

How Will You Escape Judgment?

The Widows' Offering

Mark 12:38-44

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³⁸ And in his teaching he said, “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces ³⁹ and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, ⁴⁰ who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.”

⁴¹ And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. ⁴² And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. ⁴³ And he called his disciples to him and said to them, “Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. ⁴⁴ For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous, ³⁰ saying, ‘If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’ ³¹ Thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. ³² Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers. ³³ You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell? Matthew 23: 29-33

If you were asked - what is one proof or evidence of God's judgment on humanity, what would you say?

One evidence of God's judgment is our short life span or natural death. Some may deny there is no God but no one can deny there is no death.

When God banished Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden and from the tree of life, it was for this reason – they sinned and wanted autonomy from God.

Today, man still wants autonomy from God. And yet, man has not figured out why we die. Man can explain and give reasons for our slowdown but why should you die?

It wasn't meant for man to die. God meant for man to live in a relationship with him, in harmony with each other. But the first brother killed his sibling. Cain killed his brother Abel. Therefore, we inherited death from Adam, Eve and Cain.

That's the judgment of God.

However, there is a judgment that is far greater than physical death.

The author of Hebrews says “*it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment*” Hebrews 9:27

But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed. Romans 2:5

This judgment is God’s wrath that will be spent on those who are hard hearted, defiant, brazen, shameless, impenitent and unrepentant into an eternity without hope.

God would be perfectly just in sentencing every human being away from his presence into everlasting darkness and hell.

There is no escape from this future judgement unless God himself intervenes.

That is why we proclaim the good news week in and week out.

Why? God’s intervention is His Only Son Jesus Christ who came to redeem sinners.

God’s compassion and patience is great.

God desires for sinners to not die but to live.

God told the people of Israel in Ezekiel’s day, “*I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live*” Ezekiel 33:11

Live to love God with all that you have.

The scribes knew the Law of God. They were experts in teaching the law of God but their hearts were far from God.

So, Jesus begins his teaching with the warning “Beware!”.

I have two major observations and two implications in this passage.

Observation#1: Jesus warns of the dangers of pride:

Verses 38 through 40.

³⁸ And in his teaching he said, “*Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces* ³⁹ *and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts,* ⁴⁰ *who devour widows’ houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.*”

Jesus calls out the scribes for at least three acts of self-flattery. One – they desire to be honored by all. Second – they like to sit first and want a place of prominence. Third – they make long prayers just to be applauded for their external piety. Their true character is revealed by how they treat widows. They devour the houses of widows. Widows were pretty much helpless and defenseless in the first century. The husband was the sole provider and the poor widow had very little to live on after the husband passed. These scribes exploited their economic and social condition to make themselves rich.

The scribes were greedy and their piety was a show.

Mark's passage is a condensed version of what Mathew describes in chapter 23, which is a longer indictment of the scribes and Pharisees by Jesus.

- *“The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice”*. Matthew 23:2-3
- *“But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces”. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness.* Matthew 23:23

If we had to put a finger on the heart condition of the scribes, it was the sin of pride. Pride is the seat of all other sins and leads to hypocrisy and neglect. Puritan writer Jonathan Edwards writes rather very precisely about this sin.

- *“Pride is much more difficult to be discerned than any other corruption, because its nature very much consists in a person's having too high a thought of himself. No wonder that he who has too high a thought of himself, does not know it;*
- *Spiritual pride is very apt to suspect others; whereas a humble saint is most jealous of himself; he is so suspicious of nothing in the world as he is of his own heart.*
- *The spiritually proud person is apt to find fault with other saints, that they are low in grace; and to be much in observing how cold and dead they are; and being quick to discern and take notice of their deficiencies. But the eminently humble Christian has so much to do at home, and sees so much evil in his own heart, and is so concerned about it, that he is not apt to be very busy with other hearts; he complains most of himself, and complains of his own coldness and lowness in grace. He is apt to esteem others better than himself, and is ready to hope that there is nobody but what has more love and thankfulness to God than he, and cannot bear to think that others should bring forth no more fruit to God's honor than he”* - Jonathan Edwards

So, Jesus warns his disciples about the scribes. And he pronounces condemnation.

Observation#2: Jesus condemns hypocrisy:

What does Jesus say in verse 40? Does he say they will receive condemnation. No.

