

The story takes place in Jerusalem. Mark previously told us that Jesus was met by the teachers of the Law, who asked him many different questions as if he were being tested. They asked about his authority in teaching, ministry of healing, and knowledge of the Torah.

Earlier in verse 28, a scribe came and asked Jesus to name the greatest commandment of them all. In verse 29, Jesus recites the Shema, the well-known verse of the Torah that anyone of Israel learns to recite from their youth and carry in their hearts. “The most important one,” answers Jesus, “is this, ‘Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than this. Impressed by Jesus's answer, the examiner responded, “Well said, teacher,” “You are right in saying that God is one, and there is no other but him. Love him with all your heart, understanding, and strength, and loving your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

This is the background story of the story Raymond read for us this morning. And we can say that there are two different stories, they are somewhat related. They are then related to the Shema that Jesus recited.

First, Mark tells us that Jesus warns people against those teachers of the law who exercise power and control over people.

As we know, the people of Jesus's time lived under a two-tiered power system: Roman colonials and Jewish leaders. The Romans controlled the region through many appointed governors, each with an army to support them. The Jewish leaders, including high priests and other religious authorities, like scribes and Pharisees, controlled people's lives, behavior, and civility under customary and religious law. The two were supposed to work together to keep Israel calm and peaceful.

The scribes, who studied the law of Moses and claimed to know the ways of the Torah, decided what was acceptable according to Jewish Law. They even drafted legal documents and contracts regarding loans, inheritances, mortgages, sales, and divorces. They became important, wealthy, and influential among the people.

There was some corruption in these practices, which undermined the rights of the poor and marginalized and the widows and orphans. This is why Jesus speaks strongly against them in verse 38: “Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes, be greeted in the marketplaces, and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. They devour widow's houses and, for a show, make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely.

Firstly, Wow, Powerful words... if Jesus was trying to gain enemies out of the religious authorities in his time, this ought to do it. He does not seem afraid because he does this right in the middle of the temple, surrounded by them all.

Of course, Jesus speaks to only some of the scribes and Pharisees. They were also those with good and pure intentions, like the one Jesus conversed with previously, to whom Jesus said in verse 34, “ You are not far from the Kingdom of God.”

But some have lost their way, abused their power and influence, and had less pure and true intentions. We sense the anger in Jesus' voice, from what Jesus speaks about in verse 40, where he says they devour widow's houses, which sounds a more severe offense than any, for as the teachers of the law, they are violating the very principle which they claim to have the authority over, that helping the widows, aliens, or orphans are in the traditional practices of good deeds called mitzvah which they must do as the ones who are completely devoted to God.

Then, while sitting and watching across the courtyard in the temple opposite the offering box, Marks tells us that Jesus saw people making offerings at the temple. This occurred in “the women's courtyard,” the only place women were allowed in those days in the temple. The box was one of the thirteen trumpet-shaped boxes that no one could remove what they put in because of its shape. They say it is usually the money left over from burnt

and sin offerings to be placed there. Therefore, all those who put money there that Jesus saw were offered the leftover money they had, while the poor widow gave everything she had to live on in the only place where she was allowed.

Jesus praised her over other rich people who obviously gave much more than she ever could, saying, “I tell you this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others.”

Jesus sees the intention behind giving this poor widow, which is her complete devotion and her sincere and genuine heart.

Mark highlights this in the use of the words. When we examine the words used in verse, we find that the verb used is *Para Bellein* in Greek meaning throw around, and said, the many rich people is ‘throw’ their money into the offering box, In contrast, the poor widow *Kathidzo*, meaning placed, set aside, put gently next to, saying the poor widow placed her two coins in the offering box convey, the gentle and sincere attitude.

In the same way, Mark highlights the intentions of the scribes ‘craving power and importance while failing to do mitzvahs, the good deeds that are required. In comparing them with the widow, from what he saw, Jesus emphasizes the importance of our pure and good intentions.

Secondly, God sees what is in our hearts. Though her gift was only a fraction of what the rich had given, Jesus declared that the widow gave more than all of them because God sees the value, not the money, not how much we provide, but where our gifts are from.

Lastly, this story teaches us the importance of the heart of faith. Jesus saw the faith of the Widow, who was willing to give everything she had to live on. By giving them, she trusted that God blessed her with everything and God would provide for her every need. This is faithful giving that takes courage and strength.

So, how does this apply to us? What does it say about our giving, our faith?

Matt Redman, an English pastor from Watford, England, has written many beautiful praise songs. One day, he saw how he and his team were busy preparing for the service, and something just clicked, and he began to realize how the band, the music, the screen, and the sound systems and all these things were becoming distractions to what is the most essential thing in coming to worship that is the heart of worship. So from then, he decided to remove all the bands, music, and sound systems and focus solely on why they were there and dedicate this time and space to encountering God and God only. So, the church was encouraged to worship without music, a sound system, and so on for a while. And amazing things happened, he said most of all, they gradually came to learn their voices, words, and hearts.

He wrote a song based on this experience that I would love for us to listen to as we consider what God has for us in this passage. He said the main thing they learned was that worship is about Jesus; all we do as we worship must come from our true and pure hearts. I love this song; it brings me to the centre of everything we do. This song inspires many of us at the core of our hearts that our worship is about God and not ourselves.

This does not just apply to giving or worship; it also applies to our time, talents, charity, helping others, and almost all aspects of our lives. It invites us to examine all we do, who it is for, where our heart is, whether our intention is pure and true, and whether we are here for God or ourselves. Are we here because we love God with all our hearts, souls, minds, and strength, and do we live to love and let the love shown for our neighbor as ourselves?

What is at the heart of our living, giving and our worship?