

The Inverted Kingdom

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[0 : 00] All right, thank you, Jesse. Appreciate that. So good to be with everybody in the room and those listening online. And as Jesse said, we're going to be moving forward in our Mark series today.

We've now been in this for 32 weeks, so that's a lot of Mark, but it keeps getting better as we go. And during the last week, Jesse showed us, he walked us through a teaching of Jesus where he showed us how the law really points us towards love.

And that the most important thing is that you love God first with all your heart and soul in mind. And then that you love others, that you love your neighbor as yourself. And this week, what we're going to get from the text is kind of contrasting picture images of what that actually looks like on the ground.

Like what loving God does look like and what it doesn't look like. Now, all through the book of Mark, we've been seeing that Jesus' kingdom really is this upside down kind of kingdom, right?

So we have been shown over and over and over that the people that Jesus encounters, both, you know, the powerful, the important, the common, everybody kind of has preconceived notions about who should be in and who should be on the outs of this kingdom.

[1 : 13] And he's shown over and over that their notions of it aren't correct. And we've seen that this king over this kingdom really has this radically different view than the world of who and what is really important and what is not.

And we see that lesson again right here in living color in Mark chapter 12. So in Mark 12, 38 through 44, it says this. And in his teaching, he said, This is God's word to us.

So I think the first thing we see in this segment of text from Mark is probably the most obvious and is simply this. Jesus hates hypocrisy and pretense, but he loves humble faithfulness.

So I think one of the things in our current cultural moment that our society seems to crave is authenticity, right? Things being authentic and real. And that's probably because we're inundated with a mountain of fake things, right?

Like cultivated images on social media. It's really hard to tell, like, what somebody is and what they're not, what an institution is and what it's not. And so we kind of long for stuff that's not been kind of gatekept, right?

[3 : 17] Like something that is actually what it says it is. And because of that, it might be tempting to think that that's kind of a modern phenomenon, right?

Like our hate, our distaste for hypocrisy and our desire and love for things that are authentic. But that's actually something, if you go back and look at writings through antiquity, has been recognized for a while, which is pretending to be something that you're not is not a virtue.

The state motto of North Carolina is actually a Latin phrase, *esse quam videre*. And what that means is to be rather than to seem.

That phrase actually comes from an essay written by a Roman scholar named Cicero, writing actually a couple decades before the events in the book of Mark here. And in that essay, part of what he's talking about is looking around society.

He's like, you know, there's a lot of people that seem very interested in seeming like they're virtuous and good people, but there's a lot less people who actually want to be virtuous and good people.

[4 : 27] And so in that, we can see, you know, even those who weren't seeking the God of Israel were given the common grace to see the, you know, the danger of hypocrisy, right? And that's no different in our day.

You don't have to be a follower of Jesus to dislike pretense and hypocrisy. But what we see here in the scribes that Jesus calls out, and one of the reasons he makes this such a public confrontation

is, but is because as much as we hate hypocrisy, it still seems to hit a little different when we're talking about hypocrisy in the church or hypocrisy about pretending to be close to God when you're not.

And that's exactly this picture here. So these scribes gave a very visible public image that they were close to God. They dressed in a way that society would take them to be good and religious and virtuous people.

They prayed in a way that sounded eloquent or informed or educated in a way that would make people think they were searching the scriptures.

They knew God. They were drawing close. And they made very sure that they were seen in the places where people would assume that they had to be close to God, right? Like they wanted the places of importance, right?

[5 : 45] Because if you're uninitiated and you walk in, it's like, well, that's the important place. That must be the place for the people who are drawing closest to God. But it was all a sham.

Like it was all a sham. First, the text shows us they don't have the right motivation. It says they're in love with the honor that comes from people thinking you're religious or thinking you're a good person.

Like they like that honor. They are in love with the spotlight, right? It says they like to be in the places. They are the ones who want to be in the big chair, on the stage, at the head of the table. They love being seen and known for them being virtuous people. Their motivations are wrong. That's not why you follow God. But that would be bad enough.

