

HE IS THE GOD OF THE LIVING

Luke 20:20-47

Key Verse: 20:38

"He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive."

There are three questions in this passage. The first question to Jesus was raised by the Jewish leaders about whether the Jews should pay taxes to Caesar or not (20-26). The second question to Jesus was from the Sadducees about "whose wife will she be" (27-40). The third question was made by Jesus, about how a descendant of David, the Christ, could be David's Lord and Christ. Today's passage is as it could be. But through the religious leaders' questions and Jesus' answers we learn several precious spiritual truths.

First, our obligation to Caesar and to God (20-26).

The religious leaders determined to trap Jesus so as to hand him over to the power and authority of the Roman governor (20). They sent spies, who pretended to be honest. They asked 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. Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"

The Jews did not complain about the burden of this tax, for it was less than \$5. Nevertheless, taxation was a boiling question among the Jews, and it had been the cause of incessant riot and rebellion against the Roman imperialists. At that time, the Jews claimed that they had no

king but God, and that paying taxes to Caesar was treachery to God. So their question to Jesus could be a trap to Jesus. If Jesus said that this tax should not be paid, the Pharisees would report at once to Pilate so that Jesus would be arrested. If Jesus said that this tax be paid, the frantic Jews would stone him to death.

What could Jesus do in this situation? Look at verses 23-25a. "He saw through their duplicity and said to them, 'Show me a denarius. Whose portrait and inscription are on it?' 'Caesar's,' they replied." He said to them in verse 25b, "Then give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." It was indeed their tricky question. But when Jesus answered them on the basis of the truth of God, they were unable to find a basis to trap Jesus in what he had said there in public. And astonished by his answer, they became silent (26).

When Jesus said, "Then give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's," he was speaking to them about man's basic obligation as a citizen of a nation, as well as a citizen of the kingdom of God. If a man lives in a country and enjoys all its privileges, he must fulfill four basic obligations: the obligation of paying taxes, the obligation of national defense, the obligation of excellent elementary education, and the obligation of labor. In a time of war, all eligible men in their twenties are obliged to be drafted and go to the front lines of battle and fight against the enemy at the cost of their lives.

Likewise, we, the children of God, have basic obligations to God. First, we must love God. Deuteronomy 6:5 tells us, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your

strength." When we love God, we can love our parents. If we honor God, we can honor brothers and sisters. Second, we must stand clearly on the side of God. This world is a battleground between God and Satan. So we, the children of God, must stand on the side of God. We children of God should be the soldiers of Jesus Christ. We must equip ourselves with the truth of God so that we can defend the gospel of Jesus against the schemes of the devil (Eph 6:11). Third, we must obey Jesus' world mission command (Mk 16:15). It is to obey the ultimate purpose of God for world salvation.

Second, "Whose wife will she be?" (27-33)

After the Pharisees' spies left Jesus speechlessly, the Sadducees came to Jesus with a question. At that time, they held the political power of the Jews. Ironically, they controlled the high priesthood, though they did not believe in the resurrection. They were extremely nervous that someone might disturb their wealth and established position in the world. What was worse, they were political collaborators with Rome. In order to rule the religious world, they adopted the five books of Moses' Law, but set no stock in the prophetic books, which urged them to repent. They believed in free will.

Their question to Jesus was based on the Law of Moses. For example, when Er, the first son of Judah, died with no heir, Onan his younger brother married Tamar, who had been his older brother's wife. When Onan also died, Tamar had to wait for Shelah, the youngest son of Judah, to grow up and become her husband (Ge 38:1-11). Their question was as follows, "'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. Now there were seven brothers. The first one married a woman and died childless. The second and then the third married her, and in the same way the seven died, leaving no children. Finally, the woman died too. Now then, at the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?" (28-33)

The Sadducees were the object of aspiration to all the people of the time. But when we analyze their question, they were tragic in their thought world and were under the power of death.

In this story we see the wealthy Sadducees' tragic thought world. In verses 29-32 they talked about the death of seven brothers. All of them died young and childless. This is also a story of a most sorrowful woman, who had married these seven brothers, and then she died too, unable to fulfill her duty of bearing an heir to the family. The Sadducees were only thinking about tragic death--the first brother's death, the second brother's death, and all the seven brothers' deaths, and the death of a woman who had watched seven husbands' deaths. Their thought world was tragedy because they had no resurrection faith.

The Sadducees' integrity was nothing but greed. The gist of their question was, "At the resurrection, whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?"; in other words, "Who among the seven brothers will grab her as his wife?" The picture of this scene is exactly a demons' carnival. The Sadducees had grabbed money; they had scrambled for political power; they had obtained the places of honor in society. Even though they had worldly wealth and honor, they were under the power of sin and death because they had no resurrection faith.

They were similar to Nicodemus. He had a golden chariot, a sash around his chest as a Sanhedrin member. But he came to Jesus to beg heavenly sunlight. Because they did not have resurrection faith, their agony of life was, "whose wife will she be?" among the seven brothers.

