Message Transcript

CHARACTER OVER IMAGE | THE KINGDOM REVEALED
AARON BROCKETT | OCTOBER 25, 2026

Well, it's great to be with you today. And as we get started, or before we get started, I'd love for us to pray today. Many of you, across all of our locations, probably know the name and the face of one of our very own, Landon Rose, who is on our executive team, oversees all of our creative. He is often here at Northwest leading worship.

And Landon's mother, about a month ago, received her second cancer diagnosis. And he just texted me this morning, a couple of hours ago, and she passed away. He was with her in her room in Tulsa, Oklahoma. And this has come quite suddenly upon him and his family. Our hearts are heavy for him. Landon is like a brother to me.

His mother was a wonderful lady. In fact, right after the second cancer diagnosis, about a month ago, she came to just spend time with the family. She was here worshiping with us. And I talked to her right in front of the soundboard. And she came up to me and hugged me and she said, "Take care of my boy." And that's what we're going to do.

So, I know that Landon is loved across our entire church. If you are new around here and you don't know Landon very well, you will soon. Landon is one of the heartbeats behind our church. He's one of the greatest men I know. And what I want to do as he is grieving right now, watching from a hospital room, we're just going to lift him, and their families, up as a church family. Would you pray with me right now?

Father, we come to You today and we thank You for the life of Landon's mother. She was a godly woman. All the way up to the very end faithful—faithfully sharing the love of Jesus to nurses and doctors in her hospital room. And we know that Landon and his wife, Jenna, and family are grieving right now. And we grieve with them in her loss. But we also celebrate knowing where she is. So, God, I just want to lift up the family to You right now. We thank You for her life that was well lived and the impact she made on all of us. We ask this right now in Jesus' name. And everybody said: Amen. Amen.
Thank you for doing that with me.

It's good to be with you. If you have a Bible go ahead and turn to Mark, chapter 12. That's where we are going to be together today. We've actually been in chapter 12 for the last three weeks together. We're going to finish it today.

And we are marching on in this series that we have been in all year long in the gospel of Mark. We've been calling it The Urgent Kingdom. We just have a few short weeks left in this series. And in our text today we are in the final week of Jesus life.

Now, over the past two weeks together we've been walking through some passages where we have been seeing Jesus standing before the very people who will conspire to take His life. And Jesus knows it. He knows what is coming for Him. He knows that there is a cross with His name on it in Jerusalem. He's predicted it in chapters 8, 9, and 10. But He keeps marching toward Jerusalem anyway.

Now, I don't know about you, but if I was in Jesus' position, I'd be looking to evade or escape. But Jesus is emboldened to go. And He goes to this cross. And what kept Him going is the thought of you and me, knowing this would be our only hope for redemption.

And our passage today, this is one of the last of the somewhat heated interactions that Jesus has with the religious leaders outside of the cross. It is also the very last teachings that Jesus ever would give in the Temple. And, really, what He is doing is He is applying some pressure to see what emerges from the character of these religious leaders as well as you and me today. This would be a passage that is necessary for all of us. I think it can be character forming for all of us. It doesn't necessarily mean that it is easy. And one of the things that I have learned over the years is that it's oftentimes the most uncomfortable passages that bring about the most change. Can anybody testify to that? Four of you. That's awesome.

I've titled this message today Character Over Image. And in the image saturated world in which we live, we're pretty much like image is the thing that we present, image is what we post on social media, image is like the paint and the veneer. It is so important that we have character. There is nothing wrong with image, just as long as our character is in alignment with that.

And this is becoming so crucial and so important now a days with the loss of trust in any sort of institution or organization or leader. And it's true for all of us as well. We want to be a people, and I'm talking to Christians here, Christians, Christ followers, we want to be a people who are real and vulnerable and we are who we say we are. We are the same person in public as we are when nobody else is looking in private. And that's what Jesus is driving down on in these passages.

Now, last week we left off in verse 34 where Jesus squares off with a parade of opponents: the Pharisees, the Herodians, the Sadducees, and a single scribe. And last week we saw how the scribe asked what seemed to be a genuine question from a sincere place. He said, "Jesus, out of the 613 laws in the Old Testament, which is the most important?"

And He said, "Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, and strength. And love your neighbor as yourself." And the scribe agreed with him and He said, "You are not far from the Kingdom of God." Now, that is both a compliment and a challenge. He is commending him and He's inviting him to more. He said, "Hey, man. You're not far but you are not there yet."

