

Jesus the Lord of the Poor

Luke 20:45-21:4

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May 13th, 2018

- I. Having Nothing
- II. Needing Something
- III. Giving Everything

Good morning! It's a wonderful day to be in the house of God together! Amen?

If this is one of your first times here, welcome! And if you've visited before and come back, we're so happy you did. We love meeting new people and welcoming them into our lives and into our church. My name is Duane. I'm the preaching pastor here and my heart is for as many as people as possible to enter in and find their home, with God and His people.

We're jumping back into our study of The Gospel According To Luke today in the Bible but before we get into that I want to personally plug both the Men's Retreat and the Women's Day the following weekend.

Relationships are important. Extremely important. They are the stuff of life. God is a God who exists eternally in relationship with Himself as Father, Son, and Spirit, He created us in that relational images, He invites us up into that relationship through Jesus and we flourish and prosper as human beings when we are in healthy relationships with other humans.

When we have Men's and Women's Retreats, they are special times, not only to get away and to focus on God but times where real, quality relationships are formed and fostered. Some of you have been around here for awhile but have maybe had a hard time just getting to know people on Sundays. If that's you, you gotta go. Register asap. I promise, you'll make friends and it will be good for your soul.

For the Men's Retreat. We're going camping, but it's close. Only about 45 minutes outside of town. There's a pool at the campground, volleyball, the woods, and mountains. It's only \$50 bucks so you can afford it. We'll have some special times learning together about how we can ENGAGE God, our souls, one another and the mission He's called us to.

Likewise, the Women's Day is going to be a special time of fellowship, where you can hang out with other gals, gets some tan, go shopping if you want and just enjoy God's creation together.

And this is the last thing I'll say on it. Spouses, boyfriends, and girlfriends...make your man or woman go. Tell 'em you got the kids and you've got it. Men, even if it's a lie, just say it. Women, it will pay off in your man's life. For both, your significant other will come back being recharged and refreshed, so make them go. And if you're single make sure you go to. We'll brainstorm together who we can hook you up with.

Okay, commercial done. How did I do? Did I sell it enough? You all in?

Let's get into Luke now. We're in Luke 20:45-21:4 today in a sermon I've titled, "Jesus the Lord of the Poor." Would you stand with me for the reading of God's Word?

Luke 20:45-21:4

45 And in the hearing of all the people he said to his disciples, 46 “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, 47 who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.”

21:1 Jesus 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. 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.”

- Pastoral Declaration: This is the Word of the Lord.
- Congregational Response: Thanks Be To God.

Jesus the Lord of the Poor. I preached my first sermon in 1997. It was at a little church in Oregon on a Sunday night. Maybe 40 or 50 people there. That's when I first discovered I had a natural gift and knack for preaching.

I had no plans of becoming a preacher at that time. My family did not grow up with a lot of money. I remember in school when all the other kids were getting Air Jordans, I wanted them to, but we couldn't afford them so my parents bought me British Knights. And if you don't know what those are all you gotta know is that they weren't cool. So when I went away to college I had big dreams of being financially successful and making a lot of money, like most college kids do.

After preaching that first sermon I entered into a season of seeking God about what He wanted me to do with my life instead of what I wanted and I began to think He wanted me to become a preacher. But I had a hard time with that idea. Because I didn't want to be poor like I was growing up and I didn't want to be a nobody, I wanted to be a somebody.

Then I went to a Billy Graham crusade and saw how thousands came to hear Him preach. I started listening to other preachers and visiting their churches and saw how well they seemed to be doing. They were successful. Lots of people and they were doing well financially. Nice cars, nice houses, nice clothes...they seemed to be doing alright.

And while, make no mistake, there were good genuine things going on in my heart in a love for God's Word, a desire to preach it and see people come to Christ, the dirty secret I don't think I've ever told anyone is at the same time a seed was planted in my heart. A seed where I desired glory.

Fast forward a number of years, paying my dues, preaching to small groups of people. Eventually, I started to have larger and larger opportunities. I remember on one occasion I was preaching at a fairly large event, about 3,000 people. After preaching I got down off the stage and to my horror I remember thinking I liked that. I liked the lights. I liked everyone looking at me. I liked the attention. I liked the applause. I liked the glory. I knew I was in trouble.

So I began a quest of trying to learn to live for God's glory instead of my own. At times it's still a battle for me...to preach and want you all to like my sermon, to work and serve and be paid far below an average wage in San Diego and still live month to month.

