

*“38 And in his teaching he said, “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces 39 and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, 40 who devour widows’ houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.”*

*41 And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. 42 And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. 43 And he called his disciples to him and said to them, “Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. 44 For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”*

### **Dear Fellow Redeemed,**

Looks can be deceiving! Jesus turns our attention to two groups that were not what they appear. The Scribes were very upstanding citizens. They were the scholars who made God’s word their life’s work. Today’s equivalent of a Dr. of Theology. They served in the Temple teaching God’s word and making accurate, reliable copies of the Old Testament Scriptures. They prayed and worshiped strictly according to God’s law. To all appearances they were a truly godly and honourable bunch. Then there was this poor widow. She had only two small copper coins worth less than a penny to her name. One can only wonder what terrible things she had done that God had forsaken her to such a miserable life.

That is what one might conclude judging by appearances. Yet Jesus paints a very different picture. He says of the Scribes, “They will receive the greater condemnation,” and warns his disciples to beware of them. And the widow? Jesus highly commends her for her sacrificial giving! This story is not so much about giving. It’s a story about true faith. Her sacrificial giving was the evidence of her faith. This is a lesson about

### **Faith and Hypocrisy.**

It is meant for us to examine our own heart and life. We came here today to worship God and give our offerings. We confessed, “I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth... and in Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord.” To human appearances we all look like faithful children of God. And I don’t doubt that about any of you, but what does God see? God wants us to examine ourselves to be sure we continue in true faith.

There are four things that show the difference between true faith and hypocrisy. First of all,

#### **-I- Hypocrisy is a cover for Pride, Faith shows itself in Humility.**

Look again at Jesus description of the Scribes. They “like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts.” It’s all about themselves. That is the essence of pride. Pride is all about elevating oneself. They loved recognition and honour. That describes our human nature, it’s all about me.

The Scribes “like to walk around in long robes.” That is an interesting comment. It’s still the same today. Many false teachers like to call attention to themselves. Some, like the Anglican Priests and Bishops, do that by wearing long elaborate robes. Others name their ministry after themselves. It’s all about elevating themselves, seeking the honour and praise of the people. Showing they are a cut above the rest.

But pride isn’t just found among the clergy. We all have a human nature that is prone to pride. We like to elevate ourselves at least in our own mind. Some seek to draw attention to themselves by wearing a Versace dress with a Gucci hand bag and Louis Vuitton shoes. It all says, Look at me! But there are plenty of other ways to draw attention to oneself and seek the attention of others.

Pride always works against true faith. Faith shows itself in humility. It doesn’t seek glory and honour for oneself, it seeks to give all honour and glory to God. The widow in our text had nothing to show off. Those who put large sums of money into the treasury may well have made a spectacle

of it to make sure people noticed how much they were giving. I would guess this widow was probably ashamed that all she could give was her two worthless coins. She probably tried to be as inconspicuous as possible, slipping them into the treasury box unnoticed. She certainly had no thought of her own greatness. Her actions showed that her heart gave all honour and glory to God. She gave everything she had! God was clearly more important in her heart than her own life. That is the humility of faith. It's not about yourself. It is all about God and giving all honour and glory to Him. God doesn't ask us to give all our money to Him, but He does want our whole heart and life. The second distinction we see between Hypocrisy and faith is

### **-II- Hypocrisy Trusts Itself, Faith has a Firm Trust in God.**

Here the widow shines brightly. She showed her trust by giving everything she had to God. Jesus really emphasized that with three statements. She gave "out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."

The most common thing that limits the amount that we give for anything is that we want to make sure we have enough for ourselves. Isn't that trusting in ourselves and in our money? It didn't take any trust for the Scribes and Pharisees to give large amounts of money because it didn't really affect them at all. They still had more than enough for themselves. Giving a large offering fed their pride and brought them honour as being generous, but it didn't affect their standard of living. They gave of their surplus.

Think about this widow. Can you imagine giving everything you have to live on? She had absolutely nothing left. That takes real trust. She was like the widow in our Old Testament Reading. She only had enough flour and oil to make one more little loaf of bread for her and her son, and then she figured they would starve to death. She couldn't see any other option. Then Elijah came along and asked her to make that little loaf and give it to HIM! He said if she did, the God of Israel would make it so that her flour and oil would not run out and she would have enough for herself and her son until the drought was over.

