

“CONFRONTING WITH PARABLES”

Mark 12:41-44

2018 Lenten Series - His Last Week

March 4, 2018

INTRODUCTION:

On Monday of His final week,

**Jesus entered the Temple and symbolically “destroyed” it
by disrupting the selling of sacrificial animals
and the changing of money.**

It is now Tuesday.

**The Scribes and the Pharisees have had all they want of this Jesus
and they are plotting ways to get rid of Him.**

He is dangerous.

The people are beginning to listen to Him.

The people are beginning to question their authority.

Jesus knows this is not going to end well.

But he persists in His mission to preach the Good News.

CONTINUED CONFRONTATION:

Jesus spent most of Tuesday

**in direct conflict with the elders and priests,
the temple authorities and their associates.**

And He did so through a series of parables.

According to Mark,

**these parables were important enough to warrant
giving a lot of space to them in his gospel account.**

PARABLE OF THE WIKED TENNANTS:

The first parable was about wicked tenants.

According to the parable,

**a man prepared a very nice, productive vineyard
and leased it to some tenants
on the condition that they share the harvest.**

At harvest time, the landowner sent someone to collect his share.

The tenants bet him up badly and sent him away empty-handed.

**The landowner kept sending people to collect what was due him
and each time the tenants refused to share
and either beat or killed the one sent to collect.**

Finally, the landowner sent his son.

Unfortunately, he met with the same fate and was killed.

**Jesus asks: Don't you think the landowner will come and destroy
the tenants?**

**The scribes and Pharisees realized Jesus had aimed that to them
directly.**

A QUESTION OF TAXES:

Then some Pharisees and Herod supporters were sent to trap Jesus.

They asked Jesus if He thought people should pay their taxes.

Jesus used a Greek coin, a denarius, to answer them.

He pointed to the emperor and said:

Render to the emperor what is his; and to God what is God's.

The answer Jesus gave was simply:

“Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.”

It *seems* like such a simple answer -

- and almost evasive.

However, the answer challenges us to make a decision:

How much of what we have belongs to us? Or to Caesar?

How much belongs to God?

The answer, of course, is that it is all God's!

There's a classic old story

about a preacher who was driving down a country road
when he came upon a beautiful farm.

Having grown up in the country,

the preacher knew good farms from average farms
and this one was outstanding.

Oh, it wasn't a new farm,

but the house and buildings were well constructed
and in perfect repair and paint.

A garden around the house was filled with flowers and shrubs.

A fine row of trees lined each side of the white gravel drive.

The fields were beautifully tilled,

and a fine herd of fat dairy cattle

grazed knee-deep in the pasture.

The preacher stopped to Take a good look.

He noticed the farmer, on a tractor, hard at work,
heading to where the preacher stood.

The farmer stopped the tractor,
idled down the engine, and then shouted a friendly “hello!”

The preacher said to him,
“My good man, God has certainly blessed you
with a magnificent farm.”

The farmer paused, took off his cap
shifted in the tractor seat to look at his pride and joy.

He then looked at the preacher and he said,
“Yes, He has, and we’re grateful.
But you should have seen this place
when He had it all to Himself.”

What belongs to Caesar?
The implication is *nothing!*

Who does this Church belong to?
No one but God!

Who owns your house? Your car?
The state may say *you* have title to it -
- but, it belongs to God!

QUESTION ABOUT THE RESURRECTION:

When that didn’t work, they tried another tactic.

They asked questions about the resurrection.

I must admit, I could never answer this question!

A woman marries and is widowed seven times.
Who will be her husband in heaven?

**Jesus responds by saying something like:
You really don't understand God, do you?**

THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT:

**Then they questioned Jesus
about which commandment is the most important.**

**You know the answer: Love God and love your neighbor –
that's the summary of the whole law.**

**You see, if you love God – truly love God –
and truly love your neighbor,
you will fulfill the law.**

THE OFFENSIVE:

**When the questions ceased,
Jesus went on the offensive.
What He said next is extremely inflammatory!**

**As He is teaching in the temple courts, Jesus says this to the people:
“Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around
in flowing robes and be greeted in the marketplaces and have the
most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at
banquets. They devour widows' houses and for a show make
lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely.”
Mark 12:38-40**

**What a stinging indictment against the elders and priests of the
temple!**

Jesus knows what is in the heart of the elders and scribes -

- and now Jesus is inviting the people to *watch* these elders and scribes -

- watch with discerning eyes and hearts
- and see what they are *actually* doing.

Jesus says, in effect -

Watch them and see . . .

. . . are they serving *you* or serving *themselves*?

Are they following God?

Or following their own self-centered agendas?

