

Luke 20:45-21:4 "God's Internal Eternal Economy"

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Preacher: Will Spink

- [0 : 0 0] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.
- Amen. Beautiful, beautiful song. We're going to talk about that if you turn to Luke 20. The end of Luke 20 here.
- In the chapter 21, we're going to talk about that familiar passage that I talked with the kids about a few minutes ago. But before we do, I want to remind you of something that we all know, but I think we often forget.
- That's this. God sees our hearts completely. You know, man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart.
- 1 Samuel 16. And the Bible also says, you, God, know the hearts of all mankind. 1 Kings 8, Acts 1.
- [1 : 0 8] In fact, God knows the secrets of our hearts. Psalm 44. And He weighs our motives. Proverbs 16.
- So that, in the end of the day, no one hides from God, but all are exposed before Him so He can see it all. That's Hebrews chapter 4. Probably not new information to you, but that's a little bit frightening, isn't it?
- It's frightening to me because I spend a lot of time concerned about what I look like. My appearance. Managing what others see about me.
- Hiding in some ways. Working on appearances. And this morning, Jesus looks at our hearts. He sees our hearts, the hearts of others in this passage.
- He's concerned with what and whom we love. You probably expect this is a passage about giving. That's true.
- [2 : 1 5] But the truth is, it's about loving before it's about giving. Let's pray that our hearts would be open to His work in them this morning.
- Pray with me. Father, we often would like to keep our hearts hidden. And not even consider them.
- And yet, Your Word tells us that it divides joints and marrow. Soul and spirit. That it judges thoughts and attitudes of the heart.
- And so as we open it up, we know You will do that. And Holy Spirit, we ask You to give us tender hearts. That we might be willing to have You show us what You see there.
- That we might be eager even to have our hearts changed by You because You love us. Do that work, we pray. Teach us of Jesus.
- [3 : 1 6] Change our hearts, we ask for His sake. Amen. Jesus has been debating the religious leaders here in the temple.
- And then He turns to His disciples in this passage and He issues a strong warning about these leaders. Luke 20 at verse 45.

And in the hearing of all the people, He said to His disciples, 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.

Who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.

Beware, Jesus says, of these religious leaders who are supposed to be models of virtue, religious piety, but they care only about external spirituality.

[4 : 21] Because they care only about themselves, ultimately. That's classic hypocrisy.

In modern language, Jesus says there's a special place in hell for those who pretend to love God, but really love only themselves.

Dante and Milton, many others through history have picked up on the seriousness and evil of hypocrisy.

And perhaps for some of you, this is what you hate most about Christians. That many of those Christians you know seem to you to be all about appearances.

Care only about themselves and what they look like. It's all about the external show. So it seems. Let's look at what Jesus sees when He gazes into the hearts of the scribes and see where we too may need to repent.

[5 : 26] There are many ways in this passage to know Jesus is talking about the heart and what they love. One is that Jesus here talks about what they desire, like, what they love.

Those are the verbs used. So we know that's what He's concerned about. But another one is that the actions themselves that Jesus is critiquing are things like being friendly.

Attending church. Praying. Good things, right? Things He commends and commands elsewhere.

It's the self-focused heart that Jesus is attacking, right? You tracking on that? He's concerned about the heart. And this heart for self feels image is everything.

They like to walk around in long robes. Nothing wrong with wearing robes. In fact, some temple priests were required to wear amazingly beautiful garments.

[6 : 31] But the priest's clothes were supposed to point to God and His glory. Not the glory of the priest himself. They were actually to cover Him.

So God's glory would be clear. But when we indulge our heart for self, we want to be seen and have the appearance of success, of piety, of importance.

And that's largely because in our hearts our value comes from others. Greeting someone in the marketplace is not sinful.

Sitting at the head table is not sinful. Sitting up front at church is not a sin, although you'd think it was. But loving these things is.

The words used for these are all about being first. Being recognized. Being praised by men. Being somebody because other people think you are.

[7 : 35] That's where these scribes got value. That's why it's so dangerous in the church. So easy for this to happen. Because you see, to feel valuable in the church, you don't have to love God.

You just have to make others think you do. And maybe preach really well about it. You don't have to love God's Word. You just have to make sure others think you do.

And maybe say some really profound things about it. You don't really have to love God's people. You just have to make others think you do. And maybe write a book about it.

And you can be valued in the church. Praised. Adored. And your heart can be empty. Dead.

It's pretty scary for a pastor. As a people pleaser who has longed my whole life for the approval of others. This is always a challenge for me.

