

Trick Questions

Luke Series #51

Luke 20:19-47

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Please open your Bible to the Gospel of Luke, chapter 20. It's about the authority of Jesus Christ, and His authority is being questioned. Thus, this chapter is full of questions.

We all have questions and we've all been stumped by questions. Some of our questions arise out of curiosity. I was pleased to discover that, back in 1926, someone wrote a book called Answers to Questions. Can you imagine being smart enough to write a book called Answers to Questions? "Whatever you have, I'll answer it."

There are some interesting questions in that book. For instance, maybe some of you young people have wondered this: do fish sleep? Anybody ever wanted to know the answer to the question, "Do fish sleep?" The answer is, "Fish do not sleep. At times, they remain quiet in pools and streams." That's helpful to know, isn't it?

Or maybe you've wondered, "Are pigs naturally dirty farm animals?" I like barbecued pork, so I'd like to know if they are naturally dirty. The answer is, "Pigs are the cleanest of animals if allowed to be so." How do you do that? How do you allow a pig to be clean?

Then there's this question that I have wondered about: "Is it true that a person dreaming of falling from a great height will die from shock if he does not awaken before he hits the ground?" I was somewhat relieved to read this answer: "Physicians say that such an idea is ridiculous, although this is not susceptible of absolute proof. For if any man has ever died from the shock of landing at the bottom of a dream, he has never had a chance to tell about it."

Because Jesus was such a masterful Teacher, people were always asking Him questions. Luke told us that, even from His youth when he was 12 years old, well-educated people like the teachers in the temple were amazed with His understanding and His answers. No one ever stumped Jesus. Even the devil was confounded by the devastating answers that Jesus gave to the temptations in the wilderness. Whether the questions were sincere or sinister, Jesus demonstrated unparalleled wisdom in the way He answered. No one ever spoke like this Man.

Now, here in Luke 20, Jesus is teaching in the temple, the place where the people found their identity as God's people. He's showing Himself to be the true Lord of that temple—the One

Who is sovereign there, the One in Whom people meet with the Living God, and the One Who has the authority, as Doug Dunton put it last week, to go in and move the furniture around in that temple. The religious leaders were furious and Luke 19:47 says, *“They were seeking to destroy Him.”*

They pummeled Him with trick questions, trying to trap Him. Every time, Jesus skillfully maneuvers His way around their trap and ends up dumbfounding His opponents with the wisdom of His answers to their questions. Jesus knows what’s in our hearts. He knows when our questions are sincere and He knows when our questions are designed to skirt around the real issues. We have in our passage two more trick questions—questions that are directed at Jesus—but we’ll see that Jesus gets the final word. Jesus always gets the final word; He will have the final word over you and over me. There is no question that Jesus cannot answer. In fact, to every honest question, Jesus Himself is the ultimate answer. That’s what we see here in Luke 20.

Trick Question #1: A Political Trap

Now, let’s look at the first trick question which is a political trap. It begins with the motive and intent of the people in Luke 20:19, which says, *“The scribes and the chief priests sought to lay hands on him at that very hour...”* That was their motive; they were trying to lay hands on Jesus. Why? *“... [F]or they perceived that he had told this parable [the parable of the wicked tenants] against them, but they feared the people.”*

They knew that Jesus had favor with the people, so what they did in verse 20 was very clever. It says, *“So they watched him and sent spies, who pretended to be sincere...”* That’s very important. They were coming at Him with hypocritical pretense. They’re trying to *“catch him in something he said, so as to deliver him up to the authority and jurisdiction of the governor.”*

So they started by flattering Him in verse 21, which says, *“So they asked him, ‘Teacher, we know that you speak and teach rightly, and show no partiality, but truly teach the way of God.’”* Everything they just said there about Jesus is true, but it’s sickening coming from their mouths. They were saying these words to try to butter Him up and trap Him.

They set their trap in verse 22: *“Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar, or not?”* They were thinking, “Now we’ve got Him.” If He said, “No, don’t pay taxes to Caesar,” the Roman government would accuse Him of treason. The Jewish leaders didn’t have the authority to execute the death penalty, but the Roman government did. So they were trying to hand Him over to the Romans with this trap.

If Jesus said, “Yes, it is lawful to pay taxes to Caesar,” that could alienate Him from His Jewish followers, many of whom were fed up with the Roman government and its tyrannical rule. They were very frustrated and resented the taxes being issued from Rome. So if Jesus says, “No,” He’s in trouble, and if He says, “Yes,” He’s in trouble. They thought, “Wow, we have really gotten Him this time.”

