

The Last Week: Giving in an Inverted Kingdom

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Preacher: Tobin Miller

[0 : 0 0] The scripture reading this morning comes from the Gospel of Luke, chapters 20 and 21. Please follow in your bulletin. Now there came to him some of the Sadducees who say that there is no resurrection, and they questioned him saying, Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies, having a wife, and he is childless, his brother should marry his wife and raise up children to his brother.

Now there were seven brothers, and the first one took a wife and died childless, and the second and the third married her, and in the same way all seven died, leaving no children.

Finally, the woman died also. In the resurrection, therefore, which one's wife will she be? For all seven had married her.

Jesus said to them, The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage. With those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage.

For they cannot die even, they cannot even die anymore because they are like angels or sons of God, being sons of the resurrection. With that, the dead are raised.

[1 : 2 8] Even Moses showed in the passage about the burning bush where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob.

Now he is not the God of the dead, but the living. For all live to him. Some of the scribes answered and said, Teacher, you have spoken well.

For they did not have courage to question him any longer about anything. Then he said to them, How is it that they say that Christ is David's son?

For David himself says in the book of Psalms, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet. Therefore, David calls him Lord.

And how is it he is his son? And while all the people were listening, He said to the disciples, Beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes and love respectful greetings in the marketplaces, and chief seats in the synagogues, and places of honor at banquets, who devour widows' houses.

[2 : 5 0] And for appearances' sake, offer long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation. And he looked up, and he saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury.

And he saw a poor widow putting in two small copper coins. And he said, Truly, I say to you, This poor widow put in more than all of them, for they all put out of their surplus, put into the offering, but she, out of her poverty, put in all that she had to live on.

This is God's word. We've been in a journey in the Gospel of Luke. If you've been with us for three years, you've seen us go through 20 chapters up until this point, not all at once, just a little at a time.

And you would see that there are certain themes that Christ continues to teach on and talk about through the passage. One of the biggest themes that we've been talking about is the kingdom of God.

It's a theme that's threaded through the whole Gospel of Luke. It's this theme that he's trying to tell us or show us as Christ teaches that there's a big difference between our kingdom that we live in now, the things that we value, the things that we grab onto, the things that we cling, the things that we deem important in God's kingdom.

[4 : 31] And today, he comes to probably the most difficult lesson for any of us to learn. It's the lesson that often and continually drags us away from God's kingdom.

It's the lesson of our money. And what he basically is going to say is, if you don't want your stuff to have hold of you, if you don't want to be controlled by your finances, if you don't want to be controlled by your money, if you don't want to be controlled by your financial appetite, you need to give it away.

Because the only way you can break a hold of something is by releasing it. And so what I thought we'd do is we'd try a little exercise today in giving away. What I would like for you to do is take out your wallet.

Come on. Hold it up. It's not like your Bible. This is my Bible. This is my wallet. This is your wallet. You know, Christ is going to say today that so much trouble and so much difficulty comes from this object that we have right here.

For some of us, it represents power. For some of us, it represents security. For some of us, it represents popularity and wealth and the ability to have freedom and to do whatever we want.

[5 : 50] And he says to us that this little object here and what it represents draws us away from the kingdom of God more than anything else. And to be broken from the power of this little object, we need to give it away.

So what I want you to do is I want you just to hand the wallet to the person next to you. Go ahead, give to them. Here, I'll give mine to my wife or I'll give mine to Charles.

I don't often give my wallet to my wife, but this is a step of faith, right? Now we're going to do something we've never done before. We're going to take an offering.

So what I'm going to ask the offering stewards to come forward and I want you to open that wallet up deep, right? And just grab in there and just give till it hurts, right? So, no.

I'm teasing. Jesus has been teaching about the kingdom of God. He's been showing us that His kingdom is very different than ours.

[6 : 51] He's come to Jerusalem. You can give the wallet back. I know some of you are weirding out and freaking out over it, so go ahead and give it back. He's come to Jerusalem. We've heard this because His whole life has been focused towards Jerusalem.

And He's coming in. He's teaching the kingdom of God. He's being followed by maybe 10,000 people. Now it's the Sabbath. It's the Passover. It's the entrance into the Passover.

