

Jesus Changes Everything: A Poor Widow

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[0 : 00] We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, as I mentioned, tonight we're going to be looking at the story of the widow's mite. That begins in Luke 21.

But we're actually going to back up a few verses into chapter 20 and start in verse 45 and continue on through chapter 21 to verse 4.

Now, I think I might have mentioned before that Rachel and I lived in China many years ago where we taught English at a university. And we actually lived on the university campus, and it was located on the outskirts of this city.

It was a city of 7 million, which by Chinese standards is not very large, but certainly large by our standards. And it was interesting where it was located because it was located right on the edge of the city where you'd have farmland on one side and urban development on the other.

And so what we loved to do was walk around the area around our university and it was quite an impoverished area. You'd walk around and see rubbish just littering the streets.

[1 : 03] You'd see these little cinder block homes with tin roofs, no real insulation for these family dwellings, probably a lot of them no running water. It wasn't uncommon to see people selling fruit or vegetables off a cart that's being pulled by a donkey.

But also you'd see this stark contrast because often you'd see these people driving by in their Mercedes or their BMW going to their new luxury condos that have been built just a little bit down the road.

And so that's always stuck out to me was this stark contrast between the wealthy and the poor, between the haves and the have-nots. And so we're going to see in their passage today a very similar contrast, a contrast that Jesus makes between the privileged and the poor, between religious show-offs and spiritually sincere.

And so this contrast is actually going to help us see what Jesus loves and what he hates, who he commends and who he condemns. So let's look at this passage now.

Luke chapter 20 starting in verse 45. While all the people were listening, Jesus said to his disciples, Beware of the teachers of the law.

[2 : 23] They like to walk around in flowing robes and love to be greeted in the marketplaces and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers.

Such men will be punished most severely. As he looked up, Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins.

I tell you the truth, he said, This poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she had to live on.

This is the word of God. Now, as we've been walking through this series of Jesus, looking at Jesus' interaction with women, you may notice that this passage is a little bit different because Jesus doesn't actually interact with this woman in this passage.

There's nothing to indicate that Jesus had any personal contact with this widow, that he talked to her before or after her offering. But instead, Jesus uses this poor widow as an object lesson.

[3 : 37] He highlights her sincere faith. And he does so more powerfully by contrasting it against the hypocrisy of these teachers, of the scribes.

And so perhaps you've been taught that way before. You've not only been taught how to do something correctly, but you've also been shown how not to do it right. You know, two of my kids, the older two, are playing football now on Saturday mornings, and we often go into our back garden and kick a ball around as well.

And I grew up playing football, soccer, as we'd call it in the States, of course. And so I often give them instructions. I show them how to kick the ball with their laces, with their ankle locked when you're taking that shot, or how to pass the ball with your instep.

But oftentimes I'll show them, too, how not to do it. We don't want to toe the ball. We don't want to flex our ankle when we kick it. And it helps them because they see how not to do it to better understand how to do it properly.

So the same thing goes here. Jesus is pointing out the virtue of this woman, but he's also highlighting the hypocrisy of the scribes. He contrasts this woman's sincere faith with the phony religion of the religious leaders.

[4 : 47] And so we see in this passage there's really this large difference between the religious, what it means to be religious and what it means to have sincere faith. Throughout the Gospels, we see Jesus spend time with a lot of different people.

We know that he spent time with tax collectors, with prostitutes, with other sinners. But we see that he reserves his most harsh statements.

His strongest rebukes are reserved for the religious leaders of the day. He was far more concerned with how they were bringing down the glory of God, how they were focusing attention on themselves rather than acting like true shepherds of the people.

And in fact, if we were to turn back to Matthew 23, Jesus calls out the scribes. This is where we see Jesus give the seven woes to the Pharisees and to the scribes.

He's saying that everything they do is done only for men to see. He says, And he ends by saying that these Pharisees and scribes are like snakes.

[6 : 14] They are a brood of vipers. And so we see that Jesus is not parsing his word when he shows his contempt for the attitude and the actions of those who pretend to be men of God, but are in fact leading men from God.

And so in this passage, Jesus, when he points out the hypocrisy of these scribes, he's really pointing out three different forms of hypocrisy that I want to look at this evening. And they all begin with the letter P.

