**THE GOSPEL OF LUKE**

**JESUS IN JERUSALEM**

**PART III**

**Luke 20:41-21:4**

**INTRODUCTION**

Over the last two sermons in our series we’ve looked at what Luke tells us about Jesus’ arrival in Jerusalem. As I pointed out on previous occasions, this was meant to be a moment of great celebration and joy. Why? Because before Jesus was born, Israel had lived for hundreds of years in profound sadness. They had lost their homeland, the land God promised would be theirs forever. They had lost their right to have a king, as they were forced to live in subjugation to foreign kings. But worse than all this, they had lost a prophetic presence, which was far worse than having no king and no land. Israel could cope with no king and no land as long as they had a prophet to tell them how everything would work out. But even that, God had taken away from them. For the four hundred years between the close of the Old Testament and the opening of the New, Israel waited in prophetic silence as God withheld his words.

But Jesus changed everything. He was not only prophet and king. He was *the* King. He was *the* prophet, the prophet-king whom the Scriptures foretold would come and bring God’s people into the ultimate promised land: the Kingdom of God. He was the descendant of David who would reign on the throne of David forever, as the Scriptures said in 2 Samuel 7. And he was the great prophet who would be like Moses, as the Scriptures said in Deuteronomy 18. He had come to definitively rule over God’s people with God’s own authority.

And so, if there ever was a moment for Israel to celebrate, it was the moment when Jesus arrived in Jerusalem. The centuries of waiting for a king and a prophet to restore God’s people to their homeland had finally come to an end. But they didn’t praise him. They didn’t even welcome him. Instead, they tested him. They questioned him. They tried to trap him in his words so that they could get rid of him. One after another, the various religious factions of the city took turns taking shots at Jesus on ministry, politics, theology. They questioned Jesus on the most difficult issues of the day, and Jesus answered them all with quiet, confident, brilliance.

Having passed their tests, Jesus decides that it’s his turn to go on the offensive. In our text today, Jesus turns the tables on his questioners and poses a question to them. And unlike Jesus, they won’t have an answer to his question, which is a shame, because if they had answered it, they would have gained a crucial insight into who Jesus truly is. He’s not just the Messiah. He’s not just the great prophet. He is the Son of God himself.

Because of the relationship between our text today and the rest of Chapter 20, I’m titling this sermon **Jesus in Jerusalem (Part III).** My aim today is to show you that **Fake Worship Glorifies Self. True Worship Glorifies God.**

We will have three points today:

1. Jesus’ Question
2. Jesus’ Warning
3. Jesus’ Praise

(1) **JESUS’ QUESTION**

Verse 41 says that Jesus “said to *them*.” The “them” in verse 41 refers to the scribes, who were the ones Jesus had just been speaking to in verses 39-40. We may be tempted to think that the scribes were just that, a group of people who wrote things down on behalf of other people, but they were much more than that. They were the religious teachers of the day, with the responsibility to teach God’s Law to his people, and therefore, they had a lot of influence and played a crucial role in Jewish religious life.

As teachers of religion, they would have been intimately familiar with the Jewish Scriptures. If anyone knew their theology, it would have been the scribes. And so, Jesus asks them a theological question in verse 41, which is simply this: “How can they say that the Christ is David’s son?” What is Jesus asking here?

It was common knowledge that the Christ, or the Messiah, would be a biological descendant of David. In order to qualify for the job, the Messiah had to have the right bloodlines, so the first question anyone would ask about a person claiming to be the Messiah would be, “Who was your father? Who was your father’s father? Who was your father’s father’s father?” etc. Only a Son of David could reign on the Throne of David, because that’s what God promised.

Jesus isn’t putting this in doubt. He’s not challenging the biblical testimony that the Christ would be David’s son. But he is asking, “Is that *all* he is? Is he *only* a biological descendant of David? Or is he more?”

Jesus begins to answer the question in verses 42-43: “For David himself says in the Book of Psalms, ‘The Lord said to my lord, Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.’” What’s Jesus saying here?

Jesus is quoting from Psalm 110, which was written by King David. This is what verse 1 of that Psalm said,

“The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.’”

