

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Abusing the Poor

Scripture: Luke 21:1-4

Code: 42-251

This morning I want you to open your Bible to the twenty-first chapter of the gospel of Luke, Luke chapter 21. And I want to read this somewhat familiar portion of Scripture to you, to establish it in your mind. And then we're going to look at it, I trust, in a beneficial way. Luke 21 and verse 1.

Speaking of Jesus, the text says, "And He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury. And He saw a certain poor widow putting in two small copper coins. And he said, 'Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all of them, 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.'"

Now, if you are beginning to say to yourself, "Here goes another message on sacrificial giving," you might be right to expect that because that is the universal application of this text. It is always used to tell us we ought to give the way this widow gave.

But let's back up a little bit before we look at the actual interpretation and remind ourselves where we are. This is Wednesday of Passion Week. This is the final week of our Lord's life. On Monday He entered the city. On Tuesday He cleansed the temple. All day Wednesday He has been teaching the multitudes in the temple area and has been confronted by the false religious leaders of Judaism who have endeavored to trap Him in His words so that they might have some cause to have Him executed. He has silenced them every time with His answer, thwarted them every time with His answer, so that they're going to have to lie and fabricate a reason for the Romans to execute Him on Friday. They're done asking questions. It's over. At this point on this Wednesday after a long day of teaching, He no longer addresses the crowd, the fickle crowd that hailed Him as Messiah and will cry for His blood not too long after this Wednesday. He has no more to say to the crowds in general. He has no more to say to the false religious leaders. He has denounced them and given them His last invitation and given His last invitation to the crowds as well.

In fact, follow the flow here because in chapter 21, starting in verse 5, the theme is judgment. The time of invitation is over. The ministry of our Lord in these three years has come to its end. No more gospel invitations. No more clarifications to the crowds and to the leaders. He's finished. And their final assessment is that He is not the Messiah they wanted, and they reject Him, leaders and people. And so, starting in verse 5 comes a long message on destruction, judgment...judgment that will come in 70 A.D. with the destruction of the temple and the city and the nation Israel and a judgment of God beginning in 70 A.D. that will stretch all the way until the return of Jesus Christ through all these 2,000

years and until our Lord comes. In fact, the last words of chapter 20 are clearly words of judgment, "Beware of the scribes," warning the people about how dangerous they are. And you remember that Luke only gives us a couple of verses regarding our Lord's warning concerning the scribes and the Pharisees. Matthew gives us the full account of His message on the danger of these false religious leaders, it's chapter 23 verses 1 through 39. He has pronounced judgment on the leaders and therefore judgment on the nation for following those leaders, and rejecting Him.

So between the condemnation of the false leaders, and the pronouncement of judgment that will last and has lasted two thousand years until Jesus comes, is this little vignette about a widow dropping two copper pennies into an offering receptacle in the temple. The question is, what does this have to do with anything? How does this fit? Why does Jesus inject this moment of reflection on a widow giving an offering in the temple into this section between a diatribe against false leaders and all the people that follow them, and a pronouncement of judgment on the temple, on the city and on the nation and a judgment that will last until the Second Coming? Why is this here?

Universally commentators tell us that our Lord is giving us a little glimpse of true worship in the middle of the false worship that dominates the temple. They tell us that it's a beautiful little story in the midst of ugliness. A little light in the midst of darkness, an illustration of giving till it hurts, contrasted with the selfishness of the spiritual leaders. This is the traditional, this is the universal explanation of this passage. In fact, scholars agree that this is a lesson on giving, but interestingly enough they can't agree what the lesson is. And if you were to go through say 25 or 30 or 50 or 100 commentators on this passage, they would suggest many lessons. They don't all agree. Here are the options, or some of it.

One, Jesus is teaching that the measure of a gift is not how much you give but how much you have after you give. But that's the measure of the gift. The measure is not the amount of the gift, but the amount left over. And that's the lesson the Lord is trying to teach us and many have waxed eloquent on that lesson.

