

Appearances Aren't Everything

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[0 : 0 0] let's pray father would you open our hearts to hear your word this evening in christ's name amen uh good to see you folks i have a confession i have the uh i've got the flu i'm in full swing of the flu right now the whole family's got it and so i come to the pulpit tonight heavily medicated and uh i am believing by faith that uh if um god can speak through a donkey like he did in the old testament he can speak through a kiwi that's completely jacked on pseudo-referred or codeine or something i don't know what whatever my wife gives me before i walked out the door so grace i need grace this evening if i'm a little bit slower for mark okay so i wrote down uh about a year and a half ago i wrote down several goals for this congregation and i think you guys know most of them just briefly they were like i wanted to massage and service a little bit just so it was a great expression of sort of historic anglicanism but fairly understandable i wanted to grow the congregation so that we could participate in a church plant i wanted us as a church family to be more hospitable uh i wanted this to be a multi-generational service and i think we've actually had a fairly decent crack at it and we're actually doing pretty good um we should be thankful to god for that one of the goals that i wrote down which haven't hasn't had much of a showing yet was i wanted to talk about money i know and that's uh the bible has a lot to say about money and i think it's because it can have such a grip on our hearts and so my plan was this right because i wanted to speak to i wanted to talk about money a couple of times and and my plan was when the passage we're in the middle of mark if you're visiting with us my plan was when the passage brings up giving when it brings up money and you're on to preach really really lean into it so this week i was i've read through the passage and i thought this is perfect right the widow's offering can't go wrong but as i've studied this passage over the last five days i've realized that the call of christ here is is um it's not financially support your church it's not give more uh it includes that but it's it's much more full-on than that it's actually much more demanding than uh mere money so let's get into it we have we have three little vignettes three little stories here uh jesus criticizes the scribes scene two we watch this widow put two small coins in offering part three uh christ predicts the destruction of the temple and they're all related they're all intertwined right we'll get there let's have a look at them one at a time so beware the scribes so jesus is still in the temple at this point and he's says these scathing things about the scribes just to remind you he says beware the scribes they like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplace and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor and the feasts they devour widows houses and for pretense make long prayers they will receive the greater condemnation so the scribes were religious experts they their speciality was god's law and they were really highly respected very very highly respected hence you know when when there's like a like a big religious soiree they kind of get you know they get to sit in like special places uh in the synagogue there were seats right up the front facing the congregation like this you know sort of you know facing the congregation for special people they always got those seats this this not a this you're fine um they uh uh it's the drag stalking um they they wore these massive

prayer shoals which were called these white kind of robes flowing white robes when everyone else wore lots of different colors and so they they kind of stood out when they entered a room or entered a space everyone stood up for them so super super respected um the problem christ points out here is their hearts uh their hearts were corrupted by their status by the power by the privilege that came with their jobs i remember doing um some itinerant preaching in new zealand before i came to regent college and and it was really nice being a special guest if you've done a bit of preaching around it's really nice being a special guest they they pay you well uh if the church is a big church they'll have like a little kind of green room out the back kind of hang in somebody make make scones or something you know bowl of m&ms; or whatever i don't know uh at the service beginning

of the service you sit right up the front with with uh maybe the trustees or the lead pastor and you get taken out for lunch or dinner afterwards and people say lovely things to you and are quite uh deferential it's probably a good word they're quite differential and it can be really intoxicating and it can become uh you want to put on a bit of a show for people you know and here's what christ says about the scribes and their hearts he says their prayers are a pretense they're not heart prayers they're just trying to look good they devour widows houses what that's about is that they weren't rich like the sadducees the scribes they didn't actually earn a salary they relied on benefactors so people supported them gave them money and so it would seem that they traded on the kindness of vulnerable people for profit uh defrauded the poor if you've seen um tele-evangelists you know when i first came to north america i used to watch i was quite addicted to watching tele-evangelists and uh because i was just i just couldn't believe this existed you know and i was just i just watched a lot of it and uh these were a good chunk of these guys were like these scribes they defrauded the poor for profit verse 40 is very scary here their condemnation is great it would seem that on the day of judgment there are degrees of condemnation and what these guys did was particularly egregious to god and i think it was particularly egregious because they're doing opposite of what christ had said immediately beforehand like love god and love your neighbor what these guys were doing is using god to bring honor to themselves and and they were praying on their neighbors on the most vulnerable on the widows who are a group in the bible often mentioned as a group that needs our protection as a special group that god has a special care for in contrast to these scribes we have this widow that's such an interesting scene right jesus finishes his his public teaching and uh he kind of walks away and grabs a seat and he watches people bring their offerings and his his attention is captured by this poor widow who we can assume everyone else ignored and uh such an amazing a profound sublime contrast to the scribes so just to set the scene here they're in the temple uh if you're new to the faith uh the temple was the center of jewish religious life built a long time ago to replace the tabernacle which was like the moving kind of temple that moved around the desert when the israelites were in the desert right so they built this kind of like

