

Givers and Takers

by Anton Bosch

This sermon delves into Luke 20:41 through chapter 21:4, highlighting the contrast between the scribes and a poor widow. It emphasizes the importance of understanding the dual nature of Jesus as both God and man, challenging listeners to focus on knowing Jesus rather than just theology. The message condemns religious showmanship and greed, urging a heart of genuine giving and surrender to God, exemplified by the widow's sacrificial offering.

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Scripture: Luke 20:41, Luke 20:45, Luke 21:1, Hebrews 5:6, Hebrews 4:7

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Description

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Transcript

Luke chapter 20 and we're going to go from Luke 20 verse 41 through chapter 21 and verse 4. It's a long section. There are three sections in this piece that we're going to deal with. They are interrelated and that's why we have to cross the chapter number.

The chapter number here is again one of those places where the numbers are unfortunate because it breaks up in the middle of a very important point that Luke is making and that is that he is comparing these two things, the scribes and the widow, and he is juxtaposing them, putting them next to each other to contrast. This is something you'll remember that Luke does over and over and unfortunately when you put a chapter heading between the two, you separate those two in people's minds and we don't get them together. So that's why we're straddling the chapters this morning.

So let's read from Luke chapter 20 and from verse 41. And he said to them, how can they say to that the Christ is the son of David? Now David himself said in the book of Psalms, the Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand till I make your enemies your footstool. Therefore David calls him Lord.

How is he then his son? Then in the hearing of all the people he said to his disciples, beware of the scribes who desire to go around in long robes, love greeting in the marketplaces, the best seats in the synagogues and the best places at feasts, who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation. And he looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury and he saw also a certain poor widow putting in two mites.

So he said, truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all. For all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God. But she has of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had.

Now the first section verses 41 through 45 are difficult. And while they're not that difficult, but you have to get your mind around it because there's this complication where David calls the Messiah his Lord and yet at the same time he is his son. And so they had now questioned Jesus.

They tried to trick him. They tried to get him into a place where he would compromise himself. And obviously it hadn't worked.

They now stop asking questions. Jesus is now on the offensive and he speaks these two sections. He asks this question, which is not an attempt for Jesus to show how clever he was.

And you'll notice that he doesn't give the answer because they don't know the answer. But he speaks about this riddle, if you will, this mystery. And then he speaks about the depravity of the scribes.

And in Matthew, this takes over more than a chapter, chapter 24 in the book of Matthew, a very, very long chapter. Luke tends to summarize things that are put in much more detail in Matthew and in Mark so that he can focus on other details which the others don't focus on. And that's, of course, why we have different gospels, because they give us different perspectives of the same events.

And so there's only a few verses concerning the scribes versus the many verses that you find in the book of Matthew and also in the book of Luke. All right, so let's have a look at this. Verse 41, and he said to them, how can they say that Christ is the son of David? So that's the first question.

And at the end, he's going to come back to this question. How can they say that the Christ, the Messiah—to us as Gentiles, we speak about the Christ, which means the anointed one. If you were Jewish, you would speak about the Messiah.

So how can you say that the Messiah is the son of David? Now, this idea that he was the son of was common. You remember that the blind man cried out, Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me, just a chapter or so ago. And so this was a common understanding that the Messiah would be the son of David.

This fulfills the promise that God had made to David that his throne would be occupied. And obviously, it's not just that he would be the son of David, but he would also take the throne of David and rule over Israel. And of course, this is the part that they were really looking for.

They were looking for this king who would come and who would sit on the throne and who would rule Israel and bring Israel back into the golden age that they had under David and later under Solomon. So how can the Messiah then be the son of David? And of course, it doesn't make much sense until you see the point that he's making. So now he goes to Psalm 110, where it says, now David himself said in the book of Psalms, the Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand.

Now we're going to analyze that in a moment. Verse 43, till I make your enemies your footstool. So let's look at it again.

The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool. Now he's quoting from Psalm 110. If you've been with us in the book of Hebrews, you remember that last week, not this week past, but the week before, we spoke about the fact that Hebrews chapter 5 quotes from the same chapter, the same Psalm, Psalm 110.

