

True Discipleship

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[0 : 00] We are in a series on the Gospel of Mark looking at the life of Jesus week by week. And today is our very last look at the Gospel of Mark until February of the year of our Lord 2024.

So this is the end for now. We'll revisit next year. This is about true discipleship, the passage Nor just read for us. And so let's jump right in because there's four things, not three things to see today.

We've got to get started fast. The first is the nature of true discipleship. And then after I say what that is, I'm going to give you the other three.

Why? Because drama. That's what you have to do. You have to create drama. So there's three points you don't yet know. Otherwise, you'll go to sleep. Something to look forward to. All right.

So first, the nature of true discipleship. The whole of chapter 12, we're reading the very end of it. This has been attacked really by the Sanhedrin.

[1 : 01] The Sanhedrin are the religious elite of the time. It's the Pharisees, Sadducees and scribes. And each of them have asked Jesus a question, a theological question and a political question.

And it says in verse 34 right before the beginning of our passage in verse 35, it says, they dared not ask him any more questions. They tried to trap him.

It did not work. He came out of it pretty well. Every single time. So they didn't dare ask him another question. And so now it's Jesus' turn. And he has a theological question to ask the scribes.

The question about David's son in Psalm 110. We'll come back to that toward the end of our time. But more than questions, after a long chapter about questions, theological questions, Jesus, you'll notice instead draws his disciples in towards him in verse 43.

He calls them to him and he wants his disciples to look at a person. So he's standing in a public court in the temple where people give their offering.

[2 : 06] And instead of going on about some of the theological questions people were having, he draws the disciples close and says, look at that person. I want you to see her.

And the person that he points to is this poor widow who's giving her tithe, her gift in the offering box. And the question is why? Why does Jesus want to pull the disciples in, to pull all of us in to say, look at the widow, look at the poor widow?

What is it about her that gives her this honor of being memorialized forever in holy scripture? One day we will get to Lord willing, learn her name.

I look forward to that in heaven. Here she is. He says, look at her. Why? Why is she so significant? And what he says about her is that she is true.

She's an image. She's an example of true discipleship. And that's the main idea. That's the big idea of the whole of what we've just read. Let me just say it in large form, the big idea, and we'll come back to the details in the next points.

[3 : 12] But you'll see it in verse 44. In verse 44, Jesus says, all the rich people, all the scribes contributed to the offering in the temple out of their abundance, out of their margin, out of their extra.

But she, out of her lack, very literally, out of her lack, she put in everything. Now here's the big idea. That very last little clause in verse 44, if you have a bulletin, you can see it there or a Bible open.

The ESV says, all she had to live on. One of the English translations, our interpreters, are translators. They have to sometimes interpret some Greek or Hebrew phrases and give them to us that way.

And they've done that here. And it's good and right. But the ESV here doesn't give you it simple enough, and so it doesn't give it to you full enough.

And so I want to say it, and I'll say it to you with the two Greek words that Mark writes here because you'll hear them and you'll know them when I say them. It says here at the very end, after it says she, out of her poverty, put in everything she had, and literally it says whole bio.

[4 : 28] WHLE in English, whole bio, meaning life. The study of biology is the study of life, and in Greek, bios, bio. It says, all it says is she gave her whole life.

So Jesus takes it beyond money at the very end. He says not that it's about her offering. No, she had given, he says, her whole life, all of who she was.

And that's true discipleship. True discipleship, Jesus is saying, is giving your whole life, your whole self away to God. That's it.

Okay, there's point one, the big idea. Now points two, three, and four. True discipleship is giving your whole life to God. And I want to take that little phrase, your whole life to God, give your whole life to God, and take it in reverse.

So let's think about what it means to give it to God, and then to give your whole life, and then what it means to give. So go backwards in that sequence.

[5 : 32] So second, true discipleship is to give your whole life to God. And that means that you were made for God, from God, to God, that everything about you is from God and for God.

