

# Keynotes from Martin Walker's am Sermon on 08/08/2021

Title: "Are you impressed?"

Text: Mark 12 v 41 > 13 v 2

## Scripture references from the ESV

**Mark 12:41 – 13:2** And he (*Jesus*) sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. <sup>42</sup> And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. <sup>43</sup> 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. <sup>44</sup> 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."

**13** And as he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!" <sup>2</sup> And Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."

There has been much to be impressed by in the last 20 months – the NHS, other key workers, the impressively fit Olympic athletes just to name a few. Here at BBC, you have appointed a new staff member, strengthened your eldership, and finished the building. You have gone from having no significant online presence to livestreaming services on your YouTube channel, with not far short of 15,000 views. You might be quite impressed by all of that!

In Mark's gospel, we see that Jesus and the disciples were all impressed, but they were not impressed with the same thing:

- The disciples were impressed by a feat of engineering that truly was impressive, and would still be impressive even today. However, **it was humanly possible.**
- Jesus was impressed by something the disciples would have missed completely if he had not drawn their attention to it. However, **it was humanly impossible.**

**Let us look to be impressed by what is humanly impossible, and by the one who is always impressive.**

Jesus was sat watching people put money in the treasury in the temple courts (**v41** above). He could hear the clang of coins as they were dropped in to what were probably funnels of bronze that were attached to the offering boxes. He made no comment about the large sums put in by the rich, though he would have heard a lot of noise from the coins being dropped in. Then a

widow, someone considered unimpressive and unimportant in her day, walked up and dropped in two coins of the lowest value, with almost no noise.

**However, those two coins made a spiritual noise so loud that it is still being heard over 2,000 years later.**

The disciples were a little way away apparently admiring the Temple refurbishments made by Herod, and Jesus had to call them to him. Having pointed out what the widow had done, and the underlying message of her actions, one of the disciples immediately moved the conversation on to the physical architecture they had been impressed by.

Jesus didn't rebuke them, but he put a massive dampener on their enthusiasm for the physical (13:2 above)!

**If they had been looking around with spiritual eyes, they would have been awestruck by the widow and not by the temple. We, too, should seek to be impressed and in awe of what is humanly impossible rather than what is humanly impressive but also humanly possible.**

**1. An impressive building** - it is easy to criticise the disciples but they had good reason to be impressed with what they were looking at.

Historians tell us that, for political reasons, Herod had offered to rebuild the temple that had previously been rebuilt

500 years earlier, when the Jews returned from exile. That work took about 10 years to complete and was finished before Jesus was born.

- Herod then extended it by building outer courts and other buildings with extravagant walls and entrances.
- The project did not actually get finished until AD 65, some 30 or so years after Jesus' resurrection.
- The temple site had to be enlarged to about 35 acres, and as it was on a hill, a massive retaining wall was needed. Some of the stones needed for this were up to 40 feet long and weighed up to 100 tonnes!
- Work was going on throughout Jesus' time, so people were naturally interested. This was an impressive structure and there was nothing like it anywhere else in the world. No wonder the disciples were impressed!

**So humanly possible but definitely significantly impressive!**

**2. An impressive widow** – whilst the disciples' heads had been turned by big stones and marble walls, Jesus' focus was on a living stone altogether more impressive.

What did he see in the widow? Clearly it was not the monetary value or the outward action of what she did. It was what lay behind the actions that drew divine attention.

**a. She gave wholeheartedly**

- The rich gave out of their disposable income, so they would not really miss what they had put in.
- The widow gave more (**v43**) because she didn't have disposable income! She gave sacrificially – all she had.
- She could have chosen to only put in one of her two coins and she would still have given more than the rich.

It would have been half her income and that would still have been impressive. When Zacchaeus gave away half of his income (**Luke 19: 1-10** see p4), Jesus said 'Today salvation has come to this house'. Yet the widow gave *all* she had.

**b. She gave willingly**

In doing this wholeheartedly, she must have done it willingly and joyfully even though it was all she had.

It is possible to be willing but not wholehearted. You can be willing to help or contribute but still have a limit to how much you are willing to help. However, it is not possible to be wholehearted without being willing. You can't be wholehearted reluctantly!

