

## ***Making Disciples Who Make Disciples***

Ministry year 2021-2022

Kenwood Baptist Church Sermon Series

Pastor David Palmer

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**TEXT: Mark 12:38-44**



We are in the midst of a year-long series on discipleship—disciple-making. Jesus' final command after His resurrection was to “*go and make disciples of all nations.*” That's the intention; that's His command. What does that mean: to make disciples? We've been working together with a definition that's rooted in the Gospels. The infinitive verb “to make a disciple” is used only a couple of times, but the result of making disciples fills the New Testament. We see “disciples” over 250 times. We've been working with this definition:

*Disciples are committed followers of Jesus,  
who learn to obey Him over time  
and joyfully share Him with others.*

Disciples are people who have committed themselves to following Jesus. It's that act of commitment that marks what we sometimes call conversion. It's a decision to start following Jesus. That initial act of commitment makes the definition and the difference between the time I was not yet a Christian and when I am a Christian. Some of us are still considering that and thinking about what that might mean. I'm so glad that you're here to expose yourself to God's Word and His Spirit in this context of worship.

To make a commitment to follow Jesus means to walk in His ways, and to do that we have to learn to obey Him. We don't learn just information about Jesus, but we learn to live as Jesus instructs us to live. We learn to love what Jesus loves. We actually learn to hate what Jesus hates. We learn to seek His honor above our own. This happens, thankfully, over time. We go to God's Word to discover how we can obey Him and what He commands us. But then, as disciple-

makers, we also joyfully share Him with others. This is a very exciting thing. I've said before that most people in the world come to know Jesus through the influence and witness of non-pastors. It is exciting to share Jesus and to share Him, not out of a sense of guilt or obligation, but with joy that we have found life in Him. That's what we've been doing.

In the last few months we've been looking specifically at that part of the definition where we learn to obey Jesus over time. We're looking at Jesus' teaching on several key topics. We looked at His teaching on relationships. We looked at His teaching on marriage and family. We looked at Jesus' teaching on holy time in April, and in May we're looking at Jesus' teaching on giving and generosity.

This morning we want to look at a very poignant passage in our Lord's teaching. The context of Jesus' teaching is in the temple courts. It's the climax of Holy Week, and Jesus is teaching in Jerusalem in the temple area, the so-called Second Temple. The First Temple was built by Solomon. The Second Temple was a spectacular building—beautiful. The Temple Mount area was the largest public square in the ancient world. Two hundred thousand people can gather on the Temple Mount. The Temple Mount was expanded dramatically by Herod the Great, the king of Jesus' infancy narrative. The temple courts accommodated large crowds. They also provided teaching space. As we move closer to the sanctuary proper, we see the Second Temple was a beautiful building. It took over 46 years to build. Think of a structure that was built with stone and decorated with gold. Ancient sources tell us that, if you have never seen the Jerusalem Temple, then you have never seen a beautiful building.

The context of our passage this morning is that Jesus is teaching in these courts, and He speaks initially with a warning. It's a warning beginning in Mark 12:38. He tells us to beware, to watch out for the scribes. Watch out for the scribes, the religious leaders—we might say the “celebrity pastor.” Watch out for those guys. I never want to be one of those guys. I don't want to be a pastor of influence. I don't want to be known and recognized by the number of followers or shares. “Watch out,” Jesus says. There are religious leaders that can make a catastrophic mistake. In fact, it's a set of mistakes, according to Jesus in this opening sentence. Jesus says:

*"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."*

His first warning is the ostentatious dress of the religious leaders. They like to be greeted in the marketplace. They seek out honor and public recognition.

Sometimes I have great joy when I'm greeting people. I love to greet people when they are coming in and when they are going out. Sometimes I love to meet people who are here for the first time, and they don't even know that I'm the pastor. I love that. Seeking greeting, though, requiring people to honor you, Jesus says, "Watch out for that." He says, "Watch out, because they like to have the best seats." The Greek text says "they like the first seats." "Watch out," Jesus says, "because they like the first places of honor at feasts." In Jesus' day, when people ate together at a banquet, the place of honor was next to the host. Usually, in a formal banquet, the seating is arranged in a U shape, and people recline while they eat, which is really enjoyable. But Jesus says, "Watch out, because they are 'honor seekers.'" They want people to notice them. Perhaps the most devastating line of Jesus' critique is: "Watch out for these religious leaders because they devour widows' houses." What does that mean, and why is that so offensive to our Lord? Jesus says, "They devour widows' homes." A deep prophetic critique in the Scripture is the unjust treatment of those who are on the margins or especially vulnerable. Israel's prophets condemn this type of action. Listen to Isaiah 1:16-17, when the Lord says:

*"Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause."*

In Jeremiah 22:3, Jeremiah says:

*"Thus says the LORD: 'Do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the resident alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place.'"*

God says "I'm watching how you treat these people."