In order to follow Jesus’ argument, we need to understand a few things about this verse. The first is that there are two “Lords” here. The first Lord is speaking, and the second Lord is being spoken to. The second thing to notice is that the first Lord is spelt with all capital letters. This was the English translators’ way of saying that the Hebrew word being translated here is “*Yahweh*”. *Yahweh* was God’s covenant name with Israel. It was the name God used to name himself at the burning bush when Moses asked him what his name was. God answered, “I am who I am”, which in Hebrew sounds something like *Yahweh*.

So whenever you notice in the Old Testament that God is being referred to as LORD, the translators want you to know that God’s covenant name, *Yahweh*, is being used there in the original manuscripts. That includes Psalm 110:1. David is telling us that he’s about to record the words of *Yahweh*, God himself, and Jesus quotes those words in Luke 21:42.

The third thing we need to notice is that David calls the second Lord “my lord”. This second lord is not all capitalized, because it doesn’t refer to *Yahweh*. It refers to someone else, someone whom David calls “my lord”. This means that, although the second Lord isn’t God, he’s still above David in authority. He is David’s *Lord*.

Who is this second lord? He’s the Messiah, the Christ. That’s apparent when we look at what God says to the second lord in verse 1. God says, “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.” A king’s right hand was a position of honour. It was the place for a king’s most trusted servants and confidantes. Even today, we refer to a leader’s second-in-command as that person’s “right hand man”.

God is clearly giving the Messiah a place of honour by calling him to his right hand, but what makes this particularly fascinating is that God is calling the Messiah to *sit* at his right hand. It would be one thing to *stand* at God’s right hand. It’s an entirely other thing to *sit* there. Standing at God’s right hand may have been a position of honour and authority, but it also implied service and submission. The person stood in order to symbolize his or her readiness to serve the king. That’s why we see Psalm 45, which was another Messianic Psalm, saying this about the king’s right hand:

“[D]aughters of kings are among your ladies of honour; at your right hand *stands* the queen in gold of Ophir.” (verse 9)

The remarkable thing about Psalm 110:1 is that God isn’t just calling the Messiah to stand at his right hand. He’s calling him to *sit*. *Yahweh* is calling the Messiah to position himself as God’s equal, not in a position of service, but in a position of rest. And then, to make this even more remarkable, God himself takes on the role of the servant. He says, “Sit at my right hand, until *I* make your enemies your footstool.” *Yahweh* himself rises to serve the Messiah as he conquers all his enemies for him.

In other words, this second lord in Psalm 110:1 is no ordinary lord. He is a lord with *divine status* who is honoured by God with the honour that God alone deserves.

So what we have in this verse is David recording divine communication between God and the Messiah, and here in Luke 20:42, Jesus quotes this verse to make a simple point: David calls the Messiah *Lord*.

How could that be? How could David’s son be David’s lord? How could the Messiah have authority over David when David was his father? That’s the question Jesus asks them in verse 44 where Jesus says, “David thus calls him Lord, so how is he his son?” The scribes have no answer, so Luke doesn’t record one, which shows just how superior Jesus is to them. Jesus answered all their questions flawlessly, but when it was their turn to answer *his* question, they had nothing to say.

But if we give this question just a little thought, if we think about how exactly the Messiah can be David’s son when he calls the Messiah “Lord”, the answer becomes clear: the Messiah isn’t *only* David’s son. He’s more than that. He’s not just a Davidic king. He’s a divine king with divine origins and a divine identity that was so far above and beyond David that it was fitting for King David, the greatest king who ever lived, to call his son *Lord*.

Jesus doesn’t say that these verses are referring to him, at least not here. Not yet. For now, he’s content to just leave the Jews with a little food for thought about who the Messiah would be. But a little later on, after he had been betrayed, arrested, and beaten, as he stood before the Jewish council, Luke would record this exchange between Jesus and the chief priests and scribes:

“When day came, the assembly of the elders of the people gathered together, both chief priests and scribes. And they led him away to their council, and they said, ‘If you are the Christ, tell us.’ But he said to them, ‘If I tell you, you will not believe, and if I ask you, you will not answer. *But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God.”* (22:66-69)

There’s only one person worthy to sit at the right hand of the power of God, the Christ, and here in these verses, before the Jewish Council, Jesus says “That’s me. I am the Christ. Yes, I am a descendant of David, but I am *much* more than that. I am God’s Own Son, the Divine King of the heavens and the earth.” It was in the darkest hours of Jesus’ life that he would take his rightful seat at God’s right hand, not by killing his enemies, but by letting them kill him. The cross would be the way to the throne. That’s what God sent him into the world to do. He sent him to die, so that through his death and resurrection, he might conquer the greatest enemy, sin, and redeem for himself a faithful people who would live in his kingdom forever.

