

Jesus the Contrarian: The WIDOW & The SCRIBES

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Commitment Sunday

Jesus was certainly a contrarian with the Pharisees. He condemned their pride and outrageous hypocrisy. He warned people about them and how they “devour widows’ houses.” In contrast, Jesus commended an elderly widow. Being an elderly widow was almost a proverbial statement describing poverty. She would have been living on the thinnest of margins. Two copper coins was a meager gift. This story illustrates how important every gift is in the kingdom. That is a contrary teaching. A child’s small gift or that of a poor person is important because THEY are important. A gift represents someone’s life and affection. Some can give generously (like Barnabas), but we want all to know the joy of giving. We strive for equal sacrifice, not equal gifts, because of the way money shapes the heart. As King David said, “*I will not give that which costs me nothing.*” Paul described the Macedonians, who were extremely poor, as a great example of generosity. He also commended the Philippians (4:10-20), too.

APPLICATION: A question is often asked, “How much should I give?” John Wesley said: “*Earn all you can, save all you can, and give all you can.*” Today is our opportunity to make financial commitments to the Lord through Asbury in 2022. These pledges are not legally binding but show our intention to do the best we can because we love the Lord, and we love His church. We give in gratitude for the gift of grace which He has given so lavishly to us. This is a great opportunity for parents to have a family conversation about stewardship and finances. If you have never given, especially in a methodical way, consider this your invitation to find a new and better—perhaps even contrary—habit.

18:18 – **Rich young ruler** story. He was an observant Jew and a “ruler” and leading man in the synagogue.

19:1 – **Zacchaeus**. Opposite of RYR – Z was corrupt. He lined his pockets by cooperating with the occupying Romans. He was not welcome in the synagogue. Fabulously wealthy, he was “Despicable Me” in Jericho. Jesus offered grace to both, but the RYR loved money more than God. Zacchaeus repented and followed Jesus. The RYR went away sad, but Z was filled with joy. He also made restitution of what he had plundered.

19:11 – the **minas** parable. Matthew called them “talents,” but the punch line is the same. Two of the three guys had a return on investment. The one who buried his talent was condemned for not investing wisely. It says he was “afraid” of the owner.

19:45 – driving out the **money changers** in the Temple. Only a certain type of coin could be used to pay the tax, so you had to have someone change your money into this coin and it

would never work out in the seller's favor. Again, the misuse of money. This did not win Jesus friends among those who had a vested interest.

20:19 – The chief priests and scribes asked Jesus about **paying taxes to Caesar**. Nobody liked paying taxes, but they tried to trap Jesus by getting Him to choose sides – supporting Caesar or being a zealot. They were shrewd. They wanted Him gone, but knew the people loved Him, so they had to spring a careful trap on Him. But Jesus was shrewder. The 2nd commandment forbids graven images. Some strict Jews believed having Caesar's image on a coin was an abomination. Jesus asked them for a denarius. Someone opposed to blasphemy carried a denarius. Jesus skillfully replied they should pay what was owed Caesar and give God His due. He was disloyal to neither. Caesar has a right to certain things, but that should never intrude into God's domain. A follower of Jesus' first loyalty is to the kingdom of God, not the nation of Israel or anything other nation. They do not have equal claims on our lives. Seek first the KOG, not the kingdom of Caesar.

Luke 20:45-21:4 (p 1085)

And in the hearing of all the people he said to his disciples, ⁴⁶ "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love greetings in the marketplaces and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, ⁴⁷ who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation."

²¹ *Jesus looked up and **saw** the rich putting their gifts into the offering box, ² and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. ³ And he said, "Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. ⁴ For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."*

v46 *"Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love greetings in the marketplaces and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts* This shows the **PRIDE** of the scribes/Pharisees. The more special we see ourselves, the less special we see God.

v47 *who devour widows' houses* Widows normally lacked influential advocates. They had few resources and most women lacked sufficient means to support themselves. As such, they often had debt. Unscrupulous people often used legal means to seize their property. Scripture demanded special consideration for the defenseless, including widows This is about the **GREED** of the scribes/Pharisees.

v47 *and for a pretense make long prayers.* This shows the **HYPOCRISY** of the scribes/Pharisees.

v1 *he saw* Jesus was always observing. The first time in the gospels it says "he saw" was at His baptism when he saw the Spirit of God descend on him like a dove. He "saw" his disciples – and invited them to follow. He saw those needing healing. He saw crowds. He had compassion. He saw the scribes/Pharisees but did not flatter. He spoke harshly to them.

