

Session 9

Radical Offering

A reflection on Mark 12:41-14:9

By Roger Graham

When I read the Gospel of Mark, I am struck not only by Jesus' great sacrifice but also by the warnings He imparts. Throughout Mark, I believe Jesus calls me to repentance and discernment, and to exercise faith, patience, obedience and awareness.

I'm reminded to detach from possessions when reading the lesson of the "widow's mite." The widow gave a greater share of her worldly possessions than the rich, even though they "gave much" (Mark 12:43-44). Years ago I unconsciously judged the significance and impact of my gifts to the church by their size. After studying and reflecting on this passage, I changed my outlook. Now I believe God calls me to devote my time, talents and treasure to glorify his name and follow his will. The spirit with which I give is more important than the value placed upon my gifts by "the world."

Immediately after the lesson of the widow's mite, Jesus predicted the destruction of the Temple: "Not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down" (Mark 13:1-2). Earlier, Jesus foreshadowed the Temple's fate when he cursed the fig tree because it did not bear fruit. For many years, I found it odd that God would destroy his dwelling place. Later I learned, "...the Most High does not live in temples made with hands . . ." (Acts 7:48).

Thereafter Jesus cautions, "So when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains" (Mark 13:14). In the context of the rest of Mark, I see the "abomination" as a reflection of the failure of believers to devote their attention to God. We seek comfort and pleasure in worldly obsessions. I perceive that Jesus considers preoccupations that replace God's presence in our hearts as "abominations." The disciples were distracted by their judgment of the woman (Mary) who poured the flask of very costly oil on Jesus' head (Mark 14:1-9). Instead of adoring God in the person of Jesus, the disciples "were indignant among themselves," and "they criticized her sharply." They engaged in condemnation rather than dwelling in the Spirit, through which they would have recognized and embraced Jesus as King and the Priest, who would soon suffer death and be resurrected.

I interpret Jesus' instruction to "flee to the mountains," as an order to return to God and bear fruit. I remember the Psalm, "His foundation is in the holy mountains" (87:1). Jesus summons us to let go of our attachment to organizations, which may stray from "the way" and miss "the mark." Jesus instructs us to flee institutions and structures when they turn away from God, and He implores us to seek the Holy Spirit in our hearts. As the Apostle Paul advises, "you are the temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwells in you" (I Corinthians 3:16).

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus calls us to faithfulness when faced with trials and tribulations. He petitions us to endure and wait. He entreaties us to godly discernment in the midst of persecution; and he invites us to surrender to him and trust his will. The language of Mark is scary, and the imagery is stark and apocalyptic. The message nevertheless seems simple

and clear: Turn to God and be transformed so that you can bear the fruit of the Spirit and make disciples of all nations!

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