(2) **JESUS’ WARNING**

Jesus has asked his question and received no reply from the scribes, so he moves on from questions and starts making statements as he continues going on the offensive, leading to our second point: Jesus’ Warning.

Throughout Chapter 20, the scribes were engaged in a subtle game of cat and mouse with Jesus. None of them outright said, “You’re a heretic!” No one went to the Roman authorities and demanded that Jesus be arrested. They were more devious than that. They hid their true plans as they tried to trap Jesus with his own words.

But Jesus isn’t fooled. He knows exactly what they’re trying to do, and he makes that clear in verses 45-47. Luke tells us in verse 45 that, “in the hearing of all the people he said to his disciples, ‘Beware of the scribes’”. Jesus is saying this to his disciples, but he isn’t afraid to let other people know how he feels about them. His criticism of his opponents doesn’t take place in a dark alley, or a private room, or to use a contemporary example, behind the safety of a computer screen. His criticism takes place “in the hearing of *all* the people.” If Jesus is going to speak against someone, he’s going to do it in public, face to face with those he has a problem with, because he’s not afraid of how they will respond. If he’s going to give it, then he’s also prepared to get it. And as we know, what he would get for this public criticism of the Jewish religious leaders would be a brutal execution on a cross.

But Jesus says it anyways. He says, “Beware of the scribes”. Why? Because the scribes are dangerous. You only need to *beware* of things that are a danger to you, and Jesus wants everyone to know that the scribes are dangerous. How does he know that?

He knows that because of how they live. They “walk around in long robes”, meaning that they dressed to impress. They wanted all eyes on them. They were attention-seeking. Self-centered. *Vain*.

They also “love greetings in the marketplaces and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honour at feasts”. They wanted special attention. They *coveted* it. They wanted to be honoured above and beyond other people by the way people spoke to them, by the places they sat, by the positions of honour that they occupied. They wanted everyone to notice them, admire them, and envy them.

Jesus is saying that these scribes were radically “*me*-centered”. “Look at *me*. Honour *me*. Admire *me*.” They didn’t want to be treated like everyone else. They wanted to be treated like *gods*.

That’s not all. Jesus says in verse 47 that they “devour widow’s houses”. They were exploiting the vulnerable. They were taking advantage of the weak. We don’t know exactly how they were doing this. They could have been charging hefty fees for managing widow’s estates. They could have been taking advantage of their hospitality. They could have been scamming these widows into giving them their money. Whatever it was that they were doing, it was *evil*. Jesus uses this language of “devouring” to make us picture wild beasts tearing them up their prey. They were wolves in sheep’s clothing, innocent on the outside but evil on the inside.

To cap it all off, Jesus ends his description of the scribes in verse 47 with this: “for a pretense (they) make long prayers.” That may seem rather insignificant compared to something as evil as devouring widow’s houses, but I think that this part of their lives was the worst. Why? Because it proved that they didn’t care about God! They were so self-centered, so focused on glorifying themselves, that they even used their prayers to God to show how great they were. Their worship wasn’t real. It was fake.

For them, prayer wasn’t about worshipping God. It was about getting others to worship them. No one who truly fears God would ever do such a thing, because those who fear God know that when they pray, they are approaching the all-powerful, all-knowing creator and sustainer of the universe. They know that God doesn’t just hear their words. God knows their hearts. He looks deep into their thoughts and motives and sees whether they’re approaching him with humility or pride. Jesus says that the scribes approached God with hearts that were so puffed up with pride that they even thought they could fool God with their long, fancy prayers.

In short, the scribes cared neither for people nor for God. They exploited the vulnerable and abused the religious practices that God gave them for his glory, not theirs. They were cold-hearted towards the poor, and hard-hearted towards their God, having no room for anyone in their hearts but themselves.

