

Widows: Exploited and Obedient

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Preacher: John Hopkins

[0:00] That he actually raised. So she had a rough family life.! In talking to her, what I learned was that she had started looking for my brothers and I when she was 11.

! Because that's when she had first found out about us. my brothers and I. And her mom found out at the same time that her husband had other children and that fractured their family.

So my sister and a little brother and my father lived alone at that time in Fairbanks, Alaska. So as we were just kind of processing this as with our family, Kayla asked me, Dad, what would possess an 11 year old girl to dedicate 10 years to find brothers who are adults who are 25 to 30 years older than her?

Why would she care? What is that about? And so we got to talking about it. What dawned on me was my kids grew up in an environment where they took for granted an extended family that went beyond blood.

What my kids took for granted was the fact that anywhere that they go in the country, if they get in trouble, I can make no more than two phone calls and find them help. And I got to thinking about it as we were talking about that several years when the conversation first started, I could probably do that anywhere in the world because of the family of God.

[1:24] My sister has no concept of that. Her family is her father and her brother and that's it. There's no reach. There's no help.

If that's exhausted, you're done. And yet for my kids, they just assumed and grew up knowing there are people out there who've got my back. I'm covered. Even if they don't know my parents, they know Jesus and they'll take care of us.

This week we saw that lived out in a dramatic way. I just want to thank you. I want to thank you as a body for going above and beyond to help me get to Washington to drive back this week, to help Kayla and the kids get here.

The degree of help, the prayers, the, I mean, some of you went shopping for the kids. You've dropped off food, given us financial help.

I'm overwhelmed. You think I'd be used to this by now, the goodness of God's people. We're just overwhelmed as a family. I just want to tell you how grateful we are.

[2:43] I have bragged about you. I have bragged about you to my family, and they got to see firsthand what a great place God has put us in with a great family.

We're just deeply grateful. And that actually ties in to the content of our sermon today as we look at the story of the widow's mite. So let's do a little bit of a review.

If you recall, from the end of Mark 11 through chapter 12, Jesus is involved in four conversations. And remember, part of Jesus' mission was to model for us how to behave as godly people in the world.

And so he showed us four different types of people that we might encounter as we live out our faith in Christ. We saw a bully.

We saw a fool who just asked a difficult question. We saw somebody who was arrogant that Jesus just slapped down. And then we saw a genuine seeker, the man who said, what is the greatest commandment?

[3:46] And then entered into a dialogue with Jesus about the greatest two commandments, to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself. And we saw how Jesus behaved with each of those people to give us an idea of how we should behave.

Two weeks ago when I last preached, we really focused in on those two greatest commandments, to love God with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love our neighbor as ourselves. And what we saw was that as we received the love of God, we reciprocated back.

And the more we get to know God, the more we experience Him, the more we live with Him, the greater our love for Him. And so I encouraged you to spend time in the Word, spend time worshiping, spend time just looking around at all the good things that God has done and given for you.

Most certainly at the cross. If you recall, we even talked about brownies and vanilla ice cream as a reminder that God loves us. And the more we receive that, the more we reciprocate, we give back, we reflect back to Him all the love that He has for us.

And then from that, the next part of it is we receive the vertical love of God and then we express it outward to the people around us. And we talked about loving each other's family, which you've done so well this week and every week.

[5:10] And then we talked about how we reflect it to the people around us wherever we go. And we share that love with people. Kind of a fun story, I had mentioned about how I felt loved by the staff at Charlotte's Coffee Shop.

And I had talked to a couple of the women there, Sarah and Savannah, about the fact that they were going to be a sermon illustration. Well, Monday after I preached, Sarah stopped me and said, well, how'd it go?

So they're checking on me. One of these days, we'll get them to come and visit us at church. So that was pretty cool. The main thing we want to remember is that God's love language is obedience. Jesus said that in John 14. And as I was studying for that sermon, I realized that that's a theme throughout the Bible. If you love me, you will obey my commandments. And given the fact that the two greatest commandments are love God and love others, that's what we need to focus on. That is the pinnacle. because everything else follows from those two things. Does that make sense? So you're in your Bibles at Mark chapter 12.