Ezekiel says similarly in Ezekiel 22:6-7:

*"Behold, the princes of Israel in you, every one according to his power, have been bent on shedding blood. Father and mother are treated with contempt in you; the sojourner suffers extortion in your midst; the fatherless and the widow are wronged in you."*

Human greed and ambition, unchecked appetites for power, and honor-seeking will inevitably spill over into the unjust treatment of people from whom we imagine we can take or siphon resources with impunity, and the Lord says, "I can't stand that." Why? Our treatment of the vulnerable, our treatment of people on the margins, is a leading indicator of our love for the Lord, our love for the Lord who loves folks in that situation.

In Deuteronomy 10:17-18, we read:

*"For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. He executes justice for the fatherless*

*and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing.”*

The Hebrew idiom is “*God does not lift up the face.*” He doesn't see person to person in a different status. He is not partial.

In Matthew 25, Jesus invokes this imagery of our care for those who are vulnerable as a key indicator of our faith and faithfulness. In Psalm 68:4-5, God is described in this way:

*“Sing to God, sing praises to His name; lift up a song to Him who rides through the deserts; His name is the LORD; exult before Him! Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in His holy habitation.”*

Widows are of particular concern to the Lord God Almighty, and Jesus, in this passage, rebukes those who would use their position or influence to exploit those in greatest need. It's Jesus' final condemnation in His temple sermon.

In Mark 12:41, He then sits down opposite the treasury. The treasury is sometimes called the court of women. It's the place in the temple proper, where you move closer to the sanctuary, past the low, four feet high, balustrade wall that marks off the court of the nations and the court of the Israelites. You come up a set of stairs, and you enter into what was called the court of the women. It was also called the court of the treasury. Jesus has moved now closer to the sanctuary, and He's watching as people are giving their offerings. The Greek verb is an imperfect tense, which means this was ongoing—it didn't happen just once. The picture we are to imagine is Jesus, Lord of heaven and earth, sitting there in the treasury area, the court of the women. He's watching as people are giving their gifts.

The Bible can be trusted in such small details. We say it's the Word of God, the inspired Word of God, and it is. Sometimes it's astonishing to me how accurate the Bible is, even in these very small details. The English translation say that Jesus watched the people “*putting their money,*” and that's what we do. That's a good translation. That's what we're used to. We put our money in places. But the text says that they **threw** their money, or they **cast** their money. Why would it be described in this way? It's described in this way because this is how people actually carried out their giving.

Second Temple sources describe how the offerings were received and what the set-up and arrangement were. The Mishnah, a second century A.D. text that reflects back the customs and practums, described that there were thirteen boxes that were arrayed around this court of the treasury, or court of women. The Mishnah calls them “*shofars,*” which is interesting. Thirteen *shofars* were arranged around the area of the court of women. One of them was marked and indicated that it was receiving the half-shekel donation, which is described in Exodus 30. Every member of the community gives a minimum amount of offering to sustain and support the

worship of the nation. A half-shekel is a modest amount—half a daily wage—that everyone in the community gave to support the ongoing ministry. If you missed your half-shekel, then there was a second box that was marked “last year’s shekels.” There was a third box that was marked as the “offering for the doves.” What was that the offering for the doves? Remember when Joseph and Mary bring Jesus to the temple, they offer doves. They offer doves because the dove offering is an offering of purification. It was the very offering that was given by people who could not afford more. There was another box marked for “the bird offering.” There was another box marked for “wood” to supply the altar. There was another box that was marked for “incense” and another box marked for “gold” for the different platings and the gold for the vessels of the temple. Then there were six boxes that were marked as “freewill offering,” a gift that wasn’t required and had no specific obvious purpose. Almost half of the boxes were there for people to bring their voluntary gifts as an act of worship. And when you give, that’s what it is. It’s an act of worship. It’s an acknowledgment to God of what He has given to us. We give to God, and then it’s used for all these different purposes.

The temple boxes are called *shofars* because they were shaped like a trumpet. *Shofar* in Hebrew means a trumpet. The Temple Institute in Israel today has come up with two possible



examples of what these boxes would have looked like. It could have looked like a silver trumpet for calling people to worship. You can see how this offering box is placed with a trumpet coming up like that. Others have speculated that the offering box looked really like a shofar, like a ram's horn, and so it's built with the ram's horn shape, narrow at the end. We don't know for sure. None of these boxes have survived, but it's interesting that, with either

type of these vessels to receive the offering, the way that you would give your offering would be to toss or place your offering.

