

Characters in Contrast

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Bible Text: Luke 20:45-21:4
Preached on: Sunday, November 29, 2015

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Let's go to Luke 20. We'll begin in verse 45 and go through chapter 21 through verse 4 so we continue going through the Gospel of Luke. Five years now we have been going through the Gospel of Luke. Luke 20:45,

45 And while all the people were listening, He said to the disciples, 46 Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love respectful greetings in the market places, and chief seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets, 47 who devour widows' houses, and for appearance's sake offer long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation."

Chapter 21, verse 1,

1 And He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury. 2 And He saw a poor widow putting in two small copper coins. 3 And He said, "Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all of them; 4 for they all out of their surplus put into the offering; but she out of her poverty put in all that she had to live on."

It's all a matter of perspective. There was a big ball game yesterday, University of Tennessee Chattanooga was playing the University of Tennessee at Martin. My daughter was playing in that game. That was the game. You see, the rest of you don't understand. Your perspective is wrong. That was the big game yesterday. There was a big game up in Knoxville as the University of Texas played Vanderbilt University and crushed them so the University is rightly aligned again as it ought to be. Then some talk about a little game that was in Auburn yesterday. And I'm sure the Ohio state Michigan folks could care less about what happened at Auburn yesterday.

It's all a matter of perspective where you're coming from, what you value. That's what we're going to see here. Here we have what the common folks of this day would have said is spiritual and right and good and that God, Jesus, brings the true perspective to bear and he talks about how there is a certain class of folks you would have called good, godly, faithful, worthy people to be emulated and honored and Jesus turns it right upside down and says, "No, the ones that you would hold in disdain or view at least as

insignificant, no, God holds them as important and worthy of emulation or honor." It's just all a matter of perspective. I call this "Characters in Contrast." The last part of chapter 20, he talks about the scribes and their character, you might even say their lack of character, and then chapter 21, the first four verses, he talks about a poor widow and speaks of her great and worthy of esteem character. Characters in contrast.

First of all, let's note in dealing with the scribes a great condemnation. A great condemnation. Chapter 20, versus 45-47 and my first sub point from the text will be: their carnal character. The word "carnal" means "base." It means low. It means not spiritual or of God. Now, they paraded themselves as spiritual men and godly men but in reality they were base and low characters. That's where they are. Jesus, I'm going to say it again and I know I sound very repetitive that's because the Scriptures are very repetitive: here again Jesus publicly, forcibly, irrefutably exposes and condemns the religious leaders of Israel. We sang about the meek and lowly Jesus a moment ago and that is so true, it's true of him. Somebody ought to write a song about the bold and manly Jesus. It took great courage, manliness and boldness to come into Jerusalem, into the temple, look at these esteemed religious authorities in the eye and basically say, "You guys are a bunch of snakes." And that's what he does again here. Now, the scribes are different than the Pharisees. The scribes are the theologians of the day. It's not a perfect parallel but you might think of the Pharisees whom Jesus has repeatedly publicly exposed, embarrassed, denounced and condemned, they're of course sort of the pastors of the day. The scribes would be sort of the theologians who work with the pastors.

So Jesus says in verse 46, talking to all the people, and I'm sure quite a number of scribes listening, no wonder they wanted to kill him, "And while all the people were listening, He said to His disciples, 'Beware of the scribes.'" That means be on guard against them. He said, "They like to walk around in long robes. They like the image of elitism and authority that they had by putting on their long robes." So these are proud, hypocritical teachers and I think one of the things the Lord is pointing out to us here that proud hypocritical teachers in religion are more dangerous than just ordinary sinners. They are sinners on steroids, if you will. So these scribes were not your garden-variety sinners, Jesus is pointing out. They are schooled professionals in sin, and those who hold high positions in religion yet use those positions for carnal and worldly ends are the worst sinners.

Now, verse 46 says, "They like to do all these things. They like to walk around in their long ecclesiastical robes." I think that word is the key word here, they like it. It means more than just like the way you and I might use it. It means this was the motive of their heart. They lived for these things. They lived to parade themselves as esteemed and above the others. It denotes that from their heart they had malicious intent; to play the role of a religious leader but purely for selfish and worldly goals. They were, in effect, usurpers. They weren't true spiritual leaders, they just took the role on and took over everything.