Others saw Jesus and almost universally, loved Him. Women, children, the sick, outcasts, and the poor. While some, like Nicodemus, came to Him, most power brokers despised and ridiculed Him.

v1 *the rich putting their gifts* – This is Passover. The Temple is overrun with people and activity. Jesus doesn't condemn their offerings. Very likely some had good intentions. But there was an undercurrent. He knew that some were giving to be seen in public. Jesus said, "*Don't be like them!*" (Mt. 6) (Either a hypocrite/pagan). Don't be like the guy who stood up at a charity event and announced, "*I'd like to give \$1,000 – anonymously.*"

v1 *offering box* The NIV calls it "The Temple Treasury." Temples in the ancient world doubled as banks. They were the safest place to store money – few would be sacrilegious enough to steal from a god - don't upset your deity. There was a Temple tax assessed. Each Jewish adult male paid an annual Temple tax for its upkeep. There were 13 collection boxes in the court of women with trumpet-shaped receptacles. Each were marked for how the offerings would be used.

v2 *he saw a poor widow put in* Her body language was different from everyone else's. She could not have been proud of her meager gift – *two small copper coins*. A Greek "*lepta*" worth 1/128th of denarius (a day's wage). 2 coins were practically worthless. (KJV calls them "mites.") Worthless. Overlooked. Useless. Good for Nothing. Disregarded.

v3 Jesus didn't make a big fuss over the movers and shakers of the community. Her coins may have been worthless but she wasn't. Her personal worth wasn't wrapped up in her financial statement. He was a contrarian. She could worship, witness, and be part of her community, too. She was included, not on the basis of her net worth, but because of her generous heart.

v4 *For they all contributed out of their abundance, some took advantage of others to gain their abundance out of her poverty put in all she had to live on* Jesus didn't say a single word to her. He just watched and contrasted with others. They will hardly miss their gift. Her gift was the greatest because she gave it all. It's like she said, "*This isn't much, but it's all I have. I love you. Here is my heart.*" This happens during Holy Week. Within days, Jesus is crucified. This widow who gave from her heart was a memory that touched His. He will give all of Himself, too.

v5 A footnote. Look at what comes next. If the Jewish leaders were treating such committed, devoted, and loyal worshipers with such disrespect and they had departed from the way the faith should be lived, severe judgment would follow. Jesus tells them – the Temple will be destroyed. About 40 years later the impossible happened.

APPLICATION 2 contrasting ways to live: selfish ambition & GREED v sacrificially humble & GENEROUS. It's hard to straddle with greed and God. I repeat last week's scripture where Jesus concluded the parable of the dishonest manager:

Be FAITHFUL in little things. Most of us will not appoint a cabinet, dine with the queen, christen a ship, write a book, start a business, convert a nation, end a war, or be burned at the stake this week, but we will have an opportunity to talk to someone (maybe a child, a co-worker, someone at the check-out stand, a neighbor, someone who is troubled, hurt, lost, lonely, etc.). We could share a meal with someone or volunteer to serve.

Money is "the presenting issue." Our sacraments of baptism/communion are described as "*outward signs of an inward and spiritual grace.*" "Money speaks." "*Where your treasure is, there is your heart also.*" It is an axiom of the heart. Money reveals the state of the heart like few other things can.

Dorothy Day was a tireless advocate for the poor within Catholic community in 1930's & beyond. Once in NYC a wealthy woman donated a beautiful diamond ring to benefit DD's programs. Her staff wondered what DD would do with the expensive ring. She could sell it to buy a great deal of food – like a month's supply of beans for the hungry or pay the office rent for a year. Instead, she did something very contrarian. She gave the ring to a poor woman who regularly came for bowls of good. The workers howled in protest. DD said, "That poor woman has her dignity, too." The poverty-stricken woman could sell the ring if she liked & spend the money for rent, a trip to the Bahamas or she could even keep the ring to admire. It didn't matter to DD. "Do U suppose God created diamonds only for the rich?" she asked. How valuable are we? Is it only rich people who are valuable? Are you worthless if you are poor?

The widow's example also showed up in the church. 2 Corinthians 8:1-12 *We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own free will, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints—and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you — see that you excel in this act of grace also. I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. And in this matter, I give my judgment: this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it. So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have. For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. God loves cheerful givers.*