





More Than the Others

Matthew 23:1-14

Mark 12:38-44

Luke 20:45-47; 21:1-4

Life of Jesus

Most studies of this story only focus on the widow and her gift to the temple treasury. But to put the story into context, it would be good to go back a few verses as Jesus is speaking all in the same sitting. The gospel of Matthew does not mention this particular widow, but the reader can tell from the context that it is the same event where Jesus is speaking.

Jesus is speaking to his disciples, but he is speaking with a much larger audience (Matthew 23:1; Luke 20:45). He is directing his words to his disciples, but the reader gets the impression that Jesus wants others to hear what he has to say.

Jesus begins by telling his disciples to beware of the scribes.

The scribes were a group of people who were very well studied in the Old Testament and were experts in Jewish law. They were the ones who wrote the scriptures on the scrolls. These were the learned teachers and authoritative leaders. They took care of legal matters; some of the scribes were also Pharisees, and the lawyers would have been scribes also. Overall, they were highly respected and esteemed by the Jewish people, and looked to for answers concerning the law. They were the voice of tradition; they were leaders in the temple and the community. They were thought to be very righteous.

They did not like Jesus; these were the ones who always tried to find fault with him. He threatened their way of life and turned everything that they spoke highly of upside down. They were among the very same people that sent him to the cross.

Jesus tells the disciples to beware of them because everything they do is because they want to be seen (Matthew 23:5).

Jesus said they “sit in Moses’ seat,” (Matthew 23:2-3). This means they held the authority that belonged to Moses. The scribes told all the people what to do; they told them which laws and feasts to observe. But Jesus said not to follow after their works, because they say it, but they themselves do not do them.

The scribes put heavy burdens on the people of all the rules and laws that the people must follow. But they themselves will not even lift a finger to help.

The scribes loved to wear the long robes that were symbols of status and authority. It let everyone know who they were and how important they were. They wanted to be seen in these clothes.

The scribes loved greetings in the marketplace; they loved to hear people call them Rabbi, and give them titles of respect. If people recognize them in the marketplace, and call on them, then everyone there will see them and know how important they are.

The scribes loved having the best seats in the synagogues. These were the seats at the front, and everyone would see them. They also loved the upper rooms in the feasts.

These rooms would be large open areas, with upper levels that could be seen from the floor. The scribes loved having these seats so that everyone there could look up and see them sitting in the upper rooms, and see how influential they were.

Jesus said they “devour widow’s houses.” The scribes would cheat the widows out of their houses. According to the law of Moses, no one was to mistreat or take advantage of a widow (Exodus 22:22). The tithes of the temple were supposed to take care of the Levites (the priests), the strangers, the fatherless, and the widows (Deuteronomy 26:12-13). The Jewish people were supposed to make sure that the widows were taken care of and they were to leave some of the harvest from the grapes, olives, and wheat in their fields for the widows (Deuteronomy 24:19-21).



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The scribes loved long prayers; they would pray loudly so everyone would hear them and see how holy they were.

These were very bold statements that Jesus made. Jesus said they were not righteous, they were proud, and they were hypocrites. **To the scribes, this was blasphemy.**

Jesus was always looking at the heart. People looked at the outward appearance and were intimidated by the scribes. But Jesus was not at all intimidated; he called them out on their motives.

Jesus was speaking in the temple when he said these things (Mark 12:35, 38). So it is almost certain that the scribes would have heard.

Jesus sat across from the treasury and was watching the people put money in the offering.

Basically, Jesus was sitting in the temple complex across from where people were giving their offerings. This would have been a part of the temple buildings but not inside the temple itself. Women were allowed in this outer court, but not inside the temple, and the content of the story lets us know that this is a place where women were allowed.

He was watching the people walk up to the treasury, and put in their money, and the rich people put in a lot of money.

They were not hiding how much they were putting in. Jesus was watching the rich men put their money in, and based on the teaching that Jesus was giving just before this, we can guess that the rich people made sure that everyone was able to see how much they gave. They wanted everyone to know and they wanted to be seen.

A certain poor widow came up to the treasury.

This lady would have been very poor. It must have been obvious how poor she was.

Discuss:

How would people have known she was poor?

Maybe they knew her? Maybe they knew she was a widow? Maybe she had lost her home?

The woman gave two small coins in the offering, worth almost nothing. These would have been coins with the least value.