The elders and scribes simply cannot stand up to *this* level of scrutiny!

If the people look *too* closely,

they are going to discover the awful truth -

- and there could be a rebellion
- and the elders and priests could lose control of the temple

More than ever,

the priests and elders realize that if the *don't* get rid of Jesus their control of the temple is going to be lost.

THE WIDOW'S OFFERING:

Then we come to one of the most powerful –
and misunderstood and misused parables of all:
the Parable of the Widow's Mite.

If you have ever attended a church
that is trying to encourage increased giving,
you have heard this passage preached.

The standard approach goes something like this:
This poor widow who have very little

trusted God enough to provide for her
that she was willing to give what little she had.

The message may even be slanted
so that giving generously is a sign of faith.

While all that might be true,
it certainly is not the message Jesus was trying to teach!

Jesus has just symbolically destroyed the Temple,
He has just confronted the Pharisees, Sadducees and scribes,
and I just don't think there is any way
that he would be encouraging folks
to give generously to the Temple!

That is totally incongruous with what has been going on.

So, what is the message Jesus is trying to teach the disciples . . . and us?

First,
consider why Jesus chose this place –
“He sat down opposite the treasury, and *began* observing
how the people were putting money into the treasury.”

I think that Jesus chose that place on purpose.
He was such a great teacher
and used common objects to drive home his lessons
that the choice of this place is no accident.

He pointed out to the disciples
there were rich folks giving large sums;
the amount is not significant to the lesson –

**these rich folks had money and could afford to give.
Perhaps they were expected to give.**

**But along comes a poor widow with very little to give.
Yet, without hesitation, she gives what she has.**

An act of faith? Certainly.

**But ask yourself this question:
of all those who were giving that day
who was giving out of love?**

The widow!

Is this last parable not a summation of all that came before?

Look at a quick summary of what Mark has recorded.

First, a parable about “wicked tenants.”

**A thinly veiled parable pointing out that the religious authorities
and all those living self-centered lives
have turned their back on God.**

**They refused to listen to the prophets,
in some cases, even killing them.**

**They are refusing to listen to the Son –
and will eventually kill Him, too.**

**Next, is a question about what belongs to Caesar
and what belongs to God.**

Doesn't everything come from God?

Isn't it to God we owe our ultimate loyalty?

**Next, there is a theological question
that has no purpose other than to trap Jesus.
And Jesus must wonder:
How much do you really know about God?**

**Then there is Jesus' warning:
You are being ruled by those who serve only themselves!
They understand nothing about our relationship with God.**

**And then Jesus points out an insignificant widow,
who simply walks up to the temple treasury
and gives a great offering –
not from her purse; but from her heart.**

**How could this possibly be anything other than a lesson in love?
This woman inherently knows – KNOWS – God loves her
and she loves God with all her heart, mind, strength
and down to the last few coins she has.**

**Is that faith?
Of course, it is!**

**But it is faith born out of love!
Knowing how much God loves her
and responding by loving God to the best of her ability.**

**Do you see the lesson Jesus was teaching His disciples?
Knowing the end of His life is near,
He has begun summarizing His teaching for them;
simplifying it down to the simplest form:
Love God – who loves you more than you can imagine.**

CONCLUSION:

**As He walks out of the temple Tuesday afternoon,
someone makes a comment on the size of the stones
which were used to build the temple.**

Jesus responds,

**“As massive as they are,
there will come a day when they will no longer form a temple.
Unless things change, the temple will be torn down.”**

They leave Jerusalem,

they cross the Kidron Valley -

- which is nothing more than a massive graveyard -**
- and climb the Mount of Olives.**

Jesus stops to rest,

**looks across the valley filled with graves
and sees the temple.**

Peter, James, John and Andrew are there with Him.

People Jesus loves and trusts -

- those who were closest to Him.**

And Jesus then shares with them things which are to come.

Jesus tells them there will be

- false messiahs and false prophets**
- wars and rumors of wars**
- earthquakes and famines**
- persecution by authorities**
- a “desolating sacrilege” where it should not be**
- a time of greater suffering than there has ever been**
- cosmic disorder: darkened sun, no light from the moon, stars
falling from the sky**
- the Son of Man coming on clouds with great power and glory**

**. . . that brings us to the conclusion of Tuesday.
And, to the end of this sermon.**

**During the week, as you think about this sermon,
what you will discover - I hope -**

- is incredible insight to the limitless love Jesus had for each of us**
- a love that sustained Him through the confrontation**
- a love that allowed Him to face the inevitable death that waited for Him**
- a love that would not give up**

**And then, in your prayer and meditation time this week -
ask yourself this:**

“How am I responding to that love?”