Now, I think a good thing for us to understand here is when it says they like to wear their robes, it doesn't mean that wearing the robe in and of itself was sin. Not at all. The point

is it was their heart attitude within the robe that made it sin. They liked to walk about, Jesus says. This means they liked to flaunt about, needlessly strolling about to be seen and to make a show before men. Again, wearing long robes was not the sin but the glorying that they had in seeking the admiration and the praise of the people was the sin. Wearing a long robe, some churches do that. I don't like it. I wouldn't be comfortable in it but that doesn't necessarily make it wrong. It's the fact that we can take an innocent thing and put wrong motives in it and it becomes a sin.

In the same way, in verse 46, not only do they just like to stroll around and flaunt their esteemed position, if you will, in their robes, he says, "and they love respectful greetings in the marketplace." Love here is like the word like. It just means they were in this thing for themselves. They loved the adoring praise of men. As they would go into the marketplace, people were expected and they expected people to show honor to them as they walked about. Now again, is it wrong to honor certain people? No you honor your parents. You are to honor civic authorities. You are to honor pastors. You are to honor those to whom honor is due, the Bible says. So honoring is not the problem, it's the fact that they loved going out and getting it. That was the problem. One good point of application in stark contrast to what the scribes did in this day was that the true Christian with a regenerate heart stays ever mindful that the honor that's important is the honor that comes from God. The fact that you can put on something and get the honor and esteem of men is not important at all and that's what these guys were doing.

He goes on in verse 46 and talks about they love the chief seats of the synagogue. There were certain seats kind of like on our platform here and the most important leaders in Israel would get the most important seats. I remember very clearly when I became a staff member here 35 years ago almost and we would go into the auditorium and the senior pastor let me come up on the platform but he had a certain seat and I didn't sit in his seat. That's fine and that's good. That was where the preaching pastor sat. It wasn't a name on it or anything but that's the way it worked. Is there anything wrong with that? No, but there would be something wrong with an over bearing greedy lust to say, "I want the seat of esteem." We do have too many in the ministry today who want the authority and the glory of ministry without the work and the labor and the warfare and the difficulty of ministry. Well, that's where these scribes were.

Now, again in contrast, the child of redeeming grace would receive a place of honor or receive the honor of others if in God's will it was given to them, but he always seeks first the honor that comes from above. He maintains in his heart that his true condition is a woeful sinner before a holy God. Now listen to me, if you maintain in your heart, "I'm just a sinner saved by grace," then that is a ballast in the heart that keeps you from tilting into self-exalting pride which is where the scribes had gotten. In the church, members are sinning if they do not honor their leaders. Their leaders are sinning if they love to be honored and manipulate and compromise their role to achieve that honor. I think that's what our Lord is getting at.

They love in the seats of distinguishingment, verse 46 says, at banquets. The same thing again. It was just a day, I don't even think we can possibly get in our minds the strong

continual externalism of the culture of this day. I know, I guess people think I pick on the Roman Catholic system but it's a rotten and unbiblical system. Now, there are Roman Catholics that I think love Christ and have found Christ despite the teaching of their church and I love my Roman Catholic friends but the system is corrupt and so the only thing I can possibly get in my mind that parallels the pageantry and the showiness of this day would be the Roman Catholic system today. Have you watched their great celebrations, their great masses? It's just flowing with all of that stuff. Again, you've got to be careful, all of that stuff in itself may or may not be completely wrong but the heart behind it can make it rotten as hell itself.

Now we go to verse 47, they have carnal character but they even have criminal character. I didn't make this a part of the outline but it's criminal what we find in verse 47. That was a pattern that these scribes participated in, "who devour widows' houses." That phrase "devour widows' houses" means they took advantage of the widow ladies of the Jewish community; the most dependent and vulnerable class in the entire culture. The Scriptures teach that widows are to be the special objects of the church's care and they are the special objects of God's care. Psalm 68:5, God promises to be a father to the fatherless and a judge for the widow. God has a special care for widows.

We have a widow lady in our church. I haven't seen her but I assume she's sitting here today, and she came to me some time ago and she wanted to buy an automobile and I called the automobile dealership and I said, and I knew them and I said, "I'm sending a widow lady down there. You'd better give her a good deal." First of all, God commands that I look after her in a special way and you're a Christian brother and you've got to look after her in a special way. And they promised me they would and I'm sure they did and I think she's still driving that car today. But we ought to have that conviction that widows need the special care of others.

