



# FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

“One of These Things is Not Like the  
Others”

Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 40:1-5; Mark 12:41-44

*This sermon was preached by Dr. L. Holton Siegling, Jr. on Sunday,  
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Charleston, South Carolina.*

Mark 12:41-44

## The Widow's Offering

He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then 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. For 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.'

Leader: This is the Word of the Lord.

**People: Thanks be to God.**

Let us pray...

Almighty and everlasting God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts, be pleasing and even joyful in your sight. For you are our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

I suspect that many of you remember the Sesame Street Segment entitled: *One of These Things is Not Like the Others*. In fact, if you remember, I invite you to sing or kind of hum along with me....

One of these things is not like the others,  
One of these things just doesn't belong,  
Can you tell which thing is not like the others  
By the time I finish my song?

When that song would be played during that Sesame Street segment, if you remember this, you will recall how four different images would come up on the television screen...there would be four squares, and in each square, there was an object. Now, three of four objects were clearly similar; the fourth item, however, was usually noticeably different.

For example, in three of the four quadrants there might have been, let's say, rectangles, but in the fourth there would have been a triangle -- or maybe in three of the four displays there were letters, and in the fourth display there was a number.

I realized I was sort of playing this game myself a few days ago – I was looking at all the Halloween decorations that are popping up, and I noticed the rich variety of inflatables just in our neighborhood.

And if I were to put those inflatables into four displays / four boxes, if you will...in one box would be an inflatable scare crow, in the next box would be an inflatable pumpkin, and in the third box would be an inflatable ghost, but in the fourth box would be an inflatable...an inflatable dinosaur. And for me that is the one inflatable that is not like the others, that was the case for me.

As I was preparing this morning's sermon, I found myself thinking again about that classic Sesame Street segment, because in our NT Lesson, and within the span of four short verses, there are any number of people for us to see – but I'm going to spend a few moments considering four people in particular...and, I dare say, one of these people is not like the others.

Of course, in some ways they are the same. They each have the same backdrop, which is to say that they are in the same place -- the treasury. And from what we know about the treasury, it was probably either a temple chamber or an actual receptacle for offerings located in a precinct.

Whatever the precise form the treasury took, we can safely assume from the verses that proceed our Lesson and the ones that follow, that these events took place in and around the Temple in Jerusalem.

So where to begin? Well, since Jesus tells us that there were many rich people putting large sums of money into the treasury, let's start with them...let's start with the picture of a rich person.

That's fitting, I suppose, seeing as this rich person was first in so much of life. Granted, they probably worked very hard to earn their rarified living / that rank and station that they had come to enjoy.

I would add that these days a wealthy person can be rather unassuming / they can be that next-door neighbor who drives a modest car and lives in a modest home, but that was not necessarily the case for the people in this morning's story.

No! Seldom, if ever, did a rich person go unnoticed – people knew who they were...they were important. And, what's more, they knew that they were important!

When we look at the picture of this person, we observe that they literally wear their wealth on their sleeve, and the full measure of their gift to the treasury...oh, it was probably loud and clear / it probably rattled and banged around loudly as it was perhaps not so humbly deposited into that receptacle.

The person in our second picture, though not identified, was surely in the crowd that day – and the person I have in mind is a Scribe / a clergy type. This was a person who was well educated and had become somewhat an authority on God's Word -- it's interpretation and application.

This is the kind of person that Jesus likely had in mind when he advised us to always take the seat of lesser honor lest someone more important show up and we have to move. What I'm trying to say is that a candidate for that honorable position could very well have been a Scribe.

In other words, Scribes have good seats at the table / they were part of the "statusphere," as it were, and, like most situations, I'm sure some Scribes relished that honor more than others.

I suggest that they would be at the Treasury when Jesus is looking on, because they historically would directly benefit from the collections – it would make sense for a Scribe to stand near the action...and maybe in our picture they are stoic and reverent or maybe their picture

depicts them with folded and prayerful hands accompanied by a subtle bow of appreciation to all those who were making their deposits.

I doubt they bowed to the widow / the person in our third picture...probably not...probably didn't even notice her! And why? Well, I think part of the reason she does so unnoticed is that there's nothing to notice about her...she has no status – she has no fine clothes...she hardly has any money.

To the world, this widow is a nobody, which was not uncommon seeing as once her husband died, she could very well have been left without a provider as well as a means of providing for herself.

She does, however, have two small copper coins. So insignificant were they, that most of us wouldn't even stop to pick them up if we saw them on the ground...and the Bible so far as to tell us that those two coins were all she had to live on.

I don't know about you, but I've often struggled with this situation...I have wondered why a Scribe didn't step in and say, "Hey, listen mother, you need those two coins more than we do...just keep them...and may God bless you."

This picture of this woman is dimmer than the others...there's no spotlight...we hardly see her face at all...the darkness of her anonymity is mostly what we see. Is she that one person who is not like the others?

We've seen three of them / three distinct people -- a Rich Person, a Scribe, and a Widow. And the pictures are clearly not the same; indeed, these three people invite us to think seriously about wealth and poverty, about fellowship and loneliness, about "apparent" sacrifice, and "real" sacrifice.

But tell me, do such differences really make it so that one of these people is so truly set apart from the others that they can be viewed as wholly distinct and separate?

I mean, are not each of these people about the business of tending to the treasury? They recognize that they need to be there...and while some give out of their abundance and others out of their poverty, they all give. Be it their treasure or their time, they each know – they each understand – that they have been called upon to respond to God and to give of themselves to the work of His Temple / his Church.

In these ways and others, they are somewhat similar in that they are all children of God! Make no mistake about it, coming to the treasury that day was an act of worship, which should also serve to remind us that it's not a very productive enterprise for us to spend our time wondering if these people were part of God's story of salvation or not...

But they are part of this story, and, if you are keeping count, then you know that there is a fourth person whom we have not yet discussed. And the person in this fourth picture -- well, it is someone we have already talked about.

For He is the one who watches the others from a distance. He's the one who does not dismiss any of their contributions, but rather compares them with the truest measure of authenticity / a true spirit of sacrifice that should prevail in the hearts and minds of God's children.

He's the one who is human like each of the other three, but God like none of them. Oh, He is the one who, while they were depositing their money into the treasury of the Temple, he was preparing to deposit the very grace of God into the treasury of the human soul.

Jesus is the one in that fourth picture -- He is one who is unlike the others...because He is God! He is our Redeemer who would die for the rich person...and the Scribe...and the widow...and all those who would be saved by grace through faith.

Ah His picture is most assuredly one of grace...and it beautifully illustrates the extent of God's love for us and for the world / a love that would provide a way -- the way -- for us to be reconciled to God!

A way that is simply not possible through sacrifice, large or small, nor is it accomplished by any amount of faithful adherence to the law / it is not dependent upon how well we are known...if we are even known at all.

No! Our life, our eternal life, it is wholly dependent upon the one who is not like the others! For there is but one who is the way and the truth and the life; indeed, there is salvation in no other save the Lord, our God.

Our Savior – the one who has revealed to us the wonderful complexities of the last becoming first / and the greatest being a servant / and a Lamb, of all things, upon a throne -- it is in Him that we have life, and life abundant...and praise be to God, life eternal!

And for this, for God's unspeakable gift of grace, our life is to be lived in joyful response -- and when I say life, I mean the whole of our life...all that we have and all that we are -- a joyful response...a very living offering of worship and praise

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

\*The following sermon has not been edited by the author; therefore, there may be discrepancies. When in doubt please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website.