

SUNDAY, AUGUST 20, 2023



LUKE

A PROMISE KEPT

TWO SMALL COINS | LUKE 20:45-21:4

There are so many instances where the verse and chapter breaks in our Bibles actually get in the way of the story. They make it easy for us to find a passage on Sunday morning, but often break our Bibles into bits and pieces that obscure the larger whole. The break between Luke 20 and 21 is a case in point.

Luke deliberately presses these two stories together to make a larger point. There is a careful contrast between those who devour widows houses for personal gain and a poor widow who is willing to give her last penny to God—between those who pursue the appearance of righteousness and those who are truly righteous.

THE APPEARANCE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS (20:45-47)

⁴⁵ While all the people were listening, Jesus said to his disciples, ⁴⁶ “Beware of the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. ⁴⁷ They devour widows’ houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely.”

1. The teachers of the Law are often paired with the Pharisees in Luke’s gospel. They were essentially scribes, who were charged with producing hand written copies of Torah. There were few positions that were considered more honorable in first century Judaism. They became experts in the Law by virtue of their intimate knowledge of every line and every letter in the Law. We in fact share a common theological heritage. They took Scripture very seriously and very literally. They were not only meticulous rule keepers, they even had rules about how to keep the rules. They had a supernatural world view.

What are some ways that someone can have an intimate knowledge of Torah, be meticulous in following the teaching of the Torah and completely miss the heart and thrust of God's heart and character expressed in Torah?

2. Jesus had earlier indicted the teachers of the Law, along with the Pharisees, for loading "people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them (Luke 11:46)." Here he makes six strong indictments against them.
 - a. What are they?
 - b. What do they tell us about their motivation?
 - c. Which of these is most serious?
 - d. What are some ways we may be guilty of some of the same things?
3. What do you think it means to devour widow's houses?
4. How should they have responded to "widows (see James 1:27)?"
5. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus offers this challenge to the Pharisees: "But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice (Matthew 9:13a).'"

How might the same apply to the teachers of the law? ... to us?
6. The Bible clearly teaches degrees of reward and punishment (see Luke 12:47-48; 1 Corinthians 3:11-15). Why do you think these particular people will be punished most severely?"

A PORTRAIT OF TRUE RIGHTEOUSNESS (21:1-4)

21:1 As Jesus looked up, he saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. 2 He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. 3 "Truly I tell you," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. 4 All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."

1. If we shared Jesus' vantage point, what might have stood out to us?
2. The fact that there was such extreme wealth and such desperate need in Jerusalem was in and of itself an indictment on the people of Jerusalem, and perhaps Israel as a whole. God's intention was...

DEUTERONOMY 15:4-5 "However, there need be no poor people among you, for in the land the Lord your God is giving you to possess as your inheritance, he will richly bless you, 5 if only you fully obey the Lord your God and are careful to follow all these commands I am giving you today (Deuteronomy 15:4-5)."

EXODUS 22:25-27 "If you lend money to one of my people among you who is needy, do not treat it like a business deal; charge no interest. 26 If you take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, return it by sunset, 27 because that cloak is the only covering your neighbor has. What else can they sleep in? When they cry out to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate."

ACTS 4:32-34 All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had... And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all 34 that there were no needy persons among them.

How might these passages be an indictment on us as well?

3. It is not often that Jesus calls the disciples attention to an individual's actions, but in this particular case he makes an exception. Why do you think he calls this poor widow to his disciples attention? ...and also to ours?
4. Each of the small copper coins the poor widow dropped in the treasury were about 1/132 of a denarius. A denarius is what a common day laborer might expect as wages after a full day in the fields.
 - a. If you saw someone you knew to be a poor widow giving her last penny to the church building program, how would you respond?
 - b. Why do you think Jesus allowed her to give her gift?
5. The widow's sacrificial gift is reminiscent of the Macedonian believers who surprised Paul with the level of their generosity.

2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-5 And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. 2 In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. 3 For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, 4 they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people. 5 And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us

- a. What is extraordinary about the widow's gift?
- b. What is extraordinary about the Macedonian's gift?
- c. How should Jesus' commendation of this poor widow and Paul's extravagant praise for the Macedonian believers shape the way we view our possessions and respond to need around us?