

Time of Grace Ministry
Death to Selfie: Serve Like a Ninja
Mark 12:38-44
October 13, 2019

Pastor Mike Novotny

Every time there'd be a good deed, Jesus would initially be impressed but he would never end the conversation without asking, "Why?" Because Jesus knew something that many of you know; that if someone does something good for you, with impure motives, it's really not that good.

Kanye West had never seemed so spiritual. Back in 2016, Kanye graced the stage of Saturday Night Live as their musical guest and from the second he stepped on it was worship. Behind him stood a crowd of gospel singers; incredible booming voices dressed in white and they would lift up their hands in prayer and in praise. Joining him on stage was guest after guest who cried out to God with questions and confessions of faith, almost like David in the ancient psalms. It was spiritual and it was beautiful until the second the song was done. 'Cause as soon as the last note was sung, Kanye popped up off the floor, he grabbed his mic and he shouted, "KanyeWest.com. It's streaming! Now, now, now, right now. KanyeWest.com. Check it out!" And if you think that was awkward, you should have seen the actual performance. It's confusing and it's jarring and you stare at the screen and you're forced to ask yourself, "What was that?" Like it seemed so spiritual in the moment but was that really the spirit? And it seemed like people were calling out to Christ but was that really in the end about Christ or was it about a clique and a website and a Kanye?

Did you know that Jesus talked about stuff like that all the time? Before there was a Kanye, before there was hip hop, before there was an internet, before there was an SNL, Jesus talked about this really subtle danger of doing things that looked good on the outside but they didn't look so good to God on the inside. And he wasn't just chastising rappers and then people who want more likes and Instagram followers. He talked about this all the time for people like you and for like me. People who had faith in God; people who looked very, very spiritual.

Jesus wanted to make sure you and I would never fall into the trap of doing the right thing but doing it for the wrong reason. And that's why Jesus, throughout his teaching, was always asking this one question; he'd come back to it again and again and again. The question was: Why?

So often in church, we think about the "what?" What's right and what's wrong? In the world that's falling apart and doing whatever it wants, what should Christians do? And that's a good question but Jesus would follow that question with, "Why?" In fact, I think if Jesus would show up and he would follow you around this week. Every time you did something that looked good, he'd be like those seagulls in - is it Finding Nemo? - that goes, "Why? Why? Why? Why? Why?" "Okay, you're in church, hey, that's great! You could be in a thousand places but you came here. Why'd you come? Oh, you're giving an offering today? I'm God, so I know what's inside that envelope. That's really generous! Why are you giving that much?" "You play in the band. You preach a sermon. You get to stand in front of people and talk about God and lead worship and praise. That's great! But why are you standing up there?" "You volunteer at your

church in your community. You tutor at a local school. Great. Why?" "I see you doing the laundry; I see you helping out at home. I see you working your hardest at school. That's great but why?"

Every time there'd be a good deed, Jesus would initially be impressed but he would never end the conversation without asking why? Because Jesus knew something that many of you know; that if someone does something good for you with impure motives, it's really not that good. If you're in a marriage and someone serves you just because they want to get something back, in the end it doesn't feel like service. If someone says something nice to you but you found out in the end they wanted to get something from you, you don't consider it praise; you consider it flattery and it doesn't bring you closer to someone who pushes you further away. And so, Jesus knew for his people, his followers, it would be important to do the right thing but also to do it for the right reason. And that's what I want to dig in with you today. If you're ever going to truly worship God instead of just doing this all for a show, if you're ever going to actually love your neighbor, your family, your enemy, your boss, your employees, your brothers and sisters in the church, you need to know this. And actually, we're going to find out if you're ever going to find freedom, like real peace for your soul, to not feel the pressure of getting something, it's important not just to do the right thing but to have a right heart. And so, if you brought a Bible with you today, or you just want to follow along with me on the screen, we're going to jump into Mark 12 today and see what Jesus taught about attention.