So if you're taking notes, this will be easy to write down and to remember, hopefully. We're going to be looking at three forms of hypocrisy. One, the scribes' passion for prominence.

Second, their predatory pastoring and their pretentious prayers. All three of these things showing their hypocrisy. And so let's look first at their passion for prominence in verse 46.

It says, Now, we should remember that these scribes are teachers.

[7 : 30] Their role is to reveal the glory of the God through scriptures. And yet we see time and time again when Jesus rebukes them, it's because they crave their own glory and honor.

They're seeking their own attention. In fact, they're expecting adulation from other Jews. Perhaps we know people like that. You know, these people that always want to be the center of the tension.

They love receiving praise. If they're going to do anything, they want to make sure that they're going to be acknowledged and appreciated for their work. And so when we see that people that desire this prominence, what's at the heart of this issue is their pride.

C.S. Lewis says this about pride. He says that the essential vice, the utmost evil, is our pride. Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, all of these things are mere flea bites in comparison.

It was through pride that the devil became the devil. Pride leads to every other vice. It is the complete anti-God state of mind.

[8 : 36] And so when we think about pride, it can really be summarized as this attitude of self-sufficiency, this attitude of self-exaltation in relation to God. And the problem with pride is it's always easy to identify in other people, but it's much harder to identify in ourselves.

But Lewis goes on to say this. He says, There's no surer proof of a confirmed pride than a belief that one is sufficiently humble.

And so we need to ask ourselves, what puffs us up? And not just in our normal lives, not in our jobs, in our relationships. That's important, of course. But more importantly, in our spiritual lives.

That's what makes Jesus so particularly upset at the scribes is because they are prideful in their role as spiritual leaders. There's another really good quote from the great Puritan Jonathan Edwards.

He says this about pride. He says the first and the worst cause of error that abound in our day and age is spiritual pride. He said this is the main door by which the devil comes into the hearts of those who are zealous for the advancement of Christ.

[9 : 54] Pride is the main handle by which he has hold of Christian persons and the chief source of all mischief that he introduces to clog and hinder the work of God.

And so, like I said, it's easy to identify pride in others. Let us take time to search the depths of our own heart. Certainly, we don't parade around like these scribes in long robes.

We may not care about where we sit at church. But our pride certainly shows itself in other ways, maybe more subtle ways. Maybe our pride isn't detectable to others, but it's certainly something that we sense ourselves.

And so, let's consider what tempts us. How does our pride tempt us? Are we tempted to prove ourselves based on being active in service? Do we try to prove our worth through being faithful in prayer, by being more knowledgeable of the scriptures, by having perfect church attendance, or maybe being more concerned for the needy?

You know, all those things aren't bad in and of themselves. But when we view them as the source of our personal significance, we're no longer honoring God.

[11 : 12] We simply want to honor ourselves. And so, in addition to this passion for prominence, Jesus points out that second form of hypocrisy that the scribes show.

It's that predatory pastoring. In verse 47, it says that these scribes devour widows' houses. Now, we're not given any explanation of what that really means.

It may indicate that in trying to help widows, maybe manage their finances, they're actually swindling them out of their money. Perhaps they're persuading them to give more to the temple than they can actually afford or ought to give.

But whatever it may be, we certainly know and can understand that rather than caring for these vulnerable women, these scribes are actually taking advantage of them. And so, this really corresponds well with what we just finished up studying in 1 Peter.

We looked a couple weeks ago at 1 Peter 5, where Peter discusses the role of elders. And he tells the elders that they are to be the shepherds of the flock. And in doing so, they must do so not because they must, but because they are willing to lead.

[12 : 25] Not out of greed, but out of a desire and an eagerness to serve. Not lording over others, but leading by example. And so, this description that Peter gives, we can see in this passage, is certainly not being followed by the scribes of the day.

As shepherds, leaders are to care for the flock, to nurture and to provide for the needy. But we see here, instead of the scribes being shepherds, they're actually playing the role of the wolf.

They are devouring the sheep rather than protecting them. And so, that leads us to this last form of hypocrisy that Jesus points out here. The hypocrisy through pretentious prayers.

