

## **The Gospel According to Luke**

Luke 20:45-21:4

Reading: Matthew 23:1-12

*Parallel Passages:* Matthew 23:1-12 and Mark 12:38-44

Sermon #88

August 16, 2020

### **Beware of Attempting To Earn God's Favor**

#### **Do Not Seek The World's Favor**

Last week we heard Jesus place the scribes in a difficult situation as He asked them a question, in front of the people, concerning His person. In verse 44 Jesus asked, “David thus calls him Lord, so how is he his son?” In front of the many people Jesus was pointing out these self-proclaimed scriptural experts lacked understanding of the Word of God. Prior to this He showed their lack of understanding of the scriptures when they asked about the woman of 7 husbands and the resurrection. Jesus demonstrated in front of the crowds that these men might study the scriptures but they lacked spiritual wisdom. Luke’s record alludes to their lack of spiritual wisdom but Matthew’s record of the same confrontation leaves no room for doubt. Reading from Matthew chapter 22 at verse 29, “But Jesus answered them, ‘You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God.’ ” Jesus brings to the surface the real problem; these religious scholars did not understand the Scriptures and therefore, they did not understand God. Now, this was a problem; for it was these men who were the interpreters of God’s Word and the teachers of God’s Word to Israel. In a sense, it was the Scribes that were the pastors of their day and they were leading the people of Israel to destruction. A basic tenant is corruption brings more corruption; because they, in truth, did not care for the people and their relationship with God and were more concerned with position and being rich. Nor did they did possess the heart of flesh to gain spiritual wisdom or the ability to lead people to God’s

righteousness. As the prophet Ezekiel wrote of God's desire for those who sought Him with a true heart, <sup>19</sup>“I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, <sup>20</sup> that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God.” (Ezekiel 11:19-20) Because their hearts were made of stone, they sought man-made rewards. In order to achieve their success within society they created man-made rules and laws that hindered the people from knowing and having a relationship with God. Since their focus was on their own glory, they had lost the power God offered and they could not even recognize the Messiah standing before them.

Now as I prepare to take us into God's Word, I want to be up front and let you know that most sermons taught on this passage focus on giving or tithing, and we will look at tithing, but only briefly. I want to dig into this passage and I believe we will discover there is something more profound going on.

### **Pray**

The underlying concept that we must keep before us as we work our way through this passage is; ***Salvation is a gift from God by His grace and not based on human works or wealth.*** As Paul made clear, “You were dead in the trespasses and sins ... <sup>4</sup> But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved ... <sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” (Ephesians 2:1, 4-5, 8-9) Our fallen and sinful nature leads us to want to be in control and believing we can affect, in part, our salvation. We are called to war against the temptation to base our lives and our

security, as the Scribes did, on our own efforts, seeking position in society and desiring money. Our natural inclination is towards money and material possessions, and yet, all through the Bible, we are told to give it away and have our treasure in heaven. The only way we can do this is to have correct understanding concerning God's Word, both written and Living. As Paul taught, faith fuels obedience, and obedience increases faith, so faith is deepened by hearing and taking the Word of God into one's heart. As Paul wrote, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." (Romans 10:17) This brought to my mind the question, "Am I, are you, winning or losing the battle for faith? Are we obedient to God?" For the two are interconnected. My beloved, it is a battle, we must be prepared and we must fight, as scripture teaches, "In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one." (Ephesians 6:16) The evil one wants us to live in the world and consistently tempts us to do so.

As we work our way through this passage of God's Word, I would like you to notice the difference between the wealthy Scribes, who love to be seen by men, and the poor widow who has given all she has, and from the world's viewpoint her future is bleak.