Another option, a second one is that the true measure is the self-denial involved, the cost to the individual which is a just another way to say the first one. But that the percentage given is really what the issue is relative to one's expression of self-denial in that percentage. Obviously, the woman gave the highest percentage...everything. So it's about the percentage you give.

Third possibility also related to the other two, is that the true measure of any gift is the attitude with which you give it. Is it selfless? Humble? Surrender? Expressing love for God, devotion to God and trust in God? The widow, we are told, had the least left behind, gave the highest percentage and must have had the best attitude.

Fourthly, and this is another option that some have suggested, that the gift that truly pleases God is when you give everything and take a vow of poverty. And all of these and combinations of all of these are defended by virtually all those who write on this text. Teachers have waxed eloquent on all of them.

Now at this point I will confess to you, in spite of the popularity of these views, in spite of the universality of these views, none of these explanations makes any sense to me....none. In fact, all of those interpretations are imposed on the text and you know how I feel about imposing things on the Bible text....not good. You say, "Why do you say they're imposed?" Because Jesus never made any of those points. Jesus never said anything about what's left behind, what percentage, what attitude, or do the same and give everything. He didn't. Jesus never makes any of those points. He does not say the rich gave relatively too little, they had too much left over. He doesn't say the rich gave too low a percent. He doesn't say the widow gave the right amount. He doesn't say the rich had a bad attitude and the widow had a good attitude, or good spirit. He doesn't say that. In fact, He doesn't say anything about their giving except that she gave more than everybody. He doesn't say why or with what attitude, or whether she should have, or shouldn't have, or they should have, or shouldn't have. Her outward action is all that you see. It is no more or less good, bad, indifferent, humble, proud, selfish, unselfish than anybody else's act. There is no judgment made on her act as to its true character. There is nothing said about her attitude or her spirit. She could be acting out a devotion. She could be acting out of love. She could be acting out of guilt. She could be acting out of fear. We don't know because Jesus doesn't say anything. Doesn't say anything about the rich, doesn't say anything about the widow, doesn't draw any conclusions, doesn't develop any principles, doesn't command anything, doesn't define anything. Why? Because none of that matters.

The only thing I can conclude is if Jesus wanted to say any of that here, He could have said it. If He wanted to say, "Now you need to give like the widow, she had a good attitude and she gave a maximum percentage and what she had left behind was little. This is the kind of sacrificial giving that we're after." He doesn't say that. Doesn't say anything. The story then is not designed to teach any of those things. It's not designed to teach us about percentages, about how much you have left over, about attitudes. It's not designed to teach anything about giving. If there is one thing apparent here, and this is the bottom line, if there is one thing apparent, it is that she gave everything. So if there's one lesson that would be obvious and wouldn't need to be stated, it is that God expects you to give 100 percent of what you have.

That's ridiculous. That's ridiculous. That's irresponsible. That's foolish. It's not designed to talk about the principles of giving. There's only one comment that Jesus makes, she gave with her two copper coins relatively a great deal more than all the others because all the others gave out of their surplus, which means they had some left. She gave out of her poverty all she had to live on. That's all there is. No comment that the Lord appreciated her. No comment that the Lord loved her, commended her. No comment that she was now in the Kingdom of God. No invitation to the disciples to reach in to their

little money bags and go up there and throw in everything they had because it was good enough for the widow, it should be good enough for the disciples of Jesus. And if she was truly spiritual, they should be truly spiritual as well.

