



## **Luke 20:45-21:4** *Humble Worship*

### **Introduction**

When I came back to Christ at age 19, God had done a great work in humbling my heart, but there was more humbling to be done. One of the means God used to humble me more was music. At the time, I considered myself to have a well-refined taste in music. So when I heard the worship music at the campus ministry I was attending, I got a little snobby. My flesh bristled, “I left the world for this?”

I had much to learn: worship music was not about me and pleasing my musical sensibilities. It was about God’s people humbling themselves and lifting their hearts to Him. So this circumstance was a perfect fit. I had to choose to humble myself and prioritize Jesus over me if I was to follow Him.

In our passage, Jesus talks about two sets of people: the scribes, and a widow He sees in the temple. He uses both of these examples to teach us this:

Main point: *Our humble and sacrificial worship is seen and valued by God*

### **Setting**

Here’s where we are in the Gospel of Luke: Jesus entered Jerusalem and went to the Temple, where He began cleansing it from false worship (Lk 19:45-46). He began teaching people in the area of the Temple (20:1).

As a result of His temple cleansing and His teaching, the number of interactions with the religious leaders (Pharisees, Sadducees, elders, chief priests, scribes) has ramped up. Jesus’ cleansing the Temple stirred up a hornet’s nest. Even though they are done asking Him questions (20:2, 22, 28-33), Jesus has more to say about them.

### **Beware of Frauds (20:45-47)**

#### *Verse 45*

Luke is often concerned for who Jesus is speaking to. In this case, He was speaking in everyone’s earshot, but particularly to His disciples, those He was investing His life into.

## *Verses 46-47*

Jesus issues a warning to His disciples about the scribes.<sup>1</sup>

The scribes are biblical scholars and often teachers and interpreters of the law.

They could be of the religious party of the Pharisees or Sadducees, and they regularly visited synagogues and taught people.<sup>2</sup> Jesus notes several things about the scribes.

### **1. They look good on the outside**

They wear long robes. The equivalent today would be nice suits. These clothes reflect the seriousness of their role. The scribes are able to impress people with how well they know the Bible. They can pray lengthy prayers. People are quite impressed by these men.

### **2. They enjoy recognition**

People liked having scribes around. The Law of God is the basis of their culture, so people who understand the Law are considered important. The scribes enjoy all of the perks: Front row seat at the synagogue; being invited to every feast. The scribes love all the extra recognition. They feed on it, and they “perform” for more.

**QUESTION: The scribes have a great deal of Bible knowledge. Why hasn’t this resulted in godly character? How can the same situation be dangerous for you? Read James 1:22-25 and discuss.**

### **3. They have become corrupt**

In verse 47, Jesus says that they “devour widows’ houses.” What does He mean? Though we are not exactly sure, scholars have suggested a few options.

- 1) They are managing property for widows and are charging them exorbitant management fees.
- 2) They are charging fees for giving legal advice to the widows. With so many different rabbinical teachings, if you wanted to know if something was by the book, you could obtain “legal advice” from a scribe.
- 3) They could have been taking advantage of the widows’ hospitality by overstaying in their homes
- 4) They could have taken the widows’ homes as a pledge for a debt that they owed. This would work like a modern pawn shop. If you owed money, you might “pawn” your house to a scribe. They would hold on to the house until

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<sup>1</sup> This is the second time in Luke that Jesus has told His disciples to beware the hypocrisy of religious leaders. See Luke 12:1.

<sup>2</sup> Green, Joel B, Scot McKnight, and I Howard Marshall. 1992. *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. InterVarsity Press.

the debt was repaid. Given the financial challenges of the typical widow, the hold might be indefinite.<sup>3</sup>

Whatever the situation, it is clear that the scribes are taking the trust afforded them as spiritual leaders and taking advantage of people. The fact that they were widows made their sin worse. Widows are very important to God in Scripture. Taking care of widows is mentioned over 30 times in the OT.<sup>4</sup> James 1:27 says pure religion is taking care of widows and orphans in their affliction. Paul gives specific instructions to Timothy (1 Tim 5:3-16) about how the church should care for widows in need. Widows represented the most vulnerable group in society in the Ancient Near East. Without a husband to support them, they were often at the mercy of their neighbors. God cares about vulnerable people and He commands His people to take care of widows.

Jesus is exposing these men for being religious fakes. They are not men of God. Their mouths speak God's holy word but their lives bring dishonor to God.

