

# On the Road to Revival (Part 1)

---

## Introduction

### The Text

<sup>45</sup> And in the hearing of all the people he said to his disciples, <sup>46</sup> “Beware of 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, <sup>47</sup> who devour widows’ houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.”

<sup>1</sup> Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box, <sup>2</sup> and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. <sup>3</sup> And he said, “Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. <sup>4</sup> For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.” (Luke 20:45–21:4)

### Reformation and Revival

- A. Over 500 years ago now, October 31, Martin Luther, a small-town monk there in Wittenberg, Germany, put forward what he called his 95 Theses. And this document, really became the catalyst of the Reformation of the church and the breaking off of Protestant Christians from Roman Catholicism.
- B. And now, while the Reformation was certainly many things, it was at bottom a call for religious revival.
  - 1. The church had devolved through the Middle Ages into a sort of superstitious formalism, where you do the outside work and who cares what’s going on inside, or if you even understand what’s happening, or speak Latin or not, who cares! “You came to the mass, you engaged the sacraments, you bought your indulgence, you’re good. Trust us.”
- C. And Luther’s saying: “I’m not so sure. Isn’t there more to biblical Christianity than this? Can I really just buy a piece of paper and with it God’s forgiveness? Is that really what we’re telling people? We’re leveraging the guilty consciences of men for our own profit. ‘As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs’?! What is that?! Doesn’t God care about the heart and the things that are at work within a man, even more than He cares about the things going on outside him?”
  - 1. So his first few theses go right at this saying repentance is not just some external thing merely, but an inner reality fundamentally. Go read them.
    - a. But you see, it’s a call for religious revival.
- D. You say what is religious revival?
  - 1. Well, on a personal level it is when you stop playing the religious game and you really get it. By sovereign grace, the Holy Spirit opens your eyes and suddenly you see God’s holiness,

you see your sin, you see His provision in love and mercy for you in Jesus, and you are overwhelmed by it—as you should’ve been all along, but now you get it!

- a. Your heart catches fire for God and your whole life is given over to Him in adoration and praise and surrender and service.
  2. And religious revival on a corporate level is just when the Spirit does this sort of work with a large group of people—a neighborhood, a city, a nation.
- E. Now, I bring up this whole idea of Luther and the Reformation and religious revival for a few reasons.
1. First, because today is actually celebrated by Protestant churches all around the world as Reformation Sunday—the last Sunday of October. We owe the recovery of the gospel in many ways to what began there October 31, 1517.
  2. Second, I bring this up because I actually think this is precisely what we see taking place in our text this morning. Reformation, religious revival. We move from these scribes Jesus refers to, caught up in empty religion and external formalities with no heart for God, to this poor seemingly helpless widow who has nothing to give to God but her heart and Jesus says: “Yes, that’s it! That’s what we’re after, the inner realities of a person encountering God!”
  3. But then third, I bring this up because I want God to do this for us. That’s the point in all of this—that we would experience something of this revival personally, corporately.
- F. I mean how has your heart been for God and Christ lately?
1. Have you been enamored, on fire, deeply broken by your sin, overwhelmingly relieved and authentically amazed by His grace?
  2. Or has it just been going through the motions? “I do my Bible study, I do my church on Sunday, however weird it may be in-person with masks or online miles from other saints. I do the stuff, but I don’t feel a thing. My heart’s not in it.”
    - a. Oh, may God be pleased to awaken and revive us this morning!
- G. So that’s it. That’s what we’re after this morning. I’ve got two main points for us: (1) Beware the Scribes (20:45-47); and (2) Behold the Widow (21:1-4). So let’s get to work!

## (1) Beware the Scribes (20:45-47)

### An Exhibition of Empty Religion

- A. In these verses what we see is in essence an exhibition of empty religion. It looks full of life on the outside, but if we peel it back all we see on the interior is dead men’s bones, as Jesus would say (Matt 23:27).
- B. Jesus is telling His disciples to “beware of the scribes” (v. 46).

