

Generosity

[Announce Text] Please Open your Bibles to Luke 20:45-21:4. [Page 880](#)

[Scripture Introduction] Good morning, my name is Brett Sweet and I'm one of the pastors here at Grace Christian Fellowship where we exist to glorify God through gospel-centered worship, evangelism, discipleship, and community. We are continuing our series through the book of Luke.

Review...predestined...conflict.

[Prayer for illumination] Please pray with me...

[Illustration] So you walk into the local coffee shop and you order your favorite drink. You pay with your card. Of course. And after approving the cost for the drink, there is that little question: would you like to tip? How much? You try to be generous. You're waiting for your drink alongside the young guy from line behind you and you start talking. He mentions this whole tipping phenomenon. Is this generosity or is this insanity? Asking for a 25% tip. You sit at adjacent tables and you continue talking about generosity.

He tells you that he loves to be generous. He tells you about the amount he has given to better the world. He starts bragging about volunteering time to help the people of Azeroth against invaders. He states that when he's in Hyrule, he only shops at small businesses- to support the little guy. He has gold rings, yes, but they're all going to benefit the wildlife of the green hills. In your confusion you notice the Nintendo Switch controller next to his college textbook. Sure, this guy has been generous. But all this generosity hasn't been real. It's been in video games. When you realize that his claims are unreal, that is, not real, you recognize that he has misunderstood generosity. You find a reason to excuse yourself from the conversation and think, "Get real," as you head to your car.

Video games, alternative reality, online social media profiles and more allow us to be unreal. We can virtue signal that we're doing good things when we really aren't. And perhaps nowhere is that the case more than with our generosity. So the main application is this:

[Proposition] Get real with generosity.

Do you give money only for your own benefit? To look good or feel good? Do you only give after you've achieved your other financial goals? Are you willing to trust Jesus- except with your money? In this true, historical interaction with Jesus we'll look at three types of people when it comes to generosity. The unreal. The real. And the ideal. The unreal. The real. And the ideal. And Jesus will help us get real with generosity.

Let's look at the first group. If we're to get real with generosity,

[Main Point 1] We'll beware the unreal.

Jesus has been in conflict with religious leaders for a while now, but now it's come to a head. We saw this last week, and as our texts overlap, and Jesus tells His disciples to beware of the scribes. And that word "beware" is in a Greek form that means "beware constantly." They are corrupt. "Don't be like them," Jesus shouts to us. They are unreal. How do we identify the lifestyle of the unreal?

[Lifestyle 1] The unreal steal

These unreal steal. And we see that from v. 45 to the beginning of v. 47

And in the hearing of all the people he said to his disciples, "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, who devour widows' houses..."

The unreal are all about themselves. They steal praise that should be given to God. They steal attention that could be given to humble servants. They steal the finances of poor widows who are trying to survive. This exact behavior was pronounced by Jeremiah to those who entered the temple in Jeremiah 7:6- "*Don't oppress the sojourner, the fatherless, or the widow.*" But all claims to generosity that these scribes have are unreal. The unreal steal.

Beware the unreal. The unreal steal. That's one part of their lifestyle. Now,

[Lifestyle 2] The unreal conceal

Let's read the last part of v. 47

"...and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation."

Jesus is saying that the Jewish religious system is corrupt. Things might look okay on the outside, but that's only because they conceal what's really going on. So, sure they make long prayers, but it's all a pretense. They want praise from others. They want the best parking spot. If you follow the Instagram preachers sneakers, you'll find images of pastors where ridiculously expensive shoes and clothing. That's what they want. Just like these scribes. They steal. And they conceal.

When it comes to generosity we need to beware the unreal. Beware the TV prosperity preachers who use religion as a way to get money, comfort, and nice things. It will all be pretense. And we must not be like them. In America, we're often on our guard to beware the unreal who steal and conceal money. But what about those who steal and conceal praise? As importantly, how do we avoid being like them?

