First Place Doesn't Always Win

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[0:00] This is the First Mustang Pulpit Podcast, a podcast of the weekly preaching and teaching at First Mustang.! Thank you for joining us. Singing Sunday, listen to them together, listen to them by yourself, with your family, so that when you come to church on Sunday, those songs are already in your heart and you're familiar with them.

And the new song we sang today is a great example. It's coming straight from the Psalms, and so we're learning the Bible as we're learning songs together. So I encourage you to take advantage of that.
Well, let's go to Mark 12. Mark 12. We are continuing in our study through this gospel, and specifically in Mark 12, this very lengthy day in the life of Jesus.
Just to remind you, this has been a day filled with confrontations. It starts in chapter 11 with the authority being questioned by the scribes and the chief priests and the elders.
And then in chapter 12, here come the Pharisees and the Herodians that try to trap Jesus and ask Him a question about, should we pay taxes? And then here come the Sadducees asking about what's going to happen in the resurrection.
[1:28] They don't believe in the resurrection. It's just a trick question in their mind. And then here comes a singular scribe and ask what is the most important commandment.

And it's just one after the other, after the other, after the other. Just a barrage of questions. Most of them purely with the motive trying to trick or trap Him.
And then Jesus moves in the temple and declares Himself to be the Messiah and begins to teach.
And the last passage we looked at was verses 38 to 40.
And with where we're going today, it is critically important that our minds are clear on verses 38 to 40. It says, They will receive the greater condemnation.
A couple of weeks ago, last time we were together here in Mark 12, we looked at this reality of the wolves. Jesus warns of the scribes, the wolves, that they have a certain motive.
[3:14] And their motive is pride, money, and power. It's always a tip-off if someone is a true shepherd or a wolf by if they are chasing money, pride, and power.

And one of the specific things they would do is they would dress in a certain way, these robes with the long tassels, so everybody would know exactly who they are.
So when they passed from the marketplace, people would stop and give them a special greeting.
They would be in the synagogue. They would sit up front, so everybody would look at them. They would have the special place of honor at all the feasts.
And verse 40, they would devour widows' houses. The way they would do that is they would go and ask for money and say, I would like to pray for you.
I need support to be able to do my role. And the more money you give me, the more you're on my mind, the more you support me, the more spiritual work I can do.
[4:27] And essentially, the more you pray for me, the more you give me, the more I can pray for you. The more I pray for you, the better it is for you. And so the more you give me, the more we both win.

If that sounds vaguely familiar to you from watching a lot of religious television, it's just the same thing.
What you see on television today is what was happening 2,000 years ago. And the result of it were these widows, the most vulnerable in the land, were devoured.
The ones they were supposed to be protecting, shepherding, were devoured. Which brings us to verses 41 to 44.

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Now I want to tell you, before I read these words to you, what I'm going to teach you today is a minority position.
[5:37] I'm not on an island by myself, by any means. But this is the minority position. And my hope is to show you as we walk through this, from the text, not from my mind, why I believe it means what it means and does not mean what you've likely heard before.

I also want to say that I don't, in any way, want to be disrespectful at all to someone who you have heard teach this with a different interpretation or application.
I want to show great respect and kindness to any other pastor that you've heard preach on this, or any other church where you've been, where this has been taught.
It's never my desire to be novel, just faithful to the text. And so it's important that you see today, from the text, with your own eyes, in the Bible, in your lap, why I believe what I do.
verse 41 says, he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box.
[7:09] Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny.

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.
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.
What do we do with this? Well, let me tell you the majority interpretation. Most of the time, when you hear this passage taught, it's also recorded in Luke, most of the time, this is taught as the ultimate example of the spirit of sacrifice.
There are good men, friends of mine, who would take it that way? That this is the standard of giving that is being upheld, and that she is the ultimate example that we should follow.
[8:37] The majority interpretation of this text is that Jesus sees this widow putting in all that she has, and is saying, this is the greatest example of giving, and that this is the example that we should follow.

