

Watching the Pennies

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[0 : 00] Well, I wonder if, like me, you're ever tempted from time to time to try your hand at some maintenance task, thinking rather stupidly that you'll either save money or time by not getting in a qualified technician or tradesperson.

I tell you what, if you've got that experience, if you had that experience, you'll know it's pretty good for your humility as you flounder around with all sorts of questions behind you, reasonably loud, like, are you sure you know what you're doing?

I mean, don't wreck it. Are you sure you're undoing the nut the right way? And, of course, you'd mutter under your breath, of course. And then you pull down anti-clockwise on the nut.

I guess I've got to do it that way for those sitting there watching. And you do it even harder than you'd previously done before. But, in fact, the harder that you do it, it just seems that that nut gets tighter and tighter, in fact, tighter than when you first started.

And then, when no one's watching, you try to undo the nut in the other direction. And you can just start to feel it release.

[1 : 11] Ah, success. If you're a Get Smart fan, you'll know that that's the old reverse screw trick. Reversals often catch us out.

And as Paul's already mentioned, we're working through the last chapters of Mark's Gospel, if you've joined us just tonight, or maybe you haven't been here for the last couple of weeks. So let me very briefly review these reversals that we've seen time and time again, beginning in Chapter 8. You see, just after Jesus' first announcement to the disciples that he would be rejected by the religious elite, that he would be killed, rise again, he went on and he taught the disciples this in Mark 8, 24.

If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake and for the sake of the Gospel will save it.

For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation of them, the Son of Man, will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.

[2 : 33] And of course, in Chapter 8, if you recall, we also see the reversal in blindness of the man at Bethsaida. And then in Chapter 9, we see the proud, self-focused disciples jostling for position.

And again, Jesus patiently teaches them. And he says, Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all. Friends, the kingdom of God is very different to the kingdom of this world.

In Chapter 10, the disciples sought to keep little children away from Jesus. And his patience with these slow-to-learned disciples is starting to wear a bit thin.

We read in Chapter 10, Verse 14, Let the little children come to me. Do not stop them. For it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly, I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.

And he took them up in his arms. He laid his hands on them and blessed them. And then again in Chapter 10, James and John are battling it out in the world championship ring of egotism.

[3 : 44] And again, Jesus instructs the disciples in 1042, You know that among the Gentiles, those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them.

But it's not so among you. But whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant. And whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.

For the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. The kingdom of God is very different to the kingdom of this world.

And now Jesus has come to the temple. This place of religious power, prestige, and national influence.

But there's been no warm welcome at the temple for the king. Instead, rather than a warm welcome, there's been this series of confrontations with various power groups.

[4 : 48] They remind me a little bit of the first century equivalent of Victorian political factions. Often bitter opponents of one another, but then united in their hatred for some common enemy.

In this case, Jesus. United in their desire to get rid of him. And if you were here last Sunday night, you recall when Paul was preaching that Jesus took the initiative with those who were looking on, with those who were watching him in the temple.

You see, the Jews, they considered that David to be the role model. And the promised Messiah was considered to be good, but, you know, a little bit less than David.

And Jesus showed them from Psalm 110 that physical descent does not mean inferiority. You see, Jesus reverses the relationship that the Jews expected.

And Jesus' teaching on this upside-down kingdom of God continues then through chapter 12. The scribes, the Old Testament legal eagles, had superficial piety.

[5 : 54] And if you've got your Bibles open there, you can look as we read at verse 38. They 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 honour at banquets.

But what do they do? They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearances they say long prayers. But then, what a reversal.

Jesus says, they will receive the greater condemnation. The kingdom of God is very, very different to the kingdom of this world.

But it shouldn't surprise us, should it? And when you think of the kingdom of this world, it's a kingdom about self, self-fulfillment, self-worship, self-adulation, personal advancement, power and influence.

And wealth can get you a long way in this kingdom of the world. There's no doubt about that.

Wealth in this world, in this kingdom of the world, can get you quite a long way. For a time, anyway.

[7 : 04] In New York, there's 8 million people who compete in that crowded city. And the rat race starts as early as, guess, three years of age.

See, the competition to get children into the city's exclusive preschools is ferocious. Tuition fees for preschoolers are about \$25,000 Aussie.

But New York's got lots of wealthy people. It's not the tuition fees that are the problem. The issue is, how do you actually get your child into the preschool?

And the answer is, by big donations, very big donations, and having lots of connections, having lots of influence. And the reporter who was relaying this story commented, private schooling in Manhattan is an altered universe of money, influence, and angst.

Parents sweat about the future of their children with a belief that a failure to get their children into the right school means that they'll never make it to Harvard, Princeton, or Yale.

[8 : 13] Make no mistake about it, wealth can get you a long way in the kingdom of this world for a time at least. But the kingdom of this world is not on about loving God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your strength, and with all your soul.

