

A New York divorce lawyer died and arrived at the pearly gates. Saint Peter asks him "What have you done to merit entrance into Heaven?" The Lawyer thought a moment, then said, "A week ago, I gave a quarter to a homeless person on the street." Saint Peter asked Gabriel to check this out in the record, and after a moment Gabriel affirmed that this was true.

Saint Peter said, "Well , that's fine, but it's not really quite enough to get you into Heaven." The Lawyer said, "Wait Wait! There's more! Three years ago I also gave a homeless person a quarter." Saint Peter nodded to Gabriel, who after a moment nodded back, affirming this, too, had been verified.

Saint Peter then whispered to Gabriel, "Well, what do you suggest we do with this fellow?" Gabriel gave the Lawyer a sidelong glance, then said to Saint Peter, "Let's give him back his 50 cents and tell him to go to Hell." If God asks you, What have you done to merit entrance into Heaven, How would you answer this question?

In today's New Testament reading Jesus tells us that we are in danger of becoming so preoccupied with small benefits from our walk with Christ that we miss what God is really looking for in our lives, and we miss it because we are afraid to full depend upon God alone. Jesus teaches us what God is looking for in our lives with two examples.

Jesus' first example is the scribes. To Jesus, the scribes have thrown away a great chance to know God. The scribes were men who were given the luxury of preoccupation with the Law. They were distinguished by their robes. It had a long white mantle that reached all the way to the feet and had a long fringe along it.

White long robes were regarded as a mark of distinction, so those who wished to parade their position wore white long robes. With this white robe they would be noticed, stand out in a crowd, and were venerated by people with great respect and awe. People would stop what they were doing and rise in respect as a scribe would walk by. Their words were considered to have authority. The scribes had a position that demanded great respect.

Moreover, when one of the important men of Jerusalem gave a feast, they considered having a scribe in attendance as ornament to the feast. The highest places of honor were assigned to the scribes. They were given precedence over age and even parents. They would be given the seat of honor at the table. In the synagogues the seat of honor was reserved for them too. They are blessed with God's law and word.

What is Jesus so upset about? They had to point people to God, but in practice they pointed people to themselves.

Even their prayers were selfish. Jesus says that their public prayers may look pious but in reality were used as opportunities to gain the respect of men. So they use their position to enrich themselves. The sad thing is that not only are they throwing away the opportunity given to them to teach others about God, they are missing the true riches God has had in them.

We can, like the scribes, be satisfied with small rewards that feel good in the moment, but have little eternal value. The scribes were satisfied with public respect and some material possessions, really small rewards. They couldn't see the real and satisfying life that God wanted for them. They missed what God was looking for. Are we also missing what God is looking for in our lives?

So what do we do? How do we not end up like these scribes, missing out on the true blessing that God has for us? Jesus tells us by the example of the poor widow. Usually when we look at the poor widow, we consider stewardship. But there is more and greater value to us in this story than stewardship.

Mark 12:42 says, “A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins.” She places two of the smallest copper coins which circulated in Palestine. The coin was called the lepton. It was worth roughly one cent.

Jesus is very impressed by a poor widow. The scribes should have been the true example for all to follow, but this poor widow is noticed, and held in high esteem by Jesus. Why is that?

In verse 44 Jesus called his disciples and said to them, “For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

She put in everything. It means more than all her money. It means more than her whole savings. It means that she gave her whole self. She could keep one of those coins, but she put in everything. What is the value of her offering? The value is total trust, total commitment.

In Romans 12:1 Paul says, “So, brothers and sisters, because of God’s mercies, I encourage you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice that is holy and pleasing to God. This is your appropriate priestly service.”

The poor widow put it all in there. Placing the coins in the offering was a step of faith, a commitment of faith. As those two small coins fall from her hands her

current life falls away. There goes the rent money, there goes her next meal, there goes the shoes she needs, there goes any possibility that she can take care of herself. Nevertheless, she put in everything. This was a greatest act of faith Jesus had seen all day. What she gave was her total trust to God.

Now imagine, she gives her offering and turns and walks away. What is the feeling and the emotion that overwhelms her? Is it fear? Is it despair? Is it anxiety? Is she just numb?

I think her emotion that flows over her as she turns away from the offering is peace and confidence. "I finally did it. I released my anxiety. Now my anxiety is yours, God. My life is in your hand. I am now free."

Who knew she had done this? In fact who cared that she had done this? I'm quite sure this whole act of faith was overlooked by everyone there except the one who really counted. Jesus.

Is there a promise that everything will work out for her? No, there is nothing. Jesus did not say, "The Father who sees all things will reward her and make sure she is taken care of." Jesus doesn't tell us that all her material needs will now be met because of her great faith and generosity because that is not what this is all about. The scribes thought that was what it was all about. So they concentrated on praise from men and stacking up clients who would take care of them. This widow, this poor widow, by her act of faith receives more as she is walking out of that Temple than any one of those scribes would ever see in their lifetime.

She has made that critical step of faith. She drops those coins, and turns from her old life, a life where she took care of things, and she turns away from that offering

and turns toward a new life, a life where God takes care of things, a new life, where she is free from her burdens.

We have a great opportunity to let go of things that we have been holding onto, things that we are trying to take care of, but in reality only God can take care of. Are we fully trusting the Lord to meet our needs, knowing He is able and willing to provide? I know it is difficult when we face adversities in life, but we must learn to trust in the Lord, being confident that He will provide. The Lord will honor your faithfulness. We must learn to faithfully serve Him while trusting Him with every aspect of our lives. This poor widow serves as a challenge for all regarding commitment and service for the Lord.

The Lord knows our hearts and the motivation of our actions. He knows why we serve and why we give. We must not seek the praise and recognition of men but seek to honor the Lord and please Him. He gave His all as He took our place on the cross. He gave His life so we could be forgiven of sin and reconciled to God. The least we can do is live with what God has blessed us. Are you living fully submitted to Christ and His will for your life? Jesus is worthy of all we can offer.