

Real Trust

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[0 : 0 0] If you turn to the gospel according to Mark chapter 12. It's Mark chapter 12 and we're going to be picking up from where we left off from a couple of weeks ago. Last week we had the break from Mark because we concentrated on prayer as the hymn indicated, Facing a Task Unfinished. But if you remember, we finished in Mark at the end of verse 17, which is, give to God the things, give to Caesar that which has Caesar's image on, but then give to God what belongs to God. In other words, give to God what God has his image on. And you have God's image on you in the same way Caesar has his image on the coin. So the point was, give to God what belongs to God. Now that's worth remembering, given what Jesus is now about to say. Verse 18, now hear God's word.

And the Sadducees came to him who say that there is no resurrection. And they asked him a question saying, Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife, but leaves no child, the man must take the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. There were seven brothers. The first took a wife, and when he died, he left no offspring. And the second took her and died and leaving no offspring. And the third likewise. And the seven left no offspring. Last of all, the woman also died. In the resurrection, when they rise again, whose wife will she be? For the first seven had her as wife.

Jesus said to them, Is this not the reason you are wrong? Because you neither know the scriptures nor the power of God. For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels in heaven. And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God spoke to him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. He is not the God of the dead, but of the living.

You are quite wrong. And one of the scribes came up to him, came up and heard them disputing with one another. And seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, Which commandment is the most important of all? And Jesus answered, The most important is, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this, You shall love your neighbors yourself.

[3 : 3 2] There is no other commandment greater than these. And the scribe said to him, You are right. Teacher, you have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him. And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as one's self, is much more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. And when Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, You are not far from the kingdom of God. And after that, no one dared to ask him any more questions. And as Jesus taught in the temple, he said, How can the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David. David himself in the Holy Spirit declared, the Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.

David himself calls him Lord, so how is he a son? And the great throng heard him gladly. And in his teaching he said, beware the scribes who like to walk around in long robes and like greeting in the marketplaces and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation. And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offertory brocks. Many rich people put in large sums and a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. And he called his disciples to him and said to them, truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offertory brocks. For they all contribute out of their abundance, but she gave out of her poverty, has put everything she had, and she had all that she had to live on.

Well, may God bless the reading and the proclamation of his word. We'll come back to that. Well, we have read a lot this morning, but in reading a lot, it means a lot of what we have read.

As I said previously, we left off Mark by recognizing that everything belongs to God, and so we're to give to God what belongs to God, and we're not to hold anything back.

The person who treats their Christian life as though they're paying taxes has got it the wrong way round. The portion is what we actually get to give to God, but the whole belongs to God as well.

[6 : 42] And this is where Jesus wants to take us this morning. Mark seems to be making, through Jesus, or Jesus here in Mark over these last three or four chapters, the same point over and over again, almost as if to say that he recognizes that it's going to take a long time for us to recognize that we're not to rob God, but we are actually to give to God. And what we are to give to God is everything.

If we could go all the way back to chapter 10, into 11, and now into 12, they would be the three big points. Don't rob God, give to God, and give to God everything.

And what happens here at the end of chapter 12 with the widow is that we see a woman who is trusting God, but she trusts God in the right way. Now, we've already said that the reason why it's so difficult to trust God is because when God tells us to trust him, he wants us to trust in him alone.

The trouble is, is we divvy our trust up between different things. We put a little bit of trust in God. We put a little bit of trust in the house that we live in. We put a little bit more trust in our own personal health. We put a little bit of trust in our finances, and we divvy our trust up.