But in verse 23, Jesus showed that He had complete mastery over the situation. Jesus “*perceived their craftiness.*” He knew what was in their hearts. He knew they were clever, sly and crafty; trying to trap Him. However, unlike Eve in the Garden of Eden, Jesus was not beguiled by these serpents. Effortless and with ease, Jesus rose above their trap, leaving them speechless.

He said to them in verse 24, “*Show me a denarius [a coin].*” They showed it to Him and He asked the question, “*Whose likeness and inscription does it have?*” In other words, whose head is on that coin? “*They said, ‘Caesar’s.’*”

There’s an old adage that asks, “Why does a Rabbi so often answer a question with a question?” Answer: “Why not?” Jesus followed that rabbinic advice here. He said to them in verse 24, “*Whose likeness and inscription does it have? They said, ‘Caesar’s.’*” And He brilliantly gave an answer that stumped them, saying, “*Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.*”

With that brilliant answer, Jesus managed to do two things. First, He gave a magnificent summary of the God-fearing attitude toward the relationship between religion and politics. Those are two subjects you’re not supposed to discuss in public, especially not at the same time. Jesus gave us the way God-fearing people view religion and politics.

He said, “Render to Caesar what belongs to Caesar.” Notice, Jesus didn’t say, “Give to Caesar,” as if we’re giving the government a gift when we pay our taxes. No, He said, “Render.” Paying your taxes to the government is a matter of rendering what you owe. It’s a debt. We may not like it or agree with the way the government decides to assess taxes, but we have a duty to honor the government God has sovereignly ordained over us. That’s the bottom line.

Scripture is clear in Romans 13 that the authorities are ordained by God, so we, as Christ-followers, are supposed to be law-abiding, tax-paying citizens. Romans 13:7 says, “*Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed...*”

I was reading 1 Peter this week, because we’re planning to go to that letter during the summer months. I was impressed with how Peter says to people living under this wicked Roman government, “Honor the emperor. Honor him.”

Jesus showed us what the relationship between religion and politics is, and we have a duty to honor the government. But, secondly, He put politics in its proper perspective with this answer. He moved from the lesser—giving to Caesar what belongs to Caesar—to that which is infinitely greater, by saying, “And render to God what belongs to God.”

Roman people who heard this answer may not have gotten what Jesus was saying here right away, but a good Jew who knew his Old Testament would be thinking right away, “Okay, what bears the image and inscription of God? If a Roman coin bears the inscription of Caesar, what bears the image of God?” A good Jew would be thinking of Genesis 1:26-27, where God said, “*Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.’ ... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*”

They realized, “My life, my existence, bears the inscription of God. It bears the image of God.” So what belongs to God? Everything! All of me. It all belongs to Him. Everything—including Caesar, the President of the United States and all the governments of the world—ultimately belongs to God. So whatever belongs to Caesar ultimately belongs to God.

That’s an important word for us to remember, because we often get bent out of shape about politics. We become preoccupied, fretful, angry and sometimes even rebellious about the authorities God has ordained over us. Politics has its place, but, remember, God is sovereign over every government and every individual life. God is calling us to render our very lives as a living sacrifice to Him.

Yes, pay your taxes and give what is owed to the government, but remember life is about God. You were created by Him and for His glory. He deserves your wholehearted affection, obedience and devotion. You bear His image and belong to Him. As Psalm 100:3 says, “*It is he who made us, and we are his. We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.*”

Jesus is asserting His crown rights as our Redeemer. All that we are and have is His right to claim as an offering, and He’s going to the cross to claim us as His own. Can “love so amazing, so divine” demand anything less than “my life, my soul, my all”?

By answering with these words, Jesus convicts the scribes, the Pharisees and the chief priests, because they were so much more concerned about the filthy money of Caesar’s economy than they were about consecrating their lives in service to God. We see that they were convicted in verse 26 because they have nothing more to say. In this case, silence is golden. Verse 26 says, “*And they were not able in the presence of the people to catch him in what he said, but marveling at his answer they became silent.*”

They were standing in the presence of One Who is greater than Solomon and in Whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden, and they had to put their hands over their mouths. Silence. We'll come to that again in a few minutes.

Trick Question #2: A Theological Trap

Let's move to their theological trap. Let's see how it's set up by the Sadducees, another party of Jewish leaders who believed in the five books of Moses—Genesis through Deuteronomy—but denied the reality of resurrection and life after death. The Sadducees often denied things that are supernatural; they were more rationalistic in their approach to religion.

