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Date: September 6th, 2009
Series: Who Jesus Is & Why He Matters
Section: Jesus on Mission in Jerusalem
Topic: The Christ
Message Title: Devotion Jesus Commends
Short Title: What Jesus Commends
Text: Mark 12:38-44

- 38 In His teaching He was saying: [38-40: Warning Against the Scribes]
"Beware of the scribesⁱ [Prev ctx places J. in Temple]
who like to walk around in long robesⁱⁱ, and [What did the long robes do for them?]
like respectful greetings in the market places, [Ego puffer: people speaking respectfully of them in public]
39 and chief seats in the synagogues [Other's seeing them as recognized by peers as honored]
and places of honor at banquets, [Again, others seeing them as honored by others]
40 who devour widows' houses, [In spite of all the high honor people gave them their true character was repulsively low]
and for appearance's sake [Why did they pray? To be seen and thought well of by those who saw them]
offer long prayers;
these will receive greater condemnationⁱⁱⁱ." [For this duplicity: future greater condemnation.]
- 41 And He sat down opposite the treasury^{iv}, [What was the treasury?]
and began observing how the people were putting money into the treasury; [J. was interested in how...!]
and many rich people were putting in large sums. [Contrast: Many/Rich/Large vs. One/Poor/Small]
- 42 A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which amount to a cent. []
- 43 Calling His disciples to Him, He said to them, [Jesus addresses this teaching to His disciples. Listen up!]
"Truly I say to you, [Emphasizing the importance of what He is about to say]
this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury; [In what way did she put "more"?)
[Explanation of the way the widows gifts is considered more in Jesus' accounting.]
- 44 for they all put in [] [Non-mention of the object of "put in" says, what they put in wasn't worth mentioning]
out of their surplus, [Surplus]
but []
she,
out of her poverty, [Poverty. Forward position emphasizes poverty/surplus contrast]
put in all she owned, [Object of "put in" specified: all she owned...]
all she had to live on." [further explaining the magnitude of her gift.]

NOTE: With NASB right-justified notes from Johnny Potter.

Misc. Notes

What did Jesus intend His disciples to take away from their thinking about the difference in the contributors and their contributions? Jesus seems to continue to bring clarity of understanding to whatever topic He speaks about: who the Christ is (35-37) of the previous passage, and here he is redefining commendable giving. I take it as a window into what Jesus values and particularly what He sees as more = greater when it comes to our lives of devotion. It is Jesus setting right side up what has been upside down for so long that we think it is right side up.

What is the “putting in” of our day that Jesus commends? Is it our financial giving to the church? Maybe it is better more broadly regarded as what we put in to our relationship with God generally speaking.

The one poor widow stands in direct contrast to the many rich religious (41-44) and she also stands in contrast to the scribes of 38-40.

Logical Structure of the Passage

Jesus: Negatively, beware of Men-A; positively, take note of Woman-B.

Exegetical Main Point of Passage

Concluding a series of mostly antagonistic entrapping questions put to Him by the Jewish religious authorities, Jesus warns His listeners to beware of those regarded by men as authorities in spiritual matters who are actually more concerned that men think highly of them than that they rightly understand truth about God; and in contrast to these, Jesus positively holds up the exemplary devotion of a woman who gave a gift small in the eyes of natural man, but measured by Jesus as “more.”

Homiletical Idea

Because things are not what they appear to be (with what looks like commendable holiness actually being the ugliest opposite of condemnable religious hypocrisy) we must be on the alert (beware) and take for our positive examples (of genuine devotion to God), what Jesus declares superior (more).

Subject & Compliments

What Jesus Commends

- Not Acting for the Applause of Men
- But Giving for the Love of God
- So What Do We Stop and What Do We Start?

Goals of Message

1. That **we would heed Jesus warning** about those who express apparent devotion to God as a mask over what is really self aggrandizing posturing.
2. That **we would identify and exterminate from our own lives any remaining fake devotion** to God and **replace it with genuine love for Him** – love which will spill over and manifest itself in our love for one another and even overflow in our love for our neighbors.

Transformation Card

This page provides an overview of the message and resources for individual and group study.

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Message Outline

What Jesus Commends

- I. Not **Acting** for the Applause of **Men**
- II. But **Giving** for the **Love** of God
- III. So What Do We **Stop** & What Do We **Start**?

Related Scripture

1. Mat 23
2. Lk 20:45 – 21:4
3. Exodus 30:11-16
4. 2 Kings 12:1-16
5. John 8 (note v. 20, location of Jesus' teaching)

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. What does "the Christ" mean?
2. In what way was the Christ to be the son of David?
3. Who was David referring to in Ps 110:1 when he said, "...my Lord...?"
4. How does knowing that the Christ is David's son and Lord help you understand who Jesus is?
5. How does knowing who Jesus is help you love God?

