

Luke 20:45-21:4

Chapter 20

Verses 45-47: Then, in the hearing of all the people, He said to His disciples, "Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces, the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts, who devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation."

--(45) Jesus addresses the hypocrisy of the religious leaders openly, publicly, and specifically to His disciples. It is important for those who can be led astray to discern the hypocrisy between a message and a messenger (**Mt. 23:1-7; Mk. 12:38-40**).

Matthew 23:1-3: Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, saying: "The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do."

--(46) **Beware.** . . is also translated *take heed* at times. It means to give careful, serious thought to something. Often it is tied to the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees (**Mt. 16:6+11-12; Lk. 12:1**).

--Jesus is going to point out five signs of hypocrisy in the religious leaders that we should beware of.

--1) **Who desire to go around in long robes.** . . The religious leaders loved to dress to impress. Their long robes said something about them; they were official, regal even.

Matthew 23:5: But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments.

--Phylacteries were square capsules holding small scrolls of parchment, usually strapped to the forehead, left arm, or near the heart. It was an external expression of **Ex. 13:9+16 + Deut. 6:8; 11:18**.

--The borders of a garment were from the law (**Num. 15:37; Deut. 22:12**), and meant to be fringes of blue, signifying the heavenly nature of God's covenant with the people.

--Isn't it interesting that Jesus has so much to say about their clothes? God does care about our clothes because God cares about our hearts, and our clothing says something about the position of our hearts as well.

Deuteronomy 22:5: A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman's garment, for all who do so are an abomination to the LORD your God.

Proverbs 7:10: And there a woman met him, with the attire of a harlot, and a crafty heart.

Isaiah 3:16-24

Zephaniah 1:8: And it shall be, in the day of the LORD's sacrifice, that I will punish the princes and the king's children, and all such as are clothed with foreign apparel.

--Why is God punishing people wearing foreign clothing? Because their clothing was a reflection of the idolatrous heart He was rebuking. They no longer wanted to be seen and known by the garb of God's people.

--God cares about our clothing because our clothing says something about the state of our hearts. ***1 Tim. 2:9-10; 1 Peter 3:3-5***

--Dressing *to be seen by men* is much different than dressing *because I am seen* by men and God. The religious leaders' inflated robes, borders, and phylacteries were evidence of their inflated hearts.

--2) ***Love greetings in the marketplaces.*** . . Jesus is referring to more than the friendly recognition rightly due to those around us (such as a holy kiss in those days). They loved greetings that honored and recognized their position and authority in society: Rabbi, Father, Master, Teacher, etc. **(Mt. 23:7-10).**

--Beware of any religious leader who demands their exalted "position" be recognized. No servant of Christ should demand to be called: Apostle, Pastor, Reverend, Father, Dr., etc.

--Do we ever find Jesus Christ demanding to be called anything by His followers? Well, the servant is not greater than the Master.

--When some came in faith and expressed the truth of Jesus' divine or Messianic character, He responded to such faith, but that was different than the prideful and demanding recognition of a human title. Only One Name under heaven can rightly and will rightly demand that every knee bow and every tongue confess.

--3) ***The best seats in the synagogues and the best places at feasts.*** . . The religious leaders wanted visibility and glory in religious realms. They wanted to be something spiritually. **Self-conscious over God-conscious.**

--The religious leaders wanted visibility and glory in social realms. They wanted to be something societally. **Self-conscious over Others-conscious.**

--These two together are the very opposite of loving God and others with all our hearts.

--(47) 4) ***Who devour widows' houses.*** . . By what dastardly means they devoured the households of widows, we are not sure. What they did, though, is clear. Like merciless wolves, they took unfair financial advantage of the neediest and most hopeful.

--How many religious leaders today are still leveraging spirituality for personal financial profit? Usually succeeding by manipulating the neediest and most hopeful of some supernatural miracle or intervention. This type of hypocrisy is a scourge in the Church and a serious offense in the eyes of God.

--Paul warns Timothy of this same type of wolf in sheep's clothing early in the church:

1 Timothy 6:5: *useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself.*

--5) ***And for a pretense make long prayers.*** . . The direct condemnation of long prayers is mentioned three times **(Mt. 23:14; Mk. 12:40).**

--Doing something for a **pretense** means doing it for show, a pretended cause, play-acting, a cloak to cover true motives and means. The long prayers of the religious leaders were a cover for their pride, greed, and lack of true spiritual life.

Matthew 23:28: Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

--Again, this is not just someone unwittingly hogging up too much time in a prayer meeting. Nor does it refer to long times in prayer, as we know Jesus got alone and prayed often, sometimes for whole nights (**Lk. 6:12**).