In the book “Glory Hunger” one of the preacher's whom I've admired, looked up to and wanted to be like, Matt Chandler, says this,

“I find in my heart an insidious desire to be recognized and applauded. I work hard, I have some natural gifting, and I want people to notice this and say something to me and to others about how awesome I am. Notice that I used the word awesome there. If I had typed the word glorious, then all of us would have raised an eyebrow. In fact, as I read over the sentence and replace the word awesome with glorious, I feel a sharp stab of conviction.

Glory is ultimately God’s, and though I might reflect it, any glory I have is my Creator’s not mine. In my saner moments, I am well aware that I am fragile and that God has not made me the hinge upon which his kingdom will swing. But sin isn’t sane. I know what the Bible says about the proud. I am almost haunted by John 3:30, which says, ‘He must increase, but I must decrease,’ and by Psalm 138:6, which says, “Though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly, but the haughty he knows from afar.”

This is what our passage from Luke today is all about...our desire for glory when the reality is we are all simply spiritually poor widows in need. Last week, we talked about how Jesus is Lord of All and that our need is to admit that and say “Jesus Is Lord.” This week what we’re going to see is that there is a sense in which it’s only the poor who will really ever utter those words.

So I’ve kind of have two goals today. Both to humble us and to help us see God’s heart of the humble. I’ve got three points, “Having Nothing”, “Needing Something” and “Giving Everything.” And the theme for today is simply, “God Cares.” God cares. God cares about our pride and desire for approval and praise. And He cares for the poor, the broken-hearted, the needy and those who call upon Him.

I. Having Nothing

So let’s jump into this first point, “Having Nothing.” Our text starts out today with Jesus speaking up. There’s a whole crowd of people around, as well as a group of religious leaders standing around. This is the same setting and conversation from the text last week, which says the chief priests were there, the Sadducees were there and here in the part, we’re looking at today, the Scribes.

They’re all basically staff employees of the church. They work at the temple and are supposed to work for God and His people. So to use some parallels, they’re different church leadership roles, just like how we have pastors, deacons, community group leaders and ministry leaders.

The Scribes here were the guys who had the job of making copies of the Bible, studying the Bible, teaching others what the Bible said and then they were also the treasurers, which is why Jesus mentions their role in managing the financial affairs of widows.

What Jesus does is He speaks up and directly addresses His disciples in front of everyone. I wouldn’t even be surprised if He pointed with His hand and looked directly at the Scribes. And in front of everybody, He says, “Beware”! Beware of these guys and then just rips them.

It’s pretty ballsy. He makes fun of their clothes, their social networking, their eating habits, their financial responsibility and their prayers!

The scribes dressed differently than everyone else. They wore these bright white robes with fancy tassels at the bottom made by Dolce and Gabbana. They were super popular, always talking and trying to get people to like them, thousands of followers on Instagram. They loved to go to galas and fancy parties. They were definitely at the Met Gala in New York this last week that had a \$30k ticket price. They had big bank accounts and loved to pray long, fancy prayers and be seen as super-

spiritual sages.

Jesus points all these things out and says, “Beware!” Don’t be like that. It will ruin you. And on the day when you stand in judgment before God, you will receive a sentence of condemnation.

What we see in looking at these Scribes is that they seemingly had everything. But they had nothing. They were spiritually bankrupt.

Widows were among the poorest of society. A widow back then was not just someone whose husband had died but also their father and who had no sons. Because of that, it made it extremely difficult for them to generate income to care for themselves and their families. Which is why in the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, God instructs the church leaders to make sure to care for widows.

In the first part of our story today, on the outside it looks like it’s the widow who’s poor. But the picture Jesus paints is it is those who seek the glory, want the approval of others and who abuse their places of power and influence who are the true widows, the ones who are truly poor and destitute.

And this is a real danger for us, isn’t it? Jesus’ strong word, His warning, “beware!” is a rebuke we need to hear today.

One article I recently read in a prominent newspaper was titled, “How the Human Need for Approval Drives Social Marketing Strategies.” Larry Alton writes,

“People post pictures, write statuses and share content that they believe will make them appear happier, wealthier or (insert any other word that applies). They wait for likes, comments, retweets, and shares. If the virtual adoration doesn’t come, they’re defeated. If it does, they’re on cloud nine.

While this clearly isn’t healthy, it’s where we are as a society that craves attention and approval.”

The desire for approval is big, isn’t it? We love it when people praise us and give us glory, even in the smallest of ways.

