



Luke 21:1-4
Not Famous, But Known
“When No One Notices”

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This morning we’re continuing a series we started last week called, “Not Famous, But Known.” It’s a look at some of the common, everyday people in the Gospel According to Luke whom Jesus ministered to or highlighted as examples of faith.

Now, to briefly piece together some things for us: in our previous series on Jesus’ mission in September and October, you might recall that we talked one Sunday about how Jesus “resolutely” set out on this journey toward Jerusalem. That’s in Luke 9, and it’s about his mindset and intentionality of where he’s going. Later, in chapter 19, he passed through Jericho (about 20 miles outside Jerusalem), where he met Zacchaeus, and we looked at that passage as well. Not long after that encounter, Jesus arrived in Jerusalem, riding on a donkey in the event we celebrate each spring one week before Easter, and know as: Palm Sunday.

Once in Jerusalem, Jesus spent his final days teaching and ministering in and around the city, including in the courts of the Jewish Temple.

Luke gathers many of those temple teachings together in chapters 20 and 21. Luke 20:1 tells us, “One day as Jesus was teaching the people in the temple courts and proclaiming the good news, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, together with the elders, came up to him.” What follows is a lot of back and forth—religious leaders testing Jesus with their questions, and Jesus responding with parables and powerful truths.

At the end of that same chapter, we read, “While all the people were listening, Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Beware of the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. They devour widows’ houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely’” (Luke 20:45–47).

Jesus is calling out the religious hypocrites—likely with several of them still within earshot—who love attention, status, and appearances but fail to live out genuine faith. That’s the backdrop for the passage we’re looking at this morning at the start of chapter 21: it’s the culmination of Jesus’ resolute journey to Jerusalem, bringing him there in the midst of the Passover celebration. And what reading this morning is really a continuation of the same teaching at the end of 20, even though it goes from one chapter to another. So, let’s see what happens right after Jesus exposes the hypocrisy of those religious leaders, as we turn now to **Luke 21:1–4**. This is God’s Word to you and me this morning...

After criticizing the religious leaders—people of position, status, and wealth in their community—Jesus sees some “rich” people putting their gifts into the temple treasury. We don’t know exactly who these people were, but given the flow of what Jesus has taught, it’s fair to think Jesus is seeing a living example of what he just said: people making a show of faith rather than truly living it out.

And then, in contrast, he points out a poor widow—someone whose gift would have been overlooked by everyone else. Maybe she is one whose home has been “devoured” by the religious leaders Jesus just spoke of. Two different words are used to describe her poverty. In verse 2, Luke uses the Greek word *penichros*. It means poor, or needy—one who has little. This is a person who is not destitute, but is living in a place of financial and material scarcity. She has some, but it is very little. She struggles to make ends meet.

Then in verse 3, when Jesus speaks, the word is: *ptōchos*. It also means “poor,” but in a more extreme sense, and with a broader meaning beyond finances. It means utterly poor, without resources, power, or status, and completely dependent on God. It’s the same word used in the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” In Luke’s gospel, it appears ten times—nine of them spoken by Jesus—such as when he says that he’s come to proclaim good news to the poor. The one time it’s not on Jesus’ lips in Luke is when Zacchaeus says he’ll give half his possessions to “the poor” to make

restitution for the stealing he had done. It's this same word, *ptōchos*, that appears in verse 3 of today's passage.

There's a theological point being made with it here. In verse 2, people see that she's poor but surviving—a woman of modest means dropping a couple coins in the offering box. **But through Jesus' eyes expressed in verse 3, he sees someone who's not just financially poor, but completely dependent on God to meet her needs.** She's got nothing else but trust in God. She is what Jesus calls "poor in spirit." She has no pride, no resources, no status—it's all in God's hands. He is all she has.

This woman drops in two small copper coins. These two coins, called *lepton* (not Lipton, as in iced tea), were each worth about 1/128th of a denarius. A denarius was the standard for a day's wage. So, with the two coins, she's putting in less than 2% of a day's wage—and it's all she has. These coins would barely make a sound dropping into the collection box. They're lightweight, small, and tinny. Compared to the other coins being dropped in, no one notices. Except Jesus. Jesus notices her. This is the first thing I want us to take away from this passage: **1. Jesus sees her; and Jesus sees you.**

This woman who had no status in the community, no power, no influence, is seen by Jesus. He notices. If you feel unnoticed by people—if you feel unloved, overlooked, unappreciated, under-financed, ignored and neglected—Jesus still sees you. He notices. You may not be famous, but you are known. Some of us this morning simply need to hear that: that we are seen by Jesus. He came from heaven for you; lived a perfect life for you; died on the cross for you; rose from the grave for you. You are that loved, that cherished, that seen, and that known by Jesus, and you are valued by him.

