

The Last Public Sermon
The Gospel of Mark 11-16: #7
Mark 12:35-44

The year was 2006. The day was July 7. The location was Baltimore, MD. It was last time one of the greatest evangelists this world has ever seen walked up the steps of the stage platform and took his place behind a wooden pulpit, the same pulpit he had used for three decades. He said these words to the capacity crowd gathered at Camden Yards: "You know you can't put God in a test tube. You can't prove scientifically the existence of God. You can't see Him on a computer screen. But that doesn't mean He is not real." His name was Billy Graham. His sermon, "The Reason Jesus Came," was Graham's exclamation mark on a preaching ministry that spanned six decades, crossed 6 continents and 185 countries, and reached 215 million people world-wide. And I thank God that he gave me the opportunity to hear that message as he proclaimed it.

Jesus preached many sermons to the masses. There was one on a mountain that began with "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." There was one on a plain that ended with "whoever hears these words and puts them into practice is like a man who laid his foundation on the rock." Today's passage, Mark 12:35-44, is a very important one in the Gospel of Mark because it not only concludes the Tuesday of Passion Week. It's also the last sermon Jesus ever preached before the masses. There will be no more parables for the masses to hear. There will be no more no more sermons on mountains or plains. There will only be a crucifixion for them to watch. And this last sermon of Jesus to the masses will not feature a wooden pulpit in middle of Camden Yards. Instead, it will feature a contrast between two types of individuals in order to teach us what he can see through in our lives and what he looks for. The first want more than anything in the world to be viewed by others as righteous, holy, good. And they think of their devotion to God in terms of what they have to gain. They were the scribes. The second live not to impress others. They live just to love God for who He is. They think of their devotion to Him in terms of what they have to give. Those types of individuals are represented by one unlikely person: a poor widow. It was a final sermon of contrasts, between false religion and true religion. For Jesus makes it crystal clear, the type of religious expression that God frowns upon, and the type He smiles upon.

I find great encouragement and application for my life in Jesus' last public sermon. Here's why: It reminds me that Jesus sees all. There's not one thing that happens that escapes his provident vantage point. He's able to see through all of the masquerades pirouetting as righteousness in our world – including the church world – and saying "I know what this reminds me of. It reminds me of the scribes in my last public sermon." For false religion always starts with a false view of Jesus. It always manifests itself in a desire to be seen in a particular way. And it always results in the exploitation of the least of these. On the other hand, Jesus sees straight to the heart of one who gets it right. And when he sees it, he says, "I know what this reminds me of. It reminds me of that poor widow I used in my last public sermon." For true religion always starts with a love for the God of the Bible, just for who He is. It always manifests itself in giving in some way that demonstrates God's "worth" to the worshiper. And it always results in the commendation of the Lord Jesus. We see the contrast between False Religion and True Religion in Mark 12:35-44

³⁵ And as Jesus taught in the temple, he said, "How can the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David?"³⁶ David himself, in the Holy Spirit, declared, "'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet."'"³⁷ David himself calls him Lord. So how is he his son?" And the great throng heard him gladly. ³⁸ And in his teaching he said, "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces ³⁹ and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, ⁴⁰ who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation." ⁴¹ And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. ⁴² And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. ⁴³ And he called his disciples to him and said to them, "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. ⁴⁴ For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."

False Religion (The Scribes)

(The Devil is a Sly Old Fox): (1) "The Devil is a sly old fox. I wish I could catch him and put him in a box. Then lock the door and lose the key. For all the tricks he's played on me." (2) My grandmother thought me that rhyme when I was a child. (3) Oh, how prophetic it is. (4) The longer I'm alive, the more I'm convinced that the devil performs his greatest works in our world not through the representation of pointy horns and a pitchfork. Instead, he performs them masquerading as an angel of light. (3) His most dastardly needs are accomplished under the appearance of goodness. And those who give the appearances of being upstanding and righteous often do his bidding.

1. How It Starts (v35-37): (1) *False religion always starts with the wrong view of Jesus.* He makes that point clear with his question in v35: "why do teachers of the law say that the Messiah is the son of David? (2) That's an interesting question Jesus poses because virtually everyone agreed that the Messiah must come from the line of David. Blind Bartimaeus certainly did: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy upon me!" (2) The problem was their expectation of the Messiah was too earthly and ordinary. (3) To illustrate this, Jesus quotes Psalm 110: the most quoted Psalm in the NT and then makes a statement and asks a question: David calls his son Lord. How is He, his son? (4) In other words, what father calls their son Lord if that son is just a human being? (5) Jesus is more than that. He's the son of David and David's Savior. (App) False religion always starts with getting Jesus wrong. When that happens, everything else follows.

