**THE GOSPEL OF LUKE**

**JESUS IN JERUSALEM**

**PART II**

**Luke 20:19-40**

**INTRODUCTION**

When we were last in Luke’s Gospel a couple weeks ago, we saw that Jesus has finally arrived in Jerusalem. This was a moment of profound prophetic significance, because the prophets foretold that God’s salvation for his people Israel would come out of Jerusalem when God’s Anointed One, the Messiah, took his rightful place on David’s throne in the City of God.

Throughout his Gospel, Luke has shown in different ways that Jesus is the Messiah, and one of the ways he’s done this has been by showing his readers how Jesus fulfilled Messianic prophecies. Jesus was born of a virgin and filled with the power of the Spirit as Isaiah foretold. His birth took place in Bethlehem as Micah foretold. His way was prepared by the second Elijah, John the Baptist, as the prophet Malachi foretold. And he descended from the Mount of Olives, riding on a donkey, just as the prophet Zechariah foretold. Jesus is the Messiah, God’s Chosen, Anointed One, and he has come to Jerusalem to bring salvation to his people.

There’s only one problem, and it’s this: his people don’t want him. He should have been greeted with joyful shouts of praise and celebration, but no one was there to greet him. No one was there to announce his arrival. That job was left to his ragtag group of disciples who did their best to make his arrival a royal one. As Jesus rode his humble donkey into the city, his disciples laid their cloaks on the ground and declared, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” This should have been met with streams of people flowing out of Jerusalem with tambourines and singing, but Jerusalem’s only response was from the Pharisees, who said, “Silence! Stop speaking nonsense.”

Jesus was the Messiah who had come to bring salvation to his people, but his people had already rejected him.

It comes as no surprise, then, that as soon as Jesus enters the city, conflict erupts. Three groups of people test Jesus on three different topics – ministry, politics, and theology – but they all have one goal: trap Jesus in his responses to either discredit him or have him killed. We already read about the first group a couple weeks ago when the chief priests, scribes, and elders question Jesus on the source of his authority, and today, we will look at the other two.

This is Part II of the sermon titled **Jesus in Jerusalem.** My aim today is to show you that **The Willing Sacrifice of Jesus Inspires Christian Worship.**

We will have two points today:

1. The Political Test
2. The Theology Test

(1) **THE POLITICAL TEST**

Immediately before verse 20, Jesus has just told a parable about a group of wicked tenants. These tenants are living in a vineyard owned by another man who goes on a journey to another country for a long time. The owner of the vineyard would periodically send servants to the tenants to collect some of the fruit from the vineyard, but each of the servants was beaten and mistreated by the tenants. The owner finally decides to send his beloved son, but the tenants treat him the worst: they throw him out of the vineyard and murder him. Jesus ends the parable by saying that the owner will judge those wicked tenants. He will destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others.

Jesus of course is talking about Israel. The wicked tenants stand for Israel, the owner stands for God, the servants stand for the prophets, and the son stands for Jesus himself. Jesus knew that the Jews would kill him, just as they mistreated and even killed God’s prophets that came before him, and the consequence of this would be that God’s covenant would no longer be with the nation of Israel, but with anyone from any nation that responded to God with faith and obedience.

The scribes and the chief priests understood exactly what the parable meant, which is why verse 19 says that “they perceived that he had told this parable against them”. They didn’t like this at all. They wanted to seize Jesus and silence him, but they couldn’t, because they were afraid of what the people would do to them.

So, verse 20 introduces us to their revised plan. They “watched him and sent spies, who pretended to be sincere, that they might catch him in something he said, so as to deliver him up to the authority and jurisdiction of the governor.” They’re not willing to do the dirty work. They want someone else to do it for them. That someone was Pontius Pilate, who was the governor of the region at the time. The scribes and chief priests wanted Jesus to say something that would get him in trouble with the civil authorities, so that they could get rid of Jesus for them.