But not only are their motivations wrong, they're not even actually doing virtuous things, right? They're not even trying to hide the ball, but they're not even doing it.

[6 : 46] Jesus says these scribes, they make long prayers for a show while they're devouring widows' houses. That means they're literally using their public piety to cover up their private sin.

Maybe if you see and think that I'm this way, you miss the fact that I'm doing this. They praise God on the one hand, and then on the other, they find the most vulnerable people in society and show no mercy to them.

Rightly, Jesus calls that as wicked. And you know what's really interesting? Compare how we've seen Jesus do things, and particularly how we've seen Jesus pray to how these scribes pray.

Right? So the one who actually is virtuous. How does Jesus pray? How many long prayers do you see Jesus praying in the Gospels? Not many.

Short. Full of trust. Full of love. Full of faith. Straight to the purpose. His disciples ask him, Lord, how should we pray?

[7 : 59] And he gives them a prayer that's about eight lines and said, this pretty much sums it up. This is how you come before your Father. A lot of times when we think it might be a situation where a long prayer is needed, what Jesus does actually looks even more like just a command.

Right? He just says, be healed, or go in peace, or take up your mat and walk. Like, that's the prayer. Right? Inviting God's power into the scenario. Right? He doesn't have any pretense to it. He actually tells this parable at one point earlier in his life where there are two people. One who is considered holy by society and one who is a very well-known sinner.

And they come before the Father in the temple to come before God, and they offer their prayers. And he says, the one prays what is a very, sounds like a very religious prayer to the people around it.

And he actually just starts listing his bona fides. Like, his prayer is literally, God, I thank you that I give and that I serve and that I'm smarter than everybody else about this. I thank you that I'm not like that guy over there.

[9 : 01] Like, that's literally the prayer is, God, I am thankful that I don't have the bad fortune. Like, I've been able to move close to you. And he's saying that, like, you're literally saying it out loud.

Right? Like, it's hard to get more pretentious than that. But that's the person that would have been assumed to be righteous from what people could see. So there's another person there that everyone knows is a sinner.

And that person, it says, can't even lift his head, but beats his breast. It says, his prayer is, you know, God, if you could just have mercy on me, a sinner.

If you could just be merciful to me. And Jesus tells the people he's teaching, that guy, that is the person who goes home right with God.

Not because he's not a sinner, but because in humble humility he comes to the Father and asks for forgiveness. No pretense. And there's obviously a lesson for us in there, right?

[10:08] And I get it. In a church context, it's really easy to think. You don't have to sound like you know what you're talking about to approach your Father. You pray what you've got.

Humble, honest prayer. C.S. Lewis said one time talking about prayer, he had this quote. He said, we must learn to lay before him what is in us, not what ought to be in us.

And that is light years away from the fancy prayers that these scribes are praying. Now, before we move away from the hypocrites, maybe one more note is worth saying here.

Because, again, this is, when you talk to people in our society, and really I understand this right, like one of the big hurdles for people in coming to church is that you see hypocrisy in the church itself, right?

And let me just say, like, if you're concerned about that, you should be. It is really gross when people make a public show of loving God and a public show of claiming to love others and then abuse them, take advantage of them, and devour them.

[11:22] And it's understandable why that might be a hurdle to coming. But if nothing else, I hope what we can all see here is that Jesus hates it even more than we do.

And frankly, he pulls no punches when talking about it, right? So when he says, hey, you see those folks who are claiming my name and then turning around and doing the most wicked of things, they will receive the greater condemnation.

And I'll be honest with you, that's a little cryptic and terrifying. And I can't tell you exactly what he meant by that, but I think it's fair to say this. It means all accounts will be settled.

You can trust Jesus not to turn a blind eye to hypocrisy. He will act justly. But thankfully for us, this passage doesn't just contain the example of condemnation and hypocrites because we also have this picture of this widow.

And what she does is going to teach us something else, which is this. While Jesus does hate showing off, he loves sacrificial giving. So the scene is the temple treasury, right?