[Illustration] When I was in seminary, to get an A on a paper, the school policy officially said that it had to be of the quality that it could be published in an academic journal. It had to be 97% or better in quality. Some of my papers did earn some "A's." Some of you teens are probably thinking, "How nerdy can this guy get?" And the answer is, "Extremely nerdy." But there was one teacher I most wanted to get an A from. Dr. Michael Kruger. He's one of the foremost experts on early Christianity and early Christian documents. He's the President of Reformed Theological Seminary's Charlotte campus. At some point during my studies, he was the President of the Evangelical Theological Society- probably the most prestigious position for a Christian academic to hold. I took his class on the gospels, and he blew me away with his insights. I loved Jesus more because of Dr. Kruger. I labored and agonized as I wrote my paper for the gospels class, submitted it, and got a few short compliments and then a critique that I didn't use Greek enough in my exegesis. I got a B+ or A-. Not an A.

So I took more Greek, not just to know the Bible better. Though that did matter. Not just to help me be a better pastor to you. Though that did matter. But partly so that I could get an A from Dr. Kruger the next time I had him. I needed an A from him. I needed him to praise me. So, when I took his class on Hebrews through Revelation, I was ready. Again, I agonized and labored over the paper. Now I used more Greek. I submitted the paper. A few days later I got it back. An A. And the comments were, "Well done, Brett." And then about three short

phrases about what I'd done well. And that was it. I scanned through to see if he had made any additional comments on the paper. Nope. And God opened my eyes! This is what you were after! This guy's busy. What did you expect? A paper of his own praising *you*? There it was. The "A." But it wasn't an "A" I wanted. I wanted praise. I wanted a proper greeting in the marketplace of academics. I wanted a place of honor in the list of Dr. Kruger's list of favorite students.

[Application] And during that time, I was concealing who I was- not that I cheated or anything. But because, the truth is, I'm almost certainly NOT one of his greatest students. I was stealing. I wanted praise, but God is the One who deserves praise. If I wrote a decent paper, God wrote the Bible! The number one best seller. And yet, I suspect that I'm not so different than you. There are some people out there who you are unreal for. You want their praise. And you're willing to conceal who you are to get their praise. Maybe like me, it's a teacher you respect. Or your parents. Or your boss. Or your parole officer. Or that one person- you know the one.

Get real. So long as we're unreal like this. So long as we're obsessed with praise and money, we'll never be real. We'll always have to put on a show. We'll always have to use pretense. And that will be the case with how we give. We won't be generous, because it will always be about us. If it's about you giving enough to pay for the painted ceiling. Or to attract the celebrity pastor. Or for the elders to sit in our Thursday morning meeting talking about how generous you are. It's time to get real. And it starts in the heart.

And when it comes to praise, most people need encouragement. So give regular honest encouragement to the people around you- it is a gift. Let God work in the hearts of believers to put to death their own love of praise.

Get real with generosity. If we do, we'll beware the unreal. But now notice

[Main Point 2] We'll celebrate the real.

In contrast to these very visible but unreal Scribes, we meet another person in the Temple while Jesus is there. A widow. And when it comes to generosity she's real. An unlikely hero is going to help Jesus show and bring down the corrupt system around Him by showing who's real. How do we know if we're real?

[Lifestyle 1] The real will kneel

[Illustration] When someone is knighted in the UK, they kneel before royalty. There they are, defenseless. Basically immobile. While someone with a sword holds the blade inches from windpipe, carotid artery, and jugular vein. The blade on plane for a perfect beheading. But the person being knighted kneels trusting that the King, Queen, Prince, or whomever won't destroy him. Even though he has nothing else to offer in that moment. That's what we see happening here.

Let's read Luke 21:1-3

Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box, and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. And he said, "Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them."

This widow puts in less than a penny. The note tells you that it's about 1/128th or 1/132nd of a daily wage in. It's nothing. It will make no difference to the Temple building, the ministry system, the sacrifices, whatever if she doesn't give it. But it makes a difference to God. She doesn't care what others think. She cares what God thinks. She is not exalting herself before others. She's spiritually kneeling before a Holy God. And Jesus celebrates her!

