

Three Tests

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Preacher: Colin Dow

[0:00] We're going to read now from the Bible in Luke chapter 20. Luke's a very long book, but we're! We're working our way through Luke. It started actually in 2021. But it's a very long book.

Luke, there's a lot to learn. But in Luke chapter 20 and verse 19, page number 879.

The scribes and the chief priests sought to lay hands on him at that very hour, for they perceived that he had told this parable against them, but they feared the people. So they watched him and sent spies who pretended to be sincere that they might catch him in something he said, so I'll deliver him up to the authority and jurisdiction of the governor. So they asked him, Teacher, we know that you speak and teach rightly and show no partiality, but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar or not? But he perceived their craftiness and said to them, Show me a denarius. A denarius was a Roman coin. Whose likeness and inscription does it have? They said, Caesar's. He said to them, Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's. And they were not able in the presence of the people to catch him what he said. But marveling at his answer, they became silent. There came to him some Sadducees, those who denied 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 a wife. 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. But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed in the passage about the bush, what he calls the Lord, the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. Now he's not the God of the dead, but of the living, for we all live to him. Then some of the scribes answered, Teacher, you have spoken well, for they no longer dared ask him any questions. 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, this is Psalm 110, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool.

[3:16] David thus calls him Lord, so how is he his son? Amen. May God bless that reading. Heavenly Father, we bow in your presence. May your word be our rule, your spirit our teacher, and your greater glory, our supreme concern, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

They used to say about students in the Free Church College, our Denominational Seminary in Edinburgh, that we were some of the most tested students in the whole world. I once calculated that we had to sit upwards of 14 written exams every year, as well as other written and oral assessments.

As I look back, I wonder how any of us managed to pass any of them. I do hope our Free Church students don't have quite so many tests to pass these days. I don't know, really know many students in university who really enjoy exams. Now, I don't guess Jesus enjoyed being tested any more than any of us, but never mind 14 tests. He had to endure a lifelong barrage of tests, and not from those who wanted him to pass, but from those who wanted him to fail, those who wanted to trip him up so that they could report him to the higher authorities and condemn him.

It doesn't exactly make for a life of calm if at every stage you know that there are people out to get you. Well, that's where we are in Luke chapter 20 verses 19 through 44.

The religious leaders, knowing that they can't snatch Jesus because the people would rise up in Jesus' defense, hire witless stooges who, though they appear to be sincere, are spies.

[5:15] Now, many Christians in countries hostile to Christianity today face the same problem. Government agents, who appear to be sincere, infiltrate churches with a view to closing them down and arresting Christians. So, how wise Christians in countries like Iran and China and Saudi Arabia have to be? This is a remarkably contemporary passage. A repressive government, unable to defeat the gospel openly, resorts to shadowy practices and threats.

Well, our passage consists of three tests, two set by Jesus' enemies and one set by Jesus himself. You see, far from being overawed by his opponents, Jesus destroys their arguments and he silences them.

And these three tests are about money, about marriage, and about messiahship. The question we must ask ourselves is this, would we pass these tests? Would we pass these tests?

So, first of all then, the first test is about money from verse 19 through 26. Money. Flattery is described by the dictionary as insincere or excessive praise given to further one's own interests. We flatter someone not to make them feel good about themselves, but because we think there's something in it for us. So, the religious leaders of Israel sent spies to flatter Jesus. Teacher, we know that you speak and teach rightly and show no partiality, but truly teach the way of God. Now, they didn't believe that for one second. It was all a carefully devised plan to make them appear that they were sincere so they could infiltrate. But did they really think they could pull the wool over the eyes of the Jesus who knows the hearts of all men and, as we read in verse 23, perceive their craftiness. Foolish men. Their flattery is with a view to testing Jesus. Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar or not? Is it lawful for us to pay our taxes to the Romans or not? And it's a dilemma question. Jesus can't win. If He says, no, not right to pay taxes to the Romans, the Jews listening to him in the temple that day might have applauded His answer because no one likes paying taxes, especially not to the occupying Romans, but the spies would return to their masters who would report to the Roman governor that Jesus was speaking out against them. So, if Jesus said, no, He'd get in trouble with the Romans. Well, if Jesus said, yes, well, the Romans would salute His loyalty to them, but the Jews would turn against Him. He'd be seen as being disloyal to the Jewish state, and the religious authorities could use Jesus' answer to turn the people against Him, those people who, up until now, had been hanging on every word Jesus said. These spies had carefully planned their question.