So tonight, as we come to this short passage, just four little verses. Widows, interestingly, they become the link with that section that we looked at at the end of last week, with that teaching illustration on reversal.

So what's the scene? Jesus is seated opposite the treasury. Not on about you, but I quite enjoy watching the world go by. Well, maybe for an hour or two I quite enjoy doing that.

And I was thinking particularly of circumstances when you're in airport boarding lounge. I mean, there is such a fascinating group of people who come past you.

Different ethnic backgrounds. You see some person sitting over here quite content to read a book. I don't think it's Paul Barker. Others over here demanding that everybody in the lounge takes notice of them.

[9 : 32] Some are clearly excited by the prospect of a plane trip and others are just absolutely bored to tears that they're getting on another plane. I mean, you can actually tell quite a lot by just sitting and watching.

Friends, if that's true for us, how much more for the Son of God? Jesus is sitting opposite the place where the offerings were put and he's watching the crowd.

He's watching the crowd as they put their money into the temple treasury. I want you to imagine this scene. There were 13 brass treasure chests around the court of women.

They were called trumpets for a good reason because they were shaped like inverted horns. They were narrow at the top and then enlarged at the bottom. Imagine these 13 of them. And on each of those chests there were inscriptions for the type of offering that it was to be used for.

So, for example, on one of them there was an inscription translated into English young birds for whole offerings. So, that was used for the purchase of pigeons. And on six of these 13 chests they were marked freewill offerings.

[10:44] Imagine these 13 trumpet inverted horns and this is a very busy scene. This is Passover. So, there are stacks of people.

There are the locals and a large number of pilgrims. And they're coming past and they're literally throwing their money into these treasure chests.

And Jesus was watching. There were lots of rich people.

And if you think about that that shouldn't surprise us either. Because throughout the history of the world there's always been a wealthy class. In fact some you might say hideously wealthy. Just in yesterday's age it was reported that Forbes magazine has just released its list of the world's wealthiest people.

And not surprisingly Bill Gates of Microsoft fame topped the list with a personal fortune of 50 million US 50 billion US. Just think about that.

[11:48] That rich and still selling products that need interminable patch up corrections and security fixes. James Packer well he weighs in at just US 5 billion.

That's a miserable 114th place in the world's list. The text of course doesn't tell us whether any of these folks depositing money in the treasury on this day would have made the rich list of the Middle East in 30 AD.

But we do know that there were many rich people and they were putting in large sums. Imagine how impressive that scene would have been.

I mean the rich would have likely been throwing in silver and gold and gold coins and there would have been a loud clanging noise as those coins went into the brass inverted horns.

Coin after coin being thrown in. But then Jesus sees a poor widow. Poor perhaps because the people of God have not cared for her.

[13:06] Poor perhaps because she's been ripped off by the religious elite referred to back in verse 40. We can't be sure, we're not told. But we do know that she's poor.

What was her offering then? Just two copper small coins. She puts in two lepta. That's what they were called.

They were the lowest value coin in circulation at the time of Jesus. Jesus. Well, it's time for Jesus to teach his disciples again about kingdom values, about kingdom living.

So in verse 43 we read, as Jesus teaches them, truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury.

What a reversal. in God's eyes, the poor widow has contributed far more than all of the rich who put in large sums.

[14:11] So here's this widow, out of poverty and in true devotion to God, making an offering unseen, unnoticed, unseen and unnoticed except by Jesus.

And the Lord clearly wanted the disciples to identify themselves with this nobody over against the various representatives of the Jewish establishment that we've seen as we've gone through the end of chapter 11 and then through chapter 12.

I mean, what a contrast this is between the simple piety of this poor widow and the self-seeking ambition for which the scribes are condemned in verses 38 to 40.

Jesus is not impressed by the splendour of the temple. But the poor widow is highly praised by the Lord, by Jesus, by the Son of God, by the one who when he ascended back to the Father sat down in the position of all honour and glory and power over the whole of the created cosmos.

That's some endorsement. And one writer I think has wonderfully remarked, when the widow passed by, though Jesus sat still, he was inwardly on his feet clapping.

[15 : 38] Jesus explained the significance of this scene to the disciples in verse 44. He says, speaking of the rich, for all of them have contributed out of their abundance. He doesn't knock it, that's what they've done, they've given a lot.

but she, out of her poverty, has put in everything she had, all she had to live on. What trust in God from this poor widow?

She has literally given her all. Just four simple verses. The characters, of course, displayed here are rich people and poor widows, but the passage is not primarily about rich people and poor widows and it's not even specific teaching on how much we should give in financial terms to the Lord's work.

Elsewhere, the Holy Spirit teaches us, through the pen of the Apostle Paul, that each of us must give as we've made up our mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver and God is able to provide us with every blessing in abundance.

So that by always having enough of everything, we may share abundantly in every good work. The passage is not teaching us about specific guidelines on giving.

[16 : 58] And further, these short verses in Mark 12 are not teaching us that you can't be rich in material terms and be excluded from God's kingdom.