Today, where and how have you had glory hunger? What is it you’ve been seeking to get from other people that you know deep down you can only get from God?

Approval can wreck us. And so can the abuse of power and influence as Jesus points out with these Scribes. It’s when we’ve failed to be generous or charitable to others with what we have. It’s when we’ve not fulfilled our duties or responsibilities properly, wasting time at work, not working our full hours, doing a poor job...which is really scamming people out of the money they’re paying you for.

Today are there places and ways you’ve not been honorable before God with what He’s given you?

Or how about the flip side of this? Where you’ve been a victim of someone abusing their place of authority, like the widows experienced, being devoured by these guys who were supposed to be church leaders.

My wife was hanging out with the person who started Soul Care House here in San Diego. It’s a professional Christian counseling center here in our city that we love and respect and have sent

several people to in cases that needed a little more than what our pastors can provide.

She said over 75% of the cases they deal with are people who have had bad church experiences, where they experienced spiritual abuse from a pastor or church leader. Just in the past two weeks we've had two meetings with people in our church who were extremely hurt at their previous church. It's painful. It takes a lot of courage to admit and then to still try to pursue God in His church and be a part of it.

If that's you what we want to tell you, "It's okay." Sometimes sheep bite and sometimes pastors use their shepherd's staff in the wrong way. We want our church to be a place of healing and if you've come from a bad past experience typically we just say, "Hey just sit for awhile and heal." It's okay and you're going to be okay.

What we see in all of this is that Jesus cares. He sees the pride in us and in compassion says, "Beware." He also sees the brokenness in us and says, "I see you, I see how you've been devoured and it's not your fault." And that's why He came.

God cares. He cares about us having nothing. He doesn't want us to end up spiritually empty and bankrupt. He doesn't want us to be condemned. He wants us to be cared for.

II. Needing Something

Well, let's move on to our second point for today, "Needing Something." In this point, I want to look a little closer at the widow in the next scene whom Jesus honors for her financial gift to God's church.

First off, some things haven't changed. In the outer court of the temple where people could seek God and pray they had offering boxes. We've still got those, four different offering boxes in different places here in our place of worship.

They did things a little different, however. Their boxes were made of metal so when a person gave it made a sound and on top of it, one Bible commentator said that the Scribes would be standing next to the box and when people gave they would announce how much the person gave.

Can you imagine that? If we had one of our pastors standing at each of the boxes and shouting out how much you gave each time you did it? That sounds insane.

We don't do that, one because that would be really weird. Two, because 2 Corinthians 9:7 says it's between you and God, an amount that you decide before Him. So we try hard to keep what people give confidential. It's not something we're supposed to compare with each other about. 2 Corinthians 10:12 says that those who compare themselves with one another are not wise.

So don't do that. Don't ever say something like, "I gave this much, how much did you give?" And if you hear of anyone doing that just say, "I don't think this is a healthy conversation, what a person gives is between them and God."

The widow in our text gave two "lepta" is the actual money denomination in the Greek that our English is translated from. One lepta was about a 128th of a day's wages, so it'd be equivalent to about a dollar of minimum wage today.

This woman gives two dollars. Everyone saw it and likely heard it. Then Jesus adds some of His divine knowledge to the situation and says, "She gave all she had." Those were her last two dollars.

Just stop and think about that. To me, that doesn't seem very smart. If she came to me as a pastor, I would've said, hold on to that and let me see how we can give you some money instead. Which by the way is actually part of the church's job. James 1:27 says, "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction."

And we've actually done this with widows and divorced women in our church and we're proud to say we have families who have adopted orphans or some that are in the process of doing so. We take this seriously.

But this woman, this widow, one of the poorest of the poor, with no means and seemingly no hope of how she was going to make it gave her very last two dollars to God at God's house. Why? Why would she do that? How could she do such a thing?

I was baffled by this question this week. It didn't make sense to me. This woman needed help. Desperately. She needed something, from somewhere. She needed help bad.

It just didn't make sense to me. Then I had a counseling meeting with a member of our church this week. We were talking about life and some hard things. Sometimes it's hard to find our way forward with God.

But then, almost seemingly out of the blue, we weren't talking about my sermon or anything. The person I was meeting with said, "Hey, but you know I believe God is with me. Money has been really tight and we didn't have enough to give, but my wife and I talked about it and felt like we should anyway, so we gave our saving." I literally interrupted him and said, "Oh no brother, you shouldn't have done that." He said, "Wait, Duane."