And as long as all of those accounts are fairly full, then life is good. The trouble is, is that when a couple of those accounts begin to get empty, then we struggle. But the real reason we're struggling is because we should have just put all our trust in God completely. The reason why we find trusting God so difficult is because God expects our trust to be in him alone. And we find it really difficult to trust in just God alone. But nevertheless, that is exactly what God wants from each of us. God can handle it in other ways. You know, God can handle you putting your complete trust in him. You know, God can do more than your finances. God can do more than your health, your house. You know, God can take care of all of that. But for some reason, we, we, it seems to, it seems to be that we really struggle to believe it. Jesus here is not without his question as yet again, but everything is going to lead to this widow who trusts in God and, dare I say, trusting God's to the point beyond her own understanding, which again is something quite difficult to do. The Sadducees come up to Jesus and they've got a problem with their understanding as well because they don't believe in the resurrection. In fact, they deny that the resurrection can even take place. Now, you'll notice that when Jesus turns up to Mary when her brother Lazarus has died and Jesus says, you know, well,

[9 : 48] I'll, you know, I'll bring him back to life. I'll rise him from the dead. And Mary's got no problem in believing in the resurrection. The trouble is, is that she doesn't believe it's going to happen until a much future date. And what Jesus proves by raising Lazarus from the dead and, of course, in his own resurrection is that it isn't set for a particular time. God is going to do it here in Jesus to make a very powerful point. But here are people who are denying the resurrection and Jesus says, it may look like that, but what they're actually denying is the power of God to be able to do something like that.

So for them to say, well, I don't believe in the resurrection, they're not attacking resurrection, they're attacking God. They're saying, God can't do that. So when a person denies the capability of God or deny the resurrection, what they're actually denying is that God isn't powerful enough to do something like that. And so Jesus makes the point that if you stop at your own level of understanding, right? Well, because I can understand God can do this, therefore God can do it. But if I can't get my head around the things that God can do, I don't believe that it can happen. Well, you're limiting God. You're putting the limitations on God because of your own limitations. You can't figure it out. You can't get your head around it. And of course, when you get to trust, what do you do? When we divvy our trust up into a whole load of other things, what are we doing? We're not openly admitting it, but we're saying, yeah, we can trust God, but just in case. And then we divvy up our things elsewhere.

So faith in God is something that is based on the knowledge of God, but faith is always going to take us beyond what we understand, and that's why it's so uncomfortable. Faith is based on what you know about God, but it's going to take you in places, two places, which you just won't know how to handle it, and you just have to trust God in the moment. This widow, when she gives, she gives everything that she had. Okay? When we get to it, the reason why it's that Jesus is making this point is not because she gave more proportionately to what she had. It's that she gave everything that she had.

The reason she gave more than all the scribes putting in their, you know, huge amounts of money was not because she gave more proportionately. So let's just say the scribes had a hundred pound and they put in fifty, and she had one pound, but she put in seventy-five pence. Proportionately, she's putting in more. But that's not what Jesus is saying. What Jesus is saying is the reason she gave more is because she gave to the point where she had nothing left. And that's crucially important for us to understand this morning. She didn't probably know where her daily bread would come from, but that wasn't the point. The point was in giving to God, she trusted God. And so when we trust God, whether it be about the resurrection, whether it be about Christ, whether it be about our future, whether it be about our present life, what God is actually asking us to do in some circumstances is you need to go beyond your own understanding. You need to trust me at the point where you're going to be able to understand so far, and then I have to take you much further than that. There are some things that I just cannot explain to you. You just need to trust me. But of course, as people, we just don't like doing that. We put our trust in things to the level of which we can understand them.

So the people who question Jesus here do so first because, one, they don't understand. It's beyond their understanding. But two, because they deny that God is powerful enough to raise somebody from death itself. And what Jesus is saying here is that the simple way to follow Jesus, the simplest way to follow Jesus, is to believe who God is and trust him completely.

[14 : 30] And the more you know about God, the easier it is to trust God. Almost like it is with a person down here that how often have we get something to somebody else to do, and we say to them, are you sure you can handle it? Now, we only say that to people that we're not sure of.

We don't say that to people who we know can. Just get on with it. Okay? And the same applies to God. Your level of trust in God is always going to be roughly at the same level of how much you know about God. And if you find your trust lessening or weakening or shaking, what's happening is either you're failing to truly believe what you know about God or you don't know as much about God as you should to get you through this. So, Jesus says to these Sadducees here that the two things that are letting you down is one, your own level of understanding. And then, out of that, you're then denying that God can do or God has the power to do certain things. So, I have three short headings.

