

On the Road to Revival (Part 2)

Introduction

The Text

⁴⁵ 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.”

¹ 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.” (Luke 20:45–21:4)

Part 2

- A. This is now Part 2 of what we began last week, a couple sermons I’ve titled: “On the Road to Revival.”
 - 1. If you were here last time, you’ll recall I’m saying this text really puts us on the road to religious revival because in it we travel from the external nominal religiosity of these scribes to the inside-out, authentic, wholehearted devotion of this widow.
- B. Now, last week the focus was largely on those verses at the end of [Luke 20](#). Well, now this morning we are going to set our sights in particular on those opening verses of [Luke 21](#).
 - 1. But before I outline precisely where we’re headed with this, let me take you back to [Gen 3](#) for a moment and remind us of why we need revival in the first place. And this will set us up, actually, to anticipate appropriately what, in fact, this revival is supposed to look like.

The Fall and the Flip

- A. I’ve mentioned this before but sometimes I feel it bears repeating that in [Gen 3](#), what we often call the fall—when men turned on God and fell from glory as it were—we actually also see that there is a sort of flip, an inversion of the created order. Let me show you what I mean.
 - 1. God created all things, and He clearly puts a certain order to it all.
 - a. First He creates the inanimate world—nature, vegetation—with all of its splendor and abundance.
 - b. Then he fills it with animals who are sustained within it, nourished by it.
 - c. And over top all of this He puts humanity, and calls them to subdue the earth and have dominion, with the man as head of the woman.

2. Well, in the narrative of the fall in [Gen 3](#) we have creation coming undone in precisely the opposite order of things. Have you ever noticed this?
 - a. First, the whole matter turns on a piece of fruit—from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, vegetation.
 - b. Then comes an animal, the serpent animated by Satan.
 - c. And this animal deceives first the woman who then turns and gives to the man.
 - d. And then it is man that turns in the end on God and blames Him for the whole mess.

- B. The fall is also a flip! It is not just that now we have descended to life on some lower plane of existence, it's that the whole order of things has been inverted.
 1. It was at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that we called evil good and good evil and everything's been upside down in our hearts ever since.

- C. Revival, therefore, true religious revival, is not just redemptive awakening it is also reversion. It is the beginning of God putting things back into order, which, ironically, from the perspective of this world and our fallen and flipped human nature is going to look at first to be a bit upside-down.
 1. So this is why, in biblical Christianity, we talk about the Lion who's a Lamb, the King who's a Servant, the Savior who suffers and dies.
 2. This is why we talk about foolishness being the new wisdom, weakness the new strength, and sickness the new health.
 3. This is why we talk about the poor being rich, the humble being exalted, the last being first, the servant being greatest.
 4. This is why we talk about losing your life to find it, becoming a slave of God to be set free, dying with Christ to live.
 - a. If the fall is a flip, then revival is reversion—it's the reordering of all that's been turned over in our sin. And, hence, it's going to look counterintuitive and even crazy—it's going to look upside-down to us at first.

- D. Now, why do I say all of this up front here?
 1. Well, because this, it seems to me, is the necessary biblical context to make any sense of why Jesus is making such a big deal here about this poor widow putting a few pennies into one of the temple's offering boxes.
 - a. "Who cares?! The rich just put in a thousand times as much. Get her out of here. She's taking up space from people who matter. Who cares about this poor widow?"
 - i. Jesus cares. And He doesn't want His disciples or us to miss it.

- E. There's revival going on in this text and this revival is reversion. Jesus is saying: "Things you've long overlooked, it's time to look again. Things you've long devalued, it's time to start seeing their worth. Things you've long called foolish, it's time start discerning the wisdom tucked within. Look at this widow . . . and learn!"

1. I see at least three lessons we can learn from her here (and I've just alluded to them): (1) God Sees What We Often Overlook; (2) God Treasures What We Often Undervalue; and (3) God Commends What We Often Condemn. Let's go!

(1) Lesson #1: God Sees What We Often Overlook

- A. Bottom line here: If we were to sit down with these disciples and ask them where they would expect we should find godly, biblical wisdom, counsel, and example, undoubtedly, they would have pointed to people like the scribes discussed at the end of [Luke 20](#).

1. I spoke last time of the great respect these men garnered and the unrivaled authority they had in first-century Palestine. If you want godly wisdom and insight, this is where you look—these guys.