And maybe that would be true for all of us. Maybe we're not far from the Kingdom of God, but there is a little bit of a gap that needs to be closed. There is a gap in all of us. I want you to identify the gap.

In our passage today, Jesus is closing that gap. So, let's look at our text together from Mark, chapter 12, verses 35 to 44. Beginning in verse 35 Mark writes these words. This is right after Jesus' conversation with the scribe. It says:
" And as Jesus taught in the temple, he said, 'How can the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David? David himself, in the Holy Spirit, declared, "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?' And the great throng heard him gladly."

Verse 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 and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.'

" And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny.
"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. 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.'" (ESV)

I don't know if any of you are familiar with this term. I wasn't until I looked at it this week: Potemkin Village. Any of you ever heard that term? Yeah, I didn't think so. It actually comes out of a story; it's a legendary story from the late 1780s. It's based in truth. It actually happened. But historians question how much is exaggerated. But there is a phrase that has come out of this. This is relevant for us today.

Apparently, the true story of what happened is merged with a little bit of legend and is that there was a Russian minister by the name of Grigory Potemkin who want to impress Empress Catherine during her tour of a recently conquered region of Crimea.

So, apparently she is on this barge or this boat. She is drifting down a river. She is kind of examining the region. And there would be these elaborate village facades that were supposedly constructed, painted building fronts, so to speak, fake settlements that made it look just a little too perfect, and there would be peasants staged there who looked happy to be there waving at her as she floated by.

And then as soon as she would float by they would tear them all down because none of it was real. It was all erected and staged to present things as a little bit better than what they really were. So, from her perspective on the water the region looked to be flourishing and prosperous even though it was all fake. There was nothing to it. It was just paint and veneer.

And like I said, while this event actually happened, historians argue how much of it was exaggerated propaganda. Really, that's not the point because what emerged out of that was this phrase called Potemkin Village, which has come to mean this. Alright? Here's what it is:

"something impressive from the outside, with nothing of substance behind it" Now, we may not know this story, but we know that. Right? That's everywhere. What immediately came to my mind when I thought about this was like, "Oh, maybe that's where..."

If you've ever gone to Disney and you walked through downtown Disney and everything looked so perfect, it's just a set. Or Universal Studios. Or whatever it may be. Or maybe a play and there is a set on stage. And it looks like a real city, but you walk around and it's just plywood. It's just a set. There is nothing of substance behind it.

Or maybe this picture right here of this building, which is where this kind of comes from, you look at the back of the building and it's kind of run down, but they just slapped some paint on the front to make it look better than it really is. And now we're talking about image versus character, or substance beneath the surface. That's what Jesus is driving down on in these verses. He's taking a peak behind what you and I present.

If any of you have ever had to buy a house or sell a house? What do you do before you close on the deal? You have a home inspector come and inspect the house. What are they looking for? Well, they are looking for black mold. They are looking for stuff behind the walls. They are looking for the things that a fresh coat of paint and furniture and drywall can conceal. The things that are not apparent to the naked eye until it's too late.

That's what He is doing. Jesus is kind of doing an inspection within their interior lives. And we see from the text what He finds with them. The real question today is: What is He going to find with you and me when we lay ourselves out on that inspection table as well?

And Mark begins in verses 35 to 37. I don't know what you thought as I read those. Chances are, I'm just guessing, that you didn't exactly know the meaning of it. Let me read it again and just see if this stirs anything in you. Mark writes: "And as Jesus taught in the temple, he said, 'How can the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David? David himself, in the Holy Spirit, declared, "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?' And the great throng heard him gladly."

Any of you understand that? Any of you read that and go, "Oh, man. I'm so glad I came to church today. New favorite verses right there. Stirred my heart." Yeah, it's a little bit challenging to understand at first. But, actually, the meaning is quite simple. Let me just unpack it really briefly here for you. Here's what is happening in those verses.

The Pharisees, as we have seen all through the gospel of Mark, had a very low view of Jesus. They did not see Jesus the way that He came to declare Himself to be. Can I say it this way? They weren't thinking rightly about Him. And when you don't think rightly about Jesus, everything else comes apart.

I'm reminded of that quote from A. W. Tozer that says, "What comes to mind when we think about God is the most important thing about us."

