

# WIDOW'S MITE

## MARK 12:41–44

### INTRODUCTION

- *two themes*: the true measure of giving and the coming judgment upon the nation of Israel (an underlying theme in Mark)
- evidence for God's lawsuit against Israel accumulates as Mark progresses—culminating in mocking the Messiah (15:31–32)
- *context*: why is this story between the condemnation of the scribes (12:38–40) and the destruction of the Temple (13:1–2)?
  - the end of Jesus' public ministry occurs in Mark 12:40—in the Temple (12:35)

### CONDEMNATION OF THE SCRIBES (MARK 12:38–40)

- *two sins*: hypocrisy (appearance of godliness) and stealing from widows—covering up their terrible theft with long prayers
  - *crime*: "devour widows' houses" probably refers to encouraging widows to make large gifts beyond their means to teachers (teachers were not allowed to charge for their teaching) and to the Temple
- "devouring" (*katesthio*) implies consuming completely: birds eating seed (Luke 8:5) and the effect of fire (Rev 11:5; 20:9)—to devour financially is to leave someone pennyless (cf. the prodigal son completely lost his inheritance, Luke 15:12–14, 30)
- *Corban*: a similar crime of encouraging sons to dedicate their earnings to God, impoverishing needy parents (Mark 7:6–13)

### WIDOW'S OFFERING (MARK 12:41–44)

- the pious widow is a striking contrast to the greed and hypocrisy of the scribes (12:38–40): she is likely one of their victims
  - she is also a striking contrast to the "many rich people" who "were putting in large sums" (12:41)
- contributions were dropped into 13 clearly-marked trumpet-shaped chests placed at intervals around the Court of the Women
  - she gave and believed God would provide all of her needs; the scribes used their religion to exploit people to raise money
  - her small offering (*lepta* = an eighth of a cent) was actually greater than all of the offerings made by the rich together (12:43)
- the rich gave from their surplus *after* their own needs were satisfied; she gave all she owned *before* God provided her needs
  - the value of an offering is best measured (1) against the financial worth of the offerer, (2) as a percentage of total assets, (3) by the amount left over after giving, or (4) by the sacrifice made, not the amount given (cf. 2 Sam 24:24)
  - by this measure anyone—rich or poor—can lay up treasure in heaven and be rich toward God (Luke 12:21, 33–34; 18:22)
    - she entrusted her life to God, lived in total dependence upon him, and laid up treasure in heaven

### REASON FOR ISRAEL'S JUDGMENT

- the story of the widow is a bridge between the avarice of the religious leaders and the coming destruction of the Temple
- abuse of widows in Jesus' day justifies the coming destruction of Judea (as it justified the destruction of Israel and Judah)
  - the days of covenant-breaking Israel are numbered; all that remains is to implement the curse of the Sinaitic Covenant

### WIDOWS IN THE MOSAIC LAW

- widows were as much a part of the covenant community as anyone else (Deut 16:10–11, 13–14)
- widows, orphans, and aliens were vulnerable and dependent and were offered special protection under the Law:
  - (1) fields should be left for widows to glean (Deut 24:19–21; cf. Lev 19:9–10; 23:22; carried out in Ruth 2) and
  - (2) a triennial tithe provided food for widows and a blessing for Israel (Deut 14:28–29)
- God promised to (1) support (Psa 146:9; Prov 15:25), (2) execute justice for (Deut 10:17–18; Psa 68:5), (3) avenge (Psa 94:1–7), (4) curse anyone who withholds justice from a widow (Deut 27:19)—oppressing a widow was a sin unto death (Exod 22:22–24)
  - widows were often taken advantage of in times of apostasy (Isa 1:16–17, 23; 10:1–4)
- abuse of widows contributed to the fall of Judah (Jer 7:5–7; Ezek 22:7; Zech 7:9–14) and will be judged by Jesus (Mal 3:2–5)