

- What would happen if we were to define our church, our Christianity, by what we see in movies and TV shows?
- If you walk into a church in the middle of the week, the pastor is always tending to the altar. (It's usually a flower arrangement)
- The most prominent feature on a pastor's desk is a large open Bible on a wooden book stand.
- Preachers are usually judgmental jerks in the movies, but naive simpletons on TV.
- Deacons are always self-righteous prudes.
- Pastor's kids are either naïve simpletons or angry rebels. (If the pastor's kids are rebels, the pastor is always wrong and the kids are always right.)
- If a pastor preaches against a sin, he will be caught committing that sin.
- They love To Argue, Fight, And Attack
- They are hypocritical
- They are "anti" (intolerant, judgmental)
- They are superficial and even when they mean well, a bit uneducated and backwards. Perhaps sheltered and naïve.
- What if this was not the case? What if those who claim to follow Jesus were the most authentic, most generous, most hard-working people at their jobs. In their neighborhoods. In their cars?
- Most Christ-followers feel that they ARE those people.
- Stereotypes exist for a reason – there is usually some experience or truth that set it off, even if generally it is inaccurate.
- Are we? How do we know? **THERE IS GREAT VALUE IN AN AUTHENTIC LIFE.**

- We are in Mark 12 today.
- The event we are going to go through today was the last public event for Jesus in his life. Everything after this is within the group of disciples leading into the aloneness of his death.
- As Mark does frequently in his writings, he puts two little accounts side by side to contrast the attitudes and actions of the people in the story to real force home what Jesus is saying or doing.
- If you read through the end of Mark 11 and all the way through 12, you find that the religious leaders are going after Jesus hard. Remember, he had just made a spectacle of the temple courts by overturning the tables and criticizing them. They are fed up with him and their first step is to try to discredit him but getting him to make a mistake in his teaching or actions that they can use to get people to stop following him.
- They begin by questioning his authority.
- Then they tried to trap him by asking whether they should pay taxes to Rome.
- Then a different group tried to trap him by focusing on marriage and the afterlife.
- Finally, a teacher of the law pushed at Jesus regarding the most important commandment.
- None of them work. Jesus brilliantly deals with each one.
- He sees their hearts though and in the last part of chapter 12, we see Jesus point out their hearts.

Mark 12:38 As he taught, Jesus said, "Watch out for the teachers of the law.

- These are the people who had just been trying to trap him. They were the ones who caused him to turn over the tables in the temple. They were the ones who were going to spearhead his death in a couple of days.
- Jesus was not talking so much about watching out for these men to avoid them, but to watch out that their behavior and hearts did not look like these people. **THERE IS GREAT VALUE IN AN AUTHENTIC LIFE** but that did not describe these men because:

I. Their hearts were all about putting themselves first.

- He is calling them out as hypocrites, which is simply to put on one face to cover true identity. To put on that you are one thing when you are another.
- He describes what this looks like in detail.

A. They sought attention from others.

They like to walk around in flowing robes

- We know historically that they favored fine white linen robes, when everyone else had colored ones.
- They dressed to be noticed. Of course this is not about wearing nice clothes, but what Jesus was pushing on was the reasons behind it. They wanted to be noticed. They wanted to see that they were of a “higher order.” They desired for people to accommodate them because they saw them.
- They desired the attention of others and they wanted to impress them to get their adulation.

B. They desired the approval of others.

and be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, 39 and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets.

- These men desired and even demanded respect. They wanted to be seen and recognized for their position and accomplishments. They wanted people to call them reverend, or sir, or teacher, or rabbi. They wanted to sit in the prominent positions in the church services so that people would notice their holiness and position.
- They did good things so that people would applaud their goodness.
- They loved to be invited to people’s houses and be put at the right hand of honor of the host. To be the center of attention and have people admire them.
- Their identity was wrapped up in what others thought of them.

