

Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost

WE BOAST OF CHRIST CRUCIFIED

Mark 12:38-44

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Analysis by Timothy J. Hoyer

As he taught, he said, "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the market-places, 39and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! 40They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation." 41He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. 42A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. 43Then he called his disciples and said to them, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. 44For 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."

DIAGNOSIS: Braggarts Will Be Buried

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Taking Advantage of Others*

Scribes are not the problem. It is people who are braggarts that are the problem. There are also show-offs, and people who boast about themselves. There are those who hold up their index finger

to say they are number one. They are those who argue about who is the greatest (Mark 9:33f; 10:35-45). They are all a problem. Not just that they make themselves better than those around them, and not that the braggarts irritate those around them. It's that they take advantage of others. They feel entitled to take advantage of others. After all, they are greeted with respect, they have the best seats and places of honor and they say long prayers in public. Even worse, the braggarts take advantage of the weak, the scared, of those who don't know the rules, and the widows.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Hearts Are Self-Concerned*

Those who take advantage of others have the same attitude as those who boast or who say long prayers in order to be seen. Their attitude is concern about themselves. Everyone says, "We're number one! We're number one." No one hears people chanting, "You're number one! You're number one!" Self-concern means one is not concerned about others. Even worse, self-concern means one is not concerned about God. We are born that way, unable to have true fear of God and true love for God. We are concerned about looking good to others, concerned about being better than others, as if our bettering others makes us look good to God. We think that our accomplishments impress God and that God will give us the place of honor at God's heavenly banquet.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *God Orders the Greater Condemnation*

Those who gain greatness—greatness of fame, greatness of wealth, greatness of achievement—feel they have done well with their life. Others honor them in death, as if greatness and honor is sufficient for the meaning and purpose of life. Some people die satisfied they have done well. Death for them is an end, a becoming nothing, and they have no problem with that. Yet Jesus

says that those who boast, who brag, who show off, who better others, who trust their accomplishments and greatness, they will receive the greater condemnation. Death is not just an end; death is God saying that no one gets to keep their achievements. No one gets to keep their wealth. God pays no attention to our boasts. Most of all, no one gets to keep their life. They will no longer be noticed or admired-especially by God, who eternally condemns them in their self-trust.

PROGNOSIS: Christ-Trusters Will Be Praised

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Jesus Offers Us His Promise of Life*

Jesus gave all he had. He gave his life on a cross. His life was not much—like two small copper coins. His was not a life where he was greeted with respect by the scribes in the marketplaces or given the seat of honor at banquets. Jesus had made those who can't boast his friends and his company when it was time to eat. He was concerned for the weak and made them walk, the blind and made them see, the condemned and made them the ones God boasted about as God's children. So the scribes and all the great ones took everything away from Jesus. They took his innocence and declared him guilty. They took his clothes. They took his life. He was not even worth two small copper coins, not enough to be given as an offering to God. Jesus was devoured like he was a widow's house. Yet God raised from the dead this Jesus who could not boast before God! This One who was nothing God made to be everything. This One who was powerless God gave all authority in heaven and on earth and the name that is above all other names.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (External Solution) : *Hearts are Jesus-Concerned*

Now risen from the dead, Jesus continues to promise all that he will give them life with God forever. Jesus promises that God, because Jesus died, will forgive all their boasting and all

their self-concern. Jesus will look at all, and like the widow who gave two small copper coins, he will praise them, lift them up, glorify them, boast of them, brag about them, and say, "You're Number One to God." His saying it makes us so. Jesus gives us his Spirit who puts faith into us, that is, puts trust in Jesus into our hearts, a trust that believes Jesus is their greatness to God, that Jesus is what they get to brag about to God. We are made to be Jesus-concerned people instead of self-concerned people. To be Jesus-centered is to trust Jesus and to act toward others with the love Jesus gives—a love that sacrifices for the sake of others.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Giving Advantage to Others*

"Then what becomes of boasting? It is excluded. By what law? By that of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law" (Rom. 3:27). We cannot say that the widow's deed is admired by Jesus, as if by some other standard her deed was great to God. That changes nothing. The widow, one of those who was prey to the scribes, still, in the midst of hardship, trusted God's promise to be her God. Jesus praised her faith. Our deeds of love—giving change to a friend so she can buy lunch, or a congregation helping a neighbor pay their mortgage—are only good the same way the widow's deed was good. The widow's deed was good because Jesus praised her faith. Our deeds are good to God only when Jesus says they are good, that is, done in faith acting in love. So we cannot boast to God about what we do. We can boast only about Christ. Instead of boasting about ourselves, free from that because of Jesus, we can encourage others with our praise and thanks.