Hebrews quotes from verse 4. This quotes from verse 1. So let's have a look. Psalm 110 verse 1, the Lord said to my Lord, and this is David speaking, sit at my right hand till I make your enemies your footstool. And then the fourth verse is the verse that is quoted in Hebrews.

The Lord has sworn and will not relent. You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek. And remember, we've been speaking a lot about Melchizedek, and we're going to speak a lot more about Melchizedek and Jesus' priesthood after the order of Melchizedek, not after the order of Aaron.

And we're going to get to that in chapter 7 of Hebrews. Now, I hope I haven't got you confused already. So let's have a look at this in detail.

And it's just, we can take Luke, the Psalms is exactly the same. There's no significant difference. So verse 42 in Luke 20, he says, the Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand.

So David is speaking and he says, the Lord, the word here in the Hebrew is Yahweh, Adonai in the Greek, the God of Israel. So Yahweh says to my Lord, my master, sit at my right hand. Of course, remember the sitting at the right hand, we're going to see this in the book of Hebrews, is the position of authority and of privilege and of power and of blessing.

So God says to David's Lord, sit at my right hand. So who is he speaking about? Well, clearly he's speaking about Jesus. He's speaking about the Messiah.

He's speaking about the Christ. Because verse 4 in Luke chapter, in Psalm 110 is very clear that you are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek and that applies to only one, and that is to the Lord Jesus. All right.

So it's really simple. The question is this, how come David says Jesus is his Lord? God says to my Lord, in other words, Jesus is my Lord. How can Jesus be his Lord and be his son? That's the question.

So let's have a look at that. Therefore David calls him Lord. How is he then his son? Now, obviously, if you haven't been with us in our studies in Hebrews, you may have difficulty.

If you've been with us in Hebrews and you were awake, you shouldn't have any problem with this riddle. How can he be David's Lord and yet be David's son, his descendant? It can't be both things, unless you understand that he is both God and man. Very simple.

For us, it's simple, because we have the answers and we have the answers particularly in the book of Hebrews, but elsewhere as well. So it's a really simple riddle if you understand what we call the dual nature or the duality of Jesus, that Jesus is both God and he is both man. As God, he preceded, he was there before David was.

So he is David's Lord. But as a man, he was not yet born. He was only going to be born several thousand more years later in Bethlehem, and then he becomes David's son.

So at the time that David speaks, Jesus was not the son. He was not David's descendant, because he had not yet been born, but he was the Lord. Once Jesus was born, he was still Lord, but he is also now the son of David.

He's both the son of God and the son of man, both of those concepts. So the answer is pretty easy if you just think about it for a moment. So why does Jesus ask or set them this riddle? I guess that's what you have to call it.

You have to call it a riddle, because it has an answer. And if you know how things work, you can figure the answer out. Any riddle works that way.

Once you get the clue, once you know what the solution is, you look at it and you say, well, that's easy. Of course, that's the way it is. And we have riddles all the time.

You get them on Facebook. People post things all the time. I had six eggs and two broke.

Let me see if I can remember this. I had six eggs, two broke. I ate two.

How many do I have? Well, you have four, because two broke and you ate the ones that broke. You see, once you know the answer, you go, of course, that's how it works. So the answer to this riddle is pretty simple.

So why is Jesus—is he just trying to entertain them? Is he just trying to trick them? What's he trying to do? Is he trying to be clever? And obviously we know that Jesus didn't do any of those things. He didn't play these kinds of games. Jesus was making a point.

And they were saying, we are the learned people. We know the Scriptures. And we are in a position to test and examine Jesus as to his theology and as to his faith and as to his person, whether he is the Son of God or not.

We are the judges. We know these things. And Jesus asks them a simple thing, which if they—and admittedly, we have the benefit of the New Testament—but if they had thought about it, if they had studied the Scriptures, not just from their traditions' point of view, but from wanting to really know Jesus.