[6:20] We're going to read 35 to 44. I'll explain why in just a second. Does everybody got your Bibles? Am I cutting out again? I think it's me.

I'm getting paranoid. I turned off my phone. I can't figure out what it is. All right. So you just have to listen more. It's actually a plan just to make you more attentive.

So we're going to read Mark 12, verses 35 to 44. And Jesus began to say as he talked in the temple, how is it that the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David? David himself said in the Holy Spirit, the Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I put your enemies beneath your feet. David himself calls him Lord. So in what sense is he his son? And the Lord's crowd enjoyed listening to him. I think the Lord's crowd enjoyed listening to him because they liked the show-offs that were the Pharisees and the Jewish leaders made to look through it.

In his teaching, he was saying, beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes and like respectful greetings in the marketplaces. And chiefs sit in the synagogues in places of honor at banquets who devour widows' houses.

[7:33] Important four words there. who devour widows' houses and for appearance' sake offer long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation. And he sat down opposite the treasury and began observing how the people were putting money into the treasury and many rich people were putting in large sums.

A widow came and put in two small copper coins, which amount to a cent. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said to them, truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury, for they all put in out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on.

Let's pray together. God, thank you that you notice the little things, that you see whatever we offer. You see through the offering to the heart of the giver. And you are, you reward a cheerful giver. You desire a cheerful giver. God, I pray as we spend time looking at your interaction with the Jewish leaders and the crowd and then with the disciples, that we would learn how we should be behaving ourselves before you, how we should be following you, and what that looks like, and how we can offer our lives to you as a sacrifice.

God, I pray that as we go through your word this morning that you would help me to speak freely and help everyone here go deep into your word and understand what you're trying to say to us.

[9:06] God, I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. So I did a sprint from Everett, Washington, or not quite Everett, Seattle, Washington, back here from Monday to Thursday, and I caught a cold, so excuse me for one second.

Okay. Grandchildren are going to be the death of me.

They screen out the weak germs, and what is left is like the eubonic plague. So every time we visit grandkids, I come away sick.

So before we get into Mark, I want to tell you about my goals when I'm teaching. One of my goals is to teach you from the passage we're reading and then to help you get to a point where you're applying it, you're putting it into practice because we know that teaching doesn't really take place when we assimilate information.

Teaching is actually considered effective when we take what we've learned and we put it into practice. So that's my primary goal. But I have other goals as well, and one of those goals is that you will be better equipped to not need me.

[10:22] That you can study the Bible for yourself. That you can learn more. So I'm going to give you a couple of tips that came up in my reading this week that might help you in the future. So, funny story, I told Martha that I'd done a better job this week of noting in my notes where I was in my notes for the slides, and then I skipped that slide.

And that one. And that one too. But, this is a picture of my Bible. Right in the middle of the section I read is this little subtitle, A Widow's Might.

Now here's the thing that drives me crazy. That is not the inspired word of God that's circled in red. Well, some of it is, but the bold part. It's not inspired by God. It's some editor put it in there.

And you know, I'm sure that your brain is wired like mine that when we see a break, we think that there's a change of topic. We think there's a movement. That's a breaking point. The problem is that when I was writing the outline for our preaching series in Mark, I created a break.

Pastor John spoke last week. Now I'm picking up the ball this week. The problem is there shouldn't be a break. This is a continual conversation. So what I want to caution you is when you're going through God's word, really look at context.

[11:46] What comes before? What comes after? Because it might be a subtitle like this. I'll tell you one that just drives me crazy every time I go through John. In my Bible, in John chapter 13, the first subtitle says the Lord's Supper.

Except it's not the Lord's Supper. It's the washing of the disciples' feet. So clearly the guy who did the subtitles didn't even read the passage. Keep in mind, this is not the inspired word of God.