- B. But Jesus is here, in no uncertain terms, saying: "I know everyone is watching them. But look away. Don't behold them. Beware of them. It's so counterintuitive, I know. They look wise, but they're foolish. They look clean, but they're filthy. They look spiritually alive, but they're dead. Instead, may I invite you to turn your gaze towards this widow."

1. Now, widows, of course, in every society are some of the more vulnerable and marginalized, but this was especially so in Jesus' day. To put it bluntly, you wouldn't expect to find any wisdom or exemplary activity here. You probably wouldn't have even noticed her had Jesus not drawn your attention to her.

a. So here then we learn, then, that God sees what we often overlook.

- C. And it's always been this way. Ever since He began His redemptive, reverting work, He's done it in surprising, unexpected, upside-down (though right-side up) ways.

1. So Abraham, in his old age, with a barren wife—he's going to be the father of many nations. Your kids sing that song: "Father Abraham had many sons, and many sons had father Abraham, and I am one of them, and so are you, so let's just praise the Lord." No one would have picked this guy out to be father of anything. But here we are singing about it. Because God did it. He sees what we often overlook.
2. Or Israel, He says in [Deut 7](#) that they were nothing to look at—not special, not big, not significant. But He chose them and says: "All the nations are going to be looking at you. Salvation and blessing for the world is going to come through you."
3. Or David, little shepherd-boy. Surely you want Saul as your king. He looks good to the human eye. Of if you're going to pick a son of Jesse, surely it's one of these older, stronger boys. No, Samuel says, "You got any other kids." "Well yeah, but he's just a little guy out with the sheep." "He's the one." "For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart" ([1 Sam 16:7](#)).
4. Or then there's Jesus, of course—God in the flesh coming in hot from heaven, born not in a palace but in a manger, laid not on a pillow in a crib but on straw in an animal's feeding

trough. No one saw it coming. No one saw the truth of who He truly was and is: “² [H]e grew up . . . like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.³ He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not” (Is 53:2–3).

5. And you can just follow this same line of biblical redemptive activity straight to this widow here in our text laying down her pennies in the temple. Everyone just looks right over her. No one sees her. But Jesus sees her. God sees what we often overlook.

D. And you know there’s a couple things for us in this:

1. First, beware of judging things based on appearance.
 - a. You’re going to want to do this. And you’re going to get it backwards and upside-down. What we must learn is that, in the kingdom of God, things are not always what they seem. And we have to have a healthy suspicion of our own native inclinations and intuitions. Wisdom and truth and power come in the most unsuspecting forms.
2. But second, you’ve got to know that God sees you.
 - a. Hear me on that. This is going to factor in big with where we’re going next. Some of you feel like this widow, no doubt. Overlooked. Unseen. All the rich are coming in with all this fanfare, everyone’s paying them mind, meeting them with approval and applause. But here you are, trying to be faithful, trying to serve, trying to use whatever you have for God’s honor and glory, and it feels like no one even cares, no one sees.
 - i. Jesus sees you. That’s a big implication here: “¹ Jesus looked up . . . ² and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins” (vv. 1-2). And I’ve got to think a smile formed on His face. He saw her. And He sees you.

(2) Lesson #2: God Treasures What We Often Undervalue

A Couple Bucks

- A. If what we look at and notice tends to be inverted, well, related, what we value tends to be so as well. The economy of the kingdom of heaven runs on a very different kind of currency than we do it would seem.
- B. Looking at this widow here, it’s important that you realize her offering, monetarily speaking, on the surface at least, is virtually worthless.
 1. She puts in “two small copper coins” (v. 2)—in the Greek “leptos.” This was the smallest valued coin available at the time, something like 1/128th of a denarius (a day’s wage for a

common laborer)—so maybe by modern standards something like \$1.00. And she puts in two of these. You can't even buy a bus ticket for that.

C. But Jesus, having seen all the money the rich just came through and gave, looks at these two coins from this widow and says, v. 3: "Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them."

1. And He goes on to give His rationale, v. 4: "For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on." Remember from last time in the Greek, it's bios there which means "life"—she put in her life!

D. You see now here's what I love about this: On the one hand, Jesus clearly doesn't care about how much a person gives to God (she didn't give anything, really), and yet on the other hand we see that He cares very much about what a person gives (His whole lesson here turns on whether the rich or this widow gave more). It doesn't matter, and yet it matters very much. It means nothing, and yet it means everything. Let me explain.