So this makes what they were doing that much more vile and evil. These scribes were snakes residing over Israel and using their authority to take advantage of the most defenseless among them, these trusting widows. The word "devouring, devouring widows' houses," means that they would literally eat them up. It's the picture of a voracious African lion wrestling down a defenseless little impala and literally tearing it to shreds with their teeth. Jesus said that's what they do to these ladies.

So under the guise of helping these widow ladies, under the guise of disciplining these widows, they would extort them out of their wealth and they had learned how to take the Scriptures and twist the Scriptures to give them the authority and the right to do so and while they are extorting the wealth from these widows, they would claim that they are helping them. Now, I want to say something here and I believe this, I know this is true and that is that works religion always tends to this type of abuse. Works religion always tends toward this type of abuse because works religion invariably leads to a person being the key guy to tell you what you must do to get to heaven and please God. So it puts a fear in the people of a person. They have a reverence and a fear for the religious authorities because if they don't do the works, the religious authorities tell us we must do, if we do not perform the rituals or whatever it is the religious authorities say are required,

then we're not going to make it to heaven. And so through the ages we have seen, again, in the Roman Catholic system, all these indulgences and paying a penance is telling people your forefathers in the grave are in purgatory and they're suffering and if you don't do these certain works, and it always had to do with money, then you're not going to get your ancestors out of the torments of purgatory. And there were these abuses and it just continued throughout the ages and I don't care which group, which denomination, which sect you're talking about, if it's works based religion it tends toward abuse. That's why I love the Gospel of grace. I have no power and no authority over you to get you to heaven, period. Period. I can only preach to you Christ and the Gospel of Christ and you by faith embrace that Christ, but I'm just a spokesman. I cannot dictate to you any work, anything, any ritual, any whatever to help get you to God. Only Christ can do that. Can I get an amen? I love the liberty of that. You're not dependent upon me. I can die tomorrow and God will have a good preacher in here and you can go right on. It is Christ that we are connected to. But that's where the Jews were of this day, steeped in ritual and works and it was a great abusive system and the scribes were leaders in abusing these people.

Now, verse 47, he talks about what mechanisms they used for seducing these poor ladies and others, but particularly the widows. Verse 47, they "devour widows' houses, and for appearance's sake offer long prayers." Here's the point: Jesus is saying they knew how to put on a public display that these trusting poor ladies would think, "Oh, those are godly men. Those are men I can trust. Oh, listen to them pray. Oh, look at their humility and their devotion to God." Jesus said it was just all a put on. Have you been struck as we have gone through, has it been striking your heart how thoroughly Jesus is exposing and trying to reform the religion of the day? And that's always the Spirit of Christ. As a matter of fact, that's why we're Baptists. Baptists from the beginning have been reformers. Baptists have been the people that looked at the established state churches through the generations and said, "We can't just go through the motions of this ecclesiastical state church. We must be true to God in the Scriptures." That's why I'm proud of our heritage as Baptists.

Well, then Jesus said there is a coming condemnation and that would be the second sub point. I'll not spend long here at all. Jesus says very clearly, the last part of verse 47, "These will receive greater condemnation." There are degrees of punishment in hell and according to Jesus, God, in effect, has an especially hot place in hell for those who are premeditated plotters who use his name and use his church to abuse others for selfish gain and selfish profit. Now, it's one thing not to know the light of truth, it's another thing to use the light of Scripture and truth and to abuse it for selfish and carnal ends.

Now, real quick, let me give a conclusion thought for practical application here and that is the truth is, all of us have some scribe in us. We all have some scribe in us due to being housed in this unredeemed humanity that's not yet purified and glorified. It will be one day but it's not yet. We're housed in this flesh so there is some part of us that would like to use the fact that we teach a small group, we're the outreach leader, we're a deacon, we're an elder, whatever it might be, we're just recognized as a spiritual guy or a spiritual lady, there is something in all of our fallenness that would make us, that would tempt us rather to try to use that for self, but thank God for regenerating grace that puts a seed in

here that convicts us at that point and hopefully we yield to that conviction and we keep repenting the scribe back down. Are you with me? We keep repenting that spirit back down out of our hearts and lives. The scribe is the one says, "The way I approach this is the elite way and the spiritual way and the way you approach this is not the elite way." We all have some scribe in us so we have to be careful and keep it, keep the old scribe repented down.