If we're to get real with generosity, we need to celebrate the real. And the real will kneel. But there's another, related aspect

[Lifestyle 2] The real will feel

By feel, I mean that it is inescapable for her to feel the cost of giving. Let's read v. 4

"For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."

Jesus understands math. He knows that someone who gives a year's worth of money is more than a penny. But the truly generous. Those who get real with generosity. They feel it. This woman has literally given all that she has. She didn't make excuse or postpone giving until it made more sense. She gave up all she had to live on. In a sense, she took all of her money. Bought a sword. Handed it to God. Kneled before Him. And said, "Do what you want with this, even if it kills me."

[Application] There are many points of application from the poor widow. Let me point out a few things. We'll stay close to generosity but then widen it a bit more.

First, is your generosity real? Do you kneel before God in your giving? Do you feel it? Is it a sacrifice? If not, it's probably not real. Other people only contribute out of their abundance. That's Jesus saying, "They've still got a lot of money. They're still rich." But Jesus says that when we get real with our generosity, it's not the amount of the dollars. It's actually the amount of our faith and what's relative to our income. If you won't kneel before God with your money, then you are either kneeling to your sinful self or inanimate money. Which can't really do anything for you. We must *feel* it. That's how God grows us in faith. This poor widow gave up everything. And Jesus praises her.

But here's the qualifier: we learn elsewhere in the New Testament- 2 Corinthians 8:11-15, 1 Corinthians 16:2, that God doesn't usually require us to be unduly burdened to the point of being destitute like this widow. He tells us we should give generously. We should feel it. And we should give regularly. There isn't a tithe commandment in the New Testament, but we recommend you start giving at around 10% with the desire to grow from there. But we care about you more than your money, so it's not like we check up on you. With this in mind, some of us may be doing worse than we realize in our giving because we don't feel it, even if the dollar amount is high. And others might be doing better than we realize because we kneel and feel it- even if it's a small amount. The New Testament also talks about giving regularly. I've learned that that's important. If everyone saved their giving until the last week of December, utilities would be shut off, pastors and their families would be hungry, and most importantly- ministry would suffer. So giving with each paycheck is probably a good idea. **Building fund? Benevolence? Tithe?**

Now, you are a generous church. I suspect that most of you are real in your generosity. I want to celebrate that the way Jesus does here. Jesus is pleased with your sacrificial giving. And we are honored to give money away as a church to missionaries, members in need, and other causes. Dave and I are willing to take pay cuts for the sake of this church- if that's the wisest course of action. There's still a bit more application:

Let's notice that this widow receives commendation from Jesus. But she does not receive a promise of prosperity that will follow. So do not trust people who emphasize money is the route to God making you healthy or wealthy or wise. He

does bless faith, but that is easily twisted to a form of idolatry where we love God only for what gifts He gives us.

And, importantly, we see that this lady is another of Luke's unlikely heroes. Maybe you are here, and you are like this poor widow. It doesn't feel like you have much to offer. You wonder if there's a place for you here at this church. You have so much PTSD. You are uneducated. You have no idea where to find certain books of the Bible. You have a history of homosexual relationships and attraction. You are too old. You are poor. You are too young. You are unemployed. You aren't white and most of these people are. We want this to be a place for you. It might feel awkward and uncomfortable for a while- maybe a couple years. We may make dumb mistakes and sin against you. We may challenge you at times. But we want you to know there's a place for you. You, like this widow, have a meaningful role to play in building God's kingdom here. This is a way for us to try to be real in our generosity toward you. There will be times when we will celebrate you for being real.

If you don't kneel before Jesus, the ideal. If you don't rely on Him. Then you will face Him. You will be exposed as one of the unreal. But you'll have your money- right? Listen to Isaiah's warning about the Day of the Lord and the futility of money and praise from man-

In that day mankind will cast away their idols of silver and their idols of gold, which they made for themselves to worship, to the moles and to the bats, to enter the caverns of the rocks and the clefts of the cliffs, from before the terror of the LORD, and from the splendor of his majesty when he rises to terrify the earth. Stop regarding man in whose nostrils is breath for of what account is he?