The first is this. The resurrection is a real problem for those who don't trust in God. Okay? The resurrection is a real problem for the world out there, for those who don't trust in God. Secondly, the reign of Jesus is over heaven and earth, even now. And then, thirdly, real trust.

So, Jesus points out that there's two things that the resurrection teaches us. First, salvation is real. Secondly, you can't actually get away with the sins that you commit. There are two things that the resurrection states. One, salvation is real. It has been accomplished. But more importantly, because salvation is real, nobody can get away with the sins that they commit. So, you have to imagine and people who imagine that the resurrection won't happen. And of course, if there's no resurrection, there's no heaven, because you can't resurrect to go anywhere. If there's no resurrection, there's nothing after it. But there are plenty of people who have imagined this, and there are plenty of people who sing that song, Imagine. You know my feelings about that song. I hate it with a passion, but I'm going to quote it for you now as a way of explaining to you why I hate it with a passion. People who imagine that there's no heaven. Imagine there's no heaven. It's easy if you try. Now, hell below us, above us, only sky. What do you think John Lennon is saying in those lyrics?

He's saying this. Imagine above Lockerbie, only sky. Imagine above Dunblane, only sky. Imagine above Columbine High School, only sky. Imagine above all the awful things that are done to people on this earth.

[17 : 53] Imagine above that, only sky. Imagine above that, only sky. Imagine John Lennon above the person who shot and killed you, only sky. You see, what John Lennon is really saying is that if there is no heaven, there is no resurrection. There's neither any justice. People die and get away with it.

So, believing in the resurrection may be a real struggle for some, but denying the resurrection, just look at what you have to believe instead. If you deny that there is a resurrection to eternal life, if you deny that there is a resurrection to a God who sits on the throne, who will hold things accountable, just look at what you have to accept instead. Above Dunblane, only sky.

That's the type of world that you're left with. And so, while believing in the resurrection may be a real problem, Jesus points out to them that you have a far greater problem if you don't believe in the resurrection to eternal life, if you don't believe in a Christ who sits on the throne at the right hand of the Father, who will judge the living and the dead. You have a massive problem because what it means is, is that people will die and effectively get away with it. If they've never been tried on earth, and even if they have been tried on earth, they still get away with it.

So, I don't encourage you to sing that song. In fact, if you have it in your LP collection, or your CD collection, or your MP3 collection, delete it, burn it, get rid of it now. Because the message is just horrible. But then most people listen to music without ever thinking through what they're actually singing. But it's a horrible message.

So, believing in the resurrection may be difficult. It may be incredibly difficult for some of you here, hopefully not. But without it, you've got a far bigger problem. You've got a world in which people can do whatever they want and effectively die and get away with it. So, Jesus' answer is really quite simple. You neither understand what the Scriptures say or believe in the power of God to be able to deal with such a thing. And so, the reason why these Sadducees deny is because of that problem. The problem is on their end, not on God's end. You just don't know, he's saying to them, what you're talking about. You just don't know. You neither understand, and neither understand the power of God. Well, another scribe comes up to him in verse 28. And the conversation changes ever so slightly. But now it is about God. It's about loving God. It's about the commandments. And he says what is the greatest commandment. And Jesus, in short, says, one, the Lord your God is one.

[21 : 18] Okay, crucially important. And this God, you are to love with your whole being. Leave nothing out when you love God. And then the second commandment is like the first, love your neighbor as yourself.

One of the things that I've always found amazing, and I heard somebody else say this before I had children, is that they had a number of children, not quite as many as we've had.

