

# SERMON *study* GUIDE

## “DIVINE MATH”

### LUKE 21:1-4

#### THE QUESTION THAT SHAPES EVERYTHING:

#### “WHAT MAKES A PERSON GREAT?”

Your answer to that question shapes more than you think:

- What you pursue
- Who you listen to and take seriously
- How you evaluate success—in yourself and others
- The direction your life actually goes

The problem is that our instincts are broken. We almost automatically admire the wrong things and look up to the wrong people.

#### WHAT THIS PASSAGE IS (AND IS NOT) ABOUT

##### NOT MAINLY ABOUT GIVING

- Many have used this text to make sweeping statements about how you should give
- Jesus doesn't say “Go and do likewise” (compare the Good Samaritan, Luke 10:37)
- He doesn't comment on her faith, her attitude, or her motives

##### NOT MAINLY A CRITIQUE OF THE SCRIBES

- Some argue the widow is primarily a victim of religious exploitation
- But the contrast Jesus draws is between the rich and the widow—not the scribes and the widow
- Every similar figure in Luke is presented as a positive example
- Jesus' words sound like praise, not lament.

#### WHAT IT IS ABOUT

- Jesus is illustrating the difference between how God evaluates things and how the world evaluates things
- He's forcing us to stop, step back, and ask: am I really seeing life the way he does?

#### THE WORLD'S MEASURING SYSTEM

The religious leaders of Jesus' day reveal how the world defines greatness. It's almost entirely externals:

- Position and title
- Family background and credentials (“Who gave you this authority?” – Luke 20:2)
- Appearance (long robes, impressive clothing)
- Public approval (greetings in the marketplace, best seats, places of honor)
- Religious performance (long public prayers—meant to be seen)

To sum it up: what looks strong, what looks beautiful, what looks powerful—that must be great.

#### JESUS' MEASURING SYSTEM: A PATTERN THROUGH LUKE

Throughout the gospel, Jesus repeatedly overturns human expectations. The people he holds up as examples are almost never the ones anyone would have chosen:

- Mary (peasant girl) over Zechariah (priest in the temple)
- Shepherds receive the birth announcement—not the elite
- Roman centurion → “I have not found such faith in all Israel” (Luke 7:9)
- Sinful woman → example of love for Christ (Luke 7:47)
- The Samaritan → example of obedience to God's law (Luke 10)
- Mary (sitting at Jesus' feet) → “she chose the better part” (Luke 10:42)

#### SERMON NOTES

- Tax collector → goes home justified; the Pharisee does not (Luke 18:14)
- Children → “To such belongs the kingdom of God” (Luke 18:16)
- This widow → “she has put in more than all of them” (Luke 21:3)

“For he who is least among you all is the one who is great.” – Luke 9:48

### THE SCENE: TWO VERY DIFFERENT GIFTS

Jesus sits in the Court of the Women, watching people give at the treasury. There are 13 trumpet-shaped offering boxes along the wall.

### THE RICH

- Many wealthy people are present, putting in large sums
- The wealthy were roughly 7-10% of the population in Jesus’ day
- About 70% of people were poor; 30-40% were at or below survival level
- In that context, the rich stood out sharply—especially at Passover

### THE WIDOW

- A poor widow—the word Luke uses means “beggary”: lowest class, no resources, a daily struggle to survive
- Widows were among the most vulnerable in society—often with no one to depend on
- She gives two lepta: the smallest coins in circulation, worth about half a penny each

- Two coins was the minimum allowed gift—one alone was considered too worthless

### JESUS’ EVALUATION

“Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.” – Luke 21:3-4

Notice what Jesus is not saying:

- He’s not comparing her humble attitude to their pride
- He’s not saying their gifts were insincere
- He’s not condemning the rich for giving

He’s making a simpler, more startling comparison: less and more.

- The rich gave less.
- The widow gave more.

### THE PRINCIPLE:

*God uses a completely different system of measurement than we do.*

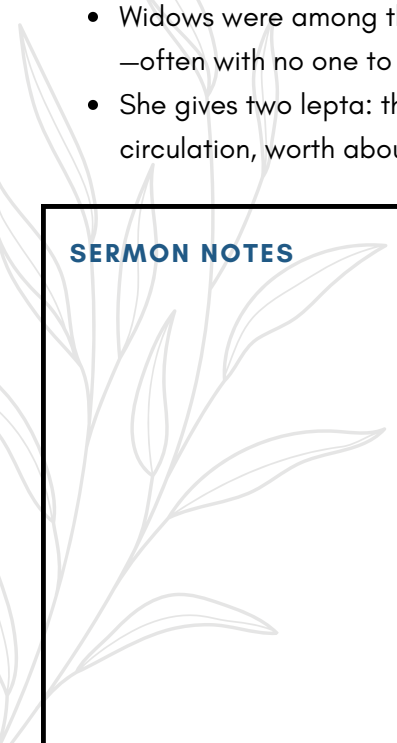
### THE AUTHORITY QUESTION

Jesus isn’t simply offering a better list of virtues. He’s raising a deeper question: who gets to define reality for you?

The crowd in Luke 20-21 faced this choice directly:

- God declared Jesus the cornerstone (Luke 20:17)

### SERMON NOTES



- The religious leaders rejected him
- The crowd followed the leaders—and suffered for it

The same choice confronts us. The world still minimizes Jesus:

- The world says there are many ways to God — Scripture says Jesus is the only way
- The world dismisses the cross — Scripture says it is God’s plan to forgive sin
- The world says the resurrection is just a story — Scripture says God proved his plan worked by raising Jesus from the dead
- The world says make your own path — Scripture says salvation is found in no one else

Before anything else: have you submitted to God’s evaluation of who Jesus is and what he did? That’s where the authority question starts.

### WHAT GOD ACTUALLY VALUES

As Luke unfolds, Jesus consistently highlights a different set of qualities as significant. Not externals—internals:

- Faith — not position, credentials, or where you came from
- Love for Christ — not reputation or a clean past

- Obedience to God’s Word — not religious ancestry or family name
- Humility — not title or status
- Sacrificial mercy — not how religious others say you are
- Genuine repentance — not religious performance
- Using resources with an eternal perspective — not how much you have
- Dependence on God’s mercy — not how good others think you are

### NOTICE:

*Jesus says nothing about her faith, her attitude, or her motives. He simply observes what she did—and evaluates it by a different standard than anyone else would have.*

### THE FINAL CHALLENGE

This story isn’t primarily a command about what to give. It’s a call to think straight—and then to choose.

The world still has its list. It’s based on externals, and it will keep pressuring you to accept it:

- Status, reputation, power
- Appearance, public approval, performance

### SERMON NOTES

- What looks strong, beautiful, impressive

Jesus has a different one:

- Faith, love for Christ, obedience
- Humility, sacrificial mercy, repentance
- Dependence on God's mercy

If what impresses unbelievers is what impresses you, it will take you somewhere—usually in the opposite direction from Jesus.

Things are not always what they appear on the outside. The people who seem to give more sometimes give less. The people who seem to give less sometimes give more. Because God does “math” differently than we do.

***Who are you going to allow to define greatness for you? God uses a different measuring system than the world does—and getting that right changes everything.***

## SERMON NOTES