So Jerusalem, which is usually about 25 or 30,000 people, is now 2 million people. 2 million people are crowded into a space that only 25,000 should be living in.

So it's amazing. It's noisy. It's dirty. It's out of control. And Jesus comes up the Temple Mount and He walks in and He chases out the money chasers and He basically takes over the teaching within the Temple of God.

And as He's doing this, He is confronted by the religious leaders of His time. They have an idea of what the kingdom of God should be like and so they're holding it and they're trying to transpose it over what the kingdom of God should be like and it's just not working.

[7 : 56] The first group that comes in is the Pharisees or the scribes. They're the conservatives. They would believe in the sovereignty of God. They would believe in God's word. They would believe in the Torah. They took the Ten Commandments and they wrote it out to 635 other commandments.

I mean, they believe in tradition. They believe in teaching well. I mean, that is all about them. And as they hear Jesus teach, there is a struggle in their kingdom and that struggle is authority and control.

And they start asking Jesus some authority and control questions. And Jesus has to remind them that their kingdom is not God's kingdom. And the things in God's kingdom work differently.

He goes on and he teaches them about the parable of the vineyard and the question of the parable of the vineyard is ownership and stewardship and who owns what. And we're told that after this confrontation, they try to trick him with this coin.

And again, he says, you know, that's your kingdom. But in God's kingdom, everything is his. Everything is his.

[9 : 01] Verse 26, they shut up. They never ask him another question again. And then we get to the passage today and now the Sadducees come in. The Sadducees have never confronted Jesus. They've never asked him a question.

This is the only time in the Gospels the Sadducees come in and ask him a question. The Sadducees would be the liberals. They would be the popular people. They would be the wealthy people. They would be the founding fathers and the founding members of the city.

They would be the people who were into their looks. They would be very sympathetic to Rome. They were focused on purity outwardly. The Sadducees were always fighting the Pharisees.

There was this big struggle on the issue of purity and holiness. And they always won after each other. And you never knew really who won because the Sadducees had control of the temple. The Sadducees believed in free will.

Do whatever you want. There was no angels. There's no devils. There's no resurrection. This life is all there is. This is all there is. So if this is all there is, you've got to make the most of this life.

[9 : 59] This is what you've got to do. Make the most of this life. It's a lot like people in Hong Kong that we run into, right? This is all there is. How can we make the most of our lives? And so the Pharisees come and they ask Jesus a question.

It's in your bulletin. It's found in verses 29 through 33. It's a very interesting question. It's not really a question. It's basically a question to make Jesus look stupid because they don't even believe in the resurrection, but they're asking a question about the resurrection.

Now we're told through historians that the Pharisees have been trying to answer this question for 100 years. And the Sadducees always ask them this question and they can't answer the question because it's really starting to bother them.

It's one of those questions that your friends ask you, right? You're talking to them about God and they'll say something like, you know, if God is all-powerful and God is all-loving and God knows everything, then how can he do this or how can he do that?

And you'll sit back and you're like, oh, it's one of those questions that's made to make you look stupid, right? They might ask you a question like, well, if God is all-powerful, can he make a Diet Coke can so big that even he can't pick up?

[11 : 03] Right? Come on, work with me here. It's one of those questions that you know that's just a foolish question. And Jesus answers it right away. And he tells them, hey, you guys, you don't understand the kingdom of God.

You're thinking about your kingdom, but you're not thinking about God's kingdom and things operate very differently in God's kingdom. Then in verse 40, they shut up.

I mean, they're afraid to ask him any more questions. They don't want to ask him any more questions because they look stupid when they ask Jesus questions. Jesus has one last lesson he wants to teach us. I mean, this is his last lesson on the kingdom of God.

I mean, Jesus spoke about money more than anything else in his ministry. 45% of the time, he's talking about money. He's talking about hell and heaven. He's talking about those things. He's talking about money because he knows that it has a pull on our hearts.

And after this, Jesus is going to go away. He's never going to come back to the temple. He's going to be on the mountain. He's going to be in the upper room. He's going to be preparing his disciples for his death. But he has one more lesson he wants to teach us. And so he's sitting off to the side in the treasury.