1. Scribes were specialists in the law of Moses, teachers of the Torah, scholars in matters of the Jewish religion. So they were highly regarded in Israel. Indeed one commentator writes: “Scribes commanded unrivaled authority in first-century Palestine” (PNTC).
    - a. So, among the Jews, these are big, important people . . . and they were loving that fact.
- C. Jesus goes on to outline the various hypocrisies these scribes were engaged in. And I just want to break these things down for us one by one and try to bring out a bit more of what’s going on in the heart, under the surface—what they’re wanting in all of this.
1. As we do this, I think we’ll find, we may be in a different context now 21<sup>st</sup> century America, but we’re not all that different in the end. We still play the same games, we still want the same sort of things.
    - a. Whether we’re non-Christian and secular or we’re deeply religious, we’re all trying to get what they’re after here in one way or another. And, more often than not, we go about it all wrong.

### Hypocrisy #1: Long Robes—To Be Seen

- A. Jesus says: “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes . . .” (v. 46).
1. These robes were full-length prayer shawls with tassels attached to the four corners. They were meant to distinguish them as men of stature and eminence there among the Jewish people.
    - a. In no uncertain terms, such a garment was meant, it would seem, to draw attention to themselves, to make sure people notice them, people see them. They like walking around in long robes because they want to be seen.
- B. Listen, this desire to be seen is in all of us, and it’s not inherently wicked either. What we do with it, is not always so good, but it’s not wrong to want to be seen.
1. We watch this play out with our kids in a good way, I think.
    - a. I still remember when I took the kids to the mall a while back and they were playing in the playground there and doing these jumps off the equipment and I couldn’t help but notice, every time they did a new jump or something, you want to the know the first they did? They turned back to me, to make sure I saw. “Did you see that, Dad?!” “I did. It was awesome!” And they just light up and go try something else. But you get that. It’s in kids. They want to know that mommy and daddy see them.
    - b. Just this last week, Bella was so proud of herself, she just finished reading Little House on the Prairie. I was there in the room with her when she read the last lines of the last page. What do you think she did, right away? She got up and ran to tell mommy. “I want you to see me and what I’m doing!”

- C. Listen, we can learn a lot about ourselves just watching kids. We like to act like we're adults and we're so sophisticated. Goodness. It's the same thing in us. We do our stuff hoping to be seen, wanting someone to notice—the clothes you wear, the work you do, even the religious stuff.
1. Now I know there are some of us who would say: "Nick, maybe that's the case for some, but not for me. I want to be a wallflower. To be seen, to be the center of attention or something, is my nightmare. I hate that. I like have panic attacks just thinking about it. I don't want to be seen!"
    - a. Listen, if that's you, I would wager it's because at some point in your life you have been seen, but not by eyes that appreciate you but by eyes that have judged you and cut you down and left you damaged, exposed, ashamed. You've been seen but not loved, just criticized and so you want to hide. But deep down, you still want to be seen. You don't want to be alone. You wonder if anyone could ever see and love you.
- D. So I know we all want this, but we often, like these guys, get all twisted up in how we go about it. We've got to beware.

### Hypocrisy #2: Marketplace Greetings—To Be Known

- A. Jesus says these guys love "love greetings in the marketplaces . . ." (v. 46). They love being seen and they love being known.
1. The Greek word here for greetings refers to "personal salutations" (BDAG). And I think the idea is that people know who you are, they know your name, your place in society.
- B. And, again, I think we all desire this sort of thing. We don't just want to be seen, we want to be known.
1. Who cares if everyone notices you, if no one actually knows you or wants to be near you. People may see you coming, but they choose to pass by on the other side. That's not what we're after.
    - a. And I think this is what's elaborated on further in what comes next . . .

### Hypocrisy #3: Best Seats—To Be Loved

- A. Jesus says these scribes also love "the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts" (v. 46).
1. You see, they're not just seen, they're not just known, they're also loved, appreciated, honored, adored. That's what they want. Not just to come in and be another anonymous face in the crowd, but to come in and everyone sees you, knows you, loves you . . . there's a special seat saved just for you.