“They will receive the greater condemnation.” Mark 9:40

Matthew's Gospel is even more severe. Jesus says, *“how will you escape being sentenced to hell?”* Matthew 23:33

Jesus' pronouncement is rather terrifying.

Why does Jesus say the scribes and Pharisees will receive greater condemnation?

Answer: Because they teach and preach but do not practice.

James the brother of our Lord says in his letter - "*Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.*" James 3:1

APPLICATION: If pride is not constantly checked it will lead to disastrous consequences in a Christian's life. Pride exists to exalt only one – the self. Pride can be so subtle and is a self-consuming sin. Pride eats you from the inside and you may not even know it. Pride can destroy relationships. Pride can burn bridges. Pride can leave you miserable, sad, lonely and isolated. Nothing good comes from pride. Pride is an arch enemy of Christ-likeness.

What is the remedy? Starve your flesh. Don't feed it but fight your flesh. No true Christian will ever say I am done fighting my flesh. Your fight against your flesh will be there till the day you die but the more you grow in God's Word, the better you can mortify your flesh. Discipline yourself in prayer and scripture so you can put to death the deeds of the flesh.

So, Jesus condemns hypocrisy and in the next passage Jesus observes, illustrates and teaches from the giving of a poor widow.

Verses 41 through 44.

⁴¹ And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. ⁴² And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. ⁴³ And he called his disciples to him and said to them, "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. ⁴⁴ For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."

Notice, Jesus *observed, watched* or *examined* those who gave their money to the temple treasury. Rich people gave much. They did not give everything they had. They gave much. But a poor widow also gave. How much? Only two coins which make up a penny or a quadrans. A quadrans was 1/64 of a denarius. One denarius was a day's wage for a laborer. This poor widow did not have a lot. Matter of fact the two coins are all that she had. Verse 44 says, "all she had to live on". Another translation says what she had was her *life*. And yet she gave all of it.

Jesus was illustrating to his disciples that the scribes and the Pharisees would exploit the widows even it meant taking everything from them. This was greed and false religion on

display. No one should be imposed to give their life savings to feed the greed of others.

Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 2 Corinthians 9:7

And yet Jesus commends this widow for giving more than others.

Verse 43 “*this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box*”. How? She obviously did not put more than others in terms of monetary value. Yet Jesus commends her giving. The widow very likely believed she will be blessed by giving than taking.

⁴⁴ For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had..

Remember when the rich young ruler came to Jesus? Jesus told him to sell *all* that he have, give to poor and then come follow Jesus.

The principle is about putting God first not how much you give.

Implication#1: Give up in order to gain.

Consider some of these instructions from God’s Word:

1. Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered. Proverbs 11:25
2. Whoever has a bountiful eye will be blessed, for he shares his bread with the poor. Proverbs 22:9
3. In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘*It is more blessed to give than to receive.*’ Acts 20:35
4. We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, ² for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. ³ For *they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord.* 2 Corinthians 8: 1-3

The widow’s giving should direct us to the Lord Jesus Christ. What did Jesus give?

Implication#2: Look to Christ for life.

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. 2 Corinthians 8:9

Jesus, as the Son of God has the whole universe at his disposal. And yet he became poor. He gave his all so that you could be rich in faith.

For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. Mark 10:45

In conclusion, how will we escape judgment? By seeking Christ and his forgiveness. By turning from every proclivity that leads us to pride and hypocrisy. By not neglecting the gift of salvation.

How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? Hebrews 2:3

If you have never received the gift of salvation, consider what the Bible says:

“Enter not into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you”
Psalm 143:2

If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared. Psalm 130:3-4

“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.” Acts 2:38

----- Discipleship Questions-----

MESSAGE SUMMARY: How Will You Escape Judgment. Mark 12:38-44

HEAD: These questions help you examine the truth of God's Word.

1. What does Jesus warn his disciples against and why? What appears to be heart condition of the scribes and Pharisees?
2. HEART: These questions help you wrestle with what you believe.
 - How should you guard against pride? What will pride lead to? What does Jesus illustrate to his disciples in observing the giving of the poor widow?
 - What is God convicting you of and to believe in light of this message?

HANDS/HABITS: These questions help you bring the truth into your everyday life and develop behaviors that change your habits.

3. HANDS For personal reflection: What will you do guard yourself against "Phariseeism"?