

## Mark 12:38-44

When attending a concert, play or movie, you may want the best seats in the house. For optimum vision and listening, that desire is understood. In the Jewish community of Jerusalem in the time of Christ, there were men who desired the best seats in the house, but not in this sense. They wanted the best places or chief seats as part of their exaltation of themselves and their aim to be seen by men.

During the last week of his life, our Lord described this evidence of selfish ambition and wanted the people to beware of these scribes.

As he taught, Jesus said, Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted in the marketplaces and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely.

If Jesus says, certain people will be punished most severely, we should do two things: #1 Avoid that behavior and the attitudes that lead to it and #2 watch out for those who exhibit that behavior; we must resist their influence on us. While we must not act out of ugly anger, I believe we ought not to give them the reverent salutations they covet.

These men never miss an opportunity to parade their status, show their rank and remind people of their power. They wore religious garments to draw attention to themselves. Their carnal sanctimonious attitude was fed when common people saluted them. And in synagogues and banquets, they demanded VIP seating. These men were driven by the attention they believed they earned. They were hypocrites, with hearts

filled with self-importance. Their religion had nothing to do with any love for God.

This is obvious when you consider their ungodly, ostentatious practice of prayer and their dreadful mistreatment of widows. They were outwardly religious, but inwardly corrupt. That corruption was evident in their devouring of vulnerable widows. Some historical accounts suggest, these men robbed widows of property, peace and livelihood to enrich themselves, pretending the money was for the Lord.

Jesus warns us about self-exalted, unscrupulous people. He condemns them as worthy of punishment. Pretension ever hides emptiness, and often guilt. Fixed for ever for our repugnance, hatred and contempt is the character of the religious pretender in the Gospel. Men need to be warned that there is more danger to the soul in pretending to a piety we have not got, than in merely having none at all. Notice in this context: before this passage and after this passage Jesus describes the opposite attitude and behavior. Love God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself. He gives an example of generosity from the very class oppressed by the scribes. In vivid contrast to the greedy scribes, there is the widow who gave all that she had to the Lord.

If I am personally serious about avoiding the hypocrisy of the scribes, I will love God, love my neighbor and give as the widow gave. Will you join me? AMEN