41 And He sat down opposite the treasury, and began observing how the people were putting money into the treasury; and many rich people were putting in large sums.

Mark 12:42 A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which amount to a cent.

Mark 12:43 Calling His disciples to Him, He said to them, "Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury;

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- Jesus begins His final teaching to the public collectively by issuing a warning of sorts.
 - This warning, recorded in Mark's gospel is an address directly related to Jesus' disciples, specifically, and to the crowd, generally.
 - I mention this varying detail because Matthew and Luke's gospel mention specifically that the target audience was the disciples.
 - However, with such a large following and gathering, the crowds of people would become bystanders of this teaching, collectively.
 - This warning that Jesus issued to His disciples was provided in the imperative form meaning that this is something the disciples should be cautious of.
 - The word for “beware” in Greek is *blepo* which means to be vigilant or to be on the lookout, to watch carefully.
 - In other words, Jesus is warning His disciples of the types of men in whom the disciples should be cautious and watchful for.
 - It's clear that Jesus is making known that the scribes, specifically, but Israel's religious leaders, collectively, are a problem.
 - It's after issuing this imperative, that Jesus begins to list out for the disciples the reason for their need of caution against these men.
 - Notice, that Jesus lists five behaviors/descriptors of these men so that the disciples would be aware of and vigilant against these types of men.
 - For this type of behavior would continue even throughout the ministry of the disciples within the Church Age. (False teachers, religious leaders, etc)
 - 1. Men who like to walk around in long robes.
 - 2. Men who like respectful greetings in marketplaces
 - 3. Men who like chief seats in the synagogue and places of honor at banquets.
 - 4. Men who devour widows' houses
 - 5. Men who for appearance's sake offer long prayer
 - In listing these behaviors, they all boil down to one thing; matters of pride.
 - The reality is that the religious teachers and leaders of Israel desired more public praise than true private prostration before Holy God.
 - There was more of a focus on prominence, position, power, and prestige than submission, obedience, and humility to God.
 - Let's quickly look at each of these external behaviors and see how the leaders' attempts of external acknowledgment gives light to their internal darkness.
- Jesus begins by saying that these scribes seek to walk around in long robes for the sake of being seen and respected in the marketplaces.
 - Jewish teachers in that day wore “special identifying garments”.
 - In many cases these robes were long, white robes which were like that of priests and temple officials.

- These types of garments were of high-quality and reflected positions of high status and priestly function.
 - The term long “flowing robes” spoke to the *tallith*, which refers to the Jewish prayer shawl worn during formal prayer.
 - So, to wear these types of garments out in public to simply “walk around in” was a means to seek out public attention.
 - And along with these exaggerated items of garment wear came the desire for respectful greetings in the marketplace.
 - For it wasn’t enough for these men just to be seen in public but they needed to be publicly acknowledged for “who they were”.
 - So, with public viewing came the titles that tickled their ears, titles with “high honor” such as Rabbi (teacher), master, or father.
 - What is quite telling is this type of behavior is like that of some Christian leaders today: There are some that demand to be called Pastor, or Bishop, and the list goes on and on.
 - If you see these individuals out in public, they require a certain entourage or security detail as if they were some type of government official, instead of a servant of God.
- Next, we see that these men enjoyed being seated in chief seats in the synagogue and places of honor at banquets.
 - The word in Greek for chief seat is *protokathedria*.
 - This word is a combination of *protos* which means “first” and *kathedra* where we get the word seat, or chair.
 - Which is why when put together it speaks to a seat of honor, meaning highest or uppermost seat of prominence.
 - This practice in most churches exists today where the place where the pastor or guest preacher sits has roped-off seating areas separated from the people.
 - In some instances, the pastors sit on elaborate furniture on the stage behind the pulpit so that everyone can see them.
 - This type of treatment becomes a means of separating “the haves” from “the have nots”.
 - And when this type of culture is perpetuated in the church and amongst believers, the sight of being “servants of all” becomes lost.
 - This is why James says these words in James 2:1-4.

James 2:1 My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism.

James 2:2 For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes,

James 2:3 and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, “You sit here in a good place,” and you say to the poor man, “You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,”

James 2:4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with

evil motives?