But she said, it was in a previous church, we were washing dishes together, right, of all things, and a conversation struck up. And she says, you know what, when I had my first child, I just loved him. And when I had my second child, I just loved them as well. But when I had a third child, I wondered if there was going to be any love left. You know? And I thought, well, you know, what a strange thing. But then I had children, and I understood exactly what she meant. That why is it that love never seems to run out? You can stop it, but there's always enough to dish out, to give to people. And so what Jesus is getting at here is that love is one of those untapped, or not untapped, it's never going to run out resource, because it comes from God. And so you love God with the love that God gives you. It's just ever there, every day, every day, all day. And then now we have to exchange that love from God, keep it towards God, but now towards another person, and another person, and another person, and another person. And you might want to go, well, is it ever going to run out?

It may be difficult to love, but the point is that there is always love there for your new neighbor, and your next new neighbor, and your next new neighbor, and it goes on and on and on.

Love is not one of those things like, say, finance, where you have a limited supply, and once it's gone, it's gone. Love doesn't work like that. And that's the basis behind this commandment.

[23 : 28] Love God. What if I run out? Well, you won't run out. And love your neighbor. How can I love God and my neighbor? I don't know if I've got that amount of love yet. Don't worry. Just go ahead and do it. Now, when Jesus is questioning with this man here, he basically turns around and says to them, do you know what? In your questioning, in the conversation that we had, I can tell that you are not far from the kingdom of God. But why does, in the context here, loving God and loving your neighbor matter? Well, it matters because a resurrection is about to happen.

Okay, the reason why it matters is because you're going to go and meet God, and you're going to go and meet some of your neighbors. And so the way that we, what will be true of us then must be partly true of us now. The way our relationships will work in the future must be partly true of how our relationships work now.

Unfortunately, we have sin and disease and problem down here. We won't have it there in the new heavens and the new earth. Don't forget the new earth. But the whole point is that this is the condition by which relationship works. And the reason you're going to understand that is because you're going to face a resurrection. Well, when we are judged according to what we have done in the body, this will be part and parcel of the standard by which we will be judged, whether or not we have loved God and loved our neighbor. So secondly, the reign of Jesus is over heaven and earth.

One of the mistakes that the people were making here is that they were not just limited in their understanding. They were limiting who Jesus was. Jesus quotes Psalm 110, which King David wrote in verse 36. And the people make the mistake of underestimating Jesus, underestimating the Christ.

They knew that the Christ would be a descendant of David. They knew that the descendant of Christ would, of course, if he is a descendant of the king, would one day sit on the throne. But he wouldn't be anything more than that. He would just be another king on a throne. And what Jesus points out here is, one, you've missed the point, because I am the savior of the world and I am the judge of the world, because I will go to sit at the right hand of my father. So these people here, they've neither listened to David very carefully, who said in Psalm 110, the Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool. In other words, believe it or not, the Lord Jesus Christ, at this very moment, is sat at the right hand of the father, reigning from heaven.

[26 : 19] And you say, well, what's happening down here on earth? You may even be tempted to think that he's not doing a very good job. But remember how God works. God doesn't get rid of the mess and then start all over again. God enters this world in the same way you do a really untidy room.

Now we've all had those days, perhaps there's been such a mess in the room that we have just shut the door on it and we've walked away. I can't handle it now. It's just too much. And what God does by Jesus entering into the world is he opens that door into a very untidy world and says, right, let's start cleaning things up. And what we see here in Psalm 110 is that Christ is reigning from heaven until all his enemies on earth are made his footstool, until God completely clears the place up.

Because that is effectively what Christ accomplishes through the cross and, of course, the resurrection. Jesus is not just someone who will sit on a normal throne. He is one who reigns from heaven over earth.

His reign is over heaven and earth. All authority has been given to him. But the mistake that they make is that, one, they underestimate Jesus. They underestimate God. They deny the power of God, that God can't do these type of things. And so they are left with real problems. They are locked into their own misunderstanding.

Unable to consider for a moment that God is God, can do by definition anything that he wants. Well, what has this then got to do with the psalm and the widow? Well, when we understand that there is a resurrection, and then after that resurrection, we go to meet the judge, we recognize immediately that we have to be in the right kind of relationship with him.