Remember, Jesus says, you search the Scriptures, speaking to them. You search the Scriptures because in them you think you have eternal life. But they speak of me.

And so if they were searching the Scriptures, not just to make rules and laws for one another, but if they searched the Scriptures to know God, they would have known the answer. But they didn't search the Scriptures with a right purpose. And therefore, even the simplest things become difficult and impossible to understand.

And, folk, we find ourselves in the same position today where there are many learned theologians who claim to know the Scriptures, but they don't know Jesus. And they sometimes and many times don't even know the easiest answers. And I've told you many times as I read the commentaries, and I read many commentaries, because sometimes I find something useful in them.

And I read them so that I can make sure that I am not way off track in my own understanding. But I look at it, and I look at how they analyze it, particularly the passage in Hebrews chapter 4, verse 7, that we dealt with on Thursday night. As I read the commentaries, and I think about eight different or nine different commentaries I'd read on that passage, not one of them had a clue as to what it was all about.

They'll discuss the Greek word and the origin of this word and this complication and that theological issue and whether it's in this document or in that manuscript, and it goes on and on and on and on, and they totally miss the point. We need to search the Scriptures to find Jesus in them, not theology. Theology is important, but it's not about theology.

It's not about doctrine. Doctrine is important, but that's not what it's about. It's not about trying to figure out who's the Antichrist.

It's about figuring out who's Jesus Christ, and to know him, and to know him better, and to be conformed to his image. And so Jesus is basically saying to them, you guys are clueless. You're clueless.

Now he goes on the offensive even more. Then in the hearing of all the people, so everybody is still there, and the scribes and the Pharisees and the rest of them, they're all there as well, but he's speaking to his disciples sort of with the intent that everybody can hear what he's saying. Beware of the scribes who desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces, the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts.

Now remember, Matthew goes into much, much more detail about this. So let's have a look at what he is saying. They desire to go around in long robes.

This would be the robe that would define them in their office. So when you looked at him, when you saw him come down the street, you would see this long white robe, and with the long tassels at the end on the corners, in most cases dragging on the ground, because the longer the tassels, the more religious you appeared. And this is serious.

I mean, this is real. There was one of these rabbis, and I've forgotten his name now, but his nickname was Long Tassels. And the story is that he one day went up to visit a woman of ill repute, a prostitute.

They were not really moral guys, these at all. And she's on the second floor, and he's going up the steps to where she is, and he trips over his tassels, because they're so long. And as he trips over his tassels, he remembers the law, and he turns around, and he goes back.

But the point is not about the prostitute. The point is just about how long these tassels would be. And remember that Jesus says you make these tassels extra long, because you're showing how religious you are.

And what he is dealing with here is any show of religion. It doesn't matter what it is. Jesus speaks elsewhere about those who fast, and they have long faces.

He speaks about those who give money and sound a trumpet so that everybody can hear and see that they're giving money. They pray long prayers so that everybody can see how religious they are. In a low church, what I mean is a church like ours that doesn't have high ecclesiastical stuff, stained glass, and we have a little bit, but, you know, the organ and the ceremonies and the robes and the smoke and all of this kind of stuff.

We say, well, we don't do these things. This speaks about those people in those churches who have a big fancy show. Maybe this speaks about the money preachers who come out in their multi-thousand-dollar suits and their fancy cars to show how rich they are.

In fact, these days it's the other way around. They come down with torn jeans and washed-out t-shirts just to show how religious they are, how humble they are. It's all a religious show, and Jesus says it doesn't work.

God is not impressed by that kind of show. So they love the long robes. They love greetings in the marketplaces.

Luke says that they like to be called father and rabbi or teacher, titles. What would actually happen, and it is required in the Mishnah, that when a rabbi comes past, you stand up. The only exception was given for a man who's working at his trade.

So if he's a tentmaker like Paul and you happen to be working at your trade at that, you don't have to stand, but everybody else has to stand as the rabbi goes by. We see modern forms of that today as preachers are elevated and they run around with bodyguards so that nobody can get close to them. Literally, when they come onto the platform, everybody cheers and everybody claps.