The text is. Even the chapters, John pointed this out last week, the chapter divisions and the verse divisions came out later. And sometimes, if you're like me, I read a chapter of the New Testament every day, you get into a rhythm and you miss a flow of thought, especially with Paul who's got a very, very well thought through flow, you can miss something because you read one half of the flow of thought yesterday and you read the next one today because there's a chapter break and you miss out.

And I'll tell you, I have done, for years, I've been reading through the Bible. And then all of a sudden, I'll go, wait a minute, these thoughts are connected. There's even that danger with Bible verses.

Every Christian camp in the country has kids memorize Ephesians 2, 8 and 9, for by grace you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves. It's a gift of God that not works like the man you boast.

[13:11] The problem is, that's not the whole sentence. The whole sentence continues to be that we are going to work and create a good work which we prepare for us to do. Do you hear that?

I'm going to look it up. But the point is, when we look at the narrow process and there's danger that we miss a lot, read the context. The other thing is, I'm not a big fan of study Bibles, because I've heard too many times people say, well in my Bible it says, and they'll read a commentary that's

below, oh now it's loud.

Are you guys just training me to move in a certain way by playing with the volume? That's what it is. I heard a story once about a psychology professor at a college where his students would lean forward if he moved to the right and lean back if he moved to the left.

And over the course of the semester they trained him to stand over in the corner and speak from over here. I know that trick, so don't try it.

So that's what they're doing in the back. So be aware of context. Be aware of what is the Bible and what is not. Because it's very easy to think, your subconscious thinks, well it's all in the same book, it's all the same.

[14:24] No it is not. There is a specific, the Bible is the Bible. That's what we want to keep as our attention. Okay? Done with that subsermon.

Now there's another problem that comes up. I found this, especially reading in Genesis and reading the history books, you can read about the 40 years that the Israelites spent in the wilderness in an hour or two.

But it was 40 years. An entire generation. 40 years ago, I was a 19 year old guy figuring out who I wanted to marry. That's a pretty smart guy by the way.

Or she was, well I won't say she was smart, you'll have to ask her. But, but 40 years is a long time and we tend to think, oh I read this in an hour so that must be the time span involved.

And we lose context, we lose an understanding of what the people were enduring. Or we lose sight of the fact why they forgot. How did you forget that? I just read that 10 minutes ago.

[15:25] And they're saying, well I heard it 20 years ago. So be aware of time frames. Now in this case, it's the opposite. We've, we've spent a month going over these four conversations.

Now you might be fuzzy in your mind about why the conversations even started. Which was the cleansing of the temple. But for the people in the story, that was day before yesterday.

No, that was yesterday. So this is fresh. And we need to keep that in mind. That Jesus cleansed the temple, then he went home to his friends at Bethany, came back, and was immediately attacked by various groups to ask him questions.

So we need to keep track of time. So when you're reading the Bible, focus on the Bible. Read the context. That's lesson one. Lesson two is be aware of time frames.

Time frames matter. The fact that we've talked about it in Mark. The fact that Jesus intentionally took two and a half weeks to go from north of the Sea of Galilee down to Judah because he wanted to spend quality time with his disciples.

[16:36] Be aware of the time. So there you go. That's your bonus lesson for today. Make you a better Bible student because that's the goal. So now this story that we're going to look at today, I'm going to just touch briefly on the section from last week and then we'll get into the widow's mite.

This is a bonus conversation. It's the fifth conversation that Jesus has. And I've got a picture in mind that I want you to imagine. You've probably seen YouTube videos or on Instagram, this type of thing, where there's a lion.

Picture a lion that's got a litter of cubs and the cubs are old enough that they want, they're thinking they're big. And so they're climbing all over the lion and they're biting his ears and they're biting his nose and they're roaring and they're high-pitched little mewling sound and the dad is just looking disgusted and allowing them to do all this chewing until you notice one of those baby lions and their sharp little teeth get a hold of his lip and that's it, I'm done.

And he puts them down. His giant paw comes on the back of the lion cub and says, alright, that's it. Dad's finished. Knock it off.