The Sadducees came to Him in verses 27-33, which says,

There came to him some Sadducees, those who deny that there is a resurrection, and they asked him a question, saying, "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. Now there were seven brothers. The first took a wife, and died without children. And the second and the third took her, and likewise all seven left no children and died. Afterward the woman also died. In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had her as wife."

Now, I know you woke up this morning wondering what the answer to that question would be. Frankly, they say there is no such thing as a stupid question, but reading this one I wonder. It is based on the Levirate laws of the Old Testament. The word *levir* means "brother-in-law." You can read about this in Deuteronomy 25:5, which says that if a man dies and leaves his widow childless, it is the duty of that man's brother to marry the widow and take care of her and provide offspring for her.

So the Sadducees thought, "Aha! We've really got Him on this one." Because there's no way Moses's teachings on marriage could square with this idea of the resurrection. So they put together this ridiculous scenario: a man dies and leaves a widow; his brother marries the widow and then he dies. All right, maybe that would happen. But then a third brother marries the widow and he dies. This is starting to look fishy. Then a fourth brother marries the widow and he dies. Finally, a fifth brother comes, and you can just imagine him saying, "Over my dead body am I going to marry this woman!"

I mean, there's no way such a scenario would even be realistic. But they thought they could cook up this idea because they were frivolous, flippant and irreverent men, trying to trap Jesus. No wonder Jesus says in Matthew 16:6, "Beware of the leaven of the Sadducees. Beware of the influence of people like this, who use God's Word and twist truth in such a way."

However, Jesus is not thrown off-guard by their absurdity. Again, he seizes this absurd example as an opportunity to teach truth—brilliant and wonderful truth. Look, first of all, at verses 34 through 36:

And Jesus said to them, “The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage, for they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.”

What was Jesus saying here? He was saying, “Sadducees, first of all, you do not understand the significance, the purpose, of God’s design for marriage. You’ve missed the point.” Marriage is a great gift from God. It’s designed to help us in this life—to serve God, grow in our sanctification, cultivate companionship and produce offspring. But marriage is a picture—it’s a parable—of an infinitely greater reality. The relationship of God with His people and the relationship of Christ and His church—that’s the ultimate reality. So God said, “I can illustrate for the world to see what my relationship to My people is like and will be like for all eternity by creating marriage as a picture of this glorious, eternal reality.”

So marriage isn’t ultimately about marriage. Marriage isn’t final. It’s a great gift from God to serve people in this age, but Jesus said, “God is going to create an entirely new order of life in the age to come, and marriage as we know it will no longer be needed in that age.”

Look at Jesus’s words in verse 36. One of the reasons marriage will no longer be needed in the next age is because people cannot die anymore. Now, that is an amazing truth that ought to give us comfort and hope as we worship. There is coming an age that is going to be inaugurated by the Son of God and His return when those who live in it cannot die anymore. Isn’t it wonderful to know that a new order of things is coming when death has already been abolished through the death of Christ on the cross and His resurrection? That reality is going to pervade the whole atmosphere in the coming age. Praise God for that! “They cannot die anymore,” Jesus says, “because they’re equal to angels.”

Don’t take that phrase and think Jesus is saying that we become angels, like in “It’s a Wonderful Life.” Remember when the bell rings and an angel gets its wings and all that kind of mythology? That’s not what Jesus was saying. He was just saying that you’re on equal par with the angels because you’re sons of God. You are sons of the resurrection, living in a world where there is no more death.

One of the chief, earthly purposes of marriage is the procreation of children which is necessary for the on-going life of the human race. But that will no longer be needed in a world

where people can't die. Look back at verse 35 and see where Jesus said that this reality is given to *"those who are considered worthy to attain to that age."*

How do we get worthy to attain to that age? Through a Savior Who is going to a cross to die for the sins of those who trust in Him, so that we can be cleansed from our guilt and shame and clothed in His righteousness. This is why the Apostle Paul says in Philippians 3:8-11, "I want to know Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Jesus Christ. I want to know Him in the fellowship of His sufferings and in the power of His resurrection, so that, by any means possible, I may attain the resurrection from the dead."

This worthiness to enter into this new age is a gift that Jesus is going to obtain for those who put their faith in Him, and it's a glorious thing. When we enter into that age, by God's grace, the relationship of Christ and His church and the union of Christ and His church will have reached its consummation. And marriage, with all its exhilarating joys and rich blessings, will seem like a shadow compared to the reality of the fullness of our union with Christ.