When you kneel, know that God always exalts the humble. But if you remain obsessed with money or praise. You're unreality will be on full display. And you'll face wrath in a miserable Hell disappointed you couldn't live in a cave.

Let's get real with generosity. To do so, we'll beware the unreal. We'll celebrate the real. But to really get real with generosity, third

[Main Point 3] We need the ideal.

We will never be truly generous until we look at Jesus. The ideal. Perfect God and perfect man. We will never understand generosity without the ideal. What do we notice here about Jesus the ideal that will help us get real?

[Help #1] The ideal came to reveal

Let's read the end of v. 47 through v. 3

(Speaking of the unreal scribes) *"They will receive the greater condemnation."*
Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box, and he saw a poor widow put in two copper coins. And he said, "Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them."

If Jesus, the ideal, didn't come, we wouldn't know what true generosity was. We would look at the spiritually dead but outwardly religious and not know that they will receive great condemnation in Hell. Condemnation is a death sentence, by the way. And we wouldn't know that giving less than a penny could be more meaningful than giving a million dollars. I wouldn't know that. That's why we need the ideal He came to reveal.

We need the ideal. He helps us because He came to reveal. And now

[Help #2] The ideal empowers us to be real.

Jesus goes after our hearts. He goes after our motives. He motivates us. And v. 4 hints at how His motivation works

...out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.

She was laying her life on the line. Maybe the widow lives, maybe she dies. We don't know. But Jesus, the ideal, came and laid down all he had to live on. He laid His life down. Jesus knew what He was doing. Through interactions with the Scribes and other religious leaders, He's challenging the corruption going on around Him. The unreal religious leaders. Who steal and conceal. If they live like this, they'll hate anyone who undermines their selfish, stingy, ungenerous, sinful way of life. And they'll murder anyone who gets in their way. Jesus knows this. He's always known this about mankind. He, as second person of the Trinity, is the true God of the universe. He owned everything. He sat comfortably in Heaven richer than all.

But Jesus is the ideal who empowers us to be real. So our giving is motivated by Him.

2 Corinthians 8:9

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

Listen to a selection of verses from Philippians 2

...Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant (slave), being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

The ideal gave all he had to live on. He was willing to be poor. He was willing to be a slave. He was willing to be tortured. He was willing to receive the wrath of God. He gave all he had to live on. And He did this for people like you and me. Who aren't naturally generous. Who've sinned again and again. Who have loved praise. Who have done religious things just to look good for those around us. And we deserve the great condemnation of Hell. But when you've knelt before Him. Called Him your Lord. Handed Him the sword and said, "You can kill me or commend me, not my will but yours." I'm trusting you to save me because You've died in my place. Well, you can be sure that He will keep His promise to save you.

[Application] And here's what happens. The Holy Spirit changes your heart. So you change from the inside out. And the Holy Spirit uses that gospel truth- that you've been saved by God become poor. By generous God become slave. By God on the cross. And the Spirit feeds on the truth of the ideal. He empowers you. And He transforms you to be real. You won't care what others think of you. Where you sit. How rich you are. You will just be real. And generous. With your money, but also with your time. With your energy. With who you pray for.

With \$33 trillion in debt. It's likely that this country is headed for significant hard times. But if we are real with our generosity, to God's people and those around us- we'll be able to help one another. And we will change society! It will attract others to the gospel- the ideal who gave up everything.

[Conclusion] In *the Lord of the Rings* Tolkien makes a profound observation through the mouth of the noble Faramir: *“Praise from the praise-worthy is beyond all rewards.”* No one is more praiseworthy than Jesus. He’s the ideal! And He sees past the unreal people who we’re so deceived by. And He praises the real. Know this: when you get real with your generosity, Jesus knows. And someday, He’ll let us all know. And you’ll be commended with a joyful, “Well done!”