There are all of these shows of worship and of adoration and elevating these men. And so they love the greetings in the marketplaces, the best seats in the synagogues. They would sit in the front row, not just in the front row here, but the row they would face the congregation with the ark where the scriptures would be on behind them, so that when the preacher spoke, everybody could see them and could see their long faces and see their pious looks and see how religious they were.

It has to do about show and not about reality, not about substance. The best seats in the synagogue and the best places at the feasts. And so if a rabbi was invited to a meal, and obviously it would be a good thing to invite a rabbi because that makes the host look good, because he actually has a teacher or a scribe as a friend, so-called, and so they would sit on the right or the left of the host, the boss of the house.

And so it was all about show. It was all about themselves. And that really is the way, as I struggle to see, how do I sum this all up? It's about them.

It's not about the Messiah. It's even about the word. It's about themselves.

And so preachers fall into the same trap today. It's about themselves, but it's not just preachers. Every one of us falls into that trap.

It's all got to be about me. It's all got to revolve around me. Everybody's got to see how good I am and how religious I am and how spiritual I am.

And the list goes on and on and on. But it's all about me. And Jesus condemns that.

Now let me just put in an aside here, by the way. This does not mean, because here's the problem, is that it's very easy to go to the other extreme and to disrespect those that God has given to the church as ministries. We've got to find the balance between those two extremes.

And unfortunately, in our kind of environment, the preacher easily becomes just nothing, because he has made himself nothing for the sake of the gospel. We despise him, and we look down on him. And it's not

about his ego.

It's about respecting the Word. Because you see, the next thing is, it seems that every Christian today is a judge of the preacher. And yes, we must judge the Word.

We must make sure that what is being preached is the truth. But the problem is that we're not judging as to whether the preacher is preaching truth. We're judging as to whether I like the message or not.

And when I don't like it, I just reject it. Oh no, the preacher's got it wrong. Folk, it's not about whether you like the message.

It's not even whether you like me, and I know many folk don't like me. I understand that. But I have a job to do, and by the grace of God, I trust I'm preaching the Word of God.

And if you have an argument, your argument is not with me. Your argument is with the Word of God. If I was preaching my own ideas, I was preaching my own agenda, you would have an argument with me.

But your argument is with the Word. But let's be careful of elevating men. Let's be careful of elevating ourselves.

There's only one that must be elevated, and that is Jesus. Not even the Scriptures. Folk, there's a danger in churches like ours where we emphasize doctrine and we emphasize the Word of God, that the Word becomes more important than Jesus.

That's exactly what happened in the New Testament. These guys were more interested in the Bible in the Old Testament than they were in Jesus himself. And in the process, they couldn't understand the difference between truth and error.

Jesus must have the preeminence. He is the most important thing. And maybe thing is obviously not the right word.

I guess you understand what I'm saying. He is the most important. It's all about him.

It's not about me as a preacher. It's not about you. It's not about our church.

It's not even about the doctrine. It's about Jesus. Yes, doctrine is important, but it's not more important than Jesus.

You can get your doctrine all right and still not get Jesus. And that's the problem. So let's move on.

Verse 47, you devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers, that these will receive greater condemnation. So you devour widows' houses, speaking of the fact that they take advantage of widows for financial gain. And these would be particularly widows that would dedicate themselves to the service of God in the temple.

And so, widows—remember, and we're going to speak about this other widow in a moment, and that's where we have the connection between this passage and the next, is the story about the widow. Widows at that time were particularly vulnerable. Widows had no legal standing in society.

They couldn't defend themselves. You remember the widow who has to go to the judge and says, can you defend me? Can you avenge me? So they have no legal standing. They have no means of income.

They have no one who's going to defend them. And for them to defend themselves against a scribe would be terribly insolent, would be an insult to the scribe, and they would be censured for that. So they're in a very disadvantaged position.

They have no income. That's the other big problem, because very few of them had any source of personal income. And so, maybe the husband has died and left the house.