What is the smallest, least valuable coin in your currency? This would have been like two of those. It was worth very little.

Jesus always looks at things differently than everyone else. His kingdom is an upside-down kingdom. It is usually the opposite of what everyone expects.

Jesus saw her put this money in, and he called his disciples. It's like he said, come here, I want to show you something.

He said, 'Truly I tell you, that this poor widow put more in than everyone who put money in the treasury.'

Everyone else put money in out of their abundance. She gave out of her poverty all that she had, all of her money for living.

Jesus saw their motives. The rich men had plenty of money, and possibly even got it by questionable tactics; Jesus had mentioned that they took advantage of the widows. They had plenty, and put a lot of money into the treasury. They did it with a show, making sure that everyone knew how much they gave.



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This story also ties in with the teachings of Jesus at the sermon on the mount:

We can summarize Matthew 6:1-4:

Do you do good works in public so that people will see you? If you do, your Father in heaven will not reward you.

When you give to the needy, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues (houses of worship) and on the streets. They do it so that people will praise them; they have received their reward. Some translations say to not make a big show of it.

When you give to the poor (or help a needy person) do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.

Some translations say, do it in such a way that even your closest friend will not know about it.

Let your giving be done in secret, in private. And your Father who sees what is done in secret will Himself reward you openly.

Jesus is making an illustration; he is showing you what the leaders of the day would do. It is not clear if the Pharisees actually sounded a trumpet when they gave to the poor, or if a trumpet was sounded when they put a large amount in the offering. Some scholars have thought that a trumpet may have been blown to call the needy to a place where the synagogue leaders would be giving alms, or money, to the poor. Other scholars think that Jesus was illustrating how they made a big show of how much they were giving.

Whether Jesus' words were literal or for illustration, if a big show is made of giving to others, it puts the attention on the person giving.

Jesus said that they received their reward, and that reward was that everyone would see what they had done and give them honor. The glory should go to God; not to the giver. When we do what Jesus says, if we give to the poor, but we do it secretly, and do not bring attention to ourselves or tell everyone what we did then God will see this, and HE will reward us. And the rewards that come from God are much greater than anything we could ever receive from other people.

Discuss:

We can look at this as something that the people in the Bible did. But people are people, and human nature does not change. There may be things in our society, life, or culture that are similar, but they just look different and show up a little differently.

The message is still the same.

We need to always give glory to God and not bring attention to ourselves. If we put God first, giving thanks to Him, and praising Him, it makes the temptation less to make it about us.

There was no fanfare when this widow put her money in the box. No one made a big deal about it. She might have been embarrassed as she put her two cents in and the others put in so much more. The people probably even looked at it as if it were nothing, and may have even scoffed at it. But there is a big difference between what people value, and what God values.