So, here's what Jesus is doing in those somewhat confusing or at least difficult to understand verses. He is correcting their theology. They assumed that since the prophesied Messiah, we're talking about all of the prophecies in the Old Testament of the coming Messiah, was from King David's lineage or family tree, that the Messiah was merely an earthly king or a political figure who was to come just to restore the glory of Israel. That's the only thing they assumed about the Messiah. Not that this is God in the flesh come to rescue, and redeem, and pay for the sins of the world.

So, what Jesus is doing in these verses is He is asking them a very direct question. He's saying, "Well, if the supposed Messiah is only King David's great great great grandson and nothing more, then why is it that when David writes in Psalm 110, and He's quoting Psalm 110 in these verses, he calls the prophesied Messiah, Lord, coming out of his family tree?

So, David, inspired by the Holy Spirit wrote, years before Jesus would ever walk the earth, that He was the Messiah and he calls him Lord. And no ancestor in that culture would have ever addressed a descendent of theirs as lord. That would be like you calling your kids or grandkids lord. That ain't ever going to happen. No, the honor would flow the other direction.

So, what Jesus is doing here is He isn't denying His lineage from the line of David, He's saying, "I am that and I'm so much more. I am David's descendant and I am David's Lord."

Now, this right here is so crucial that Paul, when he introduces the book of Romans, which if you are not familiar with the book of Romans, it's the Mount Everest of the Bible... Paul's introduction in Romans actually addresses this very thing. Let me read it for you. Romans 1: 3 through 4. It says:

"The Good News is about his Son. In his earthly life he was born into King David's family line," there it is, "and he was shown to be the Son of God when he was raised from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit. He is Jesus Christ our Lord." (NLT)

Now, here's why this is so important as it relates to our topic today: character. Substance and surface. Character and image. Making sure our outsides match our insides.

It all begins with what you actually believe about Jesus, not just the lip service you give him

So, Jesus is either who He says He is or He is not. He can't just be a good, moral teacher because He said He was God in the flesh. So, He is either who He says He is or He is not.

Now, Jesus is actually giving this theology lesson and the crowds are all listening to Him explain this. And if you look back again at verse 37, the NLT says, "They listened with great delight."

What delighted them? Well, the depth of the explanation. They loved the cleverness of it. They loved the eloquence of it. They are listening to this and they were sort of wowed by Jesus' explanation of this theology. But that didn't necessarily mean they were going to apply it. I think, oftentimes, we are guilty of that. We love some really good, deep teaching. So much so that it confuses us so we don't have to do anything with it. We don't have to apply it.

Now, this is really, really important, especially in this day and age where we have access to so much content. Don't we? It's right there, accessible, in the little black boxes that we call phones that we keep in our pocket or our purses. We've got social media posts. We've got news reels. We've got podcasts and we've got access to more content than any other group of people in civilized history. And everybody is looking for more and more content.

And I'm not against content, but we do need to be really discerning about the content we take in and we need to diagnose the motives of our heart with what we do with what we take in. Here's the question: I know I have access to a lot of content, but am I doing anything with it? Am I applying it in any sort of way? We could become content junkies. We can become addicted to content. And there is nothing wrong with that. Correct doctrine and solid orthodoxy are critical. Expositional Bible teaching is essential.

But it means nothing if we are taking in all of these content calories but we are never allowing it to shape our character or to apply it to our lives. Are you with me? Is this making sense to anybody? I know I'm saying a lot of words and that's how I want you to think about it—content calories and what am I doing with them?

I don't know about you all, but I love a good vacation. How many of you love a good vacation? How many of you love really, really good food? Any of you with me? Yeah, you're my people. How many of you love really good food while on vacation? Yeah.

Now, when I'm on vacation and I'm eating really good food, here's the thing. Here's my tendency. I don't know if any of you can relate to me. I have a tendency to eat two to three times the amount of normal calories that I take in in a regular week and I work out two to three times less than I normally do in a regular week.

And the result is... You know the result? You know that feeling that I'm talking about? You feel a little sluggish. You feel a little thick. You feel a little doughy. I don't like to say I'm feeling fat. I just tell my wife I'm feeling over nourished. It just sounds more sophisticated that way.