For these reasons, the traditional explanations of this text make no sense to me at all. One thing I do know is this, the Lord does not expect you to give 100 percent of what you have so that you have absolutely nothing left. But that's the only obvious principle here if you're going to draw a principle. Besides, why would you inject the principle in giving in a context like this? This is no place to interject, "Oh by the way, a few words on giving." That sounds like a traditional Baptist sermon, in the middle of everything you always have a few words on giving. What in the world does that have to do with anything? The Lord makes no comment about giving except that she gave more than everybody else relative to what she had. She is not commended. They are not condemned. No one's attitude or spirit in the giving is discussed. And no principle regarding giving is drawn by our Lord. The narrative is not intended to deal with any of those matters. The reason the Lord doesn't say anything about it is that's not what it's about. And if you look at the context before and after, this is all about the condemnation of wicked spiritual leaders and a corrupt religious system that is about to be destroyed. In fact, in verse 5, the passage immediately after this, some were talking about the temple, that it was adorned with beautiful stones and votive gifts, and He said, "As for these things which you're looking at, the days will come in which there will be not one stone upon another which will not be torn down." This little vignette is in the middle of a diatribe against a false religious system and a pronouncement of judgment on that system, judgment that is still going on today.

So what...just exactly is this about? Now one more comment or two before we look at it, it's not obscured. Anybody can read it and read exactly what it says. It's not profound. It's not got some deep hidden secret meaning. This is not one of the great spiritual insights in the Bible. This is not one of the great revelations of Scripture. This isn't one of the great brilliant things that Jesus said that has all kinds of deep meaning. It's simple, clear. He saw a widow give more than everybody else. In other words, her involvement in religion cost her more than it cost anybody else because it cost her everything. That's all, just an observation. And the disciples weren't confused about it. They didn't ask questions about it. It was patently obvious.

Another thing to think about. The assumption in interpreting this as a model for Christian giving is that Jesus was pleased with what she did. It doesn't say that. Absolutely doesn't say that. It doesn't say that Jesus was pleased her gift. It doesn't say Jesus was pleased with her attitude. It doesn't say anything about His attitude. In fact...in fact, what I think what she did displeased Him immensely. I think it was more than displeasing. I think it angered Him. I think what she did angered Jesus.

Let me put it this way. How would you feel, you're a person who loves the Lord, you're a person that loves your brother and cares about people and cares about their needs...how would you feel if you saw a destitute widow who only had two coins left to buy her food for her next meal give those two

coins to a religious system, how would you feel? You would say, "Something is wrong with that system when that system takes the last two coins out of a widow's hand." That's what you would say and you would be right to say that. Giving your last two coins to a false religious system, how would you feel if you saw a destitute, impoverished person give to her religion her last hope for life to go home perhaps and die? You'd be sick. You'd feel terrible. You would be repulsed. Any religion that is built on the back of the poor is a false religion. What a sad, misguided, woeful, poor victimized lady. It's tragic, painful. And I think that's exactly how Jesus saw it...exactly.

He saw that corrupt system taking the last two pennies out of a widow's pocket. In desperation, hoping that maybe in that legalistic system her two coins would buy some blessing, trying to be dutiful, the rabbis had said with alms you purchase your salvation, trying to buy your way into heaven, trying to buy relief from your desperation, your destitution, contemporary quote/unquote evangelists call this seed faith. "Give me your money and God will multiply it back to you." God doesn't want a widow to give up her last two cents, you couldn't find that in the Bible any place. That's the last thing God would want a widow to do.

Look at Matthew 15 for a moment and I'll show you this. Matthew 15, and here the Pharisees and scribes are again confronting Jesus and they're upset because the disciples don't go through certain ceremonial washings of the hands which they have invented. And so they say, "Why do Your disciples...verse 2...transgress the tradition of the elders for they don't wash their hands when they eat bread?" And He answered and said to them, "Why do you transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your traditions?" See, what they had done is create a false religious system in the name of God, a false religious system that transgressed the commandment of God. And here's a perfect illustration of how they did it. This is so interesting. "For God said," back in Exodus 20, Deuteronomy 5, "For God said, 'Honor your father and mother and he who speaks evil of a father or mother, let him be put to death.'" Wow. "But you say, follow this, 'Whoever shall say to his father or mother, Anything of mine you might have been helped by has been given to God.'" That's what they were saying. They were supposed to support their mother and father. Honor their father and mother boils down to making sure their needs are met. And in order to get around that and to parade their righteousness and to buy salvation, instead of giving to their mother or father, they would say, "Oh, we're giving to God," and leave their mother and father destitute. And so by the tradition of giving money to God that belonged to the needy, they violated the Law of God.