That's what is happening. Jesus sits and watches people come and give their offering. Remember that this is a very crowded public space. Jesus is watching, and He notices, and many others certainly do, too, that many wealthy people come and put in large sums. They probably were noticed for doing this. They set a large gift, and it was placed inside the offering box. All of a sudden, in the midst of this crowded scene, Jesus highlights one woman. Jesus calls our attention to a poor woman, a widow, who comes into the court of women and tosses in two small copper coins. The coin is described and identified as a *lepton*. A *lepton* means in Greek “thin.” It's the smallest coin that circulated in the first century. It is a common coin, and there are abundant examples of them. Here is just one. You can see how these copper coins

were used and circulated. The edges are worn off. On one side there is a typical Seleucid-shaped anchor. On the other side there is a royal symbol of a star with eight rays. There's a Hebrew inscription identifying the king. These coins are well worn, they are thin, and they are almost worthless. Mark, in fact, helps us understand the low value by interpreting them. Remember that Mark's Gospel is written to the Roman world, and the Roman world doesn't even use these coins, so Mark translates and says this is a *quadrus*, the smallest Roman coin that circulated.



English versions try to help us understand the value of this. The ESV says *"which make a penny."* It's the King James Version that translates that the woman threw in *"two mites,"* and that's where we get the expression, *"a widow's mite."* In fact, the mite was a coin that was the least



valuable coin that circulated in England in the 16th century. Two mites were a very small amount. The New English translations say *"worth less than a penny."* Probably the most accurate translation is the TNIV, which says that she put in *"two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny."* It's arresting, isn't it? Scholars tell us that the *lepta*

coins, two of them together, equal only 1/64th of a day's wage, almost insignificant. It was just a couple of coins, easy to pass over, easy to miss, with all kinds of activity happening, thirteen offering boxes, thousands of people a day, and Jesus was watching. Many people were offering generous portions, large sums, but Jesus draws our attention to a woman who makes an offering that from a monetary perspective seems almost worthless. Why does He do that? He calls the disciples to Him and interprets what He sees. Jesus, who knows everything, tells the disciples in Mark 12:43:



*"Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more...."*

That's a challenging word. Jesus says that her offering was more. We are used to counting things, aren't we? We count all kinds of things. We count things that don't count, and sometimes things that count, we don't count it all. Jesus says her offering is more, and He goes on:

*"Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box."*

That's an astonishing statement. Jesus says that her offering is the greatest offering that He sees. Her offering of two coins, worth less than a penny, is the greatest offering, the most valuable. Jesus continues to explain in Mark 12:44:

*"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."*

Jesus says that everyone else contributed out of their abundance. They gave out of their surplus, Jesus says. They tossed in something that cost them nothing, but she, out of her lack, out of her limited resource, gave everything she had. And there's a second phrase in Mark 12:44 that I think is the key to the whole scene. It's a phrase that describes all she had. Jesus describes that what she gave was "all of her life." That's what it says.

The translators wrestle with this expression. How do you capture that? The ESV says *"all she had to live on."* The text just says she "gave her life," and that's a world of difference, isn't it? The world of difference is a gift that costs me nothing, that is really a token gesture to God. Someone who receives the immeasurable, incalculable benefits from God daily may just give something that's a gesture, maybe even to be noticed by others, but really costs nothing. Jesus says, *"She gave her life."* You see, our giving reflects our life, doesn't it?

There is a very helpful thing for young married couples to do (and actually it's helpful for older married couples to do occasionally, to review and check.) Sometimes I challenge couples who are about to get married. I say, "After you get married, take 30 days to keep track of everything you spent—every penny, every dollar." And people say, "Why would I do that?" I say, "Do that, and then let's have a conversation about that." Everyone is surprised. Keep track of everything you spend for 30 days, to the dollar. Try it. Don't over-think about it. Don't process it during the 30 days. Just do it for 30 days, and then interpret your life based on the receipts. What do you love? What do you care about? What's important to you? What part does the Kingdom of God play in the receipts of my life?

Let's be absolutely clear: God doesn't need our financial resources. God does not lack anything in heaven, but God entrusts a phenomenal amount of resources to us as human beings, and He calls us to do what? What are we supposed to do? Jesus says, *"Make disciples of all nations."* Do the receipts of my life reflect that the top commitment in my life is making disciples? Jesus says that this woman's giving reflects that loving God is the most important thing in her life. We could look with an earthly measure and say, "Well, her less-than-a-penny offering, how many doves is that buy? How much gold does that buy for the mercy seat? How much wood for the altar does that buy?" Not much. But when the Lord sees that offering, He says, "That one right there is the greatest of all, because it shows that she gave her life, that her life is dedicated to

the Lord.”