1. It all comes down to how you run the equation. You see, Jesus has a different value system. He trades in a different currency. He doesn't care about the external features of product or output nearly as much as He cares about the internal features of the heart, matters of faith and love.

- a. These rich men gave from their margin, they still had a cushion, they still kept back much for themselves, and their hearts were all tangled up in their wealth.
- b. But this woman gave everything. She didn't give from her margin, she gave her very life, her whole heart, to God.

i. And that, in the economy of heaven is infinitely more valuable than what the rich put in. As one commentator writes: "In purely financial terms, the value of the widow's offering is negligible. But in the divine scale of value, her gift is inestimable" (PNTC).

A Couple Implications

Implication #1: Beware of Overvaluing the External and the "Big Things"

A. I think we can take a false sense of assurance that we're doing great with the Lord because externally we're doing something big.

1. We give a big lump of cash to the church, we give a lot of our time to ministry, we seeing big numbers coming to the Lord, whatever it may be. It's big so it must be that we're doing good, right? And we congratulate ourselves.

- a. But we forget that external size and effect are not the main metric God uses when measuring worth. Oh we are prone to this, no doubt, but he operates differently.

B. Instead we ought to be asking: How much of my heart and life does God actually have?! You see, we can hide behind our religious stuff.

1. We can give in a way not to get more of God but to get God off our backs and relieve our guilty consciences. The real sacrifice isn't some carefully calculated offering given to God from the margins of our lives while the center remains untouched or unthreatened. It is the giving of the whole person (including all of his things) over to God in trust.
2. Or what's more we can pursue the big thing for God but for all the wrong reasons. For ego. Paul mentions this sort of thing in [Phil 1](#) when he speaks of those who "preach Christ from envy and rivalry" (v. 15) and "proclaim [Him] out of selfish ambition, not sincerely" (v. 17) but to have the better ministry or whatever. We can smuggle our selfish ambition into our spiritual pursuits. We're driven by our need to be seen and do something significant, big, noticeable, famous, whatever, not by our love for God, though we do it in the name of God.

a. Beware of overvaluing the external. It's not what God fundamentally cares about.

- C. I thought at this point of something I remember reading from Zack Eswine's book, [The Imperfect Pastor](#). In the book he talks about how selfish ambition and a desire for greatness almost made shipwreck of his ministry. And he recounts how years later, he saw the same sort of ambitions in guys looking to get into the ministry. Listen to this (it's long but well worth your attention):

"Years later, on the other side of the ruins, I found myself listening to a young pastor's desires. I saw and heard myself in him. Maybe you will too.

'No matter what, I want to go all out for the ministry,' he said.

His passion inspired me, but the context worried me. We had just spoken at length about his difficulty as a husband and father along with a recurring bend within the road of his soul. I took a breath and paused, staring down at the bowl of pad thai in front of me.

'If the ministry is what we will go all out for,' I began, 'then how we define "the ministry" seems important, you know?' I took a bite and chewed.

'I just want to preach the Word,' he declared. 'No matter what happens, as long as I keep saying what God said, he will bless it. I know God has given me purpose.'

There was urgency in his voice, hurry in his eyes. Both were like a mirror to me. I twirled peanut and noodles around my fork . . . I was hunting for words.

'Yes, God will bless his Word,' I ventured. 'You do have purpose,' I affirmed.

. . . 'I spoke at a conference once,' I began. 'I preached five times. It was one of those moments when God's presence was tangibly felt. In fact, after that particular conference, the rest of my year was planned full with preaching all over the country. God does bless his Word. I've seen him do it firsthand.'

'But,' I said, and then stopped. I stood at a crossroads in my mind, wondering how to say what was next. 'On my way home after that last sermon amid the divine blessing of that night, my wife, of fifteen years told me she was leaving me.'

. . . 'I'm trying to suggest,' I said, 'that "the ministry" involves more than the question of whether our sermons are powerful and we influence crowds of people. Going all out for God means more than going all out for sermons and crowds.'

Later that night we stood beneath the stars.

'When I get back home,' he said, 'I finally begin as a pastor. Maybe soon I can get to seminary and get equipped and then become a professor somewhere. I can't wait to get there. Two years as a pastor and then . . .'

I found myself staring at the gravel driveway . . . I heard my voice in his. He was restless to do something great for God. His pastoral work was a platform to use to help him get somewhere other

than where he was. And yet he did not know how to include changing diapers or holding his wife's hand in his definition of greatness.