[28 : 31] So there's a plenty, there's lots and lots of time now for people to get right with Jesus, for people to get right with God through Jesus. That's why God is taking his time. God is purposely giving the world this time. And the trouble that we have is we think that God only has to save the people in the world today. But that's clearly not the point, is it? What about all the people that God has to save 5,000 years from now? What? I just thought it was for my generation, and then I thought we were going home. No. What if God's got 100,000 people to save in the year after you die?

In the next 500 years, in the next 5,000 years? See, we think, just like most Christians do, no, it's the end is coming, and it's really right very soon. The trouble is, is when we get into the next part of Mark, Jesus clearly points out that when I go, don't expect me back very quickly.

Okay. I've never read that in my Bible. Well, next week, actually not next week, because Ray's preaching a week after. We will actually get to see it. Okay. Christ is reigning. And the reason why he's reigning is to give men and women, boys and girls, time throughout every generation that God has deemed to save people, time to get right with God. So what is the definition of being right with God?

Well, it's this. Giving to God what belongs to God. You belong to God. Giving to God that which God has his image on. You have God's image on you. So give to God yourself, and this is where we pick it up with the widow. Thirdly, real trust. What the widow does is she shows us how to live, contrasting her life against a group of people who think they know how to live. They're brilliant conversationalists. They go out on the streets. They like walking around in their long robes, talking with people in the marketplace. Don't I look wonderful? And how are you today? And I don't know how the conversation would go, but, you know, you know, all these kind of pleasantries, you know. And then to hide the fact that they are accumulating wealth on earth. They do, they do, you know, they hide it in long prayers. You know, even people back then, or perhaps especially then, knew that you could convince a whole bunch of people if you just prayed longer. Must be a very spiritual man. Must be a very spiritual woman. You know, the reason why I have a paperback Bible with paper edges and not gold leaf is so that when it gets dirty, you can see how much I read it.

That was a joke. So you really believed that then, didn't you? Believe it or not, this is not the Bible that I'd read from throughout the week. But, you know, you can understand people do that. I can remember sitting in Bible studies with this guy. I'm telling you, he had one of those leather-bound Bibles that as it opened, the pages just drooped down.

[31 : 54] It was sort of, it was hardly a pocket Bible. But it was to give the impression of, you know, gold leaf, wonderfully kept clean, you know, super spiritual. But as I said, you know, even, even having a Bible, you can hide behind. And that's exactly what these Pharisees are doing here, these Sadducees, these scribes. They're basically not worshipping God. They're walking around pretending.

They're brilliant at fellowship. They're brilliant at conversation. They're brilliant at their long prayers. But underneath it all is a person who doesn't trust God. And so Jesus says, and I've lost my page. Jesus says, who devour widows' houses and for the pretense make long prayers. In other words, they cover it up. This is how I can convince people that what I'm doing, if they saw that, I can get them to concentrate on this now. And along comes this woman who is completely different.

A widow who trusts God and gives to God everything. She gives to God what belongs to God. In money terms, it clearly is the case that she gave less than everybody else.

In proportionate terms, I don't think that's the argument. The argument here is where it ends, that she had given everything that she had to live on. In other words, she'd given everything. She hadn't had anything left. That's the definition of trust. What do you do? What do you do when you run out of the resources that you have? So what would you do if you lost your job? Would you pray more?

Right. Why are you praying more when you've lost your job to when you had a job? Because you began to realize is what you were relying on has run out. It's gone.

[34 : 04] Now I need to turn it up. Right? What have we done? We've got it the wrong way around. We've got it completely the wrong way around. This widow gave everything that she had. Right? But where was her daily bread going to come from? She probably didn't know. But she knew that if God owns everything, then it's going to come from God one way or the other. The trouble is, is we are so far from living like this, we don't actually get to see God working like this in people's lives and in the church. Some people do, but many people don't. Because we've divvied trust up in this kind of, I'll put a little bit here, a little bit there. In other words, we've believed the statement of putting, not putting all our eggs in one basket. But I think that our life before God is about putting all our eggs in one basket. Because God is not the sort of person to drop them. This is the point that the widow is teaching us here. And the lesson is the lesson of first fruits.