[8 : 41] Finding my value from what others think of me. It was especially hard when I moved into this new role three years ago. More people saw more of my responsibilities.

The things that I did. More people listened when I talked. And my immediate struggle and temptation has been to try to look the part.

To prove myself capable. To have people honor me publicly and say nice things about me. And man, it is hard not to love that. Some of that is being an extrovert.

Loving being with people. But a lot of it is being a sinner. I'm in the process of learning to repent of that idolatry.

That's what it is. All last year I tried to remind my heart of God's approval. To focus more on important things that no one else sees.

[9 : 45] Like private study. Private prayer. Investing in people no one else notices. Please pray for my heart.

But this is not a hard issue for pastors only. Jesus is critiquing the religious leaders. But he's doing it for the sake of all of his disciples, isn't it?

It's his disciples he's speaking to and he wants everyone to hear. It's a warning for all of them about this hypocrisy. Other people can't see your heart, can they?

So if your value comes from others and they can't see your heart, all you have to worry about is how you look. Whether you appear spiritual.

Whether you appear important. Then perhaps the pinnacle of hypocrisy here. Verse 47.

[10 : 46] They devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation. They pray to God, but not to God.

They pray only to be heard by others. They don't really mean it. And they devour widows' houses. They depend on self to provide.

Taking advantage of the social and religious system that they live in. They play a role of helping the poor widows while they get rich off them. There is systematic injustice going on.

And Jesus hates it. They will receive the greater condemnation. You see, it's actually this whole temple system that Jesus is frustrated about.

God has set up this temple system in the first place to be about a love relationship with God, right? That's what it's about. Remember, the temple is where God dwells with His people.

[11 : 50] It's where they bring sacrifices to deal with their sins so they can be in relationship with Him. It's where they bring their offerings, their prayers, their songs of praise to praise the glory of His name and to own their own need for Him.

The temple is where the poor and marginalized are cared for by this community. But what's happened? Instead of loving God, the caretakers of this temple system love themselves.

And under cover of doing the work of God, they line their own pockets and neglect relationship with God and the people He loves. So God's left out and there are widows with almost nothing left to live on.

Where? Right there in the temple among them. Jesus sees their hearts and He won't stand for it. He won't stand quietly by.

It's why He's just overturned the money changers in this very temple, right? Because this was to be a house of prayer and you've turned it back to focus on yourselves. It's to be about loving God, but you only love yourselves.

[13 : 05] And when you love yourself, you're a taker. You use other people. Taking affirmation from them to boost your self-image.

Taking their places to feel self-important. Taking their livelihood to support your lifestyle. It's wicked hypocrisy.

The reality is that heart that Jesus sees in the temple in Jerusalem is not all that unfamiliar to us, is it?

That heart for self is by nature what we all have now from birth. We are naturally takers who will use others.

We'll do anything to make ourselves look and feel better. You ever spent time polishing up your Facebook image? Ever dropped a comment into a conversation to seem more important?

[14 : 09] You ever damaged a relationship because you unintentionally pressured the other person to affirm your value? You ever done something at church because you knew it would look spiritual?

Isn't it hard to imagine going through a day, even one day, without thinking what other people are thinking about you and the evaluation they're having of your appearance?

Isn't it hard to imagine even doing? Isn't that naturally what our minds think about and what we often dwell on? Managing that and those appearances well before dealing with our hearts?

Isn't that a lot harder and less normal for us? Taking, taking, taking. That's the heart we're born with.

And we can't change our own hearts. How does God work to change our hearts? What makes us able to love God more than we love ourselves?

[15 : 16] How does the good news of Jesus make takers into givers? Let me give you a picture. I love seeing my girls get old enough to buy presents for their mom.

They have an awesome mom and they love her so much. And we all love to give to people we love. So what happens?

At Christmas time, they go out with me knowing how much they love their mom and they see something that they know she would love and they say, Oh, I want to get that for mommy. And they burst with excitement.

And I say, \$17? Do you have \$17? She checks her wallet. All of her birthday money from that year.

All of the tooth fairy money she's been saving. Yes, daddy, I have 18. I can get it for her. And everything in me sees that as so beautiful.

[16 : 19] But just knowing that it's from love, I just want to pay for it for her, right? Oh, just let me cover it. And then I, darling, that's all you have. There's nothing left to get me something.

But then I realize, what's it to her that it's everything in her wallet?

She hasn't spent that money all year because we provide everything that she needs. If she needs something tomorrow, she's not going to pull out her wallet and go looking to see if she's got enough.

