

Jesus Passes the Test - Luke 20:20-38

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Finals

1. Just a few weeks ago, most of our High school & college students enjoyed their favorite part of school – *Finals*.
2. It was the end of the class, & they faced the challenge of proving they'd actually *learned* something.
4. Most students sweat bullets as they *study* because the Final usually counts for a large % of their grade.
5. The questions on the test usually cover the course material for the whole semester.
6. Finals are tough & have proven the undoing not a few.

B. Jesus' Final Examination

1. As we come to Luke 20, Jesus is facing His final exam.
2. He's arrived in Jerusalem just one week before Passover when He'll be crucified.
 - a. During each day of this last week He goes to the temple courts where He teaches the crowds that have packed into the holy city for the great celebration of their deliverance from bondage in Egypt.
 - b. On the first day, He cleared out the religious market that had been set up in the sacred grounds of the temple.
 - c. The next day, His opponents lined up to fire questions at Him that were aimed at putting Him in His place.
 - 1) Remember now – Jesus was from Galilee in the North.
 - 2) The people of Jerusalem considered the Galileans to be *hillbillies*, backward country-bumpkins.
 - 3) Jesus had earned quite a reputation as a dynamic & powerful rabbi during His 3 years of ministry in Galilee. His name & fame had spread far & wide.
 - 4) Now, as Jesus comes to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover, the city is abuzz with the rumor that it's *now* He will publicly declare Himself Israel's Messiah & will take the throne of His ancestor, King David.
 - 5) While that's what the *common people* all looked forward to & excited about,

- a) The rulers couldn't think of a **greater disaster**.
 - b) To them, Jesus was a **threat**, a dangerous challenge to their position.
- 6) They were the elite, who looked at Jesus as an unsophisticated upstart from the backwoods of Galilee.
 - 7) They were **jealous in the extreme** of Jesus' popularity with the people. Until He came, it was they who enjoyed the limelight & fame.
 - 8) Jesus had stolen their position of influence with the people. So they determined to bring Him down, to publicly embarrass Him by asking questions they thought were **impossible** to answer.
 - 9) "This simple Galilean was no match for their towering intellects;" they thought.
 - 10) So as they approached Him there in the temple court where He was teaching, they were confident they were going to make Him look "the fool."
 - 11) Little did they know, they were only setting themselves up for a hard fall.
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- 12) Interesting that these men came to **quiz** Jesus on the 10th day of their month, Nissan.
 - a) You see, this was the day when all the lambs that were to be offered for Passover were brought into the temple court to be inspected.
 - b) In Exodus, Moses had instructed the people to take a lamb 4 days before the feast & give it a careful inspection to make sure it was **without blemish**.
 - c) This was inspection day. So at the same time that the priests were giving inspections to the thousands of lambs to be offered at Passover,
 - d) Others were inspecting the Lamb of God in the same court, not far away.
 - e) Their inspection would find **Him** spotless, then He too would be offered up as the **Final Passover**.
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- 3. In vs. 1-8, we learn that the first group that challenged Him was the priests & elders of the people; the Jewish rulers.
 - a. They demanded to know by what **authority** He claimed to work.

- b. Specifically, they wanted to know where He got the right to teach as well as take such strong action as to demand the temple grounds be cleared of the money-changers and animal sellers.
 - c. The rulers had **licensed** those merchants for a healthy kickback and didn't appreciate the way Jesus messed up their income.
 - d. So they demanded He **prove** His authority to do what He was doing and say what He was saying.
 - e. Jesus turned the question back on them & asked them to **verify their authority** to demand such an answer from Him. What gave them the authority to question His authority?
 - f. This was a valid question on Jesus' part.
 - 1) Let's say your putting up a new fence around your house.
 - 2) You have all the permits and necessary permissions from the City,
 - 3) But some guy walks up & demands to see your permit.
 - 4) Your response is, "And who are you? Show me some ID, some credentials."
 - 5) You have every right to ask, "What **authority** do you have to demand that."
 - g. Jesus gave the rulers a simple question to **validate** their authority to challenge Him.
 - h. They **refused** to answer, because to do so would have gotten them into serious trouble with the people who stood as a crowd around them.
 - i. Jesus then rightly declined to answer **their** challenge.
4. After this, two more groups came to challenge Jesus; first the Pharisees, then the Sadducees.
- a. These were **2 very different Jewish sects** who were at odds with one another.
 - b. The Pharisees were ultra strict-legalists who constantly **hassled** Jesus because He had little regard for their man-made religious rules & traditions.
 - c. The Sadducees were on the **other end** of the religious spectrum —
 - 1) They were ultra-liberal and had embraced Greek culture and philosophy.
 - 2) They'd gutted their faith of **anything spiritual or**