- B. I mean again, thinking about kids, do you remember back when you were in school and one of your friends would save you a seat in the lunchroom or assembly or whatever? Doesn't that feel good? Isn't that it?
1. Or to put it negatively, did you ever have it where you come in to sit down and then they tell you they're saving it for someone else. Like Forrest Gump when he's trying to find a seat on the bus, "Seats taken . . . taken . . . can't sit here." How does that sort of thing make you feel?
- C. There's one more thing to bring out here. It's interesting the Greek words translated "best seats" and "places of honor" are respectively: *prōtokathedria* (best seats) and *prōtoklisia* (places of honor).
1. Now, I bring this up just so you can see both words are these compounds beginning with the Greek *protos*—where we get English words like *prototype* from, it means "first". So . . . "first seat," "first place." That's what they want . . . to be first, ahead of everyone else.
- D. Listen, as a preacher of the gospel, I've forever been impacted by the words of John Stott in his book *Between Two Worlds*. I've read this to you before a long while back, but it doesn't hurt to hear it again: "Pride is without doubt the chief occupational hazard of the preacher. It has ruined many, and deprived their ministry of power. . . . In some it is blatantly obvious. They are exhibitionists by temperament and use the pulpit as a stage on which they show off. . . . Other preachers are not like [these] Nebuchadnezzars, however, for their pride does not take the form of blatant boastfulness. It is more subtle, more insidious, and even more perverse. For it is possible to adopt an outward demeanor of great meekness, while inside our appetite for applause is insatiable. At the very moment when in the pulpit we are extolling the glories of Christ, we can in reality be seeking our own glory, and when we are exhorting the congregation to praise God, and are even ostensibly leading them in praise, we can be secretly hoping that they will spare a bit of praise for us. We need to cry out with Baxter, 'O what a constant companion, what a tyrannical commander, what a sly, subtle and insinuating enemy is this sin of pride!'" (pp. 320-321).
1. I can preach a sermon, lifting up Jesus with my lips, all the while craving the praise of man in my heart: "Did you see that? Are you impressed with that? Am I loved? Am I special? I want to be first!" It's a constant companion. God have mercy. It's in me!
- E. And I daresay it's in you too—the propensity to turn religion away from authentic relationship with God and make it a mechanism of self-adoration and worship.
1. What does it look like for you? Maybe you like to brag on your Bible knowledge; or look down on others because of how missional you are; or how many people you've shared the gospel with; your heart for service; your perfect attendance on Sundays; you show up on time, those other heathens get here ten minutes late, what is it. We're doing this. Beware!

#### Hypocrisy #4: Widow's Houses—To Be Wealthy

- A. So Jesus says: "Listen, these guys 'devour widows' houses . . .' (v. 47)." They use religion not just to get acclaim but to get stuff.

- B. Widows, along with orphans, were the most defenseless people group of the day. And, consequently, God is always throughout the Old and New Testaments, talking about His heart for, His concern for, widows in particular.
1. Deut 10:18: “He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing.”
  2. Psa 68:5: “Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation.”
  3. Psa 146:9a: “The Lord watches over the sojourners; he upholds the widow and the fatherless . . .”
  4. Prov 15:25: “The Lord tears down the house of the proud but maintains the widow’s boundaries.”
- C. That’s the heart of our God. And He calls His people, especially leaders in Israel, to have the same kind of concern:
1. Exo 22:22-24a: “<sup>22</sup> You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child. <sup>23</sup> If you do mistreat them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry, <sup>24</sup> and my wrath will burn . . .”
  2. Deut 27:19: “Cursed be anyone who perverts the justice due to the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow.”
  3. Jer 22:3-5: “<sup>3</sup> Thus says the Lord: Do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the resident alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place. <sup>4</sup> For if you will indeed obey this word, then there shall enter the gates of this house kings who sit on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they and their servants and their people. <sup>5</sup> But if you will not obey these words, I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that this house shall become a desolation.”
- D. And yet here we are, scribes devouring widows’ houses. We’re not told how exactly. They’re manipulating using religion, guilt, false promises . . . to get their stuff. To “devour.”
1. That’s a very vivid word, isn’t it? These widows are coming to you needy and hungry, but instead of helping them you are feeding on them! Profiting on another’s poverty. It’s despicable. It’s devastating. And yet it’s happening all the time, isn’t it?
    - a. Out in the culture, we see it even with COVID and stuff. Like those people buying out all the hand sanitizer so they can turn and sell it for a ridiculous amount to people in need. Profiting on their poverty.
    - b. But you don’t need me to tell you that we also, sadly, see it all too often in the church. Again, even in COVID times. You remember Jim Bakker, the televangelist who said he had the cure from God, the “silver solution”, which you could get, for a price of course. It’s no different than the sort of thing Luther was fighting against. Religious people, trying to manipulate needy, defenseless people . . . to make a buck, to line their own pockets.
      - i. You know it’s crazy, those verses about the widow giving all she has that we’re coming to in [Luke 25](#) in just a minute here, I know this is a favorite text among prosperity preachers. “Look at that widow. She gave it all. So