She trusts me for that. See, what changes the heart of a taker, like we're born and grow up living like, into a giver, is the love of a God who provides all that she needs.

The good news of the gospel is that Jesus has come and he has lived and died for you. To give you value in his righteousness.

[17 : 30] Restored relationship with your heavenly father who treasures you. That's what happens when Jesus comes for you.

He brings you back into that love relationship with God and says, guess what? Before you even love him, God loves you. He treasures you.

He values you. So you don't have to chase value in the praise of men. You don't have to pretend or put on a show for them.

You don't have to fend for yourself. You have all you need in Christ. You are so valuable to the creator of the universe that the son of God lived and died for you.

And as that hits home, as your heart begins to believe that that really is true, it begins to love him way more than you feel the need to worry about loving yourself.

[18 : 42] As you realize how valuable you are to him and what Jesus has done for you. Your heart actually starts loving him and not having to worry about providing for and loving myself.

What's it to you to give all you have when he promises to provide all that you need, right? Take her becomes a giver.

When that heart change happens, as God does that in our hearts, what does that new heart for God look like?

When Jesus sits in the temple and he's looking around for someone who really loves God. He's there in this story, right?

And that's what he's looking for. And he looks around. Who do his eyes stop on? His soul-searching eyes, seeing into their hearts, don't stop on the religious leaders or the rich tithers.

[19 : 45] If he were here this morning in our sanctuary, he wouldn't stop on the pastor with the snazzy suit up front looking really good. Or the person who just put the biggest check in the offering plate.

When he's looking for someone who really loves God, his eyes settle on a poor widow.

Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box. And he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins.

And he said, truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. For they all contributed out of their abundance.

But she, out of her poverty, put in all she had to live on. In the temple treasury, there were 13 large brass treasure chests.

[20 : 51] They were trumpet-shaped with these wide mouths at the top. And they're made of metal, right? So in the midst of a bustling Passover crowd, if you came in with lots of metal money, you could make quite a display with putting rich money.

It would be loud and visible to everybody how much you were putting in. Or you could have only two lepta.

That's the word for the coin. Two lepta. Two lepta. So thin that you probably could barely hear the plink when she put them in.

So worthless that together, they're less than a penny that you'll walk by on the ground this afternoon and not even stop to pick up.

And that's apparently the case for the widow that Jesus sees. That's all she's got. And Jesus sees what? Her heart.

[22 : 02] He sees her heart. Remember, he's looking for what? For love. For God. And her treasure is very small. But it's all going to God.

Where her treasure is, there her heart is also. That's the internal, eternal economy of God that values the heart way more than the amount.

See, for the widow, God is everything, isn't he? It's certainly not the external, her image to others. Apparently, from this passage, it was obvious that some people were rich.

And it was very obvious that she was a poor widow. But there she was in that busy crowd coming to church, as it were, dressed just like that in those rags coming into the presence of God.

Just like that. And she can overlook the people looking down their noses at her because her value comes not from their opinions of her importance, but from God.

[23 : 17] Jesus says, Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. More than all of them. That's fuzzy math, Jesus.

Jesus says it's God's math. God has all the money He needs. And He values hearts that respond to Him in love.

God has the ability to multiply our gifts however He chooses. Those two worthless coins have taught countless followers of Jesus through the centuries about loving and giving to God.

God multiplies our very small gifts in great ways for His kingdom. Jesus pronounces it's more than.

He values her, doesn't He? Don't you love here again Jesus' heart for widows? It happens over and over again in this story.

[24 : 24] Once again, Jesus values someone who is insignificant to others. Those who are the least, the loneliest, the most left out in His society.

Jesus sees and He treasures the widow that no one else values. There are quite a few of you in this room this morning.

I hope you hear your Savior's voice when He speaks these words. Of what He values. Of what He sees when He looks at you.

Even when you feel like you can barely get here and bring your two pennies worth of energy, strength, and joy.

Jesus sees those whom others view as insignificant and says you're more than all the others.

[25 : 30] Hear His heart for you. He sees your heart through your grief, your loneliness, dear widow, and values you.

He sees your heart through the walker that you're frustrated or ashamed that you need.

He sees your heart through the feeble prayer you offer. And He multiplies it for His kingdom because you are big to Him.

Because He values you. Because He loves you. And what He cares about is love in relationship with your God. And you haven't lost a step in walking with Him.

He loves you. He values you. Even when you don't feel it. If some of the most precious gifts each morning are the coins dropped in the plate by our kids, some of the most precious gifts of service to God in this whole church are the prayers and notes and shared tears of our widows.

