

# He is the God of the Living

Luke 20:20-47

Key Verse: 20:37b, 38

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

As was suggested last week, Luke 20 is the chapter of questions and answers. Today Jesus fields two questions from opponents, and then poses one of his own. The religious leaders only wanted to catch Jesus in his words. But Jesus sincerely answers their questions with profound truths from the Bible. We get a glimpse of Bible study with Jesus. Let's go through these questions one by one.

## **I. IS IT RIGHT FOR US TO PAY TAXES TO CAESAR OR NOT? (20-26)**

Jesus' parable of the tenants had struck a chord with the powers that be in Jerusalem. Afraid to continue to confront him directly, but unwilling to concede defeat, they kept an eye on him. They sent spies, who pretended to be honest. Their strategy was to trick him into saying something that could be twisted as insurrection against Rome. Then they could simply hand him over to the Gentile governor, who would kill him as a traitor. Their motive was murder.

These spies acted sincere. They began with flattery: **“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.”** (21) Perhaps nearby people said amen. These spies were good at their job. But this was all pretext in order to ask a question that was a hot-button issue in the minds of all conscientious Jews of the day: **“Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?”** (22) This question may seem innocuous to modern day people like us; after all, living in Cook County we routinely pay the highest taxes in the country. Why was this question such a big deal? The Jews of Jesus' day would hear this question like this: “Is it right (the way of God in accordance with the truth) for us (the chosen and beloved people of God) to pay taxes (extortion money) to Caesar (an idol-worshipping monstrosity) or not?” This tax wasn't common, perhaps a yearly tax. Many Jews faced with such a choice didn't pay. They would rather risk it all and avoid paying. Was this the proper thing to do in order to properly honor God?

How do we balance and process our commitment, loyalty and participation in the society in which we live while maintaining our identity and citizenship in the Lord's kingdom? We feel stretched with responsibilities and commitments. It

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seems easy to brand all civic and secular duties as unimportant or optional. Jesus gives an authoritative answer. Look at verses 24-25. **“Show me a denarius. Whose portrait and inscription are on it?” ‘Caesar’s,’ they replied. He said to them, ‘Then give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.’”** Jesus’ answer shocked them into silence. What does his answer mean to us today?

## **In the first place, Jesus said, “Give.”**

In history, those who follow Jesus have been the first to give, both in material and time, to the needs of society. This hasn’t changed. When the tsunami hit Indonesia, killing hundreds of thousands and devastating that area, Jesus’ people were the first on the ground helping. Do you know who gave the most monetarily? It was not the United Nations, nor was it the US government, but individual people in the US, contributing through organizations such as World Vision. Rather than pulling away from our civic and social duties, Jesus teaches us to give. Sometimes we don’t agree with how the money will be used, or who is in power. Jesus teaches us that giving to Caesar is under the sovereignty of God. The authorities that exist have been established by God (Ro 13:1). Giving to Caesar is more than just taxes. Recently a group of high school children went to the Appalachian Mountains to assist the poor and needy. We should be the first to vote and to care about the society we live in. This is because it is not only Caesar’s; this world is God’s world, and he has entrusted it to us as stewards. Let’s trust God’s sovereignty and give, instead of looking to get.

## **In the second place, Jesus said, “...and to God what is God's.”**

Jesus teaches us the attitude toward God’s sovereignty. Just as the denarius bears the image of Caesar, every human being is created in the image of God. If we pay taxes to Caesar, how much more should we give offering to God! Not only so, but our very lives belong to him, and should be yielded to his purpose. This is real worship (Ro 12:1). Thank God for hundreds who dedicated themselves to God’s purpose this past SBC. Jesus did not teach that giving to Caesar and giving to God are mutually exclusive, but he put them together with the word, “and.” Students should study well to be the best, a blessing to our society, while also caring for one lost soul. Instead of seeing Caesar and God as a means to carry out our ends, Jesus teaches us to give generously and sacrificially as stewards, knowing that God is sovereign.

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## II. AT THE RESURRECTION, WHOSE WIFE WILL SHE BE? (27-38)

Jesus' teaching on the sovereignty of God, especially in a giving life, didn't make much sense to the Sadducees. They were intellectual, well-educated, and the religious leaders of their day. However, we are told they didn't believe in the resurrection, or in angels or spirits. They had a common-sense approach to life, believing in what they see. You might think of them as pragmatists, or perhaps early capitalists. But living this way, with no spiritual life, had a serious effect on their way of thinking and philosophy of life. Just look at their story. This woman, married and then widowed seven times, left with no children, finally dies. While the story seems preposterous and unbelievable, such tragedy does occur on this earth. To suggest that she would then have to be resurrected to live in that agony again was ridiculous at best and sadistic at worst. In their story, death was the best conclusion for this woman's life. What a tragic way to view existence! As Paul summarized in 1 Corinthians 15:32, the best way to live with such a worldview is to eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. In fact, if the Sadducees' view of the resurrection is true, who would want to live forever, perpetuating the torment of life on earth? Once is enough!