In verse 6 He says, "You invalidate the Word of God for the sake of your tradition. You hypocrites." Verse 9 He says, "You worship Me in vain, teaching as doctrines the traditions of men."

The point that I want you to understand is this, God is concerned that people have their needs met. It is the responsibility in the Ten Commandments of children to provide for their parents when their parents need care and provision. To say we can't do that because we've given it to God, is to violate the Law of God with your tradition. If you'll notice in Mark chapter 7, Mark's account of this same

conversation, it adds something familiar to us. Verse 8, Mark 7 verse 8, “Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.” You've invented a kind of religion that has nothing to do with the commandment of God. Verse 9, “You've nicely set aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition, for Moses said, ‘Honor your father, your mother. He who speaks evil of father or mother, let him be put to death. But you say if a man says to his father or his mother anything of mine you ought to be helped by is korban,’” that means they had a word for it, Oh it's korban, it's korban. That means devoted to God, you no longer do anything for your mother or father, thus invalidating the Word of God by your tradition.

The system that had developed in Judaism abused poor people. And it abused it on...abused them on a spiritual level. Anyone who withholds money from needy parents in order to give it to God is in direct disobedience to God and is dishonoring God's Word and substituting a man-made tradition for God's Word. Basic human needs come first with God before religious offerings. Listen, God's Law was never given to impoverish people, but to help them. Man was not made for the Law but the Law was made for man. We would conclude that this woman was part of a system that took the last two cents out of her hand on the pretense that this was necessary to please God, to purchase her salvation and to bring her blessing. She was manipulated by a religious system that was corrupt. This is not an illustration of heartfelt, sacrificial giving that pleases the Lord, this is not a model for all of us to follow. Jesus never expects that, in fact He told a servant who had very little, “You should have put your money in the bank and earned interest because you need that to meet your own physical needs.”

Something very different is going on here. This is not about Jesus honoring giving, this is about a victim of a corrupt system who is literally made absolutely destitute trying to live up to that system and earn heaven. Let's go back to the account now in Luke 21. You'll see how this unfolds.

Verse 1, “And He looked up,” now stop there. That assumes that He was...what?...looking down. Good! That's lesson one in exegesis. If you looked up, you had to have been looking down. That's really important...really, really important. Mark in a parallel passage, Mark 12:41 to 46 or so, says He was sitting down. And you need to understand what's gone on here. In verses 46 and 47, at the end of the chapter, you have that brief, brief statement about His beware-of- the-scribes speech, but the full speech is in Matthew 23, okay, the full speech is in Matthew 23. He had just completed that speech.

At the end of a whole day of talking, teaching, confronting, interacting, conflict, an exhausting day, a whole day, in the midst of massive crowds jostling, listening, interacting, that in itself, the sheer physical effort in itself would leave Him exhausted. But then in addition to the physical exhaustion, He is given this...this denunciation, this damnation speech that is recorded in Matthew chapter 23, you need to look at it for a moment. It's really...it's the low moment in His life. After all the years of incarnation, all the years of ministry, all the sermons preached, all the questions answered, all the

miracles done, it all comes down to the leadership rejecting Him and the nation following the leadership and also rejecting Him. And so He gives this diatribe, this blistering malediction against the false religious leaders. And He uses the word “woe” repeatedly which means curse, damn, consigned to judgment. Matthew 23, it appears in verse 13, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites.” Verse 14, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites.” Fifteen, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites.” Sixteen, “Woe to you, blind guides.” Verse 17, “Fools and blind men.” Verse 23, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites.” Twenty-four, “Blind guides.” Twenty-five, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites.” “Blind Pharisees.” Verse 17, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites.” Twenty-nine, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites.”

