

Beware How You Live And Give

Luke 20:45-21:4

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Beginning in Luke 20:45, Luke says, "Then, in the hearing of all the people, He..." that is, Jesus "...said to His disciples..." this is a warning "...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.' 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.'"

A long day of controversy has now come to a close. Jesus is no longer under the direct assault of the scribes and Pharisees asking Him questions. They have given up trying to trap Him in His words. So Jesus is still probably in the temple on Wednesday afternoon. And in the audience of the people, Jesus turns to His disciples and warns them of the false, religious leaders. Jesus is teaching His disciples, but He is intentionally doing it within earshot of the crowds and multitudes that could hear Him. We will see He is in or near the area known as the court of the women.

The warnings Jesus gave are in two categories. The first is the danger of false living for God or hypocrisy, in Luke 20:45-47. The second is the danger of false giving to God, in Luke 21:1-4. We are to give with the right motive from our hearts. And these two sections do go together.

First, let's look at the danger of false living for God, verses 45-47. There are three sections. Number one is the caution, in verses 45-46. "Then, in the hearing of all the people, He said to His disciples..." He is still holding the audience of the people, and He knows they are listening to Him. So it's a dual focus; He's talking to His disciples, but He's lifting His voice so the people can hear Him. "...beware of the scribes."

Jesus had the most bitter denunciations against the established leaders of His day. Verses 45-47 is a greatly edited and reduced or concise statement of what Jesus gave at length in Matthew 23. Read Matthew 23 in light of our text, verses 45-47. Matthew 23 is the elongated version of the woes Jesus pronounced on the false teachers.

All throughout the Old Testament God warned about false prophets and false messengers. Jesus came on the scene and warned us about the scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians and all the religious leaders. They were false teachers, the blind leading the blind (Matthew 15:14). In Matthew 23:27 it says, "You are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness."

They would whitewash the tombs, because if they touched a grave, they became unceremonial unclean. If the tombs were whitewashed, they would stand out and become visible, so people

were able to walk around them and not touch them. But if people contacted them, they became polluted and defiled.

He said it was like the blind leading the blind. He said they're like cups that are clean on the outside, but on the inside, they're full of extortion and evil things (Matthew 23:26). So Jesus really lit into them in Matthew 23:23 with His "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!"

Paul the apostle came on the scene in Acts 20, and when he met with the elders in Ephesus, he said in verses 29-30, "After my departure, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves." He warned us about false teachers.

We should be careful and be aware of false teachers, false preachers, false prophets—even in our day. Not everyone who is preaching from the Bible, about the Bible, who is preaching in the name of Christ is preaching from the true Gospel of Jesus Christ. So you must be discerning. You must be a Berean; you must study the Scriptures to see if the things being said are true.

That even includes me. When you're listening to me preach, open your Bible, follow along with me and think critically; is this what the Bible says? Is this what the Bible teaches? Is this the proper application of this text? Is this in context? So we all should be thinking that the Word of God is the authority; not the preacher, not our intellect, not our religious denomination, not our experience. The authority is the Bible—and the Bible alone.

Jesus was warning them about false prophets and false teachers. In Luke 20:46, they are referred to as "scribes." The scribes were the theologians, the Bible students, the Bible teachers. And most of the scribes were Pharisees. But in Matthew 15:14, Jesus said that "They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch." So we don't want to be following blind leaders; we want to be clearly following the Word of God. I exhort you, my dearly beloved, be Bereans; search the Scriptures "to find out whether these things [are] so" (Acts 17:10-11).

Now we move from the warning, verse 45 and the first part of verse 46, to number two, the conduct, the second part of verse 46 and the first part of 47. Notice how He describes their conduct. "...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."

I want to put these indictments of their conduct into three categories. The first category is their pride. Number one, they "desire to go around in long robes." I don't want to indict someone just because they wear a religious robe. What a person wears is not an indication of what is in their heart. But if their motive is to wear religious clothing because they want recognition or they want to be acknowledged as a spiritual person, then it's dangerous.

These scribes didn't want to glorify God, they didn't want to seek the Lord, they really didn't want to honor God. Like David, they didn't say, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me,

and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23-24). They were saying, "Just give me a robe. I want people to know that I'm a man who is holy."

Number two, they "love greetings in the marketplaces." They desire to be greeted. "Rabbi! Rabbi!" They wanted all the veneration that went with the title of Rabbi or teacher.

Number three, they wanted "the best seats in the synagogues." The synagogues had seats that were on a platform that faced the congregation. From those seats, everyone could see them in their long robes. Everyone knew they were the rabbis and teachers.