I'm sure all of us who are parents have had that experience as well. I think that's what Jesus is doing. Alright guys, I'm tired of you. I'm going to ask you a question. They can't answer it.

[17:58] It's about how could David, how could the Messiah be David's son when David refers to him as Lord? And he doesn't answer the question. But what he does do, starting at verse 38, in his teaching he was saying beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes and like respectful greetings in the marketplaces.

Hello, Rabbi. Oh, take the seat, Rabbi. You go first, Rabbi. Let me cover your bill, Rabbi. Oh, Rabbi, what do you think? They liked that.

That went straight to their ego. They cultivated that response and that level of respect and subservience from the people of God. They liked it.

And Jesus was saying beware of those guys. Beware of the scribes. They liked the chief seats in the synagogues. So they wanted to be in the front row. They wanted to be seen.

They devour widows' houses and for appearance sake offer long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation. Now this is the first half. Like I said, the widow's mite, that subtitle, kind of messed up my thinking as I was progressing through this series.

[19:15] Jesus was saying, watch these guys and he specifically says they devour widows' houses. Now how do you suppose they do that? I want you to think back. I don't know if this is still current because I don't pay attention, but I can remember when I was a new believer in the mid to late 80s, Jim Baker was on the TV and radio all the time.

And he would share the gospel, but it always involved prosperity for you if you sent him a check. There was a tenfold blessing. I think there was a hundredfold blessing and you just send him a check and he'd be fine.

Or you'd be fine because you sent him money. He'd be fine, of course. That's really what the Pharisees were doing, described, and the Pharisees, the Jewish leaders were doing. They were telling widows, you need to give your money to us.

When if you read the Old Testament, it's really clear that God's expectation was for the people of Israel to care for widows, to look after them. The poor, widows, orphans, just people who are struck with poverty, people who are traveling, away from home, those people have a very special place in God's heart and you don't mess with them.

As a matter of fact, I'll tell you something that we often miss. We think that Sodom and Gomorrah was punished by God because of sexual sin. That's actually not the main reason that Sodom and Gomorrah was punished.

[20:38] Sodom and Gomorrah was punished because of their horrible treatment of widows and orphans. Their evil was expressed by neglecting the people that God wanted them most to care about.

I want to take you to a passage in Isaiah. See if I got this one right. Look at that I did.

Isaiah chapter 10. Woe to those who enact evil statutes and to those who constantly record unjust decisions so as to deprive the needy of justice and rob the poor of my people of their rights so that widows may be their spoil.

The most vulnerable among the people were the ones being exploited. So that widows may be their spoil and that they may plunder the orphans.

What kind of a person plunders orphans? Hate to tell you, it happens all the time. But here's what happens. Now what will you do in the day of punishment and the devastation which will come from afar?

[21:41] Isaiah's addressing the people who are doing these terrible things. To whom will you flee for help and where will you leave your wealth? That's the warning that God makes to the people who do exactly what the Jewish leaders were doing.

They were defrauding people. That's why Jesus cleaned the temple yesterday. yesterday. Because the people were being taken advantage of. They were being stolen from.

And it was sanctioned by the leaders who were there to supposedly look after their spiritual well-being. To help them live godly lives. But instead, those men were using it as a front for money laundering.

God does not take those things lightly. So that's the crime that's being perpetrated. They're doing wrong. Now the next scene, let's go over to verse 41.

Jesus sat down opposite the treasury. So they had a place where you could come in and drop off your offering. And they didn't have folding money back then. So they were dropping coins.

[22:49] And so if a rich guy came through with a bag of money, you could tell. It was noisy. It was large. It was obvious. So Jesus is seeing these people come in. Began observing how the people were putting money into the treasury and many rich people were putting in large sums.

Because it makes you feel good to be the guy who's giving the money. It looks good. People respect you. People like you. You're counted among the cool kids if you're giving more money. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins which amount to a cent. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus did this a lot. Hey guys, come here. I want to show you something. We should do that by the way with people that were, with our kids, with the kids around here.