[12:39] And it's a place where you can very visibly see the gifts being brought to the house of God. And of course, there would be people there that just had more, right? And so there are people who are bringing large, expensive gifts.

And you can imagine those would make noise. They would be very visible. It'd just be very obvious. Again, it'd be kind of like if we were giving gifts and somebody rolled up with their 50-foot yacht and gave it, right?

It'd just be hard to miss that, right? Like somebody gave a yacht. Wow, you know? And so it's very visible. And this woman puts in two small coins that are basically the lowest denomination, like the lowest, least valuable coin in circulation.

And Jesus makes a point to say she has given the most. That is the most valuable thing that anyone here has given. Now, before we talk about why it's the most valuable, maybe to lean in just to one more tension here.

Imagine for some of us in the room, it might be uncomfortable. Like we have to wrestle with why does Jesus allow her to give this gift at all, right? Like why is this poor woman required to give anything?

[13:47] Why wouldn't he just tell her like keep your money, right? She's poor. I mean, think about it. If you knew somebody that you knew was struggling financially, like they're struggling to get by, and then they came to you and they told you that really what they felt God was asking from them was to take everything they have left for rent and everything they have left for food.

Like they don't know how they're going to take care of their family, but they really feel like that's the thing that God wants them to give today. I think for a lot of us, myself included, the first inclination is to say, well, let's not get crazy now, right?

You know, you got to like pragmatically, you got to have some money, you know, and there's some wisdom in here. And there's certainly moments for that. But whatever we think of it, Jesus not only doesn't tell her not to give it, he receives it and he celebrates it and he honors it.

And the fact that he does that, I think reveals to us why that gift is so valuable. The first thing is this. I think it shows us that Jesus actually does cherish our sacrifices.

So a lot of times when you are following Jesus, when you are trying to walk in his footsteps, I'll be honest, it doesn't always feel like life and flourishing when you're doing it.

[15 : 02] Sometimes it does, but a lot of times it actually does feel like taking up a cross. That can certainly be applicable to finances, right? Like anytime you give some money, right?

Like there's a level where you're saying, I'm giving up a standard of living I could have. I'm giving up some joy I could have. I'm putting away something that would make my life a little easier because it's needed for God's kingdom, right?

And sometimes you feel great about that and sometimes it does feel like dying a little, right?

Particularly if you're watching people around you not use their money in that way, right? They got better stuff than you.

They go on better vacations. They have more free time. I remember, you know, I was a single adult for a lot of my adulthood and when you're a single adult and you're trying to fight for sexual purity, right?

Like you're trying to maintain that. It doesn't feel like life in the moment. As a matter of fact, what it feels like is that you're wasting your sexuality. Like you're throwing away an important part of your life.

[16 : 05] And even more so, it kind of feels like you're becoming the butt end of a joke, right? Like you're kind of a joke. Doesn't feel like life at the time. Feels like that I think a lot of times if you're like a caregiver, like you're caring for children, you're caring for others, elderly, people who can't give a lot back, right?

Like just the day in and day out of providing that, it feels very unseen and very like, what does this matter, right? Part of the battle of discipleship is always choosing whether you're going to believe this lie that Satan has created around something or you're gonna choose to believe this truth that Jesus has given.

And the lie and the truth here are simply this. Satan wants you to believe that the stuff that you do, particularly the stuff that's small and unseen, doesn't matter. Like ultimately it doesn't matter.

Whereas in the gospel, in the book of Mark, we've seen Jesus say, hey look, if you give even a cup of cold water in my name, I don't forget that. It is seen and it is known.

And that's what we see in this picture here. The problem is, it's not that Jesus doesn't understand how money works and the fact that we need it and that she needs it in a practical way.

[17 : 24] What it's really revealing is that we don't really understand how money works in his kingdom. Matthew chapter 6, 19 through 21 says this, do not lay up for yourselves treasures on this earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

The loud clangs of all those big gifts that people were bringing into the treasury, right, as they dumped this truckload of gold or whatever it is, that big noise that was made there was silence in heaven, made no sound in heaven.