So when I read these verses, I know it's good news, but I have to admit I sometimes struggle with it, too—to think that there is coming an age when marriage as I know it is going to be subsumed under something else. In my life, the biggest heartache I can remember was when I thought that I was going to lose my wife and the wonderful relationship that we have. I don't want this marriage to end. I love marriage!

But there is a threefold comfort in these words. First, there's comfort for those who are not married. You are not second class citizens in this church or in the church of Jesus Christ. The church doesn't always do a good job showing that. I think it's right for us to put an emphasis on nurturing godly marriages, but sometimes we can give the impression that, if you're not married, you're somehow not fully qualified to serve or your status is lower. But Jesus is saying here that what defines our identity in His church is not our marital status; it's our union with Him. What's ultimate is our identity in Christ and our union with Christ. So that should bring comfort to those who are not married.

This truth should also bring comfort to those who right now are not happily married. You may be married but right now it's difficult. These verses remind us that marriage is not the ultimate joy. Living as sons and daughters of God in the resurrection world is the ultimate joy. An unhappy marriage, though presently miserable, is momentary compared to the infinite glories that await those who have put their hope in Christ.

This passage thoroughly brings comfort for those of us who, by the grace of God, are happily married. Do not imagine that because there will be no marriage in heaven your situation then will be less happy than it is now. Listen to these words from a Scottish pastor who says,

But suppose marriage, at its sweetest and best and highest, were simply a pointer, a shadow, a slight token of something infinitely more grand and glorious, beyond all our imagining and almost beyond belief? A relationship with God which is unspeakable in its intensity, splendor and rapture? After all, marriage was instituted as a help toward closer fellowship with the Lord; and this is the very thing that will not be needed in heaven, where we shall see Him face to face, and will require nothing to bring us nearer!

So take the most wonderful marriage that has ever existed on the face of this earth and, in Christ, that marriage is but a faint shadow of an infinitely greater reality. C.S. Lewis, who knew a short marriage that was intensely full of happiness before he lost his wife to cancer, says that trying to compare the joys of an intimate, close marriage with what is coming in heaven would be like trying to talk to a five-year-old boy about marriage. You tell him, “You know, marriage is so wonderful—the intimacy and the warmth, the way you can understand and know each other, and the beauty of it all.” You’re talking to the five-year-old, and he’s just starting to yawn, then he says, “Can I have an ice cream cone?” His highest joys at age five are things like ice cream and chocolate. He doesn’t have categories to understand what marriage could be like. But give him 15-20 years, then describe for him the joys and beauty of marriage, by then, perhaps, he will have the capacity to imagine the possibilities and desire it.

The union of Christ and His people in the age of resurrection is beyond our capacity to fathom right now. But you can be sure of this: there won’t be anything about life in the resurrection that will seem disappointing or anticlimactic. You won’t find yourself wishing you could go backwards to something you had here. Everything joyful, everything blessed and everything beautiful that you enjoyed here will not disappear; it will be subsumed and swallowed up in a reality that is so much greater that it will just serve to remind you of the wonder of Who God is and all that He is for His people. Jesus taught that in His answer to that question.

Then in verses 37 and 38, He showed these Sadducees that they didn’t know their Scriptures nearly as well as they thought they did. They were quoting the Levirate laws from Deuteronomy. Jesus said, “You believe in the law of Moses? Okay, how about Exodus? You like that book?”

Look at what He did in verse 37. It says, *“But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the bush...”* It’s as if Jesus was asking, “Did you Sadducees read that passage at the burning bush? What did God say there? Have you heard the Word? Have you listened to it?”

“... [H]e calls the Lord the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” Do you know your verb tenses? He didn’t say, “I was their God.” He said, “I am the God of Abraham. I am the God of Isaac. I am the God of Jacob.”

Verse 38 says, *“Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him.”* Abraham is alive. Isaac is alive. Jacob is alive. Fill in the name of your loved one who died in Christ. God is his God. God is her God. And she is alive today in His presence. Jesus assures us that the very testimony of Scripture confirms the reality of the resurrection and the life of the world to come. They were wrong because they didn’t know their own Scripture, nor did they understand the power of God.

In verses 39 and 40, we see that they were caught in their own trap. I love what it says here in verse 39: *“Then some of the scribes answered, ‘Teacher, you have spoken well.’ For they no longer dared to ask him any question.”*

A 17th century English poet, Richard Crawshaw, wrote:

“’Twas time to hold their peace when they
Had ne’er another word to say:
Yet is their silence unto thee,
The full sound of Thy victory: ...
To hold their peace is all the ways
These wretches have to speak thy praise.”