C. They were focused on what they could get.

40 They devour widows’ houses

- The role of the priests and leaders was partially to make sure that they took care of the marginalized and down-trodden. Jesus uses the example of widows to show this self-focus with money and stuff.
- They would put on a show of caring for them, but in fact would use them for their own financial gain. These men were reliant on the gifts of others in order to be paid, so they did what they could to get more.
- They would teach and preach about the need to trust God, to give to his temple. Widows were particularly vulnerable and they would prey on them. “Give to the temple. Trust God. Turn over what you have to us.” Then they would take control of what was offered and it made them rich and made the situation of these women. It sounds like stories we continue to hear even to today.

D. Their religion was about impressing God and others.

and for a show make lengthy prayers.

- Their function was to lead people to God. What happened was that they did it for show. They would look spiritual, sound like they were standing next to God, but it was all a cover for their selfish actions and desires.
- They did all the right religious actions, but it never touched the heart of God. They acted like they did to justify themselves, to justify themselves to God, and look impressive to people.

- Jesus finishes with these oh-so-lovely words. *These men will be punished most severely.*"
- And we think. "Absolutely!" These hypocrites give us all a bad name and they deserve what they get.
- **THERE IS GREAT VALUE IN AN AUTHENTIC LIFE.**
- But before we move on too quickly, let me ask you:
- Are you ever obsessed with your appearance? It might be your actual appearance or maybe not letting people see you in need. Not admitting your weakness. Avoiding certain things because they might make you "look stupid." Do you never let people see the real you?
- Do you get bummed when others don't recognize your service? Do you serve others regularly? Do we sometimes let it go to our heads, somehow imagining we are a better person than the average Joe blow?
- Are you focused on your stuff? Getting the next greatest thing? Saving for retirement. Dealing with all your own financial stuff first? Doing whatever it takes to get ahead?
- Do you have a special voice and style you use for public prayers, to sound more religious? Are you here because you are trying to please God, please a spouse?
- **THERE IS GREAT VALUE IN AN AUTHENTIC LIFE.**
- In your bibles, there is probably a break at this point, with a heading that says something like "The Widow's Offering" or something like that. When Mark wrote this originally, there was no break here. This is not an unrelated account. It ties to what Jesus just spoke.

41 Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury.

- This is most likely in the Court of the Women (remember our map from last week). Jewish men could come into this court area, but no Gentiles were allowed.
- Around on the dividing wall were 13 trumpet-shaped funnels acting as offering collection containers. Instead of dropping your money in the offering plate, you dropped it in one of these receptacles. They had different designations and the money in them was to be used for different purposes. Helping others. Upkeep of the temple. Etc.
- Jesus sat there with his disciples where they could see some of them putting money in.

Many rich people threw in large amounts.

- Remember, there is no online giving. There is no paper money. There are no checks. There is only coins of various values. These trumpets, which were partly made from metal, would announce pretty loudly what was being put in and as the rich gave huge sums of money, their offerings probably made a loud clanging sound.

42 But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents.

- The "two small copper coins" were the smallest coinage of that time. It took 64 such coins to make a denarius, a day's wage, that is, enough on which to live for a day. The woman had only 1/32 of what it took to live for a day. In our parlance today, this was a couple of dollars, maybe \$5 max.
- Jesus noticed this woman. The disciples paid no attention to this woman – it was why Jesus had to call them to get their attention.

43 Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. 44 They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything – all she had to live on."

- Mark is presenting a direct contrast to the rich and the powerful. It is not accidental that he condemned the rich leaders by showing how they took advantage of widows and then uses this widow as example.
- In doing so he contrasts the superficiality and hypocrisy of the religious leaders with the authenticity of the widow. **THERE IS GREAT VALUE IN AN AUTHENTIC LIFE.**

II. An authentic life reflects the extravagant generosity of the Father.

- This widow shows what this authenticity looks like.

A. An authentic life is a sacrificial life.

41 Many rich people threw in large amounts. 42 But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents. . . 44 They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything – all she had to live on.”