**Her actions followed where her heart led – joyfully, willingly, wholeheartedly for the Lord!**

**c. She treasured God above money**

She showed that she genuinely valued God above any earthly treasure. It wasn't just intellectual knowledge. She gave away all she had to live on, but she could only do that because she knew that in the Lord, she had something much more valuable than money.

- The rich gave away some financial treasure willingly because they knew they had more riches stored up.
- The widow gave away her financial treasure willingly because she was rich in God.

**She had the Lord and lacked nothing. This was not a theoretical belief for her. It was a joyful reality!**

**She knew that the Lord was of so much more value to her than money.**

This was truly impressive. The Bible tells us that 'the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil' (**1 Tim 6: 10**). Souls are

enslaved by the love of money, whether they are rich or poor, and are powerless to break free from the deeply rooted belief that money is their greatest need and is to be valued above all things.

**Outwardly unimpressive but inwardly astounding! The widow's heart was wholeheartedly for God and she sought**

**to please him. She really did value God more than money. He was her treasure and her portion.**

How do we understand this impressive heart for God? Who built this heart? Did she always have a heart like this? To answer that we need to briefly consider a doctrine –

### **3. An impressive work of God – regeneration (being born again)**

Regeneration is the complete reconstruction of the inner spiritual person, according to the design specification of the great commandment. **Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength (Mark 12:30).** The widow fits this description, with her wholehearted desire to please God, coupled with the ability to do so.

**When we look at a regenerated heart like this, we are looking at something only God can do.** The widow was living in Old Testament times and we don't see or hear her expressing faith in Jesus, but she was clearly spiritually alive. God spoke about regeneration in **Ezekiel 36:26-27** (see p4), and caused it to happen in people's lives before the promise was more clearly fulfilled in Jesus.

**The divine, regenerating hand of God had been at work in the heart of this widow.**

So how do the temple and the widow compare?

- The temple was renovated with new stones arranged by expert builders, but the widow was a **living stone** with a heart reconstructed by the hand of God.
- The temple took a lifetime to complete yet was destroyed only 5 years later in AD 70 – the widow's act of giving has outlasted the temple by thousands of years and she carried within her life from God that would never be destroyed.
- As impressive as the temple was, it brought Jesus deep heartache as he found it filled with money-changers and hypocrisy, but the apparently unimpressive widow brought praise from the eternal Son of God.

How should we apply all this to our lives?

- 1) **Be impressed and stirred by what God has done in you.** If you've been born again, you have this same life from God in you. Remember that God has given you a new heart

that not only wants to please him but is capable of doing so. God has done the impossible in you and living in the light of that leads to changed lives.

- 2) **Be impressed and stirred by what the Lord has done in your brothers and sisters.** These people are not just people you've got to know. They are part of this local body of Christ – a church! They may be annoying at times, or do things that hurt us, but if they are born again, they are walking miracles. Seeing each other in the light of what God has done can help bring a new sense of honouring one another. It can bring a new joy and sense of privilege at being part of this, and a new desire to encourage and strengthen one another.
- 3) **Be impressed and hungry for God to do the same in the lives of many more.** It is so exciting to see the incredible work of God's Spirit, bringing new life where there was none before. In 30 or 40 years, who knows whether the new building will still be standing but for now, let it serve to encourage and house the creation of new life, the impressive reconstruction of souls that will outlast all we see here.
- 4) **Above all be impressed by Jesus.** The essence of this new life is that we are able to see, love, follow, obey, worship and rejoice in his value, worth, splendour and beauty. We can know his sovereign power, his mercy, grace and truth and his life-changing presence.

**New life is unspeakably impressive because Jesus is unspeakably impressive.**

**Be impressed!**

**Luke 19: 1-10** He entered Jericho and was passing through. <sup>2</sup> And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. <sup>3</sup> And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. <sup>4</sup> So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. <sup>5</sup> And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." <sup>6</sup> So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. <sup>7</sup> And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." <sup>8</sup> And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it

fourfold.”<sup>9</sup> And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham.”<sup>10</sup> For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

**Ezekiel 36: 26-27** <sup>26</sup> And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.