[12 : 07] And we're told that the treasury was this amazing place in the temple. It was this huge, like, you know, the biggest place in the convention center is bigger than that. It's like the meat locker, the big hangar, the airplane hangar.

It's just massive airplane hangar. And as you walked into the temple, there would be 13 bronze containers. They were like a trumpet, a shofar, but it was the big part on the bottom and it would move up to the top.

And people would come in and they'd give their offerings. Now, it was very interesting because some of them said for offering for doves, offering for wood, offering for frankincense, offering for clothing, offering for sin offering, old offering for sin offering, new offering for sin offering, and then there were six free-willed offerings.

And so before the sermon started, or before the time started in the temple, the people came in and the historians tell us it was amazing. I mean, wealth and power and kings coming in and people are carrying these big bags of gold and they're walking in there and they're dragging it and they're dripping it off and they have all this money in their hand, right?

And they have this money and it's kind of dripping and they're walking so they're drawing attention to themselves and people are looking at them. And they come up and some people say that actually the priest would be there and they would count the money.

[13 : 21] And then they would say, Tobin Miller gave \$5,000 a day. And people go, ooh. Daniel gave \$1,000 a day.

Ooh. Howard, he gives \$10 in his chariot keys.

Ooh. Ooh. And we're told that people made a spectacle of themselves. They would pull in and sometimes they would go, see if anybody was listening.

Sometimes they would do this and no one was listening. They'd go, and people would wake up. And so Jesus is watching people give their offering to God.

And he realizes there's a collision happening in their kingdoms. But their kingdoms are very different. And you see in the text, you read it there, what he says. There's three things that I want to challenge us with to think about as we look at these last four verses.

[14 : 39] There's three things I think that Jesus wants to tell us about what does it look like to give in the kingdom of God. And the first thing he says is in God's kingdom, in the inverted kingdom, God sees everything.

Did you know that? Verses one and two tell it. And he looked up and he saw, the word saw is a very special word. It means he understood. He looked in their soul. He understood what was going on in their life.

And he saw what was going on in their life. And the rich came in and they're putting, and the word is throw, let fall, let tumble. They're throwing all their gifts in there. And as they're doing it, Jesus sees what's going on in their life and what's going on in their heart.

And then this widow comes up. Can you imagine what she felt like? Following guys with bags of money. And this little widow comes up and she takes the two smallest coins.

They're called lepta. It's probably the only Jewish coin talked about in the Bible. It actually, the word means peeling or shaving or it means feathery. It means nothing.

[15 : 45] And you can imagine her walking into this temple complex and what did the priest do? Did they look at her offering and yell it out? Or did they just look at her and go, get out of here. Go, get out of here. And she comes in there and she has these two little coins.

You can't even hear it. But the passage says that Jesus hears and he sees everything.

I think sometimes we forget that, don't we? I mean, sometimes we live life and we give and we do with our resources and our things and sometimes we make choices and we don't ever think about Christ looking at us and looking at our hearts and what's going on in our hearts.

But in the kingdom of God, in the inverted kingdom, he sees everything. The kingdom of the Pharisees was all about appearance and how well you look and what you did. And you know, the Sadducees could care less because the Sadducees, all that was important was here and now because when they died, there's nothing.

So the fear of God or what God did for them didn't mean anything. All that mattered was here and now. But the passage says here that in God's kingdom, he sees everything and how we give in our heart is very, very important because it shows us and it shows God what kingdom we are actually a part of.

[17 : 18] It's called stewardship. Jesus preached about it over and over and over in Luke. If you're faithful with this, I give you more. If you're not faithful with this, I take these things away. Jesus, God, sees everything in his kingdom and what we do with it is very important.

The second thing that sticks out to me in this passage of how our kingdoms collide in money is just basically in the inverted kingdom, accounting is done very differently, isn't it? I mean, you look at this passage and you realize that God is an accountant in a very strange way.

I mean, you and I, we judge people and we judge ourself by how much we give. Well, how much we give? If a wealthy person comes in and they give a million dollars, we go, whoa, they gave a lot. But when someone comes in and they bring two lepta, you don't even notice them.