If you see something, point it out. Hey, come here. I want to show you something. Check this out. Even something like the example I gave two weeks ago where eating a brownie and ice cream with Asher and Uriah and saying, hey guys, check this out.

Here's a spiritual truth in a common thing. That's what Jesus was doing. Calling his disciples to him, he said to them, truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury.

[23:59] For they all put in out of their surplus, but she out of her poverty put in all she owned, all she had to live on. Jesus is not impressed with dollar amounts.

He's impressed with percentages. Now here's what's interesting. If you put it in the context, the widow's offering, in the context of the conversation Jesus had just had about the Jewish leaders, it's safe to assume she thought she had to put in 100% because somebody had told her.

They didn't tell her you have to put in 100%. They told her that God is really pleased if you, I'm making up numbers, if you put in 100 bucks. And she thinks, well I don't have \$100, but I got a penny.

I guess God will take care of me and she put that in because that's all she had. But she was responding in obedience to what her leaders had told her, which makes it all the worse.

is that she was ignorant of what the actual, of what God's actual expectations were. The people who were supposed to care for her were taking advantage of her ignorance.

[25:19] That's a crime. So in Romans chapter 14, whoops, did I do a slide for that one?

I may not have. We'll blame me. So I'll just read it to you. Romans 14, 22 and 23 says, the faith which you have, have as your conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves, but he who doubts is condemned if he eats because his eating is not from faith and whatever is not from faith is sin.

What Paul meant by that is there was a debate going on among the early church about could you eat meat offered to ICO or not. And some people were deeply offended if you ate meat offered to idols.

Other people said, I don't care, it's meat, I'm hungry, let's go. I'll take that medium rare please. But there was a debate about what was appropriate. And where Paul landed was first of all, you need to examine and decide what's right and wrong and you need to act accordingly.

So if you think it's wrong, but you go out to lunch with a group of guys and they think it's okay, so they grab the stakes that were just offered to an idol and you partake with them, you're in sin because you're violating your conscience.

[26:39] You came to a belief that this is the way, this is what God approves. Are you tracking with me so far? So it's, God is basing his judgment in that scenario on what our understanding of truth is.

Now the goal is for growth. The goal is for those stronger brothers to actually say, I'm not going to eat because I know it bothers you if I have the stake because it was offered to an idol.

But can I show you something? Let me show you something from the Bible. And the stronger brother, the one who's got more freedom, sits down and says, you know, actually, these idols, they're just blocks of wood.

And we get a discount. So, actually, the discount's not the point. But the idol's nothing. This is something that God has provided.

It tastes good and we can eat it with a thankful heart and it's okay. And if that person's mind is changed, they realize, oh, I can have this and it's okay. They can eat and it's no longer sin because they have grown in their understanding.

[27:43] Are you tracking with me? Does that make sense? So, in the case of the widow, her understanding was you need to give a hundred bucks. And if you don't have a hundred bucks, you give what you got.

And, I'm sorry, it's just too bad. That's the way it is. That was her understanding. And based on that understanding, what does Jesus say? Jesus said, the rich men, ah, they gave out of their surplus. But the widow, out of her poverty, put in all that she owned, all she had to live on. So, those men were taking advantage of her teaching, of her understanding.

They were taking advantage of her ignorance. Now, we live in a different world. And here's why. It's very likely the widow was illiterate. It's very likely that she had no access to Scripture herself. Her sole source of truth were the people who were misleading her, which puts the burden even more firmly on her.

[28:47] But we don't live in that world anymore. We have easy access to the Bible. I have an embarrassing number of Bibles, actually, I was going to say at home, but actually they're in the office. But I have access.

I have on my phone. I've got the Bible not only in a dozen different translations in English, but I can look it up in any language I want. Not that I can read it, but if I was talking to somebody, I could share the gospel in their language.

We have an embarrassment of riches. What that means is we have a greater accountability. We need to check. We need to test. And that includes testing what is said from this pulpit.

You need to examine the truth. You need to examine what I say. Oh, Pastor John or Pastor Tim or Jim next week when he's speaking out of Mark chapter 11 or 13. Well, that came as 11.

