

GIVING FROM THE HEART / Sunday, December 27, 2015

Unifying Topic: A GENEROUS GIFT

Lesson Text

I. Giving Like A Scribe (Matthew 23:2-12; Mark 12:38-40)

II. Giving Like A Widow (Mark 12:41-44)

The Main Thought: And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted. (Matthew 23:12, KJV).

Unifying Principle: Integral to the human condition is that deep-seated craving to be recognized and held in high esteem by others. Will the adulation of others bring confirmation of a person's real importance? While Jesus denounced the scribes' and Pharisees' obsession with receiving recognition, He affirmed the acts of selfless compassion and humility as exhibited by the poor widow, who gave all she had.

Lesson Aim: To differentiate between tithing versus giving and between giving selfishly versus selflessly.

Life Aim: To better understand giving as a Christian and to commit to better stewardship.

HISTORY:

The true nature of the religionists, the Scribes, and Pharisees is clearly seen as Christ opened up the hypocrisy of their lives and religion point by point. Christ warned against their religion—a religion which stands as a symbol of the false religions of the world. The great tragedy was that they were supposed to be the godly teachers and leaders, God's very own representatives and messengers to the people. Yet, they were so far removed from God that they were unable to recognize God's very own Son.

23:1 Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples. Jesus spoke to the multitude, and to His disciples, not to the religionists, not to the Pharisees and Scribes. There are at least four reasons why Christ warned the multitude and disciples at this point.

1. Everyone needs to know what is true and what is false in religion. Man-made religion always includes some truth and some error.
2. Everyone needs to have the hypocrisy and sin of religion exposed. When men add to or take away from God's revealed truth, it creates and causes hypocrisy and sin within religion.
3. Everyone needs to be warned against following the error of religion. If a person follows false religion he is doomed.
4. Everyone needs to have his false ideas about Christ corrected. The false teaching and attacks of the religionists had influenced the people.

There is always more hope for people to repent and change when brought to the light and their heart is touched.

LESSON:

Matthew 23:2-12;... Giving Like A Scribe

23:2 Saying The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat:— Jesus tells the multitude and disciples that the Scribes and Pharisees "*sit in Moses' seat*" (*seat of authority*). Moses was a great leader teaching and interpreting God's Law. The "Scribes" copied the Scriptures by hand. They were the teachers of the law. The Pharisees means "*separated one*" and were strict in keeping the law. So for the Scribes and Pharisees to "*sit in Moses' seat*", it represented the highest authority to instruct people in the Law. They were responsible for teaching and interpreting God's Word just as Moses had done. They were not to teach false religion. All teachers shall be held accountable for how they "*sit in Moses' seat*"; how they sit in their position as teachers and interpreters of God's Word. It is a terrible thing for a false teacher to "*sit in Moses' seat*." The most severe judgment awaits those who teach error.

23:3 All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. Whatever the Scribes and Pharisees told them to practice and observe, they were to do them. "*Observe*" means to obey the truth of what they say, in so far as it is God's Word. But, they were not to imitate their wrong actions or their wrong examples. The religious leaders would tell the people to obey these

rules, but they didn't do so themselves.

1. Jesus is condemning false religion and teachers, but not the truth.
2. Jesus is saying that teaching the truth does not mean that a person is acceptable to God. Being acceptable to God also depends on living the truth. He is acceptable because he walks in the truth day by day.
3. We must separate the office from the officer; the ministry from the minister, the church from the people, the truth from the teaching; the doctrine from the practice; the preaching and practice. *"Try the spirit whether they be of God."* Every man is human and every man comes short, but God's Word is perfect.

23:4 For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. Another translation: *Common English Bible*— "For they tie together heavy packs that are impossible to carry. They put them on the shoulders of others, but are unwilling to lift a finger to move them." *Message Bible*— "Instead of giving you God's Law as food and drink by which you can banquet on God, they package it in bundles of rules, loading you down like pack animals. They seem to take pleasure in watching you stagger under these loads, and wouldn't think of lifting a finger to help." There four heavy burdens that are laid upon the shoulders of men.

1. God's Word and law can be imposed by men upon men in such a strict and severe way that mercy is lacking.
2. Religion and men can add to God's Word through rules, regulations, rituals, observances, and traditions. Such tends to become more important than the truth.
3. Religion and men can deny and take away from God's Word, leaving men to stumble around searching for the truth within themselves and other imperfect and frail men.
4. Religion and men can exercise undue authority, lording it over people, insisting that tradition and ritual and other man-made burdens be kept.

Many are willing to impose the rules upon others, but not upon themselves. They will preach and teach the rules to others and bind them to keep the rules. The shoulders of others are weighed down ever so heavily, yet they will not lift their own fingers to carry the weight of the rule or restriction.

23:5 But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments,— Evidently all the works of the Scribes and Pharisees were just for show. They give a show. ¹All their prayers, alms deeds, and fastings, were all done in a public manner, that men might behold them, and they might have applause and glory from them. Their works was from a legalistic heart or a heart of obligation (duty), not from a free or cheerful heart or a heart of love. Whatever good they did; whatever they gave was for the people's applause.