Jesus says beware of such people. Beware! They’re dangerous to your soul. How are they dangerous? They’re dangerous because they’ll make you just like them. It all starts when you start feeling like you’re not good enough because you’re not like them. You feel inadequate. Insignificant. You feel like a nobody. That feeling of inadequacy and insignificance then morphs into the belief that the only way to make yourself feel better is by becoming just like them.

And so, you start dressing up your life so that people start noticing you, and saying nice things to you, and picking you out from the crowd. You make sure you excel in everything, from the clothes you wear to the prayers you pray, because you want people to envy you, and admire you, just like you envied and admired them. And you know what? People do start envying you. People do start admiring you. And before you know it, you’re the one who’s turning people into cold-hearted, hard-hearted people who care neither for people nor for God, because they only care about themselves.

That’s why Jesus says beware. Beware, because these wolves don’t just eat the sheep. They turn sheep into wolves who turn other sheep into wolves. This vanity, this self-centeredness, this robbing God of his glory will spread like a cancer. It may start with a few, but it will end with an entire community pursuing the things of man rather than the things of God.

Do you have these kinds of people in your life? Jesus says beware of them. Beware of them because they’ll make you just like them. Better yet, ask yourself this question: are *you* this kind of person? Do people need to beware of you? Is your piety a show? Is your love only for yourself? Do you just want people to notice you, or do you want people to look beyond you to the God who saved you?

There are few questions that are more important to ask ourselves than these, especially if you’re in a position of leadership like I am. I am in need of these verses and these warnings more than any of you, because as your pastor, I *am* respected by you. I *am* honoured by you. There’s nothing wrong with that. The Bible calls believers to honour their pastors. But the moment that I start loving that honour more than I love serving my God is the moment when all of you need to beware of me.

For the scribes, it was too late. The cancer of self-love and self-serving ministry had spread so far and so deep that Jesus could only say beware of them. Not just one or two. All of them. There may have been an exception here and there, but there wouldn’t have been many. This entire group of religious leaders had been corrupted by their vanity, and as a result, Jesus says at the end of verse 47 that “they will receive the greater condemnation.”

(3) **JESUS’ PRAISE**

That brings Chapter 20 to a close and leads us to Chapter 21. If you look ahead and skim through Chapter 21, you’ll notice that the chapter is a long one. It has 38 verses, and 34 of those verses are all focused on the coming destruction of the Temple and of Jerusalem itself. We’ll look at those verses next Sunday. But before Luke goes there, he has this little group of four verses about a poor widow. And though these verses are in Chapter 21, they really should be considered along with what we have studied in Chapter 20. They serve as a sort of “surprise ending” to Jesus’ conflict with the religious authorities. So let’s turn to our third and final point: Jesus’ Praise.

These four verses are often treated as a stand-alone lesson about true generosity. That’s not all there is to it, but let’s start there.

Jesus is in the Temple observing various people putting their gifts into the various offering boxes stationed around the courtyard. The money from these boxes was mostly used to maintain the Temple, which of course was very important to the Jewish people. So as Jesus watches, he sees rich person after rich person depositing their offerings into these boxes. Mark tells us that the rich were giving “large sums”, and it’s safe to assume that the same was true here. You would have thought that Jesus would have praised them for doing their duty to maintain his Father’s house, but Jesus says nothing. He wasn’t impressed by their impressive gifts. He didn’t praise any of them for their apparent generosity.

But then a poor widow appears, a vulnerable, impoverished woman who doesn’t come with bags of gold or large denominations. She only has two small copper coins. Each of these coins was a *lepta*, which was the smallest currency available. It would be like bringing two pennies to church. Some scholars calculate the value of the *lepta* as one one-hundredth of a denarius, which was the average daily wage. 1% of what a common labourer would have made in a day.

It wasn’t much, but it was all she had, and she wanted to give it to God. It seems completely insignificant and unlikely to make any difference at all in the work of maintaining the Temple. But as she deposits her two pennies into the offering box, Jesus suddenly sits up. He hadn’t cared much about the rich with their rich offerings, but this woman caught his attention. Why? Because of what Jesus says in verse 3: “Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them.”