Two coins, clink, clink. And that was the noise that caused the king of kings to stop and take notice of what was going on there.

She knew and he knew exactly what it cost. It might not have looked like something to anyone else, but he knew it cost her everything she had.

And I think that shows the second thing, which is it's better to do small things for the right reason than attempt great and grand things for the wrong reason. Jesus pointing out this sacrifice really shows us that the amount that the widow gave was so much less important than the heart she gave it with and the one she gave it to.

[19 : 03] I think it also shows us it's not just about the sacrifice, about like how much it cost her. It was the fact that by doing this, she's demonstrating that she's loving God with everything she's got.

Like you can't make that offering if you don't think you're actually making a deposit, not a withdrawal, right? Like she trusts that God is going to see her.

And she's trusting him with her life. She's giving everything that she's got. And she doesn't let any of the barriers stop her, right? Like she doesn't let the fact that nobody else saw this and nobody cared about it stop her.

She doesn't let the fact that she is not important to society stop her. She doesn't let the fact that she's poor and a widow stop her because she's not focused on any of that.

She's focused on how do I love God with everything I've got. And that's one of the things that's so powerful about this scene. Whatever the people were seeing, Jesus sees it as, here is this

amazing, amazing, worthy of being celebrated sacrifice.

[20 : 09] And everybody is not paying attention to it. It is going unnoticed by the entire crowd, but it is seen by the one who matters most.

And so if you're here this morning and you're worried that your service and following Jesus is going unnoticed, I think I would encourage you with this this morning.

I would encourage you to remember that your contribution might be forgotten by the world, but it will never be forgotten by the king. I really believe that when God's kingdom comes in its fullness, when Jesus settles all accounts, when all is revealed and his kingdom comes in its glory, that some of the most honored people, like some of the most celebrated people during that time, that day, are going to be people that you have never heard about.

Some of the most significant contributions in the kingdom will have been things that this world has long forgotten. You know, if you study movements of God throughout history, particularly in Western society, it's hard within the last, you know, several hundred years to do that and miss the contributions of John and Charles Wesley.

And so if you've not been in the church, you know, you might know them from like how the Methodist movement came out for them, but during their day, God used them in a way that was, one of them was arguably the greatest worship leader of his generation, and one of them was one of the greatest revivalists of their generation.

[21 : 47] Very visible men used of God in a way that was seen by the world. And if you've heard of John and Charles, it's possible, particularly if you've been in church, that you may have heard of their mother, Susanna.

And usually when we talk about Susanna, this is the story you get, right? Because this is the picture everybody remembers. She's got all these children. It's really hard to like find some time for prayer. And so she's got this apron, right?

And like the story you always tell kids, you know, it's like she puts the apron over her head, right? And when mom's under the apron, all the kids know to back off or you know you're gonna get a side of mom you don't want, right? And so like mom's under the apron, she's praying, give mom a moment, right?

And so we tell that, and it's this story about, you know, how you can be faithful to find prayer, time for prayer, even in the midst of that busyness. But honestly, when you tell the story like that, it sounds a little bit cutesy to me if you really know about Susanna Wesley's life.

So perhaps a little more depth. Susanna Wesley had a really hard life. Her marriage wasn't great. She was married to a minister who was away for long periods of time and he was really focused.

[22 : 58] He had these grand ideas about writing this commentary on the book of Job. And because of that, he was really focused on that and he used, he was really bad with money. He spent up all his family's money chasing that pursuit and didn't really leave a lot of it for the family.

So much so that at one point in his life, he was actually thrown in the debtor's prison and they had to wait for him to get out. He really wasn't interested in helping out with domestic life at all.

So he didn't help out on the farm at all. He wasn't interested in giving Susanna any help with the children. And so basically, she was saddled with the task of managing everything about their life, the farm, the children, all by herself.