We should all give generously in the same way that she did. That's the majority. I've heard this text taught and preached many times in my life, and that's the way it's almost always interpreted.
If a church is doing a sermon on giving, this is often the place that the preacher would go. If there is to be a lesson on generosity, this is often the text that would be used.
Here's a question, though. If that's right, shouldn't every one of us before we leave today give every cent we own to the Lord's work?
Why does nobody want to say yes? If that's right, then every preacher preaching that, when a family hears it, if a man were to come up to the preacher after the service and say, I heard this sermon, I want to obey the word of God, so we are giving the church every dime in our bank account, we are selling our house tomorrow, we are selling our cars tomorrow, and by the end of the week, you will have every dime we own, we will own nothing, not a penny to our name, we're giving it all to the Lord's work.
[10:39] Is that pastor gonna say, that's great? Of course not. But if this is the ultimate example of giving, and the standard of giving, how would it be that we could affirm that and then walk out of here and go put gas in our car or pay for lunch?

How could that be? Because if this is a standard, shouldn't we give every dime we have today? I think there's something else happening here.
By the way, the TV preachers who are encouraging people to give every dime they have and literally pray upon widows at home to do that, those TV preachers are not giving every dime they have away.
There's a disconnect. In this passage, the widow is not commended as our example, though she is shown to be held in higher esteem than the scribes.
We'll come back to that. But I don't think the point here is that we should give away every last penny. If that is the point, if I'm wrong, and the majority is right, then every one of us by the end of this week ought to be trying to figure out how we're going to pay our next water bill because we would have given everything away.
[12:29] The disciples aren't told to mimic her behavior, but it's the immediate context I think that's the key for us. This is why when you study the Bible, context is always critical.

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This is why it's dangerous to just open up a Bible for a lesson or a quiet time and with no idea of the surrounding context, just pick out a story when you don't know what's going on.
This is why we always study and read the Bible in context. This is also why I think it's the best practice for a church to preach through books of the Bible verse by verse because it keeps us in the context.
What was the last word from Jesus before the widow's offering? What's the verse right before verse 41?
Let's make sure we can all agree with this. What's the verse right before verse 41? We're struggling. What's the verse right before verse 41? 40.
[13:40] That's a good clue for us. Verse 40 specifically calls out scribes who devour widows.

Are you with me so far? We are calling out the leaders who are trying to devour widows.
Take advantage of widows. Destroy widows. Get rich on the backs of the widows. Take what little the widows would have and take from them until they have nothing left.
And you say well why would anyone fall for that? It's the end of verse 40. It's because they make up for it with the pretense of long prayers. They sound so spiritual doing it.
They sound so holy in their vocabulary. In other words the widows don't suspect a thing. And so they give and they give and they give and they give until the widow has been devoured.
[14:52] The last sentence of verse 40 they the scribes the ones who devour the widows will receive the greater condemnation.

That's the context. The scribes destroying the widows and Jesus says they will be judged.
I read for you earlier in our scripture reading from James 1 the New Testament specifically makes clear that worship that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this to look after orphans and widows in their distress.
Part of what the spiritual leaders are supposed to do is protect widows. That's why the deacons of our church have assigned to them widows in our congregation.
And they're to pray for them and they're to check on them and they're to befriend them and if a need arises they can be their first contact. Why do we do that? Because the Bible says God's people are to protect widows.
[16:10] It's the worship that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless. The Bible warns against taking advantage of the weak and the vulnerable.

But that's exactly what's going on in Mark 12. The scribes are devouring the widows. So I don't think this is primarily a lesson on sacrificial giving.
I'm not saying there's not anything we can learn about that but I don't think that's the primary takeaway. It just doesn't fit the context. I mean just look at this with me.
Chapter 12 verse 40 they will receive the greater condemnation judgments coming to the scribes. That's what's right before it. What comes next right after this?
It's chapter 13. As he came out of the temple one of the disciples said to him look teacher what wonderful stones what wonderful buildings and Jesus said to him do you see these great buildings?
[17:14] There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down. Will the temple be destroyed? The answer yes.

It happens in 70 AD. Chapter 12 verse 40 Jesus says the scribes will be judged. Chapter 13 verse 2 the temple itself will be judged.
Chapter 13 verses 3 to 13 describes the judgment the great tribulation that's coming to the world.
Chapter 13 14 and on describes the judgment that's coming when the antichrist takes his seat in the rebuilt temple at the end of the age.
So here's the context judgment for the scribes judgment for the temple judgment for the world judgment for the antichrist judgment for the Israelites I don't think we just slipped in the midst of that oh by the way make sure and don't forget to give your tithe this week.
Doesn't make any sense. Judgment judgment judgment give your money judgment judgment doesn't make any sense.
[18:32] But if you just take this passage by itself and don't look at the context if you take it as the standard of giving you can't give a little bit of money today.

