



northminster presbyterian church

2400 old alabama road  
roswell, georgia 30076

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**SCRIPTURE:** [Philippians 2:5-11](#) [Mark 12:38-44](#)

**SERMON:** All She Had (Rev. Brent Anderson)

#### INTRODUCTION: JESUS FIRED UP

In this passage, you can tell Jesus is a little fired up. Jesus and the disciples are in Jerusalem in the temple. And Jesus has just waded through attack after attack from the religious leaders; first it was the Pharisees and the Herodians who tried to set the trap with their question about paying taxes to Caesar. Then he spars with the Sadducees over the question about the Resurrection. Finally, he fends off the scribes and their test about which commandment was the greatest. And the large crowd that had gathered around him was listening with delight as he answered those challenges with authority and profound wisdom.

Now it is Jesus' turn to go on the offensive. *Jesus has finally had it.* He's fed up with the religious leaders. And so he points them out and uses them as an object lesson.

He looks to his left, sees one of the scribes and in a voice loud enough to be overheard he says to the crowd, "Beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes... and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces... and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets."

They devour widows' houses... and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.

Jesus is challenging the shallow, self-centered lives of those who were seeking their own glory; those concerned with appearances; those who were seeking respect and recognition; those who were living off the poor and the helpless rather than caring for them. Jesus condemns their selfishness, their pride and their hypocrisy. They are a bad example for the people; a bad example for his disciples. Jesus had come to give his life away. If they are to learn anything, that is what he wants to teach them: *how to give their lives away as well.*

#### THE EXAMPLE OF THE WIDOW

He sits down opposite the temple treasury and watches the crowd put in their money. And there he sees a poor widow, offering her only two coins. She is a subtle yet perfect example of everything that the scribes weren't. She shows true devotion and generosity. She is willing to sacrifice. She gives all she had to live on. And she seeks nothing in return; no recognition for her gift. Her pockets are now empty... *but her life isn't!*

You can just picture her shuffling her way, quietly, almost unnoticed, up to the offering plate, dropping in her two small coins, and then slipping away again. No pretense. No pomp and circumstance. No one to notice... *except Jesus.*

Jesus notices. We forget that from time to time. *Jesus notices.*

He calls his disciples and says to them, "This poor widow has put in more than everyone else. For they give out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on"; in the original Greek, literally "her whole life".

## THE EMPTINESS OF LIFE

Back in April of 2000, there was an article in Christianity Today titled, "Wanting More in an Age of Plenty." And in that article you find a description of the paradox of our American culture. We are better off materially, but are suffering socially and morally:

"We spend more, but have less;  
we buy more, but enjoy it less.  
We have bigger houses and smaller families;  
more conveniences, but less time;  
We read too little, watch TV too much and pray too seldom.  
We have multiplied our possessions, but reduced our values.  
These are the times of tall men, and short character;  
steep profits, and shallow relationships.  
These are the days of two incomes, but more divorce;  
of a fancier house, but broken homes.  
*We've learned how to make a living, but not a life;*  
we've added years to life, not life to years;  
we've cleaned up the air, but polluted the soul."

That line says it all, doesn't it? "*We've learned how to make a living, but not a life.*"

Did you know that one of the biggest threats to the physical and emotional well-being of teenagers is a lack of a sense of purpose in life? Many of our nation's teens are suffering from their unsuccessful attempts to fill the emptiness that they feel inside.

The theme of emptiness is what ties our two scripture passages together; a different kind of emptiness than most of us feel. Where are we to look when life feels empty? Where does Jesus ask us to turn today?

Jesus points us to this widow, who, on the eve of His passion, serves as an example: a preview or anticipation of the self-emptying, self-giving life. In her, we have a living example that can help lead us out of our emptiness and into a life that is meaningful, purposeful and ultimately fulfilling. Her gift foreshadows the one Jesus is about to make on the cross. She shows us the type of self-giving that Christ himself is all about. In Jesus and in the widow, we have a model for a life of *giving* not of getting; of *emptying* not of collecting; a life of *trust in God*, not trust in wealth.

## THE LIVING EXAMPLE OF JESUS

A life worth living; knowing how to fill the emptiness that we sometimes feel inside starts with our mind. Paul begs us to have the same attitude, the same mindset that was in Christ. "*Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.*" What was Christ's mindset? Humility! And Paul demonstrates Christ's humility with a three-scene description of the life, death and resurrection of Christ.