During the course of that marriage, she would give birth to no less than 19 children. Nine of which she would bury before they saw their first birthday.

And though she gave herself to those duties willfully, it was a sacrifice for her because what she really longed for, she felt like her life wasn't counting for God in the way it should because what she wanted to was to give more time to prayer, to give more time to discipleship.

[24 : 10] For us looking at her with the prayer apron, that wasn't, for her, that was a compromise. She wanted to give more of her time to that, but she realized with the farm to run and all these children and discipling them and their education, she really couldn't do that.

And so for her, she lamented that, okay, God, the best I can do is give you a couple hours a day under this apron and that's what she gave her and that's what she could give.

But to her, that wasn't, she felt like her life wasn't counting in the way it could have. And we certainly don't know all the impact her life may have had.

What we do know is that her faithfulness and her prayer were instrumental in raising up one of the greatest worship leaders and one of the greatest revivalists of their generation, which is why we

know about her.

And we know that there would be no John or Charles Wesley without Susanna Wesley. Now, when I tell a story like that, there's a couple of ways you can take it.

[25 : 13] One, which I think is completely legitimate, is you can look at a life like Susanna Wesley's and use it as an encouragement to say, God is faithful to hear the prayers of his people, right?

Like you can use it as an encouragement that your labor isn't in vain. She did things in secret that God used in a very public way and I think, amen to that.

Like that is absolutely an encouragement you can take from that. I think there's a less helpful way you can take a story like this that feels like a burden, right? So it's like, it kind of comes at you like this.

So her life was harder than yours and she had a lot more children than you did and how can you not like, you know, get your act together and just pray a little more, right?

Like Susanna could figure that out. Like what are you doing, right? And I would certainly hope if you're here today that's not the case. Like that's not how you've taken this. The moral of Susanna's story is not try harder, do better.

[26 : 11] Because even though Jesus does love sacrificial giving, it also tells us he won't break a bruised reed. He won't put out a smoldering wick.

He's not the straw that breaks the camel's back. The reason I really wanted to share that story with you this morning is really to simply consider this question.

So Susanna Wesley, we know about the stuff she did in secret because she had famous children. But how many Susanna Wesleys do you suppose are lost to history?

I mean like how many revivals, how many moves of God, how many families restored, how many people that weren't coming near came near, how many people were disciplined by the faithful prayer and the discipleship and the offering of names and faces that no one in this room knows and no one in the room will ever know?

I mean what is that number? I would wager too great to be counted. The faithfulness of saints across the ages that we don't know about that God used in ways that we can't imagine.

[27 : 24] But on the other side of that question, of all those names and faces that we don't know, how many of them do you think have been forgotten by Jesus?

Jesus. Zero. None. Jesus hasn't forgotten one child, not one cup of cold water.

Everyone is cherished, everyone is treasured, everyone is celebrated. And that includes the saints of God in New Bern right here today.

in 1 Corinthians chapter 15, it tells us this, because we know that, because we know we have a father who sees and doesn't forget, because we know who he is and what he does, because of that, therefore, my beloved brothers and sisters, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor in the Lord is not and could never be in vain.

You may well be forgotten by this world, but you will never, never be forgotten by your king. And God makes us this promise. He promises that one day all of those names will be known.

[28 : 44] And we together as a family in his presence will share those stories of the goodness that God has poured out to this world over the ages through his bride, remembered, celebrated, cherished.

Even so, come Lord Jesus. Amen. As the band comes up, if you're here and you're not a follower of Jesus, maybe one of the hurdles to you coming into a church has been the hypocrisy that you see in the church.

And if that's the case, first I would commend you because I know it's scary. If that's the case, this can feel like a very unsafe place and so that's courageous of you to do that. And I would also say you're right.

I hate to say it, but you're right. It's there and it shouldn't be. But I hope you've seen this morning that Jesus is no hypocrite. He is faithful and true and he hates hypocrisy and pretense as much as we do.

It's not how it's supposed to be. But more than that, all of us, you included, have to give an account of ourselves to Jesus.