And there's something in particular that Jesus notices and knows about her, and it's the second thing to take away from this passage: even though she only put in a fraction of a day's wages—equivalent to a couple of dollars today in America, or about five dollars here on the Eastside 😊—even though those two tiny coins were all she put in, Jesus says she gave more than all the

others because she gave all that she had. So, the **Second point is: Her level of generosity exceeded all the others because of her devotion to God.**

The actual dollar amount that she put in was a pittance compared to everyone else who gave that day. But it's not the size of the donation that Jesus values; it's the devotion. Her devotion to God was one of complete and total surrender and led to her generosity. And we could say, "Well, considering her circumstances, it sounds like she really didn't have any choice but to surrender to God. She had nothing else to trust in or be devoted to." But the point Jesus is making with the comparison to the others is that regardless of our circumstances, we all have this choice to trust God, to be devoted to God, and therefore to be generous.

It doesn't mean we have to give to the point of becoming destitute. But: **It does raise a question: Where is my devotion?** Sometimes our devotion to God can easily be eclipsed by our devotion to other things: our work, our kids' sports teams, our comfort, our politics, or other ideologies and identities we cling to. **When our devotion to things like that exceeds our devotion to God, the Bible calls it *idolatry*.** Idolatry always keeps us from being fully devoted to God. None of us perfectly avoids idolatry, including me. But Jesus died for that sin. He forgives us, but he also calls us to turn from it. This woman, when it comes to finances, had no idols. Her devotion to God was complete. And that is reflected in her generosity, which Jesus invites us to emulate.

That brings us to the third point. To recap: He sees you. He invites us to be generous and completely devoted to him. The third point builds on the second and really returns us to the first: **3. God is generous and devoted to you.** He doesn't just notice you superficially; he sees your heart, your soul, all that you are. And even though we have idolatry and other sins in our lives, he's devoted to us for all eternity, demonstrated most profoundly in the cross and the empty tomb. The apostle Paul puts it like this in Romans 5:8, "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). That's how devoted to you and me that God is. It's not once we get our lives in order and become loveable; It's not an earned devotion. It's all God's grace.

So, when Jesus invites us to give generously, to serve, to surrender...it's not because he needs our money or to earn his love. It's because he wants us to share in the life and freedom that come from trusting him completely, trusting in his generosity and his devotion to us. He already loves us and he wants us to trust him in that more.

Several years ago, I came across a photo of a sign that someone had handwritten and posted in their neighborhood. I'd completely forgotten about it and stumbled across it in my computer files this week when I was cleaning up my computer desktop. I actually think God brought me to it this week for this message. The sign says, "Ohio Ave. neighbors: I put a cute love note on what I thought was my wife's car last night. We figured out today that in my tired state, I had put this note on the wrong car. If this car happened to be yours, I apologize for the confusion. I am not in love with you. (Sorry)."

It's funny—but it also says something about how we sometimes feel toward God. We think, "This kind of love the Bible speaks of and Jesus embodies can't really be meant for me. That message must be for someone else." **But Jesus' attention toward this widow reminds us: it's not a mistake. He sees you. He loves you. He lived for you, died for you, and rose again for you. He's that devoted to you. There's no mistake about it.**

And he invites you to be devoted back to him—ideally, as devoted as he is to us. That's kind of intimidating and we will always fall short. But the woman Jesus highlights is maybe a little more accessible, even if her generous devotion is still off the charts. This unknown, unnoticed woman, except for Jesus' noticing her, is our model for devotion and generosity and trusting God's goodness and provision. That's what God calls us to. He didn't make a mistake in highlighting her. He wants us to give generously, to be devoted, and to trust God to provide for us rather than trusting in the stuff of this world. This is true in our finances as well as in our time, our talents, and the abilities God has blessed us with.

So, let's be generous—not to earn God's favor, but because we already have it in Jesus Christ. Like this poor widow: He sees us, and knows us. He loves

us and gave everything for us. And he invites us to be devoted to him, living generously as he is generous with us. Let's pray...Amen.