Now here's the big idea if you're taking notes in your program today: Jesus wants us to pay attention to attention. If you're doing something to get attention - and we're always getting attention - who's the attention from and who's the attention for? Pay attention to attention.

Alright, let's look at the teaching from Mark 12. It says, "As he taught, Jesus said, 'Watch out, pay attention, to the teachers of the law. They like,' - circle that word in your mind - "they like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted with respect in the market places and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. They devour widow's houses and for a show make lengthy prayers."

Now watch out, Jesus says. Pay attention to people who like getting attention. And he gives us four examples and if you're taking notes, I want you to remember these. Jesus says, first of all, pay attention to the clothes. You catch that line? He said watch out for people who like to walk around in flowing robes. And I want to say, "Wait, Jesus. I used to wear a robe, believe it or not. At my last church, I had the big white robe. Is that - was that bad?" Besides having little kids come up to me after church saying, "Nice dress, Pastor Mike," you know, should pastors not wear robes or collars or crosses? And you know what Jesus would say to that? Well, it depends why? Because a robe is a symbol; it's a symbol of difference, of status. Not everyone gets to be the pastor in a church and if you wear a robe, people know you're different from the second that they see you. Now Jesus said, "If the robe has a good purpose, if it's symbolic of this call from God, that God has sent me to share his word with you, great. But if you're wearing the clothes just to get attention, pay attention." This is why rappers love fashion, right? Have you noticed that if you like rap music like I do, they're always rapping about Gucci this and Versace that and the Cristal they're drinking and the carats they're rocking like, you ever think these hard guys, sometimes these like gangsters, hard rappers like, why are they so concerned about their clothes?

But you know the answer, right? Clothes bring attention; they say, "I'm somebody. Man, where I came from, nobody could afford this but I'm not nobody anymore; I've made it. I've become someone and you can see it from the label that I wear on my clothes." By the way, before you judge rappers, my neighbor bought a knockoff purse, like that Burberry pattern that looked just right except it didn't cost you a thousand dollars. Why would we do that? Like why would we buy something of poor quality - why would we buy a counterfeit watch if it's going to break within a year? Well, because if it says the right letters, if it has the right embroidered logo, it says, "I'm somebody. I don't shop there or there, I can rock this because I'm not just anybody." Jesus said, "Careful! Watch out."

Second, he said, pay attention to the hellos. Remember his words? He said, "Watch out for those people who love to be greeted with respect in the marketplace." Number three: He said, "Pay attention to the chairs." He said watch out for those teachers of the law who want the most important seats in the synagogues, in the banquets. And finally, Jesus said, "Watch out for the prayers." He said, "Watch out for those who for a show make lengthy prayers."

Now some of you might be familiar, right before Jesus taught the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6, he had this really long section. He said this: "Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. So when you give to the needy, don't announce it with trumpets as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets," - here it is - "to be honored by others. And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites for they love to pray standing in the synagogues on the street corners to be seen by others. When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do for they disfigure their faces to show others that they're fasting." You know, the word "hypocrite" comes from the Greek word "hypokrites;" it was the Greek word for "actor;" someone who hid their actual face behind a mask. Jesus said be careful when you give and you fast and you pray that people don't see the mask as some devoutly religious person but beneath the mask is just the heart that wants self instead of Savior.

I've got to tell you that this is going to be one of the more difficult things you do this week. I mean, doing the right thing is really hard. You agree with me on that? Doing it for the right reason takes a miracle of God. At least, that's what we noticed in our family. A while ago, we noticed this kind of subtle but sinister thing happening in our home. A few years back, we came up with these family values; like some things we'd write on little pieces of wood and put up on the wall and write on the chalkboard door. Things like, "Date until we die." We're going to date each other until the day we die. "We adore experiences." Like, we're going to volunteer for crazy stuff 'cause it's going to be a great story when all of it's done. But probably our most famous family value was just two words, the words, "You first." And we're always saying to our kids, we're always saying in our home, "You first makes us blessed but me first makes a mess." 'Cause every time there's a mess, every time my wife and I aren't great in marriage, every time our girls are fighting, it's always because we're trying to get what we want. It's so wonderful when we say you first. But you know what started to happen? We started to say "you first" and look around. The girls would disagree and they'd be fighting back and forth and then they'd stop and one would look right at me and say, "You first." She'd look back at me and I think I know where she learned it from. Sometimes my wife goes to bed pretty early and I'm up watching Netflix and I think, "You know what I should do? I should fold the laundry that my wife didn't