How would Jesus respond? Look at verses 34-36. **“Jesus replied, ‘The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. 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, and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God’s children, since they are children of the resurrection.’”** Jesus states that there are two ages or worlds. In the present age God has given marriage. Those who are married should say, “Thank you Jesus.” Those who are unmarried, have hope in God, and pray he may establish your family! God gave marriage so we may complete the task he has given us. As we live in this age in marriage, we grow in the knowledge and love of God. We learn sacrifice, service, respect and love. We are able to complete the task God has given us to be fruitful and increase in number. In this age, marriage is God's blessing and God's purpose.

But Jesus talks about another age, the glorious age of the resurrection. As Jesus taught, he will return someday as Christ and Lord. In that day, all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out (Jn 5:28). It will not be like this current age. What will be different? There will no longer be a need for marriage, as we will be married to Jesus. Relationship agonies will be solved, since our sinful nature will be gone. As we longed to love our husbands or wives in this age, and

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often failed, in that age we will all be God's children. We will love and be loved in the presence of God and our Lord Jesus. Jesus says in that age people will no longer die. We will have a glorious resurrection body that is imperishable. We will be free of human limitations of the weak flesh. The resurrection is not just a continuation of this life. Rather, this life is the preparation for the life to come.

The Sadducees also made an erroneous assumption that all people will take part in the age of the resurrection. Jesus says, **"...those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and the resurrection from the dead..."** Not everyone will be allowed to participate, only those who are worthy. In fact, due to man's sins, there is no hope for resurrection. The wages of sin is death (Ro 6:23), and all have sinned (Ro 3:23). This is why death reigned from the time of Adam until the time of Jesus. So who are those considered worthy? Jesus tells us they are God's children. Jesus taught Nicodemus that we will cannot see the kingdom of God unless we are born again, born of the Spirit. This new birth comes when we receive Jesus. John 1:12 reads, **"Yet to all who receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."** Jesus gave the right to become children of God through the completed work of the gospel. Jesus paid the penalty for our sin. God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Those who believe that God raised Jesus from the dead will be saved (Ro 10:9). This new birth as God's children has a profound effect. We have a living hope in the kingdom of God. The destination of our lives will be to live forever with Christ and his people. Let's believe the gospel and live with hope in the kingdom of God.

Jesus also pointed out the Sadducees' poor Bible study. 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."** Jesus quotes from Exodus 3:6. The Lord, in speaking to Moses, introduces himself, saying, **"I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."** These patriarchs had all died hundreds of years before Moses was born. But God was pleased to introduce himself as the present God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It could be that God is the God of the dead. But at that moment he was speaking to Moses. He is the God of the living. The Bible doesn't allude to life after death, or the spiritual world. The Bible teaches directly.

Our God is the God of the living. He is the living God, who called Abraham in his generation. He is the living God who heard Isaac's prayer in his generation, and who shepherded Jacob. He is the Lord who worked with Moses to deliver his

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people. Moses trembled before the living God. He knew God is the author of all life and the Creator of all that is. He is without beginning or end. How are we to know the living God? Does he have a Facebook page? If he did, why would he befriend me? He is holy, perfect, powerful and wonderful. In contrast, I am totally wicked, flawed, weak and mundane. Yet Almighty Creator God sent his one and only Son that we might know him. Through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, God proved that he loves sinful mankind. That is not all. God raised Jesus from the dead, and opened a way to him for all who believe. He has sent his Holy Spirit as our friend, comforter, and guide. As he was the living God of the patriarchs, he is our living God. He carries out his own good work in our lives. He is orchestrating our history and our lives for his glorious purpose.

Yesterday my family went to the cemetery where my dad's body is buried. I looked at my mom, kneeling at the gravestone, arranging the plants and mulch, and realized our God is the living God. She is 55, which is young for a widow. She told me over the summer she often wanted to get angry with God who took her beloved husband so early. Yet whenever she tried to do so, she would realize how God has been caring for her. Instead of anger, tears of thanksgiving came out, thanksgiving to a living God who knows the agony of widows, and how to comfort them. Jesus' words are trustworthy and true. Our God is the living God. He hears our prayers, convicts us of sin, leads us in his path, is faithful to his words of promise, and provides grace that overpowers our sin.