should you. God's blessing will come to you. Call the number on the screen. Sow your seed." And they use this text to commit the very depravities Jesus unequivocally condemns just verses before! There's no fear of God before their eyes. Just love for self and money.

- E. Doesn't this make you think: "Gosh, there has to be a special place in hell for people like this."
  - 1. I know that's blunt, but it may actually be biblical. That's in some ways what Jesus is alluding to I think when He says at the end of v. 47 there: "They will receive the greater condemnation." Like this is a special kind of evil and it gets a special kind of wrath.
- F. But we're certainly not immune to it. And we should at least ask, are we personally and as a church concerned with the needs of the poor and the marginalized and the oppressed? Because that's true religion: "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction" (James 1:27).
  - 1. Are we doing that?! Or are we just in this for ourselves?

#### Hypocrisy #5: Lengthy Prayers—To Be Set Apart (Holy)

- A. I'm not going to say much on this one. But Jesus warns that these guys also "for a pretense make long prayers" (v. 47). It's a show for them.
- B. Sometimes even our prayers are just attempts to impress, right? We try to quote all this Scripture, we use that breathy voice that makes us sound emotionally like we're just on this whole other level with the Lord, we try to be as eloquent as we can, if we're in Pentecostal circles we may go all out speaking in tongues and things trying to outdo the others.
  - 1. Sometimes our prayers like this are totally genuine, but other times it's a show, pretense. I look like I love God, like I'm so holy and set apart, but really it's still just about me and the prayers never get past the ceiling. Beware.

#### "Beware of the Scribes . . ."

- A. One final thing I should say on this: Remember, in the context, this isn't just about being careful that we not become this kind of person ourselves, though surely that's a legitimate implication. Technically, if you go back and look, Jesus is telling His disciples here: "Beware of others who are like this, in the church, guys who will look like they have it all figured out, they'll be impressive, but they're manipulating you, they're using you, and they're going to twist you all up in knots and you'll just be collateral damage."
  - 1. In other words, beware of your spiritual leaders, guys like me, make sure I'm legit, I'm not perfect, but am I growing and trying to shepherd well, honestly, with integrity. Does what I'm saying line up Scripture? Does my life line up with Scripture?
- B. I've spoken to so many over my years in ministry who have been radically mistreated and misled by their pastors, guys who have started cults and you're in it and don't even know it until it's too late.

1. And Jesus is saying: “Be on the lookout for that.” Don’t be the opposite extreme where you’re unwilling to trust any spiritual authority, that’s just as dangerous. But don’t be gullible either. Beware.

## (2) Behold the Widow (21:1-4)

### An Exhibition of True Religion

- A. Now we come to [Luke 21:1-4](#) and we Behold the Widow. Here we see something entirely different. Here we see not an exhibition of empty religion but one of true religion, authentic worship. (Now, to be clear, I’m not going to be able to do much with this this week. I plan to come around next week and do a lot more. So we’re just going to get things started here.)
  1. But let’s read those verses again: “<sup>1</sup> Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box, <sup>2</sup> and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. <sup>3</sup> And he said, “Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. <sup>4</sup> For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.”
- B. I love this! If you’ve been with us the past weeks, we’ve seen throughout [Luke 20](#) all the ways these Jewish leaders were trying to trap Jesus, acting genuine and things, but their hearts aren’t in it, they’re doing religion, they look good on the outside, but they’re empty.
  1. And then here we come to one who Jesus says finally gets it. And it’s not who we would expect. It never is. It’s not the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the scribes, it’s a poor, helpless, seemingly insignificant widow—maybe even one of those widows who these scribes have been taking advantage of . . . devouring. Maybe the reason she only has a couple coins to her name is because these guys took it all!
    - a. But, in any case, she doesn’t have the Bible knowledge, the training, the money, the pedigree, the position, she doesn’t have any of that, but she has a heart filled with love and affection for God.
- C. And Jesus is saying: “That’s it! Beware of all them. Behold this widow. She gets it! She’s given more than all these other guys combined, because she’s given God her heart.”
  1. Indeed, tucked under the English in the Greek, Jesus is hinting at this sort of thing when He says that “she . . . put in all she had to live on” (v. 4). The Greek underneath it is the word “bios”, which literally means “life”—she put in not just coins, but her very life! “God you’ve got me, all of me!”
    - a. That’s what revival looks like. Religion stops being this external game you play to get something else and it starts being about loving and adoring and serving God because He’s all you want and He’s all you need!

