

Today the rubber really hits the road.

Last week Jesus told a scribe, that the 1st and greatest commandment:

30 ... you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'

In other words: Love God, with every part of your being:

And

31 The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

But even at that point, the Scribe (who agreed with Jesus) still had something missing. Jesus said to him, "You're close to the Kingdom of God", (like an affirmation) but there's a bit of a sting in the tail to it – "You're close to the Kingdom of God,,,,, but you're not there yet"...

You see, the Scribes had a wrong view of the Christ. They saw the Christ as being subordinate to David – He's a descendant of David – he's David's son, but the Christ isn't David's son at all – He's the Son of God. David himself calls Him, "Lord"...

And to love God with every fibre of our being, **must begin** with recognising His Son. It must begin with recognising that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is **Lord**. And He's not just a Lord – He is **the** Lord, and He is **our** Lord.

And for Jesus to be Lord, means that Jesus must come first (in everything). To be "Lord", means Jesus is "Boss"....

Today we're presented with a vivid contrast. We see **one** person who **is** truly loving God with everything that she **is**, and with everything that she has... We don't know her name. All we know, is she's a widow, who had very little, and she put her last 2, small copper coins, into the offering box...

And we get a vivid contrast, of this quiet, unassuming, widow, giving to God, everything that she has, and she's contrasted with the ostentatiousness of the Scribes.

“Ostentatious” – there's a word for ya... It means: Showy; pretentious; They're doing what they're doing, to try and attract attention for themselves (It's all to do with appearances), so that everyone can see them and admire them:

- The long robes they wore;
- The big sums they put in the offering box;
- High-falutin language they used in their long prayers...

They wanted their Spiritual insight and knowledge to be admired

But let me tell ya: God, is not at all impressed with ostentatiousness and showy religion.

And showy religion, is something that has stretched across:

- the centuries;
- traditions; and
- denominations ...

It comes in the form of

- Grand medieval cathedrals

- The temple itself in Jesus' day
- The albs (dressing gown); and
- the pretty stoles (scarf)
- Fancy hats....

Jesus said: **"Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces**

What are they doing? They're getting dressed up, so they **don't** look like normal people. It's a way of saying, Hey, look at me everybody, I'm special...

How is a minister supposed to look BTW? Over the years I've been told by lots of people, "Oh, you don't look like a minister; pastor; priest"... And I always follow that up with a question, "What's a pastor supposed look like." And they usually answer, "I don't know – just not like you look."

Obviously pastors shouldn't be average height; overweight; and dress in daggy clothes...

But showy religion - It can be found in:

- Mega-churches
- Small gatherings of just a few, who don't feel that any other church is holy enough for them...

And

- I wonder what Jesus would say about the showy-ness of some of our modern worship today – Concert-like productions, with smoke machines; and fancy lighting; and

- where the pastor and the worship leaders, are all about projecting an image...

(But obviously not the image I project...)

But ostentatiousness; showy religion – it's all to do with external appearances.

I was greatly saddened (one day), when the synod of the denomination I was in, decided to employ a media liaison person... We couldn't afford our Youth & Children's Ministry Unit any more, but we could put some \$ aside to create a new position for a media liaison person...

And as I read the position description, I realised that the church was employing a 'spin-doctor'. This person, was employed to present a positive image of the church to the media, and at the same time, keep track of any negative publicity the church was getting, so that if possible, they could tell an alternative story, to give a positive image...

It was all to do with external appearances... And that just made me sad.

Showy religion, is concerned with "How things appear."

Anyway, Jesus says: **Beware of the scribes...** Why???

- Because they're **not** what they appear to be.
- They're all show.
- They want the recognition;
- They're looking for accolades for themselves.

He says: "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces ³⁹ and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honour at feasts, ⁴⁰ who devour widows' houses and for a pretence make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation."

What the Scribes did, was for themselves. It wasn't because they loved God with every fibre of their being.

As I read through this, what I see, is they're chasing:

- Glory
 - Recognition
 - Promotion
 - Elite Spiritual image.
-
- They were glorious and resplendent, walking around in their fancy, long robes; and
 - They loved it when people recognised them... They loved the special greetings they got because they were so important; and
 - They did what they did, to be promoted.
They wanted to have the best seats at the synagogues, and the places of honour at the feasts... *BTW, nobody will ever accuse any of you of trying to get the best seats in church... Because here's the best seats, right at the front, And even when the church is half empty, we're*

always in the back 2 rows...

- And they liked to give off an air of spiritual elitism...
for a pretence make long prayers

Now, that was the image they wanted to present, but what were they **really** like??? Jesus described them as men who **devour widows' houses**. And even when they prayed, it was only a pretence – it was make-believe – an act...