### **Do Not Be As A Scribe** (20:45-47)

Jesus had just spent time trying to get the Scribes to understand He is both fully man and fully God; as David wrote in Psalm 110, Jesus was both King David's Lord and his descendant or Son. Reading at Luke 20, verse 45, The crowd was large "And in the hearing of all the people he said to his disciples, <sup>46</sup> 'Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love greetings in the marketplaces and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts,

<sup>47</sup> **who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.'** ” It was not enough that Jesus clearly showed the Scribes were inadequate interpreters of the Scriptures in their last several encounters; Jesus now takes a step further in demonstrating the people should not put their spiritual future in the hands of the Scribes. Since the Scribes lack biblical understanding they act on their own accord and this is increased because they also lack biblical obedience. Despite their outward appearances they lacked biblical understanding and wisdom, for the scriptures teach us who God is, and His plan of salvation and the scriptures teaches what God expects from us and how we are to live before a Holy God. God's power is seen throughout the Old Testament, but since they did not know God, they did not possess His power that is available to true believers. These leaders were no longer influenced by the Word of God because they did not understand the Word of God and their ambitions were no longer of God but of the world and seeking after their own desires. The greater problem was that they were taking the nation of Israel with them as their ambitions further separated them from God.

The lust for the world is position, power and material wealth and for these Scribes their ambition was fueled by their religion based on works. Over the years generations of religious leaders developed a system of religion based on works designed to keep the elite in power and line their pockets at the expense of the people. Some things do not change; I can name but one national politician who has not become rich at the expense of the people. I could name dozens of religious elites in America who have become extremely rich at the expense of the people – these are the modern-day Scribes who serve themselves and the evil one instead of God. They claim they are favored by God while their behavior keeps many others poor. How rich did the disciples of Christ become? How politically powerful did

they become? Following God's Word, serving Christ by sharing the gospel and teaching the people of the true and only God cost them dearly.

These scribes were able to take advantage of the people because the people did not know the Word of God. Why? Because the religious elite kept the Word of God from the people. This system continued as the Catholic Church fought hard for centuries to keep the Bible out of the hands of the common people; they did this to insure their position, power and wealth. Valiant men died translating God's Word into the common language of their countries. Today, there is no excuse for God's Word is available to most and missionaries are taking it to those who are without. My beloved, if we fail to allow God's Word to change us from the inside out and mold us into the image of Christ, then the truth is, we are like the Scribes seeking after our own desires and trying to convince ourselves we are not people of the world and falsely claiming intimacy with God through Christ. But the truth is one does not know Christ, if they are not obedient to Christ because in their hearts they do not believe the Bible is the Word of God. Many in American and the world give lip-service to God, but develop a religious system that makes one look good on the outside, but they are corrupted by the world on the inside. People seek to please themselves and the result is always sin. Without the Word of God transforming power people want to be seen in long robes like the Scribes or the latest fashions like the elite today. They desire to be greeted in the marketplaces and admired by others. They want the best seats in the synagogues or churches or to be elevated before others in their communities or nation. They desire a place of honor at feasts or public gatherings – they are Scribes in their hearts.

How does this differ from the teachings of the scriptures and Jesus the Christ? Jesus taught, <sup>3</sup>“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup>Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. <sup>5</sup>Blessed are

the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. <sup>6</sup> Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. <sup>7</sup> Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. <sup>8</sup> Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. <sup>9</sup> Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. <sup>10</sup> Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>11</sup> Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (Matthew 5:3-12) This is the life the disciples of Christ lived after His resurrection and disciples have lived every generation since Christ’s resurrection. Unlike the Scribes whose primary goal was material wealth and often at the expense of others, as verse 47 states, “**who devour widows’ houses and for a pretense make long prayers.**” David says, God is the “**Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation.**” (Psalm 68:5) As believers we are called to emulate God.

The Scribes desired to look godly while they “**devoured widows’ houses**” before the people “**for a pretense they make long prayers.**” On the other hand, Jesus taught, <sup>5</sup> “**when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. <sup>6</sup> But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. <sup>7</sup> And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. <sup>8</sup> Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. <sup>9</sup> Pray then like this: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. <sup>10</sup> Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. <sup>11</sup> Give**

us this day our daily bread,<sup>12</sup> and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.<sup>13</sup> And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.’ ”

(Matthew 6:5-13) These Scribes wanted to be recognized by people. They wanted to look and feel important. They lived for the praise of man. The Bible had no influence on them because if it had, they would have understood who Jesus was and they would have understood His teaching. They would have seen that their prayers were actually self-centered and sinful. They would have taken in Jesus’ earlier teachings and obeyed what He said. They would have accepted Jesus’ teaching and then looked at their life and saw that changes needed to be made.