Jesus has cleansed the Temple, but he is showing His disciples that there are more worship issues among the people of Israel than just Temple worship.

Let's apply this to our situation today. What is Scripture telling us?

### *Application*

#### **1. Pay attention to who you pay attention to**

The word translated "beware"<sup>5</sup> simply means "pay attention," as in "Pay attention, there is something dangerous." A flag at the lifeguard stand at the beach warns swimmers to pay attention to dangerous conditions in the water.

Jesus tells his disciples to pay attention because people are giving these men their attention all the time. They are listening to them. Their consciences are being shaped by their teaching. Yet the scribes are engaged in ongoing, unrepentant sin. Jesus says to watch out for false leaders. You can end up as their disciples instead of Jesus' disciples.

We also need to pay attention to who we are listening to. The same thing can happen to us. Those leaders could be pastors, podcasters, or friends. Anyone you let

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<sup>3</sup> Bock, Darrell L. 1996. Luke : 2 Volumes (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament). Baker Academic.

<sup>4</sup> Deuteronomy 24:17-22 is an example.

<sup>5</sup> *prosecho*. Bauer, W., F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, eds. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3d, Accordance electronic ed., version 2.8. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

influence you could lead you astray. You can take on the characteristics of a bad leader. If he has a particular sin pattern in his life, you can absorb that characteristic over time in the way you think and speak. Scripture speaks to this idea.

*Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man, lest you learn his ways and entangle yourself in a snare.*  
(Proverbs 22:24-25 ESV)

*Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals."*  
(1 Corinthians 15:33 ESV)

So what do you do if you have already been hurt by a bad leader?

- 1) Don't stop going to church. Sometimes people become disillusioned with the church and walk away from the very place that God has ordained to help them. Jesus is the leader we need to be following and Jesus is Lord of the Church.
- 2) Ask Jesus to renew your conscience through His Word, to heal you.
- 3) Place your complete trust in Him. Watch for others who are doing the same.
- 4) Spend time with elders at the church. Get to know their character.
- 5) Finally, as you are able, follow those who follow Christ (1 Co 11:1).

**QUESTION: If you have experienced the pain of having your trust broken in a church setting, how have you grown through that situation? How has God helped you?**

## **2. Find your approval in Christ**

Many times, we find our approval in people. We enjoy it when people say nice things about us or give us special treatment. While there is nothing wrong with that, we should not rely on people to make us feel good about ourselves. Rather, we should look to God for His approval.

If we are in Christ, we don't have to draw our sense of worth or approval from people. We have a God who calls us His Father (Ro 8:15), Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers (Heb 2:11), the Holy Spirit has made His home in us (Ro 8:11). God's choice to do these things has nothing to do with us! God foreknew what kind of people we would be before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4). And He didn't choose us because He thought we would be reasonable and wise up and choose Him. He knew we would not choose Him, and He chose us anyway.

Leon Morris said this of the Scribes, "But while they liked thus to shine before people, they were careless of how they appeared before God."<sup>6</sup> Their long

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<sup>6</sup> Morris, Leon, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*. Vol. 3 of Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988.

robes gave them the esteem of men, but God saw them clothed in the filth of their sin.

We should all try to grow in Christlikeness, but God's acceptance of you is not based on your behavior but on what Jesus has done. He has given to you the righteousness of Christ to wear like a white robe. To God, you look better than a bride or groom on the wedding day because all that Jesus has done has covered you completely. Find your esteem in what God has done for you through Jesus.

**QUESTION: How does Jesus' teaching in Luke 14:7-11 help us to understand what it means that the scribes take the best seats at feasts? How can we embrace a Christlike mentality about being "first"? (also Lk 13:30)**

### **3. Bring your sin to light**

We don't know if the general public was aware of how these men were using these widows to gain riches and property—if they were, it shows how much their consciences were affected! But God knew. Jesus knew. And He exposed them.

**QUESTION: Jesus mentions that the scribes "will receive the greater condemnation" (v. 47). Why might their punishment be greater than others? Compare Luke 10:12 and 12:47-48. What does this teach us about the importance of our deeds here on earth?**

Your sin will be exposed, likely in this life, and if not, before the throne of God.

*For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.*  
(Ecclesiastes 12:14 ESV)

If you are a person who holds on to your sin, and hides your sin, instead of fighting your sin, this is God's warning to you. He is trying to help you. He is putting His finger in your chest. Stop coddling your sin or pretending it will go away over time.