Remember, we've spoken recently about the property and how the property needs to stay in the family. So he leaves the house, maybe with a little bit of land. But obviously, they're vulnerable to the scribes who would maneuver to get that property.

And I think some of us know a preacher who was good at that as well. So nothing stopped their greed. Not only did they want people to give money, but they would take money that wasn't even theirs.

In fact, this speaks so much today as to what goes on in many, many churches today. You know, these big-time money preachers who fly around in jet aircraft, who are the people who support them. Most of the money comes from widows, from old people who are on fixed incomes, from people who don't have much to give.

That's where most of the money comes, so that these guys can... Is there any difference between them and these guys? No, there is no difference whatsoever. And again, we understand the laborers, where there is hire, we understand all of those things. But when widows are taken advantage of, when the weak are taken advantage of for financial gain, we have probably sunk to the lowest level of morality.

It's one thing to steal from the rich, it's another thing to steal from the poor. And these guys had no limits. There was no point where they would not... There was no low that they would not sink to.

And for pretense, make long prayers. So they put on this great show, and I've spoken about that. These will receive greater condemnation.

Why will they receive greater condemnation? Because they have the scriptures. Because they are learned in the scriptures, they should know better. It does not excuse ignorance, we understand that.

But obviously, those who are in a leadership position, those who claim for themselves a leadership position, immediately set themselves in another category of judgment. Paul deals with this. And so, we need to be careful to never elevate ourselves to a position of leadership, unless God has called us to it.

Because with it does not just come responsibility, but tremendous accountability. And if you're out of your depth, and you're doing a job that God has not called you to, you're going to be in serious trouble on the day of judgment. So they will receive greater condemnation.

Now let's move on to chapter 21, verse 1. And he looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts in the treasury. So this is in the outer court, and it seems that all of what was happening is in the outer court, or the court of Gentiles, or the court of women. We're not going to get into all of that.

And remember that this was a place where people got together. There were rabbis teaching, there were discussions and debates, all sorts of things going on. People were buying and selling sacrifices.

And this is just on the outside of the actual temple of the holy place, and the holiest of all. And so he saw the rich putting in gifts into the treasury. So there's a box of some kind.

Some say there were seven trumpet-looking things that people put money in. Doesn't matter, they're putting money in the offering. And he saw also a certain poor widow putting in two mites.

And we know from the last verse that this was all that she had. Now, what she gives is nothing. There is the coin next to an American penny, and you can see that it's very, very small.

And it's worth about an eighth of a denarius, an eighth of a day's wage. So it's not worth very much. So she just puts in this.

It doesn't make a dent in the costs of the running the temple, feeding all the priests, and the maintenance, and everything else. It really made no difference whatsoever. But Jesus said, truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all, or all the rest.

Now, folk, again, let me remind you that while this is about money in this passage, God is not interested so much in your money as he's interested in you. If he gets you, the issue of how much you give will come right. But if he hasn't got you, the money issue is not going to happen either.

And that's why I don't like to preach about money, because it's pointless. Because you can give thousands like the rich were giving, but if your heart's not right, it's no good. And God doesn't need your money.

He wants your heart. He wants you. He wants your service.

And unfortunately, many of us use money as a bribe to bribe God and say, well, God, here's my money. Now I want to go off and live my life the way I want to live my life. God says, I'm not interested in being bribed.

I want you. And I don't want just some of you like the rich, because that's the point that Jesus makes, is he says that they've given out of their abundance. They've just given a little bit.

She gave everything. And, folk, God is wanting us to give everything. Now I'm not talking about money.

Let me emphasize that. I'm talking about you. I'm talking about your life, your energy, your thoughts, your time, your abilities.

God wants all of you. And it doesn't matter how much you give, either in time or money or energy or whatever, if it's not all, and if it's not with the right heart, it's a waste of time. You may as well not give it.

And I understand as Jesus looks at this woman and as she puts those two pennies in, those two, they're not even pennies, two-eighths of a penny, so it makes a quarter of a penny. She puts that in. I'm sure that there were some of his disciples, maybe, sitting with him, snickering.

