



# Central Peninsula Church

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Luke 20:41-21:4  
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## Keeping It Real

SERIES: *A Savior for All People*

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When Nancy and I were just getting to know each other, very early on in our relationship, I finally got up the courage to ask her out to dinner. This was a big deal for me, so I did every thing I could think of to impress her. I knew she liked seafood so I made reservations at a very nice seafood restaurant in Sunnyvale. I cleaned up; I took a shower and poured on about a half bottle of Hi Karate aftershave over my head. And this was back in the mid 70's so I was all decked out in white stretch pants, white shoes, and a powder blue long sleeve shirt. I mean, I was stylin'! I was looking good! Everything was going great until we got to the restaurant because it turned out that I was dressed exactly like the uniform the busboys were wearing. Now in all honesty the busboys were probably making more money than I was at the time, but it wasn't quite the impression I had hoped for. I wanted so badly to be impressive but in the end I was simply humbled by the whole experience. I found out that even though I am tall and exceedingly handsome, real relationships aren't based on how impressive we are; authentic relationships are built on trust, where we can be absolutely honest and real with who we are in the presence of another person.

Well, this morning we're going to look at a passage in the gospel of Luke where we discover the same thing about following Jesus, because no matter how much we might try and dress up the outside, Jesus is seeking after something else, something deeper, something far more authentic and real.

So please turn this morning to Luke chapter 20 beginning with verse 41 as we look at what it means to be an authentic follower of Jesus Christ. Jesus is speaking here to the Scribes or the Teachers of the Law.

### I. Giving In to His Power

**"Then He said to them, 'How is it that they say the Christ is David's son? 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 A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET.' Therefore David calls Him 'Lord,' and how is He his son?'"**

It's now Tuesday or Wednesday of Holy Week and Jesus has been teaching every day in the outer court of the Temple. On Sunday (Palm Sunday) He entered Jerusalem with a great parade of excitement and support. The crowds cried out, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord...peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" Spontaneous worship broke out as He traveled

through streets of the city. But then Jesus makes what appears to be a huge political blunder: He storms the temple, turning tables, wildly criticizing the temple big wigs, getting in the faces of the religious elites. Luke tells us that after that: **"The chief priests, the teachers of the law and the leaders among the people were trying to kill Jesus. But they couldn't figure out how to do it because all the people were hanging on His every word."** So they subjected the Son of God to a series of questions that were intended to discredit and entrap him. Questions that touched on a wide spectrum of religious and social law. And Jesus brilliantly engaged them at their own game, often turning their own arguments against them. Finally He refutes the argument of the Saducees who didn't believe in the resurrection of the dead. Verse 39 says that **"after that no one dared to ask anymore questions."** They were afraid of how it would turn out. They knew they were no match for Jesus. And you might remember, the "Scribes" or "Teachers of the Law" who DID believe in the resurrection were praising Jesus on what a great job He had done. They were having a back slapping, high fiving celebration saying: "Way to go Jesus. We're so glad you put those guys in their place." But Jesus says, now while you're congratulating yourselves, let me ask you a question.

He takes them to a passage from scripture that focuses on the identity of Christ or the Messiah. These scribes were a subset of the Pharisees—these were the seminary professors and theologians of the day. These were the guys who knew their Bible trivia. And this was a passage they were completely familiar with. They believed and rightly taught that the Messiah would be from the line of David. In fact everyone knew this. Remember blind Bartameus who kept saying, "Son of David...Son of David." The scriptures are clear and everyone agreed that the Christ would be a direct descendant of King David. The scribes at least got this much right. But Jesus takes them to Psalm 110 to show them what they missed. And he asks them this question: How can it be possible that David's Son is also David's Lord? That's the question and he quotes David where he says, "The Lord said to My Lord, sit here at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." Now while it's true that Messiah is David's offspring, the Psalm doesn't emphasize the humanity of David's son; it focuses instead on the authority of David's Lord. David himself recognized that his own descendant would also be

transcendent. Not just human son, but Holy Lord. And this Lord sits at the right hand of God as the Father makes preparation for the final victory; not just over Rome, not just over the political forces of the day, but over sin and death through Him. So how can they simply call him David's son?

