

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our heavenly Father, through the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Mark 12:38-44 (EHV)

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

41 Jesus sat down opposite the offering box and was watching how the crowd put money into it. Many rich people put in large amounts. 42 One poor widow came and put in two small bronze coins, worth less than a penny. 43 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. 44 For they all gave out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all that she had to live on.”



Dear heavenly Father, send your Holy Spirit on us so that we may not be easily distracted by any ‘impressive’ people, events, or objects, but keep our eyes fixed clearly on the words and work of Jesus Christ. Amen.

So, have you ‘checked each other out’ this morning?

For example, have you checked out what everyone is wearing, and mentally approved or criticised their choice? Have you mentally labelled each other according to their size, age, ability, or personality? Have you made a mental roll-call to see who’s missing from worship and wonder why they’re not here? Have you internally chastised their absence and taken pride in your own attendance?

Will you, or have you already, taken note of how much others give on the offering plate and compare it with the cars they drive, the farms they run, or the type of house they live in? Do you grumble about those who don’t seem to ‘pull their weight’ on committees, or on rosters, or on any other activity of the church?

Unfortunately, whether we voice it or not, many people in church can be highly critical of each other.

We tend to ‘check each other out’ to see if others measure up to our own standards. We complain when people don’t pull their weight financially, or don’t help out as much as they could, or don’t worship regularly, or have differing opinions to us, or don’t behave as we expect.

Even though we love hearing the free and *undeserving* message of the *Gospel*, it

seems we want to live out the *Law* as if everyone has to *deserve* our love and forgiveness! No wonder some people are chased away by our hypocritical attitudes and don't want to be a part of it! Our critical attitudes, words and actions work like an anti-gospel which diseases the mission of the church!

Unfortunately, what goes around comes around, and the way you might judge others is often the way others will judge you. Perhaps this is why some of you might be reluctant to help or serve or love because you might fear failure or criticism. And, if any of you have been away from worship for a while, you might find it hard to come back because you fear the looks and comments others may make. Even if they don't say anything, you might fear what people think of you.

What may surprise us is that Jesus also 'checks people out' including you and me!

In our text today, Jesus 'checks out' those faithful religious people we're normally impressed by, you know, the well-dressed and well-respected pastors, teachers, leaders, active members, and those who can pray those impressive prayers. He checks them out and they fall short of God's glory.

But this isn't what we normally expect!

After all, we might expect Jesus to say, "Watch out for those who don't come to church regularly, or watch out for those who don't pull their weight in church activities, or watch out for those who don't give much on the offering plate. Or watch out for those who don't believe the same as you."

But he doesn't. Instead, he says something like: "Watch out for those who make a big show of going to church!"

Well, I don't know about you, but this type of comment gets my attention!

But, what do we need to watch out for?

Well, many people in Jesus' day were impressed by these church leaders. Their faith seemed so genuine as they sat in the Temple all day, giving generously of their time and money and effort, and praying long and impressive prayers.

Many widows and others who relied on them for help would be attracted to their pious displays of faith and put their trust in them. But Jesus could see that these so-called 'faithful leaders' weren't full of faith. They were full of themselves!

They pretended to worship God but took advantage of those who needed help. Instead of helping their neighbour in their time of need, they helped themselves, served their egos, and did whatever they could to become popular, loved, respected, and appreciated. God's love and mercy and grace wasn't enough for them. They wanted everyone else's love and respect as well.

Are we much different today? Are we also tempted to point to ourselves and our faithful worship practices, our understanding of Scriptures, our pious acts, our service on committees, our sacrifices of energy, time and talents for others, how much we place on the offering plate, and our ability to pray?

Whenever we're focusing on doing things for our own good and our own standing among others, then it's possible our service to others is about our own glory and popularity and reputation.

If this is true, have you considered that every time you point to yourself and how good *you* are (or how bad *everyone else* is), you're no longer pointing to Jesus?

Similarly, whenever you're critical or judgmental toward others, isn't it possible you're placing yourself above others as the one who needs to be feared, loved, and trusted instead of God?

It shocks us that Jesus sees right through our clever charades for self-glory and self-promotion and sees what's in our hearts. He not only sees what we do with our hands and say with our lips, but he knows our inner thoughts and weighs up the motivations of our hearts.

Yes, we might be doing all the 'right things' but we could be doing them for the wrong reasons. As a result, we don't impress Jesus as much as we think we do!