The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection, so they had no spiritual eyes to see the kingdom of God. So the Sadducees saw only the things of the world. They also heard only the things of the world. When they rejected the resurrection of Jesus, they were confined in the things of the world. As we see, the Sadducees had no fear of God in their hearts. The Sadducees had no absolutes of God in their hearts. As a result, they were relativistic. A relativistic mentality made them scatterbrains and the servants of Satan, eager to kill Jesus. Leo Tolstoy wrote so many good humanitarian novels. Among them, "Resurrection" seems to be the best. But he was too proud to believe in the resurrection of Jesus. So, at the moment of his death, he rose from his bed, came out on the street near a railroad station, and cried out, "Tragedies, tragedies!" These days, we see so many Sadducee-like Americans. They say that they are Christians but they don't believe Jesus' resurrection. When they do not believe the resurrection of Jesus, they become ungodly people. Ungodly people seek physical pleasure such as several days of vacation with their hard-earned money. They not only indulge in the sin of sexual immorality, they also condone their children to enjoy the sin of sexual immorality. Some people strongly encourage their children to be "normal" persons. It means they must follow the trend of the world. But the sin of sexual immorality brings forth a high divorce rate and the sin of sexual immorality discourages young students not to study diligently but to

enjoy the sin of sexual immorality. As a result, they become ungodly people.

The Sadducees' tragic question reminds us of 1 John 2:15-17. It says, "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world--the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does--comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever."

The Sadducees were tragic because they were spiritually blind, and they could not digest the tragic things of the world with spiritual meaning. On the other hand, those who have spiritual eyes are not tragic, even though they live in the midst of the tragic world. Milton was blinded when he was young. In the midst of his suffering, he thought of God. Then God opened his spiritual eyes. As a result, he could write "Paradise Lost," one of the most excellent classics. Paul, who suffered for the sake of Christ more than one can say, said in Romans 8:28, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." Those who have opened their spiritual eyes can see the deep meaning of human sufferings and agonies and can grow in the image of God, like Joseph in the Old Testament.

Third, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (34-40)

Jesus knew that the Sadducees had no spiritual eyes to see beyond

terrestrial phenomena. With great compassion Jesus taught them a Bible truth.

Look at verse 34. "Jesus replied, 'The people of this age marry and are given in marriage.'" Jesus knew what people of the world are mainly eager to do. To mankind, birth, marriage and death are the three main events of life. Men do their best to grow up to get married, and then die. Most women devote a great deal of time to solving their marriage problems. One lady spent 13 years of her life trying to solve her marriage problem and became a mental patient. Since Adam's Fall, women were cursed only to desire a husband day and night. The people of the world seem to be doing many great things. But they are doing the same things as the people in the time of Noah. They are eating and drinking; they marry and are given in marriage; they are cheating and being cheated. Those who are enslaved by money-making and marriage problem cannot see the glorious Risen Christ.

Look at verse 35. "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..." Through Jesus' death and resurrection God gave us a new birth into a living hope in the kingdom of God (1Pe 1:3,4). Through Jesus' death and resurrection God gave us the grace of forgiveness, eternal life, and the kingdom of God as our inheritance. In the kingdom of God, there will be no more marriage problems or broken family problems. There will be no procreation and no death. Those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will be like angels. They will look most beautiful. They will look like Jesus (1Co 15:49). They are happy

all the time. Here, Jesus is explaining the spiritual world through resurrection faith. Read verses 35,36.

The Sadducees, however, insisted that they could not believe the resurrection of the body because there was no precedent for it, still less any proof of it in the books of the Law. But Jesus gave them an answer from the book of Exodus. Look at verses 37,38. "But 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.' He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive." This phrase, "The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob," is an important Bible truth and is repeated over and over again in the Bible. It is repeated to emphasize that our God is the living God. It is repeated to emphasize that in the living God we are all alive. Thank God that we are all alive in the living God through his resurrection.

"The God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob" means that man is immortal. "The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob" means that God is not only the Father of Abraham, but also the Father of Isaac and of Jacob. It also means that before the living God, the three of them are all alive, not dead, even though they died a long time ago. Contrary to what the Sadducees thought, that death is the end of everything, we are born to be the immortal children of God through his Son's resurrection. "The God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob" means that our God is the God of the living. Horizontally, God is the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. Vertically, God is the God of Abraham and the God

of David and the God of Jesus Christ. God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. There is no death to those who believe in his Son's resurrection. But the Sadducees could not believe, because they loved money more than they loved God.

Fourth, "Whose Son is the Christ?" (41-47)

Look at verse 41. "Then Jesus said to them, 'How is it that they say the Christ is the Son of David?' If the Messiah was supposed to be a descendant of David, how could David refer to one of his own offspring as his Lord and Christ? Jesus' question was logically paradoxical, but spiritual, and it is based on the promise of God. They knew the Bible, so they understood what Jesus was saying. But in their stubbornness they could not believe. Jesus rebuked them for their spiritual blindness. Look at verses 45-47. "While all the people were listening, Jesus said to his disciples, '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. They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely.'" They do so many anointed comedies because they do not believe in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. We admit that the American Dream itself is good. We see that the people of the former U.S.S.R. and many other nations are eager to pursue the American Dream. But if we only pursue the American Dream, which is similar to Sadducism, we will be as tragic as the Sadducees.

When we believe the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we will be clothed

in the likeness of Jesus Christ, all beautiful and handsome. May God richly bless you to believe the resurrection of Jesus Christ.