Now, listen man. That is not only possible physically while on vacation eating good food, but also probable that we can consume so much content now a days. And you put whatever adjective in front of the content that you prefer: whether it's self-help content, whether it's news content, political content, Christian content, spiritual content, therapeutic content, whatever content you're into, man, whatever podcasts you are listening to, whatever sermons you are listening to, whatever audio books—here's the question you have to ask. Am I getting over nourished and content saturated but I'm not really doing anything with it? But, I let myself off of the hook because I've got so much content going. What's that look like in real life?

Well, let me just give you a couple of potential examples. By the way, I'm guilty of all of these, which is why I thought of them. We can like and subscribe and confuse that for obedience. We're always scrolling, but that doesn't necessarily mean that we are serving.

We forward a link, but are we really following Him as Lord? Are we always consuming, rarely contributing? Are we always collecting more and more information while rarely thinking about cultivating the character of Jesus in our lives—giving the appearance of a follower externally, but not really allowing Him to be Lord over every room in our interior life.

In other words, are there some rooms in your interior life that you've got locked and won't let Him in? Worshipping with hands raised in a weekend service like the one we're sitting in right now, then using those same hands to tear somebody apart in the comment section or to contribute to some gossip on Tuesday?

See all the content in the world, as good as content is, means nothing if our character goes unchanged by the Lordship of Jesus Christ. That's what verses 35 to 37 mean. And this is why the Bible would say, in the book of James: Faith without works, putting it into action, is dead. This is why 1 John would pose this question: Do you love God? Well, how do I know if I love God? And it says, quite simply: Are you obeying Him? Are you doing what He says?

Now, does that mean you're living a perfect life? No, that's not what that means. Does that mean that you are doing everything God asks you to do? No, that's not what that means. What it means is: Am I sincerely seeking to be as obedient to Jesus as I can with the next step that I take.

Maybe one of the most sobering things for me, especially as a pastor, is when Jesus said (I believe it's in the gospel of Matthew) in the last days there will be people who will come up to me and say, "Lord, Lord. Didn't we prophesy in Your name? Didn't we cast out demons in Your name? Didn't we do miracles in Your name? Didn't we preach sermons in Your name?

And He's going to go, "Yeah, but I never knew you." What's that? That's the difference between image, what we are projecting, what we say we are doing for Him, and our character, how we're really following Him in our interior lives. And I think that this matters so much right now in the day and age in which we live.

Translation for us today. We might come to Jesus and say, "Didn't we attend church in Your name? Didn't we like and subscribe in Your name? Didn't we listen to all of the right podcasts in Your name? Didn't we have worship music playing the background in Your name? And Jesus will say, "Yeah, but did I know you because you unlocked every room in your private life to give Me access?" And then Jesus drives down...

That, quite possibly, would be the most awkward clap in the world. If you are sitting with that and that's heavy upon you there is a reason for that. That's heavy upon me. Man, we live... And this is so important right now in our world because as I've already acknowledged over the last few weeks, it's getting darker and darker, it's getting heavier and heavier, it's getting more and more divisive.

Guys, I honestly don't say this to scare or freak anybody out. I think we're in the final act. I think Jesus' return is imminent. And I think that right now Satan is playing really, really dirty, like really sinister.

And one of his favorite plays is to actually take a group of people who say they love Jesus and are trying to follow Him, like the majority of who I'm talking to right now, and to get you to be inconsistent in what you present with what is really going on in. And the rest of the world can look at you and go, "Ah, see I knew it. You're no different than anybody else and throw the whole thing out and deconstruct and walk away."

This is why this is so important. And believe me, as a pastor, I feel like I'm at the tip of the spear on this because I stand on a platform every week and there are thousands of people listening to me and it's that question, that pressing in of Jesus to say, "Hey, Aaron. Just make sure that you are the same person on the platform as you are in private when nobody else is listening or nobody else is looking except for Me."

Here's the thing. This is just as true for you too because the same Holy Spirit that lives in you is the same Holy Spirit that lives in me. And right now you've got family members who are not following Jesus and they are looking at your every move in private to see if it's consistent. You've got co-workers and you've got neighbors and friends who are looking at your life.

And this is why it's so important. Not that we are saved by all of the things that we do, but there should be a transformation and a consistency in who we are that points to the redemption that Jesus died for us to have. And the last thing that I want is for my sins or my inconsistencies to give another black eye to the bride of Christ.