1. They phylacteries (little leather type boxes) containing a piece of parchment with four passages of Scripture written on it and worn on their foreheads and arms. The Scriptures were Exo.13:1-10; 13:11; Deut.6:4-9; and Deut.11:13-21. They tied the boxes to the front of their heads. Most Jews wore those boxes at home or in the synagogue at the time of prayer. The great fault of the religionist was that they interpreted these passages literally and they enlarged the little leather boxes; made their scripture boxes wider to draw attention to themselves; to make them more noticeable as being religious. The true meaning was to show that we are to have the Word of God in our minds just as if we had them before our eyes, which they did not.

They wanted to be seen by men as they changed their appearance, dress, and clothing to draw attention to themselves.

2. They enlarged the borders of their garments. As to God's instructions (Numbers 15:38-39), on their garments, they put fringes on the border with a blue cord / ribbon to remind them of their heritage and to obey the Commandments of God, instead of following their own desires. This was from generation to generation. When a person noticed them, he was to be reminded to keep God's commandments. Jesus does not want anyone to dress to attract attention. The religionists did it to appear righteous. They didn't care about being holy, just looking holy in order to receive the people's admiration and praise.

23:6 And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues,— The "uppermost rooms" was the most honored place at the feasts or banquet table. The "chief seats" were the best front seats.

¹ <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/matthew/23-5.htm>
<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sunday-school.html>

3. They loved the positions of honor, special seats, and places of recognition. Can you see that today? Note what is condemned: not being in these positions and places, but it is the love of them; the prideful feeling of being in the place or position that's wrong.

23:7 And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi. As they walked in the market places they were greeted with men calling them Rabbi.

4. They loved the titles that honored and exalted them. The title "*Rabbi*" meant teacher or master. It carried with it the modern idea of "*Doctor*" "*Master*", or "*My Lord*." It was a title that took a man who was supposed to be God's messenger and said, "*Here he is, this is he*." It honored the man and not the Lord.

23:8 But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. ²The direction here is an express command to His disciples not to receive such a title of distinction. The reason which He gave was that He was Himself their Master and Teacher, They were brethren; equal in authority, and should neither covet nor receive a title which implied either an elevation of one above another, or which appeared to infringe on the absolute right of the Saviour to be their only Teacher and Master.

23:9 And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. This does not, of course, forbid us to apply or give recognition to the parent-child relationship. Jesus forbids any human figure to be worshipped in the place of God. God will not share His position of supreme authority with anyone else. No religious leader is to occupy the position or share the place of God the Father in our hearts. They are not the Creator of God's Word. We must not compromise the authority of God by projecting some of God's authority on to some human person. Religious leaders are only fellow servants of God. Therefore, no man is to be acknowledged as such, for God alone is to be proclaimed Father of heaven and earth.

23:10 Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ. The word "*masters*" in this since refer to teachers; instructors. ³Jesus' teaching is a warning against giving our own leaders too much authority and power. And, while we should respect our leaders and teachers who are worthy, we need to be wary that this respect does not become adulation. There is one Master and that is Christ.

23:11 But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. Greatness is measured by service, not earthly honor. Greatness is found in serving others, not in forcing others to serve us. Jesus came as a servant and this is what He taught His disciples.

23:12 And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted. If we exalt ourselves, God will humble us. But, "*if we humble ourselves, in due time God will exalt us*" (1Pt.5:6). Someone has to fill the position of leadership, but if a person pushes himself forward for the honor of the position and not for the purpose of serving, he is to be judged by God.

...Mark 12:38-40 Giving Like A Scribe

12:38 And he said unto them in his doctrine, Beware of the scribes, which love to go in long clothing, and love salutations in the marketplaces,— The Pharisees and Scribes had wrong motives. The Sadducees couldn't trap Jesus for they were ignorant of Scripture. The Scribes were condemned for dressing to draw attention to themselves. The long robe worn was the dress of the nobility, the rich, the well-known, the person of style in which they took delight in wearing. Jesus said "*Beware of those who love to go in long clothing*" (fine clothing). He condemned the person whose mind was on attracting attention on self, on appearance. A man's life consisted not in the things he has, but in the service he renders to others. They loved greeting the people in the marketplace. It was the center of traffic, the place where people are seen and can attract attention.

² <http://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Bible.show/sVerseID/23927/eVerseID/23927/RTD/barnes>

³ <http://newlife.id.au/christian-living/jesus-teaching-on-leadership-and-community-in-matthews-gospel/>

<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sunday-school.html>

12:39 And the chief seats in the synagogues, and the uppermost rooms at feasts:— Jesus says beware of the Scribes that loved the chief seats in the synagogues, and the uppermost rooms at feasts. Some loved the front seats The most honored sat at the right hand of the host, then, the next honored at his left hand, and so on. Some loved the positions of honor, special seats, and places of recognition.