It's interesting because the question is never really answered, but make no mistake, Jesus struck a nerve. The scribes themselves are silenced with this one. You see, they're anticipating a human Messiah. They're cool with the concept of the kingly line of David coming through a man who will defeat the enemies of Israel through David's seed. But Jesus wants to know: If David calls Him Lord then why don't you? If David could see into the future and bow to the authority of his own descendant son, then why can't you see right in front of your face and bow before the authority of the transcendent Son of God? That's the real question. It was the question to the Scribes then and it's the question for us now. Will you call Him your Lord? Will you give in to His power and authority in your life? It's fashionable these days to be cool with a human Jesus, to see Him as a good man or a wise prophet. But Jesus is pressing in this morning and just as He asks the scribes He also asks us: Will we recognize Him as the transcendent Son of God and give into His power and authority? Will you surrender to Him to rule as Lord of your life?

If you've ever been involved in a choir or orchestra you know that the conductor is everything. All eyes are fixed on him. He interprets the score, controlling the tempo with the pulse of his hand, rising and falling as the music breathes out his own heartbeat. And you know that you can't authentically follow the conductor unless his authority fundamentally defines your relationship.

Well, that's what it means to follow Christ. We give up the right to play our score our way, in our time, according to our own heartbeat. We give in to Him when we don't even like the music He's given us, when we don't get to choose the struggles and trials we face each day. We yield to Him trusting that the music will be a blessing even when we don't see the end from the beginning (which we never do). We let Him define tempo, time, volume and key of our days. And we keep our gaze fixed on Him looking for every gesture and nod to point us to the next measure of music to be played or the next season of life to be lived.

This of course goes against the grain of a culture that tells us over and over again to "make your own kind of music, live your own kind of life," but to authentically follow Christ means to give in to His power; bowing to His authority; letting Him conduct the score of our lives. That's where authentic

relationship with Christ begins. But before the Scribes can even catch their breath Jesus turns to the disciples in verse 45.

## II. Giving Up on Our Pretense

**"And while all the people were listening, He said to the disciples, '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...'"** So turning to the disciples Jesus says: Look out for these guys. They're all in it for the prestige and privilege that religion can bring. These were the religious power dressers of the day. They walked around in long white robes; you could spot them a mile away and unlike my powder blue shirt and white pants that embarrassed me, their robes were a symbol of prestige that said: look at me, I'm somebody with power and position.

Jesus says they loved all the little perks. They like to hang with the rich and famous. They love to get invited to big social functions and sit in the luxury boxes at the ball game. And at church they sit way up front facing the crowd so everyone could see them perform their religious gestures—a hand raised at the right time, a pious nod of the head, maybe even a well placed amen or two. They love the public recognition.

So beware of these guys because they're all glitz and hype. Their religion is a front for their own self promotion and pretense. This is still true today. There are many religious professionals in our day and time who are seduced by the perks and prestige that comes with the territory. Look out for people like that. Don't be drawn into their hype. Don't be impressed with their long white robes, Italian suits and their slick advertising.

But Jesus warns his disciples for another reason. It's because He knows that we're all prone to this kind of external pretense. We all want to be known for something more than we really are. I remember many years ago sitting in a church during one of the bleakest seasons of my walk with the Lord, weeping all week long but pasting on a happy face when Sunday came around. I didn't want to admit or reveal how messed up I really was. Until the Lord finally broke through and said what He tells us here this morning. If you want to be an authentic follower of Christ then you have to be willing to give up the pretense and come just as you are. This is so vital to our spiritual health and to the health of those we walk with. By the way, this is one of the things that drew me to CPC over ten years ago now. I hope you are sensing this and trusting that this is a place to let down your guard, put away the pretense and come exactly how you are. Following Him means giving up on our pretense. But then notice what else Jesus says about these smug religious dignitaries.

### III. Giving to the Poor

**"...who devour widows' houses, and for appearance's sake offer long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation."** It's all pretense and show biz on the outside, but here's what's really going on. They're lining their pockets with the money they have swindled from the weakest; folks who live on the very bottom of the social order. They're devouring widow's houses and estates, they're using their position and privilege to oppress the poor and needy. And we say well, it makes sense then that they should receive greater condemnation. We want a little justice here. It's only right. This sort of thing ought to make us angry.

In fact you may have heard about this guy in the news a few weeks ago. He is Stephen Turner and apparently he was a doctor whose license to practice medicine was revoked back in 1998 but was caught performing fake medical exams on immigrants who were seeking permanent residency in the US. He gave hundreds of bogus vaccinations with salt water. And he charged \$200 to more than 1,400 immigrants from 2003 until 2005. That is just so wrong! The San Francisco District Attorney said: "These innocent immigrants were victimized by a greedy man who wanted nothing more than to advance his own personal gain at their expense."