Over the last few months, our families had these electrical issues at our house. We don't know the cause of it, but one of our breakers keeps tripping, which causes us to lose power for an hour or two at a time, and we can't get it back on.

And we've actually had a couple electricians out to the house to look at it. They haven't been able to figure out what's going on. We actually had another one last week. And when he comes, he always wants to talk about what he's doing and what he's going to try to do to fix it.

[13 : 41] And he's using all this technical jargon that I just, I really have no real understanding of what he's saying. I'm not an electrician. I know very little about electricity.

I can change a light fixture, and that's really about it. So, when he's talking to me in these technical terms, a few times I've just had to stop him and ask him to explain it another way because I just don't understand.

Certainly, he's demonstrating his knowledge and his expertise, but it's of no benefit to me as someone who's not an electrician.

And so, the same goes for the scribes here. Their prayers are only being used to make themselves sound important, to display their own level of religiosity.

The thing is, although they want to appear pious, their words are actually empty and useless. And as a result, their prayers are rejected by God.

[14 : 40] You know, we probably, we still see this in the church today. Oftentimes, when we pray publicly, we can be very concerned about who is listening to our prayers. And we have two different kinds of people.

We can have those who are very eager to pray in public because they like to be heard. They like to use their eloquence. And while eloquence doesn't mean that it's insincere, oftentimes, we focus on the eloquence, and our words are just empty.

Other times, we have people who just really hate to pray in public because they're afraid of what other people may think of their prayers because they're ineloquent. And so, the problem is here, both sides, both these groups are focusing on themselves rather than focusing on God, who is the object of our prayers.

And so, that's one of the two questions we need to ask when we go to prayer is, who is the object of our prayer? But also, what is the purpose of our prayer? The object of our prayer must always be God.

It doesn't matter who is listening to us. It doesn't matter who is around. It's God who should be the recipient of our prayers. And then, when we think about what's the purpose of our prayers, the purpose of our prayers should not be to earn the admiration or the appreciation of those who may hear our prayers, but instead, it should be to proclaim our praise and thanksgiving to God, to confess our sins and to make our requests known to Him because anything short of that is a form of hypocrisy, which Jesus shows here that He detests.

[16 : 22] And so, now we turn to the beginning of chapter 21, where we look at this poor widow who demonstrates her sincere faith in the face of phony religion.

Now, as we look at her, it's important to note a few things about this description, both the setting and the character. Jesus and His disciples, when He's talking to them, are in one of the courtyards of the temple.

And it was in this courtyard where these collection boxes would be set up for giving toward the temple. And there actually would have been 13 of these receptacles spaced out throughout the room.

And these receptacles were actually shaped in the form of a trumpet. So, it had a very small opening and then opened up toward this basin at the bottom where the coins would clink down and collect.

And so, it was a rather public setting for giving, though you could try to be private in giving your money, it could be very easy to do so in a public manner.

[17 : 28] Imagine if you came in and there'd be a lot of people there that would see you, potentially, and you came in with lots of coins and you'd have to drop them one at a time and you could hear each coin clink into the receptacle.

You know, you could do so and certainly be noticed by many people. If you wanted to be known for your giving or your generosity, this was certainly the place to do it.

But we see this widow come in and we must remember that widows in that day and age were considered the most vulnerable in society. They had no regular means of financial support.

They couldn't work in society like many of the men could. They had no one to care or protect for them. They may have children of their own that they have to care for. So, as a result, they have to rely on the charity of others.

And so, this widow walks in and it says she puts two very small copper coins in one of these receptacles. And each one of these coins would have been about one one-hundredth of a denarius, which would have equated to about five minutes of manual labor at minimum wage.

[18 : 42] And yet we see in verse 3 that Jesus says, I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people, they gave their gifts out of their wealth, but she came in and out of her poverty.

She gave all that she had. And so, Jesus here is wanting us to see the true value of her gift. By human standards, she didn't give much of anything.

You know, her two little copper coins would really not do anything to benefit the work of the temple or the work of the priests. They'd really be totally unaffected whether or not she gave that money.

However, by God's standard, her gift amounted to much more than everything else that others had given combined. And so, this really shows what matters most to God.