Memory and Meditation Verse

"How is it that the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David?"

Mark 12:35b NASB

What Jesus Commends

Intro

Brothers and sisters made so by God's grace through faith in Jesus,

In the passage of Scripture before us today this same Jesus calls us to live as the real thing in a world of fakes: **Johnny, you all, live genuine lives of devotion to God in a world of convincingly masked fakes!**

Things are not always what they appear to be. What looks like commendable holiness can actually be the ugliest opposite of condemnable religious hypocrisy. And because things are frequently not what they appear to be, we must be on the alert and take for our positive example of genuine devotion to God, what Jesus declares superior.

This is the life of faith. It is valuing (our usually invisible) genuine devotion and regarding as antithetical and despicable all false piety which has as its goal our own reputation as a godly person. The life of faith calls us away from acting holy so others will think well of us, to being holy and exercising unseen or un-acclaimed genuine devotion to God.

Pray with me for the Holy Spirit to give us ears to hear and hearts yielded to His shaping.

Let's see if we can hear His voice in Mark 12:38-44.

What does Jesus commend in our lives of devotion to Him? Well, it is certainly...

I. Not Acting for the Applause of Men

A. Understand the Danger of Faked Devotion (38-40)

1. "Beware!" – Jesus is issuing us a warning
2. It is not the religious actions that are dangerously problematic.
There is nothing wrong with:
 - a. walking around in long robes
 - b. receiving nice greetings in the market places
 - c. sitting in chief seats in the synagogues
 - d. enjoying places of honor at banquets
 - e. praying long prayersThe actions themselves are benign...
3. It is the heart/motive/intent that matters
Jesus' caution is that:
 - a. We must beware of those who "like" these things (v. 38)
 - b. We must beware of those who do them "for appearance sake" (v. 40)

B. Beware of What the Fakes Can Do to You

1. Jesus' Example of the Harm the Fake Can Do: They devour widow's houses (v. 40)
 - a. Then – Hurtado p. 205: "...probably has to do with a scribe sponging off devout people who felt an obligation to support a scribe as a representative of God's law...religious leaders who unscrupulously solicit support from ...people who are led to believe they are supporting the very work of God but can ill afford to give as heavily as they are solicited to do."
 - b. Now – I'm not against fund raising per se, but against the manipulation that seeks wealth for the shepherd at the expense of the sheep.
2. When leaders fake it, followers get hurt! The followers of the scribes who did not recognize Jesus were led away from Him who was their hope.

C. Beware of Becoming a Fake Yourself

1. We Live on the Borderline between Genuine Devotion & Fakery – the old man would manipulate for his selfish advantage: give only what you need to for your own best positioning; give so you can get back...
2. Safeguards Against Fakery
 - a. Live with the awareness of our own potential fickleness – We flip-flop with scary ease from the most altruistic of motives to the most selfish. The Bible guides us to not think more highly of ourselves than we should (Ro 12:3). Paul recognized that it is only by God's grace that he enjoyed the position of leadership in the church that he did. (1 Cor 15:10).
 - b. Repent from wrong motives
 - c. Be who God has created, redeemed, and gifted us to be
 - i. Remind yourself of who you are in Christ
 - ii. Immerse yourself in the transforming waters of the Word
 - iii. Continue to remind and immerse...

What is...

D. The End of Fake Devotion for the Fake Godly -- Condemnation!

1. Mark 12:40b – Jesus says, "...these will receive greater condemnation."
2. What Condemnation Is
 - a. It is the state of separation from God all mankind finds itself in because of the fall; it stands opposite justification which comes through faith in Christ. See Rom 5 esp. v. 18.
3. Irony: Those Who Seek the Approval of Men Receive the Condemnation of God

What is the devotion which Jesus commends? It is clearly NOT actions motivated by self love and personal elevation in the eyes of men, i.e., not acting for the applause of men...

II. But Giving for the Love of God

41 And He sat down opposite the treasury,
and began observing how the people were putting money into the treasury;
and many rich people were putting in large sums.
42 A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which amount to a cent.
43 Calling His disciples to Him, He said to them,
"Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury;
44 for they all put in []
out of their surplus,
but
she, out of her poverty,
put in all she owned,
all she had to live on."

A. Jesus Was Interested in People's Giving

1. Verse 41a
2. Why People Were Giving
 - a. Some gave to be seen giving so they would be thought well of by men
 - i. Pharisees who hired trumpet blowers to announce their gift and attract attention
 - b. Some gave from honest devotion to God and desire for His temple to be cared for
3. Why Jesus Was Interested
 - a. Its not like He needed the money and was really hoping to have a banner day for God
 - b. People's Giving Gave Jesus' Disciples Insight into the Devotion of the Givers
 - c. People's Giving Gave Jesus' Disciples Insight into their own Devotion

Let's look at what Jesus saw (41b-44) and pick out the facts first about the sad norm of...