[26 : 55] God gives you your value. And finally, because that's true, the heart for God depends on God to provide.

Verse 4, Why is the gift so big? It doesn't make sense, Jesus. It's the heart again. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.

She put in all she had to live on. In other words, she had to trust God completely for what was next, right?

She didn't have anything else to trust in herself. That's the beauty of giving out of poverty. I saw this firsthand in India when nearly 2,000 mostly very poor pastors and their families sleeping on dirt floors, gathering for church services and buildings that have makeshift plastic roofs, gathered together for a conference, and one of the families shared their struggle.

In particular, of one of their children who had a medical treatment needed they couldn't afford. And their leader, Pastor Saji Lukos, stood up with the family and said, we're now going to take up an offering for this family.

[28 : 33] I need six people to give 10,000 rupees each to this family. 10,000 rupees, not an extravagant amount.

Maybe for you, just a little more than \$100. But more than many in the room could claim to their name. While I sat uncomfortably doing currency conversions in my head, first the guest from the big city stood.

Okay. Then stood the professor who had shared the day before what God had taught him through years of extreme poverty.

I'll give. Amazing. Amazing. And it took a few more moments. And I turned around from where I was in the front and four people almost at the same time stood much further back in the large auditorium.

From what I guess and what I witnessed, I believe they had to ask others around them to help get that much to even be able to stand up and say, I'll give two.

[29 : 46] And in their poverty, they then rejoiced. They gave cheerfully. And they praised God together. They would give and get to watch God provide again the next day because they wouldn't have anything else.

See, the heart is much more significant to God than the amount, isn't it? If you're wondering about the amount, it seems to be measured more by what you hold back than by what you give.

The rich gave a lot but held a lot back. There's a lot of places we can hold things back. The widow gave little but held nothing back.

As our hearts grow in love for God, the idea is that the proportion of our giving would grow because we're trusting Him more.

the amount is incidental, circumstantial, if you will, as God blesses us. What Jesus commends here is sacrificial giving that helps our hearts depend fully on God.

[30 : 57] C.S. Lewis said, I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare.

In other words, if our expenditure on comfort, luxuries, amusements, etc. is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little.

If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say, they are too small. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot do because our charitable expenditure excludes them.

Is that the problem you've been having? There is a place to wrestle with your own heart before God, isn't it? Giving from a heart for God can look like so many things in our context.

The homebound widow who prays day after day. The quiet member who pats the Bible with your one-year-old and then slips out unnoticed.

[32 : 03] You didn't even know they were there. The cleanup crew dragging bags to the dumpster after others are gone. The family who won't eat out this year because they're saving to adopt.

The young couple with a smaller home than their friends because they are committed to giving first and sacrificially. I don't know what it will look like for you, but when our hearts are changed by the loving provision of our Heavenly Father, when we remember and rejoice that He's got us covered and that He's worth more than anything else we could purchase with no matter how much money we come up with, then we will give out of a heart for God that is beautiful in His sight because it's the heart that He was looking for.

Last story from another pastor. You probably haven't heard of Fanny Mulder, but here are the entire contents of her apartment, all she owned when she died in 1987.

Some clothes, six robes, two sweaters, thirteen adult diapers, nineteen hospital gowns, one pair of slippers, and five pairs of socks, plus two without a match.

Some personal items, a purse, a mirror, an old thimble, a toothbrush, a comb, some soap, some powder bottles, and a pair of reading glasses.

[33 : 47] She used the glasses to read her two copies of the Bible and her hymn book to sing the Psalms. In addition to a broken radio, the only other thing Fanny Mulder had in her possession was some money.

Twelve cents, a dime, and two pennies. But she had drawn up a will in her old age because she felt so strongly that she should invest whatever she had in God's kingdom as she'd done her whole life.

Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia was the beneficiary of the dime and the two pennies. Now gratefully displayed in a glass case on campus is the lasting testimony of a woman who gave Jesus everything she had.

I want to die like that. Problem is, I just don't know when that will happen and it's more of a struggle to want to live like that.

Sacrificial living and giving from someone with a heart that loved God multiplied many times by a God who loved her dearly first.

[35 : 14] Let's pray. Father who sees and knows our hearts, show us what we need to see of ourselves.

Perhaps more importantly, show us what we need to see of our Savior. Make us people so confident in your love and provision for us, so overjoyed in the goodness of our Savior that we become givers in every area of our lives.

Holy Spirit, work in our hearts for the glory of Jesus. We ask in His name. Amen. For more information, visit us online at [southwood.org](https://yetanother sermon.host).