- Lastly, Jesus mentions that these men devour widows' houses and for appearance's sake, offer up long prayers.
 - Widows during that day had very little means of support and were socially powerless in a society centered upon honor and status.
 - Being that the husband was the sole provider of the household, and the property and assets were in his name, when he died, unless a male heir was provided, the property and honor was lost.
 - Therefore, by God's grace provisions were made under Jewish Law for the widow and her protection.
 - However, because of the wicked hearts of the scribes and leadership of Israel, these religious leaders found means to exploit the widow for wages.
 - The term "devour" regarding the scribes' treatment toward the widow is quite oppressive and destructive.
 - The word "devour" in Greek is *katesthio* which means "to consume or devour in a greedy fashion".
 - This use of figure of speech and using the term "devour" which would commonly be used for vicious beasts was a perfect illustration of the hearts of the scribes.
 - In the first century, the Law Teachers were not paid for their services, rather they depended on the hospitality extended to them by devout Jews.
 - But in many cases, these extended measures of hospitality turned into ravenous wolves seeking to extort monies from the helpless in society.
 - Here are just a few ways in which the scribes could have potentially caused societal, economic, and personal damage to the widow:
 - 1. It could be through exhaustive legal fees
 - 2. Mismanaging the financials of an estate in which they were trustees
 - 3. Through making the widows make their homes as pledges for unpayable debts
 - 4. Or through exploiting their hospitality and trust.
 - To make matters worse, when it came time for prayer in public places, they would offer up long prayers as a means to impress people.
 - The longer the prayer the more trusted the teacher was being that they were the "religious men of influence".
 - In every instance, it becomes clear that these men were manipulative and wicked and sought to use their positions and piety as a means of posterity.
 - This was religious prostitution at its best.
 - What is even sadder is that these types of acts still occur today.
 - People are told that if they do not give more to the church or to a particular ministry that they won't "receive the blessings of God."
 - In other instances, people are told if they buy a particular TV pastor's "oil" or prayer shawl that they can have their prayers answered.

- The means of masquerading religion for the sake of financial gain and popularity is not only horrendous, but it's downright wrong.
 - And herein lies Jesus' point at the end of verse 40 – these types of men (including women today) will experience greater judgement.
- Why? Because of their knowledge and understanding of the scriptures, they will be held to a higher accountability of it because they teach it.
 - I find it quite interesting that James, Jesus' half-brother understood this scriptural reality and included it in his epistle.
 - Check out what James 3:1 says:

James 3:1 Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment.

- ○ ■ It's the famous line from Spider-man where Uncle Ben tells Peter Parker, "With great power comes great responsibility".
- In the same way, the more that we grow and know in the word of God the more we are held accountable to.
 - And the staunch reality is, there will be a day that every pastor, bible teacher, and layman, will have to stand before Holy God accountable for what they taught and how they lived.
- The scribes and Torah Teachers of that day lacked in their ability to truly love God and love His people in being good shepherds.
 - And that pattern of poor leadership that existed in Israel long ago continued to persist with the religious leaders of Jesus' day.
 - I believe Ezekiel, by the leading of the Spirit of God, recorded it best in these words.

Ezekiel 34:1 Then the word of the Lord came to me saying,

Ezekiel 34:2 "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and say to those shepherds, 'Thus says the Lord God, "Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock?"

Ezekiel 34:3 You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat sheep without feeding the flock.

Ezekiel 34:4 Those who are sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the scattered you have not brought back, nor have you sought for the lost; but with force and with severity you have dominated them.

Ezekiel 34:5 They were scattered for lack of a shepherd, and they became food for every beast of the field and were scattered.

Ezekiel 34:6 My flock wandered through all the mountains and on every high hill; My flock was scattered over all the surface of the earth, and there was no one to search or seek for them."'"

- ○ Well, it is after Jesus' public teaching and warning against the behavior and dispositions of the scribes, that His public ministry concluded and His remaining time was devoted to His disciples.

- Check out with me the last 4 verses of Chapter 12.

Mark 12:41 And He sat down opposite the treasury, and began observing how the people were putting money into the treasury; and many rich people were putting in large sums.

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Mark 12:44 for they all put in out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on. “

- The scene now switches from Jesus’ public discourse to the crowd and the scribes, to the disciples in a different area of the temple.
 - Jesus and the disciples moved from the court of the Gentiles where He conducted His public teaching, to the court of women.
 - The court of women was the area within the temple where the activities of the treasury were conducted, and people were able to donate money.
 - With the court of women being one of the inner courts this area was the furthest that a woman was allowed to travel within the temple.
 - Within the treasury, against the wall of the court, were 13 trumpet shaped collection receptacles to receive the free-will offerings and contributions.
 - Each receptacle was dedicated to a special offering.
 - The shape of these receptacles was that of a Shofar or ram’s horn.
 - And out of all the receptacles, the last 5 were designated for what was “left over”.
 - This could consist of trespass offerings, offerings of birds, and a voluntary free-will offering.
 - Mark mentions that Jesus and His disciples positioned themselves opposite of the treasury to observe how the people were giving.
 - At this point, the question becomes: “What would be the purpose of Jesus observing this moment of people giving in the treasury?”
 - If you notice, Mark’s description begins to outline for us the matters that are at play here.
 - Jesus is observing the difference in giving from that of the wealthy and the rich, versus the widow whom Mark is beginning to introduce in verse 42.
 - Mark states that those who were rich and wealthy were putting in large sums of money.
 - In other words, they were giving out of their abundance. There was no true means of sacrifice that was provided here.
 - We then see that the text begins to pivot to the opposite spectrum of wealth, prominence, and economic status – to the “poor widow”.
 - So, where the rich individuals were putting in large sums of money because of their abundance, the text tells us that the widow put in “two small copper coins”.
 - The Greek word for “small copper coins” is, *lepta*.

