

# Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

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## Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book):  
RCL (Revised Common Lectionary):

## Mark 12:38-44

Year B - Proper 27, Text: Mark 12:38-44  
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In these verses, Jesus comments on some of his observations of what was happening in the Temple.

**Verses 12:38–39:** In these verses, Jesus delivers a warning in relation to the dress and behavior of the learned. In synagogues of Jesus' day, only the learned (usually rabbis and teachers) were permitted to sit on the seat in front of the ark that housed the scrolls of the Torah. Those who sat on that seat faced the congregation. Furthermore, they alone were to be assigned the choicest of seats at a banquet. The "places of honor" were the couches around the table (U-shaped triclinium) where the host himself reclined.

**Verse 12:40:** Even so, Jesus points out that they know how to play the "extortion game" — possibly in relation to foreclosure of rents or preying on the piety of rich widows. This vice walks hand in hand with another vice: hypocrisy! This (Marcan) statement of Jesus against the scribes is almost more ominous than the extended "woes" in Luke 6:24–26.

In relation to how the Essenes of Jesus' day defined rank and pride of place in the coming Messianic Banquet, the following quote is worth pondering:

*The Qumran community (Essenes), where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found, believed that no Gentiles and no Samaritans would be present at this banquet. And only the Jews who kept the law in the very precise narrow fashion that these Essenes prescribed would eat at this table. The text reads: "And then the Messiah of Israel shall come and the chiefs of the clan of Israel shall sit before him, each in the order of his dignity, according to his place in their camp and marches. And no one is going to be allowed in who is smitten in his flesh, or paralyzed in his feet or hands, or lame, or blind, or deaf, or dumb, or smitten in his flesh with a visible blemish."*

*(The Messianic Rule, IQSA, 2:11–22,  
translated by G. Vermes)*

**Verse 12:41** The term "treasury" denotes donation chests. There were 13 of these in the Court of the Women in the Jerusalem Temple, each one bearing a label telling the purpose for which the money placed within it would be used. These chests were shaped like an inverted trumpet to ensure protection from theft. The rich contribute large sums, using copper or brass coins.

**Verses 12:42–44:** Jesus notices that a widow contributes two *lepta* — a tiny sum. However, her gift gives rise to some teaching on Jesus' part. She has given more than the others since the little that she still has (indeed, not enough to live on) is the true measure of her generosity. She gave so much of the little that she had.

The rich may give more, but naturally, the rich have plenty left over. However, the widow's poverty is a richer spiritual source than the material abundance of the rich. She trusts God, no matter what! She gives generously, no matter how little she has left over.

However, the attention Jesus gave to the widow was not simple to hold her up as an example to emulate, it was proof of the accusation he had made earlier in verse 12:40, that the greed of the scribes "devoured widows houses."

### ***Some additional thoughts:***

During the months of October and November, many churches focus on their annual stewardship campaign. We would do well to bear in mind that the focus ought not to be "During the coming year, how much are you going to give of that which is yours?" Rather, it should be, "During the coming year, how much are you going to keep for yourself of all that belongs to God?"

Stewardship is the job of using wisely the resources that God has entrusted into our care. Are God's people prepared to live simply that others might simply live?