Their plan is quite clever. They decide to ask Jesus a *political* question about taxes in verse 22: “Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar, or not?” Paying taxes to Caesar touched on a sore spot for the Jews. It was a constant reminder that they lived in subjugation to this foreign ruler. As God’s Chosen people, this wasn’t supposed to be the case. They were supposed to be the dominant world power. They were supposed to be free. But they weren’t. Not while the Roman Emperor ruled over them. This tax reminded them that life wasn’t what it was meant to be for the nation of Israel.

This question seemed to put Jesus in a lose-lose situation. If Jesus simply said “no, it’s not lawful for the Jews to give tribute to Caesar,” then immediately the spies would run off to Pontius Pilate and say, “This man Jesus is a threat to the Emperor! He’s telling the Jews not to pay their taxes! He’s a subversive figure that must be silenced.” Answering “no” to the question would give the chief priests and scribes the ammunition they needed to deliver Jesus to the authority and jurisdiction of the governor.

But on the other hand, if Jesus simply said, “yes, it’s lawful for the Jews to give tribute to Caesar,” then he would attract the wrath of his own people and lose the popular support that was protecting him from the Jewish leaders. The Jewish leaders would then be able to seize him and murder him themselves without fear of popular revolt, because Jesus would have proven himself to be a friend of the Emperor.

With this plan in place, these spies approach Jesus in verse 21 and begin with that time-tested tool of manipulation called flattery. “Teacher, we know that you speak and teach rightly, and show no partiality, but truly teach the way of God.” These spies didn’t mean any of this. They were only trying to manipulate Jesus into saying what they wanted him to say. But the ironic thing here is that what they said *was* true. Jesus did speak and teach rightly. Jesus showed no partiality to the rich and powerful, but truly taught the way of God. Jesus was the only way *to* God. But these spies didn’t know that. They only knew Jesus as a threat to their way of life and to their masters’ power. Their hearts were hardened against Jesus, so hardened that they only spoke what was true about him when they were lying.

Jesus wasn’t deceived. Verse 23 says that “he perceived their craftiness”. He knew that they were trying to trap him, and he knew that a simple “yes” or “no” answer would cause him to fall into that trap. So he takes a different tact in verse 24. “Show me a denarius”, Jesus says. A denarius was a Roman coin that represented about a day’s wage for a common labourer. One of the spies produces one. Jesus then asks, “Whose likeness and inscription does it have?” They said, “Caesar’s”. It appears that their coins weren’t that different from our own. We have an image of our head of state, Queen of Elizabeth, imprinted on our coins, and they had an image of their head of state, Caesar Tiberius, imprinted on theirs.

At this point, whether the spies know it or not, Jesus has already answered their question. How? By showing that the spies themselves were carrying Roman coins! It turns out that the spies were taking advantage of the system of currency that the Romans had built. They used Roman coins to buy food. They used Roman coins to pay their bills. They used Roman coins as a way of quantifying their wealth. So if they were taking advantage of this Roman service, then why shouldn’t they pay for it?

In this way, Jesus answers their question, not just with a simple “yes” that would make it seem like he’s “pro-Roman” or “pro-Emperor”, but with a practical demonstration of why it makes sense to pay taxes to Caesar. If the Jews are going to take advantage of Roman services, then they should pay for them. That’s why Jesus says in verse 25, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s.” The Jews owed a civic debt to the Romans because they lived within *their* empire, an empire maintained and protected by Caesar and his administration. Therefore, it was appropriate for them to pay taxes.

This debt, however, wasn’t an absolute one. It was limited and defined by the second half of verse 25. Jesus doesn’t just say, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s”. He says, “and to God the things that are God’s.” God, of course, owns everything. He owns their money. He owns their homes. He owns their possessions. He owns their *lives*. Even the Roman Empire belongs to him. So when Jesus says, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s”, he’s not saying, “Give some of what you have to Caesar, and give some of what you have to God” as if God and Caesar owned mutually exclusive spheres of existence. He’s saying, “Give everything you have to God”, which includes giving some of that to Caesar, because God wants them to give to Caesar.

