

Women Jesus Honored

Preached: 5/9/2021, Germantown;

Mothers' Day

Scripture

Mark 12:38-44

Message

Women Jesus Honored

As we become familiar with the teachings and practices of Jesus through the Gospels, we see that the life that Jesus was calling His followers to was an Upside Down life. He talked about the

- Last Being First
- The Greatest will be the servant of all
- The Beatitudes – Blessed are the poor in spirit; those who mourn, hunger and thirst

Jesus in His teachings and practices did not follow the normal and expected practices of His day. One of the ways that is most evident is Jesus' treatment of women. Jesus welcomed women into the company of His followers. Throughout His ministry, Jesus honored women. Some examples:

- He honored His mother, Mary
- He interacted with the Samaritan woman at the well of Sychar
- Women came to Him for healing – He did not turn them away; He commended them for their faith
- The Syrophenician (foreigner) woman who brought her daughter to Jesus for healing
- Mary and Martha
- Mary Magdalene – delivered from 7 demons
- The Widow of Nain – raised her son

And Jesus used women as illustrations in his teaching – Persistent Widow, Parable of the lost coin.

Regrettably, the Church through the ages has not always followed Jesus' example of honoring and respecting women.

In the passage that I read today, once again we see Jesus honoring a woman for her generosity. His commendation of her is most unexpected and ironic.

This story takes place at the end of Jesus' earthly ministry. The story of this widow becomes even more dramatic when we see where it is positioned in the narrative. He has spent time over several days teaching in the Jerusalem Temple. In this chapter Jesus is engaged in debate with the religious leaders of the Jewish people. The religious leaders included priests, teachers of the law, Pharisees and Sadducees. These leaders have opposed Jesus' throughout His ministry. He has attracted many followers and has been growing in popularity. His popularity has become a threat to the influence of the leaders over the common people. They are losing their hold over the people. And the religious leaders fear that the unrest that is being caused by Jesus' popularity will undermine the "peace" that they enjoyed under the Roman rule. So they have been looking for a way to get rid of Jesus. Jesus is aware of their feelings about him. Chapter 12 begins with Jesus telling a parable about some tenant farmers who lived on land where there was a winepress. At harvest time, the owner of the land sent some servants to collect some of the fruit of the harvest. The tenant farmers beat the servant and sent him away empty handed. After several more unsuccessful attempts to collect the owner decided to send his own son to collect the fruit. The tenant farmers attacked and killed the son. The religious leaders realized that Jesus had told this parable as a rebuke of the. So they began to debate with Jesus trying to trip him up in what he said, so they would have reason to arrest him. But they could not catch him.

Many of the common people who were attracted to Jesus believed that the religious leaders were knowledgeable of the Scriptures and were very spiritual. But Jesus saw through their deceit and exposed their hypocrisy. Jesus warns His followers not to be swayed by their façade. ***"Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts....and for a pretense make long prayers."*** (vs. 38-40). These men would have you believe that they were God's favored ones. But Jesus points out that it is just a show. How does Jesus know? What is the basis for His judgment of them. ***"they devour widows'***

houses....” According to Jewish tradition, the teachers of the law were not permitted to accept payment for their work as teachers. However, William Barclay in his commentary observes that these charlatan teachers would teach their students that **“there was no higher duty and privilege than to support a rabbi”** They would persuade the most vulnerable members of the community – widows – to give up their resources to support them. Sadly we see this same practice of deceit and manipulation by “evangelists and preachers” too often today. Jesus makes it clear that mistreating the poor, taking advantage of the weak and vulnerable is not consistent with the life of one who is a servant of God. There are probably some principles that we could take out of this statement and apply it in our country today.

It is at this point that Jesus honors a widow, whom the hypocritical teachers of the law have mistreated. I don't think it is coincidence that this story follows these verses. **“Here is what some people think makes one “spiritual”, but let me show you someone who is sincere in her desire to honor God.”** Jesus makes his way to the court of the women in the Temple where the “Offering boxes” were located. Jesus sat down and watched as people paraded past the offering boxes dropping their contributions, their tithes into the receptacles. There were some who made quite a show of their giving. They would drop their huge gifts, clanging into the containers in order to draw attention to their generosity. But Jesus observes a poor widow walking by and she drops two small coins into the box. (See the Coins). Jesus then calls his disciples to Him and tells them some surprising observations: **“This poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box.”** Now to the disciples and to us, it does not appear the way Jesus said. Others were dropping in bags of coins and gold. This woman puts in 2 small coins, each worth less than a penny. How can that be more valuable? **“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.”**

So the story is filled with contrasts and irony. The characters in the story include religious leaders who gained wealth by taking advantage of poor widows. And a poor widow – maybe even one of those who had been taken advantage of – choosing to honor God by giving all she had.

There are several lessons for us in this story.

- Spirituality is demonstrated by our treatment of others, especially those who are weak and vulnerable, and not by our “religious behavior”
- Giving to draw attention to ourselves does not honor God. It only honors ourselves
- Giving that honors God is sacrificial – giving out of our poverty.
- Giving that honors God is risky – giving our all.

An unnamed, poor woman who from all appearances has little to offer to the world. Jesus notices her heart and honors her.