miraculous & reduced it to little more than *social ethics*.

- 3) But the Sadducees were the rich & powerful & enjoyed privileged position as the sect of the High priests.
- d. The Pharisees & Sadducees came to challenge Jesus because like the rulers, before Jesus arrived, *they'd* enjoyed positions of influence with the people.
- e. They were *jealous* of Jesus & wanted to reclaim what had once been theirs.

C. Like A Wednesday

1. Now – before we dig into the text, I want to let you know that our study today is a bit different from a typical Sunday morning where we look at just one subject.
2. This is more like a *Wednesday evening* where we study a chapter or more.
3. My goal is simply to exposit the text, just seeing what's here and how it speaks to us today.
4. I want to encourage those of you who *don't usually* come out on Wednesday nights to do so.
5. What we usually look at on Sunday mornings needs to be set in the wider context of what we're looking at on Wednesday evenings.
6. Those who come on Wednesdays will tell you that it's a good time of digging into the Word of God.

II. TEXT

A. The Pharisees Test Jesus – Vs. 20-26

²⁰ So they watched Him, and sent spies who pretended to be righteous, that they might seize on His words, in order to deliver Him to the power and the authority of the governor. ²¹ Then they asked Him, saying, "Teacher, we know that You say and teach rightly, and You do not show personal favoritism, but teach the way of God in truth: ²² Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"

1. In Matthew 22, we learn the Pharisees were behind this attempt to trap Jesus.
2. They knew the priests & elders were *itching* to get rid of Him but had been thwarted.

3. The Pharisees thought if *they* could trap Him, it would *increase their influence* with the Jewish leaders.
4. So they became their willing accomplices in trying to find something with which they could go to the Romans against Jesus.
5. What better way to get Jesus to run afoul of the Romans than to accuse Him of saying they ought not pay taxes.
 - a. This had been one of the main rallying points *false Messiahs* had used in order to garner support.
 - b. *No one* likes to pay taxes, especially to a hated foreign occupier.
 - c. Pretenders knew a quick way to get a following was to play to people's nationalism & greed & say they ought not pay taxes to Rome.
 - d. As soon as Rome heard someone was saying this, they came down on them like women at a shoe sale.
6. So the Pharisees thought they had Jesus backed into a corner with this question.
 - a. If He said they *ought not* pay taxes, they could go to the Romans with a charge of insurrection.
 - b. If Jesus said they *ought* to pay taxes He'd run into trouble with the common people who *hated* paying taxes to the Romans.
 - c. Plus, what would that do to His claim *as the Messiah?*
 - d. It was *unthinkable* the Messiah would call for the payment of taxes to a foreign occupier!
7. So the Pharisees were quite confident Jesus' answer would get Him into hot water with *someone*; either the Romans or the common people.
8. But notice in v. 21 the way they try to sneak up on Him – with flattery.

“Teacher, we know that You say and teach rightly, and You do not show personal favoritism, but teach the way of God in truth . . .”

- a. Not one word of this was sincere! They didn't mean a syllable of it.
- b. They don't recognize his *authority* to teach or agree with *what* He teaches.
- d. They think He's a false prophet, a con-man, though they don't have a shred of evidence to support their opinion.