Jesus in the Story



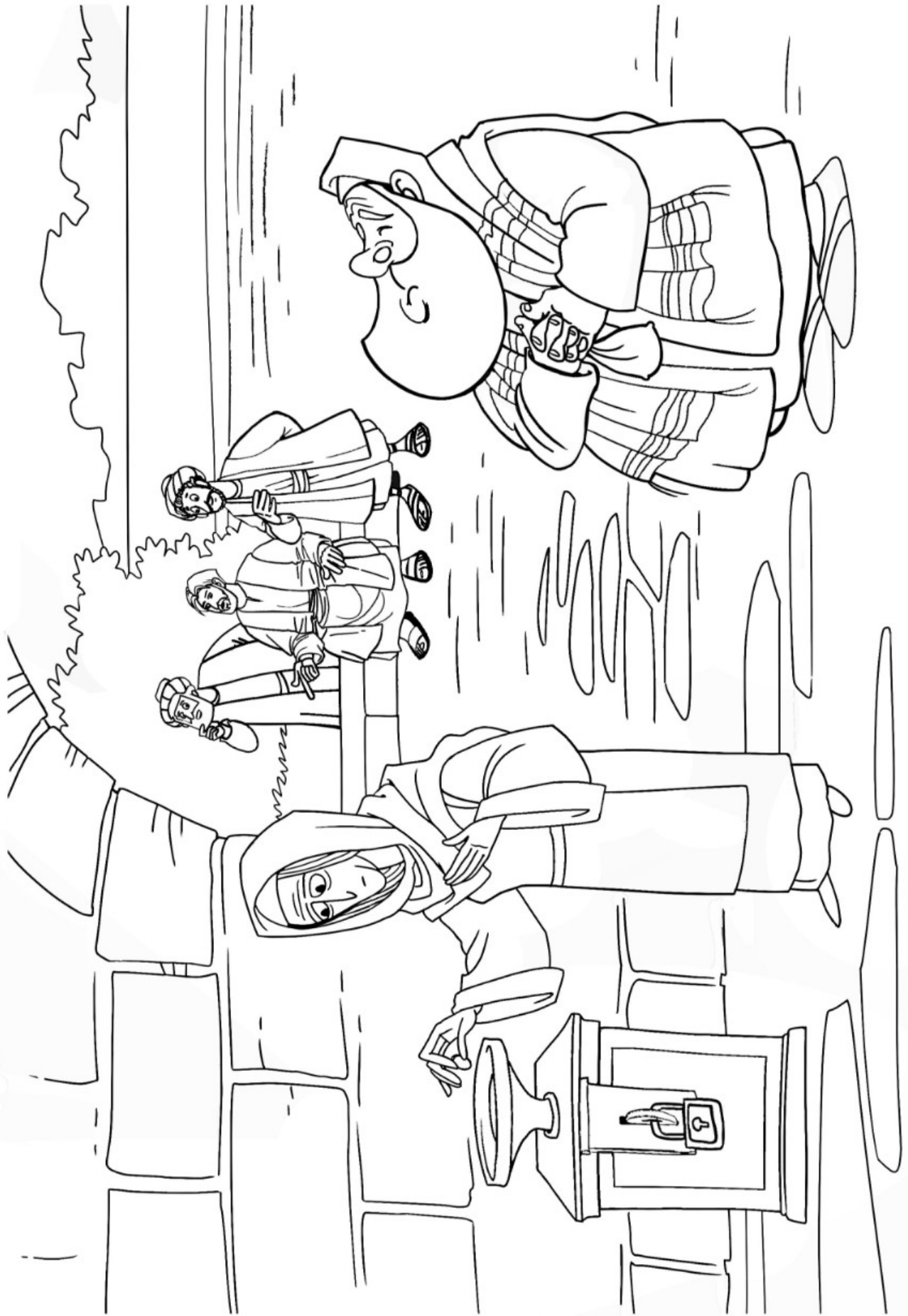
Jesus fulfilled the law of Moses. This means he obeyed every one of the 613 commandments in the Mosaic law.

The Pharisees and scribes were studied in the law. They were experts in the rules of the law. But they did not really understand the law. They thought they understood the law better than everyone, they even made many extra rules to help them keep the law. Jesus did not obey their extra laws, nor did he observe the law the same way they did. They followed it exactly, but obeyed it “legally” but not from their hearts.

Jesus was not about just obeying the rules; he wanted them to see the purpose behind the law.

God’s purpose came down to two things: love the Lord with all your heart, and love your neighbor as yourself.

All the Old Testament laws are based on these two commandments. If the reader truly understands the commandment, one can see that by following the commandment it only testifies to show love to God, or others, or both.



Lesson Questions & Memory Verses

21. Zacchaeus

1. If you seek the Lord your God, will you find him? (Deuteronomy 4:29; Jeremiah 29:13)
2. You will find him if you do what?
3. You will find him when you do what?
4. What does Psalm 105:3 say about the hearts of those who seek the Lord?

Jeremiah 29:13

And you will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart.

22. Forgiven Much

Read John 12:1-11

1. Why did the Jews come to this dinner?
2. What did Judas want to do with the perfume? Why?
3. Why did Jesus say the woman was doing this?
4. What did the priests want to do to Lazarus?
5. Why were they upset with Lazarus?

Luke 7:47

Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.

23. More Than the Others

1. Who was putting money in the treasury, or offering that day?
2. What did the rich people do?
3. How much did this lady put in the offering?
4. Jesus said the other people gave out of what?
5. Why was what she gave more valuable?

Luke 16:15

...You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.

24. How Will You Understand?

1. What happened to the seed that fell on the side of the road?
2. What happened to the seed that fell on the rocks?
3. What happened to the seed that fell on thorns?
4. What did Jesus say the birds were like?

Isaiah 55:11

So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.