Jesus tells His disciples and tells us, “**Beware of the scribes**”. Jesus also warned us as recorded in Luke, Matthew and Mark not to desire position of the world, He said, “**Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.**” (Luke 12:1) *See Matthew 17:15; 16:6, 11 and Mark 8:15; 12:38.* The life of a Scribe or the life of a disciple of Christ is before each of us. What will we choose?

### **Do Not Be Lovers Of Money** (Luke 21:1& 4a)

When a rich person gives, they often want people to know. Reading verse 1 and 4 of chapter 21, “**Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box ...**<sup>4</sup> **‘For they all contributed out of their abundance.’** ” Jesus and His disciples had arrived at the temple as the worshippers were in the process of making their temple offerings. There were 13 trumpet-shaped golden containers that the worshipper dropped their money in to as they entered. It appears the rich made a scene as they placed their offering in. The rich were impressed with their offering and may have impressed some who observed, but Jesus was not. Jesus says they gave out of their abundance and sacrificed very little. This is a lesson for us; Jesus is not impressed when we give little or out of our excess and there is no

sacrifice. As followers we are called to give from our livelihood, to give of our firstfruits, to give when it costs us and shows the value of our living as God's children. King David understood the value of honoring his Lord. In 2 Samuel, chapter 24, verse 24 we read, "But the king said to Araunah (ar·av·naw), 'No, but I will buy it from you for a price. I will not offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God that cost me nothing.' So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver." Simply put, David would not accept it for free, he was not about to worship God without their being some sacrifice on his part. The rich that Jesus and many people at the temple observed giving their offerings were not giving with any sacrifice – they were giving their extra or their leftovers to God. God is not interested in our leftovers. God wants to be first in our lives; first before our spouses, first before our children, first before our jobs, our hobbies, etc. God is to be first in our giving and love. Maybe we could give up something that does not hurt our obligation to family to sacrificially give.

What these Scribes and rich worshippers were doing was a lot like those in the Book of Malachi, Chapter 1, when the priests were offering to God blind and lame animals. God calls this evil for their hearts were deceptive. Those animals were not needed so they figured they would give them to God as a sacrifice and then at least get some good out of them. However, understand God does not want what costs us nothing. He is not interested in leftovers and sick animals and half-hearted sacrifice. If we are to honor God with our giving, we must give until it cost us something – without cost it is not a sacrifice. It is a balance and a heart issue, let **not** our hearts be deceptive before God.

Here is one way to tell if your giving is sacrificial or not; does the amount I give every week or each month to Christ's church, cause me to change my lifestyle? Here is what I mean. If all we do is give from our abundance, like the



rich that Jesus saw that day, then we are not giving sacrificially. Giving needs to impact the way we live. Perhaps, I need to give up some things in order to tithe to your church. Maybe, rather than eating out three times a week, I need to eat at home more. Perhaps the movie at the theater is not a necessity. Perhaps I can shop the sales racks more or cut back on my cable choices. These are small things and really, I do not know if they are sacrifices or not but at least we must begin thinking in terms of what can I give up that would allow me to tithe more, to give out of sacrifice instead of abundance. Giving without sacrifice is the example of the rich, not the widow.

### **Do Not Seek To Buy God's Favor** (21:2-3, 4b)

It is too bad that the translators and monks determining the chapters and verses placed the account of the widow in chapter 21. We need to remember that chapter and verse numbers were not part of the original Scriptures. These two passages of Jesus condemning the Scribes, and the rich and the widow tithing go together. When we couple them together as one passage it brings new light to its meaning. Reading at verse 2, “**he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins.** <sup>3</sup> **And he said, ‘Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. ...** <sup>4</sup> **but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.’ ”** Tie this together with verses 46 and 47 of chapter 20, which should not be divided from the first 4 verses of chapter 21 because they are the same story, Jesus says, “**Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love greetings in the marketplaces and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts,** <sup>47</sup> **who devour widows’ houses and for a pretense make long prayers.”** You need to understand in context Jesus is not praising this widow in verses 2 to 4. He does state that she had given more than everyone else because she gave from her poverty. However, in the context of this passage Jesus is condemning the Scribes and their evil

religious practices, one of which was to “devour widow’s houses” through their corrupt teaching and practices. This widow has just been devoured and Jesus and His followers watch as the false system of works religion and the rich giving publicly, it was these same men that had just taken all this widow had in the world. Our hearts must go out to this widow because she has fallen into the trap of the Scribes. She believes that by giving at the temple she can buy her salvation. This is not an example of proper giving. God would never want a poor widow to give all she has to live on. This is an example of corruption claiming another victim. The Scribes have taken her house and now she gives all that she has left hoping to buy favor with God.