'What if you are there already?' I tried. 'I mean, what if you are already what God has in mind for you? You are a blessing to people in Jesus already. What if the place of ministry where you are with the family that you have is the place where God means for you to be with him?'

His face seemed pained.

'Please forgive me if I'm saying too much,' I said. . . . 'It's just that you are talking to a man . . . who got everything he dreamed of and lost most of what really mattered, and all of this in the name of going all out for the ministry and serving God. I'm just trying to say that it seems really important to know what we mean by "the ministry" if we are going to go all out for it. My desire is that what you are going all out for is actually the thing God intends with the definition God gives it.'

He looked away in the sky again. 'I don't know where to start with all that,' he protested" (23-25).

1. And that's where the story ends. With a young aspiring pastor overvaluing the external, thinking big things for God is what it's about, not realizing that stuff is off in his heart, with the things God really cares about. He wants to accomplish much in the name of Jesus, but he's smuggled in selfish ambition.
- D. And I wonder about you, about me. Are we doing this in our own lives and personal ministries? Are we always after the bigger and the better, or are we giving God our whole hearts even in the seemingly little stuff day to day? Because that's the sort of thing that makes Him leap for joy! That's what sets off fireworks in heaven.
- E. And this all leads to the second implication, which is really just the other side of the coin . . .

Implication #2: Beware of Undervaluing the Internal and the "Little Things"

- A. You know, I have to imagine this widow with her two coins in her hand looked around at all the rich putting in their massive sums and thought: "Why am I even doing this? Does my gift even matter? God won't be pleased with this, would He? It's too small. It's embarrassing."
1. We're prone to undervalue the internal features of faith and love especially as they work out in externally little deeds.
- B. I wonder if you've ever felt like this? You look around at what other people are doing and think: "I should be more. I'm not enough!"
1. Listen, what this text is saying is that, externally, God doesn't care how you're measuring up against other people. He cares about what's going on inside and what you're doing with whatever He's given you. You don't have to somehow press beyond the limits of God's gifting and calling of you, but are you living wholehearted for Him within them?!
- C. You know, I saw an article trending on The Gospel Coalition's website that I found to be particularly relevant especially for ladies at this point. It was an article by Melissa Kruger entitled: "[Sisters, You Have Permission to Lead an Ordinary Life.](#)"

1. Listen to how it begins: “You’re special. Don’t let anyone limit your potential. You’re made for more. Your life is up to you. Exercise more. Eat better. Make time for yourself. Cheer others on. Give more. Do more. Try harder. Run faster.

And, while you’re at it, change the world. Solve injustice. Start a nonprofit. Lead a Bible study. Read all the new books (maybe write one, too). Read the classics. Make sure to vote. Wash your face. Live untamed.

No wonder you haven’t thought about what’s for dinner. (But, whatever you do, make sure it’s an all-organic, free-range, and locally sourced nutritious meal.)

Do you feel the pressure too? Some days it’s exhausting to be a woman. Internally, we feel the reality of not measuring up to our own hopes of being the friend, employee, daughter, wife, or mother we think we should be. Externally, we have so many influencers telling us to make an amazing, groundbreaking difference in the world. Words meant to inspire often exhaust.”

- a. Ladies, have you ever been there? “It’s not enough to be a mom, I should be an Instagram influencer or whatever. It’s not enough to be an employee, I should be a manager. It’s not enough to be a manager, I should be a mom too.”

- i. And you just get tangled up in it, feeling like you’re never enough—like you should be more than you are, doing more than you’re doing, making a greater impact . . . for Jesus of course! But it’s exhausting. Because you’re trying to press outside the limits of your own humanity and of God’s gifting and calling.

2. Later Melissa comes down and writes these convicting yet comforting words and I wanted you to hear them: “Don’t concern yourself with what he’s called someone else to do. Encourage and support others, but don’t believe that just because they’re doing something means you must, too. Whatever God has called you to, faithfully fulfill the ministry you’ve received from him. Ordinary lives can produce extraordinary fruit.”

- D. In *The Hobbit*, Galadriel asks Gandalf why he’s including Bilbo in this quest to fight off Smaug and take back dwarves’ homeland and things, and I love how Gandalf responds: “I don’t know. Saruman believes that it is only great power that can hold evil in check. But that is not what I have found. I’ve found it is the small things, everyday deeds of ordinary folk that keeps the darkness at bay. Simple acts of kindness and love. Why Bilbo Baggins? Perhaps it is because I am afraid and he gives me courage.”