He said later that week another couple in the church came up to them who didn't know any of this and said, "Hey, we want to pay your rent this month." For whatever reason, they just felt compelled by God to do so.

Now don't hear me wrong. I'm not saying you should give to the church no matter what, even if it drains your savings. I'm not recommending that. What I am saying friends, family, is "God keeps the books."

And I need to tell you something. I was so convicted by that. Jesus says here there's a difference between giving out of abundance and giving out of your poverty.

Real confession. Last month we had to pay a bunch of money in taxes, more than I was expecting and budgeting for. I didn't know what to do and how to make everything work out. So you know what I did? I gave a couple hundred dollars less than we do each month to the church so everything would even out.

This passage this week has been stabbing me in the gut and some of you, our church members have been putting me to shame. And I have two things to say about that.

One, I'm so proud of you, Church. Thank you for loving God and being devoted to Him and to one another. When I heard that story I was so happy to hear of your faith in God and generosity toward one another.

Two, we've got our 90-day generosity challenge. Pastor Buss explained it last week, three months

where we want to up the ante in the giving of our time, our talent our treasure. I'm challenged and want you to be challenged with me.

Think, how could I give more of my time to God, His people or His mission for others in our city.

Think, what gifts, talents, things that I can do, could I do with some Gospel intentionality to serve others?

Think, could I start regularly giving some money to God's church? Just a little something each month? If you've been doing that, challenge yourself and think "could I give the 10% the Bible talks about?" And if you've been doing that, think "could I do a little more?"

Look. Like we talked about last week. We're not after your money. We're after you seeing all of your life as God, under His good stewardship and plan. I really don't enjoy talking about money up here. Actually, it's kind of annoying that Jesus keeps bringing it up. We're not one of these churches who always talk about money because we're scamming people and living it up off of it. We haven't been devouring any widow's or anyone else's money. We're just trying to make it right now month to month.

Here's what matters. I think this sums up Jesus teaching her on money here. 1 Samuel 16:7 "The Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."

God looks at the heart. He cares about our hearts. It's not about how much we give it's about how large of a place God will have in our heart. God cares. He knows our needs and promises to take care of us no matter what.

Alright, let's move on to our last point for today, "Giving Everything."

III. Giving Everything

The poor play a prominent place in the Bible.

The Old Testament gave specific legal instructions regarding the treatment, protection, and provision for the poor. The prophets in the Bible railed against the oppression and mistreatment of the poor at the hands of the greedy. Psalm 72:12-13 says this about our God, "12 He delivers the needy when he calls, the poor and him who has no helper. He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy."

Jesus comes on the scene in the New Testament and begins His most famous sermon, The Sermon on the Mount with the words, "Blessed are you who are poor, for your is the kingdom of God (Luke 6:20)." His ministry was fraught consistently with care for the poor, the needy, the broken, those with ailments, the outcasts, the hurting, the abused. He was actually the hardest on the rich.

I've got to tell you church, this concerns me. Our city has the fourth highest rate of homeless people in it in the entire country, over 8,600 people. And I think it's fair to say that homeless people are poor. But even beyond the homeless. Depending on what study you're reading, San Diego ranks 7th or 8th as having one of the highest cost of living rates in our country. San Diego should not just be a place for the rich.

Then on top of that, what is really bothersome is the racial demographics. Pretty much all the poorest communities in our city are comprised of racial minorities. You think systemic racism is not an issue in our city? Think again. And that's another thing that really torques God.

So this concerns me, Church. If Jesus, the one whom we call our Lord, if what we see Him doing and hear Him saying is to care for the poor and instead we become a nice church for the middle class and better people and we remain a predominately white church in a hugely diverse city there's a major problem. That makes me worried about whether or not we're really following Jesus. Jesus and His church ought to make a difference in our city.

You may not have picked up on it but I've steadily been saying stuff like this since we started our study through the book of Luke in January of 2017. I've been doing that because Luke puts such an emphasis on it. And I don't think it's a coincidence that we've begun to see some fruit from that.

We've been faithfully ministering to the homeless community in our city, feeding them every week for about eight years. But this year something happened, something we've never seen before in ministering to our homeless friends, we not only started seeing more and more of them coming but starting to show up on Sundays and experience the grace of love of God's people and His Word.

This is Aaron standing next to Kevin Cieslukowski, who along with his wife Laura leads our Mercy Ministry. I met Aaron a number of months ago, who introduced himself to me as "Ace." He started coming on Tuesday nights to our church for a free meal and then shortly after started showing up on Sunday's for free coffee as a fix when he was coming down after doing meth.