2. **How It Manifests (38-39, 40b):** (1) *False religion will always manifest itself in great efforts to be seen and viewed in a particular way by others.* (2) The Scribes lived for the attention of others: (a) They dressed in a way to impress (v38). They wore long robes with distinct colors and attached prayer tassels to them. They were they were like the guy walking through the airport in a three-piece suit with Bluetooth headphones on. (b) They loved their titles and being greeted in light of them (v38). Jesus says they “liked” (=to be addicted to here) the greeting they received in the marketplace. People would rise to greet them and call them Mr. Dr. Honorable. Distinguished. Right Reverend. Ph.D. Scribe. (c) They loved their seat at church and around the table. They took their seat in the synagogue up front in immaculate chairs because they thought themselves to be important and always sat at the honor seat at dinner tables. (d) They loved to be viewed as righteous. Verse 40b tells us they made lengthy public prayers. The language denotes the idea of long-drawn out prayers with changes in vocal inflection they don’t make in normal conversations. (App): When there is great effort to be seen and viewed in a particular way, according to Jesus, there is something dangerous in that presentation we need to pay attention to.
3. **What It Results In (40a):** (1) *False religion will always exploit the least of these.* (2) Jesus says that in spite of their presentation, the reality is they “devour widows houses.” (3) In the Bible, the essence of genuine faith is how you treat those who can do absolutely, positively, nothing for you. (3) When you looked after widows and orphans, it said something about what you believed. (4) But Jesus says the scribes “devoured” them. They not only took advantage of those who they were called to protect, they chewed them up and spit them out when they were no longer useful. (App): Be careful with using people in life, especially the most vulnerable, under the pretense of faith. That’s the essence of the greatest evils known to man. Thus, why Jesus said they will receive the greater condemnation.

(Transition): So if the Scribe represents false religion in Jesus’ last public sermon. Who, then, represents the example of what Jesus is looking for? Look no further than a most unlikely example: a poor widow.

True Religion (The Poor Widow)

(The Most Unlikely Model of What Works): (1) Several weeks ago, my washing machine died and went to burn in the lake of fire where it belongs. (2) I thought it would last forever because it was High-Tech. I was wrong. It lasted under less than 3 years. (2) Yet, for my whole childhood and into my adult life, my parents had one washing machine that worked just fine. It had no fancy gizmos. You would overlook it in stores. It was simple and unadorned. And stood the test of time. (3) The faith of this widow is much like that washing machine. Not celebrated by the world. But celebrated immensely by God.

1. **How It Starts (41-42a):** (1) *True religion will always start with a true love for God just simply for who God is.* (2) The image changes to Jesus watching people at the temple and how they give. This is important because Jesus is always watching. He always observes. He always knows. (3) At the temple in the women’s court, there were several boxes for designated offerings. One was for shekels for temple upkeep. Another was for small animals like birds for sacrifice. Another was for gold for the mercy-seat. Another was for fragrances and incense. (4) By any human standard, this widow qualified to go to none of these. He had no shekels. No birds. No gold. No fragrances. No incense. (5) But this didn’t stop her from approaching and worshipping. (6) That’s apparent in the first statement in v42: “And a poor widow came.” (6) She had the courage to approach these boxes when she thought her offering didn’t qualify. And Jesus was watching. (App): And the courage to approach started with her simple love for God. It wasn’t flashy. But it worked. And Jesus saw it.
2. **How It Manifests (42b):** (1) *True religion will always manifest itself in giving of yourself in some way that demonstrates what God is “worth” to you.* That is what worship means: worth-ship. And Jesus was watching. (2) Mark tells us she put in two copper coins worth a penny. You know them as 2 widow’s “mites.” She knew them as 2 lepta, the smallest coinage in circulation. It was equivalent to 1/64 of a Denarius. There was no box for those! (App) But Jesus knew her heart. And what he smiled upon went deeper than the amount given. He was attracted to her sacrifice. She gave out of a love for God what she had to live on, not to impress others.
3. **What It Results In (43-44):** (1) *True religion will always result in the approval of the Christ who knows all and can see right into the depths of our hearts.* (2) He tells the disciples: “Truly I say to you.” That word “truly” means “amen.” Jesus put it at the beginning because he didn’t need their approval. “This poor widow has put in more,” Jesus says, because she out of her poverty, “put in everything she had.” (3) Jesus began his public ministry with a call to fishermen beside the sea of Galilee to leave all and “Come, follow me.” And he ends his public ministry seeing that call perfectly fulfilled in the giving of two simple lepta by this poor widow. She put in everything she had. Consequently, she now foreshadows what is going to happen 3 short days from now when Jesus is going to give up everything he has and die on a cross so that we can become the righteousness of God in Him.

(Final App): Praise God that like this widow, Jesus will demonstrate true religion by laying his life down for us. Jesus paid it all, all to Him we owe. The poor widow would agree. The question is: “do you?”