have time to fold." So I fold it up, I watch the show, but then do you know where I leave the basket? Like right in the middle of the hallway so she has to like trip over it when she gets out of bed like, "Oh my goodness! The laundry - who folded? That's right! I folded the laundry; that was pretty awesome, huh?" It wasn't just like serving and doing the right thing and so we drew this picture. If you'd stop by our kitchen, you would see this little picture up on our whiteboard. We call it the "You first ninja." We want to serve, we want to do what's best, but we want to do it like a ninja. Like, I'm in to serve and then I'm out and I'm not saying a word or whisper. And we've learned that's really, really, really hard.

Alright, so how do you know? Like how do you know if you're doing the right - if you're here today for the right reason - how do you know? And if you give an offering today, how do you know that your heart's right? And if you're trying to serve someone at work, how do you know that that's right? Well, here's my simple diagnostic question. Now my question for you would be: "Would you do it again if no one paid attention?" Like if you wrote the fattest check in Christian giving history, there were so many zeroes the ushers would look at it again and say, "What?" But no one said a word to you. There was no special visit, no thank you email from the pastor, no one said a word. Would your heart in some way regret, be bothered, about the gift? Or if you volunteer, like if you gave your time and you served and there was no shout out and there was no, "Hey! Let's put our hands together and thank this person." At the end of the year, how would you feel about your service? To do an actual good work in the sight of God is seriously difficult. And yet, Jesus is serious. Look at the last thing he said in Mark 12:40. He said these men who just do things to get attention will be "punished most severely." And I want to say, "Whoa! Punished? Jesus, 95 percent of people don't even do the right thing and like, here we're trying. Punished most severely?" Like why would Jesus hate it, hate it, hate it when religion was just used for your resume? You might start out doing the right thing for the wrong reason but if you love attention, if you need it, eventually you'll stop doing the right thing altogether.

I want to speak especially to the students who are here today. Can you raise your hand if you're in school - college, high school, middle school, grade school? We've got a lot of students, young men and women, here today. I just want to warn you that if you sin, the world will pay attention. Do you know what's on the news every single day? Stories of train wrecks and disaster because people can't help but watch it. If you're humble, if you're modest, if you're gentle, if you're kind, if you're forgiving, people miss that stuff. But if you're edgy, if you're snarky, if you're sexy, if you're blunt, if you're biased, people give you a whole bunch of attention. If you wear that to the dance, they will pay attention. If you wear that to the pool, they will pay attention. If you snapchat that and it's crazy and it's wild and it's out of control, people will pay attention; they'll talk about it. And if your heart needs and craves attention, if you need them to turn their face and look at you, you'll do things that will make the holy angels turn their faces and look away. Instead of joy and rest and peace, these things that Jesus wants to give, we end up on this like treadmill that we can never get off of. Because you know, if you say something funny on social media today, people laugh and give you attention and write in the comments. But then they'll chase some social media squirrel. Do you think they're going to praise you for the next week? The next minute? So you know what you've got to do? You've got to be funny again. You're going to have to impress them again and again and again and again. And if you need to be the fastest and the funniest and the best and the cutest and the thinnest, you're just going to be on this

treadmill that will kill you. It's not just you that's going to get hurt; other people are going to get hurt. That's a really curious line that Jesus says there at the end of that story. He says, "Watch out for these people who devour widows houses." What do you think Jesus meant by that? I'm not positive but I think he meant there are going to be some widows who come to church and they've only got so much money because it's not a two income family. Maybe their husband was making most of the money in the ancient world and they only have a little bit to give and pastor's going to preach about generosity, right? He's going to want them to give and because they love God, they're going to listen to him and they're going to give. But what happens if the pastor just wants attention? If he just wants the money because the money means success and we can build a bigger building and people know I'm not just an average spiritual leader; I'm somebody. Pay attention. You will devour widow's houses; you will use people. And God hates it when people get used.

