

“Jesus’ Examination Intensifies”

April 25, 2021

Luke 20:19-40

I. Introduction

For 3 long years, beginning with Jesus’ 1st clearing of the Temple in [John 2:13-20](#), Jesus had been causing nothing but grief for the leaders of Israel. In the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, after healing a man with a shriveled hand, [Luke 6:6-11](#) records that the Pharisees and teachers of the law “[were furious and began to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus.](#)” Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem accompanied by the cheering crowds and His driving the sellers & buyers from the Court of the Gentiles on the next day were enough to drive the leaders, i.e., the Sanhedrin, over the edge—something had to be done sooner rather than later with this rabble rouser from Nazareth.

The leaders knew they had to move carefully. The response of the people demonstrated Jesus’ unparalleled popularity. If they were going to kill Jesus, they first had the job of turning the people against Him. As we all know, it took just a few days for the leadership to manipulate a complete reversal of the people’s attitude toward Jesus. Some of the same crowd who welcomed Him as Messiah at the beginning of the week would cry out on Friday, “[Crucify Him! Crucify Him!](#)” ([Luke 23:21](#)). But that wasn’t all, to bring about Jesus’ death, the Jewish leaders needed to also persuade the Romans to execute Him. To accomplish both objectives, the Sanhedrin asked Him some trick questions—questions that didn’t appear to have a “right” answer. Questions of a nature like, “*Do you still beat your wife?*”

There was another reason for these questions, one they didn’t recognize. If Jesus was going to die as the Lamb of God, according to the guidelines for Passover lambs in [Exodus 12:3-6](#), it was necessary for the lamb—in this case, Jesus—to be examined. Through these questions Jesus was examined publicly, minutely by His enemies, and they could find no fault in Him. He was an acceptable sacrifice. God was able to use the evil intentions of the leaders to bring about His good and perfect will.

II. A Political Question

A. An Alliance of Enemies The examination began with a political question from an alliance of enemies. Luke wrote that “[they sent spies.](#)” [Mark 12:13](#) explains that these spies were “[some Pharisees and](#)

Herodians.” The Pharisees were the most religious of all the Jews and they advocated the rule of religious law and conduct in one’s daily life; the Herodians were the least religious and violated all that was sacred to the Pharisees. The Pharisees opposed the presence of Rome in Israel and any tax—especially the poll tax—that the Romans inflicted on Judea. The Herodians supported the family of Herod as well as the Romans who gave them the authority to rule. This was truly an alliance of enemies. Though the Pharisees despised the Herodians, they just knew they could be useful in their plot to eliminate Jesus. So, a temporary alliance was established to take care of their common enemy, Jesus the so-called Christ or Messiah.

B. The Question Hoping to use flattery to sway the people to their side and to set up Jesus, the spies began by addressing Jesus as “**Teacher,**” a term of honor reserved for respected rabbis. This must have been hard for them to say; the word must have stuck in their throats, but they didn’t stop there. They went on to praise Jesus for His integrity—His truthfulness. They said, “**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.**” Their point was that Jesus was so committed to the truth that He didn’t hedge or change His message based on human opinion or any negative consequences that may follow—unlike other people, especially politicians. Mark 12:14 summarized it this way, “**You aren’t swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth.**” All they said was true, but they still didn’t believe a word that Jesus said. On the other hand, the people listening would have been misled—to them it would seem like the leadership WAS on Jesus’ side and saw Jesus the same way that they did.

Thinking that they had the people and Jesus drawn into their trap of deception, the spies sprang their trap. Oozing with false sincerity and respect, they asked Him, “**Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?**” This was a loaded question. No matter how Jesus answered it, He was in trouble. If Jesus answered, “*No, the Jews should not pay the tax.*” The Herodians would report Him to the Romans, and He would be arrested for treason. If Jesus fooled them and endorsed the tax, He would lose the support of the zealous, religious masses who had just been cheering for Him—His popularity would plummet. A “*Yes*” answer would also cause doubts that He was really the Christ since the Messiah was expected to depose those who ruled over God’s people, i.e., the Romans.

C. The Answer As God, Jesus “knew what was in man” (John 2:25), He understood their hypocrisy and said, “**Show me a denarius.**” He understood that they hadn’t come looking for an answer to an honest question, they were trying to set Him up—they were trying to trap Him.

It may have taken them some time to find a denarius, since many Jews refused to carry them. A denarius was a silver coin minted under the authority of the emperor and equal to a day’s wages for a Roman soldier or a common Jewish laborer (Matthew 20:2). The Roman poll tax was paid with a silver denarius. On one side of the denarius was the image of the current emperor, Tiberius, with the inscription, “*Tiberius Caesar, August Son of the Divine Augustus.*” On the reverse side would be an image of Tiberius setting on a throne in priestly robes. Since the Jews considered such images idolatry and a violation of the 2nd commandment, many would have nothing to do with these coins.

Eventually, a coin was located, and it was brought to Jesus. He asked them, “**Whose image and inscription are on it?** ‘Caesar’s,’ they replied.” But instead of denouncing the coin and the false god Caesar and declaring that the true God forbids paying tribute to him, Jesus said, “**Then give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s.**” Caesar’s coins belonged to him. The strength of Rome’s military provided peace, security, and protection. The roads they built and the shipping networks they maintained allowed the flow of goods that added to everyone’s well-being. It was just and fair for them to expect the services they provided to be paid for by those who benefitted from them. Caesar had his sphere and not to pay him his due was to rob him.