You'd have to give it all. All. The context I think shows us something different.
I think this widow is a living picture of the very thing he's just warned against.

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scribes who think they're in first place on top of the leaderboard and he says you better beware of these wolves because they're in it for pride, they're in it for money, they're in it for power and they're so desperate to line their own pockets they'll even devour widows.
Jesus sits down and here comes a widow who has nothing.
[20:14] She's an example of a victim that's been devoured. He sat down opposite the treasury and he watched the people putting money into the offering boxes.

There were 13 trumpet shaped collection boxes shaped like a ram's horn. It was there in the court of women a place where everybody could go and each of these boxes had openings at the top, larger openings at the top where you could drop money into it.
Six of the 13 openings, collection boxes so to speak, were for people to give free will offerings. It was money that they would give that would support the expense of temple worship.
The rich people could give very large sums. We know because of what we've already studied that people would make exchanges of currency and what was often done is people would love to take their money they're going to give and exchange it and you'd get all this large collection of coins and you would drop it in because the more noise you made, the more attention that came to you and the more noise you made, the more people thought you were giving and so everybody's watching you give large sums of money.
This was a show. This would be like if you went to the bank, and I realize nobody under 30 goes to the bank, I go to the bank every Friday, that's what old men do, but if you went to the bank and you had a thousand dollars to deposit, I could take that thousand dollar check and I could hand it to the teller and say put this in my account.
[22:10] But suppose it's a busy crowded Friday and instead of handing her a thousand dollars to put in my checking account, suppose I said here's a thousand dollar check, I'd like you to give me all nickels for it.

And the teller, after a lengthy amount of time, gives me a thousand dollars worth of nickels. And then I go right over here to the side where the change machine is.
You ever put money in a change machine? No one under 20 has seen this change machine. You take this giant bucket and you just dump it in the change machine and it's the most enjoyable sound you ever heard.
It's just collecting the money and counting the money and the more you have, the louder it is and the more you have, the longer it takes. And I could have handed her a thousand dollars and walked away, but it's a crowded bank.
I want people to notice me. I want people to be impressed with me. So I say, give me a bunch of coins and then I go over and spend half an hour dumping all this money into the change machine while I just smile at people and say, you're right, I'm loaded.
[23:26] That's what people did. They would go to these collection boxes and take their coins and dump them in as loudly as they could.

bringing much attention to themselves so that people would be impressed by their wealth and not just their wealth but their generosity because the more money I put in, the more people are impressed.
The goal was for people to say, wow, look how wealthy he is. Wow, look how generous he is. Now I am sure some gave out of a pure heart.
Some gave with genuine motives, but most are giving as a show and as some kind of a bargain for God. It would be like today if instead of just dropping your offering into the wooden giving box, if you stood there and said, man, it's a bunch of zeros.
I'm putting a lot of money today. And then you drop it in the box. That's what's going on in their world.
[24:33] people. And these wealthy people think they're buying favor with God. Remember, in the preceding context, it was all about the scribes being in first place.

First place in the marketplace, first place in the synagogues, first place in the feasts. And here comes this widow.
Verse 42, a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins which make a penny. They'd have known she was a widow by how she was dressed. The word for poor indicates someone who is destitute in extreme poverty and in complete need of the generosity of other people to help her survive.

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The word here for the coin is a lepta. She's got two of them, lepton. It would be combined one sixty-fourth of a denarius, a daily wage.
Just a very thin, lightweight coin. She's putting in one sixty-fourth of a day's wage. Not much.
[25:59] Verse 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.

In other words, he says, the widow gave more than the wealthy people. Now, how can that be? She put in one sixty-fourth of a day's wage.
These other people are putting in large, loud amounts. Everybody here is fighting for first place, particularly the scribes whose motive is pride and power.
leader. If you watch a golf tournament, they have a leaderboard. They put everybody's name and their score. And if you're first, your name's on top of the leaderboard, and if you drop off a bogey or double bogey, your name drops down.
And you can look at that leaderboard and see who's in first place. In the eyes of the scribes, their names are on the top of the leaderboard. And you would have to look at the very last place of the leaderboard to find this widow.
[27:21] She's given a tiny amount. And Jesus has something that stuns them. He says, people who think they are number one are not number one.

the people who think they're on top are not on top. In fact, he says, this widow gave more than they did.
She gave everything she had. The wealthy people who thought they were in first place, who thought they were buying favor with God are actually far lower than they think.
Verse 44, 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.
love. God is exactly what he just warned against. Scribes who devour widows.
[28:51] I think what Jesus is emphasizing here is the foolishness of their system, of their belief, of thinking that money and power earns heaven.

