

## Luke 21 Smashing Religious Facades

Just as we saw last week – Jesus answers the BIG Q and then brings it around to personal application. This time it’s a question from the disciples – and it has to do with the destruction of the Temple and what are commonly referred to as End Times events – what will happen before Jesus returns to Earth to punish the wicked and reward the righteous? This conversation is captured by three of the four gospel writers - Matthew, Mark, and Luke. In Matthew and Mark we find a lot more information about End Times events, while Luke seems to focus primarily on the destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the Temple.

We’re going to touch upon all of that this morning, but our main emphasis will be on discovering WHY Jesus said what He did – what sparked this whole discourse? And that will lead us to back to the personal application that usually followed Jesus’ answers.

[1](#) Jesus [\[fn1\]](#) looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box,[2](#) and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. [\[fn2\]](#) [3](#) And he said, “Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them.[4](#) For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.”

**God loves little things done for right reasons.** Jesus highly esteems the tiny little gift that this woman brings – two pennies in our currency – He esteems it not because of its size, but because of its precious value – she had nothing to live on and yet she made a priority of giving to God.

I saw something similar in a small church in a refugee camp in Northern Uganda as older woman came walking down the aisle bringing a few bananas as her offering because she had no money but still wanted to surrender something to God.

That kind of worship (and giving is an act of worship) gets God’s attention. He wants to be our number one priority and He is far more concerned about that than He is about the amount you drop in the offering box each week.

You won’t find it on any anatomy and physiology charts, but there is a direct connection between your **heart** and your **wallet**, and there is another one that goes directly between your heart and your **watch**. The three form a trinity of sorts, where one is, the other two can’t be far behind. The things you give your heart to will also begin to possess your watch, or your time, and your wallet because money, as we have said, is just another expression of your time. You either have already given away a chunk of your life to earn it, or if you use credit, you are promising away a chunk of your future.

God wants your heart first, and if He truly has that, He knows your wallet and your watch will eventually follow. If you remember, Jesus said back in (Lk 12:34) that “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” The little bit of treasure this woman put into the gift box was simply a reflection of the fact that she had **already** given Him her entire heart.

What about the rich who do give to God out of their abundance? Is it still possible to be blessed for that? I think so, you don't have to be poor to be recognized by God, but check your heart - do you still see yourself as wholly dependent upon Him even when giving doesn't hurt?

Money is only valuable to God when that direct link to your heart is still intact. If the connection between the two gets severed, God won't care one bit no matter how much you think you are giving to Him.

We're about to see how that applies to the Temple building. This massive, beautiful, ornate structure had been built by people giving time and money to God, but because their hearts were far from Him, He just didn't care.

[5](#)And while some were speaking of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings, he said,[6](#)“As for these things that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.” [7](#) And they asked him, “Teacher, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?”[8](#)And he said, “See that you are not led astray. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he!’ and, ‘The time is at hand!’ Do not go after them.[9](#)And when you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified, for these things must first take place, but the end will not be at once.”

[10](#)Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.[11](#)There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven.[12](#)But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake.[13](#)This will be your opportunity to bear witness.[14](#)Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer,[15](#)for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict.[16](#)You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers [\[fn3\]](#) and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death.[17](#)You will be hated by all for my name's sake.[18](#)But not a hair of your head will perish.[19](#)By your endurance you will gain your lives.

[20](#)“But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near.[21](#)Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it,[22](#)for these are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written.[23](#)Alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! For there will be great distress upon the earth and wrath against this people.[24](#)They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

### **Details of the Siege and Battle**

- Happened during the Passover season so Israel was full of travelers coming to town for the religious festival – the town was bursting at the seams, Josephus estimates at least 2M people on the basis of how many lambs were killed for Passover and how many people it took to consume one lamb.

- Zealots are rebelling against Rome – Rome sends a few legions to crush the rebellion starting up North in the Galilee – the men fight and flee down south to Jerusalem and enter the city and start telling everyone that the Romans are coming.
- Zealots are not good guys, gangs running in the streets READ Josephus
- People start to rebel against the Zealots – who band together and retreat into the temple because it’s like a big fort inside the city and they’re using it as a defensive position. Then the **Zealots call for help from the Idumeans** who live nearby and they are able to sneak into the city before the Romans get there but then they get trapped inside when the Romans show up and the fighting inside the city resumes. At one point you’ve got **three different parties** fighting against each other inside the city while the Romans are outside the city preparing to take it on.
- At the same time, even the weather is against them - famine sets in and people try to sneak out at night to gather herbs to eat – READ Josephus
- Eventually the defenses of the city start to fail because they are so busy fighting amongst themselves.
- Titus encourages his men with the belief that God is using them to do this. READ Josephus
- So much gold is taken by the Romans that the price of it falls in half in nearby Syria
- Many Jews are taken back to EGYPT as slaves, so many that they essentially flood the market and it becomes hard to sell a slave in Egypt for the next several years.

It was a horrible time in the history of Israel because people were not focused on knowing God in Spirit and in truth. Even though they had built a mighty building, they were not giving Him their hearts. This all occurred on a national scale, but according to Jesus similar events will occur one day on a global scale:

[25](#)“And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves,[26](#)people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken.[27](#)And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.[28](#)Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

[29](#)And he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree, and all the trees.[30](#)As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near.[31](#)So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near.[32](#)Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place.[33](#)Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

[34](#)“But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap.[35](#)For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth.[36](#)But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

[37](#)And every day he was teaching in the temple, but at night he went out and lodged on the mount called Olivet.[38](#)And early in the morning all the people came to him in the temple to hear him.