They didn't give anything. I mean, we look at names on buildings and things raised up as monuments to ourself. But in God's kingdom, what we give isn't so important as what is left over.

Do you realize that's what he's saying? But God's saying it's not so important what you're giving, but the heart behind it, and he's asking the question, what's left?

[18 : 41] What's left over? And why did you leave it over? Did you leave it over because you didn't think God was good? Did you leave it over because you didn't think God was going to take care of you?

The passage is saying that in the inverted kingdom, giving is about what is left and why. So what Jesus is saying here in his passage is that giving isn't actually about giving, but giving is about our heart.

And how we feel. Now we live in a kingdom today that could care less about how we feel, right? I mean, I've thought about this before. What would happen if you went to the IRS or the IRD and you said, you know what, I was going to give taxes this year, but I just didn't really feel like it.

It was just so inconvenient. Maybe next year. Or you know, I was going to give taxes this year, but I really wanted that car. And so I bought the car instead.

Or maybe next year if I get more money and more bonus, then I'll give taxes. And the Pharisees and the Sadducees were going, oh, right on. Because it was outward appearance and what was important. But the passage says that she gave out of love.

[19 : 56] It was an act of worship. So the question I have to ask myself is how do I give?

I mean, when I give my money, what am I thinking? Am I thinking that God's going to supply all my needs? Or do I think if I have just enough left over, I can do these things and do these things and that's okay.

But in God's kingdom, sacrifice is what is praised. I mean, if you're like me, sacrifice means, well, I'm not going to eat at Ruth Chris this weekend, but I'm going to eat at another steakhouse.

But in God's kingdom, sacrifice means not eating steak that week. And I realize if we're honest, if I'm honest, we don't really sacrifice very much.

Do we? Jesus says here that in the kingdom of God, in the inverted kingdom, it's not what we give that is important, but it's the heart behind it and what is left over.

[21 : 13] And finally, what we see here is in God's kingdom, in the inverted kingdom, that even the smallest amount given, if it's given in love, in faith, can do amazing things.

I mean, he says here in verses three and four, look at this lady, she's given more than everybody else. And if you think about that, you know, she's given these two little coins, they're nothing. But in God's world, he can use these two coins to change everything.

Do we believe that? In 1966, you've heard him speak two weeks ago and I've seen it happen over and over in my life. John Bechtel, when we had our anniversary, John came up and his dad was here after the occupation of World War II and he started all the churches that basically birthed our church and John Bechtel told us a story about 1966.

He and Donna come and their goal is to reach children of Hong Kong. And he said at that time there were four million people living in Hong Kong. Two million of them were 18 years or younger.

And they prayed about how can we reach the kids? What are we going to do? What's going to happen here? How can we reach these kids? And they got this idea we're going to start a camp. And so they were looking around for almost a year and they found this piece of property in Fanling that was about four acres.

[22 : 38] But the bad thing was the government had just built this one million dollar building on it. But it wasn't being used. And so John goes to the government and says hey we need this. We want to reach. We want to minister to the youth and children of Hong Kong.

Can you give it to us? And the guy's thinking about okay I'll tell you what this is 1966. We can sell it to you for \$240,000. Now John was making like \$50 a month.

And he's like that's crazy money. I can't. There's no way I could do that. That's impossible. He goes well we'll sell it to you for \$240,000. And as John was in the office there was a guy who was in charge of fundraising for his denomination.

And he heard it and he said John that's no problem I can do it. And so that guy went back to America and for four months he stumped churches and talked to people and asked for money and asked for funding and at the end of four months John gets his letter.

and it starts off dear John it's really bad when you start off you know even I'm sorry but we've tried for four months and we've had no response.

[23 : 40] No one's given anything. Please find the letter that came in from little Belinda Holmes. And in the package there's a little letter from Belinda Holmes.

She's 14 years old. She'd heard the guy speak at the church and she wrote this letter out to John and she said dear John I want to be a part of reaching kids in Hong Kong I want to use my money I've stopped eating ice cream for two weeks.

