

Questions In The Temple

Luke 20:20-44

Pastor John Miller

I want to back up one verse, to Luke 20:19, to get us started. “And the chief priests and the scribes that very hour sought to lay hands on Him...” that is, “Jesus Christ” “...but they feared the people—for they knew He had spoken this parable against them.”

This is now Wednesday before Jesus is crucified. He had ridden into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. They were singing, “Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” (Mark 11:1). He went into the temple, observed what was going on and the next morning He returned, made a whip, overturned the money changers’ tables and drove them out of the temple. And on Tuesday and Wednesday Jesus taught in the temple and was challenged by the Jewish authorities.

In our text today, which occurs in the temple, we will see the Pharisees and Sadducees, the Herodians and the scribes—all the Jewish leaders, many of whom make up the Jewish high court called the Sanhedrin—come against Jesus and try to lay hands on Him or find something on which they could report to the Roman authorities, so He could be given up to Rome and maybe crucified. Then they could wash their hands of Him.

But God is in control. This happened during Passover, and Jesus Christ was the Paschal Lamb. He was going to die on the Cross for the sins of the world. And nothing can hinder, nothing can thwart the purpose and plan of God. God was working out His perfect plan; Jesus would go to the Cross to die for the sins of the world.

This story is also recorded for us in Matthew 22 and Mark 12. In our text today, in Luke 20, we will find a series of questions asked of Jesus, and then Jesus closes by asking a question. So He questions the questioners.

In verses 20-26, Jesus was asked a question about paying taxes. This is a great verse for tax season. “Pastor, do we need to talk about taxes?! Can’t we just skip over that?” I would like to do that, but we have to be faithful to preach the whole counsel of God.

The story begins, in verse 20, with the setting of this questioning. Jesus is in the temple, probably in the outer court in the court of the Gentiles. The scribes, the chief priests and we learn, from Matthew 22:15-16, that the Herodians were in the group.

That is interesting, because the Herodians and Pharisees hated each other. But now they found a common cause to join together in their hatred of Jesus Christ. The Herodians were the ones who appeared on the scene. “So they watched Him, and sent spies who pretended to be righteous, that they might seize on His words, in order to deliver Him to the power and the authority of the governor.”

These weren't honest men. They weren't sincere but were hypocritical. So they hired guys to make believe they were sincere and genuine. They were to go to Jesus and ask Him a question. No doubt they had huddled together and determined they could get Jesus if they questioned him about taxation, about paying tribute to Caesar.

The people of Israel in the land of Canaan were under the iron heel of Rome. They hated the Roman government and wanted their Messiah to overthrow the Roman government. The Pharisees hated Rome and didn't want to pay their taxes. The Herodians were the opposite. They liked Rome and aligned themselves with the Herodian dynasty. So the Pharisees and the Herodians came together in this common cause of trying to trap Jesus by asking Him a question about paying taxes to Caesar. They wanted to deliver Jesus to the power of the Roman governor.

They questioned Jesus, in verses 21-22. "Then they asked Him, saying, 'Teacher, we know that You say and teach rightly, and You do not show personal favoritism, but teach the way of God in truth.'" This was nothing but pure flattery. Someone said, "Flattery is saying to someone's face what you would never say behind their back. Gossip is saying behind their back what you would never say to their face." So they were trying to butter up Jesus. They feigned themselves to be just men. Their only motive was to trap Jesus, so they could do away with Him through the Roman government.

So they said they knew that Jesus taught "the way of God in truth." But they didn't believe that at all. What we have, in verse 20, is hypocrisy; in verse 21, we have flattery; and in verse 22, we have deception.

"Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" If Jesus said, "Yes, pay taxes to Caesar," He would lose the popular crowd, all those following the Pharisees. They would say, "He's a traitor! He's sold out to Rome!" and they would abandon Him. If Jesus said, "No," they would run to the Roman authorities and report that Jesus said that they shouldn't pay taxes, and no doubt, Jesus could have been arrested and maybe even crucified at that time as they proposed. So they thought they had the Son of God in a bind. But we know better; Jesus knows what He's doing.

Now notice His answer, in verses 23-25. "But He perceived their craftiness, and said to them, 'Why do you test Me? Show Me a denarius'" or a penny. A denarius was one-day's wage for labor. It was a silver coin embossed with Caesar's image and hailing Caesar as lord. Jesus asked them, "'Whose image and inscription does it have?' They answered and said 'Caesar's.' And He said to them, 'Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.'"

Notice their response, in verse 26: "But they could not catch Him in His words in the presence of the people. And they marveled..." or they were "blown away" "...at His answer and kept silent." These guys were no match for the omniscient Son of God.

When Jesus gave His answer, He affirmed two things. First, we should give “to Caesar what is Caesar’s.”

I think it’s interesting that Jesus had to ask for a penny. He was like a typical preacher; He had no money on Himself. So no doubt one of the accusers reached into his garment, pulled out a denarius and handed it to Jesus. I like this visual aid; He probably held it up high and said, “Whose image and inscription does it have?” They might have thought, Where’s He going with this?! And if I were making a Jesus movie, I’d have Him flip it back in a cool-Messiah flip. He went, “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” Wow! But they couldn’t say anything about what Jesus had said. They couldn’t trap Him with His words.