So, what Jesus is going to do in verses 39 to 40 is He's going to address two instances really specifically. Look at verse 38 again. It says:
"And in his teaching he said, 'Beware of the scribes, who 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, who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.'"

So, He's talking about character here. Last week we said that the scribes were lawyers of sorts. So, they saw themselves as helping people interpret the law. Therefore, if they were sort of like the attorneys of the day, at least a portion of them would serve as an estate planner for widows, which gave some of the bad ones an opportunity to cheat distraught widows out of their estates by convincing them that they'd be serving God by giving them a cut of what they had. So, Jesus is calling that out.

He's also calling out the image management thing that they had going on. So, they loved to wear long, fashionable robes. They loved public accolades, being seen with the right people. They loved box seats at the game. They loved long impressive prayers. They wanted to be noticed and seen. And their motive wasn't the exaltation of God, but the recognition and attention from others. And He's calling that out.

See, they were faking a relationship with God that they didn't really have and honestly really didn't have any desire to have. But if it could benefit them in some way, they were in. And Jesus says, "Yeah, not only is it not benefiting them, but they are cheating other people."

Now, the word for this type of behavior is a word that we are all familiar with. It's the word: Hypocrite

And the word hypocrite actually is a term that came out of Greek culture used to describe an actor who would play many different parts in a play by wearing multiple masks in front of a gathered crowd. And in order to change the character, they would just change their mask. And so that's where the term hypocrite came from.

Now, we say that term. Nobody likes to be accused of being a hypocrite. But here's the thing. We're all guilty of it. Aren't we? We are all guilty of wearing various masks, not even so much in a sinister way, even if it's just a matter of giving thought to who you are around and presenting in a little bit of a different way.

How many of you have been at home and maybe your kids are getting on your nerves and you are speaking very, very directly to them and you're kind of in a bad mood. And then, all of a sudden, somebody comes to the door. Do you come to the door with the same tone when you were talking to your kids? No, probably not.

This can happen whenever you are going to work or whenever you are talking to a customer on the phone or whenever you're coming to church. Wherever it may be, we all have these various masks that we wear, depending on the audience that we are around. And some of that is just having a good, emotional intelligence. Some of it is, are we faking it and pretending to have it more together than what we really have?

And we let ourselves off of the hook because we usually compare ourselves to the worst people we know, or in this case we're comparing ourselves to these scribes and we're saying, "Man, these guys just seem like they are the worst." And the thing is that our long robes and pretentious appearances are still there. It just looks a little bit different.

So, maybe we carefully curate that social media post to make it look a little bit like our lives are more together than what they really are. How many of us are posting our worst moments online? No, it's a highlight reel.

Or when we go to dinner with friends and we slap on that plastic mask to cover the shame that we feel. Or, we come to church and others ask us how we are and we just flat out lie. We're probably really hurting, but we pretend to be something that we are not.

Or, we go to a Rooted group or we sit down and have coffee with a friend and it comes time to get vulnerable and we've got a decision to make. What should we share?

And we end up concealing the thing that we really need to get out into the open and we really need freedom from, but we go with the more acceptable struggle because we don't want them to think less of us and we're afraid of what it might mean if we bring that out into the open.

Or, how about this? Instead of calling something a sin, we just call it a struggle. Like, "I'm struggling." Yeah, you may be struggling, but let's call it what it is. It's a sin that we may need to confess or we need to get out into the open. See, most of us have our stash of masks that we use to manipulate the way that others see us and think about this.

And we've been talking a lot about confession and repentance lately, over these last few weeks, because I've been praying for revival. I've been praying the Holy Spirit would revive our church, revive our nation. It's our only hope. And revivals, if you study their history, never begin in a big crowd at church on the weekend or a big arena at some crusade. Revivals always begin with individuals who are confessing and repenting. In other words, taking off the mask to give Jesus access to every room in our hearts so that we can bring our character into alignment with our image and be set free and healed.
See, we have a lot of Christians… Once again, very awkward claps. I love it. I know you don't know whether to clap or to listen because I keep talking. I get it. I get it.

We have a lot of Christians who confess their sins so they can be saved. Christians—this is the book of Romans—we have very few Christians who are like, "Hey, confess your sins to one another so that you can be healed."
So, we confess our sins to God to be saved. And you can be saved from anything because His blood on the cross covers everything. We confess our sins to one another so that we can find healing.