Everything is about being unto God. That's what one of the ways Jesus frames it for us here. Now how does he teach us that? Here's how he teaches us. Sometimes to understand what Jesus is trying to get at, you've got to look at what he points to as the opposite.

So he says, look at the widow, that's true discipleship. And to understand what that means, you've got to look at the opposite. And he gave us the opposite in the story, he's pointing out the scribes just before the widow.

So you can see that in verse 38, he says in verse 38, beware of the scribes. Beware of the scribes. Why? These are the religious elite, and particularly their role in the Sanhedrin was that they are the scholars, the intellectuals, the academics of the day.

So Jesus is saying, he's pointing out that these men have a very good intellectual grasp on the things of God, but they do not follow God.

[6 : 47] So he says, and this can happen, he says, they are theologians, but not disciples. They have an intellectual grasp on the things of the Lord, but they do not follow the Lord.

In other words, he's saying they've given their minds to God, but not their hearts to God. And that those are two different things. They know about God, but they don't know God. And he gives it to you in a very particular word.

He says they live just after that for appearances. So they want to be seen, they want to be known, they want to use their religion to live for public appearances, how he puts it.

Now, that means that when Jesus says beware of the scribe, he is saying that the scribe stands for something much bigger than the scribe.

The scribe is just a particular external form of something much deeper, and he's saying you need to beware of the inner scribe. John 2.25, Jesus looks out at humanity, every single person he had ever encountered so far in the gospel, and it says Jesus did not have to be taught about the human heart.

[7 : 53] He knew what was in the heart of every single human. And what is in the heart of every single human, according to the Bible, is the inner scribe. And the inner scribe is the natural instinct of the human ego to be entirely self-absorbed, to be the center of our own universe.

And it's not just the scribe, it's the inner scribe. The inner scribe comes out in the outer scribe, and every single person has in them, every single one of us has in us the inner scribe. The fact that we live in the center of the universe.

The universe is our universe, that we are fundamentally, Jesus is saying here, self-absorbed. And that's what he's pointing out. A.W. Tozer called it the self-life, the life entirely devoted to the self.

Now, here are the details, a couple of details. So it says in verse 38 that they love to walk around in long robes. So they were the best clothing. The long robe here is the tallit.

It's a prayer shawl, actually. And it flowed from the head all the way down to the ground, and it had tassels coming out all around. Now, in an age where almost every single person only had one pair of clothing, the Sanhedrin wore this very elaborate, very luxurious prayer shawl.

[9 : 08] It wasn't about prayer. It was about luxury. It was about wealth. It was about being seen, appearances. And then he tells us they love to receive greetings, verse 38, in the marketplaces and the best, the seat of honor at all the banquets.

So it was expected in this age that when the Sanhedrin walked into the temple, walked into the room, walked into the synagogue, everybody that's not Sanhedrin was expected to stand before them and to wait to be seated until the Sanhedrin had been seated.

So they expected this atmosphere, this air of dignity all around them. It says that they always have the best seats in the synagogue.

So in the synagogue, the seats of the Sanhedrin face the congregation. So they would come in for worship, and instead of facing towards the object of worship, the Sanhedrin would sit up here and look out at everybody else while they worshiped.

So they loved the best seats. How about that, VIP seating in church? And then lastly, it says that they, we'll come back around to this, but they love to make long prayers for pretense, and they devoured widows' houses.

[10 : 15] They were self-important. They lived for appearances. Jesus is saying that that is in every single one of us. That you can't look at the scribe and say, oh, I see it, it's so obvious, they lived for appearances, they're a walking Jane Austen novel.

No, he's saying that this is the human heart. It's self-absorbed. And so the Bible says that this is us. It's the natural condition of the human ego.

Paul uses the word when he talks about this. For all of us, he says, he uses a word for pride that is very literally inflation, or to be self-inflated.

So it's got this idea of self-absorption where it's like pumping up a balloon. And the ego is always trying to fill the balloon, pumping helium, helium, helium into the self, doing things to appear to be great, to appear to be respectable, to appear to be a good person.