The point that should be made is that we should “render...to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s.” Christians should be good citizens; we should pay our taxes. I know this is hard, especially in California with all the taxes we have. We are to be supportive of our government and pray for our government. Romans 13:1 says, “Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.”

Any time government asks us to violate Scripture, we must “obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). Any time government asks us to violate our conscience, we must “obey God rather than men.” Other than that, we must be good citizens.

Second, we must render “to God the things that are God’s.” Just as that coin was stamped with Caesar’s image, so you and me are stamped with the image of God. We were made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). We have the ability to think in abstract terms. We also have self-awareness—“I am.” We have a moral nature; we know good from evil. So we have this inbuilt consciousness that brings us an understanding of who we are in the sight of God.

What does it mean to render “to God the things that are God’s”? You should give Him your love, your worship, your praise, your service. And Romans 12:1-2 says that you should “present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service....That you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

So if I’m going to give to God what belongs to God in my life—He made me, He created me and we find our highest purpose and fulfillment when we surrender our lives to loving Him, to following Him and to serving Him as our Lord and Savior.

The second episode in our text is in verses 27-40. This is the question about resurrection. This is a fun one. It’s a story about the Sadducees coming to Jesus and questioning Him about life after death and the resurrection of the body.

Starting in verse 27, we have their approach. “Then some of the Sadducees, who deny that there is a resurrection, came to Him.” The Sadducees also denied the existence of angels, of spirits, of life after death and of a bodily resurrection. Someone said, “That’s why they’re called

'Sadducees'; they're sad, you see," because they don't believe in life after death. And this story is going to affirm all the things they deny.

The Sadducees were a sect of the Jews that were in control of the temple. They were priests who were very materialistic. They believed the only inspired part of the Old Testament was the books of Moses, the first five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch, which were Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. So this whole dialogue will involve the Pentateuch and Moses, as Jesus answered their issue.

Moses wrote this in Deuteronomy 25. It is called "the law of the labyrinth." They hypothetically paint this picture, because they believed that it was absurd to believe in life after death and in the resurrection beyond the grave. So they came to Jesus "...and asked Him, saying: 'Teacher, Moses wrote to us that if a man's brother dies, having a wife, and he dies without children, his brother should take his wife and raise up offspring for his brother. Now there were seven brothers. And the first took a wife, and died without children. And the second took her as wife, and he died childless. Then the third took her, and in like manner the seven also; and they left no children, and died. Last of all the woman died also. Therefore, in the resurrection, whose wife does she become? For all seven had her as wife.'

Can you imagine being brother number six or seven?! "No way, José! She's a black widow; I'm staying away from her! You need to check out what she's putting in their coffee!" She just burns through seven of these brothers. Amazing! And I have to chuckle at verse 32: "Last of all the woman died also." You bet she did! Seven husbands?! She's tired. She gave up the ghost!

I have a friend who lost two wives to cancer, and I officiated at all his weddings. When he got to number three, I said, "Terry, this is insane! Your third wife?! You'd better slow down."

In verse 33 they asked, "Therefore, in the resurrection, whose wife does she become? For all seven had her as wife." They thought they had Jesus by asking Him this question. But they didn't believe in the resurrection. They didn't believe in life beyond the grave, so their question actually was hypocritical and not honest.

It's interesting that when it comes to heaven and life beyond the grave, we get so many questions. People ask, "Well, I was married three times. Which one will be my wife in heaven?" They're worried about it. Jesus will make it clear that there won't be marriage in heaven. For some people that's a bummer. For others, they're praising God right now!

He said in Matthew 22:29, "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God." The same is true of us; we make a big mistake and err, because we don't know the Bible, and we don't understand God's power. There is so much Biblical illiteracy today in the world, and we need to know what the Word of God teaches about life beyond the grave.

Verses 34-36 "And Jesus answered and said to them, 'The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are counted worthy to attain that age and the resurrection

from the dead..." those who put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ and are saved and go to heaven "...neither marry nor are given in marriage; nor can they die anymore, for they are equal to the angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection."

We learn that in heaven we won't marry or be given in marriage. Charles Spurgeon was asked, "Will we know each other in heaven?" His classic response was, "Do you think we'll be dumber in heaven than down here?" We'll know each other, but there won't be marriage in heaven, because we won't need to procreate and we won't die. You may think that's a bummer, but heaven is a wonderful place; it's going to be beyond your wildest imagination.

Notice in verse 36 that they can't die anymore. "Nor can they die anymore, for they are equal to the angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection." Don't misinterpret that; we aren't going to be angels, but we'll be like angels. How? We will not die; we'll be eternal and get new bodies. So we'll be like angels in that we'll be eternal. We're not angels; we're the children of God. In verses 34-36, Jesus dealt with the issue of who one will marry in heaven. It's a non-issue, because there is no marriage in heaven.