B. Devotion that is No Devotion at All

1. v. 41 -- "many"
2. v. 41 -- "rich"
3. v. 41 -- "large sums"
4. v. 44 -- "out of their surplus"
5. Natural Accounting – $1 + 2 + 3 =$ A good day for the temple treasury!
6. Jesus Accounting – These gifts were regarded as less than the 1 cent gift of the widow.
The unspecified amount of these major donors (v. 44) speaks to the un-noteworthy and unremarkable nature of their gifts in Jesus' accounting.

This was the negative side of a contrast that we might know the positive. Now, let's look at the facts of the unusual and commendable devotion...

C. Devotion Declared as "More" by Jesus

1. Elements of the Devotion Jesus Commends
 - a. "this" = one woman, as contrasted to the many
 - b. "poor" – she was poor, as contrasted to the rich
 - c. widow = "woman" – making more clear her humble social status
 - d. "two small copper coins, which amount to a cent" – small offering, as contrasted to the large gifts of the many rich

- e. “out of her poverty” – as contrasted to the surplus put in by the many rich (v. 44)
 - f. “all she owned” – as contrasted to the “some” implied by the “surplus” (v. 44)
 - g. “all she had to live on” – Nothing was held back not even enough for her own self provision. Talk about being all in! (v.44)
 - h. “more” – Jesus declared her gift more. In what way was it more? (v. 43)
2. Why Less is More -- Why Less (to the Natural Eye) is “More” to Jesus
- a. More -- a greater percentage of her total net worth.
But that is not the heart of “moreness”
 - b. More – a greater expression of dependence
 - i. Some would say she didn’t have much therefore it was easier for her to give all she had. Well you don’t have much in comparison to others. You give all that you own right down to the change for your next meal and then tell me that it was no big thing.

Will Smith, *The Pursuit of Happiness* when the wealthy boss needed money for a cab and it was the money for his next meal.

- c. More – a greater expression of her love. A few weeks back we looked at the passage where Jesus held up love of God as His greatest commandment. And we remembered together that love is best showcased for us to understand in God’s sacrificial **gift** of His Son for us. “in this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and **sent His Son** to be the propitiation for our sins.” 1 John 4:10 “But God demonstrates His love for us in that while we were yet sinners **Christ died for us.**” Rom 5:8: Paul recognizes Jesus giving of Himself as an act of love, “...the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who **loved me and gave Himself up for me.**” Gal 2:20 Very clearly stated in John’s gospel, “For **God so loved the world that He gave** His only begotten son...” John 3:16a We come to the conclusion that **giving is an expression of love. Giving sacrificially of yourself for the good of another is God-like love. And loving God with everything we’ve got is the heart of God’s greatest commandment.** The widow epitomized love for God as she literally fulfilled the greatest commandment in giving “all she owned, all she had to live on.”

No wonder Jesus called His disciples over and had them look at this widow and her extravagant gift. He wanted her picture and her giving burned into the permanent memory their minds. We **know**, without over analyzing it, that her gift was indeed “more” than even the larger gifts of the rich because it was loving God with everything she had and therefore the greatest of all gifts.

What type of devotion to God does Jesus commend? It is:

Not **Acting** for the Applause of **Men**

But **Giving** for the **Love** of God

So, what do we make of this image Jesus gave His 1st century disciples in real time and has given us His 21st century disciples in Scripture? He doesn’t list three action points to do in sequence. I believe He wants us to think on this. Why would Jesus call His disciples over and have them take this in? What did they need to know? What do we need to know? How would Jesus have us respond to His correction in our understanding of the definition of truly commendable devotion to God?

III. So What Do We Stop & What Do We Start?

A. Stop

1. **Faking It** = Religious Actions Motivated by Self Love. Stop faking our devotion to God!
2. Practice of **Surplus Giving** – Every-other Sunday for an hour and a half Christian living, with a little tip for the man upstairs, as long as someone is watching. Stop that!
3. **Flirting with Giving Up on God and Giving In to the World** – because it is just too hard. When I had a hard season of my life a couple years ago, I just wanted to go chop wood in the desert. The widow could so easily have given up in despair; but she chose to “put in” in devotion to God.
4. **Stop Acting Like A Christian Should Act** and...