The Greek word is προφάσει (*prophasei*), *to pretend to be engaged in a particular activity*ⁱ They were **pretending** to pray... They'd make long prayers, but they weren't real – they were just pretending...

Pretend praying; Pretend worship... What do you think about that?

I got invited along to a worship-leading seminar once. And at that seminar, we were taught, “You can't ever get up to lead worship and not be happy and joyful – you've got to exude happiness... Even if you've had a terrible morning, and everything's gone wrong, and you're feeling miserable, put a smile on your face, and dance for joy”

*And they said “You might think that's faking it – not, it's not ‘faking it’ – it's ‘faithing it’... In faith, act happy, and you **will** be joyful...*

Now, I don't know about you, but I wasn't at all convinced about that... The Psalms, are basically the worship book of

Israel. And there are times when the Psalmists would praise God **from** the pit of despair...

God doesn't want us to pretend. He doesn't want us to pretend that we're joyful when we're not. He doesn't want us to make up pretend prayers, that sound really good and really spiritual, but aren't coming from the heart. And He doesn't want us to pretend in our worship....

He wants us to be real with Him, and He wants us to be real with each other...

In a lot of 'popular' churches today, it's all about projecting an image:

- Happiness
- Prosperity
- Successfulness
- "My life is altogether".
- Popularity
- Hey, this is a happening place

Come to our church, and you'll be just as happy; prosperous; successful as we are...

And it's paramount that the leadership of the church, project this sparkly image... It's all about image.... How do you think God feels about that???

It's more than a few weeks ago now (for us), but in the terms of the Gospel of Mark, it's probably only a couple of days,

since Jesus was condemning the fruitlessness of temple worship, and saying that it's like a den of robbers – it's like a lair – a safe place for thieves...

The example of the fig tree was: it was all leafy; it looked all lush and green, but it had no fruit... And that's what the temple was like – it all looked very impressive – it all looked very religious, but there was no fruit of righteousness...

And today, Jesus singles out the scribes (lawyers) (religious lawyers) – they knew stuff. They knew the Scriptures inside-out and back-to-front, and maybe that's the way they twisted them...

But Jesus singles **them** out, for their part of being a den of robbers... they **devour widows' houses**.

Now, we don't know **how** they were doing that. What we **do** know, is that God has always had a deep concern for widows and orphans... And we don't know how the Scribes were devouring widows' houses, but it is particularly despicable to take advantage of those who are most vulnerable:

- Maybe they were charging exorbitant fees for their religious/legal services;
- Maybe they were mis-managing their estates...

We don't know what they were doing... But they **were** having financial gain, of such a scope, that the widow would end up losing her home... It may have **been** legal (what they were doing), but it was not at all, the fruit of righteousness, that God wants to see in His people...

And that's a lesson for us today: We might be quite within our legal rights, to take financial advantage of someone, and often it's the most vulnerable members of the community... But that's not the fruit of righteousness that God is looking for in our lives.

Righto:

Now, at this point, we move to the next scene... There were numerous offering boxes (for various purposes) in the Temple...

And Jesus actually sits down, to watch what people are putting in...

*I've always felt a bit embarrassed about seeing what other people put in the offering... Even as a little kid, when it was my turn to pass the plate around to take up the offering, I'd try **not** to see what different people were putting in (I didn't feel it was right to know).*

*And I'm still a bit embarrassed to know what people put in the offering. At BD, we have an offering box sitting on the smoko table. **Nobody** is obligated to put anything into it. It **doesn't** get passed around, and people can anonymously put their money into the box...*

But most of our regular givers give by direct deposit. And then we've got to enter the bank deposit information into the cashbooks... And I'm a little embarrassed, and more than a little humbled at what people give... (I'm greatly humbled)

There's even some folk who support this ministry, who up until recently, I'd never met,, Just this regular offering's been turning up in the BD bank account. They've been supporting BD because they're regular listeners to the podcast, and they're finding the Bible teaching really helpful... And up until recently, I had no idea who they were... But that's really humbling, when this ministry gets supported by people we don't even know. And without that support, we couldn't function in the way that we are...

Anyway, I've always felt a little bit **embarrassed** to know what people are giving, but Jesus sits down and watches... I can't even picture that – was that the done thing back then, or what? I don't know... Maybe I just need to get over being embarrassed.

And as Jesus watched, He noticed 2 things: Firstly, **Many rich people put in large sums.**

And that's a good thing... If God has blessed you, it's good for you to support the ministry of God with your finances...

But sometimes, when a rich person gives a large sum, a big deal is made of it – *“Isn't it wonderful, that they've given so much money...”*

But what God values, is different to what the world values. Do you know what Jesus noticed as He watched the offering box? He noticed a poor widow, who came and dropped in two tiny copper coins. How much were they worth?