Contrast the Apostle Paul with the scribes of the day. The scribes of the day did everything for the appearance among men and to please men and make men think they were special. In Galatians 1:10 quickly, the Galatians, actually the false teachers had sneaked into the Galatian churches and they had begun saying Paul was just a man pleaser and a false teacher. Paul counteracts their accusations with this statement, "For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ." In other words, Paul is saying, "Just look at the record. I have preached and taught things that continually get me in trouble. They continually make my life difficult. Would I do that if I am a man pleaser?" That's what Paul is saying here. The very opposite of the spirit of the scribes Jesus was talking about. 1 Thessalonians 2:4, Paul speaking of himself and his associates says, "but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men." We're not fitting the relative niche of the day. We're not preaching the kind of message that the culture of the day would say, "That's the kind of thing we want to hear. That will build the church. That will draw the crowd." He said, "We're not doing that. That's not our goal. We just want to please God who examines our hearts." I'll jump down to Ephesians 6:6, "not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart." So let's keep the scribe repented down and let's say, "God, let me do what I do in my church that God would be glorified and pleased." If honor comes because it's right to be honored, so be it, but may it be because God has ordained it to be that way. Certainly never because we have manipulated and schemed to get it that way.

II. A great commendation. We've seen this great condemnation as Jesus has given us a description of the low, base character of these scribes, now we see a great commendation that centers around this widow lady. First of all, in sub point 1, notice A. The rich give large gifts. Chapter 21, verse 1, "And He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury. Now, scholars tell us this is the last teaching Jesus is giving in the temple. It's interesting, his last teaching in the temple is about finances and so with giving this last discourse in the temple, Jesus, now listen to me, he ends his efforts of reforming the Jewish religion and the temple service in particular. He's been going to synagogue after synagogue. He's been preaching in their churches and churches. He's trying to reform them to the truth. He knows what's going to happen but they're not going to be reformable and so he's going to abandon that. The next verses in Luke are going to talk about the judgment he's sending on Jerusalem to destroy it and then he's going to establish the new centerpiece of his work on earth, no longer the Jewish religion, no longer Israel, no longer the synagogue, no longer the temple, but the New Testament local church becomes the centerpiece of God's work.

So this is his last effort to get the synagogue right and they won't have it. Now, I think it's interesting, Jesus is sitting there and he's watching these people and he points out the rich are putting in offerings and Mark points out the rich were putting in large offerings and so Jesus is watching this and I think it's very interesting, these men are putting in large gifts for God and at the same time many of these men, their hearts are full of malice as they are in agreement with at least the plot to kill Jesus Christ. For some people today, give large devotion, large gifts in the name of Christ yet at the same time work to destroy the cause of Christ. I think it probably happens. These same men, many of them putting in large gifts to support the temple work, will in just a few days cry out, "Crucify him!" It reminds us again of the deep depravity and deceitfulness of the human heart. Jeremiah 17:9, "The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?"

Jesus sees what's going into the treasury. Well, Jesus sees all. Jesus even sees the attitude of the heart. "The eyes of the Lord," the Proverbs writer says, "are in every place watching the evil and the good." I think one of the applications for us here would be that the true believer tries to be seen of Christ and Christ alone in all that he does, including in his giving. You remember Jesus said, "Don't be like the Pharisees who make a big noise about what they're giving." He said, "You give your giving in secret and the Lord who sees in secret will repay you." Now, there's a balance here. David in the Old Testament talked about his great gifts to the temple work because he was motivating the people under him to give sacrificially so there can be a balance there. Parents should probably discuss their giving with their children. There may be a place in a small group or maybe some of you men will challenge other men about your faithfulness to God financially, so the Bible does teach that but not in the sense to glorify ourselves but that we might all help one another to be better and more faithful in our stewardship perhaps.

But on this day, Jesus is watching and rich people are putting in large gifts and Jesus looks on it and watches it and that day he watched from his seat in the temple; today he watches from his throne in heaven what you give to the treasury of the church. What I give to the treasury of the church. A good cross reference here that shows us that we ought to be genuine in our gifts and not trusting in riches, Luke 12:16-21. He told them a parable saying, "He told them a parable, saying, 'The land of a rich man was very productive. And he began reasoning to himself, saying, "What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?"'" This guy's got so much wealth he doesn't even know where to put it. Verse 18, "Then he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.'" Verse 20, "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?' So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

Now, again, being wealthy and having a lot of stuff is not necessarily the evil, it's that this man wasn't God-ward in his wealth. He wasn't God-centered. There was not a component in his heart that said, "O God, you've been gracious to me. Lord, help me be honoring of you in all that you've given me." It was the heart attitude, not just the

financial statement that had his name on it. 1 Timothy 6:17-19, "Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited," and here's the key, "or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. Instruct them," the rich, "to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share," then verse 9 says, "storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed."

