

Swedenborgian Sunday School Notes for the Revised Common Lectionary

Mark 12:38–44 • The Widow’s Mite

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Mark 12:38–44 The widow’s mite
Ruth 3:1–5, 4:13–17 Ruth and Boaz

Overview

Today’s reading from Mark provides a stark contrast. There are rich and powerful people who make a big show of being good, but are really selfish and secretly take advantage of other people. And there are poor people who do not have much, but use what they do have to help others. The point is not that rich people are bad and poor people are good; rather, it is that whether we feel we have a lot or a little to contribute, the most important thing is that we use it to love and care for people according to the Lord’s teachings. The children in our classes may not feel that they can do much, but we can encourage them to do good things in whatever small way they can.

Key Points

- Using our power to take advantage of others leads to great misery both for them and for us.
- It is even worse if we pretend we are good while doing bad things.
- If we devote everything we have to God—even if it isn’t much—God will richly bless us spiritually.

Example for Teaching Children

Do you know someone who is always saying what a good person he or she is, but then turns around and does mean things to people behind their backs? In some ways this is even worse than being a plain old bully. At least we know we have to watch out for a bully, and we can protect ourselves. But what if we lend money to someone who has a reputation for being honest, but later they claim we never lent them anything? If that person hadn’t pretended to be honest, we never would have lent to them in the first place—and we wouldn’t have lost our money.

In today’s Bible reading, Jesus talks about people like this. He warns us to watch out for religious leaders who make a big show of being righteous, kind, and loving, but who are really using religion as a way to get other people to follow them and give them money. Some TV evangelists are like this. They preach great, emotional sermons that make people cry, but all they really want is to have people to send in money. Many poor people watch these programs

and send money, while the TV evangelist lives in a fancy house and drives a fancy car. One of them even installed an air conditioner in his doghouse! I’ll bet a lot of the people who sent him money couldn’t even afford an air conditioner for their *own* house. That evangelist ended out going to jail because of the way he had cheated people out of their money.

This doesn’t mean all rich and famous people are bad. Many of them are genuinely good people who do their best to help others. But we do not need to be rich and powerful to do good things for other people. When Jesus saw rich people throwing lots of money into the church’s collection box, and a poor widow throwing in two pennies, who did he say had given more? He said that the poor widow had given more because she had given all she had.

The most important thing in God’s eyes is not how much we have; it is that whatever we *do* have, we use it to love and care for other people. Even if all we can do is comfort someone who is crying, if we do it because we care about the other person, that is giving all we have to the Lord. And the Lord will make both us and the person we are helping happy.

Basic Correspondences

widows = good people who want truth
devour = destroying people’s faith
two mites = all our love and faith

Thoughts from Swedenborg

A “widow” means a person who is good and wants to know what is true. *Arcana Coelestia* #9198.7

“Devouring widows’ houses” means taking true ideas away from people who want them, and teaching false ideas instead. *Arcana Coelestia* 4844.10

(*From a debate Swedenborg attended in heaven:*)

Rich people should not consider the benevolence and excellence of their charitable acts to be greater than the small amounts one poor person gives to another. For we know that people act according to their social class. . . . Real kindness is not valued by our social status or the size of our gift; it is valued by the depth of love that motivates us to act. A menial laborer who gives one small coin may give with deeper kindness than a magnate who gives or bequeaths a fortune.

True Christian Religion #459.9