About two years ago my wife and I were standing in our kitchen the week of Thanksgiving. We looked up and saw a water mark on our drywalled ceiling and then noticed that there was water dripping all the way down the inside of the wall.

We had somebody come to check it out. And apparently my daughter's interior shower pipe had a slow leak in it. We don't know for how long. But it was just a consistent dripping that had been going on for a long time concealed inside of an interior wall until it got to the place where it got to be concealed no longer. By the time we figured it out the whole inside of the wall had been drenched in water all of the way down the three levels of our house, down into the basement. So, what had been concealed inside of an interior wall had been covered up by a pretty good looking piece of drywall and paint and furniture and furnishings for a long, long time until it could be concealed no longer.

And we had to have a whole remediation crew come out and do the dryers. Any of you had to do the dryers in your house? It's awful. It's like jet engines. We were walking around with noise cancelling headphones in the house. Plastic up everywhere. It looked like we were on the set of ET or something. I mean, it was horrible.

That's where black mold can come from. Black mold can grow in the interior walls of your house for a really long time and you never know it until you get sick.

And that's how character works. Character is the framing and the foundation; image is the drywall and the paint. And you can manage your image for a while, but eventually the weight of that becomes too much to maintain and it ends up coming out. And, oftentimes by the time it ends up getting exposed, it's caused a lot of damage and hurt, instead of you coming clean with it so that Jesus can heal you in the moment.

And all of us, every single day... This is why confession and repentance should be a daily thing for a Christian, not a once a quarter thing. It's that we are constantly bringing that to Jesus, constantly cleaning up the system so that way He can bring healing and redemption to our lives.

Here's a very convicting question that I'm going to ask you. I'm not going to spend a whole lot of time on it because it's super convicting.
Could my private character survive public inspection?

That's the question. Just sit with that for a little bit. Hey, by the way guys... Hey, look right at me and let me smile at you. God already knows anyway. Think you're hiding anything from Him?

How many of you have kids and they think they're sneaking candy into their room and you know it. And all you're trying to do; you're not trying to shame them by getting them to confess it. You want to set them free from it.

Proverbs 5:21:
"For a man's ways are in full view of the Lord, and he examines all his paths." (NIV)
See, this is just an invitation for you to come clean with what God already knows anyway.

And then the very last segment, verse 41, it says this:
"And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny.

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. 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.'"

So, here's the image that I want you to get into your mind. Jesus is in the Temple doing a little people watching. How many of you love some good people watching? At the airport or at the mall? I love to watch people because it gives me some good sermon illustrations. Be careful about being a friend with a pastor because everything can and will be used against you. Alright?

Now, Jesus is in the Temple and He's doing a little people watching. And I think this is hilarious. He sits down across from the collection boxes. That's where He chooses to do the people watching. Keep in mind that they didn't have online pay stuff then. They didn't have Apple Pay. They would come and they would come with literal coins to drop in the money box. Could you imagine going to drop in your offering and Jesus is sitting there? "What's up, bro? What are you going to do today?" Right?

And what would happen is that they would bring tangible coins and offerings. Some of us are old enough to remember when we used to actually carry around money with us. And they would drop it into these collection boxes. Now, the bigger the coin the louder the clank. And it turned into a performance. So, for them they are like, "Hey, the bigger the coin the louder the noise it's going to make. And people are going to notice that we are giving a really big offering. So, this, once again, turned into a part of image management. And they loved that. This is what Jesus is calling out.

But what really gets Jesus' attention was not the rich people dropping in big coins. It was a widow who drops in two small copper coins. In fact, this was the smallest amount that you could possibly think to drop in.

These two coins, Mark tells us, were worth about one sixty-fourth of a denarius. Now last week we said that a denarius was about a day's wage. That's how little she dropped in. And she had two coins. She dropped them both in. That was everything she had, literally. Meaning that she wasn't going to eat again until she earned more.

So, here's the question. Why was Jesus so pleased with what she gave? Because by every measurable metric her gift was inconsequential. They are not going to do a whole lot with two small copper coins.

In fact, if anybody had a reason not to give that day, don't you think it would have been her? She could have rationalized it and nobody would have blamed her. She could have said, "You know what? I'm a widow. I'm at the end of my rope. These two small coins are all I have." She could have just dropped in one and kept one. But she dropped in both.