That's religion. That's religion. And the helium is always leaking out. And so you're always trying to inflate and inflate and inflate and reinflate. That's the human ego. That's the life of self-absorption.

[11 : 22] This is the story that Jesus is telling. It's this. You were made for God. You were made for God and to God. You were made by God, for God, all of life, unto God.

And that means that because we've replaced God with self-absorption, we have a God-sized hole in the midst of our souls.

And we try to fill it with appearances, with helium, with the self, with making the self great, with being good, with religion even. And it doesn't work.

It can't hold the air. It just leaks out. The hole is too big. We live for appearances. Very literally, we think that we are the center of the world. And it's an appearance. It's not real.

God is actually the center of the universe. And so he says, beware of the scribe, the scribe that's living within you. And it's simply to say, it's to think, I am my own purpose in life.

[12 : 21] I exist for me. Now Jesus, let me move on. Jesus is saying, remember Jesus, he said earlier in Mark. If you want to save your life, you have to lose it.

And he's saying there, if you want to save your life, you've got to get out of the center of it. You've got to de-center yourself. If you make yourself the center of your life, you will lose your life. And some of you have experienced that.

You felt that. You've made yourself the center of everything. And it's not worked. It's left you empty. You've been deflated. Here's how you know if you're struggling with an inflated heart, with self-absorption.

You know it when one single word of critique, one single bad circumstance, one single loss of the thing that you've built your life around pops you, completely deflates you.

You know you're inflated when circumstances can make you incredibly deflated. That's fragility. It's living a life of fragility.

[13 : 22] You see, self-absorption is the beginning of all misery because it creates a life of fragility. One critique, one bad word from the person you desperately want to affirm you.

And you're deflated. You're done. You're done for. You've lost your identity. That means there's self-inflation, there's self-absorption in the middle of your life. And Jesus says, you want to save your life?

You want to save your soul? You want to save your psychology? Lose it. Lose it. Realize that your life is not for you. It's for God. You are made by God for God, unto God. That's really the key.

It's a secret to success, to spiritual success. And that means that one day, one day when you're hooked up to the wires, and we all will be, right, hooked up to the wires in the hospital, in that moment, if we have made our lives entirely about ourselves, we will be on the brink of losing everything we built.

But if you made your life about the one who made you, about God, the one who you live unto, if you've made your life about God, when you're hooked up to the wires, you'll be on the brink of gaining everything, of gaining everything.

[14 : 35] Beware of the inner scribe. That's the second thing. Third, true discipleship is to give your whole life to God. To God. That's what we focused on now, your whole life.

So that's somewhat obvious here. Jesus is trying to tell us that the true, the life of the disciple is not just to give some of their life, not just their margins, their abundance, but the whole, the whole of the self to God.

The scribes gave their minds to God in a way, their intellect, but not their hearts. And the rich gave the extra their abundance, but not their whole life.

That's exactly what Jesus says. He, you're called to be a disciple, to give your whole life to God, not just your abundance, not just your margins, not just your mind, but something much more than that.

Now the way we learn about that more is by looking closely at the widow here. One of the ways to say this is that the old writers used to call it this. They said that true discipleship is blessed poverty.

[15 : 38] And that's what we see here in the life of this poor widow. It's not about money. It's much deeper than that. And you'll see it in verse 41. In verse 41, we learn that Jesus is still sitting in the public court.

This is the court where anybody, Gentile, Jew, men and women, children can all be, it's a very open space, a very public space. Now my understanding is that in the court that he's sitting in, there are 13 offering boxes.

How about that? 13 places that you can give your tithe. And each of these is shaped like a ram's horn upside down. So the little end is at the top, the big end at the bottom with a covering so that you can't stick your hand in and get anything out once you've dropped it in.

That's what he's seeing here. It's very public. Giving was a very public act of worship. And there's a temptation here to say, what do we learn?

You can see where the prosperity preachers might go with this. They might say something like, remember, here's what we learn that every time you walk past the offering box, Jesus is watching you.

[16 : 46] But we're not that kind of church. That's not what this is about. That was a joke. Nobody got it. But we're not that kind of church. That's not the point of the passage.