This is just another way of saying what Paul says in Romans 13, verses 1 and 6:

“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God…For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God…”

The same is true for us today. We pay taxes not just because the government wants us to, but because God wants us to. God wants us to financially support the institutions that he has placed over us. That doesn’t mean that those institutions are perfect. That doesn’t mean that we’re going to agree with everything that they do. But it does mean that we need to honour them, and one of the ways we do that is by paying our taxes.

We render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s, so if the state compels us to do something God forbids, then we must obey God rather than men. Likewise, if the state forbids us from doing what God command, then we must obey God rather than men, because our ultimate allegiance isn’t to the state. It’s to God.

That’s how Jesus answers their question, and that’s how Jesus evades their trap. He shows these manipulative spies that they were hypocrites. They were trying to discredit Jesus in front of the Jews by proving that he was pro-Roman, and yet they were carrying Roman coins in their pockets! So who’s the one who is pro-Roman now?

There are at least two applications here for us, one primary, one secondary. The secondary one is that we need to be reminded that there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. That includes our Canadian authorities. Justin Trudeau and the Liberal Party of Canada have no authority except from God. They wield God-given authority. The same is true of Doug Ford and the Progressive Conservatives of Ontario. The same is true of Chief Justice Wagner and the Supreme Court Justices. The same is true for those who lead our police force, and military, and economy, and education. These men and women have authority over us because God has given it to them.

God has put these authorities over us, and God wants us to support them with our taxes. That doesn’t mean that we can’t speak out against some of the things they may do that we disagree with. In a liberal democracy like ours, there’s a lot of room for public, civil debate. But as we debate, as we engage with public issues, as we vote, we must never stop honouring our civil authorities, because there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.

This isn’t just a money issue. This isn’t just about paying taxes. Paying taxes is a necessary part of showing honour, but it’s not a sufficient one. You can’t honour the authorities without paying taxes, but if you only pay taxes you’re not honouring them. Take children for example. Children are called to honour their parents, and yet no one would say that they were doing that if they gave their parents a few dollars every week while muttering to their friends about how their parents were losers. Honouring someone includes speaking respectfully about them. Being grateful for them. Giving them the benefit of the doubt, not just in our public discourse, but in our private conversations as well. Let’s remember to do that, because in his divine providence, God has given these authorities to us, for our good, and for his glory.

As important as this is, this isn’t the main point of this text. I’ve called this the secondary application, not the primary one, even though a lot of people might think it’s the primary one. The primary application has to do with what this text tells us about Jesus and the attempts that the religious leaders are making on his life. That’s the context. The spies aren’t asking Jesus these questions because they’re genuinely interested in the relationship between church and state. They’re asking because they want to trap Jesus and kill him.

Jesus found a way out of the trap, but we need to pause and ask, “Why?” Why did he want to escape the trap? It’s not because he feared death. Jesus knows he’s going to his death. That’s why he wept over the city. That’s why he told the parable about the wicked tenants killing the son. Jesus doesn’t only know he’s going to die. His very purpose in coming to Jerusalem was to die. So why would he go out of his way to escape their trap?

The answer is that it wasn’t time for him to die. Not yet. Jesus still had a few more things to teach. He still had a few more commands to give. He still had to give his disciples the institution of the Lord’s Supper. Jesus would only die when the time was right – no sooner, and no later – and when he died, it would be in accordance with the prophecies about his death, which said that it wouldn’t be through the manipulation of spies, but through the betrayal of a friend, Judas Iscariot.

Jesus came to Jerusalem to die, but no one takes his life from him. Jesus lays down his life of his own accord. Death wouldn’t be something that would be thrust upon him by the clever deception of evil men. It would be his *choice*.That is why, when the time was right, Jesus would do nothing to defend himself. Not when he was mocked. Not even when he was slandered. The Jews would actually say to Pontius Pilate,

“We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king.” (Luke 23:2)

That’s what they wish Jesus had said when they set this political trap for him, but he didn’t. He said nothing of the sort! They lied about him. They slandered him. They made him a political threat when he had never said anything against the civil authorities. So what would Jesus do in response? Would he speak up in his defence and say, “That’s not what I said! I never forbade giving tribute to Caesar. I told them to render to Caesar what belongs to Caesar! They’re lying!” No, he didn’t. Instead, he remained silent, like a lamb before the shearers is silent, because it was time for him to die. The Lamb of God willingly laid down his life for sinners like us. He laid it down, not out of compulsion, but out of love, so that anyone who puts their trust in him could be forgiven by God.