[30 : 03] I mean, all of us like to assume, like to pretend that we're more like the widow and we're not like the scribes, but the truth is I don't have to peel too many layers in my life to figure out I might be a hypocrite, I might be pretending in some places I rather wish I wouldn't.

And the truth is when Jesus comes to settle all accounts, neither I nor you nor anybody else will be able to point at the hypocrisy of somebody else as an excuse for your own sinfulness.

And so, what's going to be our plea, right? For those who put their faith in Jesus, our plea certainly isn't we have attained a goodness, we have grown out of that, we've moved into maturity.

Our plea is simply this, I know, I confess, I have been a hypocrite and a sinner, but Jesus has taken my place.

Like there is an account to be settled that he has settled. And now, he offers that as a free gift to anyone and the only cost for it is the humility to say I need that.

[31 : 10] I will never be good enough to earn that standing, but I need it. Have mercy on me. And if that's you, there's a couple ways you can respond.

There'll be a prayer on the screen behind me. You can pray that where you're at. If you want to meet with someone, there'll be people here after the service to talk with you about that if you just want to pray that to God.

If you feel like you can't come near to him or if all you can see is the hypocrites, I would encourage you move close to the one who is faithful and true. If you're here today and you are a believer, man, I just, I think the word that comes out of me of this message is are you tempted to believe that God doesn't see you?

And if you are, I mean, I really just think his word to you today is I see you. You matter. I know what you've done, who you are.

And maybe you just need to let that into your heart today. Maybe you want to pray with somebody about that. If that feels like you're going unnoticed by him, maybe you just need to let the Holy Spirit convince you that you are not forgotten.

[32 : 19] And we can bring that to him as well. Let's go ahead and stand together. We come now to a moment of communion together.

And the interesting thing is the greatest example that we're going to see in the book of Mark of that upside down kingdom isn't even this picture we got of the widow.

It's going to come a couple of chapters later where the king of glory is going to lay down his life in a humiliating and embarrassing way. At least it would appear so to those around him.

He's going to give his life in a way that seems like utter foolishness. Right? Like we forget this. It would have seemed crazy. It's the kind of thing that people during that time would have like cautioned their children.

Right? Like hey you kids don't go acting a fool and getting yourself murdered like Jesus did. And for everybody there like all the world it looked like it turned out well exactly like it always turns out.

[33 : 26] Those who are influential and those who are powerful win. But in this upside down kingdom the thing that looked like defeat was victory.

And Jesus claimed victory. And not just victory for himself but victory for all those who claim his name. All those who trust and faith in him. He offers that to us. We can be a part of that victory.

And as we take this communion that's what that is. We celebrate that God I am excited like I would rather be a part of the foolishness of this upside down kingdom than what the world could offer me.

I want your blood and your broken body over what this world can offer me. And so if you're again if you're not a believer this morning I would encourage you to first just move towards him and ask for mercy because he'll give it.

He is faithful to do that. And if you're a follower of Jesus it tells us we should take a moment to examine ourselves. And what that really means is to just maybe there's something he showed you today.

[34 : 30] Maybe there's a place that you've seen you are a hypocrite. You need to repent. You know repentance is not this thing that is full of shame. It's just a word that means you're changing course.

Like you're changing your mind to agree with the king that that is not how you walk. And you trust that in his goodness he is faithful and true to forgive and forgive and to restore and to restore.

So if he's shown you anything maybe the thing you need to repent of is believing God doesn't see you and doesn't care. So let's just take a moment you don't have to rush this just offer that up to the father don't feel any urgency like have to get to the table.

Take whatever you need to him and then when you're ready come to the table take the drink take the bread take it back to your seat and eat before the father and ask Jesus to nourish you to be with

you to let you be part of him.

Amen. Father we thank you for your word to us. We're thankful that we're so thankful that you never forget us your eyes are always on us and that you are faithful and true.

[35 : 47] Holy Spirit come and have your way in this place right now. We ask that in Jesus name.
Amen.