And it all comes down to verse 37, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets, stones those who are sent to her, how often I wanted to gather your children together the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate.” It's over. Judgment. And it's going to be that way until you say, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.” Judgment will fall and last until Christ returns. This is the sad, final message. The conclusion is devastating. Not only devastating to the leaders, devastating to the nation, but devastating to Jesus. This is where all His efforts end, long judgment until the Lord's return on this nation. So it's not just the physical weariness, it's the agonizing sad reality of what our Lord says. He feels deeply the sinful rebellion and unbelief of Israel, leaders and people. He shed tears when He walked into the city, chapter 19 verse 41, and saw it, He wept. And He's still weeping. Preaching these words would be heart wrenching. All these 33 years and this is how it ends, an exhausting emotional experience for Him. It was over. No more calls to the Kingdom, no more invitations to salvation, only a pronouncement of damnation that would last 2,000 years and send generation after generation after generation after generation of these chosen people into a godless eternity.

After those tragic words, the acknowledged end of salvation hope for the nation, He had come to His own and His own received Him not, He must have been exhausted, He must have been spent, He must have been heart-broken. And so, Mark says He was sitting and His eyes must have been looking down as He contemplates the damning religion of Judaism and the fact that the temple where He sat which He had earlier cleansed was so corrupt, its religion so ungodly that it along with the city of Jerusalem and the whole nation of Israel had to be totally destroyed and kept under judgment for millennia.

So there He sat in moments of thought before He turns to pronounce the judgment for all his disciples to hear. No wonder He was looking down. And when He looked up, Mark 12:41 says, “He saw opposite, the treasury observing how people were putting money into the treasury.” Jesus had said in Matthew 6 that you were to do your giving in secret. But the religious system had developed a very public prominent way to do it and Pharisees came along and had trumpets blown announcing their arrival to give, according to Matthew 6. So He looks up and there He sees the people coming, the treasury and He observes how people were putting money into the treasury.

What is the treasury? Well the court in which Jesus was sitting is a very, very large open court in the temple area. It was called the Court of the Women. There was an inner court where only the men could go but this is the court where everyone could go, men and women. Jesus taught here as indicated in John chapter 8, in fact, He taught on the light of the world on that occasion. And He taught in the Court of the Women, the great open court because it was where everyone could come. He calls it the treasury because there was a section of it that the leaders had designed as the place you give your money. They had set up 13 shofar-trumpet shape. You know what a shofar is, it's a horn. They had set up 13 of those in which people dropped their money. And each of them had a sign on the bottom of it indicating exactly what that money was to be used for. Old shekel dues, new shekel dues, bird offerings, wood, incense, gold, free will, they all were labeled and people would go by and they would in very open courtyard, publicly put their giving on display. The treasury is actually the word gazophylakion from two Greek words, gaza meaning treasury, phylake meaning prison. Once you dropped them in, they were held in there. This is the real heart beat, folks, of false religion, right? This is the real center of false religion. The center of false religion is the treasury, folks. It's all about the money. They do it, says Peter, for filthy lucre. Luke 16:14, Jesus said, "The scribes and Pharisees were lovers of money." We know the Sadducees who ran the temple franchises were lovers of money, because Jesus said you've turned My Father's house a house of prayer into a den of robbers, as they extorted money out of people for sacrifices and coin exchange. False religion is always about the money. When you get to the treasury, you get to the heart of false religion.

And so, as the wearied and spent and sad heart-broken Savior lifts up His eyes and watches, He sees the normal course of false religion, poor, deceived souls putting their coins in trying to buy blessing and salvation. And He sees, verse 1, the rich putting their gifts into the treasury. Rich is plousios in the Greek, it simply means they have a full supply. Those with enough. Not mega-rich, super-rich, very rich, super-rich, just they had enough. Those who could put some in and have some left, the non-poor, people who could make offerings and still have enough to live. In fact, Mark 12:41 says they were putting in large amounts, polu(?), much, they were putting in much. They were putting in a substantial amount and they still had plenty left over.

