

# Further up, Further in

## Resources for Continued Study



LOOKOUT  
MOUNTAIN  
Presbyterian Church

### “BEWARE OF EMPTY RELIGION”

For individual study or group discussion

In Luke 20:45-21:4, we encounter another example of the upside-down Kingdom of God—where the first are last, the humble are exalted, and the proud are opposed. Here we find Jesus on the offensive, as he condemns the hypocrisy of the scribes and commends the devotion of a widow. This passage serves as a warning from our Lord to **beware of empty religion**, because those who practice it “*will receive the greater condemnation*” (v. 47).

**Jesus reveals the stark contrast between a religion by façade: inward insincerity masked by outward religiosity (20:45-47).**

In Luke 20:46-47, Jesus denounces the scribes “*who like to walk around in long robes, and love greetings in the marketplaces and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.*” In the first part of Dante Alighieri’s 14th century poem *Divine Comedy*, *The Inferno* describes the journey of Dante through hell led by the Roman poet Virgil. In the eighth circle of hell, Dante comes upon a ditch where he discovers the hypocrites. Among the hypocrites suffering in hell, he identifies the biblical high priests Annas and Caiaphas crucified to the floor while being trampled by a horde of hypocrites condemned to a never-ending march under the weight of beautiful golden robes that are lined with heavy lead.<sup>1</sup>

- In Matthew 23:25-28, like Dante’s poem, Jesus reveals what is hidden underneath the religious leaders’ façades. Compare Jesus’ warnings in Matthew 23 to the descriptions of true religion found in James 1:22-27 and 1 John 3:4-10. Note the contrasts.
- Read James 3:1. What warning does James give to those who seek positions of power? The Kingdom of God is a primary theme throughout the *Gospel of Luke*. What are some of the upside-down Kingdom values you have learned about thus far? (cf. Luke 1:52-53; 6:20-26; 14:11; 18:14). Discuss how today’s passage illustrates them.

**Jesus reveals the stark contrast between a religion by faith: genuine devotion marked by sincere love and dependence (21:1-4).**

As Jesus sees the wealthy putting their tithes into the temple treasury, he watches them give big gifts with a big show so that others will take notice. By way of contrast, “*he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins.*” In actual value, the widow’s gift is tiny. The small copper coin is called a “lepton” and is worth about 1/8 of a cent.<sup>2</sup> But Jesus sees her offering from a different perspective, “*this poor widow has put in more than all of them*” (v. 3). The widow gives herself as a living sacrifice. Her offering reveals her genuine devotion and dependence on God, while the offering of the rich reveals their devotion and dependence on themselves.

- The story of the widow’s sacrificial giving points us to Jesus’ greater sacrifice (Ephesians 5:2). Read Romans 8:32, 12:1. What should our response be, knowing that Christ died to give us life? Can we ever outgive God? (cf. Proverbs 3:9-10; Malachi 3:10)
- 1 Kings 17:8-24 tells the story of the widow of Zarephath. Like the widow in today’s passage, she gave all that she had. What lessons can we learn from the sacrifices of these two widows?
- A religion by faith is evidenced by “*giving our lives away on the mountain, in the city, and around the world.*” We know God uses our earthly talents, time, and treasures in order to expand his Kingdom. What do you need to let go of and, in faith, give to God today?

DATE: October 13, 2024

SPEAKER: Chad/Frank

SERIES: The Gospel of Luke

PASSAGE: Luke 20:45-21:4

## RENEW: 31 Days of Prayer

### DAY 7: Vitality of Worship

**PRAYER:** Great Lord, you are most worthy of praise. While we certainly cannot fathom your greatness, how often we forget. Our hearts are so easily distracted by lesser things that can never deliver what you alone can. We confess that we often exchange the truth of God for a lie and sadly worship created things rather than the Creator. We beg that you would move powerfully among us so that nothing is set above us for worship but God, and nothing is set below us but creation. Please be merciful to us by keeping idolatry, irreverence, and unbelief far from our lives. Each week as we kneel before you in corporate worship, our Maker, would you enable us to come with thanksgiving, songs of joy, honest confession, sincere listening, and glad expectation. May our gathering be like that of a flock in the pasture under the care of a Good Shepherd. As you enliven our hearts each Lord’s Day, keep our hearts inflamed for worship in every conversation, vocation, and recreation that follows. By the mighty power of your Spirit, transform us into a community of believers who respond to your amazing grace with worship and wonder. Give us faith to offer our lives in worship to you, because from you and through you and to you are all things. To you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be glory forever. Amen.

### PRAY FOR HOME MISSIONS

Bridges Community Church,  
strategic partner ministry

### PRAY FOR WORLD MISSIONS

Melanie and Bill, supported  
national partner

<sup>1</sup>Alighieri, Dante. *Divine Comedy: The Inferno*. May 2003 NY, NY. New American Library. 140

<sup>2</sup>Lane, William. *The Gospel According to Mark*. 1975, Grand Rapids, MI. Eerdmans. 442