So he tells rich folks, "Work at making sure your riches serve the ends of the true eternal kingdom that will last forever." Yes, it's okay to enjoy the blessings of God that he gives us now, but make sure your heart is God-centered and God-ward in all of your wealth. I don't know if we have any truly rich men today who are truly godly men. I think we had some in the past. I think Truett Cathy might have been one of this men. Truett Cathy I understand taught the same fifth grade boy's Sunday school class for like 50 years. Go to Chick-Fil-A today, you can't go because it's closed. Truett Cathy set up his business so that people could go to church on Sunday. I've met him. He wasn't a friend but I've met him though, I've heard him. I think Truett Cathy loved God and he made sure his great, great business and wealth was God-centered. There is a man by the name of J. C. Penney who started a department store and my understanding is by the time J. C. Penney died, he was giving 90% of his wealth away to Gospel ministry. He just saw God as the center and the most important of all things. The man that owned the Quaker Oat company, his testimony is and many witnesses bear this to be true that he was godly. He had an enormous company but he dedicated his wealth dramatically to the cause of the Gospel. The man that started the Kraft Cheese company. The man that began, he really invented those giant excavation machines. You know the dump trucks that have tires ten feet tall, he's the one that developed and became enormously wealthy and by the time he died he was giving practically 100% of all that he had to Gospel ministry.

Now, they lived very comfortably and very good. They were very wealthy but there was just a rich, God-centeredness. I just don't know that we have that anymore. I think our church has men who do better than the rest of us who are very God-centered. I know some of those. I thank God for them but I don't know as far as, you know, I'm talking billionaire kind of stuff. I don't know that we have any of those anymore who really believe that Christ is the real answer.

So Jesus is seeing wealthy people put in large sums of money here. I think one lesson we need to learn from this is that Jesus isn't going to condemn really or affirm or commend the rich putting in large amounts and I think what we do need to know is that giving when it doesn't affect your lifestyle much is not without value, just in God's eyes it doesn't have the greatest value. So the rich should give big gifts. The Bible very well teaches that, clearly teaches that. They should be generous toward the causes of God but, secondly, B. in our outline: God says the poor give more. The poor give more than the rich. Verse 2, "And He saw a poor widow putting in two small copper coins." This is a poor widow, perhaps she's poor because she's been the victim of the extortion of these scribes of the day and she's giving two coins about like two pennies literally today. It was a very small amount monetarily but it was very great in God's eyes. You know, Christ's church and

Christ's Gospel does not depend on our gifts, but an unwillingness to support Christ's church and Christ's Gospel should cause one to doubt his faith.

Verse 3, Jesus continues, "And He said, 'Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all of them.'" Now, they had been watching rich people put in large gifts and then he says, "But this lady has put in more than all of them." Jesus amidst the great stores of chaff and fruitless religion finds a couple of grains of truth to point out. I mean think about it, he's sitting in the temple and it's just full of wickedness and ungodliness and compromise, yet there is a godly widow worthy of emulating and commending. He picks that out. Her heart was infinitely richer than her gift. Her motive made her little gift very much. 2 Corinthians 8:12 reminds us, "For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have."

Jesus goes on in verse 4 talking about the contrast of the rich putting in large offerings and the widow putting in two small copper coins. "For they all," the rich, "out of their surplus put into the offering, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had to live on." Out of their surplus means just what it means, it means out of the extra that they didn't need. It didn't cause them any discomfort whatsoever to put in those large gifts. They'll not feel what they gave because they had a lot left when they gave even a big gift.

