

54. Questions about Eternity

Luke 20:20-47

Luke: A Walk Through the Life of Jesus

Sometimes, people catch us “off guard” with a statement not meant to embarrass us, but it does. I remember a time when different churches in my area of England were asking me to be a guest speaker. I was in my twenties, but I still looked like a teenager. A couple of hours before the evening meeting, it was customary to go to the pastor’s house for tea. Sandy and I arrived at the home of the pastor, whom we had not met before. I knocked on the door, and when he opened it, he said, “Yes, what can I do for you?” It was an awkward moment. When I replied by saying that I was the guest speaker, the pastor asked me, “But you are so young!” I guess he was surprised that I didn’t look the part of a preacher. It was hard to know what to say in response to that statement, but I answered in the most honest way I could, not meaning to offend. My answer was “I am trying to get old, but it takes time!”

He could not believe that his associate (a friend of ours) had sent two young kids to speak at his church. Hopefully, this man felt reassured after our visit. We were invited back, so he must have changed his mind. How often God has sent us a message, and we nearly missed it because it did not come in the way we expected or in a package that we recognized. We all have our own ideas and assumptions of how God will speak to us and whom He will use.

This was the situation with Jesus and the religious leaders of His day. The Lord came with words of truth, and even better than that, He was the embodiment of Truth, but their own perceptions blinded them from seeing clearly or being open to hearing something new from a young thirty-three-year-old from Galilee. Jesus did not “fit the bill” or match the image for what they were expecting in a Messiah.

In his narrative on the life and teaching of the Lord Jesus, Luke is now describing the conspiring of the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders against Jesus. Their goal was to try to discredit Christ before the crowds listening to His teaching and preaching in the courts of the Temple Mount. They sent spies (v. 20) and were hoping that they could catch Him out by using His own words and teachings against Him. Jesus had silenced them once already and spoken a parable which focused on their plans to kill Him (Luke 20:1-19). Their response was to look “for a way to arrest Him immediately” (20:19). Why immediately? Their religious money-making schemes were threatened. Jesus had overthrown the tables of the moneychangers and stopped them selling in the Temple Courts. Those in power, the religious elite, could not give up; there was too much money, power, and authority at stake. They decided that they would come at Him again; this time, it would be on the issue of taxation imposed on Israel by the Roman authorities.

Paying Taxes to Caesar

²⁰Keeping a close watch on him, they sent spies, who pretended to be honest. They hoped to catch Jesus in something he said so that they might hand him over to the power and authority of the governor. ²¹So the spies questioned him: "Teacher, we know that you speak and teach what is right, and that you do not show partiality but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. ²²Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" ²³He

saw through their duplicity and said to them, ²⁴"Show me a denarius. Whose portrait and inscription are on it?" ²⁵"Caesar's," they replied. He said to them, "Then give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." ²⁶They were unable to trap him in what he had said there in public. And astonished by his answer, they became silent (Luke 20:20-26).

If they could get Him to say something against paying the tax, they could tell the Roman governor that He was a rebel against the state and should be executed. Because of the Roman occupation, Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, was the only one with authority to kill Him. They assembled together certain individuals that were good actors. Some of the leaders were sent to keep a close watch on Him, no doubt taking note of His every word. In verse 21, the Scriptures refer to these people as spies!

Question 1) What did the Roman authorities and the Jewish religious leaders have in common when it came to silencing Jesus? What did they hope to gain by using flattery?

They were sent to appeal to His pride by flattering Him, attempting to gain trust among His followers before asking their questions. (The word translated "pretended" (Verse 20) in the NIV, comes from the Greek word *hypokrinomai*, which means to play the role of an impersonator or actor. We get the word *hypocrite* from the root of this word. The enemy masks his motives by using flattery to appeal to a man's pride. They were hoping that Jesus would not detect their true motives or see where they were going with their questions by inflating His pride. It was a classic misdirect! A man or woman can be blinded to the enemy's attack by his or her own pride. Many a minister has passed the test of outright sin but fallen easily to the sin of pride. CS Lewis wrote about this in his book, *Mere Christianity*. Lewis wrote:

If anyone thinks that Christians regard unchastity as the supreme vice, he is quite wrong. The sins of the flesh are bad, but they are the least bad of all sins. All the worst pleasures are purely spiritual; The pleasure of putting other people in the wrong, of bossing and patronizing and spoiling sport, and backbiting; the pleasures of power, and of hatred. For there are two things inside me competing with the human self which I must try to become; they are the animal self, and the diabolical self; and the diabolical self is the worst of the two. That is why a cold, self-righteous prig (a person who demonstrates an exaggerated conformity or propriety) who goes regularly to church may be far nearer hell than a prostitute. But, of course, it's better to be neither.¹

Pride is one of God's greatest enemies. Pride is what caused Satan to fall (Isaiah 14:12-17). If you would like to please your enemy, just begin to admire yourself. Pride is so hard to see in ourselves but easy to see in others. God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. There will always be grace issuing from our lives if we will seek the best for others rather than elevating self. Jesus never gave in to a spirit of pride for one minute. Christ took every opportunity to humble Himself and show us the way. See Him as He washed the dirty grimy feet of the disciples. Watch Him as He touched the leprous. He was not worried that men would see Him weeping over Lazarus even when He knew that He would raise him from the dead. He

¹ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (New York: Macmillan, 1986).

would look for the lowest seat when He was invited to a meal. There was none humbler than the Lord Jesus.