Australia's copper coins (1c & 2c) were removed from circulation the year that I was married (1992). And so none of the kids here, would've ever handed a 2c piece over the counter of the local corner shop to buy a 2c lolly...

But what were **these** copper coins worth?

Well, the coins that she gave, were the *Lepton*. They were about the size of our 1c, and it was worth 1/100 of a Denarius. A Denarius, was 1 day's wages for a labourer. So, our equivalent today, 2 of these coins would be worth about \$3.20. She could probably buy enough grain for 1 meal, or maybe 2...

Even if she gave one of those coins to the offering, and kept one for herself, she may still have just enough for 1 more meal... But she didn't keep anything for herself – She put them **both** in the offering – she gave everything that she had to live on, away...

⁴³ And [Jesus] 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 offering box. ⁴⁴ For **they** all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."

That, is sacrificial giving... You see, the rich people – yes, they gave a lot of money, but they made sure that they stayed rich... Out of their abundance, they gave a lot to God, but

they were still abundant... But the widow, she only gave a little bit, but she gave God everything...

Jesus has just said V³⁰ ... **you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'**

What's he saying? Love God with everything you are and everything you have... And the widow did...

Now, I've gotta confess: I get really torn over this... This widow was giving to God, but where was the money ending up??? It was propping up a system of fruitless religion... In part, it was funding the religious leaders, who were probably a part of the den of robbers...

But in her heart, she wasn't giving to a den of robbers – she was giving to the Lord her God, Who she loved with all of her heart...

And there's a lesson here, for leaders in the church – When people give to support the work of a ministry – let's bring it closer to home – when someone makes an offering to BD, they are giving to God... Therefore, those who are in charge of the church's finances, and oversee how the money is spent in the church, **must** remember, "Who we are responsible to"... We're not managing our own affairs... Whatever money is received, belongs to God. And it is imperative, that we use this money to the glory of God, and in His service...

Oh, I cringe at worldwide televangelists, who buy private jets for themselves...

In the U2 song “Bullet the Blue Sky”, there’s a stanza that says:

*And I can't tell the difference between ABC News
Hillstreet Blues and a preacher on the Old Time Gospel
Hour
Stealing money from the sick and the old
Well, the God I believe in isn't short of cash, misterⁱⁱ*

Jesus said: **They will receive the greater condemnation.**

.....

But with this example of the widow, I still get torn... *Over the years, in various churches I've attended, I've seen this happen: The rich give out of their abundance, but sometimes those who can least afford to give, give so much more... It mightn't be as much (in \$ terms) as what the rich people give, but it might be all their savings... And the rich stay rich, and the poor sacrifice what little savings they have...*

And I'm torn because I want to say to these people, “**Don't** give. You can't afford it. Let somebody else do the giving... The church should be giving to you to help you get by....” But at the same time, I know that “Loving God with every fibre of their being” means they **want** to give – they **need** to give... Even out of their poverty...

And in my experience, in the church, some of the biggest givers, aren't rich. Some of them have the least... But they give, because they want to love God with **everything** that they have...

And it's hard to see someone who has little, and yet they give much... But who are you and who am I, to put the brakes on their personal sacrifice to God???

What we have to do, is make sure we honour them in the way that offerings are used. Offerings aren't for making anyone rich; They're not for propping up 'showy religion'... And those who mis-use what's been given, will be judged...

God's economy, is the opposite of the worldly economy... And what God values, is different to what we value ... It's not about how much you have, and therefore how much you can manage to put in the offering... It's about devotion... It's about devotion that gives, at great personal costⁱⁱⁱ... It's about sacrificial giving.

But let's take this beyond \$ and c....

Yes, the widow gave everything in terms of money, but it was just an example of her loving God with every part of her being... And that was a stark contrast against the ostentatiousness (showiness) of the scribes, and then her quiet, humble, unassuming giving of herself...

How about we love God, with the whole of our being:

- not being showy about it;
- not pretending;
- not projecting an image to either make people like us, or to try and attract them to God;
- not giving our money because we want people to think we're really generous...

Let's love God, with the whole of our being, simply because we love God...

Jesus is the Christ. Jesus is Lord. He is our Saviour, who died and rose again, and He did that for us. Let's Love Him with the whole of our being...

Questions:

ⁱ Louw, J.P. & Nida, E.A., 1996. *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*.

ⁱⁱ https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&ei=CaVUXbOFM4XyrAGwqamYDg&q=u2+the+god+i+believe+in+isn%27t+short+of+cash&oq=u2+god+isn%27t+short+&gs_l=psy-ab.1.0.0i22i30.24184.26234..29278...0.0..0.236.2859.0j14j2.....0....1..gws-wiz.....0i71j0i273j0i67j0j33i21j33i160.4vyY428mjL0

ⁱⁱⁱ France, R.T., 2002. *The Gospel of Mark: a commentary on the Greek text*, Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.