Here's my one dollar. So John's looking there and he owes \$240,000 he has one dollar. He goes this is crazy nothing's ever going to happen to this. So he goes well this is what God gave me so I'm going to use it.

Because God can take a small thing given in faith and he can use it in amazing ways and he goes to the office and he talks to the guy he goes you have your \$240,000 he goes I don't really have \$240,000 but I have this. The guy reads the letter from a 14 year old who gave up her ice cream for two weeks looks at the one dollar he kind of laughs and he goes okay I'll sell it to you for one dollar.

And since that time 1.3 million children in Hong Kong have gone through that camp. 1.3 million and over 120,000 of them have said that they have come to the Lord because of that.

[24 : 57] In God's kingdom small amounts given in faith can do amazing things. Now I have a lot of other questions to ask Jesus when I get to heaven when I see this.

You know like well why didn't you just go up behind and take the money and give it back to her and go here daughter you need this more than I do. But he didn't. He allowed her to give out of the joy. I mean why didn't he let her give because he knew that the temple was corrupt.

You're being a bad steward. But he didn't. He allowed her to give out of joy because he knew that in God's kingdom in God's inverted kingdom small things can do amazing things.

Listen to what I'm saying. I'm not saying that God wants your money. God does not need your money. God wants you.

God wants you. He wants a relationship with you. And he knows that money has such a strong pull on us that until we give that up we're going to have a hard time living in his kingdom.

[26 : 08] So the question is what does our giving say about us? If Jesus were watching us as we came to put our money in the offering box what would he see in our heart?

What would he think about us? I've often thought that Jesus is watching this lady this poor widow come and give her everything and I wonder if Jesus is thinking in his mind in three days I'm going to the cross and I'm going to give everything for her.

I'm going to give everything for Tobin. I'm so thankful he didn't look at us and say well I don't know he's a jerk and he doesn't fall very well and he doesn't do these things and sometimes he breaks his promises he just gives everything for us.

This passage is telling us that if we have a generous savior that we as his followers should be generous also. On December 8th we're going to do something we've never done we're going to take an offering December 8th the church and the staff and the leaders have identified three or four ministries that we think are doing amazing amazing things.

so on December 8th and I don't know who gives what in here I know that the elders we talk about what we give because we want to be faithful and we want to be true as we present these things and so you can ask them how much they give and they'll probably ask you how much you give so that's a fair exchange but I don't know who gives what but I do know that it takes about 200,000 Hong Kong dollars a week to keep everything going in the church and people's salaries and outreaches that we're doing and training pastors and all these things but on December 8th everything 100% of everything that comes in for that week we're going to give to those ministries.

[28 : 26] my prayer is for all of us as a church as we reflect on this passage and we understand what God has done for us if we understand how generous he is for us that we as his people would be generous towards those around us so that God could use it for his kingdom.

In God's kingdom money is seen very differently than ours he watches everything we do with it we're not really judged by what we give but we're judged by what we keep and why we've kept it and he always uses little things given in faith to change lives.

Father we just come to you today and we thank you for your goodness and your grace in our life. We come as your people and we look at this passage of this widow and we wonder how many times throughout the last 2,000 years you have multiplied those two leptas those two slivers how many times you have multiplied them for your kingdom and done amazing things.

Lord help us to realize that you have been so generous and gracious to us for everything and then all we have is yours. The Pharisees didn't understand that because they were legalists.

the Sadducees didn't understand that because they just couldn't care less and they wanted to party and sometimes we bounce back and forth between both of those extremes.

[30 : 03] Lord I pray that we would see you as you really are but I confess in my life I confess you have been so abundant and many times I have squandered those things.

I want to repent of that. Lord I pray for our church I pray that you would forgive us as individuals and as groups and how often we've wasted your resources when you were waiting to do amazing things amazing things if we were willing to step out in faith and trust you.

so we come before you now and we just pray that you would change our hearts help us to see your son as he truly is help us to understand the depth and the breadth and the width of the grace and mercy you've given to us and help us to be people who are generous because we serve an amazingly generous God.

We love you and we pray these things in your son Jesus name Amen.