And if she wanted to get herself off the hook she could have let herself off of the hook of being generous. Because I've done that. I've done that. Have you ever done that? "I really want to be generous and I am going to be generous but now just isn't the best time.

The HVAC unit at the house just went out. Or, we had to have a remediation company to come out to dry out the walls. Or, the kids are in diapers. Or, the kids are in college. And yet, she gave sacrificially because that's what sacrificially means. Sacrificially means I'm going to be generous even when it's not the right time to do so.

Now, the application here isn't, "Well, I guess the less I give the purer my motives." That's not the application. Because many of you, I think we all know this intuitively:

You can be just as greedy in poverty as you are in abundance
We call that college. I let myself out of being generous all of the time in college because I was living off of Ramen noodles and working a part time job.
You can give a large amount due to your affluence, and still not sacrifice
You can also give a large amount due to your affluence, and it's still not sacrificial. It checks all of the boxes. If anybody knew the amount that you gave they'd be impressed because that sounds like a lot. But you know that you really didn't miss it. It's not sacrificial.

See, the whole point of this isn't the amount that you give. The issue right here is character related. When I give, and actually do anything for that matter, what is my motive and who is my audience? Those are the questions.
And those are two really important questions when it comes to character formation: What's my motive for doing and saying and posting anything? And who is my audience?

See, the primary difference between the widow and these scribes and Pharisees was not in the amount she gave it was in the fact that she gave sacrificially and it was not a performance. Nobody was applauding her offering except for Jesus. And He was noticing what she was doing and what stirred Him was that He said, "She gave her all."
Now, keep in mind, here in just a few days Jesus is going to give His all. He's going to lay down His very life for us on a cross. And that's what got His attention. Because that came from a real place of trust and vulnerability in her character.

So, in this text we have a crowd that was wowed by a clever, theological response; we have scribes dressed to the nines for applause, but nothing of substance behind it; and we have the widow with nothing impressive to give except two small coins and a whole heart. And that's what Jesus commends. So, as we come down to this time of decision right now, I want us to contemplate this. Jesus, really what He wants in this talk of character is that Jesus wants access to all of you because He gave you access to all of Him. And He laid down His life to pay for your sins so that you would not continue to on in image management but that you might come clean with everything to have your character redeemed and restored, bringing your outside into alignment with your inside, which is what He created you to be.

It's been said this way. When you look at yourself in a mirror that shows you what you are. I don't know about you. I'm not going to ask for hands to raise, but chances are when you look at yourself in a mirror, you don't necessarily focus on your good qualities. You focus on the thing that you are not super happy about. When you look at yourself in a mirror, it just kind of shows you what you are right in the moment.

What I want you to know is that God's mirror tells you what you can become. He doesn't see you just as you are, He actually sees as who you can be—fully sanctified, character formed in the image and likeness of Jesus. And that's what He is beckoning you toward.

And right now He's just standing at the door and He's extending this invitation for you to let Him in and for Him to do a little bit of inspection behind your drywall and paint to the foundation and the frame. And to say, "God, what will You find? What have I been living my life for? Have I been living for the applause of men or the glory of God?"

Here's maybe another way to frame it. Right now, in your life, what are you gazing at that has your fulltime energy and attention? And what are you just glancing at? And for many of us we've got those things flipped around.
For many of us we're focusing or gazing on our image and we only glance at character. Or, we're gazing at our shame and our guilt and we're only glancing at forgiveness and grace. Or, we're gazing at fear and we only glance at faith. Or, we are gazing at the health diagnosis or the marriage problems or the bank account or politics or we're gazing at the world and we only glance at the Kingdom.

And, right now maybe we need to flip those around and we need to gaze at who Jesus is and we only need to glance at insecurity and that shame. And it is never too late to give Him full access to begin the demo work of redemption and sanctification.

Listen. Pride and insecurity come from the same place. It is a lack of understanding as to who you really are and who Jesus really is. And what He desires of us every single day is that we would come to Him with both our crowns and our wounds, our strengths, and our weaknesses. That, when I'm good at something I exalt Jesus with that. It doesn't just terminate with me. And when I'm struggling with something I confess that to Jesus so that He can take it and I'm not living in it any longer.