1. The little stuff matters, especially when it’s done with a big heart for God! God treasures what we often undervalue.

(3) Lesson #3: God Commends What We Often Condemn

- A. Now, obviously I haven’t left myself much time for this last one, but here’s what I mean by it. I think anyone looking in on this widow, aware that she’s literally just given the last bit of money she had to live on, would speak out against such an act as foolish and religious fanaticism and things like this.

1. Some commentators have even tried to make the case for this, that Jesus isn't necessarily pleased with what He sees going on here.
- B. But I think it's quite clear that Jesus is commending her here. And, furthermore, we see the same sort crazy, risk-taking generosity commended elsewhere all over the Scriptures.
1. Coming at it negatively, do you remember what Jesus calls that man in Luke who's stored up all his stuff in barns instead of giving freely to God and the poor and things? We may call Him wise—He's ready for retirement, He's got that pad to fall back on. But do you remember what Jesus calls Him? **"Fool!" (Luke 12:20)**. It's not what we would think.
 2. Or positively, Paul seeing churches in Macedonia doing precisely the same sort thing the widow is doing here, doesn't rebuke them or chastise them as imprudent, He commends them and holds them out as examples to the church in Corinth: **"¹ We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, ² 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. ³ For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, ⁴ begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— ⁵ and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us" (2 Cor 8:1–5)**.
 - a. Giving beyond your means even in the face of extreme poverty?! That isn't foolish. That's the mark of God's grace upon you! That's what Paul says.
- C. When you throw your whole life onto the altar for Jesus, it may look foolish to those on the outside but, if God is who He says He is, then it is truly the wisest thing you can do.
1. I love **Pro 19:17** on this: **"Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will repay him for his deed."**
 - a. You lay your life down in love for God and others, you let go of your stuff, you throw in your coins, your life so to speak, and you are not throwing things away carelessly, foolishly, you are, as it were, lending to the Lord. And, as Matt Perman writes on this text, **"the Lord does not default on His 'loans.' [He] pays back everything that is 'loaned' to him with great increase and even more abundance (Luke 6:38)" (What's Best Next, 95)**.
 2. **Pro 11:24-25** gets at the same idea when it says: **"²⁴ One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want. ²⁵ Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered."**
 3. Jonathan Edwards in his book **Charity and Its Fruits** helps us make more sense of these things when he writes: **"If you are selfish, and make yourself and your own private interests your idol, God will leave you to yourself, and let you promote your own interests as well as you can.**

But if you do not selfishly seek your own, but do seek the things that are Jesus Christ's, and the things of your fellow human beings, then God will make your interest and happiness his own charge, and he is infinitely more able to provide for and promote it than you are.

The resources of the universe move at his bidding, and he can easily command them all to subserve your welfare.

So that, not to seek your own, in the selfish sense, is the best way of seeking your own in a better sense. It is the directest course you can take to secure your highest happiness” (as quoted by Matt Perman in *What’s Best Next*, 100).

- a. Again, It’s not foolish to throw your life and all your stuff into the hands of God, it’s the smartest thing you could do!

Conclusion

How Can We Become Like This Widow?

- A. You say: “I want to be like this widow, but how does her heart shift like it does? How does she get there? Where do you get the strength in faith to just lay it all down like that? I don’t think I have that in me.”
 1. Well, you see, when Paul is calling the Corinthians to lay their lives down like those in Macedonia, he goes on to show us where the power comes from. Jesus. The gospel. He goes on few verses later in that chapter to say: “At the end of the day, don’t merely look at the Macedonians, look at the cross.”
 - a. [2 Cor 8:9: “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.”](#)
 - i. The Macedonians got it. That’s why they just released their stuff, their lives, for the glory of Jesus and His kingdom. It’s grace.
 - ii. And I think this widow must’ve been starting to get some of this too.
 - (1) When you see all that God gave up of Himself to forgive you, to wash you, to save you, to bring you back home to Him, you’re going to want to give Him your heart. And the extent to which you still hold back is the extent to which you still don’t understand His love.
- B. So, I don’t know. Are you there? With the widow? Laying down the last two coins she has? It looks backwards, it looks crazy, it looks upside-down. But truly it’s an indication of revival!