The religious system demanded money. It demanded money to make the guys who were in charge of it comfortable and prosperous and wealthy. And that's what false religion always, always does. This was the pattern then. Here they were in the open court where everybody could see, coming along, dutifully following the prescriptions and the demands of their leaders in the self-righteous acts of giving to buy favor from God, literally to purchase their salvation. And for the most part, Israel was a prosperous country, people did okay. They could afford it. But in watching this, the Lord sees one widow. He saw a certain, poor widow, the word is penichron meaning poor and needy but not totally destitute. It's way down there, but it's not the bottom. It would mean somebody with very, very little, penichros, a certain poor widow putting in two small copper coins, lepta, lepta, Jewish coins, the smallest coins they had. She puts this coin in there.

Now wait a minute. A poor widow, does that sound familiar to you? My mind immediately goes back to verse 46 of chapter 20, doesn't it? "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, who devour widows' houses...who devour widows' houses. They build their success monetarily on the backs of widows. Wow! Our Lord indicts them for their severe abuse of widows, along with the Sadducees, the Pharisees and the scribes had a system that abused the poor and the defenseless for whom they had only disdain. They viewed any poor widow as being under the judgment of God, that's why she was a poor widow. And they would aid God in making life tough for them to punish them for whatever sins God was punishing them for. Furthermore, widows were women and women were second-class, and Pharisees every day prayed, "Lord, make me not a Gentile or a woman." And because they were widows, they were defenseless and easy prey.

What do you have here? You have a destitute widow then, one of them ones just discussed in verse 47. How could you not make that connection. Here is just a couple of sentences later an illustration of a poor widow who is being devoured by a religious system, her last two cents, her life she gives to this system, dutifully, along with everybody else, trying to live up to the system, trying to buy her salvation in an act of charity in a hope that it will earn her favor with God, she gives up her last two small copper coins...smallest coin, she dropped two of them in one of those 13 shofars. That was all, nothing is said about her attitude, nothing is said about her spirit, nothing said about whether she did it in desperation or devotion, whether she did it in legalism or love, it doesn't say anything about that. The Lord doesn't commend her, doesn't make her an example, doesn't validate what she did, doesn't say it was a worthy spiritual act that greatly pleased Him. All He said was, this religious system is preying on widows, this cost her more than everyone else. She put in relatively, comparatively more than anyone. Yes, the religious leaders were devouring widows and the more desperate they became, the more they needed, they thought, to buy God's blessing. Belittled by the establishment because they were thought to be in that state because of divine punishment, second-class women, they were defenseless, easily exploited and the system exploited them to the max. Took the last two cents of that poor woman and it was all, the end of verse 4 says, she had to live on, it was literally her life. She'll go home and die.

Now Scripture is full of commands and instructions for the people of God to take care of widows, is it not? I wrote down about twenty of them here which I won't take you through, but you can check a concordance, look up widows and find them. There are warnings all throughout Scripture to care for the poor, care for the widows, and do not abuse them. The real tragedy that struck our Lord was the abuse of widows taking place in the name of God in the temple, the temple of God. They had turned it into a den of robbers and they were robbing those who had the least. It is ugly exploitation of widows in the house of God in the name of God. Verse 2 says, "A certain poor widow," penichros, poor but not ptochos, but then Jesus says in verse 3, this poor ptochos because once she gave up the last two coins, she went from penichros to ptochos, destitute, nothing. She gave up all her life, cost her...this

religious system cost that widow her life. She's going to go home and die. Do you get the picture? Jesus isn't commending her, she's a victim. He's not proud of her. He's not making her an example of sacrificial giving. This is an absurdity. He is observing the corruption of the system that is going to be destroyed under the leadership of these corrupt condemned leaders. They're exploiting the most defenseless, the most impoverished. Jesus certainly is not saying she gave her last cent and that's what you should do, of course not. He doesn't want you to give up everything you've got and go home and die. He's given us richly all things to enjoy. It says nothing about percentages, nothing about proportional giving, nothing about giving with the right spirit, nothing about the measure of the gift is what you have left, nothing about giving up everything and living on faith. That's not here. He's observing the false religion that preys on the weak and the desperate and the defenseless and holds out hope to the hopeless if they just give their money. I think Jesus was not happy. I think Jesus was angry. And that's why He says in verse 6, "As for the things which you're looking at, the days will come in which there will not be left one stone upon another which will not be torn down." And the disciples say, "When's it going to happen?" And He says, "It's going to happen," and He describes it in the remainder of the chapter.