### How Does This Happen?

- A. Now, how does this happen? Because that’s what we want, right? Not to be like these religious hucksters, but to be like this widow. How do you get that?

1. Well, I'll tell you how you get it. The gospel.
- B. Everything that these guys are after—to be seen, to be known, to be loved, to be wealthy and secure, to be set apart and holy—everything they're trying to do an end-run around God to get, God is willing to freely give us in the gospel. We don't need to play those games to get it because we already have it from God in Christ.
1. God sees you, sin and all, God knows you, all the mess and junk you try to hide, and yet God loves you, and He's given His Son to save you, that you might know Him, share in His inheritance, and be holy and set apart for relationship with Him.
- C. Listen, Jesus is the only One deserving of the long robe and the marketplace greeting and the seat of honor and the riches and the holy status. He alone, and yet He gives all of that up to come after us.
1. On that cross, there's no robe, He dies naked and shamed; there's no greeting of affection, just scoffing and spitting; there's no seat of honor, just nails and thorns; there's no riches and wealth, but utter poverty; and He's not set apart as special to God, but He's hung up and killed next to common criminals.
    - a. And He does it for you. So that all that is rightly His, might be graciously shared with you.
- D. This is what's so profoundly pictured for us in the parable of the prodigal son, isn't it? I thought of this because there that same word "bios" is used only there it's referring not to what the prodigal son gives to the Father but what the Father gives to the son. His very life.
1. It's a hint towards what God would do for sinners like us in Jesus. He's going to come and not figuratively give His life for us, like this woman with her coins, He will literally lay His life down. For the wicked, for the huckster, for the manipulative, for the empty religious, for you and I.
- E. But my goodness, what happens in that parable, you remember, right? A picture of our salvation in Jesus.
1. The sinful man returns home, and we're that from afar the Father sees Him—"while he was still a long way off, his father saw him" (Luke 15:20). Listen, God sees you.
  2. And what does the Father do, bolt the door, close the blinds? No! He throws open the door and He comes out running. He sees you and He knows you.
  3. And then when He gets to the boy, what does He do, slap him, shame him? No! He throws His arms around him and He kisses him. He sees you, He knows you, and He loves you.
  4. And then He freely, graciously puts the robe, the robe you were trying so hard to get on your own, around you. Puts His signet ring on your finger, you're in the family. You're set apart for Him.
  5. And He kills the fattened calf and throws a party. And you've got to know the prodigal got the seat of honor at that party. All that's His is yours. You don't have to devour widows to get your fill. The Father will care for you. He will satisfy you. And in the age to come you will share in "the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints" (Eph 1:18).

- a. All because God in Jesus gave His life on that cross for you!
- F. Listen, if you get the gospel, deep in your bones, and you get revival.
- 1. You know, we're not told how the prodigal son went on to live after this gracious welcome and neighborhood party his dad threw for him, but if I had to guess, I would say it would probably look something like this widow in our text.
    - a. When you get the love of God for you in Jesus, you give Him your life, you lay it all down, you entrust Him with everything.
      - i. You no longer do your religious stuff to impress others or even to impress God. Now you're doing it because you personally are impressed by God and satisfied in Him. And that makes all the difference. You see Him—who He is, what He's done, what He's pledged to do for you in Jesus. And you just say: "Wow! My life is yours!"