Therefore, whenever we hear that Jesus 'check's us out', it can make us feel uncomfortable. We don't just need to repent before God of our words and actions, but also our motivations.

However, Jesus doesn't just check out the pretenders. He also checks out a widow. She's one of those often exploited and deceived by the so-called 'faithful' people of God.

She has her whole life savings in her hands – two small copper coins. Physically, these are the smallest coins in currency, like a couple of five cent pieces. Fiscally, these two coins were worth about 1/128th of a day's wages. So, for a person earning about \$50,000 a year, these two coins would be worth about \$1 today. That's all she had to her name!

Knowing how poor she was, would you have thought any worse of her for keeping one of the coins? Then again, what do you already think of those who only put a small amount in their offerings, or even pass the offering plate over without putting anything on it? Remember, while Jesus can see our hearts and knows our bank balances, we can't. If you don't know the complete truth, are you really in a position to fairly judge anyone?

Anyway, she put *both* coins in the offering box, and those who made a great show of putting their large amounts into the same box probably frowned at her. What they didn't know was she now had nothing left to live on. In reality, she's putting herself totally into God's hands, trusting God will look after her.

Sure, the others may have put in larger amounts than her, but they also had much more still sitting in their wallets and bank accounts. It wasn't about *how much they put in*, but *how much they kept for themselves*. The more they kept, the more they showed their lack of trust.

Jesus commends this widow. He didn't praise her for her wise fiscal management (after all, giving both coins was fiscally irresponsible)! Jesus praised her as an example of complete trust in God. Despite the way others treated her, and despite their impressive shows of piety, she gave herself completely into God's care. This is the type of trust Jesus looks for.

Why?

Because Jesus was also about to give himself completely into God's care. He would soon be stripped of his clothing and dignity. He would be accused and ridiculed by God's own faithful religious people. He would willingly subject himself to beatings, whippings, and death without complaint or declarations of innocence. He didn't do any of this to impress anyone, but to save selfish, recalcitrant, and obstinate people like you and me.

He didn't give just two coins, but he gave his two hands and both feet to be nailed to a cross. His two eyes still looked to heaven in trust, even though he felt abandoned by his Father. Yet his eyes were also drawn to those he loves, and cares for, and forgives.

Even today, his mouth still intercedes for you before his Father in heaven and that same mouth declares your sins are forgiven, including all those sins where you took pride in yourself. You are also forgiven for all those sins where you unfairly judged those around you!

Jesus didn't hold anything back, but surrendered himself completely into his Father's care so that you would be reconciled with our Father in heaven. In fact, he still gives of himself today whenever you receive his body and blood for the forgiveness of all your sins.

As the Son of God touches your hands, enters your mouth, and combines himself with your own bloodstream, his loving and gracious Spirit enters into your own bodies so that you in turn would forgive, and love, and serve like he does.

You're not called to check others out. You're called to check out Jesus Christ and what he did, and continues to do, for you!

Today Jesus warns you not to be fooled. Don't be fooled by all those impressive people, even if their shows of faith seem genuine. After all, if they say they love God but ignore the needs of those around them, their faith could be a charade. And, if they point to themselves more than they point to Jesus, then they're pointing the wrong way.

Don't be afraid of anyone who may be 'checking you out' and seem to look down on you. It doesn't matter what they see in you. It only matters what God sees. And what God sees is that all those who trust in Jesus are covered by his blood and all their sins are paid for in full.

Like the widow, you don't have to give God much, but you do need to trust him...much. It's not always about what you can give to God, for what can you possibly offer God that he doesn't already have? Rather, faith is about *receiving* what God gives to you, such as his gifts of forgiveness, life and salvation, in complete faith and trust. You don't receive these things so you can keep them for yourself. You receive the gifts of God so you can pass them on to those around us who need your love and care and grace.

Keep checking Jesus out because only Jesus saves you. Only Jesus gives you true forgiveness, hope, life, and peace. Only Jesus loves you enough to die for you so willingly.

Check him out and continue to trust him completely like the widow. This doesn't mean you should empty your bank accounts into the offering plate, but you should empty yourself of yourself in complete trust that what Jesus gives you is more than enough for your forgiveness, peace, hope, life, and eternal salvation...

...So that the peace of God, which surpasses all human understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Pastor Stuart Kleinig
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