

Teacher, You Have Spoken Well
Luke 20:27-47
July 10, 2022
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Read Luke 20:27-47

“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” (Matthew 4:4b)

Introduction

I heard a story recently about a mega-church pastor (I will leave out his name to protect the guilty). He was at the height of his church’s growth and being asked to speak at lots of conferences because people wanted to know how the church grew as large as it did and about the unique ways that his church operated. He spoke at a conference in London and one of the guys on his team was new, and since he hadn’t been around all the hype he commented on how people were going so crazy for a pastor that they wanted the man’s picture and autograph. To which this pastor responded, “I don’t know if you have noticed or not, but I am kind of a big deal.” And the staff guy started laughing, because he thought the pastor was joking and referencing the movie *Anchorman*. But the pastor didn’t smile or laugh, he was dead serious. The staff member says that he remembers immediately thinking, “Man, we’re in trouble.”¹

That’s how everyone in a church should think when a pastor or a ministry leader starts seeing himself as a big deal – “we’re in trouble.” Our first reaction should be disgust and disbelief at how a church leader can be so egotistic. And yet, I have to tell you, in my experience that’s actually what a lot of churches want to see, maybe even demand – a super-confident pastor who boasts about all of his successes and giftings. How do I know that? Because I struggled greatly when I was interviewing with churches to be their pastor – I tried to be humble and not boast about my gifts and experience. I figured that my resumé and my references would call attention to the things that I had done well. And yet, so many times I heard some version of “we need someone who can handle the rigors of ministry” or “we need someone with a track record of teaching and leading.” I actually heard an elder say, “We don’t want to miss out on hiring the next rock star in the PCA.” And I realized that they had expected me to boast about myself, to explain all the ways that I would be God’s gift to their church. Thankfully, this church’s search committee didn’t want superficial bragging, but wanted to hear my heart for ministry. To be clear, I’m not actually humble, I’m just not as obvious about it!

Jesus wants His people to be humble servants, especially those in positions of leadership. He said things like *“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave”* (Matthew 20:25-27). And Paul said, *“in humility count others more significant than yourselves”* (Philippians 2:3b). In today’s passage, Jesus called out the church leaders of His day over several issues, including not knowing their Bibles well enough; but it ends with His rebuke of leaders who thought they were kind of a big deal. The first section is a story of men approaching Jesus with

I. A Challenge About the Resurrection (vv. 27-40)

²⁷ There came to him some Sadducees, those who deny that there is a resurrection, ²⁸ and they asked him a question, saying, “Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies, having a wife but no

¹ <https://gracetruth.blog/2021/09/14/i-am-kind-of-a-big-deal-insecure-pride-and-humble-confidence/>

children, the man must take the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. ²⁹ Now there were seven brothers. The first took a wife, and died without children. ³⁰ And the second ³¹ and the third took her, and likewise all seven left no children and died. ³² Afterward the woman also died. ³³ In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had her as wife." ³⁴ And Jesus said to them, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, ³⁵ 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, ³⁶ for they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection. ³⁷ But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the bush, where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. ³⁸ Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him." ³⁹ Then some of the scribes answered, "Teacher, you have spoken well." ⁴⁰ For they no longer dared to ask him any question.

An oversimplified way of understanding the differences between the Pharisees and the Sadducees is that the Pharisees were the conservative religious leaders and the Sadducees were the liberals. I'm not talking about politics, I'm talking about being conservative or liberal in terms of Jewish teaching and doctrine. The Pharisees wanted everyone to obey everything that was written in the Bible (plus a lot of their own rules that weren't in the Bible), today's world would call them the fundamentalists; while the Sadducees didn't believe in a lot of the doctrine, rejected all but the first five books of Moses, the Pentateuch. Verse 27 says that the Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection of the dead, which means they didn't believe in an afterlife at all. (That's why they were so "sad-you-see.")

OK, what were the Sadducees talking about in verse 28 when they presented this case of "one bride for seven brothers"? Deuteronomy 25:5 says that "*If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the dead man shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her as his wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her.*" Umm... "Awkward!" I remember thinking how weird that would be if my brother died that I would be forced to marry his wife, who I can't think of as anything but a sister. Thankfully, we do not still follow this custom, but the Jewish culture was very focused on having children and producing heirs. This custom kept families from dying out and preserved their accumulated possessions and wealth. So, they asked Jesus the question: a woman had seven husbands, she just kept marrying the next brother in line when the last one died, but never was able to have children. Whose wife will she be in heaven? This is not a sincere question, it's an exaggerated hypothetical designed to show why they were right about denying the afterlife.