[8:43] Jesus couldn't say yes or no without getting into trouble. Now, when I'm asked a question I don't know the answer to, I usually say, let me think about it. That's, if you ask me a question and I say, let me think about it, it means, I don't know. But Jesus didn't have that option. He's in the temple in Jerusalem. He doesn't have the luxury of time to think through His answer. But with deep spiritual genius, Jesus responds by asking them to produce a denarius, a Roman coin, the tax the Romans demanded.

You often find that metal detectorists in England find denarius in the soil. Even though righteous Jews hated paying this tax, not just because it was to the Romans, but because the coin carried on it the image of a man, the emperor, which they thought broke the commandment not to make a graven image, they did as they were told. They pulled out a denarius. Well, Jesus then asks them the question, whose likeness and inscription does this coin have? To which they answer, Caesar's. Just like any coins you have in your pocket carry an image of King Charles. In an instant, Jesus turns to the tables, then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, or pay to Caesar that which is Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.

Even though I've entitled this point money, it's not really got anything to do with money at all. It's got to do with where our royalties lie. They ask him, is it lawful to give? To which he replies, render or pay. Give implies a voluntary contribution. Render or pay involves duty. Jesus is saying, it is your duty to give to Caesar those things over which he has authority. So, it's our duty as citizens to honor those in authority over us, to obey the king, to pay for those things government do for us, whether

we like what they do for us or whether we do not. As long as those things do not directly contradict the Bible, it's our duty to play our role in civil society, rendering to Caesar those things that are Caesar's. You'll tend to find that Christians make the best citizens because they take this seriously, render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's. I don't want to get into politics here. That's a different topic. What's of primary interest, however, is what Jesus says next.

Render to God the things that are God's. It is our duty and our responsibility to render to God those things which are His.

[11:49] Now, Jesus is saying these things, remember, in the temple, and He, Jesus, is the Son of God. Rather than being caught in the horns of a dilemma, Jesus has trapped these spies. To what extent are they rendering to God the things which belong to God by trying to destroy, trap, and entice God's Son?

To what extent are they worshiping, praising, and honoring God at His temple, but at the same time condemning God's Holy Son? This is not a question of no relevance. This is a personal challenge concerning our relationship to a person, Jesus Christ. By following Jesus, by believing in Him, living for Him, and trusting in Him, we are rendering to God the things which belong to God. We are fulfilling our duty toward God.

We may be the finest, most upstanding citizens of our nation, but unless we are rendering to God the things which belong to God, namely honoring, praising, worshiping, and trusting in His Son, Jesus Christ, as our Savior and Lord, we are falling short of our duties as human beings made in the image of God. Now, of course, you'd expect me to call upon you to respect and honor God, our nation, and I do with all my heart, but what I'm really calling upon you to do is to believe and follow Jesus Christ as Lord. While the spies understood only too well what Jesus had said, we read that they marveled at His answer and fell silent. Rather than trapping Jesus, He trapped them. If we should try to trap Jesus in philosophical or theological arguments, we need to be aware He will always turn the tables on us and trap us instead. The best thing to do is to take the second half of Jesus' command here seriously. Render to God the things that are God's, and today, once for all, pay what you owe God by putting your faith and your trust in Jesus' Son. Money, that's the first test.

[14:19] Second test from verse 27 through 40, marriage, marriage. There came to Him some Sadducees. Now, Sadducees were the ruling rich class of political and religious leadership in Israel of the day.

They didn't like the Pharisees very much, but it's amazing how those two groups allied themselves against Jesus. Strange bedfellows going up against Christ. The Sadducees were religious liberals. They didn't believe in the resurrection of the dead. They didn't believe in most of the teachings of the Old Testament. They were entirely opposed to Jesus. They, as much as the other religious leaders of the day, were trying to trap Jesus. So, they asked Him a lengthy question regarding the traditions of marriage. We don't need to repeat the whole question. It revolves around the perpetuation of a family name. If a man died, it was his brother's responsibility to marry his widow, to keep the family name alive, to keep the family name alive, and so on and so forth. The question then is, in the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For seven had her as wife. But just like in the previous point, the question is not so much about money as it is about loyalty. In this question, it's not about marriage as much as it is about the resurrection. The Sadducees weren't interested in what Jesus would tell them about marriage. They'd spun this story to show just how ridiculous in their minds the idea of a resurrection was. They wanted to know how Jesus would answer. They wanted to trip him up, what he would say. Would he say, well, the first husband, obviously. That's whose husband, though I shall have in heaven, or the seventh husband. After all, he was married to our last.

But Jesus sidesteps their trap, and he spoke not to the details of their question, but to the notion of God himself. In one small passage, he rips up all their theology books.

This passage deserves a far longer treatment than I've got time to give it today. Pastorally, this is an issue many husbands and wives ponder. So, husbands and wives spend their whole lives loving one another, being with one another.