Imagine that a doctor has just broken the news to his patient that he has a malignant form of cancer and his patient replies, "Let's just leave it and see what happens." The doctor would be incredulous. You need to bring that sin into the light. Talk about it with a trusted brother or sister in Christ. Talk about it with one of our elders. God's grace can help you walk in freedom from that sin.

To summarize this section: These men are hypocrites. They are engaging in religious fakery. God sees it and Jesus brings it to light.

But Jesus doesn't just call out the fakes that day in the Temple. He points out an example of true worship.

## **Worship God Humbly and Sacrificially (21:1-4)**

Jesus looks up and sees people giving at the offering boxes. According to sources from the time period, there were thirteen offering boxes in the Temple, shaped like a ram's horn trumpet (*shofar*).

There are rich people are giving their offerings, but Jesus notices someone that everyone else there would have considered insignificant: a widow. She gives two *lepta*, small copper coins. To put it in perspective, a denarius was a day's wage, and two *lepta* were 1/128th of a day's wage.<sup>7</sup>

**QUESTION: Jesus praises the widow's giving. Who are some other people Jesus commends in the Gospels? Do these people have something in common?**

Jesus' words show us several things.

### **1. God Sees Our Worship**

No one would have seen what this woman is doing as extraordinary, but Jesus sees her as she truly is. He knows something only God (and those who are close to her) would know: this is the amount of money she has to live on. Maybe this money was a charitable gift, or it was the little she was able to earn. Regardless, it was all she had.

God sees what people cannot (1 Sam 16:7). He sees what is really happening in our lives. He sees us when we are suffering but are obeying and worshipping Him anyway. Sometimes our suffering causes us to question, "God, do you even see what is happening in my life? Don't you care?"

Jesus shows us in this passage that He sees you.

*Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love,*  
(Psalm 33:18 ESV)

You may feel small or insignificant, just like this widow, toiling in obscurity, but the eye of the King is fixed on you. He has not forgotten you. Far from it! He sees your faithfulness. If you are worshipping Him in the midst of that difficulty, this passage is here to remind us that we are seen. Don't let doubt creep in. Don't be discouraged by the voice of the enemy. Your worship is seen by God!

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<sup>7</sup> See your ESV translator's notes

## 2. God values humble worship

This woman stands in contrast to the scribes in the previous section. She is not loudly praying, touting her giving. She is not looking for the esteem of man. She is not focused on herself, she is focused on God. Indeed, she would have to be in order to give all that she is giving.

I am reminded of Tim Keller's famous quote. "Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it is thinking of yourself less."<sup>8</sup> She is clearly thinking of God before herself, grateful to be His servant. This is the freedom that Jesus gives us, to take the focus away from us. Likewise, this freedom takes the focus away from "stuff." Let Caesar have His coin. Our attitude should be, "Let the world have its stuff. Give me Jesus." When I see Jesus as immeasurably great, nothing He might ask of me is too great, no cost too high. Witness Jesus' one-verse parable:

*"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.*

(Matthew 13:44 ESV)

That treasure was worth more than the man had, so all of what he had was a good trade. Jesus the Savior is of inestimable value.

The Apostle Paul also came to understand the great value of Christ. Paul had great learning, and was on a fast track to the top of his profession. Yet when Jesus blinded him on the road to Damascus, he became blind to the value of anything else:

*Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ*

(Philippians 3:8 ESV)

When you see Jesus and what He has done for you, giving all that you have, taking up your cross and following Him, becomes a bargain. Sometimes we can be as blind as the scribes were, celebrating their own learning, and the esteem of men, and the things they have, while Jesus is standing *right there*.

At the end of chapter 19, we read how Jesus flipped tables over in the temple and drove out the moneychangers to reset Temple worship so that it was focused on God. Jesus is still flipping over tables in our lives today. Sometimes there is something in our lives that we begin to find our rest in, but instead of enjoying it with Him and giving thanks to Him for the rest we find in it, we simply begin to enjoy it without Him. The things our hearts find their rest and comfort and peace in apart from God become the idols of our hearts.

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<sup>8</sup> Keller, Timothy J. 2012. Freedom of Self Forgetfulness. 10 Publishing.

Jesus won't share worship with those things. Sometimes, He will flip them over in your life to get your attention. If that is you, humble yourself before God. Thank Him for His good gifts, but seek Him for your rest and your peace instead of letting the temporary things of this world have your heart. This is the wonderful thing about this widow's worship. She is saying, "I find my all in you Lord: my identity, my comfort, my joy."