12:40 Which devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers: these shall receive greater damnation. Jesus says beware of the Scribes that devour widows houses and pretend making long prayers for they shall receive the greater damnation (judgment).

1. The Scribes used their legal position to manage the wills and other legal business for the widows, and they cheated, devouring the widows property by skimming too much out of their estates.
2. Some Scribes used the guise of religion to steal from widows. There are some today—lawyers, religionists, preachers, and institutional, civic, and Christian leaders (all professing hypocrites) who court the attention and favor of people, especially widows for the purpose of securing their money. They seek large donations, endowments, trust funds, investments, and gifts to promote themselves and their institution. Widows in particular are exposed to those who seem to be so devoted to God.
3. Some used long prayers while others used short prayers to show their piety. There is the danger of praying publicly for attention.

Note, Jesus said the damnation of these shall be greater.

Mark 12:41-44 Giving Like A Widow

12:41 And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. Jesus comes into the Court of the Women and sat over by the treasury. The "*treasury*" was an area in which there were thirteen trumpet-shaped receptacles—narrow at the mouth and wide at the bottom; their treasury collection chests where the worshippers dropped their offerings. He sat down to get some relief and rest from the tension of the past hours. While resting He deliberately observed how people gave their money; discerning the motives of people giving their offerings, and how much was given. Some gave large contributions for Jesus could hear them clang against the sides as they slid down the funnel shaped trumpets.

12:42 And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. But none attracted Jesus' admiration until finally a poor widow came along. The word "*poor*" means pauper. The widow was poor, a pauper, destitute, and in deep poverty. She threw in two mites, which were the smallest of coins; coins of very little value—which make a farthing; $\frac{1}{4}$ of a penny.

12:43 And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury:— Jesus took what He saw and taught what true giving really is. He called His disciples to Him and used the great sacrifice that the widow made to teach a much needed lesson.

1. They all gave an offering to God: both the people who had, and the poor widow who did not have.
2. The ones who had plenty gave more money, much more than the widow.
3. But in God's eyes the widow gave more. Why? Because God measures what was kept, not what was given.
 - a. The widow had less remaining; the others still had much.
 - b. The widow had sacrificed more; the others had sacrificed less.

In proportion to what she had, the widow gave a large percent. The others gave a much smaller percent because after they had given they still had 85% or 90% or 95% to spend on themselves. This is the lesson Jesus was teaching. God counts what we have left, not what we give. He counts the amount of sacrifice, not the amount of money. The gift that matters is the gift that costs the giver to give; the sacrifice the giver had to make in order to give the gift. The greater the sacrifice, the more appreciative the recipient.

12:44 For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living. Real giving is sacrificial giving. Real giving is giving all a person has. The coins were all the widow

had, yet she gave them despite her own desperate need. What the others gave was not a sacrifice. It did not cost them nor hurt them. They still had plenty left, for they gave out of their abundance. But not the widow her gift cost her. It hurt to give, for she gave what she could not spare. She could have said what so many often feel:

- My gift doesn't matter. It's so little.
- I have so little. God will understand. He doesn't expect me to give it when I can't even buy food.

She sacrificed; she went without a meal or gave up something else so that she could give. Two more lessons we have to see:

1. We lack devotion and dedication in our commitment to God, whether commitment of life, time, gifts, or money.
2. We lack boldness in giving and using what we have for God.

SUMMARY:

Jesus exposes the true hostility and hypocrisy of the religious leaders of Israel. The Scribes and Pharisees ⁴when speaking from Moses' seat in the synagogues were speaking with authority. Unfortunately, they were binding things on others, they themselves were unwilling to observe. When they did their works, they did them to be seen by others. They loved to wear religious clothing that gave appearance of devotion, for they made broad phylacteries and their long fringes on their garment. They loved the places of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues. They loved when the people greeted them in the marketplaces; being called rabbi by others. Jesus tells the multitude and His disciples not to use religious titles like "*Rabbi*", "*Father*", or "*Teacher*." Rather than to be esteemed by such titles, they were to be humble servants. The greatest was to become a servant. Whoever wants to exalt himself shall be lowered, and whoever humbles himself, then shall be exalted (**Matt.23:2-12**).

Jesus taught the people in the Temple to beware of the Scribes who loved to wear the long clothing (robe) of the rich, greetings in the marketplace, the chief seats in the synagogues, and the uppermost rooms at the feasts; devouring widows houses, make long prayers for false show, for they shall receive greater judgment. Jesus sat down opposite the place where people put their gifts of money for the Temple. He watched the crowd as they put their money into the collecting boxes. Many rich people put in large amounts. A poor widow came and she put in two copper coins. They were worth a quarter of a penny. Jesus called his disciples to him. He said to them, *'What I am going to say to you is true. This poor widow has put more than all those who made gifts of money. They offered a lot, because they are rich. But she gave, although she is poor. She has put in everything that she had to live on'* (**Mk.12:38-44**).