amazing big permanent structure got destroyed by the babylonians uh rebuilt a while later not as good um and then there was herod who was the tetrarch who was like the roman installed kind of leader over over uh the israelites and and he had no love of god but he did love grandeur he loved majestic buildings and architecture and he spent a lot of time a lot of money um building these magnificent buildings and so one of the ones he was had his eye on was that was this temple here right so he he really renovated this it was beautiful amazing apparently incredible so jesus and his mates here are in what they call the temple of the court of the woman which is so the different areas in the temple right and some people weren't allowed in some areas and so this was the final court that woman were allowed into they couldn't go further and it was the the part of the temple where they collected the offerings and so there are these 13 big uh trumpet shaped like upside down trumpet shaped things where people put the money in and the money would sort of cascade down into a uh into a central coffer i guess you know so people would line up and do this says verse 41 here and he sat down opposite the treasury and watched people putting money into the offering box many rich people put in large sums and it would have been easy when somebody would have been easy to tell when somebody was dropping the big bucks because there wasn't um paper money it was all coins right so that would have uh the cascade of of the big offerings would have sounded you know pretty cool i would think and so this poor widow she has she has two cents it makes a big deal of how much money she has in the text right she had she had the two smallest kind of uh denominate what do you call them the the the coinages whatever whatever the word is right the two smallest thing you can get little copper coins throws them both in um would have sounded rather unimpressive by contrast i would think and she is unnoticed by everybody except christ which is amazing right these guys are in the most impressive building in the country perhaps the region perhaps the world at this point uh wedged between wealthy donors and the religious elite uh the only thing jesus says is worthy of our attention in that whole scenario is this poor widow dropping in one cent and he calls the disciples over and he goes folks team this is what i'm talking about this this is this is exactly what i'm talking about right here obviously the passage is setting up a contrast uh selfishness of the scribe and the simple piety of this widow but what does christ specifically point to as a difference well specifically he says this truly i say to you this poor widow has put in more because it was everything she had all she had to live on so is this passage about being generous when it comes to the offerings at church of course it is i want you to hear that our offerings in the

evening service should be should be much bigger than they are and that's i take responsibility for that we never we don't talk about money that much it's it's embarrassing right like it's people feel uncomfortable right but it's about so much more than money because if if you came to the service and all you gave christ was your money i think that would be a great that would give me a great i'd be sad about that but literally in the greek here it says it says that she she put in her whole life that's what it actually says she put in her life into this offering a few verses before this jesus has said love god with all your heart and your mind and your soul and your strength and here is the example this poor widow's wholesale commitment to god at great cost to herself her total trust in his provision what little control she had of her life being this very vulnerable person what little control she had of her life she gave it over to the father what a beautiful picture of an undivided heart and we could uh there's just an just as an aside it's not in my notes here but it's it could seem really it could it from the outside it could seem very wasteful couldn't it what she was doing like a um a financial manager would say well just maybe keep one coin maybe you know i mean what a waste but faith looks like waste i think from the outside but it's not i mean this there's these two senses i mean if you could calculate the yield on these two cents it's probably pretty good i would think this two cents that this woman gave um it was recorded that was seen by christ that was written down by mark that was retold millions and millions of times throughout the world there's probably been a uh a fairly good return on that investment faith although it looks like a waste is not a waste okay back to my notes now uh as if as i've studied this passage i really think it's the heart stuff heart h-e-a-r-t heart stuff that this passage is getting at you know the scribe's heart was full of himself and the widow's heart was full of love for god and love for god is something that um we need to have i don't know how else to say it st john's is a thoughtful church right we're a thoughtful church we're a well-thinking church we um we uh uh again this potentially is the codeine talking uh we have i think we have gospel clarity we're good at doing this stuff right like you know whatever is whatever this is sign language for you know um we can i think i think we can break up texts we can work out what the points are uh you say the creed and i think we have a good understanding of probably what that means and that's great i love that i love that but faith can't be just an intellectual assent to good theology although good theology is is very good you should have it faith is also about uh the affections of our heart which is i think i want to say affections it sounds better than emotions i think the affections of our heart and the words of calvin sort of john calvin slightly paraphrased faith does not just believe the promises of god faith also relies on them faith relies on them bringing about uh confidence and boldness and what a wonderfully bold woman this widow was wasn't she so much more bolder than those who who brought much more because it is easy to give out of your abundance uh when it doesn't actually change the way you live so so we have this widow and we have these scribes and christ holds them up before us and says examine your hearts our last little vignette here kind of i think stamps the point and uh jesus foretells the destruction of the temple that's the that's the heading and it's it's a pretty good summary so he's leaving the temple for the last time he never goes back to the temple and it says as he came out of the temple one of the disciples said to him look teacher what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings um in retrospect probably feeling like a bit of a doofus probably thanking my thanks for not mentioning my name mark um oh look it's just so great this this is a what an amazing apparently the stones were like 12 feet high 12 feet wide just crazy right um and it was an amazing building apparently but as we've seen in the last chapter uh and the chapter that's um d little preached on the the it had become a perversion of god's purpose for it and previously christ had alluded to the fact that you know the temple was going to be gone but now he's fairly explicit he says do you see these great buildings they will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down and sure enough in 70 AD the temple was destroyed by the romans uh this uh unnamed disciple was very impressed by the external and christ says we must look past the impressive uh to the internal to examine your hearts and see find beauty and where christ found beauty is in a very unlikely place where no one was looking in the heart of this wonderfully pious widow okay i'm going to finish up here uh so let me ask you some hard questions which i'll leave with you when you take an honest look at your heart do you see attributes of the scribe bubbling up sometimes do you see the surrender of the widow uh i would think you probably see both i would say there are like all of us there are probably areas of your life which are mostly given over to god and there are other parts of your heart which are full of yourself and and as i read this passage and i'm confronted by the scribe and sometimes the widow in my heart i um here is what i want to pray i want to pray father would you shine your light into my heart

um would you expose the parts which are so impressed by the external things which are so impressed by uh the structures of power um by fleeting beauty uh by intellect by status would you expose those parts of my life and show me where i'm like the scribe show me in my role and all our roles where i desire adulation more than wanting to see you on it where i've become more interested in my praise than yours and christ forgive me and we can have great confidence in that forgiveness knowing that christ lived the life that we couldn't a life of sublime surrender father forgive me

[20 : 22] and give me the heart of the widow a bold and trusting heart an undivided heart amen pardon thank you for the lamb continuing to accept and sorry that hurts so let's show me on the porch and here our