The end of verse 38 reads, **"...for to him, all are alive."** Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, my Dad, my grandfather; all are alive to God. While we stood on Dad's grave, he wasn't there. He is with God in heaven. His body remains as a seed, and one day we will be reunited. While we wait here, serving the Lord and awaiting his return, those who have gone before us are alive with God. Since God sees us and is our living shepherd, we can live in hope. We can give ourselves fully to the work of the Lord, growing in his image and relationship with him and his people. This is an eternal investment. While the world and the clever schemes of Satan deceive and attempt to suppress the truth, our living God will not be contained. Praise and thanks be to God in whom we have hope through the resurrection!

### **III. HOW IS IT THAT THEY SAY THE CHRIST IS THE SON OF DAVID? (39-47)**

The Sadducees were silenced, and no one asked any more questions. But a teacher of the law, so impressed by Jesus' Bible teaching, called out, **"Well said,**

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**teacher!”** He was happy to see his rivals the Sadducees corrected. But Jesus wasn't going to forge a political alliance with the teachers of the law. Instead, Jesus points out a glaring problem in their teaching regarding the Messiah. Rabbis and teachers taught about the coming Messiah as the Son of David. They were looking forward to a descendant of David who would retake the throne and herald in a new age of Jewish dominance. Their emphasis on the Christ as the Son of David overlooked something crucially important. Verses 42-44 read, **“David himself declares in the Book of Psalms: ‘The Lord said to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”’ David calls him ‘Lord.’ How then can he be his son?”** Just as he taught from Exodus to the Sadducees, Jesus now teaches from the Psalms. David, who wrote this Psalm, saw in divine inspiration the Lord, YHWH, speaking to his Lord, Adonai, the Messiah, about his impending ultimate victory. To call him Adonai is to acknowledge the divinity of the Messiah. Jesus teaches that the Messiah would be fully human and fully divine. His victory would be completed and carried out by God, not through wars and bloodshed. We know this victory was won on the cross and when God raised Jesus from the dead. But the teachers of the law didn't get it.

Having a poor view of the Messiah was not a light matter. Since they only viewed the Messiah as a human descendant of David they didn't recognize the many miracles and signs that proved Jesus as the Messiah. What was worse, their lifestyle was ignoble. Jesus warns his disciples, publicly, to beware of the teachers of the law. If our view of the Christ is earthbound, we too can easily become distracted by human recognition, positions, clothing, and worldly honor. Instead of living in hope of the kingdom to come, and carrying out the will of our Lord, we can get caught up in our own plans, desires and religious duties. The religious leaders did all these in the guise of righteousness and obedience to the law. But religious activity cannot solve the corruption of the heart. Although they looked good on the outside, their view of the Messiah could not change their inner selfishness. They devoured widow's houses and for a show made lengthy prayers. But God was not pleased. They would be punished most severely. Is your Christ able to save you, or is he merely an excuse to justify lazy, selfish behavior?

We need a view of Christ as fully human, as the one who came to understand us, and also as fully divine, the perfect sacrifice for our sins, and the one worthy to be our Lord. The disciples came to follow Jesus. Jesus didn't have flowing robes and wasn't greeted in the marketplaces and didn't have the best seats in synagogues. Rather, Jesus was a man of sorrows, familiar with suffering. He was a man of obedience to his Father. With an attitude of humility and

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compassion, Jesus lived as a shepherd of the people, deciding to serve, instead of to be served. This attitude of obedience led him to the cross, where he died to save us from our sins. The disciples didn't take advantage of that grace. Rather, they had the same attitude as Jesus, and lived as shepherds and Bible teachers. They longed more to be with Christ, than to enjoy the benefits of some temporary glory and prosperity on the earth. They had an attitude of unworthiness on their part to serve the gospel message. Last year as my dad was dying, I wondered how to handle his burial. His statement was, "Not better than my father." Peter is a good example, as seen through the pope. On the pope's throne, there is a symbol of an upside down cross. Legend suggests when Peter was finally going to be martyred by crucifixion he wanted to be hung upside down. He didn't consider himself worthy to suffer in the same way as Christ, but should die worse. So it is with all who know the true Christ of the Bible. Through the grace of Jesus' gospel, our relationship with God is restored. Let's decide, in response to the amazing grace of God, to live as Jesus did, serving as shepherds of our people and stewards of our world until Jesus comes again. You can do so practically by sharing the gospel with those in your context. Those who are attending the Chicago Harvest tonight for the evening of hope, please bring someone.

Today we were able to sit in on a Bible study with Jesus. Jesus taught us to live sacrificial lives under the grace of God's sovereignty. Jesus taught us from the Scriptures that God is the God of the living. Let's believe Jesus' teaching, and put our faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Let's praise the living God, and follow the lifestyle and leadership of his Christ. I pray to the living God that he may touch your life personally through his word today, that whatever separates you from him may be solved in the gospel of Jesus Christ, and each of us may be alive with the living God even today.