Their silence, confounded by the One in Whom all wisdom is hidden, speaks forth the praise of Him Who, in the end, will have total victory over all unbelief, over all skepticism and over all cynicism. In the end, there won’t be an honest question in the universe to which Jesus does not have a brilliant answer.

Right now, we live in the short window of time when it’s possible to raise your fist and argue with God, accuse God and raise questions before God that you think prove that somehow you’re more clever than He. However, a time is coming, Scripture says in Romans 3:19, when every mouth will be shut and the whole world will be held accountable to God. Silence forever. God has the final word.

What He wants to know more than anything is how we answer this question: “Who do you say that I am?” That’s what Jesus is driving at in verses 41-44. The text reads, *“But he said to them, ‘How can they say that the Christ is David’s son? For David himself says in the Book*

of Psalms, “The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.”” David thus calls him Lord, so how is he his son?”

Jesus is reminding us that, when we run out of questions, He still has questions for us. Are you ready for Jesus’ question of you? There’s one thing Jesus wants to know about you that will determine everything else about you: What do you think of Jesus?

He went to Psalm 110, a psalm that they knew so well, but there is a riddle in it. The scribes and Pharisees couldn’t answer it. How could the Messiah be David’s son, yet David himself calls him “Lord”? Jesus was not disagreeing that the Messiah is the son of David, but He was arguing from Scripture that the Messiah is more than just the son of David. He is the Son of God; He is fully man but He is fully God. He is, as the Apostle Paul says in Romans 1:3-4, the Son *“who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord...”*

They had been reading this Bible for a long time, but they had been missing the key at the heart of it: it all points to this One Who is fully God and fully man. They didn’t know Him. Jesus gets the final question.

This brings us to the question, have you ever been rendered speechless in the presence of a holy God? Right now, we don’t have the answers to every question. We should endeavor to find answers to honest questions, but Jesus is ultimately the answer. Our goal is to point people to Him.

Many questions we ask are not honest. They arise out of skepticism, cynicism, unbelief, pride and prejudice. Jesus knows how to puncture that pride. He knows how to silence pretentious arguments that are raised up against the knowledge of Him. He did that here. No one dared to ask Him any more questions. They were silent.

Have you ever become silent? It’s hard to do in our culture. It’s more possible to always be chattering or sending text messages back and forth, even in church. To never be still. To never offer to God the silence of the submissive heart. To be always talking, never listening. Always opining, never pondering. Always spouting off, never standing in awe of God.

The Bible says, *“But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him”* (Habakkuk 2:20). It is far better to do that now, and, in the silence of your soul, you can hear the saving voice of a Savior coming to you through His Word, saying, “Repent of your sin. Trust in Me. Believe in Me. I will save you.”

It is far better to be silent now than to wait for that dreadful day when every mouth will be silenced before the Judge. If anyone in Scripture ever had a right to argue with God, it was

Job. He had many questions he brought before God, but then God had some questions for Job, too. Do you remember what Job did after God asked His questions? He said, “*Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth.*” Speechless! Silent.

I’ve had the joy over the last 11 years of going about once a month to Camcraft, a company in Hanover Park, to teach God’s Word to people who want to learn more about Him. There is a couple there who are so dear—Ralph and Camille—who are about 70 now. They are both Italian, very expressive and full of love and kisses. I was so excited this past Tuesday when they told me with joy, “We’re going to be baptized at our church next week!” At the baptism, they’ve been asked to pin on their shirt one word that describes how they feel. Camille was saying, “One word? How am I going to put it in one word? There’s so much to say!” I said, “Camille, how about ‘speechless?’” She said, “That would never fit me.”

Speechless. That describes the proper response to the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, Who is going to the cross to die for our sins. Speechless. Martyn Lloyd-Jones says this is how you know you have found a true Christian. A true Christian is a man whose mouth has been shut. Jones says,

You are not a Christian unless you have been made speechless! How do you know whether you are a Christian or not? It is that you “stop talking.” The trouble with the non-Christian is that he goes on talking... People need to have their mouths shut, “stopped.” They are forever talking about God, and criticizing God, pontificating about what God should or should not do, and asking, “Why does God allow this and that?” You do not begin to be a Christian until your mouth is shut, is stopped, and you are speechless and have nothing to say.

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