Now, I think it's important to remind ourselves whether one gives out of surplus like the rich on this day, or out of sacrifice like the widow of this day, it's the motive of the heart that counts the most. In 1 Corinthians 13:3 we're reminded that, "If I give all of my possessions to feed the poor and if I surrender my body to be burned but do not have love, it profits me nothing." Now, I think 1 Corinthians 13 is one of the most terribly misinterpreted texts of the whole Bible. It's in the context of spiritual gifts and it's in the context of the Corinthians misusing spiritual gifts and they would put all these gifts in front of all the people in the church, tongues, whatever it was, in order to exalt themselves and the point Paul is making here, "If you've been born again and when you're converted and a genuine Christian, the love of God has been shed abroad in your heart and if you love what God loves and your motive is to love God and love God's people by supporting his work his way, then that has some value. But if your goal is to do some neat things that people might think grand thoughts about you, then that's worth nothing. If you give it all away to help all these poor people and your motive is not to do God's work, God's way, for God's glory because you love God first, then it's a waste."

The great philanthropic works of our day, the Bill Gates and others who do all these things to help people, they might make the world a tad better, but according to the word of God, God's not impressed and he doesn't count it up for nothing. For it to count for God, you've got to love God and, listen, when you love God, you love God's wisdom more than your wisdom you say, "God, your means and your methods to support your work is my priority." So Corinthians reminds us there has got to be a love in our hearts for God and God's truth that motivates our giving whether it's a surplus offering that doesn't really affect our lifestyles or like the widow, a sacrificial offering.

So to the rich who give out of their surplus, he's not saying that their gifts are valueless, he's just saying they are not as great as the gifts of the poor because it affects them so much more. If you have only the smallest ability but do what you can for God's church and God's Gospel, God will see it and reward it. Jesus said she had given all that she had to live on. Her pocketbook was empty on this day but her heart was full. She loved God. She trusted God and she knew he would provide for her. I think Jesus' point is it doesn't have to be this way but his point is that these wealthy could give large gifts and not love God or trust God at all. Perhaps they did love God but they could, but she giving the way she gave was a more clear testimony of devotion and love to God.

All right, very quickly, five things and I'll be done. Do you think it's a coincidence that this is the last text before our offering next Sunday? Five years ago when I started, I timed this out just like this. Five years ago when I started, I knew I would end up, honestly, I had no idea. Number 1 in our conclusions for practical application: the rich should give large gifts. The Bible teaches that. It's very clear. It should happen.

2. Giving out of surplus has value. Jesus did not teach nor does the Bible teach that those who are wealthy and give large gifts even though it doesn't bother them any, they can still live fine, live comfortably, it doesn't mean that that is without value. It does have some value but it just has far less value in the eyes of God than those who give out of their mean condition like this poor widow.

3. Giving all one has to live on is not a pattern for giving. Giving all one has to live on is not a pattern. Now, perhaps some pastor would be tempted to take the text here and just really bear down on the people, "Give all you've got!" I can't say that. That's not what Christ is saying here and the balance of biblical truth doesn't teach that. Now, that may be something God leads some to do occasionally but that's not the pattern. As a matter of fact, the pattern of giving is to give out of surplus. The pattern we are to practice week in and week out is to return tithes and offerings above the tithe and live on the rest. That's the pattern the Bible teaches. The Jews of this day gave about 23% back of their income back to the temple work and the work of the Lord in that day. We do know in Acts 5 as great persecution has come, the early church is just being birthed, it was a great and difficult time that people voluntarily gave all that they possessed to the church treasury in order that it could be distributed and everyone be taken care of but that was a one time event for a one time situation. That's not the pattern. Certain situations may call for that kind of giving but that's not the pattern. Tithes and offerings are the patterns. Today we give a tithe, not out of legalism or law. We tithe out of love. What the Jews were required out of law, we joyfully choose to do out of love.

It's the heart and that's 4, the heart is the key. The heart is the key. Was your heart in it. I mean, you can sacrifice all that you have and if your heart is not right, if you're not trusting God's way to do God's work and give God's way and through God's means for God's purposes, you can give everything you have and God says, "You get a big goose egg in heaven for that because you did that because you thought you were smart and wise. You didn't follow what I told you." So you can give great sacrificial gifts and it not be right with God. You can displease God. Secondly, you can give a very large gift out of

your surplus and give it in love for God and his church and his Gospel and it has value. Not as much value as somebody who gives genuinely out of a mean or meager financial position, but it does have value. You can give out of sacrifice and do it in love and it has great value to God.