Instead, notice Mark's language. Notice the specifics of Mark's language. He points out right after that many rich people put in large sums.

And then verse 42, again, the SV doesn't quite get the distinction as clearly as it could. Verse 42, and a poor widow, but in the Greek text it says, and one poor widow.

So he says, look at the many, and then there was one. A deep contrast he's making. The many and the one. And he's saying, look at her. Another contrast, take it back to the scribes.

He's not just talking about rich people. He's talking about the scribes. Why? And he had mentioned, and I said, I'd come back to this, that they devoured widow's homes. And we have an account from Josephus, a first century historian, about a woman named Flavia.

[17 : 48] And Josephus tells the story of a scribe who convinced this woman, Flavia, to sell, she was a widow, to sell her home and give all the money to the temple.

And then the scribe, according to Josephus, embezzled all the money. And so Jesus probably knows about that, or something like that. He has that in mind. He says, the scribes are devouring, devouring, devouring, I can't say that word, the widow's homes.

They're taking their money away. And you remember in places in the Old Testament like Amos chapter 2 where it says, God loves to care for the widow.

He loves to care for the widow. He loves to care for the fatherless. He loves to care for the vulnerable. And the religious leaders ought to look like God in that. And they look like the exact opposite. They are stealing the homes of poor widows.

Being a widow in this time in the first century makes you particularly vulnerable, typically poor. And we see that here. And the scribes are stealing, stealing their money.

[18 : 49] And so Jesus says, look at her. This is true discipleship, not them. Look at the widow, not the scribes. And he says, she's given everything. She's given her whole life.

Now here's the details of that. She comes up to the offering and puts in, we're told here, a lepta. A lepta is one one hundredth of a day's wage.

So that's about 80 pence or a pound in today's money, something like that, a hundredth of a day's wage. And it says that that was everything she had. She does not know where her next meal is going to come from, not at all.

She gave God everything. Now one of the commentators calls this the divine exchange rate. You see, the rich and the scribes had put in so much money into that public offering box.

Everybody saw it. They could hear the clinging, all the coins going down the gold, right? And of course, it's true that their money is going to support most of the budget of the temple.

[19 : 48] They're big givers. The temple needed big givers. They needed somebody to give a good chunk of the percentage of the needs for the year. And the rich and the scribes were doing that.

But in the divine exchange rate, Jesus says they gave little to nothing. And when she drops in one one hundredth of a day's wage, one pound, and now she doesn't know if she's going to eat that day, he says she gave everything.

You see the divine exchange rate? It doesn't see the things the way we see them. It's quite different. And you see what he's saying. He's not really talking about money. Money is just the surface. Money is just the symptom.

He's saying beware of the inner scribe, being wealthy on the inside. Because that is when you say, I live to be safe.

I live to be in control. I live to develop a great life, to be a good person, a decent, ordinary person that's respectable. I live to be taken care of and to be entertained.

[20 : 53] And when all that is settled and when I feel secure, I will give God something out of my margins. I'll give God some extra.

I'll give God the extra time that I have, the extra money I have. Once I'm safe, once I'm in control, once I'm entertained, once I'm fed and taken care of, once I feel like I've done enough.

I've done enough for God to accept me. I've done enough to be a respectable citizen. Then I will give out of my margin. And he's not really talking about money.

What is it to give your whole self like the widow? The whole of the self, the whole of your life is not your money, not your stuff. Where is the whole of your life?

It's your soul. It's your heart. And when he says at the end, when she dropped in her last penny, she had given her whole life. Not in that moment.

[21 : 45] No, no. Long before. You see, the reason she did that was because she had already given her soul to God, her heart to God, her bios.

Where is it truly? It's deep down in the depths of your consciousness. It's your soul. It's your heart. And she had given that the scribes never did. The scribes had religion. And religion is when you say, I will do what I need to do to make a good name for myself, to be a decent person, to be respectable.