9. This is all *sickening flattery* and Jesus isn't fooled by a bit of it.
10. As the Proverbs repeatedly war - Beware of those who flatter.
[Pro 20:19 29:5]
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11. So, how will Jesus answer this seemingly impossible question?

23 But He perceived their craftiness,

12. He knew their intentions to snare Him -

and said to them, "Why do you test Me?"

13. Did they really think they were going to entrap the *very embodiment* of Wisdom in a contest of cleverness?

14. Jesus begins His answer by asking a question, as God so often does when trying to help sinful men & women confess their error.
- Jesus wasn't just speaking rhetorically here when He asked this.
 - He wanted them to *consider their own motives*.
 - No matter how much they might like to argue the reason behind their actions, the bottom line was nothing more than *envy*.
 - They were *jealous* of Jesus and wanted the popularity they'd once enjoyed, back.
 - That's a pretty sick motive.
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15. Then He said -

24 Show Me a denarius.

16. A denarius was a Roman coin, equal to about a day's wage for a common laborer.

Whose image and inscription does it have?" They answered and said, "Caesar's."

17. When Roman coins were minted, they carried the reigning emperor's image.

- This coin would have borne Augustus Caesar's image on it.
- When it came time to pay taxes, it was the form of payment they would use.

25 And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

18. BRILLIANT!!!

19. But you know, we're so familiar with this story & with Jesus answer we lose the stunning surprise it was to those *who first heard it*.

20. "Render to Caesar the things that are his" has become a popular

figure of speech so common many people don't even know they're *quoting Jesus*.

21. So imagine yourself standing in the crowd that day, listening to Jesus, when a group of well dressed guys press through the crowd, then pose this question to Jesus.
22. Despite their flattery, you *know* it's a loaded question that no matter how Jesus answers He's going to get into trouble.
23. Then He delivers His reply.
 - a. It's so *unexpected* you have to *process* what He's just said.
 - b. Your immediate reaction is – “Wow, that's right on, that makes total sense.”
 - c. But then you're thrown back on the dilemma you thought Jesus was in – has His answer gotten Him in trouble?
 - d. As you mull it over, you realize, Nope!
24. Rather, what was meant to be a *trap* has turned into a powerful *tool* Jesus has used to say something crucial.

26 But they could not catch Him in His words in the presence of the people. And they marveled at His answer and kept silent.

25. Jesus took the wind out of their sails and left them overwhelmed with His wisdom.
 26. The backwoods country bumpkin has proven to be far more clever than they'd imagined.
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27. Now, we could launch from what Jesus says in v. 25 and develop a whole practical theology about government, taxes, and the duty of the people.
 - a. We'll sum it up by saying that Jesus affirms the authority of civil government to tax the people.
 - b. People *do have* a duty to pay their taxes, even if they're paid to a foreign occupier.
 - c. From time to time, Christians have tried to withhold their taxes because of the way government *USES* them – to fund things that are immoral; like war, abortion, & stem-cell research.
 - d. *Government officials* will have to answer to God for how they spend.
 - e. *Our duty* as citizens is to pay our taxes; *that* is what *we will give account for* – for how we've *submitted* to those God has placed in authority over us.

28. The real *triumph* in Jesus' answer was to turn the whole thing back to *man's duty to God*.
- He asked whose image was on the coin. It was Augustus' image.
 - They had an obligation to give Rome what belonged to Rome.
 - What Jesus left unspoken but was clearly implied was, "Whose image is on *you*?"
 - Man was created in the image of God. Therefore, we belong to Him.
 - Just as we *owe* taxes, we *owe* God *our very lives*.
29. Not a person who heard this wasn't moved to consider whether or not they'd given God *His* due.
30. The Pharisees came to *challenge Jesus*, but went away challenged to the very core of their being.
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31. It's a challenge that echoes & resonates with us here this morning.
- There is within every one of us the awareness that there is *more to life* than the world tells us.
 - We all know from personal experience that *things* don't satisfy.
 - Power & position* don't fulfill.
 - Wealth* doesn't scratch the itch of our soul.
 - Pleasure*, while nice, doesn't last.
 - When the party's over & we're alone in the silent dark, there's that still small voice that haunts us with the awareness we're trying to find meaning & purpose in all the wrong places.
 - As Augustine once said, "God has made us for Himself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Him."
 - Or as Pascal said, "There is a God-shaped vacuum in every heart that God alone can fill."
32. Listen, God created you in *His image*.
- Sin has corrupted and marred that image but *not* destroyed it.
 - Its outline lies buried in your heart.
 - And the echo of God's Voice that spoke you into existence still reverberates through you.
 - Give to God what belongs to Him – YOU belong to Him.
 - True life *begins* when you give to God what belongs to Him.