Some of the scribes may have been directly involved in a scam like this, where they used their position and privilege to take advantage of the marginalized widows in their community. But the scriptures are clear—the privileged and powerful contribute to the oppression of the poor simply by neglect; by turning a blind eye to their suffering and need without lifting a finger to help. If you were here last week you might remember how Abram was complicit in the injustice that was done to Hagar and Ishmael; not because of what he did, but because he neglected to act when he should have.

It's important here that we realize this is one of the recurring charges of the OT prophets against the religious leaders of Israel. The prophet Ezekial compares Israel with the city of Sodom and says: **"Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed, and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy."** Proverbs 21 says: **"He who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be answered."** This may startle us a little, but the Scribes and the disciples knew exactly what Jesus was getting at. They knew that authentic faith was always measured (at least in part) by how you care for the needs of the marginalized and the poor. That's why James can say, "This is pure and undefiled religion..." In other words, if you really want to know whether or not your faith is the real deal, you want to know if you have an authentic relationship with Jesus, here's what it looks like—to look after orphans and widows in their distress—that's it. That's how you measure the authenticity of your life in Christ.

This means that we use our power and privilege to engage in issues related to social justice. We ask Him to sharpen our minds, break our hearts and open our hands to the needs of the marginalized and poor. Following Jesus means we give in to His power, give up on our pretense, and we compassionately, creatively, and wisely give to help those in great need.

Now I know we can go in all kinds of crazy directions as we try to practically apply this. So let me just say, it would be foolish to give the keys to your new car to the next guy you see panhandling on the street. That would not be a wise application of this text. No doubt there are complex issues related to drug abuse and mental health. So it's best to find those ministries that are experienced in these areas and come along side the work they are doing—giving our time and resources to care for those in great need. And let me say we don't respond to this because we call ourselves religious people and we feel terribly guilty (that won't get us very far). No, we respond because we call ourselves biblical Christians and we want to be authentic biblical followers of Christ in caring for the powerless and the poor. Ron Sider, the president of Evangelicals for Social Action said, when it comes to serving the needy, Jesus is simply asking you: "Will you let me love you enough to give you a heart like mine?" And I think that's such a great place for us to start. It sets all of the guilt tripping aside and brings up before Jesus as we ask Him to tenderize us, to open our eyes and open our hands to be involved and give as He leads. And you know when we do that Jesus really will be faithful to direct our desire to follow Him.

So Jesus warns us about these self promoting dignitaries, and now He dignifies a socially powerless widow. Look at verses 1-4 of chapter 21.

### IV. Giving Out of Our Poverty

**"And He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasure and He saw a 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.'"**

I think there's a seamless transition here, even though there's a chapter break. First, Jesus questions the Scribes about His authority; then He warns the disciples about the pretense and self promotion of the Scribes and now He looks up and seizes this living illustration that further condemns the power hungry Teachers of the Law.

Isn't Jesus amazing?! And what a teachable moment this is! He tells His disciples look out for the scribes, they're far too consumed with themselves. But if you want to see something truly impressive, take a look

at this. He turns their attention to a poor widow who is giving everything she owns to God. The text tells us that she had two copper coins or lepta (which was about 1/5 of a penny). And while the rich were making a show of their big offerings—stuffing wads of 20's and 50's into one of the 13 trumpet shaped receptacles that lined the courtyard—there she is with her two copper coins. As she puts them in I sort of imagine them making a swirling sound like a gumball machine as they make their way down. No one probably even noticed and if they did they probably laughed it off. "What good is that going to do?" But Jesus noticed and Jesus lifts her up. You see, she didn't give something out of her riches...no, she gave everything out of her poverty.

So what's Jesus up to here? Most of the time we read this as a lesson on tithing or giving, and in one sense it is. The poor widow is held up because of her willingness to trust God, to give sacrificially. She could have held on to one coin. And most financial counselors today would have urged her to keep something for herself. After all, giving away half of what you own is a huge sacrifice. But instead she gave it all.