Now in verse 37, He switches; He wanted to deal with their belief that there was no life after death, no life beyond the grave. He said, "But even Moses showed in the burning bush passage that the dead are raised, when he called the Lord 'the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.'"

Again Jesus drew from the Pentateuch, from Exodus 3:6, when Moses was by the burning bush. So Jesus believed in the story of Moses and the burning bush. Jesus was giving this story about Moses His stamp of authenticity in the historicity of the Old Testament. "He said, 'I am the God of your Father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.'" Notice the present tense. And in our text in verse 38, He said, "For He is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live to Him." So Jesus drew from Scripture.

As far as time goes, Abraham had been dead for 300 years at this time. Isaac had been dead for 225 years. And Jacob had been dead for 198 years. But they still were alive. They weren't dissolved or they hadn't disappeared. When your loved ones die in the Lord, they go to the Lord, to be in His presence. They are still alive and waiting for you to be reunited with them. He is the God of the living and not of the dead. So our loved ones who died in Christ are living with Him, waiting to be reunited with us.

When Jesus was transfigured on the mountain, Moses and Elijah showed up. How did they know they were Moses and Elijah? Did they have name tags? They just knew intuitively. We're going to know each other in heaven. Moses and Elijah had been dead for quite a long time, but they still were Moses and Elijah. So you will be the new-and-improved you in heaven.

I like what Jesus said. He said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die" (John 11:25). We'll celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday. That gives us hope

beyond the grave. Praise God for the hope beyond the grave in Jesus Christ!

Verse 39, “Then some of the scribes answered and said, ‘Teacher, You have spoken well.’ But after that they dared not question Him anymore.” They’re done with the questioning, because Jesus responded with such wisdom to all their questions. They couldn’t trap Him in His words.

In the third episode, the questioner is now Jesus. He’s questioning the questioners. Verse 41, “And He said to them, ‘How can they say that the Christ is the Son of David?’” The Jews believed that the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Christ, was David’s son.

Jesus will now quote from Psalm 110:1. It’s a Messianic psalm. David is speaking about his son, the Messiah, and calls Him “my Lord.” Verse 42, “Now David himself said in the Book of Psalms: ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.” Therefore David calls Him ‘Lord’; how is He then his Son?’”

When you read that you say, “Wow! That’s amazing!” And you wonder what the answer is. The answer is that David’s son, the Messiah, was also David’s Lord, or God in human form, God in flesh. That is what we call “the Incarnation.” God became a man. He didn’t give up His deity but took on full humanity. It’s call “the hypostatic union”; two natures—truly God and truly man in one Person, Jesus Christ.

Jesus is affirming His deity as well as His humanity here. This is such an important doctrine for us to understand as New Testament Christians. We do believe in the hypostatic union of two natures in on Person, Jesus Christ; that He is God and man.

Jesus is affirming that from the Messianic psalm in the Old Testament. Let me break it down for you. Psalm 110:1 says, “The Lord said to my Lord.” The first word “Lord” in this verse is in all capital letters. So in the Hebrew, it is actually “Yahweh” or “Jehovah.” The second word “Lord” is in upper and lower case letters, which means “Adonai” or “sovereign Lord.” So “The Lord...” Yahweh “...said to my Lord...” Adonai “...‘Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.’”

So Jesus was wanting to trap them. And David clearly called Him “Lord” from that psalm. “How is He then his Son?” They believed this psalm was Messianic. They didn’t have any answer to Jesus’ question other than David’s son, the Messiah, who Jesus was claiming to be, which they rejected, was actually not only the Messiah, but He was the Son of God. It’s like this: He was the son of David, a human being—sinless but a human being—and He is the Son of God, divine. So He is the divine Son of God.

It’s interesting that there was no response to Jesus’ question recorded in Luke. It doesn’t say what they thought, what they did. Only silence. There’s no response from the Jewish authorities.

One of the great and clear teachings on Jesus’ two natures is found in Philippians 2. It’s called “the gnosis passage.” Verses 5-7 say, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,

who, being in the form of God....” The word “form” in the Greek is the word “morphe,” which means “essence.” It doesn’t mean “shape.” This is an affirmation of the deity of Christ. Continuing with verse 6, “...did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.” Jesus actually is God but took on “the form of a bondservant,” or He took on humanity.

So this Philippians 2 passage is teaching the same thing that Psalm 110 teaches; that He is David’s son, a man, the Messiah and is also the Son of God.

We celebrate Christmas by reading the prophecy in Isaiah 9:6, which reads, “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given.” “A Child is born” shows His humanity; “ a Son is given” shows His deity. Jesus is the God-man, which makes Him perfectly suited to die on the Cross; putting His hand on God and putting His hand on man and reconciling us to God. So these verses clearly teach the deity as well as the humanity of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Right now Jesus is the exalted God-man in heaven. He is the Savior and is seated in the place of authority at the right hand of God the Father (Hebrews 10:12). And Philippians 2:9-11 says, “Therefore God also has highly exalted Him, and given Him the name which is above every name...” David called Him “Adonai” or “my Lord” “...that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow...and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”