I do not often quote other pastors because we are mere men who are fallible, it is God’s Word that is infallible. However, today I want to read to you an excerpt of what John MacArthur said in his sermon on Luke 21:1-4, I quote, *“He saw that corrupt system taking the last two pennies out of a widow’s pocket. In desperation, hoping that maybe in that legalistic system her two coins would buy some blessing, trying to be dutiful, for the rabbis had said with alms you purchase your salvation, trying to buy your way into heaven, trying to buy relief from your desperation, your destitution, contemporary ... evangelists call this seed faith. ‘Give me your money and God will multiply it back to you.’ God doesn’t want a widow to give up her last two cents, you couldn’t find that in the Bible any place. That’s the last thing God would want a widow to do”* end of quote. Unscrupulous religious leaders, at that time and today, take giving sacrificially and distort it to mean; you cannot out give God or give until it hurts. Like all lies they take an element of truth and distort into something God never meant it to be. Is it any wonder with the rich TV evangelists and wealthy pastors living far above the people they are supposed to serve, that people say they want nothing to do with the money-grubbing church?

This scene is a sad picture of the victims that works base salvation theology takes advantage of.

Let me be clear; God wants us to give sacrificially, but, but He does not want our “last penny”. God wants us to live up the responsibility of caring for our family. One thing tithing as a sacrifice is meant to teach us is, we do not need all the things of the world and a life lived sacrificially serving others to bring glory to God is far better. Let us live as servants not Scribes!

To recap; the widow gave all she had under the misguided impression that she was serving God, buying God favor. This is why the Lord said (v. 40) that the scribes were guilty of “**devouring widows’ houses**”. The scribes, with no apparent pangs of conscience, actively promoted the kind of extreme sacrifice exhibited by this poor widow. Jesus clearly is teaching that the coercions and intimidations practiced by the Scribes were evil. A further irony, the most tragic of all, is that the Scribes of Jesus’ day promoted such a heretical doctrine while this unfortunate widow, as well as the rest of the nation of Israel, suffered. All her sacrifice was for nothing. The widow could have received eternal life freely had she turned to Jesus. ***Only a false, uncaring religious system would ask members who could not afford it to donate to their cause.*** The widow’s mite does not teach giving; a better application would be, “Look out for the Scribes and Pharisees in our own time.” Live in the truth of Christ, live by faith.

As I stated at the beginning this morning; ***Salvation is a gift from God by His grace and not based on human works or wealth.***

Jesus teaches a better practice or a better way. Maybe this is why early followers of Christ were called people of the “**Way**”. As we read in the Book of Acts, “**Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord,**

went to the high priest <sup>2</sup> and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the **Way**, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.” (Acts 9:1-2) As followers of Christ we are to live in the “Way” of His life and in obedience or the “Way” taught by the Word of God, we are to live by faith.

The best way, as Jesus said to “**Beware of the scribes**” is to learn the truth about God and salvation from the Word of God. The Scribes did not know their Scriptures nor did they see the power of God. The power of God that they did not understand was the power of God shown as God saves sinners by grace not by works. When we realize there is absolutely nothing, we can do to earn our salvation and that it all is a work of God, by His grace, we will see the power of God.

Christ frees us from the thinking that we have to do all this religious stuff before God will love me. We belong to God because we have trusted and loved His Son. We are relying on the work of Jesus to please God.

So, my beloved, our biggest challenge is not how much do I need to do or give but how can I trust Christ more? How can I make Jesus my treasure and not treasure my possessions? I must learn Christ rightly from the Scriptures. I need to love Him more each and every day. By trusting Jesus, we need not worry about our needs being met but simply concern ourselves with the Kingdom of God.

Here is what I want you to focus on in this coming week. **My beloved - Seek the Lord, battle for faith, love Jesus more than the world and beware of the Scribes. Amen!**