So the rich should give large sums, giving out of your surplus has value in the eyes of God; giving all that you have is not the basic pattern God instructs us in Scripture to follow; the heart is the key in any event, whether it's a surplus gift or a sacrificial gift. What is your heart like? And then lastly, give to the church treasury. Give to the church treasury. I know there are lots of good causes and I'm not suggesting Christians shouldn't give to some of these good causes. We give to things as a church family outside of our church to other ministries but here's what I want to tell you and I had to repent myself of this early in my Christian ministry and that is: biblically I have no grounds to assure you of credit before God in anything outside giving through God's local church. If you can show it to me in Scripture, show it to me and I'll stand up here and repent. Biblically, God has ordained to do his work through his local church for his glory. You say, "Pastor, that's very self-serving since you're the pastor of a local church." I'm sorry, that's what the word teaches. Am I saying it's wrong to give? No, I'm not saying that. I'm saying biblically I can't promise you anything. Isn't it interesting that you cannot get more rotten and corrupt than the temple was in this day, yet Jesus affirms the widow for doing God's work, God's way through the treasury of the local synagogue because that's just God's means.

Now now, now, God is finishing his efforts to reform the synagogue. They would not reform so he's going to shut all of that down. He's going to die on the cross. He's going to redeem his bride. He's going to rise for their justification. He's going to be seated at the right hand of God the Father and there faithfully intercede for his church. He's going to call Gospel preachers and they are going to preach his Gospel. He's going to commission the Holy Spirit of God to accompany the preaching of the Gospel. Men, women, boys and girls will hear that Gospel, repent of their sins, place their faith in Jesus Christ, the Spirit will bring them together in local churches and the treasury in the local church will then become the means and the centerpiece of God's work and God's ministry until the kingdom age. But the Bible even promises when Jesus returns again the church will be the centerpiece of the kingdom. You can't go wrong in finding the best godly, Christ honoring, Spirit filled, glory of God focused local church and saying, "That's where I'm going to pour my life. That's what I've chosen to do."

So giving to the treasury is the centerpiece. It ought to be our heart because that's what God has ordained. Now listen to me, other ministries are good and I know many of you are involved in other ministries and I affirm those and I thank God for you but make sure in your heart, you see, those others may come and go but the local church will be here forever. The church will be here forever and the church shows God's wisdom, not ours. I have to be careful. We have to be careful that we don't create ministries based on our wisdom instead of God's wisdom. We're getting all back to that point that giving should be primarily through the treasury of the local church. Jesus affirmed that, the New Testament clearly affirms and teaches that.

One last thought and I'm done as we think about these great contrasts. The wicked carnal scribes who paraded themselves as the esteemed spiritual men of the community and they were not; the poor widow lady with almost nothing who had been looked upon with disdain and in their theology of the day, it would have been considered, since she was so destitute, she must've been somehow wicked and sinful and displeasing to God and Jesus turns the whole thing right side up and says, "No, she's the true righteous and godly one and all the scribes are the wicked ones." So great contrast here.

But as we think about giving, let me just end with this thought about surplus giving and sacrificial giving. While sacrificial or giving all you've got is not the pattern, one would hope over a lifetime that there would be a season or two or more when, listen to me, not out of coercion, not out of accountability with anyone, not out of signing a pledge card, but just out of sheer joy and gratitude of love for God and his Christ and his Gospel, you say, "I want to do something above and beyond what I have ever done." I think in God's grace Pam and I have done that a few times. Not very often and not lately but hopefully we would have those times. Now, don't force that. That's got to be you and God. Maybe this Sunday's offering is the time God would have you do something like that. I don't know. That's not the pattern but perhaps over a Christian's lifetime there would be those seasons where just in sheer love for God you want to do something like that for God's glory. Now, you seek God and do what God tells you to do. Keep repenting the scribe down and loving God from your heart.

Now, all the stewardship guys will tell me, "Don't end this way." Well, I'm going to end this way: don't feel guilty if you've been blessed materially. Don't feel guilty. Don't feel condemned. That's this garbage that comes out of Washington. That you're supposed to somehow feel guilty because you've got more. You know, what we call equality in America today is everybody ought to have three 55 inch televisions and not just two. Don't feel guilty but do fight the good fight and say, "O God, let me not put my hope in these riches. Cause these riches to focus my eyes on you, the one who gave them, and help me to humbly tremble over the stewardship of them for your glory." And all of God's people said, amen.

Let's stand together in prayer.