- Do you know what the rich people were after they gave their offerings? Rich. They still had all they needed. Their needs and wants were taken care of.
- Do what the woman had after giving her offering? Nothing. Mark notes that was all she had. There was no reserve. Yet it was important enough to give that she gave it. She knew that the two pennies were not going to make any real difference in the temple. It wasn't going to change what happened in ministry.
- But it mattered to her heavenly Father and so she sacrificed for him
- She gave what she would almost assuredly would rather have kept.
- When God gets only what we can afford, or what we feel capable of giving, it reveals something about our hearts.
- The issue is the heart. Am I willing to put God first? The way we show it is by putting others first.

B. An authentic life often leads us to actions that appear unreasonable.

44 They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything – all she had to live on.”

- A widow in Jesus' time was among the most vulnerable of the population.
- A widow had less capacity for earning than slaves; and unless she had family or friends to protect and help her, she was most likely penniless and perhaps even homeless, and reduced to begging. She was desperately poor, and more fit to be a recipient of charity than a donor.
- She gave everything she had! She didn't stop at ten percent. She gave 100 percent! “Why isn't she planning ahead? Why isn't she saving some for food, or rent, or Netflix, for goodness sake?”
- After all, you have to be wise. Way too often I have used the excuse of wisdom as a reason to simply do less, give less or focus on myself.
- We don't get the option to not be generous because money is tight. We can't substitute service for money.
- Some of the most generous people I know are people who by all appearances cannot afford to do anything.

C. An authentic life is of great value to God.

43 Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others.

- This woman's sacrifice, by every single standard of human endeavors, was pointless. It accomplished nothing, impressed no one, and could have been spent on herself in ways that would seem to be of so much more benefit.
- Yet Jesus points out this woman gave more than ALL of the others. The rich gave from their leftovers but she gave from what she had.
- God is never impressed with those who give from their leftovers. That's why generosity is such a mark of a Christ-follower.

- God gave it all up. He gave up what was most valuable in his son. He willingly parted with that which he did desire to part with. He, in what seems utterly unreasonable, let his son die for sins and crimes he never committed so that you, a rebellious creature, could enjoy eternal life with him. He has always been and always will be an extravagant giver. We cannot be authentic followers of Jesus and be stingy or self-focused.
- (It's why one of the criteria we use for selecting elders is their giving and generosity)
- Divine standards on generosity are different than worldly standards on generosity because the value of a gift is determined by how much that gift costs the giver.
- The gift we celebrate from God at Christmas cost him everything. Can we do any less?
- **THERE IS GREAT VALUE IN AN AUTHENTIC LIFE.**
- The act of this humble, needy widow seems to summarize Jesus' teaching.
- The kingdom of God is not like the religious leaders. It is not about self. It is not about appearances. It is not about ritual and religion. We cannot put our own needs first and seek God's kingdom. We cannot make our position, our comfort, our power, our own lives, our primary responsibility and still follow Jesus wholeheartedly.
- Rather, like this widow, the kingdom is about putting God ahead of everything else, living radically generous lives, because everything we have ultimately belongs to him and he has been and continues to be radically generous with us.
- **THERE IS GREAT VALUE IN AN AUTHENTIC LIFE.**
- All the excuses in the world will not change this.
- This story also teaches us that what God requires from us is not merely our money.
- The focal point of the gift is not the determining factor. The temple was utterly destroyed a few decades later, never to be rebuilt.
- "I cannot afford it." (Neither could this woman. But God had unlimited resources.)
- "They don't deserve it." (We never deserved God's extravagant generosity)
- "They will misuse it." (Perhaps. We are often guilty of the same)
- "I already did my part. They need to do theirs." (God's grace is unconditional)
- "What I give or do won't even make a difference." (God places a huge value on it)
- "I have to be wise with my money." (Is our selfishness simply masquerading as wisdom?)
- "*We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.*" (Winston Churchill)
- So rather than living for ourselves. Living for the attention of others. To play it safe. To gain the approval of certain people. To cover my wants. To give lip service to God.
- Let's instead be people who reflect the radical, extravagant generosity of our God. People who sacrificially give of ourselves and our stuff. It might seem silly or even unreasonable. At least to the world around us. Sometimes even to us. But it never does to God.
- **THERE IS GREAT VALUE IN AN AUTHENTIC LIFE.** May we live as truly, authentic, sold out, radically generous followers of Jesus.