This is the main application of this text. It’s meant to demonstrate Jesus’ absolute control over the nature and timing of his death, so that the reader can be certain beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus didn’t die because the religious leaders finally outwitted him. Jesus died because it was his choice to die. He didn’t go to the cross against his will. He went as a willing volunteer, so that he could bear the penalty of sinners like you and me.

(2) **THE THEOLOGY TEST**

Jesus passes the political test with such skill and wisdom that verse 26 says that the spies marveled at his answer and became silent. Now we see a new group enter the picture, the Sadducees, and they have a very different test for Jesus. This leads to our second point: The Theology Test.

This is the first time that Luke mentions this religious group called the Sadducees. They were mostly priestly and lay aristocrats who were known for their rationalistic approach to the Jewish faith. As a result, they tended to focus a lot on Jewish laws, revering the *Torah*, or the Law of Moses, more highly than any of the other Jewish Scriptures.

The Sadducees were commonly known for denying two things: the existence of angels, and the reality of a future resurrection, which Luke points out for us in verse 27. The Pharisees believed that God would one day raise the dead in a glorious resurrection, but the Sadducees did not. They thought it was an absurd idea, one that they didn’t have much time for. They wanted cold, hard laws, not future, promised miracles.

And so, they try to illustrate the absurdity of the resurrection by the question that they bring to Jesus. The question concerns the Jewish practice of Levirate marriage, which was meant to perpetuate the name of a man who died childless. They describe this practice in verse 28 when they say, “Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies, having a wife but no children, the man must take the widow and raise up offspring for his brother.” In other words, the brother of the deceased man would marry the deceased man’s widow, and the children they would have together would be part of the deceased man’s lineage so that his name might not die out.

The Sadducees were quite clever and saw this as an opportunity to undermine the doctrine of the resurrection through a hypothetical situation in verses 29-32. In this hypothetical, there are seven brothers who all end up marrying the same woman through the laws of Levirate marriage. The first brother dies without children, so the second brother marries his wife. But then the second brother dies without children, so the third brother marries the first brother’s wife. This continues through all seven brothers until all of them have died. The question is then stated in verse 33: “In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had her as wife.”

What would Jesus say? Would Jesus actually say that the woman was married to all seven men? That would seem preposterous! In that culture, men would sometimes take multiple wives, but a woman taking multiple husbands? You might be the case for a sexually immoral woman, but surely it could not be the case for a woman living in heaven. So, the Sadducees ask, if there actually is a resurrection, then whose wife will the woman be?

It’s a fair question, but it has one fatal flaw: it assumes that the next life will be just like this one. Jesus tells them that this won’t be the case. He explains in verses 34-36 that in *this age*, people get married, but in *that* age – the age of the resurrection – people neither marry nor are given in marriage. Why? Because we will be different from the people we are now. We will be *changed*. We won’t die anymore, Jesus says in verse 36. We’ll be immortal. We will be “equal to angels” and be “sons of God” and “sons of the resurrection.” Jesus couldn’t be clearer. We won’t be the same in the age to come. *Life* won’t be the same. We’ll still be human, but we’ll be more like the glorious angels in heaven than the people we are now.

But you may wonder, what does this have to do with the existence or non-existence of marriage in heaven? Why does being immortal and glorious have to mean that we won’t get married anymore? That’s a good question. I don’t know the answer. I don’t think anyone on this side of heaven can know the answer, because none of us have been there. Only those who are in the eternal bliss of God’s presence can know exactly why. It may be because we will all be so satisfied by God’s presence that we won’t need marriage anymore. It may be because marriage in this lifetime is only a symbol the ultimate marriage between Christ and the church in the next. When the resurrection comes, *that* relationship will become a reality, making the symbol of the reality redundant. Whatever the reason may be, we can have confidence that it will all make sense when we stand before God in the age of the resurrection, where we will spend an eternity mining the depths of God’s wisdom and will.