God's greatest concern, Jesus' concern in this passage, is the widow's heart. Because it's through her actions that she demonstrates her sincere faith. You see, her sincere faith doesn't look to elevate herself.

[19 : 48] It doesn't look to see how she can benefit from her relationship with God. Unlike the scribes who are more concerned with seeking their own glory, this woman seeks the glory of God.

She demonstrates that it is God alone who is worthy of her praise. And she demonstrates that through her giving. We see in the Westminster Shorter Catechism, the very first question, it asks, What is the chief end of man?

The answer, To glorify God and enjoy Him forever. That is our goal in this life, and that is our goal in the life to come. In Revelation 5.12, it says that the angels and all living creatures and elders encircled the throne of Jesus and sang in a mighty chorus, Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise.

And so we see here, through this poor widow's sincere faith, she demonstrates that God is worthy of her worship and that God is worthy of her resources.

In giving her money, she's not trying to attract the attention of men. She's not trying to earn favor with God. It's truly an act of humility that stands in stark contrast to the pridefulness and the hypocrisy of these scribes.

[21 : 17] You know, it's these scribes who wanted to be praised and acknowledged in everything they do. This widow recognizes her lowly position. She recognizes that she is nothing, but yet gives everything she has.

John Calvin said this, He said, He said, The chief sacrifice that God requires of us is self-denial. Because it's only through self-denial that God can be elevated in our lives.

We cannot worship self and God. We only have one throne in our hearts, and it cannot be shared. We cannot have God sit on our throne while we still sit on that same throne.

You know, picture with me the scales. When one side goes down, the other side goes up. If this side goes down, this side goes up. We can't have both sides up at the same time.

And so the same goes for our lives. If we are attention-seeking and hungry for praise, then God becomes less in our lives. If we elevate God, if we want to see Him high and lifted up, then we recognize that we must be humbled.

[22 : 24] John the Baptist said this, When Jesus started His ministry and He too is baptizing people, people come to John the Baptist and are concerned for His own ministry. What's going to happen now that Jesus is here?

And what does John respond by saying? He says, He must increase and I must decrease. And so not only is God worthy of our worship that we see, but He's also worthy of our resources.

Because the same holds true. The more we value our possessions, the less that we are going to value God. Jesus says that where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

So if we want to see God glorified, then we're going to be willing to hold on loosely to the things of this world. Our possessions, our finances, will pale in comparison to the treasure that we have in Jesus.

And so that ultimately leads us to where a lot of people, their sole focus is on this passage. They see this poor widow who has given everything she has.

[23 : 31] And so that's our lesson, right? That we need to be willing to give everything that we have. Well, not exactly. The story of generosity isn't in the Bible simply to encourage us to be generous too.

It's not just, this woman doesn't serve just as an image of how we should be, but it's an image of who Jesus is. It reveals to us the gospel story.

It's a foretelling of the sacrifice of Jesus. Because it's only in this very next chapter in Luke where Jesus is betrayed and arrested and is soon to be crucified.

It says in Philippians 2 that though Jesus was in the form of God, he did not consider equality with God something to be grasped. But he made himself nothing, taking on the very nature of a servant.

Being made in human likeness and being found in the appearance of man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross. And so if the actions of this widow seem scary or foolish to us, let us look to the cross for this story points us to Christ.

[24 : 45] It is Christ who has sacrificed everything for us. It is Christ who willingly died that we may have life. He suffered the penalty for our sins so that we may be free.

And this is the good news of the gospel. And so for those of us who have the good news, then we are motivated to lives of generosity.

And we're not generous because we think we have to earn God's favor still. But it's specifically because we have God's favor, because out of a heart of gratefulness, at the gift of life through the blood of Jesus that we have been given, that we are naturally led to lives of generosity.

So we give generously because God has generously given to us. And so really, two quick principles when we think about generosity. That God deserves priority in our giving, and God deserves sacrificial giving.

And so when we think about prioritized giving, what does that mean? Well, it means that God, that we are willing to give God everything because we recognize all of our resources come from Him.

[26 : 01] If we're truly motivated out of a gratefulness for God's generosity to us, then we're not going to be satisfied with giving God just our leftovers. Christ and His kingdom are going to be a priority in our lives.

