

“It’s All About Attitude”

Mark 12:38-44

You may have heard in the news, there was an election this week. If you think you have election fatigue, you should hear what our family and friends in Iowa and Ohio have to say. Every election cycle, there is always talk about “class warfare” – pitting the rich and the poor against each other. For centuries, that has been a popular ploy of politicians. Jesus is not a politician.

As Jesus is instructing His disciples, He is not comparing the rich and the poor. He is offering an observation concerning attitudes toward God being displayed. The rich put in “large sums” of money. He is not criticizing them for this action. That is not a bad thing. I have been blessed to know some wealthy people who were generous stewards of what God had entrusted to them. Their attitude was that all they gave was to the glory of God (not to their own glory), and, after all, all that they had, had come from Him in the first place. As the hymn writer says, “We give Thee but Thine own.”

The criticism is in the big show that they make. There is a reason that Jesus and the disciples can see what, and how much, is being given. They made sure everyone saw it. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus

alludes to the practice of sounding a trumpet before you as you parade your gift. He says, “They have received their reward” [Mt. 6:2].

The problem has to do with attitude, not action. Cain and Abel both offered sacrifices to God. Cain’s problem was attitude.

All of the warnings that Jesus gives in our reading today have to do with attitude. Jesus says, “Beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes.” I know what you are thinking as I stand here in my long robe. But the robe is not the problem. In Exodus 39, God instructed Moses and Aaron that they were supposed to wear special robes when they were ministering according to their priestly office.

Jesus is warning against those who have prideful joy in putting on the external garment, and then parade around as if they are better than others (Attitude). They want the respect and honor of the priestly office, but they don’t want the burden of truly ministering to the people and caring for the sick and the poor.

Then He calls them out for liking “greetings in the marketplaces.” I like it when you greet me in the marketplace. And I like to greet others. But Jesus is not talking about a friendly “hello”. These men in decorative flowing robes liked to be greeted with title and honor. “Rabbi”, “Your Excellency” or whatever it may be. They wanted to be recognized and given honor – even though their place in the Kingdom was only theirs by the will and authority of God. They had the attitude that they deserved to be held up above others.

None of us deserve the honor we are shown in this sinful, fallen world. All that we have, whatever title, place, vocation, honor, relationships – it all come from God. I am a poor, miserable sinner – who by the grace of God has been declared righteous in His sight. That is my greatest honor, and it is certainly one I do not deserve.

They wanted the best seats in the synagogue. Seats did not come for free. You paid for your seat, and the closer you were to the front, the more the seat cost. (We are considering implementing a similar system, but in reverse. 😊 Not really!)

This was not only a practice of the Jews. Even in recent history, some Christian churches had you pay for your seat. There was an Episcopal church up the road from my home church in Louisville, KY. Inscribed in the stone façade it said, “All seats are free.” We drove past it each Sunday morning, and it just always made me laugh. But in some places, it was no joke.

In Jesus day, this was no joke. Again, God blessed families with large sums of money, but they used it for their own glory so that they could have the best seats and they wanted to be seen.

Likewise, they wanted the best seats at the feast. Where you sat demonstrated a very distinct pecking order. Jesus had a very simple solution for them. Be humble, sit at the lowest place, and let the host bring you up to a better seat.

There is nothing wrong with having a pecking order at a banquet. Go to any wedding. Careful consideration is made on where you sit. But

attitude can come into play. It is not just on episodes of “Bridezilla” that invited guests make demands on where they sit. Be humble and in all things give glory to God.

The poor widow who gave “everything she had, all she had to live on,” is commended by Christ for her attitude. Her two copper coins would not sustain her for even a day. It was all she had. She probably imagined that her life was over – much like the widow with the “handful of flour and a little oil in a jug” [1 Kings 17:12].

Elijah asks her for a “morsel of bread.” She says, “I have nothing baked, only a handful of flour and a little oil . . . and now I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die.”

Elijah promises her that the jar of flour and the jar of oil will not run out, “but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me.” It takes faith that the Lord will provide. The widow used the last of her flour for Elijah in the hope of being saved. She couldn’t do it herself.

The widow at the temple had faith that the Lord would provide. She couldn’t do it herself. The two copper coins were not going to sustain her. Her attitude must be our attitude: “I cannot do this by myself. The Lord will provide.” Amen.