That's what they were in to; everything was just a proud, ostentatious show. They loved to get the recognition. Our walk in relationship to God must not just be outward—what we wear, where we sit, what people call us. It should be a matter of the heart. The heart is what is important.

Number four, in verse 46, they loved "the best places at feasts." When they have a dinner feast, they come in wearing their robes, they hear their titles of "Rabbi!" and they wanted to be ushered to the seat of honor. Wherever the host was sitting, at his right hand was the place of honor. They would jockey for that position.

Earlier in the book of Luke, we were told Jesus was invited to a supper at a Pharisee's house. Jesus observed how the guests jockeyed for position stumbling over each other to get to the seat of honor. But Jesus said you should take the lower seat, then the host would come and exalt you to the higher position. That is as opposed to starting at the higher seat, having the host say, "Sorry, that's for somebody else" and then you would be ashamed and humbled and had to move to a lower seat.

This is a Biblical principle. The Bible says, "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time" (1 Peter 5:6). We don't want to have a false humility by saying, "Oh, I'm just not worthy. I'll sit over here in the corner," which tries to draw attention to your humility. You don't want to be jockeying for position or recognition. Jesus warned us about pride.

The second category is greed. Verse 47 says, "...who devour widows' houses." That's all it says; it doesn't tell us how or why. But it is believed that these widows would have trusted them with their money and possessions, and these religious leaders actually sold the homes out from under the widows. They were managing their money for them but were taking their money. Instead of protecting widows, instead of shielding widows, as God said they should do in His Word, they were robbing from them.

This is not so farfetched today in our modern Word-faith, health-and-wealth, positive-confession preachers. If you turn the TV on and the preacher tells you that God wants you wealthy, that God wants to give you health, change the channel immediately. Can God heal? Yes, God can heal. Does God heal? Yes, God does heal. Is it guaranteed? Is it promised? No. Not until I

get a new body in heaven. Not until I get to heaven and get a glorified body will I be free from sickness, disease and death.

Take the strongest, positive confession of Word-faith preachers, wait long enough and eventually they'll all go the way of flesh—death. When they're young, they'll teach that God wants you healthy. Then they get old themselves and die. It shows you that their teaching was not Biblical. So beware of those who preach money and that God wants you rich.

Read 1 Timothy 6. Paul the apostle said that false teachers were saying that "godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself." He said, "godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content" (1 Timothy 6:5-8). Then he warned those who are rich not to be high-minded but trust "in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy" (1 Timothy 6:17). So these religious leaders were proud, and greedy.

The third category is their hypocrisy, verse 47. "For a pretense [they] make long prayers." They desire, they love and they show off. They put on a show when they pray by praying long prayers. In Jesus' famous sermon on the mount, He said, "When you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly" (Matthew 6:6).

That doesn't literally mean the only place you can pray is in your room or closet. Some of you can't get in your closet; you open the door and there's an avalanche, and we'd have to have a healing service.

What it means is that in your heart, don't pray to impress people. Don't pray to people, and don't pray to impress people. Shut yourself up alone with God and talk to God. That doesn't mean you can't pray publically. It means that your heart is set on God, praying alone to God. It's so very important.

But these hypocrites, in verse 47, love to make a show by praying long prayers. Jesus said, "They love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward" (Matthew 6:5). They won't get a reward from their Father.

And notice their condemnation. This is pretty heavy, in verse 47. "These will receive greater condemnation." Jesus is warning us about them. We would do well to take heed of His warning. They "will receive greater condemnation."

This indicates that knowledge brings a greater responsibility. If you're sitting under Bible teaching like you do every Sunday in church, then you are responsible to live out what you have been taught and you know to be true in the Word of God. This is why it says in James 3:1, "My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment."

I want you to know one of the challenges of me being a Bible teacher is that God is going to hold me responsible for everything I teach. It's not easy to stand and teach the Bible week after week, and then you have to live out what the Bible says.

While driving the freeways in Southern California, I sometimes grit my teeth and say, "I wish I wasn't a Christian right now!" It's like the little boy who said to his mother, "Mommy, why is it only when daddy drives that the idiots come out on the highway? They're never out when you drive; only when daddy drives."

So we will be accountable for what we know to be true. Knowledge brings responsibility. Much light brings responsibility.

There is another implication in this statement, "These will receive greater condemnation." It implies or indicates the possibility of degrees of punishment in hell. Greater knowledge, greater responsibility and greater condemnation. Jesus actually used the phrase "receive greater damnation" in the King James translation.

So beware. Don't be a naïve Christian. Don't be a gullible Christian. Don't be critical or fault-finding, but be discerning. There is a balance there. Be discerning. The Bible is the authority. Be a Berean; search the Scriptures "to find out whether these things [are] so."