Oh, look at that stupid old crow. She may as well just put some dust in there. It doesn't touch sides.

It's nothing. But Jesus has moved and records in Scripture, and here we are 2,000 years ago later, and we're still preaching about what she did. You see, it's not how much.

It's not how big. It's the heart with which we give that God is interested in. I'm going to tell you a very personal story, and I can tell you many, but some of them are too personal.

But a few years ago, I think it was 2018, I was preaching and teaching in Zimbabwe. This was the end of the second week of teaching, seven days a week for six to eight hours a day. It was very hot, and I was

very, very tired.

But I did what I'd been called to do. One afternoon, one of the students that I know well, and I'm not going to mention his name because they watch these videos in Zimbabwe as well, who'd been a student for a while, young brother, came in with two bottles of Coke. Those two bottles of Coke cost him two dollars.

Folks, when a government official earns \$200 a month, this is 10% of a monthly wage. I could have afforded my own Coke. I couldn't find, I didn't have time to go and look for it.

It was at a time when you had to go looking for things. And he'd remembered from years ago that Coke helps me when I'm tired and when my throat's not working too good anymore. That is one of the biggest gifts that I have ever received.

Just two bottles of Coke. And I took a picture of it because it touched me so deeply. Because his brother gave out of his nothing.

Folks, those people don't have food to eat, but he bought me two bottles of Coke. This is a modern story of the woman giving her two mites. And I believe that God saw that.

A month ago, the same young brother was appointed the bishop or the overseer of his denomination. About 150 churches. I believe that that's where it started, with a heart to give God everything, everything, even what costs much.

For in all these, out of their abundance, have put in offerings for God. But she, out of her poverty, put in all the livelihood she had. Now, remember the contrast.

Here are the scribes and their takers. They're taking honor. They're taking the best place in the church or the synagogue.

They're taking the blessed places at the seats. They're even taking people's possessions. But this woman is not a taker.

She's a giver. And Luke puts these two stories together to make a very important point. And the question this morning is, what are you? Are you a taker or are you a giver? And I'm not just talking about money.

I'm talking about ministry. I'm talking about love. I'm talking about care.

I'm talking about interest. I'm talking about love, time, energy. Father, I pray that you'd help us, that we might be like this widow, like my brother in Zimbabwe, but especially like Jesus, who gave all that he had, even to the last drop of blood, even to his last breath, he gave it, that we might be saved.

And Lord, I pray that you would help us, that as individuals and as a church, we would not be like the scribes who just take, but Lord, that we may be like the widow, that we may be those who are giving. Lord, that we may give our time, our care, our love, our concern, our money, our energy, our skills. Lord, I know that there are some of you question the end to which it's given and say, well, maybe the money is not going to be used the way I want it to be used.

And we know, Lord, that the money that was given to the temple was being abused, but she wasn't giving to the temple. She was giving to you. And Lord, I pray that you'd help us to be those who recognize that we're not giving to the church or to the pastor or to Christianity even, but Lord, we're giving to you.

And Lord, that what you want is us first. You want our lives. You want our souls.

You want our being. You want our all. And I pray, Lord, that we may be those who are willing to lay down our life the way you lay down your life for us.

Lord, again, it's easy for us to look at the message and maybe, Lord, to be stirred up in our hearts right now, but I pray that you would help us to go from here, Lord, to be changed and to be those who give rather than take. That we may be those who bless rather than those who constantly need to be blessed. That we may be those who feed rather than those who constantly need to be fed.

Lord, that we may follow Jesus and that we may follow this widow's example. And Lord, it just blows my mind that there are all these scribes and their many years of studying the scriptures and of debating and arguing and sitting at the feet of great teachers. And this poor simple woman preached a far greater message than they could ever preach.

Help us, Lord, to be like her. In Jesus' name, I pray. I pray, Lord, that you'd go with us, keep us, protect us, bring us together again safely on Thursday, we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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