Would you do that? It's hard for us to imagine with our freezers full of food and the grocery store just down the street, but if you only had one small loaf of bread to eat and you had no way of getting any more, would you give it to someone else, even if they promised God will provide for you? That took real faith and trust in God. The widow in our text showed the same trust. Her action also showed her true love for God. That's the next point.

### **-III- Hypocrisy is Void of Love, Faith Works in Love.**

Where one's focus of attention is all about oneself, then there is no room for love. Self-centredness drives out love. We can certainly see how true that was of the Scribes. Jesus said they "devour widows' houses." The gobble them up. How utterly heartless is that? A woman loses her husband and with him her source of support. She is not only in mourning, but now she can't make her house payment or pay her rent. Then these wealthy Scribes swoop in and repossess the widow's house or evict her from her rental and leaves her destitute. All so they can get even richer. It was completely legal, but it was totally devoid of any love. It's very likely that is the reason this widow only had a penny to her name.

If they had no love or compassion for a fellow human being, that was evidence that they had absolutely no love for God. As the Apostle John says, "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?" 1 John 4:20 God commanded them to care for the widow and the fatherless. They took advantage of them instead. That is the opposite of love for God.

This widow, on the other hand showed that she loved God above all things. She gave all she had to the Lord. You might say that her two little copper coins wouldn't make any difference anyway. If that is all she had, she wouldn't be able to live on that. She might as well give them to God in hopes that He will do something for her. But it still goes against every inclination of our nature to give away your last penny and your only source of living even if it would only buy a single slice of bread. Why would she even think about giving it to God? Such a total commitment and sacrifice can only come from a heart of Love. She truly put God first, above herself.

Finally this text shows us that

### **-IV- Hypocrisy is a Cover for Sin, Faith Confesses Sin to be Cleansed.**

What could be worse than devouring widows houses? The Scribes “devour widows' houses and FOR A PRETENSE MAKE LONG PRAYERS.” The Scribes heartlessly preyed on poor helpless widows to make themselves rich, then they prayed to God to show how holy they were. There is little that angers God more than pretending to serve Him in order to cover up your absolute disobedience to Him. That’s the epitome of hypocrisy, using God to cover up the greed and corruption in their heart.

Jesus doesn’t directly comment on the widow’s repentance, but a heart that is marked by humility and love and trust in God is a heart that readily confesses its sins. That is an essential part of faith. Faith begins with recognizing that we are sinners who need forgiveness. Going to church and giving offerings can’t make us acceptable to God. As we discussed last week, faith is all about unloading our sins in repentance and receiving God’s grace and forgiveness. That recognition of our sinfulness is the source of the true Humility of faith. And receiving God’s gracious forgiveness is the source of our love and trust in God.

Jesus shows us the contrast between faith and hypocrisy for our benefit. We can always find plenty of examples like the Scribes that demonstrate very open and blatant hypocrisy. If that’s all we do we won’t benefit from this lesson. But if we take an honest look at ourselves we will no doubt see some of these elements of hypocrisy in our own hearts. Who among us doesn’t have pride that raises it’s ugly head? Is there anyone here who doesn’t trust in our own wealth and ability to take care of ourselves at least in part, rather than trusting fully in God? Who hasn’t had times when our selfishness has over shadowed the love that God has taught us?

That’s the point, that we learn to recognize these signs of hypocrisy in our heart and repent of them. We can get rid of the hypocrisy in our hearts so that we do grow in true saving faith. For “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.” For “The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all our sin.” 1 John 1:7&9

The only way we can love and trust God, is because He first loved us with a total commitment and sacrifice. That’s what makes this account truly meaningful and empowering. It is not just the inspiring example of that poor widow, but the actions of our Saviour. Did you realize this account of the poor widow was Jesus’ last visit to the Temple before He went to offer Himself for us? Jesus did not just give everything He had, He offered His whole self. He offered His life to pay the debt we could never pay. He gave His life to give us the life we could never earn. He gave His all for us and became poor so that we could have all the riches of heaven.

How can we withhold anything from Him? May we show our true, Spirit worked faith in our humility and repentance, in our Love and Trust in God, and in giving ourselves to Him, our whole life, service and possessions.

Amen.