**GOD SEES OUR HEARTS**

**(Mark 12:35-44)**

***“Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, ‘Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty put in everything—all she had to live on.’” (vs. 43-44)***

Arthur F. Burns was an influential man. He served as chairman of the U.S. Federal Reserve System and ambassador to West Germany during the 1970’s-80’s. He was also Jewish. So when he began attending an informal White House group for prayer and fellowship, he was given special honor. But no one knew quite how to involve him in the activities. So when different people took turns ending the meeting in prayer, Burns was always passed by out of respect. One week, however, a newcomer who didn’t know Burns’ unusual status was leading the meeting and asked Arthur to close in prayer. Without missing a beat, Burns held the hands of others and prayed: “Lord, I pray that you would bring Jews to know Jesus Christ. I pray that you would bring Muslims to know Jesus Christ. Finally, Lord, I pray that you would bring Christians to know Jesus Christ. Amen.” (From *The Call*, by Os Guinness) Arthur makes a valid point. What the world needs is Jesus, but all too often his followers are accused of looking nothing like him. In today’s passage, Jesus sheds light on how we can correct this. First, we’ll learn about accepting his true identity as our divine Lord. Then, we’ll learn how to avoid hypocrisy and give our hearts to God. May the Holy Spirit humble us to accept Jesus’ words.

1. **Whose son is the Messiah? (vs. 35-37)**

Jesus had now silenced every one of his challengers. The Pharisees had been foiled, the Herodians humiliated, the Sadducees stumped and the teachers of the law taken to school. Now Jesus had the floor of the temple grounds to himself during this Passover festival, with only a few days left in his earthly ministry. What was weighing most heavily on his heart?

Look at verse 35. ***“While Jesus was teaching in the temple courts, he asked, ‘Why do the teachers of the law say that the Messiah is the son of David?’”*** People’s misconceptions about the Messiah’s identity and work were a major barrier that prevented the Jews from accepting Jesus. So Jesus challenged his listeners to ask themselves what they believed and why they believed it, starting with the Messiah’s identity as the son of David. When we examine the Bible carefully, we’ll find several passages of Scripture that support this idea (2 Sam 7:12-13; Isa 9:6-7; Jer 23:5-6; Ezek 34:23-24). The Messiah was revealed as a great and glorious king who would rule “on David’s throne” with justice and righteousness, like King David himself. And God kept this promise. When the time came for Jesus to be born, Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem to register for the Roman census because Joseph *“belonged to the house and line of David” (Lk 2:4).* When Jesus was born, an angel appeared and declared, *“Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord” (Lk 2:11).*

Despite these facts, the majority of the Jewish people couldn’t reconcile their own opinions of the Messiah with Jesus because of their stubborn, human ideas and earthbound hopes. Jesus was born to a poor family in Galilee. Rather than talking about leading a revolt against Rome and making Israel into a world superpower again, Jesus was leading a spiritual revolution. He was a spiritual Messiah rather than a political king. He wasn’t affirming people’s worldly ambitions, but exposing the sin in their hearts and calling them to repentance. So every sign that Jesus performed to validate his message made the Jewish leaders furious. They were guilty of the most foolish error of missing their own Messiah. This is because they did not understand what they needed saving from. Jesus was the Messiah they needed, but not the Messiah they wanted.

The Jewish people needed to look below the surface. Jesus’ question, ***“Why do the teachers of the law say that the Messiah is the son of David?”*** really means, “Is the Messiah *only* the son of David?” It was time for Jesus to open their minds through a Bible study on Psalm 110:1, a well-known messianic prophecy. Verses 36-37a read, ***“David himself, speaking by 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.’ How then can he be his son?”*** Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, King David caught a glimpse of the Messiah’s divine identity. His words, ***“The Lord said to my Lord”*** are enlightening. The first ***“Lord”*** is the Hebrew word “Yahweh”, the sacred name of God revealed to Moses. The second ***“Lord”*** is the Hebrew word “Adon” (plural form is “Adonai”). This name was often used in place of “Yahweh” to avoid the possibility of misusing God’s name. Therefore, David was saying “My divine Lord God said to my divine Lord God…” It was an expression of intense reverence and awe. Even though the Messiah would come in his line as a great…great…great…grandson, David was already worshiping him as his Lord and God! So Jesus rightly asks, how then can he be his son? Whose son is the Messiah? He is the Son of God!

