

The Gospel According to Luke

“Of Mites & Men”

Chapter 20:45 – 21:4

Introduction

The televangelist looked sternly into the camera. She said that God was about to “lift His anointing” off certain members of her TV viewing audience. Why would He do it? Because although they were benefiting from her ministry, they had not contributed any money to her. If they didn’t immediately send her a generous gift – expect the anointing to be lifted.

Another minister takes a different approach. He wants you to share in his anointing by building a bridge to his ministry. How can you build such a bridge? Your generous gifts build a “money-bridge” over which the anointing of God can flow into your life.

Whether it is by a threat, or by a promise, these so-called ministers are using manipulation tactics to extort money from God’s people.

It’s nothing new. Jesus warned His first disciples, **beware of the scribes... who devour widow’s houses.**

Jesus’ words would have seemed radical to those listening. The scribes were considered pillars of the community. The Lord was exposing them as parasites. They were like termites devouring the house of a poor widow.

If they could not look to the scribes for an example of how to live, where could they look?

Jesus was already one step ahead of them! He directed them to look at a poor widow making her meager offering of two mites. If you wanted an example of true discipleship, there it was.

We can learn from both the *termites* and the *two mites*. We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 Disciples Don't Devour, and #2 Disciples Die Daily.

#1 Disciples Don't Devour (20:45-47)

Have you ever received a fund-raising letter in the mail? This one is from *Flesh Ministries*. It goes like this:

Dear Gene,

God spoke to me. Yes, he spoke to me and put your gullible name on my heart.

"Write a form letter to Gene," God said, "and employ Madison Avenue sales tactics to advance the kingdom of God through FLESH MINISTRIES!"

Gene, in the past God "owned the cattle on a thousand hills," but lately He has fallen on hard times. Believe it or not, the Almighty is in desperate need of your money. Without your money, God's work on this planet will sputter to an abrupt halt. You need to give a tithe to God by sending your money to me. He is desperate!

Allow me to explain God's dire need, Gene. You see, we have a giant mortgage on this monument we built to ourselves - I mean to God. Even though most of the money ends up in the hands of the bankers and utility companies, I am acting as a broker for them. So it really is sort of like giving to God.

With the rest of the money I pay my staff obscene salaries that they could not make anywhere else with their skills. This keeps them loyal to me, in case I occasionally commit adultery or get caught mishandling church funds. They can't afford to expose me. If I go down, *so do they!*

Now I know you have real needs in your own family, community, and Church. But by sending your money to me, think of how spiritual you will feel without ever getting your hands dirty helping real people. FLESH MINISTRIES will simulate all the ministry for you.

And concerning those scriptures about giving to orphans, widows, and those who are really in need; God told me in a dream that I actually was an orphan of sorts, and a widow, too, and so it was O.K. to keep giving me money.

Don't let us die! Keep the flesh alive and well with your gift.

Maybe it's reading between the lines, but many fund-raising appeals are just like that.

Jesus wants us to beware of them. He used the scribes as His example. Scribes were the recognized authorities on the interpretation of God's Word. They were revered, and feared, by the common people. They were doctors of the Law of God.

The Lord described them as devourers who have six appetites. First, they had an appetite for attention:

Luke 20:45 Then, in the hearing of all the people, He said to His disciples,
Luke 20:46 “Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes...

The rule was that their robes should just barely touch the ground. Instead, they added length to their robes, until in effect they had a train following them as they walked along.

If a woman came in to Church, wearing a long dress with a train behind it... Unless it was her wedding day, she'd draw your attention. You always notice people who are dressed inappropriately.

Be a little wary of people who draw attention to themselves – no matter how they do it. Disciples should always want to decrease, so that Jesus can increase.

Second, the devourers had an appetite for authority:

Luke 20:46 “Beware of the scribes, who... love greetings in the marketplaces...

Their robes singled them out, causing you to pay attention to them. Once you saw them, you must greet them with bows in the marketplace. When you bow to someone, it symbolizes that they are over you; they are your authority.

When I was a young boy in the Roman Catholic Church, the bishops wore ornate robes. You were expected to bow to them by kissing their ring.

Protestant Christians are not immune from an appetite for authority. There are always groups that practice a kind of discipleship that claims too much authority over the lives of the members.

Within good churches, there are always individuals who want to lord over you. Beware!

Third, the devourers had an appetite for acknowledgment:

Luke 20:46 “Beware of the scribes, who... love... the best seats in the synagogues...”

These were the seats situated in front of the boxes containing the scrolls of Scripture, facing the congregation. By virtue of being seated there, everyone must acknowledge that they were spiritual.

We’re wary of people who always want to be in front of others; who want immediately to be acknowledged. If we ask them to wait, to get involved serving quietly, they often leave; or they find ways of promoting their own agenda within the fellowship.

Fourth, the devourers had an appetite for being set apart:

Luke 20:46 “Beware of the scribes, who... love... the best places at feasts,

The best seats at feasts were those closest to the host. If seated there, you would receive special treatment. You were set apart from others.

Christians can set themselves apart by letting you know how spiritual they are.

We also do this by showing partiality to folks we consider more important.

Fifth, the devourers had an appetite for taking advantage:

Luke 20:46 “Beware of the scribes...
Luke 20:47 who devour widows’ houses...”