I don't think that the others understand it. And I don't think they understand it for this reason. And this is where we sort of wrap it up with a conclusion. When they gave their offerings in the temple, they thought that they were giving a portion of what was theirs. So this is mine. And then from mine, I give a portion of it to God. This lady, this widow understood that that's not the case.

That actually, everything that I have is God's. And I give a portion of it to God as a sign of token of love and affection. And God lets me keep the rest. That's what she understood. See, these religious people here thought the other way around. That everything that they had was theirs.

And out of what they had, they were to give a little bit to God. That's why it was sinful. What this woman does is completely the reverse. She understood that everything that she has is God's.

And therefore, if it's all God's, and God requires a portion of it, the first fruits of it, and God lets her have the rest just like he lets us have the rest, then God who provided it in the first place will continue to provide it in the future. And so what makes this woman remarkable is the fact that she trusts in God to the point where she can give it all away.

[36 : 28] And in giving it all away, it's at that point that you begin to realize that her complete trust is not in anything else. But it is completely in God. And we find it very, very difficult to trust God in that kind of way. Because of the way that the world wants us to think, save for the future, do this, do that, which is partly biblical in some places, but not entirely biblical. It tends to leave God out of the equation, as though God is sort of the backup in case this goes wrong. And so the reason why I think we find it difficult to trust God is because we have to trust God alone. Now, we don't have this problem with the things that we can't buy for money. Do you have any problem this morning in trusting God for your salvation? And do you know why you don't?

The reason you don't is because you can't buy it with money. The reason you don't is because you have no other option but to trust God for it. What about where you live? We see now it becomes more complicated because where we live and the food we eat, we buy with money. So where's our focus?

On God or on our finances? You see the point? When this woman gave, she gave everything that she had. It's not about being a generous giver. The reason why Jesus highlights this woman more than anybody else, or rather against the people who are given large sums of money but really giving nothing in comparison, is not because she gave more proportionately, but it's because she gave to the point where she had nothing left but trust in God. Real trust in God. And the reason why I think we don't get to see God work in our life in this way is simply because we've divvied our trust up.

We manage our own lives rather than relying on God like this woman does here. So Jesus understands the issue. And that is that people cannot live the life that God wants them to live when we don't understand the scriptures, when we don't understand what God says, when we don't understand God himself, and we deny God. When we do all of those things, we can't live the life that God wants us to live because everything, our life, is a challenge on who God is. Okay, the reason they didn't believe in the resurrection is because, one, they didn't understand the scriptures. Secondly, God can't do that.

And so that they make up their own course of life. What does this widow understand? Well, she understands that if she gives everything away, she's still got God. She understands that if she gives everything away, she still has everything. That's the point. Okay, she gives everything away, and what is she left with?

[39 : 39] Everything. Everything. You got it? Where they keep what they have, and what do they have? Nothing. When it runs out, it's gone. But this woman who trusts God for everything, she can give everything away.

And the reason why she can afford to give everything away is because God, who is everything, is everything to her. So Jesus understands the issue. That the reason why we find the Christian life so difficult to live is actually because we've limited ourselves by putting our own limitations on, denying the scriptures, not understanding the scriptures, believing that God can't do that. Or, even worse, believing that God is somehow favorite, that he did it for those back then, but he won't do it for me now. And why not?

And a reason? Well, I don't know. This woman teaches us that we ought to model our life like hers. I'll read it again.

This woman, verse 44, for they all contributed out of their abundance, but she, out of her poverty, has put in everything she had, all that she had to live on. In other words, what is she doing? She's giving to God what belongs to God. And that is how, one, you get right with God and ready for the resurrection. But, two, that's what real trust looks like. So don't be a Sadducee. Rather, model your life on the widow. Amen.