This Scripture also speaks volumes about the Messiah’s power and victory. It is the Father who says to the Son, ***“Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.”*** This is exactly what Jesus would soon fulfill. The very reason he came into this world in human flesh was to defeat our greatest enemies of sin, death and the devil so that we might have eternal life and the kingdom of God. In only a few days, he would be nailed to the cross. It would look like his own defeat. But by dying the death that we deserved, as our Substitute, Jesus would crush Satan’s head and free us from the penalty of our sins. He would destroy the power of death by rising on the third day and ascend back into heaven. That is where he has been to this day, sitting at the right hand of the Father in unspeakable glory. Through the work of the Holy Spirit in the world, the Father is now subjugating all of Christ’s enemies under his feet. Jesus will soon return with power and great glory to consummate his final rule in a new heaven and a new earth (Rev 21:1). This is the glorious Messiah that blew David’s mind! But the Jews of Jesus’ day were totally missing this. Out of spiritual ignorance and love for the world, they only sought a political Messiah who would solve their worldly problems and satisfy their selfish ambitions. As a result, they were the ones who would act as the Messiah’s enemies by nailing him to a cross. Jesus was warning them to repent immediately, lest they be crushed under his feet.

The question we must each ask ourselves is this: How high is my opinion of Jesus? Is he my God? Is he my object of worship? Is he my Lord, who owns my utmost allegiance? Unless our view of Jesus is radically different than that of the world, we are in danger of making the same mistake as the Jews. To confess from our hearts, *“Jesus is Lord”* is much more than adherence to church doctrine; it is the only way of salvation and eternal life (Ro 10:9-10). If we are only looking to Jesus to receive more of the comforts of this world, or turning to him only when we have problems, we will miss the spiritual Messiah we so desperately need. Jesus wants to rule over our lives forever as our loving Lord. He wants to put all our enemies under his feet. In Christ is victory and life. So let’s confess from our hearts, *“Jesus is Lord”*!

1. **God sees the hidden motives of the heart, whether bad or good (vs. 38-44)**

Now the people were hanging on Jesus’ every word. It was an opportune time to confront the hidden wickedness of that time. Look at verses 38-40a. ***“As he taught, Jesus said, ‘Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. They devour widows’ houses and for a show make lengthy prayers.’”*** Jesus smelled something foul in the lifestyle and influence of the teachers of the law. In Matthew 23:2-3, he said, *“The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach.”* Jesus constantly warned his followers to “watch out” for the trap of hypocrisy, the original meaning of which was to live like an actor in a play. The teachers of the law were experts at putting on a show for the world to see. They studied the Scriptures diligently, seeing this knowledge as their way of getting ahead in the world. They took great pride in being God’s chosen mouthpieces. They wore gaudy robes, like fashion models, hoping someone would comment on their exquisite devotion. They thirsted for approval from their superiors and vied for the seats of honor in the synagogues and at dinners. They made sure their public prayers extra long and flowery, so that everyone would know just how “spiritual” they were. Otherwise, what was the point?

These teachers of the law had their own selfish motives hidden beneath the guise of religious devotion. But they weren’t fooling anyone, especially not God. Their error was two-fold. For one, they refused to give up their love of the world. And second, they didn’t really love God in their hearts. They lived as though God was dead, someone only talked about in the Holy Scriptures from the past. They didn’t have any real relationship with the Living God. They didn’t look forward to praying to him in private. They were simply chasing after the world along with everyone else, just with a religious flavor to it. In Jesus’ words, they practiced their “righteousness” in front of others to be seen by them because they didn’t believe they would receive any reward from God (Mt 6:1). This is not true spirituality. This is unbelief.

Jesus’ rebuke cut deeper, accusing them of “devouring widows’ houses”. In those days, teachers of the law were dependent upon the generosity of their patrons for their livelihood. But widows, who had no source of income, were frequent victims of this system. The teachers of the law took advantage of their weak status in their own greedy thirst for power. It seemed like a crime they could easily get away with, but Jesus saw it and it made his blood boil. All together, we see that the teachers of the law, who were supposed to be *the experts* in the word of God, were guilty of breaking the two most important commandments: loving God and loving one’s neighbor as oneself (Mk 12:30-31). They were experts in loving themselves.

Will such wickedness go unpunished? Jesus declares their fate in verse 40b, ***“These men will be punished most severely.”*** From those who have been given much knowledge, much privilege and much power from God, much will be demanded (Lk 12:48). When God entrusts a person with the keys of knowledge through his word, he expects that person to have a positive spiritual impact on others, not take advantage of them for personal gain. Thus, the hottest fires of hell are reserved for the religious hypocrites. Yikes.

I think this teaching has a lot to say to us, as most of us either identify as Bible teachers now or aspire to be one someday. We spend a great deal of time hearing, studying, discussing and teaching God’s word, and rightfully so. But if we take a good, long look at our lives, do we see the same kind of “acting” Jesus warned us against? Are we one kind of person in Bible study or at church and a totally different person outside? When we teach the Bible to someone, are we more focused on lording our Bible knowledge over them than we are on serving them and building them up in sincere, Christ-like love? Most importantly, are we really doing what we do because we love God? Or do we simply seek to exalt ourselves under the pretext of a Christian lifestyle? I think if we are completely honest with ourselves, we will admit that we are never free from the threat of hypocrisy. We are too easily enamored by the “shiny” rewards of human approval, recognition, high status and wealth. But we can be set free from this trap by doing this one thing: listening to the word of God ourselves. When we hear God’s word and obey it, we can form a relationship with the Living God. With our eyes opened by faith, we can live before God rather than people and live with a genuinely right motive. Lord Jesus, I want to love you with all my heart! Please strengthen me to obey your words! Let’s not forget how privileged we are, and all the more so as teachers of God’s word. With great privilege comes great responsibility, and we have much to give back in thanks to God.