When a man is only nice to his wife because he wants sex in return. And God hates it when his daughters are treated like that. When someone only serves in a home because they really want to get something back, God just hates the deception. When he gives someone a place in business that they need to be a manager and a boss and these people aren't here to be loved and served and cared for, they're just about the bottom line and my profit and how I look in the eyes of my boss, God hates it when people - especially the least of people - get used for attention. And so it's a hard message but Jesus says be careful, be careful, be careful. This will blow up your heart. This will blow up the church. This will blow up the world. Pay attention to attention.

But thankfully, that's not where this story ends. 'Cause right when all the teachers of the law were walking in with their flowing robes and raising their hands with long, long prayers so everyone could see, there wasn't nobody that crept into the ancient church that nobody paid attention to. So quiet, she was like a ninja. But someone noticed. God noticed. Look at the ending of the story from Mark 12:41: "Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd put in their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts." Can you imagine how much attention that got? It says, "But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins worth only a few cents." This widow showed up and she gave these. These are actually 2,000 year old coins called lepta, l-e-p-t-a. They were the cheapest, most common coins, in the ancient world. One lepta was worth 1/128th of a day's wages; so about four minutes of work if you're working an eight hour day. These were so cheap, they were so common in the ancient world, that don't be impressed by my 2,000 year old coins. You can have your own set for about ten bucks on Amazon after church. Alright? This is nothing. And this poor widow comes shuffling up and she gives everything she has and no one pays attention. It's too peon-ous amounts and half of a measure and no one turns their head except Jesus.

Look how the story ends, verse 43: "Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, 'Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in everything - all that she had to live on.'" Jesus notices ninjas and when there's no praise and no recognition and no shout out and no, Lord, it was not worthless because God notices. And if there's one thing that will free you from this deep desire for attention it's that; that God notices. God sees. And not just sees, in all those warnings in Matthew 6 where Jesus said be careful of giving and be careful of fasting and be careful of

praying, do you know what he said three times after every single one of those mini-sermons? I'll show you. Matthew 6, he says, "Your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you."

So how can you and I do that today? If we're going to walk out of here today and we're going to do the right thing for the right reason, if we're going to be "you first" kind of people who bring blessing into this world, then find peace in our hearts, well, there's two things I need you to remember. And the two things you find on these ancient coins. You can't see them from a distance so maybe let me blow up a picture and show you what's stamped on these coins.

My version is pretty hard to see but this coin on the left has the picture of an ancient anchor. You see it? It's right here on the top - here's the bottom of the anchor and the top of it. And this one's even harder to see; the guy who stamped it, I think, had a little too much to drink before his shift at work so this is a wheel bursting with light so here's the hub of the wheel and here's the rays coming out and you kind of see the rim a bit on the outside. When this woman gave her gift, she was thinking about an anchor and she was thinking about light. And before you go on social media, you have to remember those two things: That God is my anchor and God is my light.

When you're killing it at work and when you're about to lose your job, God sees. And when people praise you, "Hey, thank you so much for cooking these meals!" And when they just chow them down, they leave the dirty dishes for you to clean up, God sees. When you're at the top of your game, the prime of life, God sees. And when you're in a nursing home and you can't do what you used to do and people need to push you around in a chair, God sees. There is this anchor that every single day you and I are going to wake up because of Jesus and we'll be loved and noticed and cared for and valuable and what we do is never, ever in vain. God is paying attention but he's not scowling; he's not thinking "how could you?" Because of what Jesus did - forgiving our sins, dying and rising from the dead - when God looks on his people, there's not disappointment and there's not anger and there's not indifference. It's that he's shining on us and that means everything.