[16:57] Will there be no such mutual love between them in heaven? After all, Jesus says, those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection of the dead will neither marry nor be given marriage.

That's a topic for another day. Interesting topic. We should look into it. Enough to say that I don't think in this passage Jesus is addressing marriage in heaven per se, as much as he is the reality of our relationship to God today.

If you're asking the question, will I love Kathmar in heaven, and will she love me? The answer is a resounding yes. Of course we will.

Don't be so silly. Again, I don't want to go too deeply into the theology of this passage and what it tells us about the resurrection life of Christians. Jesus says of us that we'll be equal to the angels. Imagine that. Equal to the angels. We'll be sons of God, sons of the resurrection. We shall not die anymore. Isn't that amazing? But what's of primary importance to us is the way Jesus refers to the Old Testament and to the first five books of the Bible, Genesis through Deuteronomy, which alone were the books of the Bible that the Sadducees were willing to accept as authoritative and inspired by God.

[18:21] Because the first five books of the Bible do not specifically teach a doctrine of resurrection, this enabled the Sadducees to deny that there'd be a resurrection at all.

So it's the first five books of the Bible, the only books of the Bible the Sadducees believed were from God, Jesus turned by saying, in verse 37, Moses showed.

Moses, of course, was the author of the first five books of the Bible, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. Okay? Jesus is referring to Exodus chapter 3, a passage that many of us might know well, where God, rather, reveals Himself to Moses in a burning bush, burning bush, and refers to Himself as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.

And Jesus says, God cannot be the God of people who were dead. He can only be their God if they are alive. And Jesus' implication here is that though Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob's physical existence is at an end, they continue to live.

God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, even though they are physically dead. Not just was while they were still alive.

[19:46] Jesus concludes. He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. So by definition, therefore, from Jesus' teaching, although a person's physical existence has come to an end, they live on.

They may be dead to us, but to God, they're still alive. The apostle Paul reinforces this argument in Romans 8, verse 38 through 39, in such powerful, wonderful words, when he says, I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in creation, remember what he said, neither death, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that's in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Our belief in the resurrection doesn't just rely upon the clear teaching of the Bible, but more importantly, the infinite, undefeatable love of God for us.

Even physical death, which one day will separate me from my wife, will not separate us from the love of God for us in Jesus Christ our Lord, for we shall live on.

In him. It's the nature of God, his infinite love for us, which secures our resurrection, our new life with God after we die here in this world.

[21:19] So to deny the resurrection, Jesus is saying to the Sadducees, is to deny the God who revealed himself to Moses. The Sadducees are silenced, but the scribes, oh, they aligned themselves with the Pharisees.

They liked what Jesus said. Teacher, you've spoken well, they said. But it's the last few words Jesus said in verse 38, which challenge us all, for all live to him.

For all live to God. Dead or alive, we live to God. This is an indisputable fact. We live to God. Christian and non-Christian, God knows us.

The question for us is this, does God live to us? That's where the roulette wheel has landed for the Sadducees.

It's all very well to ask abstract questions about the resurrection, but the most important question confronting every human being is not, does God know me?

[22:27] Because the answer is yes. But do I know God? That's the challenge facing us all. Sadducees, Pharisees included.

Do I know God? Is he alive to me? Is God the center of my life such that he sits upon the throne of my mind and my heart as King and Lord?

Is he? Yeah, one thing about this question, of course, from the Sadducees, that in just a few days from asking this question, Jesus is going to prove once for all that resurrection is real and that he himself will rise from the dead and triumphantly proclaim his victory over death.

So again, we want to conclude this point by asking, not so much does God know me. Yes, of course God knows you. But do you know God?

Are you a son of the resurrection who by faith in Jesus will rise on that last day to never dying life with him? Marriage. Well, lastly and briefly, Messiahship from verse 41 through 44.

[23:42] Messiah. Well, so far, Jesus has silenced his opponents, but now he asks a question of his own. How can they say that the Christ is David's son?

For David himself says in the book of Psalms, Psalm 110 this is, the Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool. David thus calls him Lord, so how can he be his son?

There's an awful lot going on in this passage. We need to be careful how we unpack its central teaching. We're using the terms here, Messiah and Christ, interchangeably.

Messiah is a Hebrew word, an Old Testament word, but it means the same as the New Testament word, Christ. Messiah means the same as Christ. What Jesus is attacking here is the prevalent Jewish conception of Messiahship, what it meant for Jesus to be the Christ.

In the Israel of Jesus day, one of the many ways in which people described the Messiah was the son of David. For example, in Luke 18.38, the blind man shouts out, Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me.