What’s the personal application? Jesus wants us to stay on guard against things that can slow us down, redirect our energies, and shift our focus off of Him. And He says we are to do that by maintaining an active prayer life – keeping our relationship with Him awake and alive.

Let’s go back a little bit - do you remember the original purpose of the Temple? It was supposed to be a place where people could meet with and worship God **but it became little more than a spiritual museum** complete with gift shops. And because people lost sight of the original purpose, the building became pointless in God’s eyes.

And yet, by the time it was destroyed, thousands of new Temples had been built all across the Mediterranean to replace it. For you see, with the death of Christ as the final sacrifice to be offered, individual Christians **became** the temple – now we don’t go somewhere to meet with God, *through the work of Jesus He forgives us of our sins and sends the Holy Spirit to dwell in us forever.*

2 Cor 6:14 Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?[15](#)What accord has Christ with Belial? [\[fn2\]](#) Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever?[16](#)What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said,

“I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them,  
and I will be their God,  
and they shall be my people.

[17](#)Therefore go out from their midst,  
and be separate from them, says the Lord,  
and touch no unclean thing;  
then I will welcome you,

[18](#)and I will be a father to you,  
and you shall be sons and daughters to me,  
says the Lord Almighty.”

So now we are the Temple and we have to ask the question – well, what am I using myself for, what am I building? Am I constructing my life around God and meeting with and worshipping Him, or am I just trying to create some pretty, well decorated building? Am I using my life to get to know God and make Him known to others, or am I using it for whatever I want?

He very specifically warns us – difficult times are coming and the only way to prepare for what will happen **then** is to stick close to Him **now**. The temptation He says is that our hearts can be weighed down – we can get caught up in enjoying ourselves through partying and drinking, or we can get all wound up in the cares of this life. The antidote is to draw near to Him in prayer and ask for the grace and mercy we will need to stand when the difficult times come.

As we get ready to celebrate Communion this morning take this time to reflect and allow God to speak to you – to evaluate how you are using your life – are you doing little things for the right reasons or are you building an impressive but pointless building? And ask Him to show you what specific things are weighing you down as you wait for His return, to forgive you for them, and to grant you His strength to do something about them.

And from the message I never gave because God convicted me to speak to the rock instead of striking it:

There's a stark contrast here on many levels. There's a great difference in appearance to be sure, between the rich and the poor, but what that difference is depends whose eyes you are using. To the average onlooker, it would seem one is rich and the other is poor, but if you look through the eyes of God the poor widow is alive and the rich people are dead.

To the average onlooker, the rich have made great contributions – you can hear all the coins they are putting in as they hit the offering box. And as we said last week, you can see their contributions all over the Temple grounds – some gold here, a tapestry there, some jewels over this way, sometimes given just to be able to show off or feel good about the fact that their gift was hanging in the Temple. The place was full of opulence.

And, to the average onlooker, the poor widow had just thrown in a few pennies – a mite was the smallest currency they had, just the equivalent of our penny. But by giving this seemingly inconsequential amount, Jesus said she gave more than all the rich people put together.

So what's going on here? How can it be?

Well, essentially the rich were feeding God their leftovers and the widow was offering Him first pick. The rich made a big show about giving a little something to God after they paid all their bills, bought all their nice furniture, threw their big parties, and took a little vacation – **after** doing all that, why not offer a little bit to God too? A little contribution maybe to 'help out the church.' But although the dollar amount may have been huge compared to what the widow offered, it had no value in God's sight because it was still their leftovers.

Most people still do the same thing – if they offer God anything at all, they offer Him their scraps – whether we're talking about giving of money, resources, or time – we make sure all **our** needs are taken care of first, *then if there's something left*, we'll think about offering it to God.

Now, let's use an analogy here and see if you can understand how God might look at our misdirected priorities. Let's say you tried to treat your girlfriend this way. Because you're really

busy and have a lot of stuff you have to get done all the time, you can only go out on a date once a week, hit or miss, for about an hour and a half. You usually take her out to a really nice restaurant and order something nice from the menu, you have a pretty good time. But when your 90 minutes are up you start getting antsy cause you need to drop her off at home and get on to the next thing in your schedule. She asks you to please try to call her this week and she'd really like to see you, maybe for lunch on Wednesday or something if you can squeeze it in. Well, of course, you're a busy man, and it's so hard to find any extra time, so you maybe you text her 2-3 a week, but you can't ever quite find the chance to sit down and type out an email, send a card, or call. And you tell yourself, you'll see her again on Friday, and you'll take her out again, why, the end of the week will be here before you know it.

Now, how long do you think that relationship is going to last? Do you think that woman is going to feel loved? Even if you really are working hard and there is no other woman in your life? Pretty soon she's going to feel rushed and rejected because you're giving her your scraps.

Now let's say you're broke but you keep trying to find ways to spend some time together. Maybe instead of a nice date at a fancy restaurant, you just make a couple of sandwiches and pack a picnic lunch for the park because that's all you can afford, but you also splurge a little bit and buy a bottle of Orange Creamsicle soda – you could have gotten water for free, or you could have gotten a coke for pretty cheap – but you know she really likes Orange Creamsicle so you splurge. Now, when you pull that bottle of soda out of your bag and present it to her, how does she feel? She feels loved, thought of, she's moved because you love her and you thought of her. You gave her your heart and your mind and whatever little amount of change that you were able to count out from your car's ashtray followed.