It does not. They think God is impressed with all they are giving, and heaven is not impressed. I think in context, the way to understand the widow's offering is that it's not so much a commendation of her giving, as much as it's a condemnation of their actions.
And where would I get that? From the exact language of verse 40. They will receive the greater condemnation. This is a picture of the reality of what Jesus has just taught.
And he has just said, you scribes who are first in the market, first in the synagogue, first in the feast. You think you're on top of the leaderboard.
You are lower than the poorest among you. And you will receive the greater condemnation.
[30:17] So, what does this passage say for us? it either means you should give everything you have to the Lord's work today, or it means you should never think that your religious accomplishments earn you heaven.

God. It either means that you should give away everything you have to live on, and that is the standard, or it's telling us that people who look down on others to elevate themselves actually bring judgment on themselves.
it either means that complete and absolute poverty is the expectation for God's people, or that those in this life who think their earthly wealth and social status means everything will find out in judgment that the first shall be last, and the last shall be first.
And I think the context and I think the teaching of the New Testament makes it very clear what it means. Now I'm not supposing there's nothing we could say here about giving, I think there probably is, but if I were to teach this as the primary point is about how God's people should give, then every one of us in this room ought to walk out of here with nothing.
And I don't think that's what it's saying. So even if you disagree with me, I'll bet you won't give it all.
[32:34] nor do I want you to. Not in that sense. Willing to give anything? Yes. Willing to let go of any earthly thing that's an idol in your life?

Absolutely. Willing if God should bring it your way to let go of anything at all to follow Jesus? 100%. But I don't think this is the text saying here's how you ought to give. I think this is a text saying that when religious people prey upon the vulnerable, real lives get devoured and those people will face judgment.

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Don't think you're getting away with it. it's exactly what the context says. In the preceding passage, it's a word of condemnation.
In the passage coming next, it's a word of condemnation. In the passage after that, it's a word of condemnation.
[33:51] we're not slipping in a fundraiser sermon for the church. Now, the New Testament does have plenty to say about biblical giving.

And it's important. By no means am I saying that the Lord doesn't care about the worship through giving of His people.
The Bible's crystal clear on that. In fact, I want to just give you very briefly four words to write down. If we were to look at 2 Corinthians 8, 1-5, and 2 Corinthians 9, 6-12, let me give you four words that should describe our worship through giving.
Number one, it should be regular. We give regularly. Number two, it should be joyful.
Number three, it should be sacrificial. Number four, it should be worshipful.
[35:14] Regular, joyful, sacrificial, and worshipful. Now, I want to be honest and direct and biblical with you.

It would be impossible to be a faithful Christian and not give to the Lord's work. It would be impossible.
you could not read the New Testament, finish it and say, what does a Christian do, and not come away understanding God's people are to be faithful givers.
It is an act of worship. So, if you're sitting here today saying, oh my goodness, I was so worried about that passage, I thought I was going to feel guilty about giving, I'm so glad, I don't have to give anything.
Well, I'll tell you right now, we're not after any of your money. And I would far rather you get right with God and keep your money than when you're right with the Lord, as an act of worship, worship through giving.
[36:34] We're not in the business of fundraising. our goal is not to squeeze and manipulate and twist arms so much money we can get out of you. But I will say that if you are a believer, and if this is your church home, this is the place where you're fed, this is the place where you're blessed, this is your family, this is the place where you have committed to be great commission Christians, it's far, far more than just what you give.

But it should include that. Not giving because you feel guilty, not giving because you feel manipulated, not giving because if you give more to the church, we're promising you're going to get all these great things, not at all.
I'll be honest with you, if you give an offering today, your transmission may go out tomorrow. There's no guarantees. And if you give faithfully for five years in a row, you may still lose your job. Giving to the Lord's work is not about buying favor with God. It's about a heart of worship. Were the scribes in Mark 12 religious men?
Absolutely. Was their religion acceptable to God? Absolutely not.
[38:18] How do we know? James 1.27. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this. Look after orphans and widows in their distress and keep oneself unpolluted from the world.