Isn't this obvious? If you saw a widow give her last two cents to some religious organization in the hope that she could purchase salvation or purchase blessing, or buy healing, or buy prosperity, you wouldn't commend her, you'd want to stop her and you'd want to shut down that religious system that preys on the desperate. This act did not please our Lord. She's simply been taught and she bought in to a system that destroyed her. No praise is given of her act or her attitude. She's caught in the corruption of the system at the hands of those wretched leaders. She has given her last coins to a false religion. Jesus is angry. And that's why He'll destroy this den of robbers. Judgment came, 70 A.D., and it continues now on that temple, on that city, on that land until Jesus comes again.

You know, this continued to go on through history? For Martin Luther in the Reformation it was a Catholic Church abusing the poor that in his mind invalidated the whole system. They were building massive cathedrals. They were building St. Peter's in Rome. They were building it from the money of the poor, destitute, impoverished people to whom they were selling indulgences to build St. Peter's, promising the people that for money their sins would be forgiven. When it became so abusive, Luther reacted, the people reacted and you had a Protestant Reformation. I've been in cities around the world where I've talked with people in cathedrals and I've asked the question a number of places...Why are none of the cathedrals ever finished, why do they keep building them? And the answer is because the church can tax the people as long as construction is going on. Sometimes it goes on for a thousand years. The history of the Roman Catholic Church in the world is a history of massive unbelievable wealth at the top, out of the pockets of the destitute and the poor trying to buy their way into heaven.

In a perhaps more familiar role for some of us, the largest segment of givers to the Charismatic prosperity gospel preachers are single women, desperate for healing, desperate for money.

Sometimes they're promised money, health and the new one is a spouse...a man. That's right, if they send in their money. So I say, woe to you who sell your miracle water and your miracle cloths that promise to heal the desperate if they send you their money. Woe to you wealthy self-indulgent preachers who become rich on the backs of the lonely poor, disillusioned diseased and desperate who are told to give you their money as an act of faith so that God is obligated to make them healthy and wealthy. Woe to you who indulge in ten thousand dollar a night hotel rooms, claim revelations from God, spend 112 thousand dollars a month on your private jet with money taken from the most desperate people. Woe to you, you will not escape judgment.

One person I read about this week worked for a five-star hotel, stole \$400 thousand from the hotel. They tracked the employee down. Found him in a small dingy rented apartment in a slum with no car. When they asked where the money was, he had given it all to a prosperity preacher on the promise that it would be multiplied. This is not true religion, never has been. Listen to James 1:27, "This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God to visit orphans and widows in their distress." True religion does not abuse the poor. It ministers generously, graciously to their needs.

Isn't it amazing? Of all the little things...of all the little things that could have been the trigger to set off the destruction of the temple, it was one illustration of an abused widow that our Lord puts on the pages of Scripture. Woe to you who abuse women, widows, the distressed, the downcast, the poor, the sick with your lying promises to get their money. That's false and it will be destroyed.

Father, we hear this message and we know that it's consistent with Your heart because You care for the downcast and the poor. Jesus came and He fed the crowds. Jesus came and He healed the sick. Jesus came and He poured out love and grace to all who would come to Him and said His burden is light, His yoke is easy...a contrast to the wicked false religious systems that prey on people, especially the defenseless and the destitute and the desperate and the hurting and the needy. Lord, would You bring that to an end and would You exalt Your true church and the true Christian faith. This we ask only for Your glory. Amen.

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