See, through both the Old Testament and the New Testament, we see examples of materially rich people. in God's family. But of course, the temptation of money is very real.

And that doesn't matter whether you're very well off or whether you're actually struggling to pay your zone one and zone two met card. The Holy Spirit, again, through the pen of the apostle Paul, says this, those who want to be rich fall into temptation and they're trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.

For the love of money, the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. So this pursuit of money, this love of money is something that we all need to be on guard about.

That was an issue for the rich man back in chapter 10. But it's not the principal teaching of the passage. You see, the Holy Spirit is teaching us something far more fundamental in these last verses of chapter 12.

[18 : 16] And it's using the backdrop of giving. Why giving? Because giving reveals the state of our hearts as few other things can. Commitment to God, devotion to our Saviour and Lord.

The followers of Jesus in the first century, especially after the giving of the Spirit of Pentecost, committed their lives to God and they committed their lives to God's purposes.

It was a whole of life discipleship. Of course, not all, in fact, only a small number were called by God to actually change their vocations.

But committed they were. And the Lord wants each of us, where we are, in all of our frailties, to change the world.

His request to each one of us is simple, but it's comprehensive. It's simple and comprehensive. Follow me. Be committed solely to me.

[19 : 20] A theme that just keeps being repeated as we work through Mark's Gospel. The Lord Jesus came amongst us. He became one of us in order to give his life as a ransom.

Jesus, what can I give, what can I bring, to so faithful a friend, to so loving a king? Saviour, what can be said, what can be sung, as a praise of your name for the things you've done?

Oh, my words could not tell, not even in part, of the debt of love that is owed by this thankful heart. I want us to, just for a few moments, continue to reflect on our response to the Lord as we listen to the words of this song by Matt Redman, I will offer up my life.

Thanks, Glenn. love, love, love, love, love, love, love, love, love, love.

I will offer up my life in spirit and truth, pouring out the oil of love as my worship to you.

[20 : 55] In surrender I must give my every part Lord receive the sacrifice Of a broken heart Jesus what can I give What can I bring To so faithful a friend To so loving a king Savior what can be said What can be sung As a praise of your name For the things you have done Oh my words could not tell Not even in part Of the dead of love that is owned By this thankful heart You deserve my every breath

For you've paid the great cost Giving up your life to death Even death on a cross You took all my shame away You took all my shame away You defeated my sin Opened up the gates of hell And have beckoned me in Jesus what can I give What can I bring To so faithful a friend To so loving a king Savior what can be said What can be sung As a praise of your name For the things you have

done Good words to reflect on Aren't they As we consider What is our response To the Lord You see The call at the beginning Of Romans 12 To present ourselves As living sacrifices As we sang In the song Before the message Consider Christ To present ourselves As living sacrifices To God This is not a call Sort of like an optional extra In the Christian life This is not just for some So called Superhero Christians Christ has given himself As a sacrifice of atonement He's dealt with sin And Christ has dealt With God's wrath Against sin So the call to us The call to each one of us As Christ's disciples Is to offer our life In thanksgiving To offer our life In thanksgiving As a sacrifice Of dedication You see The widow Who clearly In worldly terms Was insignificant Poor And certainly Not influential The widow Challenges Me Perhaps the widow Challenges you To be Fully committed To the Lord

To the triune God Father, Son And Holy Spirit The widow's Sacrifice Was small But it was total She wasn't just Putting in Two copper coins She was actually Putting in Everything That she had Now The practical Outworking Of that total Commitment Is going to look Different From each one of us One to the other For some It might be Expressed In packing up The family And taking the Gospel To the Middle East For others It might be Being a consistent Witness At school At college In the secular Workplace A consistent Witness To the Lord Jesus A witness Expressed In a life That expresses That exhibits The fruit Of the Spirit A witness Expressed In words Spoken Words Led by And in the Power of

The Holy Spirit It might look Like inviting Friends Along to the Introducing God Course For others Total commitment Might look like Showing Christ's Love to an Unsaved spouse Continuing to Show that love Or to a Rebellious child Or a family Member who's not A follower of The Lord Jesus For others It might be Expressed in Fact in Stepping away From a career And being Trained for Full time Christian ministry See the Practical Outworking Of total Commitment To the Lord The practical Outworkings Are many They're varied And they're a Matter for Prayer Prayerful Personal Interaction With God But there is a Key question For each one Of us And it goes Back to just A couple Of weeks Ago Do we Love the Lord our

[26 : 11] God With all Of our Heart With all Our soul With all Our mind And with all Our strength Because Ministry Mission If you like Stuff that We do It flows Out of Worship And so As the Band Comes up Consider These words Of our Next song If Christ Be God And died For me No sacrifice Too great Can be For me To make I give My life A sacrifice Of living Worship To the Lamb of God Friends If these Words Express Your heart Then as You join In and Sing You're Making a Public Declaration And also A personal Statement To the Lord Who gave His all For us