I haven't studied at 13. It's 13. You need to check us. There was a church in a town called Berea that Paul visited that was commended because they checked.

[29:51] Oh, you claim this about Jesus. Well, let me look it up. And they followed through. That's the burdens on you. And if something doesn't make sense, some of you have done this. Ask me.

Ask me. I am determined to be approachable. And I'll tell you why. I learned decades ago that questions make me better.

People have said to me most of my life, wow, you really know the Bible well. And I'll tell you why. It's because starting with teenagers, they asked me hard questions and forced me to think. And sometimes I had to back up and come back the next week and say, you know what?

I got this wrong. So-and-so told me they pointed this out and I was wrong and let me correct that. Or I may gently say to you, no, actually, the way I said it from the pulpit or in conversation is accurate. Let me show you why. And we can have a conversation. But we have a responsibility to know the Bible, to study it for ourselves, to take it in so we're not duped because that happens in the modern day.

[30:55] Eric Kronzertz told me, told me a story about a church that's doing a fundraising campaign to buy a private jet. He thought it was a good idea for us. I think he just wants to take the kids on a mission trip and plane tickets are prohibitive.

Now, if we brought forward to you that we wanted to raise money for a private jet, please ask why because I would have a hard time justifying that biblically.

But we need to be students of the Word. We need to listen to the Holy Spirit. I'll tell you something else that's interesting about how God speaks. God often speaks from the crowd.

One of my favorite stories in the Old Testament is the enemies of God are coming down toward Judah. Jehoshaphat was the king. He prays this great prayer.

God, we're afraid. We don't know what to do, but our eyes are fixed on you. And he called the nation and they prayed together. But you know what's interesting about that scene is God doesn't say to Jehoshaphat, here's the plan.

[31:57] No, he picks some dude that's out in the crowd whose name I can never remember that stands up and says, God just gave me a word. And the word is, we go into battle in this way and we don't have to worry because God is going to take care of us.

He's going to answer the prayer. The Holy Spirit doesn't only speak through the church pastors. And if you ever hear me come across that way, I need an ego check.

Hard. Because we cannot have that. The Holy Spirit is speaking to each one of us. That's one of the beautiful things. Pastor John talked about this last week. We each have the Holy Spirit in us, teaching us.

Now does the pulpit have a place? Absolutely. Does Sunday school have a place? Absolutely. Because we learn also in community. But you need to listen to the Holy Spirit as you're reading God's word.

You also need to be in part of a solid Christian community. I beat this drum over and over again because I want us to be a people who are studying God's word and living it out in community. [33:05] Remember we talked about the fact we share each other's brains. We learn from each other. Some of the most amazing insights I've ever gotten have been from children.

Because they're not burdened by preconceptions. I'll tell you a quick story because I actually have time. Shocking. I'm going to eat it all up though.

I was a counselor at camp. This is the first year I was ever a camp counselor and I was working with a group of fourth and fifth grade boys. And the night before where the story takes place I was doing our cabin devotions talking about the persecuted church.

Back then it was in the Soviet Union. And so the next morning we go to chapel and we're singing the worship songs and I look over and this camper whose name was John Big John from a few times I've been called Big John Big John and Little John and Little John was crying.

So I told my junior counselor to keep an eye on the rest of the kids because if you leave boys unsupervised who knows what's going to happen. So I grabbed John and we went outside and we sat down and I said John what's going on why are you crying?

[34:16] He said I just can't stop thinking about Christians who's they're losing their lives for the gospel I just and I'm 10 I can't do anything and I said to Little John actually there is something you can do you can pray and we can pray right now.

So we did but here's where the lesson came in because I being Big John you know a wise man of 18 what I prayed was for God to protect the Christians.

I prayed a good prayer. God protect the Christians protect them from evil people build a hedge around them give them access to your word. Amen.

Little John prayed for the overthrow of the Soviet government. Amen. Little John prayed for access for Bibles and the kingdom of God into the Soviet Union.