They asked Him: **“Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?”** (v. 22). Along with the property taxes that were due, the Romans also required an annual tax of one denarius. The coin was about a day’s wages for a common laborer that every adult had to pay. When Jesus was just a child, the heavy tax issue had caused the deaths of many people. Josephus, the Jewish historian, records a serious revolt against heavy taxes.² The Jewish leaders sought to bring Jesus on one side of the issue or the other. If Jesus said that it was right, He would alienate the Jewish people listening to Him. If He said that it was not right, then the wrath of Rome would be brought down on Him.

He saw through their duplicity (Verse 23) and responded to them by requesting that they show Him a denarius coin, and He then asked them whose portrait and inscription was on it. The request was a simple one, **“Show me a denarius. Whose portrait and inscription are on it?”**²⁵**“Caesar’s,”** they replied (v. 24).

Question 2) Why do you think Jesus asked to see a denarius coin?

This coin would have been detestable to the Jewish people. It had an image of Caesar embossed on it with an inscription around the image declaring him to be divine. Most Jewish people at the time did not even like to have a denarius in their possession due to the image of Caesar and all it represented. The religious leaders, though, came up with a denarius, more than likely obtained from the ill-gotten gains of the money-changing that had gone on in the Temple Courts. They had no qualms about an image of Caesar in their pockets! Perhaps, as He looked at the coin, He was focusing on the fact that there were “two sides to the coin.” The image of Caesar on the coin was understood to be a property symbol: it belonged to Caesar. When they replied that it was Caesar’s image, He said: **“Then give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s”** (Verse 25).

If Caesar’s image was on it, then it surely belonged to Caesar. The other view was that, in the same way, what has God’s image on it, give to God. We are told that, at the beginning in Genesis the first chapter, verse 26, God created man in His own image. The divine image is stamped on every human being on planet Earth, though marred by sin. Within every one of us there is a missing piece, a God shaped void, a divine imprint that can only be filled with God Himself. He is our Creator, and we are His treasured possession. We are made in His image! Just as Caesar had right of possession over the coins, God has the right of possession over our souls, and we do well to give to God what belongs to Him. We are “made in His image!” While we live in this world, we are to be subject to the authorities, but we are not to serve them when their law conflicts with God’s moral law. The Sadducees were astonished with His answer and became silent. Again, the religious elite had been publically out-witted with their attempt to discredit Christ, and it was brought to nothing.

The Resurrection and Marriage

² R. Kent Hughes, *Preaching the Word, Luke, Volume 2*. Published by Crossway Books, 1998. Page 265.

When Jesus brought up the issue of ownership by God and the accountability that goes with it, the Sadducees could not remain quiet about a future accountability. Jesus' ideas of the Kingdom of God and an accountability in eternity were unacceptable to them. Now, it was their turn to try to discredit Christ. They prided themselves as being more intellectual and superior in their understanding. The pro-Roman Sadducees were a small aristocratic group that held sway over the Sanhedrin, the Jewish eldership that comprised the seventy elders and law makers of Israel.

The priesthood were descendants of Aaron, the brother of Moses, and only from their family could one become a priest. It is thought that the name *Sadducee* comes from the name "Zadok," the High Priest at the time of David and Solomon. Other scholars believe that the name Sadducee comes from the Hebrew word *saddiq*, translated into English as "righteous ones" (*saddiqim* is the plural).³ They approached Him with their carefully prepared question. It was a hypothetical situation that, in their minds, proved that there could be no resurrection. They considered the idea of a bodily resurrection too ridiculous to be true.

²⁷Some of the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Jesus with a question. ²⁸"Teacher," they said, "Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and have children for his brother. ²⁹Now there were seven brothers. The first one married a woman and died childless. ³⁰The second ³¹and then the third married her, and in the same way the seven died, leaving no children. ³²Finally, the woman died too. ³³Now then, at the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?" ³⁴Jesus replied, "The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. ³⁵But those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, ³⁶and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection. ³⁷But in the account of the bush, even Moses showed that the dead rise, for he calls the Lord 'the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' ³⁸He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive." ³⁹Some of the teachers of the law responded, "Well said, teacher!" ⁴⁰And no one dared to ask him any more questions (Luke 20:27-40).

