



Sermon, Sunday November 17, 2024 “A Thirsty Soul”

SCRIPTURE: Mark 12:38-44 ³⁸ As he taught, he said, “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces ³⁹ and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! ⁴⁰ They devour widows’ houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.” ⁴¹ He sat down opposite the treasury and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. ⁴² A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. ⁴³ Then he called his disciples and said to them, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. ⁴⁴ For all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

Introduction: Hypocrisy in the teachers of the law

In today's text, Mark 12:38-44, there are two stories. Today's text, verses 38-40, contains Jesus' words about teachers of the law, who were the upper class of Jewish society at the time. At that time, the teachers of the law were respected and envied by people. They were sincere and smart people. Their social status is like today's judges, university professors, and megachurch pastors.

However, Jesus judged them differently from the common thinking at the time. In verses 38-40 of today's text, Jesus said, **‘Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive greater condemnation.’**

In this verse, Jesus did not say to the people, **‘Imitate the example’** of the scribes, but rather, **‘Beware of the scribes.’** Jesus explains three reasons why we must beware of the scribes. First, they like to be greeted and to sit high in the synagogue or at banquets. Second, they used their expertise to place a material burden on helpless widows. Third, they pray at length to show others their piety.

If the scribes had directly heard Jesus' criticism of them, they would have rationalized it by saying that Jesus' judgment of them was untrue and false. However, the teachers of the law could not hide their hypocrisy before Jesus. The result of their hypocrisy is **‘the greater condemnation’** as in today's text.

So, what does Jesus mean by said that they will receive the **‘greater condemnation’**? This means that the souls of people who live hypocritical lives are in poverty and lowly circumstances. We know how tiring it is to live a life of trying to be approved by others, and how many problems this life brings.

In fact, people belonging to the leadership of society, such as teachers of the law, must reflect on their lives **‘more strictly’** than others. They must be more honest than others, humble themselves more than others, and be more selfless than others. If they do not live this life, they will live under the illusion that they are actually high people because of other people's actions of exalting them. Some may say what's wrong with this kind of life, but this kind of life encourages our pride and puts us in the position of God.



Like the scribes at the time of Jesus, we must be able to examine and discipline ourselves more strictly to avoid making these mistakes.

Another meaning of Jesus said in today's text, '**Beware of the scribes**', is that we should not think of ascending to a high position unless we are willing to discipline ourselves more strictly. We must keep in mind the lessons that Jesus' story about the scribe teaches us and be able to reflect on our own lives as Christians.

Jesus tells us another story that is different from the story of the scribe who was respected by the people of his time. It is the story of a poor widow's offering.

Body: Story of a poor widow's offering

The second story in today's text features a poor widow. (Mark 12:41-44) In society at the time, widows were members of the lower class. So, no one wants to get close to this person. However, as Jesus sat down opposite the treasury, he watched this widow making an offering. Rich people gave an amount commensurate with their dignity and authority, but this widow gave only a small amount of money. The person in charge of finances at the temple would have paid more attention to the donations of the rich than to the widows.

However, in verses 43-44 of today's text, Jesus said to his disciples, '**Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.**'

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ!

I do not think of this story as simply a lesson that we must give our offerings sincerely. This story is about our relationship with God, about the depth of life, about the soul, and about the essence of faith.

While the scribe mentioned earlier is a person with a devastated soul, the widow in the second story is a person with an earnest and transparent soul. The life of the scribe as seen by Jesus was shabby, contrary to the evaluation of those around him, and the life of the widow as seen by Jesus was surprisingly rich, unlike the evaluation of those around her. The Bible clearly states that our lives are enriched only when our souls are thirsty. Only when we thirst for the Word of God can we experience the Word of God abundantly in our lives.

Some people may think that Jesus talks like that because he does not know how difficult the life of a widow is. Of course, the life of a widow at the time of Jesus was tiring. It is true that the life of a widow raising children without a husband is difficult. The life of a widow at that time was an example of a difficult life. However, we cannot conclude that she is an unhappy woman.

In the Gospel of Luke, there is the story of '**the parable of the widow and the judge.**' (Luke 18:1-8). In this story, a widow who has been wronged comes to the judge and begs him to avenge her resentment. In this story, the widow represents a person with a grudge. In this parable, Jesus said that just as a proud judge cannot ignore a widow's resentment, God relieves people's resentment (the thirst of the soul). There is nothing more abundant in our lives than when God quenches the thirst of our souls and then living a life in a special relationship with God.

The reason why the widow's offering in today's second story is special is that, unlike the rich who gave from their abundance, she gave all she had to the Lord from the poor. Today's story of the poor widow contrasts abundance and poverty. A rich person is rich in money but poor in spirit, and a poor widow is poor in money but rich in soul. This is because the wealthy relate to God only for part of their lives, but this poor widow relates to God for her entire life. However, the widow had a thirst of spirit that the rich man could not match.

Conclusion: A widow who gave her all to the Lord

To some people, it may seem irresponsible for a poor widow to donate all her living expenses.



However, what we should focus on in the story of the poor widow is not the widow's act of donating all her living expenses, but that this woman left her future completely in God's hands. These actions are not easy. Because this widow was poor, she could not rely on money, power, or fame that others depended on.

So, the fact that we have no one to rely on other than God is a blessing. This is because we can receive the abundance of the soul as a gift only when we hope only in God, love only God, and seek God with a thirsty heart. But can you agree with this? Some people may feel that my message is far from our real lives. The Bible does not specify right or wrong for all our actions. We just need to act according to our faith and conscience.

Jesus said in Matthew 6:28-29, '**And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.**' If we believe and have confidence in this verse, we can enjoy abundance even if we are poor, old, or sick.

The reason we do not enjoy this abundance in our lives is because we do not have the thirst of our souls. Also, because the thirst of the soul is formal, we are afraid that the fate of the widow in today's text will become our fate.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ! Please remember the story of the widow in the Bible who constantly went to the judge and begged for redress. Also, please remember the faith of the widow who put all her living expenses into the offering box, which made her look like an irresponsible person.

Even people who do not feel thirst for life now will inevitably become thirsty when the moment of death approaches. However, I sincerely hope that before that time comes, we all live with a 'thirsty soul' without fear, envy, or worry, now and here. **Amen.**