B. The Sadducees Test Jesus – Vs. 27-40

- The Sadducees, seeing the Pharisees shut down were emboldened

to challenge Jesus.

27 Then some of the Sadducees, who deny that there is a resurrection, came to *Him* and asked Him, ²⁸ saying: “Teacher, Moses wrote to us *that* if a man’s brother dies, having a wife, and he dies without children, his brother should take his wife and raise up offspring for his brother.

2. They were referring to the law of levirate marriage in Deut. 25:5.
 - a. Because it was important that land stay within the family and not pass to other owners,
 - b. Moses had given the rule that if a man died without producing any children, his next oldest brother was required to marry her and produce children by her in the dead brother’s name.
3. The Sadducees refer to this provision in the law of Moses then tell a story -

29 Now there were seven brothers. And the first took a wife, and died without children. ³⁰ And the second took her as wife, and he died childless. ³¹ Then the third took her, and in like manner the [all] seven also; and they left no children, and died. ³² Last of all the woman died also. ³³ Therefore, in the resurrection, whose wife does she become? For all seven had her as wife.”

4. As I mentioned before, the Sadducees were a sect of Jews who’d adopted Greek culture & philosophy. There was little of Biblical Judaism left in their beliefs.
5. They *denied* the resurrection & thought they could *trick* Jesus with a pet riddle they liked to stumble Pharisees with.
6. In their thinking, Jesus was far more like a Pharisee than a Sadducee in His beliefs.
7. So they assumed, rightly, that He believed in the resurrection.
8. They decided to make Him look the fool by posing this little riddle they think had no answer and that showed the silliness of resurrection.
 - a. The story tells of a woman who was married by 7 brothers, one right after another.
 - b. They each took her as wife because *none* of them was able to produce a child by her.
 - c. Their question was – in the resurrection, who would she be

- married to, since in this life she'd been married to all 7.
9. Oh you can be sure as soon as they laid out this riddle they all snickered behind their hands.
 10. Here they were, *the elite of the elite* of cosmopolitan Jerusalem. They fancied themselves *sophisticated scholars* who ate Pharisees for lunch.
 11. They thought Jesus was an *upstart hick* who couldn't hold a candle to them.
 12. They'd used this riddle on dozens of Pharisees in the past & never had one been able to answer them.
 13. It was like asking, "Can God make a rock so big even He can't lift it?"
 14. It's one of those questions that seems to deny the thing it's first proposes.
 15. An unsolvable dilemma. But Jesus *has* a solution. And His answer reveals that while the Sadducees don't have a clue about the afterlife, Jesus is intimately knowledgeable of it; it's the realm He came from.

34 Jesus answered and said to them, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage.

16. Men & women get married; that's the norm in this life.
 - a. Jesus is *not* saying *all* marry or that staying single I *abnormal*. *He* was single.
 - b. He's simply stating the obvious – that marriage is a normal part of life in *this* world.

35 But those who are counted worthy to attain that age, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; 36 nor can they die anymore, for they are equal to the angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.

17. In the afterlife, our relationships will be dramatically different than what we know here.
18. The institution of marriage will have passed away. There are no such unions in heaven.
19. All the saved will be counted as the children of God – We will each equally be His sons and daughters, making us brothers & sisters.