The danger is that a lot of times false teachers will take Scriptures out of context. That's why it's important to preach right through the books of the Bible, chapter by chapter and verse by verse, always setting a text in its context. A text out of context becomes a pretext. When a preacher just jumps around all over the place quoting verses, many times he's just taking them out of context to apply to what he wants them to apply to.

In the second section of our passage, Jesus warns us of the danger of false giving to God. It mentions they "devour widows' houses." Now He will show us a widow who sets a good example—not a bad example—that we should follow, in Luke 21:1-4. And there is no break between chapter 20 and 21.

What Jesus saw is in verses 1-2. "And He..." that is, Jesus "...looked up..." He's in the temple "...and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury, and He saw also a certain poor widow putting in two mites." Now we will read what Jesus said. "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...' or their wealth '...have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had.'"

Now I want to focus on what Jesus first saw, verses 1-2. Jesus was in the court of the women, the treasury. It teaches us in Mark 12:41 that Jesus was sitting down. It says, "Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury." I like this picture that Jesus was a people-watcher. I like to watch people. If I'm stuck in an airport somewhere, I'll just check everybody out. I think, I wonder where that guy's from. He dresses so weird. What a funny hat he's wearing. So Jesus was looking and watching and observing in the temple.

The treasury was in the court of the women where there were 13 coffers made out of metal, maybe brass, along the walls of the courtyard. People would take their coins—they didn't have paper money—and would put them in the coffers. They were shaped like trumpets with the narrow part at the top and the broader part at the bottom. When they dropped their gold and silver coins into the coffers, you could hear them clink all the way down.

And Jesus watched the rich with their ostentatious show in their long robes with their large bags of money of gold and silver. And all the crowds would ooh and awe. They were all impressed. Then this poor widow showed up. She probably felt embarrassed in light of the fact that she only had two mites to give. A mite was the smallest denomination of coin; it was less than a penny. A mite was made out of copper, and you wouldn't bend down to pick one up if you saw one on the ground. So this was a very small amount. And this widow had two mites. The two mites together wouldn't quite make half a penny today. So Jesus watched this as people entered the temple.

My question is, does Jesus still watch us today as we give to God? Yes. Does Jesus see us when we give the offering to God in church? Yes. Does Jesus see us when we worship God? Yes. Does Jesus know our hearts? Yes. Is He impressed with our outward actions? Not necessarily. He sees our hearts and our motives in what we do.

And why was Jesus interested in the offering in our text? Number one, because when giving is rightly done, it is an act of worship to God and part of our Christian life. 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 deal with the subject of giving. In chapter 8, verse 7 Paul says, "As you abound in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us—see that you abound in this grace also." Paul was referring to the grace of giving. Faith, love and knowledge are all commendable characteristics, but he wanted us to abound in and increase in giving also.

In other words, if you are a Christian, it is part and parcel of the Christian life to be a giver. It's not a smorgasbord where we can pick and choose. "I'm a Christian who is knowledgeable. I'm a Christian who serves. I'm a Christian who sings. I'm a Christian who supports missions. But I'm not a Christian who just gives to any cause. I'm not a giver." You are to be characterized by giving; that's part of the whole Christian life. You can't just choose certain parts of the Christian life to follow.

Number two, Jesus was interested that day in the offering in the court of the women because it's a test of our character. It reveals the state of our hearts. Jesus said, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21). In other words, He was saying, "Show me what you do with your money, and I'll show you where your heart is." It shows you who or what you serve, who or what you love. So they were to be showing their character by hearts that were generous.

I heard about a young man who was being baptized by a pastor one day. He had his wallet in his back pocket, and the pastor said, "Hey, you forgot to take your wallet out of your pants!" The young man said, "No, I want to be baptized with my wallet and everything else. I want God to

have all my money and everything that I have. It all belongs to God." Then he went under the water, wallet and all. That's pretty cool.

"Take my silver and my gold;

Not a mite will I withhold."

We want to be committed. God doesn't want our money; He wants our hearts. If you haven't given God your heart, you can give God all the money you want, but it won't impress Him. Jesus wasn't impressed by the great giving of the rich people. He was impressed by the sacrificial giving of the poor widow. This is so very important.

Now I want to note what Jesus said, in verses 3-4. "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...' they were rich but gave only off the top of their abundance "...have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had.'"

This is where the story of the widow's mite get a little uncomfortable. This is hard. You may say, "I'm okay with the two mites, but that is all she had?! You mean to tell me she gave everything she had?!" That's exactly what the story says.