B. Start (What the picture of the widow calls us to)

1. BEING What a Christian Is

- a. Pastor Kit Culver: “Live into the reality of who you are in Christ.
- b. Who We Are In Christ – Adopted children in the family of God, new creations in Christ, the bride of Christ, we are living stones being built alongside the corner stone in the ultimate temple of God, we are the dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

2. BEING Genuinely Devoted to God

3. BEING All In All the Time

- a. 24/7 Sabbath Rest Jesus Has Secured for Us

4. BEING Dependent on God – allowing Him to be enough!

- a. We will not have all we want: greater resources, greater relationships, greater job, greater housing, greater health, greater freedom from difficulties... but we have God who will never leave us or forsake us^v, who will provide for us, who uses all the less in our life and makes it more^{vi}.
- b. Say with David, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want... even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I fear no evil for You are with me.” (Ps 23) The presence of God indwelling us in His Spirit is enough.
- c. Say with Paul, Nothing can separate us from the love of God... (Ro 8) and declare to yourself and the world that **His love towards you is enough! His grace is sufficient**^{vii}.

Conclusion

So what are we left with? We are left with the image of one poor widow of the smallest social standing and her one cent offering being declared by Jesus more than the large offerings of the many rich and more commendable than the religious activities of the leaders.

Jesus gathers His disciples around a simple impoverished widow of low social standing and says this is what I want you to see, this is devotion worth noticing. She’s got it, while the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the scribes, the Herodians..., they missed it. It is not about what people think it is about. It is about loving God with everything thing you’ve got, and how much that is in the absolute sense means absolutely nothing! That you love Him wholeheartedly and live in dependence on Him, that means everything!

Some of you are the rich young ruler, some are the educated scribes, some of you fit more closely the description of the widow with few resources and low standing. Your journey from condemnable religion to commendable devotion will be a little different, but the distance is the same. The rich in education

and resources you privileged of social position, you have to start by getting over the hurdle of your perception that you are something special because of your riches; once over you then love God with everything you've got. The poor in social standing or financial or emotional or physical health, you have to get over the hurdle of your perceived unworthiness thinking that you could not possibly bring anything of value to God; once over that hurdle, just like the others, you must love God with everything you've got. You may be starting at different places right now but the starting line of devotion to God is right here where the widow has run the race ahead of you and received the commendation of our Lord Jesus – the commendation of greatest worth. Get over the hurdle that stands between you and complete devotion, then love Him like the widow did.

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (Rom 8:1.) As we prepare to receive communion this morning spend a little time looking at the widow Jesus has set before us. Compare your devotion to the model Jesus picked. If your devotion doesn't measure up, start climbing over the hurdle even today in your submission to His better plan for your life. You may need to make a course correction you've been running up the wrong hill. Don't waste another step, there will be no lasting enjoyment at the top of that hill. The Bible calls it repentance, the changing of understanding and life direction. Jesus calls us all to do it and only the fool doesn't and continues on the wrong road. Don't be the fool, be the forgiven. Come to the starting line of devotion this morning.

Would you please come and get the elements: the bread which stands for the body of Christ, the cup that stands for the blood of Christ; and as you do would you please consider your short journey to the table as symbolic of getting over the hurdle that stands between you and complete devotion to God. Stay in your seats in prayer until you know what to stop and what to start in order for you to be a woman or man fully devoted to God, then come as a demonstration of commitment to Him who knew the pain of the cross and yet journeyed to Jerusalem and Calvary for you. Come remembering that "this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His son to be the propitiation of our sins."

Let's pray! Hear the word of God: Mark 12:38-44.

Come to the table as the Holy Spirit releases you from your seats. Be reminded of the sacrifice of Jesus for you. Be nourished and sustained by His indwelling presence. Lift your voices in devotion that holds nothing back.

When I Survey the Wondrous Cross

When I survey the wondrous cross,
On which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small,
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.
Isaac Watts

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ENDNOTES

ⁱ Beware of Scribes – Sounds like Beware of Dogs. Was Jesus warning us against these people because they could hurt us (like the dog that bites), or was He warning us against the error of the scribes because we could fall into that error and be faced with the consequent condemnation Jesus speaks on these errant scribes, or both?

ⁱⁱ “The white linen robe was a sign of a religious leader in ancient Judaism, worn by priests and scribes. They often had long fringes at the corners as a symbol of great learning and devotion to the law of God... In rabbinic teaching, all the Jews were to rise at the approach of a scribe...” Hurtado p. 209

ⁱⁱⁱ Greater condemnation – echoes James’ warning (3:1) for not many becoming teachers as they will incur a stricter judgment. Use of “condemnation” in the NT NASB:
<http://www.biblegateway.com/keyword/?search=condemnation&searchtype=all&version1=49&bookset=2&limit=none>

^{iv} “treasury” -- the temple treasury where offerings were placed. “Ancient Jewish tradition (the Mishnah) indicates that there were thirteen trumpet-shaped receptacles for the gifts of the people located in the temple area called the Court of the Women (the farthest point to which women could go in the temple area). Hurtado p. 210

^v [Hebrews 13:5](#) -- Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, " I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU," NASB

^{vi} James 1:2-4 2Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, 3knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

^{vii} Cf. 2 Corinthians 12:8-10 – “8 Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. 9 And He has said to me, **My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness** ” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. 10 Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.”