20. Such family members do not marry!

21. Here's a thought – in this life, the most intimate relationship we can enjoy with another is marriage.

a. In fact, Gen. 2 tells us the *intimacy of oneness* is the *goal* of marriage.

b. The barrier to intimacy is sin, shame, & the fear of rejection.

22. In heaven, the relationships we'll enjoy we actually be *more intimate* & satisfying than the best marriages this world has ever known because there'll be no sin, no shame, no fear there.

23. Marriage is just for *this* life. There's no marriage in heaven except for our union with Christ.

24. After answering their question posed by their little story, Jesus moves to deal with the more important issue of their rejection of the resurrection -

37 But even Moses showed in the *burning bush passage* that the dead are raised, when he called the Lord '*the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.*' ³⁸ For He is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live to Him."

25. When God spoke to Moses from the burning bush on Mt. Sinai, He identified Himself by saying, "I **AM** the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," not "I **WAS** their God."

a. Jesus' point was that when God spoke that, Abraham, Isaac, & Jacob *were alive*.

b. Though they'd lived hundreds of years before Moses' time, they'd passed through death into life in God's presence.

26. Jesus made sure of the inevitability of the resurrection by going to the cross, dying for our sins, paying the penalty of our guilt, then rising from the grave in the final defeat of death.

27. The Sadducees had no reply.

28. This riddle, which had silenced so many Pharisees, turned to silence *them*.

29. In v. 40, Luke tells us after this, no one dared challenge Him anymore.

30. Well I guess not!

III. CONCLUSION

A. What Lesson?

1. What's the lesson we learn from all this?
2. Well, there are several lessons . . .
 - a. We owe the civil government the taxes they assess.
 - b. We owe God our lives.
 - c. As important and intimate as marriage is, in heaven our relationships will be far more intimate – So I'd better learn how to get along with people now because the essence of eternity *is* relationship with others.
 - d. The resurrection is real. There is life beyond the grave. And compared with that, this life is a brief vapor – yet my choices in this life determine where & how that eternity is lived.

B. Biggest Lesson

1. But the *biggest lesson* I glean from these verses is that Jesus always passes the test.
2. He's never stumped! He's never left scratching His head.
3. No matter how complicated my life may become,
 - a. No matter how hopeless the situation,
 - b. How dark the skies, or tangled the knot,
 - c. Jesus has the answer.
4. Because Jesus IS the answer.
 - a. Oh that we might realize that *everything* that comes into our lives, no matter how contrary to God's will they may seem,
 - b. Are only permitted *by* Him to drive us to Christ.
5. Colossians 2:3 tells us that in Christ . . .

. . . are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.
6. That's a remarkable statement the Apostle Paul makes.
7. Here's what it meant to the people of that day – “Everything that will make you wealthy and successful is found in Christ.”
8. You see, until the Modern Age, nearly all the cultures of the world sought *wisdom* above all things.
 - a. Every philosophy aimed at pulling aside the veil that hid *the meaning of life*.
 - b. The word ‘philosophy’ means – the love of wisdom.
 - c. For it was thought that *wisdom* was the knowledge of *how to live well*.
 - d. The ancients had the sense that life had a purpose, a goal.
 - e. *Wisdom was the roadmap.*

9. But Modern Man isn't concerned any longer with wisdom.
 10. Now the main thing is *Practicality*.
 - a. The question is no longer, "What's true?"
 - b. It's "What works?"
 11. Today's realist isn't concerned with where he'll spend eternity.
 12. He just wants to know how to get through today.
 13. Such short-sighted pragmatism only solves today's problems by creating 2 or more for tomorrow.
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14. Here's what this passage has to say to *this generation*, to this age with its short-sightedness – *Jesus is the answer for the world today*.
 15. He's the answer to the problems of *your* life.
 16. In Him is all the wisdom you need to live life as God originally planned.
 17. The closer you draw to Him, the *more life* you will have.
 18. The *deeper* you know Him – the more *satisfied* you will be.