You know what happens to my little girls? They'll build Legos in the living room and they'll come running to me like they do 1,700 times a week: "Daddy! Daddy! Look, look, look! Come here, come here, come here." And when I put down my phone and I stop what I'm doing and I give them my full attention and their daddy smiles at them, do you know what happens? Their hearts are good. And you can look into your Father's face with all that acceptance and all that love, you can creep out, put on your ninja costume, and serve in secret. Because if there's one thing our world needs, if there's one thing our hearts need, its secret service.

So brothers and sisters, let's leave here today and let's do the right thing and because of the love of Jesus Christ, let's do it for the right reason.

Let's pray.

Dear God, it's crazy to think that you love us as much as you do. And if I think about all the good things that I've done in my life and examine my heart, I just wonder how many good things I've ever done? And yet, the fact that you would hold none of that against me, none of that

against us; Jesus, that you would die on the cross and the Father would turn his face - he would stop paying attention to you so that he could start paying attention to us - we are so grateful for what you've done!

Thank you, Jesus, that our sin is nailed to the cross. Thank you, that because of you, there is no condemnation and there's no disappointment. Thank you that there is only mercy and peace and joy and celebration. God, we live in a world where so many people know that there's hypocrisy in the church. There used to be people using God's name to get money and to grow bigger and to become popular. Please, free all of us from that. Help this thing to be pure; help it to be transparent and authentic. Help us not to be hypocrites. Help us take off the masks and do the right thing for the glory of your name and the actual good of people. I pray, God, for honest confessions and I pray, God, for selfless service. I know that you get instantly energized and restore broken relationships and marriages if we would serve, so stir our hearts to serve. Please bless us today, God, as a spiritual community and help us to remember before we even do a thing to serve other people that we are already somebody because of Jesus Christ. That's why we pray today with confidence, with boldness, because we're not strangers; we're sons and we're daughters; people that you delight in. We pray all these things, Jesus, in your wonderful, beautiful, and saving name, Amen.



TIME OF GRACE®

Death to Selfie: Serve Like a Ninja

Study Notes

Summary

The rich gave massive offerings on a particular day in the temple. But Jesus didn't say a word or hand out an award. Instead, he noticed and praised the poorest widow who quietly gave the "smallest offering." In our day of public recognition, what would Jesus say? He would ignore those who praise themselves and praise those who serve God in secret.

- **Mark 12:38-40:** ³⁸ As he taught, Jesus said, "Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, ³⁹ and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. ⁴⁰ They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely."
- Pay attention to _____, _____, _____, and _____.
- **Matthew 6:1,2,5,16:** ¹ "Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. . . . ² So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. . . . ⁵ And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. . . . ¹⁶ When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting."
- **Mark 12:40:** "These men will be punished most severely."
- **Mark 12:41-44:** ⁴¹ Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. ⁴² But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents. ⁴³ Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. ⁴⁴ They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on."
- **Matthew 6:4:** Your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Points to Ponder

1. What do you do/say/post/wear/etc. that tends to get people's attention? Spend three minutes in prayer asking God to examine your heart and reveal the motives behind what you do.
2. Read Jesus' classic words on attention seeking in Matthew 6:1-18. Find three themes that run through his examples of giving, praying, and fasting.
3. Study the ancient blessing from Numbers 6:24-26. How could these words about God paying attention to you give you peace this week?

Homework for Next Week

Read Mark 13:1-31.

"Emotionally we're a culture of seven-year-olds. Have you ever had that moment when you are updating your status and you realize that every status update is just a variation on a single request: 'Would someone please acknowledge me?'"

—Marc Maron, Attempting Normal