So therefore, we honor the Lord with our firstfruits. But secondly, we also give sacrificially. And this really applies to all of us, whether we have a lot of money or not.

Generosity isn't contingent on how much money we have. Everyone, every one of us can be generous. Because we see here that God doesn't measure generosity by the amount of the gift, but at the cost to the giver.

And so generous giving truly means that it is going to hurt us. But we recognize the goodness that it brings and the glory that it gives to God.

And so as we think about this passage, oftentimes we've probably heard it in the context of being used by ministers who may be a little concerned about cash running low at church or a building project that's about to get underway.

[27 : 11] I assure you that this passage was not picked because of our own refurbishment project. That's about to begin. But I think it would be foolish if we didn't see this project as a point of application to this text.

Our refurbishment project is not going to be cheap. It's been said before that this is going to require sacrificial giving. But we need to remember the purpose of this project.

It's not to make us more comfortable, but to make God known. These renovations will give us the ability to do more ministry, to be able to welcome more people into the church that they may experience the love and fellowship of Christ.

And so we can be confident that in giving generously, that is directly linked to the work of the gospel. And it's important to recognize here that it doesn't only mean being generous with our finances.

We must learn to be generous with our talents and with our time because a project like this, it's really going to have no lasting benefit to the church or to the community if we don't also commit ourselves to the work of the gospel.

[28 : 25] You know, Paul says in Romans 12, I urge you in light of God's mercy to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. This is your spiritual act of worship.

And so just as we see the sincere faith of this widow that compels her to her generosity, let us also consider and remember the sacrifice of Jesus, that we may also be motivated in our living and in our giving to do so in such a way that we demonstrate our sincere faith and that God may be ultimately glorified.

Let's pray together. Lord, we thank you that you are a generous God, that you did not spare your only son in order that we may be saved.

Lord, we thank you for your sacrifice on the cross, for your blood being shed for the forgiveness of sins. And so as we consider this poor widow who gave everything she had, Lord, help us to be pointed to you, to recognize your mercy, to recognize your grace and your generosity to us.

And let us be motivated to generosity. Let us be willing to give of our money and our time and our resources for the glory of Christ, for the advancement of your kingdom here in Edinburgh and to the ends of the world.

[29 : 59] And this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. And now in closing, we're going to sing a couple songs together.

First, we're going to sing a hymn, My Worth Is Not, followed by a psalm, Psalm 16, verses 7 through 11. My worth is not in what I own, not in the strength of flesh and bone, but in the costly wounds of love at the cross.

My worth is not in skill or name, in weight or losing pride or shame, but in the blood of Christ that flowed at the cross.

I rejoice in my Redeemer, greatest treasure, wellspring of my soul.

I will trust in Him no other, my soul is satisfied in Him alone.

[31 : 45] As summer's flowers we fade and die, fame, youth and beauty hurry by.

But life eternal calls to us at the cross. I will not boast in wealth or might, or human wisdom's fleeting light, but I will boast in knowing Christ at the cross.

I rejoice in my Redeemer, greatest treasure, wellspring of my soul.

I will trust in Him no other, my soul is satisfied in Him alone. I will trust in Him no other, my soul is satisfied in Him alone.

I will trust in Him no other, my soul is satisfied in Him alone. To wonders here that I confess, my worth and my unworthiness, my value fixed, my ransom paid at the cross.

[33 : 20] I rejoice in my Redeemer, my greatest treasure, wellspring of my soul.

I will trust in Him no other, my soul is satisfied in Him alone. I will trust in Him no other, my soul is satisfied in Him alone.

I will trust in Him no other, my soul is satisfied in Him alone. I will trust in Him alone.

I will trust in Him no other, my soul is satisfied in Him alone. My soul is satisfied in Him alone. I will trust in Him only, I will trust in Him no other, my history of Mkoï Ježd Lord my God whose counsel guides my choice and even in the night my heart recalls instructions voice before me constantly I set the Lord alone because he is at my right hand

I'll not be overthrown therefore my heart is glad my tongue with joy will sing my body too will rest secure in hope unwavering for you will not allow my soul in death to stay nor will you leave your Holy One to see the tombs decay you have made known to me the path of life divine bliss shall I know at your right hand joy from your face will shine you you you you you