[24:56] But how can the Christ, the Messiah, be the son of David when in Psalm 110, which is where Jesus is quoting from here, David calls the Messiah my Lord.

How can he be David's son if he's David's Lord? In Psalm 110, which was written 700, 800 years before this, King David is placing the Messiah, the Christ, on the same level as God.

How can a man's son, his descendant, even if that man should be as great as King David, be on the same level as God?

Flesh gives birth to flesh. You know my children, none of them are God's. So where does God come into all this? In what sense is David's son, the Christ, to be understood?

Is it merely as an earthly king who will mirror King David's great military achievements in transforming Israel into being a world superpower? Is it merely an earthly ruler, the kind of earthly ruler the Jews expected the Messiah would be, a warrior king who would rally Israel to himself, instigate rebellion against the Romans, and institute a new world Jewish empire?

[26:21] Even Jesus' disciples thought that way. They were just waiting here for Jesus to step it up, to raise a flag of rebellion in the temple and start a war for Jewish freedom. They were convinced that the Messiah would be just like King David.

But David calls him my Lord. By quoting Psalm 110 with its reference to the Messiah being the Lord whose enemies God will place under his feet, Jesus is telling these people that their view of what it means for him to be the Messiah is way too small.

Way too small. Let me explain. In the first instance, the Jews were expecting a purely human Messiah, a Christ who was physically descended from David, but a flesh and blood man who by definition was capable of the same greatness but also of the same foolishness as David was.

A Messiah who would live and flourish and then die. He'd conquer the world. He'd leave behind him a new Jewish empire and spawn a new dynasty.

Never did the Jews of Jesus' day think that the Messiah would not just be a man, but that he'd also be God, not just human, but divine.

[27:46] Their view of the Messiah was way too small. They looked for the son of David in a human sense, whereas Jesus the Christ was far greater. He wasn't just descended from David according to his human nature, but he was God.

He was David's Lord. If those listening to Jesus that day had truly understood what he was saying, they would have immediately bowed their knees before him in adoration and worship, for they were hearing the word of God himself, the same God Anne read to us from Exodus chapter 24 who appeared in the cloud in Mount Sinai.

But they didn't get it and they crucified him instead. But in the second instance, the enemies the Jews were expecting the Messiah to deliver them from were purely earthly enemies.

Rome, you know the story of Romulus and Remus, it was established only as a small city 200 years after the death of David. So clearly, David wasn't talking about the Roman Empire in Psalm 110 as being one of those enemies Rome would, God would place under the Messiah's feet.

In fact, we're not very sure how much David understood at all, but Jesus understood it differently. The enemies he would subdue wouldn't be flesh and blood men, whoever they were.

[29:09] He hadn't come as the captain of God's armies to defeat the Romans. He had come as the captain of our salvation to defeat the greatest of all our enemies. He had come to defeat enemies unseen, but far greater than any Roman legion.

our sin, which stands against us in the sight of God, Satan, the evil one who's only designed for humanity is its misery and condemnation, and finally death, that final enemy which never should have been.

I really struggle doing funerals. I don't think I could ever be a minister in the Highlands because I really am not very good at doing funerals. I really struggle with it.

But as a friend reminded me recently, that's okay because as human beings we weren't created to die. Death ain't normal.

It should be a struggle for us all. Jesus came to destroy it. Their view of the religious leaders of Israel concerning what the Messiah would come to do was way too small.

[30:18] They pictured him as an earthly warrior, but Jesus knew himself to be God's warrior, doing battle with and conquering our greatest enemies as a human race.

And they didn't realize that the Christ would fight with the weapon of the cross. That his victory would be by Via Dolorosa the way of sorrow and tears. His sword would be a sacrifice and his shield would be a suffering.

He will conquer by the cross and by the resurrection. The people were desperate to raise him on an earthly throne for the salvation of Israel, but Jesus knew that as the son of David he must be raised up on an earthly cross for the salvation of the world.

Their view of who Jesus was was too small. Their view of what he'd come to do was too small.

What about us? Is our view of Jesus too small? Too small.

Three tests. Two from Jesus' enemies, one from Jesus himself, and he passes them all with flying colors. The remaining test for all of us gathered here today under the preaching of the Word of God is that when God looks into our hearts today, does he find faith in his Son, the Messiah, Jesus Christ?

[31:39] We don't need to pass any more tests than this, that we trust in Jesus and that for us he's our Lord and our God.

He's passed the tests for us on the cross. Are you rendering to God the things that are God's namely faith in Jesus? Are you a son and daughter of the resurrection who by faith Jesus will raise on that last day?

Do you have faith in who Jesus says he is and what Jesus said he came to do? Amen. Amen.