

St. Mark 12:38-44

Dear Friends in Christ,

I have read that the statement “Your money or your life” might have originated in the 17<sup>th</sup> century with highwaymen who rode horses and robbed people traveling the roads of Britain. There are other insights, but the point is that the phrase has been around for centuries.

The theme for this morning’s sermon is not implying that God is a robber. The fact is, it’s the other way around. The vast number of God’s people in this country have lived and are living fairly comfortable to very sumptuous lives. For so very many, it isn’t an issue of having enough of the daily bread God promises. It’s an issue of whether or not they will have much, much more than the daily bread, wasting so much of it, while giving the leftovers to God.

The fact is, God doesn’t want your money or your life. He wants . . . .

### **YOUR MONEY AND YOUR LIFE!**

#### **I. The Warped Condition of Human Reasoning.**

I’m calling this part of the sermon “The Warped Condition of Human Reasoning.” Here it is:

And in his teaching he said, “Beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, who devour widows’ houses and for a pretense make long prayers. (vv. 38-40)

It’s the joy of living a life of being a somebody. But as you walk through the cemetery and look around you can ask, “I wonder who that was? I wonder who that was?” And maybe the little voice whispers, “Who cares?”

Of the Scribes He said, “They will receive the greater condemnation.” (v. 40b) And that because they served themselves above God. They figured who they were would win God’s love. You know, celebrity. They figured wrong!

Today it would include those who labor to live sumptuously and the growing number of those who don’t want to work but want everyone to enable them to live sumptuously. The term would be “me first” and, then, God....God?

They are chilling words, aren’t they? “They will receive the greater condemnation.” They won’t simply be condemned. They will be fiercely condemned beyond all others. A frightening warning to the self-righteous.

And I was thinking that, if you back up about 20 verses in our text, you have these words of Jesus to another group of Jewish leaders, the Sadducees: “Jesus said to them, ‘Is this not the reason you are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God?’” (Mk. 12:24) Do you? Know Scriptures? It doesn’t make any difference how old you are or what you’ve been through in life. For the child of God life isn’t about self service. It’s about serving the Lord. That’s the daily goal. There is no **lifetime play day** or **earthly retirement** from that!

I came across this insight that was made 43 years ago:

It is a spiritual tragedy when God’s stewards feel free to lavish what has been entrusted to them on needless and even harmful luxuries, while the interests of God’s kingdom in many lands are declining for lack of means. (“Presbyterian Journal”, Dec. 17, 1975)

It has to be said! Forty-three years later the interests of God's kingdom have incredibly declined in this land.

## II. Moved By God's Love.

And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. (vv. 41-42) [A footnote in the ESV translation says of the coins, "...a Roman copper coin worth about 1/64 of a denarius (which was a day's wage for a laborer)" that is, the denarius.]

Usually, the pastors choose what we call "free texts" for Stewardship Sundays; that is, texts outside the appointed texts. I was a bit surprised when the sermon text I wanted to use is the appointed Gospel lesson for this Sunday. We've considered it here many, many times, but what it says is always stunning.

A widow. No spouse to help. No retirement benefits. No social security. No insurance policies. No investments. Possibly no family or close friends, or else the family and friends were just as poor.

It's that moment at the offering box that gets our attention. Jesus said, "For they (all the others) contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on." (v. 44) *All she had to live on.* She was putting money into the Temple which had been corrupted by its leaders. And Jesus did not stop her. God's love moved her to such sacrifice.

I'm sure we know how it works. Nowhere in Scripture does God love humans because of who they are and what they have accomplished. Not because they're celebrity, or because they discovered a cure, worked among lepers, composed great music and literature; were faithful in their work at home, the factory, the school, the business, the church, the whatever. It's what Scriptures clearly teach, and you know the text:

But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human might boast in the presence of God. (I Cor. 1:27-29)

## III. God Wanted and Wants Us.

As much as we have referred it over the years, I never tire of reading and considering our sermon text because the widow, in one way, is us. Nothing of importance to the world, but important to God. And that not because we earned His love but because He...well...because He loved and loves us. That's it!

Paul writes, "While we were sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom 5:8b) That says it all. It is the incomprehensible love of God in Christ that entered our lives and lifted us to the promise and comfort of forgiveness and eternal life.

I want to consider something else with you that we have considered before. It's from Psalm 73, a Psalm of Asaph. It's what the Holy Spirit had him write about those who mock, hate and reject God's love in Christ. It's this:

How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors! Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when you rouse yourself, you despise them as phantoms. (Ps. 73:19,20)

Think about it. Concerning those without a covering for sin, those who see no real need of God's love or think they're worthy of His love, Asaph says that such are "Swept away utterly by terrors!" Those terrors will never end. No vacation. No time off. No place to hide. Never. Forever. And once again, God will "despise them as phantoms." Phantoms! A phantom defined is "something...apparent to sense but with no substantial existence...an object of continual dread or abhorrence." God will see them as something that really doesn't exist. He will abhor them. No love. No hope. Never. Forever.

Christ saved us from that. Scriptures say, "The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. 6:23b) Beaten, bloodied, nailed to the Cross, our hell thrown on Him, Jesus did everything to make sure we would know and have God's love and the gift of everlasting life. God will never, ever despise us as phantoms; non-existent; abhorrent.

He loved and loves us and has taken us as His forever and ever. He owns us. The Scriptures teach this. Our Baptisms impress that upon us. The Supper strengthens us in the truth of that. He wants us! Our money and our lives! Because, you see, all of it is His in the first place.

So, **how are we using what has been given to us from Him to glorify and serve Him?**

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott

STEWARDSHIP 2

November 11, 2018

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## ***“Your Money And Your Life”***

- I. The Warped Condition of Human Reasoning.*
- II. Moved By God’s Love,*
- III. God Wanted and Wants Us.*

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