--Beware of holy profession and unholy practice!

--The religious leaders were going through religious motions to cover the true nature of their unsanctified lives. They were hypocrites. Double sinners. Using holy things to live out sin. It would have been better for them to have dropped all religious show and gone and joined Matthew and Zacchaeus as tax collectors.

--**These will receive greater condemnation.** . . . All sin is not the same. Since the religious leaders had more light and more responsibility, they also had more accountability.

--As there are degrees of reward in heaven. There will also be degrees of judgment in hell.

--Teaching the truth, giving the message of God to others, is very serious business in God's sight. Teachers will have a stricter judgment (**James 3:1**). *False teachers are not getting away with it. Their end is worthy of fear.*

--**These will.** . . . Their condemnation was not yet, but it was coming. Their only hope was confession, repentance, and the blood of Christ. (See the contrast of **Lk. 23:40 + 24:20**.)

Chapter 21

Verses 1-4: And He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury, and He saw also a certain poor widow putting in two mites. So He said, "Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all; for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had."

--(1) Jesus has positioned Himself somewhere within the Women's Court in the temple and He is watching as people give.

--There would have been 13 trumpet shaped receptacles marked for different purposes: freewill offerings; temple tributes; sacrifices; wood; incense; etc.

--We are told that numerous rich people (**Mk. 12:41**) give large offerings. There is no condemnation of that process as of yet, only an acknowledgement of it.

--(2) **And He also saw a poor widow putting in two mites.** . . . a mite being the smallest coin in circulation.

--You would think that Jesus would have more important things to do or think about with His betrayal, trial, crucifixion, and death just days away!

--Watching this poor widow's simple and pure faith is likely a comfort in His final days.

Psalm 40:17: *But I am poor and needy; yet the LORD thinks upon me.*

Proverbs 15:3: *The eyes of the LORD are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good.*

--Once again, Luke takes a widow and places her before us as an object of compassion and an example of faith to follow (**Lk. 2:36-37** (Anna); **4:26** (widow of Zarephath); **7:12** (widow of Nain); **18:3-5** (Persistent widow)).

--Imagine watching this poor widow make her way directly through the pomp and pageantry of the temple and offer the smallest allowable amount. There were numerous excuses that could have held her back:

- 1) She was a widow in a time and culture where life was hard for widows. If God was harsh with her, why give?
- 2) The temple was not richer, but she was considerably poorer. They did need her money.
- 3) She was in dire need, so why not wait till she had a bit more?
- 4) It was embarrassing! *How often this alone conquers us! Worship; Offerings; Gospel; etc.*

--Jesus, knowing all things, makes this poor widow an example to all His disciples for all time: **So He called His disciples to Himself and said to them. . . (Mk. 12:43).**

--The times Jesus calls His disciples closer for specific lessons are significant occasions: The feeding of the 5000; On taking up of their crosses; Being the servant of all; Washing their feet and one another's feet; And this poor widow joins as one of those momentous lessons!

--(Side note: It is important to see that even though Christ rebuked the hypocrisy and greed of the religious leaders, yet the offerings given to God through a failing and corrupt system are still acceptable in Jesus' estimation. This is good for us to recognize, as there will be times organizations and people fail us after we have given, but in those cases, the wrong is not on our end, and nothing of our personal offering to God has been tainted.)

--**(3-4)** It was not that the other offerings given that day were necessarily wrong, but there was something particular about this widow's offering that was essential for the disciples—and for us today—to see and know. What do we learn from the example of this poor widow?

--I think three main things:

- 1) Jesus doesn't count offerings. He weighs them.

--***Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all.*** . . . Obviously, that wasn't true monetarily. Her two mites were nearly the very least one could offer in terms of direct monetary value.

--The value Jesus is placing on her offerings was very different from the numerical value the coins held. He was weighing things differently. Jesus was weighing the heart behind it, the sacrifice of it, and the faith tossed in with it.

--The reason that is important for all disciples to see is so that we know: *All our giving is according to what we have, not what we don't have.*

--No one lacks the opportunity to please Jesus because they don't have as much money as another follower of Christ. God is the One who first gives to us! We have nothing that we have not received. If we are giving back to Him, we are to use the means that He has granted us, however large or small, to show our love.

--We can only give of what we have been given: Monetary gifts; Time; Skill; Energy; Strength; Intellect; Family; Homes; Friends; etc.

--We cannot give what we do not have, and God will never hold us accountable to.

--The poor widow didn't have much money, but she had a whole heart to worship God, and that gave her two mites more value in God's sight than all the other offerings given that day.