Scribes were also called *lawyers*. They weren’t lawyers in the same sense of our word; but they were often asked to handle certain legal matters. They would handle the finances of widows. But they would take advantage of them. Given an opportunity, they would equally exploit the rich.

Within any Church there are genuine needs. But there will also be those who seek to take advantage of the generosity of believers – whether you have much or little.

Sixth (and finally), the devourers had an appetite for asserting themselves:

Luke 20:46 “Beware of the scribes, who...

Luke 20:47 ...for a pretense make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation.”

Their **long prayers** were a **pretense**, meaning they had the outward appearance of being devout disciples, but inwardly they had all these carnal appetites we’ve just mentioned. Still, they asserted themselves every chance they got. It’s like the person who always has to say something at a prayer meeting or Bible Study.

Christians are not as analytical, or as critical, as they ought to be. **Listen** to what is being prayed or preached or prophesied. Does it have the tone with which God would address you? Does it really line-up with what the Bible says?

On earth, these kinds of people receive great recognition. Later, they will **receive greater condemnation**. In the case of the scribes, Jesus was indicating they were not truly saved.

In our case, people who act like this may be saved – but they are carnal; they are fleshly; they are still dominated by their sinful appetites. They go about seeking to devour so that they can feel full.

They may or may not devour your money. More likely, they devour your attention... Your acknowledgment... By putting themselves in authority over you. They assert themselves and thus take spiritual advantage of you.

Disciples don’t devour! Don’t be taken-in by someone who acts these ways. And, if you see any of these qualities in your life, turn away from them. Instead,

#2 Disciples Die Daily
(21:1-4)

Just when His disciples and followers were starting to wonder who they ought to look to as an example, God provided just the right person.

Luke 21:1 And He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury,
Luke 21:2 and He saw also a certain poor widow putting in two mites.

I'm told that there was a treasury in the Court of the Women, in the Temple, where thirteen offering boxes were kept. Each of them was labeled for a different cause or need. They were large at the base, but had a narrow neck and opening – so that you had to put in your offering a little at a time. Thus, everyone would know how generous you were.

A mite was about 1/8th of a penny! It was the least valuable coin in circulation.

The rich were parading by, taking a lot of time putting their coins into the various chests. Then a widow came and quickly dropped her two mites.

Everyone else noticed the wealthy; Jesus noticed the widow. We need to adjust our spiritual vision. We need to be on the look-out for the small; for the insignificant; for the lowly.

Luke 21:3 So He said, "Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all;
Luke 21:4 for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had."

There are several things to notice if you are interested in being a disciple of Jesus Christ.

First: They were giving money to God's work on earth. We don't harass you about your giving. Occasionally we let you know about a designated fund; but we don't really try to raise money. It's up to you how much, and how often, you give to the work.

We talk about giving when it's in our text... *And here it is!* Whether rich or poor, you should give to the Lord's work. The New Testament gives you a few principles to guide your giving:

1. It should be willing (2Corinthians 8:10-12; 9:7).
2. It should be regular (1Corinthians 16:2).
3. It should be generous (2Corinthians 8:9).

4. It should be sacrificial (2Corinthians 8:3).
5. It should be joyful (2Corinthians 9:7).

Get alone with the Lord. Talk to Him about your giving to His work – specifically, giving money. Use those five principles as your guide. Then make the necessary adjustments.

J.C. Ryle puts your giving into perspective: “Although Christ’s work does not depend on our money, yet Christ is pleased to test the reality of our grace by allowing us to help Him.”

The second thing we notice is that God considers the *proportion* more than the *portion*. The widow gave proportionately more than the rich, who gave out of their abundance and had tons left over. Hey – you could be the biggest giver to God’s work and not even know it! The encouragement here is to remember that in all areas of your life, God judges your motives, *not* just your actions.

God is even keeping a Book of Remembrance, in Heaven, about your life (Malachi 3:16). He fills it with those things that best represent your love for Him.

The third thing to notice – the thing I want to concentrate on – is that Jesus said that **she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had.**

All the livelihood probably means that it was the money she needed to live on each day. It was her daily budget. How she lived on a meager 2/8ths of a penny is anyone’s guess! But she did; and on this particular day, she gave it all to the Lord.

It is a practical illustration of the spiritual principle of daily offering to God your life as a living sacrifice. Or we could say that you die daily to yourself.

It doesn’t mean that everyday you should come here and put your daily budget into the offering box. It does mean that, in addition to giving money to the work of God, you make yourself and everything you own or manage available to God on a daily basis.

Applying God's Word:

Christian: Have you died to anything within yourself yet today? To some dream that is yours but not God's? To some desire that is yours but not God's? You can only answer that for yourself. But you won't get an answer unless you ask.

If you are not a believer, not a Christian... You should understand from this comparison that God looks deep below the surface into your heart. Maybe you feel as helpless, as insignificant, as a poor widow; you feel you've nothing to offer to God. So you're trying to get right before God by cleaning-up your life in some way, so He will notice you and receive you.

God sees you as you are. You cannot help yourself; you cannot clean-up your own life. Your problem is too deep. Your problem is sin.

God has done something about your sin. He sent His Son, Jesus, to take upon Himself your sin, and pay the ultimate penalty for it by dying on the Cross.

Now He offers you eternal life and the forgiveness of your sins. It's a gift to you. Like any gift, it must be received. You must ask the Lord to save you – acknowledging that you are a sinner in need of a Savior.