### SCENE ONE: THE ETERNAL WORD

In scene one, Paul shows us Jesus before he took human form. He says that "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ, who though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited." This is a powerful claim.

When Paul says that Jesus was in the "form" of God, he is saying that Jesus was "in essence" God. He is "in essence" God, *but he doesn't consider equality with God as something to be exploited.* Notice the humility.

### SCENE TWO: CHRIST THE SERVANT

In scene two, we have a change of scenery: Jesus empties himself of the glory of God and comes to us in the flesh. He took the "form" or "essence" of a slave. Christ took the form or nature of a slave. Do you hear the ring of Jesus words in Matthew 20:28, "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many".

The contrast of these first two scenes could not be more dramatic: from the loftiest to the lowest, from equal with God to human slavery. He starts out as high and lofty as any could imagine, and then drops down to the very depths, as low as any could imagine.

Christ didn't exploit his equality with God. *He emptied himself*. He took the form of a slave. And then Paul says, He was born in human form or likeness. He humbled himself. He became obedient unto death. Even death on a cross.

### SCENE THREE: CHRIST EXALTED

This would have been an appropriate place for Paul to end this hymn, but Paul isn't satisfied to describe only what Christ has done freely and gladly in emptying himself for our sakes. Instead, he continues with a magnificent description of what God does in response. This self-emptying, self-lowering image is radically reversed as God restores in Christ the glory that was his from the beginning. God exalts him, gives him the name above all names, so that every knee should bow at the name of Jesus.

### THE CONSUMERISM TRAP

Perhaps no other text is as clear a pointer to the way God fills our emptiness. Our world teaches us to be consumers; to measure everything by "what we will get out of it." We buy our cars, our homes, and choose our jobs by what is the "best deal" for us or by what we will "get" from it.

We're approaching a time of year that can be one of the saddest times in the lives of our families, Christmas. A time when consumerism hits its height. A time when the world turns up the volume of its message that "fulfillment in life comes from having more." We are taught to fill our emptiness by getting more things and newer stuff.

But the problem is, no matter what we do or what we get, *that feeling of emptiness still remains*. And very quickly we realize that even getting everything we've ever wanted doesn't satisfy us; at least not for very long.

This text exposes the truth: that the self-centered life leads to emptiness, but that the self-emptying life leads to fulfillment - it leads to new life. *The way of humility and servanthood is the way to real, abundant, fulfilling life.*

Everyday we have a choice to make on how we want to live our lives. We can go through life asking ourselves "What's in it for me?" Or we can go through life asking ourselves "How can I be of service to God and the world?" "How can I help?"

The more we're able to ask "How can I serve?" or "How can I help?" the more fulfilling life can get. Why? Because this is how God created us to live. This is how Christ, the servant king, showed us how to live.

What do you have to give? Are you holding back in serving others, in giving your life to others? Or are you giving all that you have - are you giving it your all? Are you giving everything you have to your family, in serving and loving your family? Are you giving everything you have to your friends, in serving and loving your friends? Are you giving everything you have to your neighbors, in serving and loving your neighbors? Are you giving everything you have to God, *in serving and loving God?*

Today, several of our young people are joining the church through confirmation. And there can be a temptation when you join a church to ask the following questions: "What does this church have to offer me? How is it serving me? What programs can I get involved with that are going to meet my needs?"

These sound like good questions. But when you think about them in light of our text, you quickly realize that they are the wrong questions. Instead, we should be asking "What gifts do I have to offer and how can I help?" "How can I give my life away through the church?"

In the church, there are two types of programs: those that serve us and *those that ask us to serve*. The way of Christ is the second way.

The way of Christ, the way of humility and giving is the way to fill our own emptiness. The path to fulfillment and meaning in life is the path of self-emptying; of self-giving; of using the gifts with which we have been blessed for the benefit of others; To not waste the gifts we have, or to let them lie dormant, but to exercise our gifts of time, talent, energy, and finances and giving them

away to the people around us: giving them away for the building up of the kingdom of God. *This is what leads to true fulfillment in life.*

What do you have to live on? And what are you doing with it? Are you experiencing a life of emptiness or a life of emptying? A life of meaninglessness or a life of fulfillment? Consider the example of this widow and more importantly *the example of Christ and follow His lead!* **Amen.**

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### **Philippians 2:5-11**

5Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, 6who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, 7but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, 8he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross. 9Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, 10so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

### **Mark 12:38-44**

38As he taught, he said, “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, 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.”

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