We may live in a physical world, but we are spiritual beings having a human experience. The Sadducees rejected the idea of eternity and heaven. They also rejected belief in angels, spirits, and the resurrection of the dead (Acts 23:8). They only believed in the physical world. Their view was that only the teachings of Moses were inspired in the first five books of the Bible. They argued with the Pharisees all the time on these issues. In fact, Paul the Apostle used this argument to his advantage when he stood before the Sanhedrin several years later, winning the Pharisees to his side against the Sadducees (Acts 23:6-9). I'm sure they were smiling smugly as they posed the question concerning to which of the seven husbands the wife would belong. They regarded such a question as the kind of thing that made belief in the resurrection of the body a preposterous idea. Furthermore, they could see no evidence in the five books of Moses, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. They were comfortable in their worldview, and Jesus' teachings challenged their thinking.

³ <https://bible.org/seriespage/3-sadducees>

Question 3) What do you think Jesus means when He said, “They can no longer die, for they are like the angels?” Why did Jesus use Moses’ words when speaking to the Sadducees?

Jesus Teaches about the Eternal State

The Lord replied to the Sadducees with four different thoughts.

1) There will be no marriage in the eternal state for the believer. “But those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage” (v. 35). There will be no need for a covenant of marriage in the eternal state. Our covenant this side of eternity is “till death do us part,” but there is no death in the eternal state. The Lord gave us a covenant of marriage as a means of procreation and a means of filling the earth, but eternity is not populated in the same way. The only way to get there is for a person to receive the gift of eternal life through the substitutional death of God’s Son in full payment for our debt of sin.

2) There will be a resurrection of the dead (Verse 34-35). The Lord speaks of the resurrection as a fact, and although the Sadducees only use the five books of Moses, Christ uses those Scriptures proving the patriarchs are very much alive and with the Lord. Jesus stated to the Sadducees, “Moses showed that the dead rise, for he calls the Lord 'the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.'”³⁸ He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive” (v. 37-38). When God spoke those words to Moses, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had been dead more than 400 years. The Lord reminded the Sadducees that God didn’t say, “I **was** the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but they were very much alive after they had passed from this world, and He uses the present tense to speak of them.

The Sadducees could see no evidence of resurrection in the five books of Moses, but they had a moment of revelation at the insight of Jesus. After this debate, no one dared to ask Jesus any more questions. His arguments were causing the religious leaders to question their own beliefs and they were not successful in swaying the crowd away from Jesus.

3) There is no death in the eternal state for those that are considered worthy will be like the angels (Verse 36).

If we are to be like the angels, what does that mean? Angels are trusted with great power. When the Assyrians attacked Jerusalem, King Hezekiah of Israel cried out to the Lord to deliver Jerusalem. God sent one angel. The power of one angel was enough to defeat a whole army!

³⁶Then the angel of the LORD went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning—there were all the dead bodies! (Isaiah 37:36).

Angels have awesome splendor:

⁵I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of the finest gold around his waist. ⁶His body was like chrysolite, his face like lightning, his eyes like

flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude. ⁷I, Daniel, was the only one who saw the vision; the men with me did not see it, but such terror overwhelmed them that they fled and hid themselves. ⁸So I was left alone, gazing at this great vision; I had no strength left, my face turned deathly pale and I was helpless. ⁹Then I heard him speaking, and as I listened to him, I fell into a deep sleep, my face to the ground (Daniel 10:5-9).

The word angel literally means messenger. They were described as having a brilliant appearance. Often, the reaction when people encountered them in Scripture was to be afraid and to fall to the ground. Meeting an angel is overwhelming to our physical state.

We could say much about the holiness, power, and character of the angels, but suffice it to say that the believer in Christ, if he is to be like the angels, will be an awesome personality that will radiate the likeness of the Lord. Paul the Apostle told the Corinthian Church that God's people would be "sown in weakness" but "raised in power" (I Corinthians 15:43). We are told in the prophetic books (the books the Sadducees did not accept as inspired) that those who are counted worthy, or wise, will radiate light when the end shall come and the dead are raised:

²Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. ³Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever (Daniel 12:2-3).

Question 4) To whom do you think the above Scripture refers when it says, "those who are wise?" What do you think it means to "shine like the stars forever and ever?"

God has come close to us in the person of Christ, dispelling the darkness of our hearts and replacing the darkness with His glorious light. "For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6). The light that is within us will be revealed at some point in the future when we enter eternity. We will be like our Lord. The Bible says that, at His appearing, the work He has been doing inside the chrysalis of our inner hearts will be revealed, for we are God's workmanship (Ephesians 2:10). We are being transformed day by day as we cooperate with the Spirit. As angels reflect the glory of the Lord, in the same way, we will also reflect His glory:

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is (1 John 3:2).