- Lepta was the smallest bronze Jewish coin in circulation in Israel.
 - To understand the numerical difference in value between the rich and the widow, two lepta were worth 1/64 of a Roman denarius, which is a day's wage of labor.
 - In today's currency 2 Lepta equates to 14 cents in USD currency, and 12 cents in European currency.
 - I believe Mark's usage of this term and later explanation of the currency was for his Roman audience to understand the amount given.
 - This woman literally gave her day back to the Lord for it belonged to Him!
 - And it would be through seeing this varied value of offering that becomes the object lesson of Jesus' teaching.
 - Now, one question that could be asked is: "How did Jesus know the actual amount of money that the widow deposited into the treasury?"
 - Regarding matters of treasury contribution, the priest would first examine the currency for authentication purposes (acceptability).
 - Secondly, they would inquire of the purpose of the gift itself,
 - And finally, would verify the contribution corresponding with the prescribed sacrifice (which receptacle).
 - It was after this verification process that the priest directed the individual, out loud, to deposit their contribution to the appropriate receptacle.
 - In the case of the widow, if the gift were a free-will offering, then it is possible that the sound of the two coins and their weight being deposited could be heard from a distance.
 - Herein lies our contrasting picture of the extravagant giving of the rich, the ostentatious ostracization of the scribes' and the small, yet abundant giving of the poor widow.
- It's in verse 43 that Jesus calls His disciples to Himself and tells them that the offering of the woman was "more than all the contributors to the treasury".
 - Now, at face value this was not the case.
 - The text is clear that the value amount that the widow gave in comparison to that of the rich contributors was not significant at best.
 - However, Jesus tells the disciples that despite the significant amount of silver and gold contributed to the receptacle in bulk, it paled in comparison to what the widow provided.
 - What is Jesus speaking about here?!
 - Friends, it's clear that Jesus is speaking to spiritual matters and not physical matters.
 - Jesus further expounds on this spiritual reality by stating that the giving of the rich came out of their surplus, whereas the widow, out of her poverty, gave everything she owned.
 - Understand that both groups provided what surplus they had to offer to the Lord.
 - We must also recognize that Jesus commends the woman for her contribution yet doesn't condemn the rich for their elaborate giving.

- Jesus' point becomes simple and that is: the woman's generosity was not measured by the amount that she gave, but by the sacrifice she made.
 - The reality was these 2 cents were all this woman had for the day.
 - This unnamed widow gave no thought, question, or hesitation to what she gave for all she had she entrusted fully unto God.
- Clearly, this woman knew that God was the provider and sustainer for all her physical needs as she fully relied upon Him despite what she had financially.
 - Wasn't this the point that Jesus was making to His disciples all along: Following Him required a whole life commitment.
 - For the disciples to follow Jesus, it required them to leave what they had in pursuit of Christ. (Mark 1:17, "Come follow Me")
 - For the disciples to accomplish all that Jesus was calling them to do would require they entrust themselves fully to the Father, especially in Jesus' coming death and ascension.
- This illustration of the widow and her wholehearted commitment to God spoke to the reality that God was all she had and all she needed.
 - Friends, this cost of following Jesus is not for the weak. It will require great sacrifice. (Discipleship)
 - Your sacrificing may not show up financially, but it may show itself in other ways.
 - Through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, every area of your life will be tested as you pursue God deeply.
- Ultimately, this illustration of the widow showed an even greater picture of what Christ came to do.
 - For just as the woman gave all she had to live on to God, so would Jesus give all of Himself to die for the sins of world.
 - Jesus, the Second Person of the Trinity would put Himself in a position of great poverty by becoming fully human yet remaining fully Divine.
 - He would live a perfectly holy and righteous life by completely obeying and submitting to the will of the Father.
 - And in being obedient, submitted His life unto death so that in His dying, we would live, if we believe in Him.
 - I love how Paul says in Philippians 2:7, that Christ laid aside His privileges. Check out the text.

Philippians 2:7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.

Philippians 2:8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Philippians 2:9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,

- ○ That just as the widow gave all she had, Jesus in the next few days would give of Himself, knowing that the plan and provision of the Father would be

accomplished.

- We must not measure our cost of sacrifice on perceived value, for if we do, we will miss it every time.
- But rather, we must recognize the divine value and know that His cost (Jesus' death) is much more than what we could ever truly offer.
- Friends, this has been Jesus' point from the start of His ministry: The perceived righteousness of man will fail us every time.
 - That it is not what we do or what we bring to the table (in works) that deem us valuable, but rather it is our hearts, being surrendered and submitted unto God.
 - Wholly committed without reservation.
- God will not do anything with white-washed tombs (external righteousness) , but He can do mightily with a broken and contrite heart.
 - There is nothing you or I can do (deeds-wise) to receive such a glorious gift.
 - We must simply surrender to His truth and respond in submission to the Lord by believing in His Son, His Only begotten.
- Truth has a name, and His name is Jesus.
 - Place your trust in Him today.
- Let's Pray.