Now, some of you may be thinking that this doesn’t sound very appealing at all. Life without marriage sounds like a subtraction from true life, not an addition. Perhaps you’re married, and you can’t imagine life without your spouse. To live without being married to your life partner sounds like a life of profound loneliness. Or perhaps you’re a single person who believes that the only way to live a happy life is to live a married life. You believe that marriage equals happiness, and that you can’t have one without the other. For you, imagining an eternity in heaven where there is no marriage doesn’t make any sense to you. How can people be truly happy without marriage?

If that describes you, then you need to recognize that you’re making the same assumption as the Sadducees. You’re assuming that the next life will be just like this one. Yes, from our perspective here in this lifetime, living without your spouse or “a” spouse may seem lonely and sad. But that perspective is going to change in the life to come. Life itself will change, and whatever would have made a spouse-less existence sad and lonely in this lifetime will be swallowed up by the all-satisfying beauty of God’s glory.

Once again, however, what Jesus teaches as a result of the question isn’t the main point of the text. The fact that Jesus is being tested so that he might be trapped is the main point. We’re not only supposed to focus on what Jesus says about marriage. We’re supposed to focus on Jesus himself. And when we look at the text from that perspective, we see that our text says something very profound. It tells us that Jesus has access to divine knowledge that no one else has. No one on this side of heaven knows what heaven will be like. But Jesus does, because he’s been there. He’s *lived* there from all eternity in divine fellowship with the Father and the Spirit. And Jesus knows what the future age of the resurrection will be like, because he himself has planned and prepared that age for us.

Jesus is no ordinary man. He is the divine Son of God, sent by the Father into the world to lead lost people back to himself. And as the Son of God, no mere mortal has any chance at outwitting him with their theological puzzles and questions.

Jesus ends our text by addressing the Sadducees’ main problem. It wasn’t the nature of marriage. It was the reality of the resurrection. Jesus wanted the Sadducees to believe the truth about the resurrection, and he uses Scripture to convince them. The interesting thing about what Jesus does here is he doesn’t use a standard resurrection text like Daniel 12 or Psalm 16. He uses a text from the *Torah*, the Law of Moses, because he knew that they trusted it more than any other part of Scripture.

That text would be Exodus 3, where God reveals himself to Moses at the burning bush as “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Jesus’ argument is simple. At that point in time, all three men – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – had died. And yet, God said (and Moses recorded) that he *is* (not *was*) the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This is present tense, not past tense. So if God *is* the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and God is the God of the living and not the dead, then it follows that the three men were dead no longer. They had been raised through resurrection. So if the Sadducees say they trust Moses, shouldn’t they trust what he wrote about resurrection?

The scribes, who unlike the Sadducees believed in the resurrection, actually like this argument and say in verse 39, “Teacher, you have spoken well.” And they leave it at that, not daring to ask Jesus, this powerful man with divine knowledge and penetrating biblical insight, any more questions.

**CONCLUSION**

Darrell Bock summarizes our text well when he writes:

“Every possible group has taken a shot at Jesus and failed: Pharisees, nationalists, scribes, Sadducees, leaders of the people. On the topics of ministry, politics, and theology, Jesus has prevailed.”

Jesus prevailed over every test that men could throw at him. No man, as clever as he may be, could outwit him. So when we reach Chapters 22 and 23 in a few short weeks, when Jesus is betrayed by Judas, mocked by the Jews, slandered by the elders, delivered by Pilate to be crucified, and executed on a Roman cross, we’re meant to remember Chapter 20 and think, “Jesus isn’t suffering because they won. Jesus didn’t die because they finally trapped him. The only reason why any of this is happening is because he’s letting it happen.”

And so, let us together marvel at this man, Jesus Christ the Son of God, our Saviour, who willingly laid down his life for sinners like you and me, so that we could be saved from God’s wrath. Let us worship him for his stunning act of sacrifice, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, not out of compulsion, but out of a deep, eternal love for us.