Little John prayed that people could go in as missionaries and y'all know history Ronald Reagan said Mr. Gorbachev tear down that wall and now you know why.

[35:38] I learned the most powerful lesson I've ever learned on prayer from that 10 year old boy. So we need to be in community is the point. We need to be together. So that's our first application. How you want to put it into practice.

Be a student of the word who listens and thinks critically about what you're hearing. The second thing I want to talk about is what is God expected about us. So before I came to Tri-State several years ago I worked at a church in Seattle Every Nation Church Seattle and I frequently did the announcements and as part of our announcements we would pass the offering and part of our spiel every week was if you're visiting the church don't feel obligated you don't have to give this is just for people who consider the church their church home.

Well I was kind of in a jokey mood and I said if you don't want you know if you're a visitor you don't have to contribute we really don't want your money we want a lot more than that.

I got in trouble the next day at our staff meeting. But actually I was right. God wants a lot more than our money.

What did she give? Everything. Everything. Now she gave it from a misunderstanding but she was so committed to obeying God that she she gave it all.

[37:09] That's what God is asking for us. Jesus said that the greatest commandment is for us to love God with all of our being. Heart, soul, mind and strength everything we are is to be engaged with God.

We have to give it all. Jesus said to love each other as he loved us. He died on the cross for us. that's the standard that we should have for each other.

And as Paul said to the Thessalonians which is the verse I skipped over earlier you're doing a great job. Excel still more. But it's all in. It's all in.

Not holding back a little bit. It's all in. And then to the world we love our neighbors. We love ourselves. which is a pretty high bar as well.

But it's all in. So that can be daunting. You mean everything? Yeah. Everything. But keep in mind first of all that God gave everything for you.

[38:20] He was all in. He didn't consider the cost. He despised the shame it says in Hebrews 12. For the joy set before him the joy set before him was us.

He was all in. How can we not give the same back? But God is no man's debtor. When we give to God he multiplies it.

He gives us joy from it. He created us to be givers. And what happens is we prove to be faithful. Now you've heard prosperity teachers say if you give God's going to give you so you can buy your own private jet.

No that's not what the Bible teaches. 2 Corinthians 9. God gives you as you give away. He gives you more to give away. And to give away more. And to give away more. And what you discover it's fun.

It's not just more blessed to give than to receive because we get some extra brownie points in heaven. It's actually inherently rewarding because of the way we've been made. You discover there's joy in giving to somebody else.

[39:30] Of seeing their reaction. Even if they don't have a clue that you gave to them. God has created us in such a way that we want to do that. And we should do that.

We should be generous. With our time, our money, our energy, all of it. And a quick look back and then I'm going to wrap us up. Two weeks ago I talked about the biggest obstacle to us loving well is margin.

We don't plan ahead. Plan ahead. Set aside money, just like the widow. Set aside money so if the need comes up, you're ready to go.

You can give. Create time in your schedule that you can meet with people either by appointment or trust me, I know from decades of working in ministry, the most likely time that someone's going to want to talk about Jesus happens to be the least convenient time for you.

It just works that way. I thought it was just a youth pastor thing. Oh no, it's people of all ages. But it doesn't matter.

[40:40] When we give of our time and our energy, our thinking, what we've learned, God is honored, we go deeper into love, and we become the widow. We become the person that God says, see him, see her, he or she gave 100% of what she had to give and that's what I'm looking for.

That's the type of church we want to be, is a church who gives without reservation with great confidence because I'll tell you what, that is what draws people to us. John 13, 35 says, by this you will know, they will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.

That's the proof of the pudding. Let's pray. Father, thank you that you gave to us without reservation, without hesitation.

You freely give us all things richly to enjoy. God, you are so generous. Help us to live in that place of your generosity and then, Lord, from there, help us to be equally generous.

Help us to be a reflection of you as we go through our day, looking for ways that we can serve people to be like the widow. Help us to be people also who are good students of your word, who are learning and growing. God, I pray this in Jesus' name.

[42:04] Amen. Amen.