God loves humble worship because it is rightfully focused on Him.

**QUESTION: How might Jesus be calling you to more humble worship? What would it look like?**

### **3. God values sacrificial worship**

This is what Jesus points out when He is talking to His disciples about this woman in verses 3 and 4. She is giving something that is costly to her.

We have been speaking recently about worship in terms of prioritization. Our lives are frequently thrown off by many things, be they *good things* like vacations or getting a new job, be they *neutral things* like kids going back to school, or be they *difficult things* like losing a job.

These situations often reveal our priorities. When the waters of life get choppy and you feel like your ship is sinking, what are the first things to go overboard? What do you hang on to? Is one of them your time with God? Any time you have to do a reset of your priorities, God is watching our hearts to see where He ends up on the list.

This woman is demonstrating with her pocketbook where her heart is. There are two different words used to describe the widow and her poverty in verses 2 and 3. It is as if the Holy Spirit (the author of Scripture) is driving home how little this woman has: this *poor, impoverished, penniless, destitute* widow. He is pointing out what she doesn't have to show what she does have: a sacrificial love for God.

It is often those who have the least who recognize that the greatest treasure is the one that can't be taken away. Maybe this widow has been cheated out of her money by one of the scribes Jesus was talking about. But they can't take away her God. And they can't take away her joy in worshipping Him!

**QUESTION: Are you prevented from sacrificial giving by the fear that you might not have enough? How does this passage speak to that fear?**

Giving is not the only way to worship, but it is a great way. Your money often represents your work, and your work represents your time, and your time represents your life. It's hard to say you are giving your life to the Lord when you keep all your money for yourself.

You should give to the Lord. It is such a help to you as you grow in your faith. Giving loosens the grip of this world on your life. It honors the Lord because it shows that we prioritize Him. God uses it for His kingdom work. He doesn't need it

(Ac 17:25-26), but He uses it as we offer it to Him. Here is another example from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians:

*We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.*

(2 Corinthians 8:1-5 ESV)

The Macedonians were hurting financially, just like this widow, but they gave to the Lord to help their brothers and sisters. Paul did not expect them to give so wholeheartedly. Verse 5 says that they gave “not as we expected.” Paul might have given the Macedonians a pass if they had only given a little. But look what he says about what likely motivated them:

*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.*

(2 Corinthians 8:9 ESV)

They were motivated by the cross, Jesus' sacrificial giving on our behalf. When we were spiritually indebted, His sacrifice on the cross opened the windows of heaven and made us rich.

Whether it is our time, our money, or our care for others, we should give to the Lord regularly and cheerfully, but also sacrificially.

**QUESTION: Read 1 Corinthians 16:2 and 2 Corinthians 9:6-7. What do these passages teach us about how we are supposed to give?**

## Conclusion

Remember the disciples that Jesus was speaking to in 20:45? Every one of them (except Judas Iscariot) learned from Jesus' teaching about the scribes and from the example of this woman.

Instead of pursuing friendship with the world like the scribes, they pursued friendship with God. Jesus told them in Jn 15:14 that they were His friends if they did what He commanded them. He commanded them to go and make disciples (Mt 28:19-20).

To participate in the work of people's redemption is messy. People don't like to be told they are sinners and that their works before God are filthy rags. So

instead of greetings in the marketplace, the disciples were spit on. Instead of the best seats in the synagogues, they were driven out of town. They received public recognition all right, but not like the scribes. They did all of this because they saw that God values our humble and sacrificial worship, worship that is shaped by the Gospel.

The disciples learned the joy of humble and sacrificial worship. They gave all they had to live on, and in the end, they gave even their lives, because they saw by faith what Jesus had given them. They did not receive long robes that would wear out and that moths would destroy, but white robes:

*The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.*

(Revelation 3:5 ESV)

These robes represent the righteousness of Christ.

You may feel like you have nothing to give this morning. Perhaps you are tired and weary from faithful service. Maybe you battled sin this week and were defeated. Humble yourself before God—give Him your heart. Offer up your worship sacrificially to Him.

**QUESTION: Read 1 Corinthians 12:7 and 1 Peter 4:10. Sometimes Christians feel like they have nothing to offer others. How do these passages speak to this idea?**

Let's follow the example of this sister as she followed hard after God. Even greater, Let's follow the example of Jesus, who left the riches of heaven and took on temporary poverty so that we might be eternally rich in Him.

**QUESTION: What was your best application from the passage?**