And if I do enough, God will accept me, it will be good enough. And I'll be observed by everyone around me with a good reputation. I'll make a life for myself. And I'll be a good person, not a bad person.

You see, that's religion. And that's the exact place the scribes lived. I'll give my extra, my intellect, my theology to God, because theology, being a good theologian, it makes you respectable.

But I will not give him my heart. I will not give him my time, not to the bottom. I'll not give him my resources, my talents, my gifts. I'll not give him my soul. And that's the difference.

[22 : 49] The widow stands before God and she says, I'm poor, therefore I am blessed. You see, blessed poverty is this. It's when you know how poor you are before God and therefore you are so wealthy.

It's spiritual poverty. You see, when you know you're spiritually poor, you become spiritually rich. When you know that you're spiritually poor before God, that everything is by God's gift, everything by His mercy, everything by His grace, then you can be in the midst of blessed poverty.

You stop holding on to things so tightly. You're willing to give it away. That's the state of the widow's heart. And it says she is the true disciple, not the scribes, not the rich.

It's her. Now, finally, fourthly, what can you do today? We talked about God giving your whole self, your heart.

And lastly, what does it mean to give? Okay, lastly, that means we're called today to give our whole selves to God. What does it mean to give? Here is how we learn the meaning of the word, the verb to give.

[23 : 54] Right back at the start, verse 35, I said at the beginning there was a Jesus at the end of these series of questions, he had a question of his own to ask the scribes.

And he asked them a fairly tricky theological question, a question of exegesis, as we say, a question of interpretation from Psalm 110.

So you can see it. Now, this is the point in the sermon where we're nearing the end, but we're getting to the hardest thing to understand. So you've got to come in close with me on this in verse 35.

As Jesus taught in the temple, he had a question. How can the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David? And then he quotes Psalm 110, David himself declared in the spirit, the Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.

David himself calls him Lord. So how is he his son? Now, what does that mean? Jesus is interpreting for us Psalm 110.

[24 : 54] And he says to the scribes, how could David who wrote, wrote Psalm 110 have looked up in some one 10 and someone 10 David looks up and has a vision of heaven.

And David, this is the important bit you've got to have to understand that David in his time is the king and he is called Lord. So if you address the king in, in the Old Testament, you called him out on I Lord.

So David is the Lord and yet he looks up into heaven and he says, I saw the Lord God speaking to my Lord.

So now you've got three Lords in Psalm 110. The Lord looks up into heaven and he sees the Lord speaking to the Lord. And Jesus is saying, how could the Lord look up into heaven and see the Lord speaking to the Lord?

In other words, how could the king, how could David say the Lord, the king on earth, look into heaven and see God talking to another Lord?

[25 : 55] And he says, you know, this second Lord, we've always interpreted the Jews that are always interpreted with someone 10 that second Lord, that's the Messiah. That's the Messiah, the Messiah that was to come.

And he's saying to them, how could it be that David looked up and called the second Lord, Lord Messiah, and yet he be called David's son?

Now here's the logic. The scribes and everybody else, the disciples included, did not think that the Messiah, the anointed one of the Old Testament that was to come to save the people, was going to be anything but a normal human being.

That's what they thought. And so Jesus is saying, you see, he's David's son, that was the promise. The Messiah would come and be David's son, but we all know hierarchically that if you are a son of a father, you are less than the father.

And the anointed was going to be one of David's grandson, so how could David turn and then say, no, he's my Lord? So how can David say, this is my grandson and my Lord?

[27 : 00] This Messiah that is to come. Now here's the answer. The only way that is possible is if the Messiah is both human and divine.

He had to be both David's son and God's son. How could David look at one of his sons and say, he's my son, yet my Lord?

Only if that son, that Messiah, is truly human and truly God. Both David's son and God's son simultaneously. Nobody expected that. Nobody believed that.

You realize that? Now listen, if you're here today and you're not a believer and you're curious and wrestling with these claims, let me say this, nobody expected Jesus.

Nobody thought that God, the second person in the Trinity, God the Son was coming to take on human flesh. That was not the expectation. This could not have been written.