Jesus not only answers their hypothetical, but He dismantles everyone's conception of what the next life will look like, after we experience the resurrection from the dead. Generally, we just want to think of the next life as an extension of this life, simply continued into a new spiritual plane of heaven. But Jesus said that it's a totally new reality. The categories of this life don't apply there, stop operating under false assumptions. Not only can you not die there, there is also no marriage since there's no childbearing and no exclusive love there. We will all love one another unconditionally and be loved perfectly by our Creator. Now I realize that that makes those of us who love our spouses and have wonderful marriages very sad; I can't imagine not being married to my wife. (I told my wife that I was preaching on the fact that we won't be married in heaven and she gave me a very sad face, which was very touching.) As Frank Barker says, though, "I don't think it is teaching us that my relationship to my wife will be less close than it is now... I believe it will be closer than it is now; but that the relationship of all in heaven to Christ will be such that it will overshadow every other relationship. We will all be closer to our loved ones who are there than we are here."²

² Dr. Frank M. Barker, Jr's sermon "Jesus on Life After Death" found in *The Gospel of Luke, Vol. 2* (self-published), p. 5.

Verse 36 tells us a few more things about our existence in heaven:³

1) We will be immortal, there will be no more death. Think about that, that means there will really be no danger. You want to jump off a 1,000 ft. cliff in the New Heavens and the New Earth? Not only can you not die, but you can't get hurt or experience pain (according to Revelation 21), so have a great jump! You will have a resurrection body that will last for all of eternity.

2) We will be equal to angels. We will not become angels, but equal to them. From what we can understand about angels, they are God's messengers but also God's servants. They do His will perfectly, so we will too. They have heavenly bodies, we will too. They perpetually worship God, we also will join the eternal song of gratitude and praise to our wonderful Creator.

3) We will be sons of God and sons of the resurrection. We will be part of God's forever family, perfectly loved and accepted. Not only will we not sin, we will have no inclination to sin, no strong dark urges that we have to resist and deny. All of our desires will be pure and acceptable in God's sight. The great emotion of Heaven will be joy. I can't wait!

In verses 37-38, Jesus proved from the book of Exodus (which was one of the few books that they accepted) why the Sadducees were wrong about the resurrection. He pointed out that Moses calling God the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was clear proof that God was the God of the living, and that all of them lived on beyond death. If someone says, "I am Billy's friend," you may not know who Billy is, but you know that he is still alive or else they would have said, "I was Billy's friend." [*The Lion King* – "You knew my father?" "Correction, I know your father." Mufasa's still alive, or at least able to whisper to his son still.] That's Jesus' logic here - God is the God of these dead men because they are alive again in eternity.

Jesus' answer essentially shut the Sadducees up, even as it drew praise from another group, the scribes. We'll come back to the scribes later, but first Jesus brought up a challenge about Himself:

II. A Challenge About the Descendant of David (vv. 41-44)

⁴¹ But he said to them, "How can they say that the Christ is David's son? ⁴² For David himself says in the Book of Psalms, "'The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand, ⁴³ until I make your enemies your footstool.'" ⁴⁴ David thus calls him Lord, so how is he his son?"

The quote is from Psalm 110:1, written by David. It comes up again in Acts 2 when Peter is preaching to the crowd, then again in Hebrews 1. The other New Testament writers saw this as absolutely convincing proof for a Jew to believe in Jesus. You have to understand that the Jews all understood that the Messiah, the Christ would be a descendant of King David. Isaiah 9:8: "*Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom.*" So everyone understood that part, but Jesus asked, "How can the Messiah be both David's son (descendant) and His Lord," as that verse says? Men don't call their descendants/their great-grandchildren "Lord"; they don't bow to them. So why would David address his descendant as "Lord"? Jesus left that hanging in the air as a rhetorical condemnation of their ignorance. He was saying, essentially, "you guys haven't really thought through the ramifications of that one, have you? You don't know the Scriptures as well as you think you do. If you did, you would see that the Messiah is David's descendant but also the Lord Himself." You've got the human aspect of the Messiah down, but you don't understand the divine part.

And most of all they didn't understand how Jesus fulfilled and embodied both the human and divine natures. The miracle of the Virgin Birth allowed this to happen: Jesus was born of a woman and was a physical descendant of King David, but Jesus was also fathered by the Holy Spirit, placed into the

³ Adapted from R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), p. 709.

womb of Mary without a human father. Theologians call this the “hypostatic union,”⁴ the joining of God and Man in one person, Jesus. Jesus is not two persons, but He has two natures. That was very hard for people to understand back then, and it is still a difficult concept. But it’s an essential truth for understanding and accepting the Gospel.

Our final passage holds

III. A Challenge About the Scribes’ Behavior (vv. 45-47)

⁴⁵ And in the hearing of all the people he said to his disciples, ⁴⁶ “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love greetings in the marketplaces and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, ⁴⁷ who devour widows’ houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.”