On the authority of God's word, I can tell you the scribes were highly religious and their religion was worthless. So you can give offerings to the church and if it's given with the wrong heart and the wrong motive, It's not worship.
But if money is such an idol to you that you say, I'll show up to church and listen, I'll take notes in the sermon, I'll go to Sunday school, I'll sing in the choir, I'll teach Sunday school, I will be a greeter, I'll go write cards to people, I'll go to evangelism, but you're not getting any money from me because I love my money.
Just understand, that's idolatry. And that's cancer for your soul. So the Bible says God's people should be givers and our giving should be regular, joyful, sacrificial, and worshipful.
I will unashamedly, unapologetically tell you that God's people should be worshiping through giving as a part of our joy as God's people.
[40:05] And I'll tell you honestly, heart to heart, pastor, and friend to friend, that if you're not faithful in giving, not only are you missing out on joy, you are missing out on what your responsibility is.

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But, your heart matters most. To just give money and not love Jesus is of no value to you.
And today, if you've come prepared to give a financial offering and your heart is a mess and you're not walking with Jesus and you don't love his word, here's what I would honestly prefer you do.
You keep that offering. Keep it. If it's in your wallet, if it's in your purse, if it's in your Bible, and you're planning to drop in a giving box at the end of the service, if your life is filled with sin, if you're not walking with the Lord, I would far rather you keep that money.
Don't even think about giving it as an offering. You keep it. You go home. You get right with God. You repent. Confess your sin. Then bring it back.
[41:18] And be an act of worship. Our church is not in the business of fundraising. We're not just trying to collect dollars from whoever we can collect them from.

It's about worship. It's about loving Jesus. It's about loving what God is doing in the neighborhoods and the nations.
God is and if your heart's not right with God, I would far rather you keep your offering and go home and get right with God and then come and worship through giving.
God will protect us. God will sustain us. Your heart is far more valuable than your check. God will take you back.
take you So, I'm not asking you to go put every dime you have in the offering box today. And all God's people said, because what we want to be are people who are faithful to understand what does Jesus mean when he says this.
[42:46] And what he clearly says is that religious leaders who take advantage of the needy, you may get rich in this life and you will stand before God and have nothing.

And this is a reminder to those who are the shepherds of God's people that we don't build ministries and churches on the backs of the vulnerable by taking advantage of them.
We are to protect people among us. And this is a reminder to us that accounts are not settled today. They will be settled on that day. And somewhere among us is a 16-year-old who has a part-time job who's just learning out learning about taxes and trying to figure out why is it I work so hard for so little pay and I get to bring home even less of it.
and on that small check you say I'm going to give joyfully and sacrificially with a worshipful heart because I love Jesus.
[44:42] and if that's you don't you dare look around and think your offering is inconsequential because other people have so much more than you.

That's not the way it works. it's about your heart it's about your faith it's about your love it's about your worship.
If the church caters to the wealthy all they've become is worldly. you don't buy your way into leadership.
You don't buy your way into heaven. We are sinners saved by God's grace bringing nothing to our salvation except the sin which made salvation necessary.
by God's grace he saves us and he transforms us and he gives us a new heart.
[46:01] A heart that loves him a heart that loves his people and a heart that can't help but worship in word in deed in thought and yes in giving but no rich man who devoured widows earned one thing from God except here's the word Jesus used condemnation which is what every one of us would have waiting on us if not for the grace of Jesus Christ so if you're not a believer today keep your money don't put a dollar in the giving box we don't want your money we want you to know

Jesus we want your soul to be saved and our call to you is not to give it's to repent and let the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ change your soul forever and when he does and you're walking in fellowship with him you won't need to be guilted into giving your heart will say I choose to worship the Lord in every way that I can the danger when unconverted people give offerings is they leave assuming they must be okay and they substitute generosity for conversion if you're not a believer keep your money don't give us a dime but I do urge you to repent to call upon the name of the Lord and this day be saved lest you like the scribes stand before the Lord in condemnation you can't buy your way out of sin but Jesus
Christ paid the price that all who would call upon his name shall be saved Lord thank you for your word today I pray it's an encouragement I pray it's helpful I pray it's convicting I pray we would carefully consider your word and seek to walk in obedience to it it's in Christ's name amen just one second before you go if you're a guest of ours if you would drop the connection card in the offering

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box we would love to be able to pray for you by name and serve you that way also tonight five o'clock our last evening service of the school year we'll do our ordination for our six new deacons take the Lord's supper together love to invite you to come back and join us at five o'clock love you church God bless you you're dismissed with me in the love you you you you you you you you Thank you.

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