

November 8, 2009 Scribes and Widows Mark 12:38-44

This is the Temple Times Radio Station, coming to you live from 1-2-3-G-O-D on your FM dial – Righteous News for Righteous Jews – with a news story that we have received just off of the floor of the Temple offering stations:

First, let me set the stage for this incident at the Temple treasury. People present include the scribes, the man named Jesus (although I don't like to use his name; who does he think he is, anyway?), the so-called followers of Jesus, a widow and various other people milling around in the crowds at the temple. I will only take time to describe the key players. The many scribes in the Temple are wise debaters, legal and biblical experts with extensive education. We know these particular scribes as teachers who rightly confront "you know who" with questions about what he seems to be doing and who he seems to be claiming to be. Here is a recap of some of the battles they have had with him because they were forced to question him:

His claim of forgiveness of sins (2:6): The teachers of the law saw him supposedly heal a paralytic and say to him, "Son, your sins are forgiven" and they could not believe that he would say this, for they knew that it was God alone who forgives sins. (That should tell you something.) He even had the audacity to call himself the Son of Man" – whatever that means.

Eating with sinners and tax collectors (2:16): of all people to be seen with, the teachers of the law catch him with "these people" in the house of Levi. And he so boldly tells them (the teachers wanted to make sure that they got his statement down for future use): "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." That is a pretty bold assumption, don't you think, dear listeners?

Eating with defiled hands (7:1, 5): that just proves the kind of "man" he is! The teachers of the law confronted him and his merry band of disciples and asked them why they would go against the tradition of the elders. You will not believe what Jesus called them; he called them "hypocrites"! And even more than that, he went on to say, "You have let go of the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!" This "Son of Man" is getting deeper and deeper into trouble.

The source of his authority (11:27): The teachers of the law, along with the chief priests and elders wanted to get an answer from him about where he receives his authority to do what he is doing and he only engaged them in tricky wordplay, putting the question back upon them so no answer was every really given.

The first commandment (12:28, 32): Well, we do have to admit that Jesus does know which of the commandments is most important, for he did answer one of the teachers of the law correctly – Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your

mind and with all of your strength – and added the second, to love your neighbor as yourself. So, we must give him a bit of credit for at least knowing the scriptures.

They have also had to deal with this man in other ways:

- Confronting him when he acted as if he was possessed by Beelzebub (3:22)
- Reminding the people that Elijah must come first (9:11-13) – which this man had to agree with the scribes correct interpretation of scripture
- Trying to set straight that rag-tag bunch that follows Jesus (9:14)
- Making the attempt to remove him (in no uncertain terms) so that he would not be causing any more trouble among the people (11:18; 14:1, 43, 53; 15:1)

I'm sure that this is only a portion of what these educated men have had to put up with from Jesus. So, the scribes are at the treasury. These men that we know to greet respectfully when we meet them in the marketplace; and, who receive the places of honor at banquets and are in the best seats at the synagogues. We have heard how long and how much they pray – oh, we hear them all of the time. This is the kind of men the scribes are.

Well, our station, the Temple Times Radio Station – Righteous News for Righteous Jews – wants to live up to its name, so we will not spend a lot of time giving Jesus too much free air time. I think that I have given him plenty of time already in the above list of confrontations that the teachers of the law have had with him. The same goes for his mindless followers. You get the picture.

That leaves us with the Widow. I am sorry. . . but I do not seem to have a name for her or any details on who she is. Oh well, that is not important. She is a widow, a woman who no longer has a husband, who no longer has anything of her own. For those of you listening, you know what a disgrace it is to be a widow. It is know that her husband died before old age, which is a judgment of sin and that sin extends to this woman. She depends upon the graciousness of those around her for what she needs. Let us get to the story, which only adds more fuel to the fire on the controversy over the man who call himself, "The Son of Man."

Picture it. Everyone is walking by the treasury. One man is closely watching not only WHAT each person is putting in the treasury, but HOW they are doing it! Yes, you know who it is, the one whose name we dare not say, but I will say it here – Jesus. Anyway, righteous Jews in their flowing robes are busily dropping in generous amounts of money – lots of money – yet this man looks upon them with disdain. At this point, a poor widow tentatively creeps towards the treasury. You know the kind; this woman is not hard to miss because she doesn't fit it. Anyway she reaches the treasury and drops in – get this – two small coins! Folks, she ONLY drops in two small coins! I am sure that is all she had. It would take about EIGHT of those measly little coins

to buy one sparrow (Matthew 10:29). So, she did not give anything remotely worth mentioning compared to the rich, righteous folk.

It was overheard that Jesus called out to his disciples, saying “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.” I kid you not. That is EXACTLY what he said. He may not have been talking to the scribes near the treasury, but you better believe that these educated, legal and biblical experts knew what they heard and were out-raged, as you should be, dear listeners, outraged!

Who does this man think that he is? Well, the teachers of the law felt judgment in his words; he continues to judge the leaders of the Temple. Is he saying that the rich should be giving even more? Is he saying that they are not giving in the right way? Does this man think that we should be caring for this poor widow, whoever she is? Does Jesus not see how much money was put into the treasury? Who gives all that they have, anyway? Well, that’s the news from the Temple treasury; a story that leaves us with more questions than answers. I guess we will have to wait and see what will happen next with this man named Jesus.

Maybe there is some truth in this imaginative radio account of our gospel text for today. There is truth in what Jesus did and his confrontations with the teachers of the law. And there is truth in what his words bring – sometimes the words of Jesus do bring about judgment, as his treasury observations brought judgment upon the scribes and the rich in Mark 12. Maybe his words about the widow’s offering make us wonder about our own giving or about how much our own communities care for those in need. That is a part of the story.

Jesus tells his disciples that the widow gave “everything she had, all she had to live on.” A “lowly widow” figures out that everything comes from God and belongs to God, no matter how much a person has. That brings us to the most important part of the story – giving all that one has. You see, Jesus may have observed this widow giving all that she had to the treasury and his words may have brought judgment to those listening, but it is also a reminder of a much bigger story for you. Jesus gives you his whole life as an offering so that you might receive grace, love and forgiveness. The widow was right and Jesus’ words are correct – everything comes from God.

Helpful Resources: “Wrestling With the Word,” William O’Brien. Exegetical notes from Brian Stoffregen.