2) Jesus knows what's left.

--for all these out of their abundance. . . but she out of her poverty. . .

--Jesus points out this widow's gift as more valuable than all the other gifts combined because of how costly it was to her. The others did not deny themselves a single pleasure in their giving. Their offerings didn't cost them anything, but her offering was **all the livelihood that she had**.

--It seems that she was giving all she had left for whatever period of time, and casting herself in trust and faith on God. Her God was worthy of a possible missed meal, comfort, or even just a measure of peace of mind.

--Sacrificial giving can happen monetarily, but more often than not it is revealed in the priority of how we conduct our lives: Bus drivers using days off to help; A whole Sunday as security or usher or children's ministry volunteer; Vacation days given to missions trips; A smaller house chosen so the wife can stay home with the kids; A weekend of no sleep and discomfort to be a leader on a Jr. High or Sr. High retreat; Ministry leaders accepting less to serve or missionaries leaving America to live in other countries; etc.

--Are we organizing our lives to mitigate the cost of our love for and worship of God? That is a question I regularly ask myself—not merely as a pastor—but as a Christian.

--What is God worthy of? Is He worthy of our best, even if our best is only two mites? We are very apt to give to God out of our abundance because it costs us very little. *We all know the "Jesus junk" type offerings people get when asking for donations!*

2 Samuel 24:24: Then the king said to Araunah, "No, but I will surely buy it from you for a price; nor will I offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God with that which costs me nothing." So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver.

--God is worthy of our best—be that much or little in the eyes of others. The question is not: *Does God have our offerings?* The question is: *Does God have our best?*

--for all these out of their abundance. . . but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood she had.

3) We who have the smallest gifts possess equal opportunity to win Jesus' pleasure as those with the largest.

--*Truly I say to you.* . . . This poor widow pleased Jesus.

--I do not deny the fact of larger and smaller gifting in the body of Christ. I do not deny the fact that there are a few “not many” and the rest of us normal folks. I do not deny that there are those to whom much is given and much will be required. I only deny that a heart with a million mites pleases God more than a heart with two.

--There is so much pressure in our day to do something, or be something spiritual or world changing or epic. It is easy to look around at the religious stuff happening on TV; Social Media; Books; Events; etc., and begin to feel like we could never please God as much as some of these other exceptionally talented individuals. It is easy to look around and be disheartened in seeing what God made us and what He made others.

--We forget that God often takes His greatest pleasure in what man overlooks or despises. In the spiritual realm, quantity does not mean quality. True production in the Christian life is measured in terms of God’s pleasure and nothing else. A gift is only big when God is very pleased.

--In this scene, we see Christ in the middle of pomp and prestige, power and affluence, the Temple and Jerusalem, but in all of this, His eyes turn to a humble and overlooked widow slipping through the crowd, and emptying her purse and heart before God. *The Holy Spirit inspires the gospel writers to copy this down because He wants us to know what He is pleased with.*

--Do we think that His pleasure has changed? Do we think His eyes are searching for pleasure in the Jerusalem’s of our day? To the lavish temples of men? That He is looking to the mega-church, the mega-pastor, the mega-evangelist, the mega-worship leader, and the mega-saint to be satisfied or glorified?

--God is not hard to please.

--I have great pleasure in telling you that there is no doubt in my mind that His eyes today see far beyond this microphone and platform. God does not need our gifts—that was never the question—but He does desire our love.

--Jesus is teaching us something wonderful about God. God is easy to please. He may be hard to satisfy, but He is not a hard taskmaster.

--God is pleased with those of us who have only the smallest offerings. He is pleased with our simplest prayers, our childlike faith, our sincere but pitchy worship songs, our common kindnesses, and feeblest attempts to share the gospel. Again, I am not saying God is happy with our second best. I am saying that many times our “best” is small and common—even for those of us with much.

--We all have equal opportunity to please God. You don’t need anything more to win His pleasure than what He has placed in your hands right now. When it comes to pleasing God, we are all on equal footing.

--Don't allow the enemy to cause you to think hard thoughts about God. Don't become weary in well-doing because Satan has convinced you that God is stingy or harsh. Don't let Satan shame you into selfishness because your best seems common. Don't be disheartened in your two mites—we know something the widow didn't—Jesus is watching, and He is not hard to please.

--Finally, we must recognize one more thing. We are given no reason to believe that the poor widow ever discovered how pleased Jesus was with her offering. She would only discover the truth when she stepped into eternity.

--I am fully convinced that in His grace, God makes much more of our mites than we could ever imagine. Here, we catch only a fleeting glimpse of how much He will one day magnify the smallest of love's true offerings!