"Well, what's she going to do tomorrow? What's she going to do next week?" Trust God. What an awesome thought! It takes faith to be this kind of a sacrificial giver.

I'm not saying you have to give everything to God. But your heart must be ready and willing to do that. God wants your heart. So Jesus is applauding and commending this poor widow.

How could it be that she could give more than all of what the others had given? Let me give you some ways. Number one, God looks not at the portion but at the proportion of our giving. What we give isn't the issue, but what we keep is the issue. God wants our hearts and not our money. So you have a lot of money, and you give a little bit to God—big deal. You have very little, and you give it all to God—that is a big deal! Why? Because it was done out of a heart of love, sacrificially giving to God.

Number two, this poor widow gave more than the others, because giving that pleases God is giving that costs us. I know this hurts us. It hurts me to preach this.

There is a story in the Old Testament, in 2 Samuel 24, where David had sinned against God by numbering the people. So God brought a plague on the nation of Israel. The plague was stopped on Mount Moriah where the temple would be built. Because God stopped the plague, David wanted to build an altar there, but he didn't own the property. So he went to the owner of the property and told him he wanted to buy the land and build an altar to the Lord on it. But the owner told David he would give him the land, give him an altar and also the sacrifices.

David responded, "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" (2 Samuel 24:24). He wouldn't give to God what cost him nothing.

Why is it we want to give God our automobile after it breaks? "Honey, the refrigerator blew up. Let's donate it to the church." No, thank you very much. People want to give to God only if it doesn't cost them anything. God takes great joy and great delight when we give sacrificially.

Jesus gave His all on the Cross. What did it cost Jesus to save you? What did it cost Jesus to redeem you? What did it cost Jesus to forgive you and make you His child?

Number three, God can do great things with tiny offerings. I like this story of the widow's mite. Can you imagine when we get to heaven and we tell her that we read her story? "I love your story! It convicted me though."

God can take the smallest, seemingly insignificant offering, and use it for great glory. In John 6, when 5,000 people in Galilee were out on the hills and needed to eat, Jesus asked Philip where the people could buy bread to eat. "Philip answered Him, 'Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little.'....Then Jesus said, 'Make the people sit down'" (John 6:5-10).

There was a boy there who had "five barley loaves and two small fish." I always wondered if the boy volunteered his lunch, or they grabbed it from him. Then they put the loaves and fish in Jesus' hands. Little is much in the hands of Jesus.

You may say at church, "All I have is two mites. All I have is two pennies. All I have to give is my time. I want to give it to God." God has given us all time, talent and treasures. What are you doing with them? Little is much if it is placed in His hands.

So Jesus blessed the bread, broke it and gave it to His disciples to distribute and did the same with the fish. The whole multitude was filled, and there were 12 baskets left over. Even if our little two mites seem insignificant, God can use them. As long as this story has been in the Bible, great blessing has come to people.

Have you ever wondered when she dropped those two mites in the coffer that she might have thought she would be in the Bible, and we would be reading about her right now? She didn't think about that. She probably thought it was no big deal; that it was so insignificant.

The mites were made out of copper. They were smaller than our dimes. They barely made a noise when they were dropped into a coffer. But God can do great things with tiny offerings.

Number four, our giving is proof of our love for God and others. In 2 Corinthians 8:8, Paul said, "I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others." In 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, Paul was writing to the believers in Macedonia and Greece. Even though they were going through a time of poverty, difficulty and trial, he wanted them to be liberal in supporting the poor saints in Jerusalem. He said they did that, but they first gave

themselves to God. What he was saying in 2 Corinthians 8:8 was he wanted them to prove the sincerity of their love by their participation in the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem. Someone said, "We can give without love, but we cannot love without giving" (see 1 Corinthians 13).

Number five, the poor widow's giving exceeded all the others' giving, because her giving was Christ-like. Just the act of giving is a Christ-like act. In 2 Corinthians 8:9, Paul said, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich."

It's interesting that when he talked to the believers in Macedonia about giving, in 2 Corinthians, he used Jesus as an example of giving. He was rich in heaven, but He came to earth as a man and "He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:8). He became poor for us, and through His poverty, His death on the Cross, we are made rich.

And in 2 Corinthians 9:15, Paul said, "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!" So Paul ended the chapters on giving in 2 Corinthians by talking about the gift that God gave of His Son, Jesus Christ.

a warning about false living—don't be proud, don't be covetous, don't be hypocritical; and a warning about our giving—give as to the Lord and not to be seen of men. The Bible says, "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7). So don't give out of necessity. Don't give grudgingly. Give out of the joy of your heart to God and be a blessing.