[27 : 58] It was never an idea in anybody's head. The only way this could have been written is if it happened. The disciples didn't even believe it, not until after the resurrection. It was only then that they finally realized who he really is.

And you see, this is the nature of the meaning of the verb to give. What does it mean to give your whole life to Jesus Christ? It's all about the incarnation. You see, in the incarnation, the Son of God took on human flesh.

And you see what that's saying? Jesus Christ came, he came to be humiliated. He took on human flesh to give himself fully away. Now here's the last bit.

As Jesus is looking at this woman, this poor widow, give her last penny to the offering. And he says, you know, she's given her whole heart, her whole life to following God, her whole self.

That's true discipleship. You know, she's very important. She's a great example. But she was not really the point.

[29 : 04] She was pointing to somebody better than her. You know, she gave her whole life away. But Jesus had to have been sitting there thinking.

When she dropped her last penny in the offering box, he had to have been thinking about the fact that he came to give his whole life away. You know, she points to him, she's a metaphor, but he's the object.

Jesus Christ, God himself, the Son of God, took on human flesh, veiled him flesh, the incarnate deity. See, that's from Hark the Herald's angel seeing.

You see, when he came incarnate, he came to give his whole self away. She was the example, but he's the object. What does it mean to give?

It means to look and see. Can you admit today, when I was self-absorbed, Jesus Christ came to give everything for me.

[30 : 00] He went to the cross to give his whole self for me, and so today I want to respond by giving myself to him. Here's the gospel as we close, and I have to cut it short. Here's the gospel as we close.

You see, it is not, it is not this. It is not that if you give your whole life away to God, your time, your talents, and your treasures, if you give your whole life away, then God will accept you.

Then God will give himself to you. You know, that's religion. That's what the scribes believed in. Now, instead, the gospel is that Jesus Christ came while you were self-absorbed, while I was self-absorbed, and he gave himself away completely so that you could one day respond, be accepted, and then give your life away to him.

See, that's the difference in religion and gospel. That's good news. Let's say a final word. Whenever he says this about Psalm 110 in verse 37, he gives the conclusion, David calls the Messiah Lord.

How can he be a son? And then we see this, the last thing, and the great throng heard him gladly. Whenever Jesus, in this very complicated theological take on Psalm 110, explains it, it says all of a sudden, the great throng heard him with gladness.

[31 : 28] Now, one of the ways that you can ask yourself today, am I following Jesus Christ? Am I, have I really experienced the gospel?

Have I realized that the gospel is that he gave himself so fully for me before I ever did anything, apart from me completely? And so today, I just want to respond by giving myself to him.

There in my life has the gospel not changed me to the point where I'm putting away things that I would have had because of Jesus, right? Here's a way to know, have I experienced this?

Has this happened to me? Well, how did they experience it? They, it said that when they realized that he was the Messiah, truly God, truly human, it simply made them glad.

The great throng, the crowd, they awoke. He came to give himself and they became joyful. And he said, I have joy in him.

[32 : 30] I have joy in this one. David's son, God's son, there's my joy. There's my gladness. Look, if you have your joy and your gladness in Jesus Christ, God come for you, then that means all the stuff in your life that God has given you, you won't possess it anymore.

You'll hold it loosely because you hold Christ so closely. Let's pray and ask that he would give us these hearts. Father, teach us to be disciples like the poor widow.

Thank you for her great example. And we make no defense before you, no self-defense that we are self-absorbed. We own it. So I'll ask today that you would come and help each of us in our hearts right now, maybe for the first time for somebody here to own it, to say, I am self-centered.

We are, and yet in the midst of our self-centeredness, you were so selfless. So reorient us, Lord, help us to see that that's the gospel, that you did it all, and to respond today by asking where in my life am I not giving the whole of me to you.

Maybe Father, some of us here have lived in intellectual Christianity. We're mere theologians. Help us and teach us today to give our hearts away to you.

[33 : 56] And so we pray for these hearts. In Christ's name, amen.