It’s been recorded that rabbis in Jesus’ day would say, “Let your respect for your teacher border on your reverence for God.”⁵ If I ever say anything like that, you have permission to smack me with your Bible. The scribes in that day walked around in long robes, as Jesus said, and expected everyone to be in awe of their presence. They were invited to all the important feasts, always getting the seats of honor. Today we’d say they got invited to speak at all of the important conferences, seats at the power lunches, and hobnobbed with all the VIPs. And they prayed long prayers and proved they were worthy of all that attention and honor. But inwardly they were selfish and ungodly. How do you devour a widow’s house? You manipulate them to support you so much that they use all of their limited financial resources to prop up your ministry. These widows probably served in the temple and were generous with their time and treasures, and the scribes took advantage of that. They’re probably not the only ones the scribes took advantage of, Jesus just pointed out the most vulnerable people they manipulated. Pride paired with greed covered with a religious veneer made Jesus sick, He promised they would be punished for it. The scribes needed to learn one of my dad’s favorite sayings: “Learn to use things and love people; don’t use people and love things.”

James 3:1 says, “*Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.*” And Jesus has already taught in Luke 12 that “*to whom much was given, of him much will be required.*” We can fool the world with our outward polish and inward rot, but we cannot fool God. Joseph Bayly said that, “No person can foster the impression that he or she is great, then exalt a great God.”⁶ I guess it comes down to the question: Do you want to be godly or do you just want to appear godly? There’s a big difference. If you just want to appear godly, then it’s easy to go through the motions and make sure people are watching when you serve and do churchy things/good deeds. If you actually want to be godly, then you will do your good deeds in secret and not parade them around for people to applaud; you will spend hours alone praying and reading God’s word, and you will work privately on the things in your life that displease the Lord.

Conclusion

Let’s pull some threads together. This was posted online after the recent school shooting in Texas: “This is just a reminder that none of the kids in the Uvalde shooting went to heaven. They just stopped existing. There is no happy ‘heaven’ story for them. We tell ourselves these things because they make us feel better but those kids don’t need us to feel better. They need us to be angry. Angry that their one and only life was stolen from them. Angry enough to make change

⁴ Read more at <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-is-the-hypostatic-union>

⁵ Barclay, p. 253.

⁶ Joseph T. Bayly, *Out of My Mind* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), p. 174.

that we were too cowardly to enact to protect them. Maybe if people realized there was nothing after death, they would care more about the life before death.”⁷

Now, I did not quote that to make fun of this person or to deny that they have a point that school children being shot should make us angry. But to accept the premise that there is no life after death is beyond tragic to me. Do we really believe the fact that God will raise His people up from death into eternal life, or is this life all there is? Paul showed the logical implications of what we should believe if there is no resurrection of the dead in 1 Corinthians 15:16-19: *“For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.”* That’s a heavy weight to put on the truth of the resurrection – our whole religion, our faith depends on it. If it’s not true and Christ was not raised from the dead, then all the believers that have died before now are simply gone forever, none of us have the hope of heaven before us, our sins still count against us, and last of all, we’re just pathetic because we’re so misinformed. If there is no resurrection, we might as shut down the church, sell the building, and stay home and watch Wimbledon instead. But Paul continues, *“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead.”* And Romans 1:3-4 says, *“concerning (God’s) 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.”* We believe that Jesus, at the same time Son of David in the flesh and Son of God in the spirit, came to die in our place and be resurrected so that we would be raised to new lives after our deaths.

I want to go back to verse 35 where Jesus said, *“those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead.”* Once we’ve established there is a resurrection from the dead, then the question is: How can I be considered worthy to get to heaven? Do I have to spend a certain amount of time in prayer? Do I have to do enough good deeds to outweigh my bad deeds? Do I need to promise to achieve great things for God and then go out and do them? Do I have to convert a certain number of people, read the Bible through multiple times, or achieve a certain level of attendance and volunteer hours at church? Will any of that make me worthy enough? If you’ve been around listening to my sermons for very long, I hope you know the answer to that question. There is nothing you can do that will make you worthy. Worthiness is given to you on the basis of someone else’s works, Jesus’, and received by faith. Philippians 3:9 says, *“that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.”* When you understand that truth, you don’t have to strut around with outer holiness like the scribes. If you truly internalize your unworthiness but worthiness found in Christ, you will live your life in extreme gratitude, looking for ways to serve God and others.

Keith & Kristyn Getty have a song that says, *“Two wonder here that I confess / My worth and my unworthiness / My value fixed, my ransom paid at the cross / I will not boast in wealth or might / Or human wisdom’s fleeting light / But I will boast in knowing Christ at the cross.”*⁸ We are made worthy to be raised from the dead into the glorious new life in heaven by Christ’s sacrifice on the cross for our sake. And all who believe that good news said, “Amen.”

Benediction

Romans 15:13 - *“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.”*

⁷ <https://ifunny.co/picture/join-weemedonald0611-1-this-is-just-a-reminder-that-none-OF8Dwn9f9>

⁸ Keith & Kristyn Getty, “My Worth is Not in What I Own”