The story continues in verse 41. ***“Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts.”*** At this point, Jesus moved to the temple court of the women. Located here were 13 trumpet-shaped chests in which people could give their offerings. As this was the middle of the Passover festival, many Jews, moved by God’s love and grace, came to offer generous donations. But it became somewhat of a scene as several rich people threw in large amounts with great pomp. One guy converted all of his money into nickels so he could maximize the sound of coins dropping into the chest! People were mesmerized by the huge donations. “God will certainly bless them for their generosity,” they reasoned.

Yet something very different caught Jesus’ attention. Look at verse 42. ***“But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents.”*** Here was a poor widow, perhaps the kind whose house was “devoured” by the greedy teachers of the law. Though she had so little to give, she dared not attend the Passover empty-handed. So she quietly snuck over to the donation box when it seemed no one was watching and threw in her two coins, equaling roughly 1/64 of a man’s daily wage ($2 in modern currency). It went totally unnoticed by the preoccupied crowds. If they had noticed, their reaction may have been to snicker. What difference would an offering *like that* make compared to these enormous donations? It seemed insignificant, if not insulting. Perhaps even she wondered if it was worth the trouble.

But God sees everything. This widow’s offering meant the world to Jesus. So much so in fact, that he stopped everything and called in his disciples for a special lesson. Let’s read verses 43-44 all together. ***“Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, ‘Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.’”*** What?! She put *more* into the treasury than all the others? Doesn’t Jesus understand simple economics? More is more! But in relative terms, her gift dwarfed all the rest. God knew the large donations meant little to the rich who offered them. They were basically giving their leftovers from all God had blessed them with. Many gave begrudgingly, wondering why they had to give away any of their money at all. But the widow gave all she had to live on, without any of the pomp or recognition. Because she lived under the reality that God exists and that he rewards those who do what is right, she could offer her gift cheerfully. She had no hesitations about the personal cost because her life was fully entrusted to God’s hands. She believed that the Living God saw her gift and would give her a reward beyond this world and this life. Jesus was telling his disciples, “This is what true a true spiritual leader looks like.”

The kind of giving that pleases God is not necessarily large in quantity. Rather, it is of a special quality we might call “heart-giving” or “self-giving”. It is the giving of our very selves to God out of love, which is what he really desires. You see, self-giving love is the very nature of God. Within the Trinity, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit freely give of themselves to one another in love, without fear. Likewise, God showed his self-giving love to us by giving his Son Jesus to die for us and bring us back to him. Any sort of giving that lacks our hearts is ultimately empty. God doesn’t want or need our “stuff”; he wants us! That’s why he gave himself for us!

It is not only our money that God asks of us. Loving God means offering him the very best of our time, our talents, our passion, our resources, our hopes, our futures…everything that makes us who we are. But how can we know if we are truly doing these things in a way that is “heart-giving”? Based on the beautiful example of the poor widow, I think there are three signs we should look for. First, we stop obsessing over the cost. I know that when I hear a story about a sacrificial missionary or another great servant of God, my tendency is to focus on the personal cost. “That’s too much”, I think. But those who give their hearts to God are compelled by love, not fear. Though they count the cost and are willing to pay it, they do not obsess over it. Like the poor widow, they believe what they receive back from God will be well worth whatever they forfeit. Second, we give in proportion to the way God has blessed us. Those who poured large amounts into the temple treasury thought they were doing a great thing. But it was the poor widow whom Jesus honored because she gave all she had. We must understand that we have been so, so, so, so, so abundantly blessed by God! We are swimming in an ocean of God’s grace. If we realized how much we are receiving from God and gave back to him in proportion, we would be full of thanksgiving. Third, we are cheerful givers. 2 Corinthians 2:7 reads, *“Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”* Are we generally joyful people? Do we derive our joy from giving ourselves to God and to others? If love for God is the driving force for our lives, we will taste the joy that comes from joining in his self-giving love. If we are not joyful, perhaps we are holding back. Only the kind of giving that is spurred on by faith and love can please our Father!

Today we were reminded that our Lord Jesus is the Son of God, who died and rose again and is interceding for each of us at the right hand of God. God is the Living God who sees the inner motives of our hearts. God himself says in 1 Samuel 16:7b, *“The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”* Do you believe that God is living and that he knows the deepest parts of your heart? Do you believe he will reward you, even if you offer him the very best of what you have and are? We must not fall into the trap of a hypocritical religious life. Let’s keep our focus on God and his wonderful grace and reciprocate his self-giving love!