Scripture teaches that government is an institution of God—turn to Romans 13:1-7. Peter wrote about this, too—turn to 1 Peter 2:13-17. Submitting to the government also involves praying for those in positions of authority—Paul wrote to Timothy in 1 Timothy 2:1-2, “**I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.**”

But Jesus didn’t stop with Caesar—of greater importance than giving Caesar his due is to give “**to God what is God’s.**” The Jewish leaders resisted giving Caesar what was due him, but far worse was their refusal to give God what was due Him, beginning with honoring His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (John 5:23). All people owe God obedience beginning with the greatest commandment of His Law, as

Mark 12:30 says, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.”

In the end, the Sanhedrin’s spies “were unable to trap him in what he had said there in public. And astonished by his answer, they became silent.” They may have been astonished by Jesus’ answer, but they had no intention of changing anything they did regarding Caesar or God or their nemesis, Jesus of Nazareth.

III. A Theological Question

A. The Sadducees’ Question Following the failed attack of the Pharisees and the Herodians, the Sadducees stepped up. This is the only place in Luke where the Sadducees are mentioned. This group accepted only the books of Moses, i.e., Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, as their religious authority. They were convinced that the rest of the Old Testament was merely a commentary on the books of Moses. Acts 23:8 adds that, “Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.”

Most of the Sadducees were priests and were wealthy. They considered themselves the “*religious aristocrats*” of Judaism and tended to look down on everyone else. Since they believed that life in this world is all there is, the Sadducees pursued power, wealth, position, and control. If obtaining those things required them to cooperate with their Roman overlords, they were more than willing to do so. For this reason, they were despised by all the other religious factions—the Pharisees, the Essenes, and the Zealots—and they were hated by the people. These Sadducees had come up with a question designed to make belief in the resurrection appear illogical and make Jesus appear foolish.

Like those before them, the Sadducees addressed Jesus respectfully as “*Teacher*,” attempting to continue the flattery and, hopefully, to get Him to let His guard down. They assumed that when Jesus was unable to answer their question, He would be revealed as an incompetent teacher and the people would abandon Him as unwise and clearly not the Messiah.

Their hypothetical question was based on the law of levirate marriage given in Deuteronomy 25:5-6. The purpose of levirate marriage, from which we get the term “*Kinsman Redeemer*,” was to keep

inheritances within a particular tribe. An example of levirate marriage in the Old Testament is Boaz's marriage to his relative Elimelech's widowed daughter-in-law, Ruth ([Ruth 2:1; 4:1-13](#)).

The Sadducees confronted Jesus with a hypothetical situation designed to make the Pharisees' and Jesus' literal view of life after death seem absurd: "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?" In other words, "*Is there really a resurrection?*" In their egotistical minds, this was a perfect question to trip up the hillbilly rabbi from Galilee. Then we see . . .

B. Jesus' Response The Sadducees had thought they were so smart, but Jesus quickly revealed their ignorance—[Matthew 22:29](#) records that Jesus began by saying, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God." The Sadducees had failed to understand that the Scriptures do teach the reality of the resurrection—[turn to Job 19:25-27](#). In [Daniel 12:2](#) Daniel is told, "Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt."

The Sadducees were also ignorant of the power of God—the God who spoke the universe and its inhabitants into existence, the same God who created the angels and gave them their nature is able to create new bodies that will be needed for new life in heaven—[turn to 1 Corinthians 15:39-44](#). Jesus said that in our new, improved resurrection bodies, we will be sexless like angels. Because of the eternal perfection of every person, there will be no need for marriage partners to complement and complete each other, no reason to establish a home and raise children to continue the race. This doesn't mean that a man and a woman who were together down here can't be together in heaven—we don't know. The Bible doesn't tell us a lot about relationships in heaven. Also, notice that Jesus didn't say that we would become angels or like angels in everything—Christians are higher than angels—[1 Corinthians 6:3](#) says that we will "judge angels."

Turning from the power of God back to the Scriptures, Jesus quoted from [Exodus 3:6](#). The Sadducees claimed to accept the authority of Moses, but they failed to notice that Moses taught about life after death. When God spoke to Moses from the burning bush in [Exodus 3:6](#), He said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." God didn't say, "I was the God of

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” BUT “I AM.” The patriarchs were alive when God spoke those words to Moses; therefore, Moses did teach that there is life after death.

Like those before them, the Sadducees were silenced. “Some of the teachers of the law responded, ‘Well said, teacher!’ And no one dared to ask him any more questions.”

IV. Conclusion

Jesus wasn’t suggesting that we divide our loyalties between God and government. Since “the authorities that exist have been established by God” (Rom. 13:1), we live as good citizens when we obey the authorities for the Lord’s sake. But when obedience to God conflicts with obedience to man, then we must put God first—our loyalty is to God alone. Turn to Acts 5:27-29. “We must obey God rather than men.” But we must do it in a manner that is honorable and loving. The counsel that Jeremiah gave to the Jewish exiles in Babylon in Jeremiah 29:4-7 is a good one for God’s “aliens and strangers” today, “Seek the peace and prosperity of the city.” We should be such good citizens that God will be glorified, and the unsaved will be attracted to the Gospel and want to become Christians.

Undoubtedly, there is going to be a resurrection in a “spiritual body” to an eternity in heaven—the Bible tells us so over and over. But, as Jesus told the Sadducees, it only for those “who are considered worthy,” i.e., for those who have made Jesus their Lord and Savior (Rom. 10:9). John 3:36 says, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them.” In John 11:25-26 Jesus told Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.” Death does not end a person’s existence. For those who have made Jesus their Lord and Savior, death is a transition to a grand and glorious eternity in heaven. But for those who reject Jesus, death is a transition to an eternity in hell where, there is “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 8:12). We need to share the Gospel while we still can. before it’s too late. Now is the day of salvation.