What does it mean that we shall be like Him? In eternity, Jesus will not look the same as the resurrected Christ who met the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:15-16), or inside the locked door of the upper room when He appeared to the disciples (John 20:19-20; 26-29), or when He was seen by the disciples as they were fishing by the Sea of Galilee (John 21:4-7). When He was seen on earth after His resurrection, His face was not blazing with light; there was nothing in His appearance that would cause Him to look any different from a normal person. In

eternity, however, we will see Him in His true nature, i.e. finally able to behold the radiance of His face: “They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads” (Revelation 22:4).

In Scripture, we see two pictures of what Christ really looks like in eternity:

¹After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. ²There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light (Matthew 17:1-2).

¹⁴His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. ¹⁵His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. ¹⁶In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. ¹⁷When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last (Revelation 1:14-17).

4) The fourth thing Jesus said to the Sadducees is that those who are worthy will be called children of the resurrection (Luke 20:36). Because those who belong to Christ are God’s children, we will look like Him. We will carry His nature, power, and authority. We will be children of the resurrection. Scripture has a lot to say about the resurrection body.

⁴²So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; ⁴³it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; ⁴⁴it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. ⁴⁵So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁶The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. ⁴⁷The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. ⁴⁸As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and **as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven.** ⁴⁹And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, **so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven** (1 Corinthians 15:42-49).

A few hours before evangelist Dwight L. Moody died, he caught a glimpse of the glory awaiting him. Awakening from a sleep, he said, "Earth recedes, heaven opens before me. If this is death, it is sweet! There is no valley here. God is calling me, and I must go!" His son who was standing by his bedside said, "No, no father, you are dreaming." "No," said Mr. Moody, "I am not dreaming; I have been within the gates; I have seen the children's faces." A short time elapsed and then, following what seemed to the family to be the death struggle, he spoke again: "This is my triumph; this my coronation day! It is glorious!"

Jesus had gone straight to the heart of the matter when He challenged the Sadducees on their beliefs about the afterlife and eternity as well as eternal reward. He challenged them on the very point that they hoped to use to trick Him, but now, their own beliefs were exposed as being contrary to the very Scriptures they accepted as truth.

His arguments were causing the religious leaders to question their own beliefs, and they were not successful in swaying the crowd away from Jesus. In fact, within a short period of time, after the Temple curtain was torn in two at the death of Jesus, Luke records in the Book of Acts, that “The

number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7). What caused a large number of priests to become obedient disciples? Was it witnessing the temple curtain torn from top to bottom (Mark 15:38), or was it Jesus’ answer to the Sadducee questions? Even the teachers of the law said, "Well said, teacher!" (v. 39). The Lord did not stop there. He went on to pose the most important question of all, i.e. the question of His authority and His identity. After all, it was this very idea that was causing the religious leaders such concern. Who was (is) Jesus?

Whose Son Is the Christ?

⁴¹Then Jesus said to them, "How is it that they say the Christ is the Son of David? ⁴²David himself declares in the Book of Psalms: " 'The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand ⁴³until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." ⁴⁴David calls him 'Lord.' How then can he be his son?" ⁴⁵While all the people were listening, Jesus said to his disciples, ⁴⁶"Beware of the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and love to be greeted in the marketplaces and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. ⁴⁷They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely" (Luke 20:41-47).

The Lord finishes the whole debate session with a warning to His followers and a reminder of Who He really is. He mentions that David called the promised Son of David to be “Lord.” In ancient times, great respect was paid to the eldest head of the family. God told King David that one of his offspring would be established on the throne of David forever (2 Samuel 7:8-16). This Son of David would be the Messiah or Christ, which literally means “the Anointed One.” David speaking prophetically called this descendant of his “Lord” (Psalm 110:1). As to His physical nature, Christ was this Son of David, but He was (is) also the Lord of heaven. Jesus is going back to the very statement that incited the anger of the religious leaders. He wants them and us to understand Who He really is and from where His authority comes.

The warning about the religious elite is very pointed and serious. He is calling out the hypocrisy and the corrupt lifestyle of these leaders and saying that they will receive severe punishment. He was concerned about protecting His followers from false teaching and from those who would try to lead them astray. Soon, He will be taken from them, and at that time, it will be important for them to look beyond the present evil physical world and to see Who He really is, viz. the Son of God, the Christ. The whole concept of the Resurrection is about to take on new meaning for His disciples when Christ Himself will be raised from the dead. This will cause them to replay in their minds all the things He had taught them.

Prayer: Open our eyes to see Who You really are. Grant us grace when we experience opposition to our faith in You. Amen.

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