We asked questions in the Kids’ Moment: “What did she do with those two coins then?” What she really did was to reveal her whole-life commitment to God. That's what she did. She offered her whole life to God. That's what she was doing. It might be really easy to pass it over. It might be easy to think, “Two pennies, less than a penny, and what is that?” Jesus says, “She offered her whole life to Me, and it was beautiful. Her gift was better than all the other ones I saw.” “Who noticed her?” we ask. Jesus Christ noticed her. Jesus sees her, and He commends her. Jesus sees her and is committed to her. Jesus sees her and honors her, and Jesus is moved by her gift. Her gift challenges us, doesn't it? Her gift, in some ways, makes us a little uncomfortable.

As I’ve listened to this passage and tried to picture it and watch it and let it speak into my own life and for all of us together, I felt challenged in three different ways. This passage has challenged me, and I trust, this passage will challenge you in the same ways:

The first way this passage challenges us is: **No gift to God is too small.** Sometimes we feel that we can't do what someone else does and that our contribution to the Kingdom of God doesn't really matter. We tell ourselves, “I just don't have anything that would make a difference.” No gift is too small in this passage. Participation pleases the Lord. Every person matters at Kenwood, not just a few, every single one. It’s participation in the ministry that makes it go. The size of the gift in terms of relative monetary terms doesn't matter really at all, but participation is critical. Every person matters.

What excites me the most is participation. Every gift matters. No gift is too small, because the gifts reflect a participation. If you give less than a cent, according to Jesus, you participate in the whole and are commended by Him. Don't let the enemy steal your joy, trying to persuade you that you aren't someone of huge means. That doesn't matter to God. It's interesting in Exodus that the half-shekel donation for the sanctuary is the same for everyone, whether rich or poor.

Secondly, this passage challenges us to ask: **Is my generosity costly?** Does it reflect a surplus or a sacrifice? Her gift reflected her whole life. Her gift was a sacrifice. It was costly. This is challenging, isn't it? It's really challenging to think: “Is there some place in my appetite that my hunger and thirst for God is being fueled and reflected in my giving, and my earthly appetites are properly put into their bounds because I'm not feeding them in the same way that I want to feed my hunger and thirst for the Kingdom of God and disciple-making?” Is it a surplus or a sacrifice? Only you know the difference, and if you ask yourself, you will see the difference. Some of us aren't participating at all, and we feel it doesn't matter. It does. Some of us are



participating, but we're just giving out of our abundance or surplus. Others have given sacrificially, and it pleases the Lord, and it prioritizes the Kingdom, and it tunes our hearts with affection to love disciple-making. I praise God for all that's happening here at Kenwood, and I believe with all my heart that hundreds and hundreds of people will come to know and trust Jesus Christ in this space. Hundreds of people will come to know and trust Jesus Christ and grow as disciples.

A third challenge is: **Do you feel uncomfortable when you read that she gave everything she had?** I do. It makes us wonder what happens next. What happens next for this woman? We're right to feel that, and we're right to wonder that. Why does a widow in the community of faith have less than a penny to live on? That shouldn't be. That should never happen. One of the most important ways that Kenwood uses the offerings we receive is through our Deacons' Fund. The Deacons' Fund is distributed by our deacons when people face an acute need for housing, medical bills, emergency help. The church is equipped to respond to that. It happens quietly. There's no fanfare. It happens personally when a real need becomes known.

You see, her gift of less than a penny, which we read was all she had, is an indictment on all of us. That should never happen. In fact, the Lord makes provision that that should never happen in the Scriptures. He says in Deuteronomy 14:22:

*"You shall tithe all the yield of your seed that comes from the field year by year."*

Give 10% to God of what He has given to you, and you should bring it to support the sanctuary, and you should celebrate in the sanctuary, you and your family. Then the Lord says in Deuteronomy 14:28-29:

*"At the end of every three years you shall bring out all the tithe of your produce in the same year and lay it up within your towns. And the Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance with you, and the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, who are within your towns, shall come and eat and be filled, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands that you do."*

Her offering is challenging, isn't it, Beloved? Her offering is challenging because it dispels the myth that my participation doesn't matter. It does. Her offering challenges us to give in a sacrificial way, to prioritize the Kingdom, and not to give God our leftovers. Her offering in its deepest register challenges us to give in such a way that a widow among us would never be in this situation. Can we live like that? If we live like that, the Lord will bless us. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, we thank You for Your generosity. We thank You, Lord, for this poignant and intimate picture of Your love for us and Your love for this woman. We thank You, Lord Jesus, for dispelling the enemy's lie that our participation is unnecessary, doesn't matter, optional. Lord,

help us to reflect in our spending, a priority of Your Kingdom. Lord, may that priority also notice the very real and human needs among us. Lord, I pray that You would help us to be stunningly generous, that no widow, no orphan, no fatherless, no person in need among us would lack. We thank You that You, Lord, see that You honor and that You bless. We thank You for Your generosity to us, and we ask that we might learn to obey Your teaching, Lord Jesus, over time, and may that time start today.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.