This poor widow has put in *more* than all of them? How could that be? How could two pennies be worth more than the large sums of all these rich people? This seems to make absolutely no sense, until we look at Jesus’ explanation in verse 4: “For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.”

In other words, when it comes to God, the value of the gift isn’t measured by the quantity of the gift. It’s measured by how much it *cost* you. One scholar put it this way:

“[T]he main point appears to be that God measures the gifts of his people not on the basis of their size but on the basis of how much remains.” (Robert Stein)

You could say, “Well, a thousand dollars is a thousand dollars whether it comes from a rich person or poor person”, and you’d be right, but it costs a poor person *way* more to give a thousand dollars than someone who is rich. A rich person may be delaying their plans to buy a sweet sound system, or a luxury car, or a larger TV, or perhaps they don’t have to give up anything except a single digit in their bank accounts. But if a poor person gives away a thousand dollars, they may be giving away their entire life savings. They may be giving up their ability to pay their rent or buy groceries.

This woman may not have given up a thousand dollars, but she *did* give up all she had to live on, and that is why Jesus could say that she gave more than all of them.

This tells us something incredibly important about God’s heart. It tells us that God would rather have a poor person give him two pennies than a billionaire who gives him ten million dollars. Why? Think about it for a moment. The only reason why God would care about the size of our gifts would be if he *needed* those gifts. If God were worried about whether enough money would come in to maintain the Temple, or whether he would have enough in the operations account to cover all the priests on his staff, he would be pretty happy with a gift of ten million dollars even if it came from a rich person. But God is never worried about whether he will have enough, because everything – *everything* – belongs to him. Every single penny in the world is within his sovereign control, and therefore, he doesn’t need anything from us. He isn’t impressed by the size of our gifts. What he *is* impressed by is whether we are willing to sacrifice our comfort, our security, even our very *lives*, to bless him and honour him.

That’s an important lesson from our text. It’s a reminder to us that what matters to God isn’t that we’re giving him money that we could spend on vacations, or nicer things, or larger retirement funds. What matters is that we’re offering him *our lives*, which will radically impact how we handle our money.

As important as this lesson is, it’s not the main one. The main point of this text isn’t so much about *what* it teaches us about true generosity, but *who* it is that teaches us. It’s a poor widow! Jesus has spent all this time in Jerusalem looking for someone who faithfully worships God and found none. Until he sees this poor widow. This poor widow had more true faith in her little pinky than all the religious leaders combined. In fact, you could say that in this little act of giving, she demonstrated all the essential elements of a follower of Christ. Robert Stein put it this way:

“(She was) an example of one who was rich toward God (12:21), who was not anxious about this life, but who sought first God’s kingdom (12:22-31). She, like Jesus’ other followers, was willing to sell everything (12:22) and leave everything (5:11, 28) in her love for God.”

By putting these verses about the poor widow immediately after all the questioning and testing by the religious leaders, Luke is reminding us that God’s Kingdom is often found in surprising places. It’s not among the rich and famous. It’s not among those who are honoured in this world. It’s among the poor and needy, those who have nothing and care for nothing in the world but God. As Jesus himself said earlier in Chapter 6:

“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.”

The scribes may have devoured widow’s houses here on earth, but no one could take away this poor widow’s house in heaven. One day, she would be the one who would be enjoying the true, eternal riches of God’s Kingdom while the scribes suffered the greater condemnation.

**CONCLUSION**

So today, are you more like the scribes or the poor widow? Is your worship real or fake? Our text gives us a number of ways for us to assess our hearts.

* Think about how much you care about your looks. Do you care more about how you look, or about how God looks through your life?
* Think about how much you covet the approval of others. Do you want everyone to think well of you, or do you only care about what God thinks?
* Think about how you handle your money. Do you give only when it’s convenient, or do you give even when it hurts?
* Think about the kinds of people you honour and esteem. Are they the rich and powerful, or are they the poor but pious?

Are there people in your life that you need to beware of? Do people in your life need to beware of you? Or are you the kind of person Jesus can point to and say, “This person gave more than all the others combined”? If you want to follow Jesus, that’s the kind of person you’ll want to become. You want to give all your life to Jesus, because Jesus gave all his life for us, and he will help us, rich or poor, proud or humble, to become more and more like him each day.