

Mark 12:38-44

³⁸He also said to them in his teaching, “Beware of the experts in the law who like to walk around in long robes and receive greetings in the marketplaces. ³⁹They love the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. ⁴⁰They devour widows’ houses and offer long prayers to look good. These men will receive greater condemnation.”

⁴¹Jesus sat down opposite the offering box and was watching how the crowd put money into it. Many rich people put in large amounts. ⁴²One poor widow came and put in two small bronze coins, worth less than a penny. ⁴³He called his disciples together and said to them, “Amen I tell you: This poor widow put more into the offering box than all the others. ⁴⁴For they all gave out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all that she had to live on.”

Image

I.

Image is everything. So goes the saying. There was even an advertising campaign once that used that slogan.

Some of you might disagree. You claim you don’t really care all that much about what people think of you or how they see you. But is that really true?

Like it or not, you have an image. There are certain aspects of your personality that you want other people to notice, and others that you would rather no one would ever know about. If you want to be seen as a tough guy, you won’t want to draw attention to your tender or vulnerable sides. If you want to be seen as happy-go-lucky, you won’t want to ever be seen carefully contemplating serious matters.

On social media sites, posters carefully curate their chosen image. What they like most about themselves is prominently displayed. Anything they are ashamed of is carefully removed from view. Sometimes people are shocked to hear the news when the “perfect couple” they thought they knew from social media is suddenly embroiled in bitter divorce proceedings.

Image, it seems, has always been a thing.

In days and weeks and months gone by, Jesus had the image of a Rabbi—a great Teacher. Another part of his image was that he was a Healer—no disease—not even death itself—had been too powerful for him to overcome. His image had grown to such an extent that days before he had ridden into Jerusalem with crowds of people waving and cheering him on; their words greeted him as the Messiah God had promised.

It was now Tuesday of Holy Week. Jesus was teaching in the temple courts. There were numerous Jewish officials who had been challenging him and asking him questions. As he continued his teaching, Jesus said: “Beware of the experts in the law who like to walk around in long robes and receive greetings in the marketplaces. ³⁹They love the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets” (Mark 12:38-39, EHV).

Certain people, Jesus said, were completely fabricating their image. They wanted people to see them as respectable and inspiring members of the community. To foster that image, they made sure to dress in a way that would seem dignified and present themselves as important. When they attended social functions, they wanted the most prominent positions. Even when they were at worship services they craved places that would elevate their image of being important people.

But it was all a facade. “They devour widows’ houses and offer long prayers to look good” (Mark 12:40, EHV). These experts in the law lived off the generosity of others, including many who were poor. To cover up their actions they spent lots of time in prayer so they would be seen as holy.

II.

After talking a bit about the falsified image of the experts in the law, Jesus sat down in a covered courtyard of the temple. In this particular area there were 13 offering boxes, called “trumpets” because of their tapered shape—a small opening at the top, broadening out at the bottom.

The trumpets were designated for different kinds of offerings. Some were to receive the offerings that were legally required by worshipers. Others were there to cover the costs of the sacrifices that were to be given; rather than bringing in an animal for sacrifice, you dropped the appropriate amount in the designated trumpet, and it would all be combined to make the necessary sacrifices. Some were for special, voluntary offerings.

It was the trumpets for voluntary offerings that were watched most closely. As people dropped their offerings in the trumpets they would linger for a little while to watch other people put *their* offerings in the box. They wanted to make some mental notes. How might *their* voluntary offerings have been perceived in the past? How could they better present themselves in the future with their voluntary offerings?

Since there wasn’t paper currency, all the offerings were made with coins. If they couldn’t see clearly, they certainly could *hear*; the clinking of many coins falling down the neck of the trumpet to the bottom was impressive. When they made their own clinking offerings, they wanted to make sure *they* were just as impressive as others they had seen and heard.

It was all part of the crafting of an image.

So it was that Jesus sat down deliberately across from the offering trumpet to watch the people presenting their gifts. Since the rich and powerful *knew* that others were watching, and they wanted to improve their image, they made quite a show of dumping in their coins. They might even have given a little nod to the others dressed in their long robes who were in attendance that day; they might have exchanged greetings with their fellow prominent citizens.

Did they even notice the woman shuffling to the offering box with her two small coins? Probably not. Only men held positions of prominence in the synagogues, so they wouldn’t take any notice of most women as they walked past. But this woman would not have been well-dressed—she was too poor for flowing robes. This widow was too common for them to exchange a greeting.

As Jesus sat across from the offering trumpet, *he* noticed the woman. “He called his disciples together and said to them, ‘Amen I tell you: This poor widow put more into the offering box than all the others. ⁴⁴For they all gave out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all that she had to live on’” (Mark 12:43-44, EHV).

As the wealthy had dumped in *their* offerings, they were concerned only about their images. How would their offering look to others? Would the size of their offerings increase their esteem; would it lower it; would it remain the same? They didn’t have to give a single thought to where their next meal was coming from; at that very moment it was probably being prepared for them.

The poor widow wasn’t thinking about her image. She didn’t think anyone noticed her. She dropped in her two small coins—her lunch money, her dinner money. She had nothing

else left.

III.

Image is everything.

The Bible teaches proportionate giving. God's Old Testament people were commanded to give 1/10 of their income, no matter how large or small their income was. It's a formula that works, no matter what a person's income is.

Offerings are to reflect the way we have been blessed. How have we been blessed compared to those believers in the Old Testament? They were all looking ahead to a promised Savior. We have the certainty of the Savior who came; we know exactly what he has done for us. We know that he took our sins to the cross and paid for them so that we need never be in doubt about our position in God's kingdom.

Tipping culture in our country has gone from 10% to 15% or 20%, with suggestions up to 22%. Offering culture, on the other hand, has not stayed at 10%; it has gone down. Average offerings are around 3%. Have you evaluated the percentage of your gifts to the Lord? Is it time to do so again?

IV.

Did Jesus call attention to the poor widow who gave everything to teach generous, proportionate giving? I don't think so. The rich would have been an example of generous, proportionate giving—they were giving above and beyond what was required. Yet Jesus was not impressed with their gifts.

What Jesus was calling attention to was faith. Faith recognizes what God has done and believes that he will continue to bless us into the future.

The widow had little of *everything*. Everything except faith. There was no Social Security or Medicare. With her husband gone, so was her source of income. But the widow believed that God had taken care of her. She believed he would continue to do so. The poor widow was rich in faith.

Christian giving is really always a matter of faith. Recognize what God has done for you in the past. He sent the Savior he promised. Jesus took your sin to the cross and paid the full price for it. Remembering what God has done in the past, do you believe he'll continue to provide for you and save you in the future?

Christian giving is about faith—trust that God will take care of us.

V.

Image is everything.

Not to the widow. She wasn't trying to improve her image as she dropped everything into the offering box. She didn't think anyone was paying attention to her gift, small as it was. It was given out of love to a Savior-God who gave everything for her.

God grant that your offerings are not given to protect or preserve or improve your image. You have salvation in Jesus. You have a place to live and food to eat. Give to the Lord from a heart filled with gratitude for what he has given to you. Amen.