Somebody who is full of pride or somebody who is full of shame it's really all rooted in the same place. And Jesus is inviting you right now to give Him your strengths and your weakness, your crowns, and your wounds.
I love this quote from Charles Spurgeon. He said this:

God does not need your strength. He has more than enough power on His own. He asks for your weakness. He has none of that himself. And He is longing, therefore, to take your weakness and use it as an instrument in His own mighty hand. Will you not yield your weakness to Him and receive His strength?
I love that invitation. And that's the invitation today. We've been trying to create a culture around here the last several months of just coming forward, coming to the altar. This is not meant to be a manipulative thing. It's not hype. Nobody is twisting your arm. You do this because it's between you and God.
Really, that's what I want invite today. It's that we would come down to the altar at all of our locations or come into the aisle and that we would bow to our knees in worship. And really what we are doing is we are taking off the mask and saying, "God, this is me. I'm inviting You in."

Maybe for some of us what we need to do, and oftentimes this is what happens, we come down front when we are hurting. And that's what actually keeps some of us from coming down front because we look at people coming down front and we're like, "Man, their life must be really messed up." No, actually the ones who stay in their seats are probably a little bit more messed up because we all need it. We all need to come down. We need to lay those wounds down before Jesus.

But, how about this? There are some of us who actually need to come and we need to come down to our knees and we actually need to give God the good things that have happened in our life. "Hey, God. I got the promotion this week." "The relationship is going really well." "Things have maybe never been better. And you know what, God?" Here's what the Bible calls this, "I'm going to take my crown and I'm going to give it to You. I'm going to exalt You in that. Thank you for that."

And here's how our character stays into formation with our image. When we give God our crowns and we give Him our wounds, we exalt Him in the good things, we cry out to Him with the challenging things, and then we can walk in—here's the term—consecrated confidence knowing that He is the God of the good and the bad. That He can handle whatever it is that is going on behind the scenes so that we can continue to come to Him and remove the mask and be real before Him.

See, it's been said that people tend to become what the most important people in their life tell them they'll become. And right now Jesus is looking at you, He calls you a redeemed son or daughter of the King. You are not who the enemy says that you are. You are not pinned down in your shame or guilt. You are not your addiction. You are not your affair. You are not your divorce. You are not all of the things that keep you pinned down. You are who Jesus said that you are and who He died for you to be and you can actually bring that into the light and know.

That's the simple invitation right now. And if revival is going to come it's going to come with people who are fully confessed and consecrated before the Lord. And so, I'm going to ask across all of our locations if you would stand to your feet. I'm going to pray and then I'm just going to open it up for you to come. If you would just begin to come down front right now, just as you are, to the altar to remove the mask. Give Him your crowns. Give Him your wounds.
Father, we come to You right now and we thank you for this invitation to just be real, to know that we can, that we don't need to manage our image anymore, that we can come to You just as we are knowing that You'll receive us by Your grace and that Your Holy Spirit will begin that sanctifying work within us to refine us, to shape us into the image and the likeness of Jesus. But that first has to come when we are willing to get real.

So, Father, we come to You today removing the masks, giving You our crowns, giving You our wounds. We pray that You would receive them today as we lift our voices in worship. We ask this in Jesus' name. And everybody said: Amen. Would you come as we sing?

Bless you guys for being courageous enough to come. Some of us it's fear. Some of us are watching way too much news, scrolling way too much on social media, it has gotten us spun off to where we've taken our eyes off of the King of kings who is sovereign over the kingdom of men.

For some of you it's an addiction of some kind and you've tried everything. You've tried covenant eyes, you've tried accountability, you've tried counseling but none of it is working and you need to stop negotiating and be in full surrender to God.

Some of you, you've been contemplating taking your own life. You've not told anybody that yet. And you are teetering right now. You need to come and you need to let that go before God.

Some of you are seeking approval for the wrong things. Some of you I haven't hit your thing, but you know what your thing is and you need to let that go and bring it to the altar and come before the Lord.

Right now, I want all of us whether you are standing at your seat or you've come down to the altar to lean in and to ask the Holy Spirit to do what only He can by taking full control of our lives.

King Jesus we stand before You today and we do not want to be in the place of the contenders who tried to take you out in our text today. God, we want to have a heart like the scribe who comes to you with genuineness and authenticity and we want to be people who step into your Kingdom coming. So, Father, would You please meet us in all of these rooms that we may be gathered in? Would Your Spirit please move right now as we lift up our voices to live for Your Kingdom and Your Kingdom alone? We ask this in the power of Jesus' name. And everybody said: Amen and Amen.