He got hooked on meth a couple years ago while trying to get off of doing heroin for like 9 years and crack for a number of years before that. When Ace first used to start coming on Sunday's he'd come, some of you might remember, with this big mean dog tied up outside the gate. The dog was his protection while sleep down by the river just across Friars street.

Most the time Ace would show up, he'd be high and when we'd try to talk to him about getting sober he said, "I just can't get off drugs. I need them to numb my mind. If I'm not high, I have to think about what I've done. I can't think about what I've done. Everything I've done is so bad. You two wouldn't even talk to me if you knew all that I've done." And he'd begin to cry.

About a month ago, April 14th, Ace tried to kill himself. He took half a bottle of oxy and says he'd said goodbye to the world. He woke up to paramedics using paddles to resuscitate him and then a tube down his throat to pump his stomach. The hospital got a hold of his mom who called the Cieslukowskis. Kevin went and picked him up from the hospital and welcomed him into their home. The following Sunday Ace came to church, no longer as Ace but said, "I'm Aaron." And told me he was going to enter a Christian rehab place we connected him with later that day.

So I and one of our deacons prayed for him in the parking lot, that he would trust Christ, and that God would bless him and restore him.

Aaron said I could share his story today and wanted me to tell you this, "I realized I'm a walking miracle. I should be dead. The number of pills I took should have killed me. God wants me here. What kind of man can turn his back on a miracle?" And on May 1st of this month, he gave his life to Christ and has been reading his Bible and can't wait to come back to church.

Thanks be to God! I'm blown away by this story. God is doing stuff among us and through us. And I can't believe I just get to be a part of it and share it.

Widows. The homeless. The weak. The oppressed. They have a special place in the heart of God. And here's the reason why.

In any Bible text and passage, we have to ask the question, who are we in this story? With today's story, you're either Jesus, the scribes or a poor widow. We're not Jesus, so we can rule that out.

If we're honest with ourselves I think we'd all admit we've got some scribe in us. We like and want other people praise and approval. We want glory. We've not cared for the poor and the lowly the way we know we should. We've misused our money and places of influence and responsibility. Who are we?

We're the spiritually poor. Every time we see someone who is actually poor, literally poor, someone like Aaron. It's a spiritual picture of all of us in our true condition before God. Every one of us are poor widows. We've been devoured by sin, Satan and the fallen world we live in.

And this is why Jesus came. Because He cares. He literally says at the beginning of His ministry in Luke 4:18, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor."

What is that good news and what did He do for poor people who call upon Him?

Jesus was God, the divine Son of God in the flesh. But unlike the Scribes He did not flaunt His privilege and role. In fact, when people tried to praise Him, He always shunned it and shifted people attention to God, to give God praise and glory.

Jesus knew we could never be good enough, that since the garden of Eden we've been in poor condition, unable to save or help ourselves. So He came to us. Not to condemn us but to be condemned for us.

Jesus grew up in a poor family. Spent the last three years of His life as a homeless man. And in the end, gave up the very clothes on His back. And then died all alone on a cross with no praise or approval from anyone, just shouts of hatred toward Him.

Jesus truly gave all He had. He gave everything. He took the place of the condemned. He was condemned on a cross for sinners. The wrath of God the Father was poured out from Him. Jesus gave everything and was widowed on the cross for you and me.

God cares. He cares about you that much that He did it all. He led a perfect life, not seeking His own glory but laying it aside and then He died the death we deserve, being condemned in our place so we could be forgiven and healed and changed forever. Then He rose again and lives today to be the true object of our praise.

And this my is the approval we long for and truly need. God knows the worst of us and yet loves us and receives us and has shown us that in His Son. So no approval could ever compare to His. We don't have to posture or fake anything with God.

He's seen our worst and loves us anyway. And for that, we give Him all the glory, all the honor, and all the praise forever and ever!

Conclusion

Jesus the Lord of the Poor. Having Nothing. Needing Something. Giving Everything.

I started out the sermon today telling you a bit of my story and how this seed of a desire for glory was planted in me. We end today by seeing how that weed and its ugly seed gets rooted it out.

It's simply by seeing the far superior glory of Jesus. When you see who Jesus is and when you see what He did and when you see Him miraculously change the lives of people...there's only one proper response.

We just say, "Glory, all glory be to your name Lord, forever and ever." And then we partner with Him in His mission for the poor, so that He may get more and more glory from as many people as possible.