

Jesus Observing People Going To Church.

Text: Mark 12:41-44

Suggested Hymns:

504, 793, 507, 362, 619

- 1) Jesus Expects To See People Worshipping God In The Temple
- 2) If Our Heart Is Not Right,
Nothing In Our Worship Will Please Jesus
- 3) If Our Heart Is Right, Then Our Whole Life
Will Be An Unbroken Act Of Worship

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Mark 12:41-44, ⁴¹ *Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many who were rich put in much.* ⁴² *Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans.*

⁴³ *So He called His disciples to Himself and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; ⁴⁴ for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood."* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Our text presents a scene from the last busy week of our Saviour's life. This week was spent in Jerusalem, where the Saviour rounded out His full life, warning and exhorting and trying to bring the people to an understanding of the spiritual nature of His Kingdom.

Tired and weary with the wrangling and bickering of the leaders, Jesus finally, on the third day of Holy Week, sat down opposite the treasury in the Temple. There He observed the worshipers as they came and went.

This serves as the topic for our sermon today. *Jesus in the Temple Observing People as They Worship God.* May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Jesus In The Temple Observing People As They Worship God Jesus Expects To See People Worshipping God In The Temple

Jesus takes it for granted that people will come to the Temple to worship. That was the right thing for them to do. That was the right place to worship God.

However, it was not the only place where God could be worshiped. After all, the place does not have a great deal to do with the act of worship. Remember that the woman at Jacob's Well once put the question to Jesus where God ought to be worshiped, at "this mountain" or in Jerusalem.¹ You will remember how Jesus emphasised not the where, but the how of worship.

Yet the Temple was the place where God wants to be worshiped. God Himself had so ordained it. Indeed, God had fixed the ritual according to which He would be worshiped. The sacrifices, the hour of prayer, the weekly Sabbath, the great feast-days, all of these things were not a matter of choice, but were fixed by divine command. God wants to be worshiped.

God wants to be worshiped today. And while it is true that today God does not insist upon a certain ritual according to which our worship must shape itself, yet there are certain basic facts that are fixed for the worship of God even today.

God wants to be worshiped in spirit and in truth.² The great central facts of divine revelation must be the pivotal points of our worship. God has revealed Himself as our Creator, as our Redeemer, and as our Sanctifier. Our worship must consist in this, that we meditate upon these great facts, including the Law and the Gospel, and that we bring to Him the sacrifices of a grateful life because of the blessings brought into our lives through the revelation of God's love.

And so, follow the example of the ancient Church, the children of God to this day come together in the Lord's temple for the study of God's holy revelation, for prayer, for praise, for the celebration of the feast in which our blessed Redeemer gives to us the pledge of His dying love, His own body and His most precious blood.

God has ordained this worship not because He is in need of it, but because we cannot live without it. We must continually be brought into contact with the divine lest we degenerate into people behaving like wild animals.

People who never worship God will lose the appreciation and the understanding of the finer and nobler things of the soul. People who do not worship God will gradually degenerate into worshipers of the idol which Jesus

calls Mammon, the god of this world. Above all we must worship God because we cannot come to faith in our Saviour Jesus and cannot be preserved in it without hearing the Gospel.³

So let us make sure that we again take to heart this fact: Jesus is sitting in the Temple in the house of God, observing people as they come to worship God. Let us make very sure that we, too, are among those who come to the temple to worship God.

2. Jesus In The Temple Observing People As They Worship God If Our Heart Is Not Right, Nothing In Our Worship Will Please Jesus

If our heart is not right, nothing in our worship will please God.

The outward act of worship does not mean a thing, if our heart is not right with God. We read in Matthew 15:8, ⁸ *‘These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me.*

One of the acts of worship in the ancient Church consisted in bringing of sacrifices according to the ritual as fixed by God. These sacrifices consisted not only in all sorts of animals, but also in the first-fruits of the field, in the paying of the Temple taxes, and in the gifts brought for the support of the poor.

There were a number of receptacles in the Temple into which the money sacrifices were deposited. We find Jesus sitting opposite the treasury, observing the people as they entered the Temple to worship God with their offerings.

Jesus sees that many people give much. Just what that meant may be inferred from the fact that this portion of the worship had degenerated into such a show that a law had to be enacted forbidding gifts to the Temple of more than a certain proportion of one’s possessions.

Jesus found fault with the people who gave much, not because they gave much, but because there was something wrong in their attitude of mind. Their heart was wrong with God. It was works righteousness.

Jesus does not find fault with these people because they worshiped God with their substance. It was proper and God-pleasing for them to do that. It is not a New Testament idea, much less a new-fangled notion that Christians give of their substance in their act of worship.

Somehow or other from the very beginning of time we find people bringing sacrifices. Cain and Abel already did that. Throughout the history of man, wherever people worshipped God, they worshipped Him also with their gifts.