But I think Jesus is doing more than just teaching about finances. He's giving us a huge lesson in contrast between the self promoting habits of the scribes and the surrendered heart of a poor widow. He's saying to his disciples, "Look over there, there's one of those poor widows that the scribes should have been caring for. They probably devoured her house too. And look what she's doing—isn't that amazing; she's giving everything she has to God; not out of her privilege, power, and prestige but out of her poverty. Remember this, I said it before, 'Blessed are the poor for theirs is the Kingdom of God.'"

Throughout the Gospel of Luke Jesus has used the blind, the lame, the leper and the marginalized children and widows, to illustrate the surrendered poverty of heart that is to characterize all authentic followers of Christ. We don't come to Him all cleaned up; we come confessing how truly messed up we are. We come in our poverty and need, each of us receiving the same mercy and grace to cover our brokenness and sin. That's how we all come. But the widow not only came in her poverty, she gave out of her poverty as well.

What was she thinking? What did she think her two little coins could possibly accomplish for God? Did she think she could buy God's favor with her sacrifice? Did she think it was going to add to the Temple building fund and get her a plaque with her name on it? Well, I don't think she thought about any

of that. I don't think she got out her spreadsheet and calculated how this decision would impact her financial future. She was simply involved in the humble act of surrendering all she had to God. And Jesus uses this poor widow to illustrate that following Him means giving out of our poverty and not out of our power, position and prestige. It means believing that He wants to use us, with our two little coins, to build the Kingdom of God. It means that He'll do this no matter how messed up we think we are, or how broken our histories seem to us. And Jesus lifts us up just like He did this widow as we give to Him out of that brokenness, out of our frailty and need.

I had this illustrated to me a few weeks ago in a sort of strange but very powerful way; when we went up to San Francisco with our Bags of Love ministry. This is a ministry that we do once a month where we partner with City Team up in the Tenderloin in San Francisco. We go to feed and pray for the folks who live in these hotels there on Sixth Street. I've been doing this for a while now. I sort of know the ropes. And I'm a pastor, I know how to pray. Then we come to this one door and we meet Vanessa. Vanessa is a small little lady who's bent over, obviously in some pain. And we chat for awhile and she gratefully takes a couple of bag lunches we brought and starts to go back inside but then my wife asks if we can pray for her. I don't know what it was but something changed. Vanessa takes a step into the hallway, slowly leans over, puts down her lunch, grabs our hands, bows her head and invites us to pray for her; to pray for her health, to pray that God would help her in her pain, to pray for her family, to pray for her broken life. And there she was; without pretense completely exposed, standing in the hallway in her bathrobe and slippers. She leaned into two complete strangers and in a very real sense, in her poverty, she gave all she had to the Lord.

Vanessa reminded me that morning that even though my life has been filled with such privilege and comfort and support, even though I've had every advantage in the world, I must still come to Christ in my poverty and like the old poem says: "Nothing in myself I bring, only to Thy cross I cling." Our poverty is not something to be hidden; it's something to be given, something to be shared, something to be brought before the Lord to fill and use for the Kingdom of God. So Jesus uses this poor widow just like He used Vanessa that day to preach the message of the prophet Jeremiah when he said: **"Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things," declares the LORD.**"

## CONCLUSION

The widow came with her two little copper coins and said, I've got nothing to boast in except for you Lord! And Jesus said, now that's impressive! And to the scribe whose religion is long on pride and pretense but short on compassion and kindness He says, "Watch out, my Father is getting ready to make a footstool of my enemies."

You know what I love about Jesus? It's that even when He's rebuking He's inviting. Even when He's getting in your face He's offering grace and mercy and forgiveness. Just like Jeremiah said: **"He is the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, while He brings justice and righteousness on earth...for He delights in these things."** And all He asks is that we come with our two little coins, our bent over, broken lives and boast only in Him as we give in to His power and authority to conduct the score of each and every day of our lives and we give up on all pretense and self promotion and in humble obedience to the Word we ask Jesus to give us a heart like His for the needy and poor. And we see His grace to keep us humble, to overcome our self-promoting pride and serve Him from that poverty of spirit that belongs to all those who will inhabit the Kingdom of God.

Maybe you need to come back and ask Him to conduct the score of your life this morning. Or you sense He's chipping away at an area of pride and pretense you need to give up. Or you just want to ask Him to begin to shape your heart to look like His when it comes to this area of caring for the poor. All of us ask Lord, may we live and serve from this place of humility, bringing to you all we have out of our poverty, asking you to use us so that Your Kingdom up there can come down here through us.