It is not as though God is in need of anything that we may give Him. The purpose of our offerings is not this, that we give something to God. In the strict sense of the word we cannot give anything to God because everything belongs to God by the right of creation.

The purpose of our offerings is to remind us of this fact. In relation to one another we may speak of ‘mine and yours,’ but in relation to God we can speak only of ‘Yours.’ Jesus has spoken so many parables in which He emphasises this fact. We are stewards, never owners, in our relation to God. We are so apt to forget that. We are so apt to forget our dependence upon God for everything.

We all know that, unless the hand of God is open through nature, we can harvest nothing. We all know that, when nature goes on a wild rampage and rivers overflow their banks, or when the dust-storms arise, it is just too bad for puny little man. Nature will ruthlessly destroy him. And so in theory we acknowledge our dependence upon God.

But we are so apt to forget that in a practical way. It is necessary for our sakes that we worship God with the offerings of our hands. We need to remind ourselves of the fact that we are God’s debtors.

When the idea of grateful appreciation of the manifold blessings of God, and the thought of our dependence upon God are missing, even the richest gifts which we may lay upon God’s altar lose their value.

That was the trouble with many of those who put much into the treasury. There was no soul, no heart, no love for God, in their offering. It was just cold cash and nothing more, so icy that one shudders at the very thought.

**3. Jesus In The Temple Observing People As They Worship God
If Our Heart Is Right,
Then Our Whole Life Will Be An Unbroken Act Of Worship**

These were Jesus’ last moments in the temple. We may think it strange that He should spend them sitting in the court, where the offerings were deposited into

13 trumpet-shaped receptacles. Jesus, the Son of God, was reading the hearts of the worshipers.

What Jesus wanted His disciples and us to note is that our gifts are acceptable only if they come from hearts filled with love and trust. That was true of this widow in a very special way.

That she was a widow makes this final episode in the temple dramatic and stirring. Jesus had just spoken to the teachers of the law, who “*devour widows’ houses*.”⁴ Were some of these among the rich who gave much? We are not told.

What the woman gave, of course, was very little in comparison with what the rich gave. She gave *two mites, which make a quadrans*, a Roman coin of the day. We have no equivalent in our currency.

It amounted to one sixty-fourth of a *denarius*, the daily wage of a labourer in those days.⁵ Since labourers then did not earn as much as they do today, her offering was indeed a tiny amount.

But the widow’s gift was not tiny in the eyes of Christ. Calling together His disciples — they had a lesson to learn, even as we do — He told them that this widow had put in more than all the others. He knew this not because He had asked her, but because He, as the Son of God, could look into her heart. Jesus knows vastly more about us and all others than we know about ourselves.

Why did Jesus say that her gift was “*more than all those who have given to the treasury?*” Unlike the rich, who had more than enough left over, she gave all she had. This was an act of worship, love, faith, and absolute trust. Finally, that is what it means to be a disciple.

The Lord measures our gifts by the spirit in which they are given. He does not with these words ask us to empty our bank accounts, but he invites us to give Him ourselves. Then our gifts to His treasury will also be liberal, and our lives will become lives of true stewardship.

So as we come to worship God with the offerings of our hands, let us make sure that our heart is right with God, or else nothing that we may do will please Him. If our heart is right with God, our whole life will be an unbroken act of worship.

Jesus saw a widow giving two mites. Those were coins of such small value that we have nothing at all to compare with them. Yet Jesus said that she had given more than all the others. Moreover, not the way accountants reckon. Two mites were probably the least that was given, unless some one put in only one mite.

But there was something in those two mites that was missing in many of the other gifts. There was a grateful heart, an appreciative soul; there was real religion in those two mites.

Jesus said that she “*put in all that she had, her whole livelihood.*” Now, there was no law which demanded that. There was no compulsion about that. She just gave out of the fullness of her heart. She gave because she could not help but give.

That was the spirit of the entire devotion. She worshiped God because she just could not do otherwise. She sang her hymns of praise and adoration to God because she just could not help doing it. She came to the Temple because she could not stay away. And so her whole life was motivated by her devotion to God.

My friends, that is real religion. That is real worship. And, truly, why should we not worship God in just this spirit? To the soul which has been conditioned by the grace of God there can be nothing more beautiful than to get away from the foul air of the every-day routine and be refreshed in the sunshine of God's love, *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*⁶

Likewise we read in Romans 5:8, ⁸ *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

There is nothing more uplifting than to get away from the sordid things of everyday life into the rare atmosphere of the tender kindness of a loving Saviour. To the soul which has given itself to God there can be nothing more beautiful than to sing hymns of praise and bring sacrifices of devotion to Him who loved us and gave Himself for us.

May God, fill our hearts with devotion and joy as we are gathered here this day to worship Him. May He give us a new heart, so that our worship may be acceptable in His sight. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ John 4:21

² John 4:24

³ Rom 10:17

⁴ Mark 12:40

⁵ The People's Bible: Mark, page 178

⁶ John 3:16