

***Who's In Charge Here? Part Two***  
***By Jason Huff***  
***Psalm 110:1-5, Colossians 1:21-29, Luke 20:20-44***

Today's Scripture lesson comes from Luke 20: 20-44. Listen now to God's Word. "Keeping a close watch on him, they sent spies, who pretended to be honest. They hoped to catch Jesus in something he said so that they might hand him over to the power and authority of the governor. So the spies questioned him: "Teacher, we know that you speak and teach what is right, and that you do not show partiality but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" He saw through their duplicity and said to them, "Show me a denarius. Whose portrait and inscription are on it?" "Caesar's," they replied. He said to them, "Then give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." They were unable to trap him in what he had said there in public. And astonished by his answer, they became silent. Some of the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Jesus with a question. "Teacher," they said, "Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and have children for his brother. Now there were seven brothers. The first one married a woman and died childless. The second and then the third married her, and in the same way the seven died, leaving no children. Finally, the woman died too. Now then, at the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?" Jesus replied, "The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection. But in the account of the bush, even Moses showed that the dead rise, for he calls the Lord 'the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive." Some of the teachers of the law responded, "Well said, teacher!" And no one dared to ask him any more questions. Then Jesus said to them, "How is it that they say the Christ is the Son of David? David himself declares in the Book of Psalms: "'The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'" David calls him 'Lord.' How then can he be his son?""

Have you ever had that dream where you sit down to take a test, only to find that it's in a subject you've never taken, and you sit there clueless? Believe it or not, in high school, a version of that dream became a reality for me. My freshman high school English class was assigned *Tom Sawyer*. Not a big deal, right? As it turned out, the version in our English book was abridged – over a third of it was missing. The teacher never looked at *our* book, so the test was on the whole thing. After the first few questions, we started to look at one another. I went up and asked about it, knowing that I hadn't read this stuff, only to be told that if I kept thinking about it, the answer would come to me. Well, I might be smart, but I'm not that smart! Eventually, it became clear what had happened...but until that moment of clarity, we all sat there stuck, stumped by questions that were impossible for us to answer. I still have dreams about that test...and yes, I'll be taking referrals to professional counselors after the sermon.

Thankfully, we serve a God who is never stumped. Last week, we read about the scribes, Pharisees, elders, and teachers who challenged Jesus' authority. Jesus' responses pointed us to God's patience and grace, His unchanging nature, and His willingness to answer His children when we approach Him with honesty. This week, the religious leaders attempt to test Him with impossible questions, and yet through it we realize the wonder of our almighty God. Jesus' Q&A with the people and religious leaders this week shows us God's sovereignty.

The first thing we see in this week's passage is this: *God is always in control*. The religious leaders are so frustrated that they're sending people undercover to try and trap Jesus. These folks butter Jesus up, then ask the perfect catch-22, the impossible question. Should we pay tribute to Caesar or not? This was serious for the Jews of that day. Caesar was a god. His coins, the denarii Jesus asked for, said so. For the Jews, having to pay a denarii to the Roman government as a tax wasn't just an issue of government interference or owing money to a despised empire...for them, it was acknowledging a living idol. If Jesus said, "Yes, pay taxes to Caesar," the authorities could accuse Him of bowing to Caesar as a legitimate authority and even a deity. But if He said "don't pay taxes," the Romans would have executed Him for sedition.

Jesus asks His questioner to show him a denarius. The fact that these men had one showed that they themselves were a part of the economic system. People could argue about it, but everyone used the coins. Nobody was serious enough about the issue to stop using Roman money. It brought into question the true condition of the hearts of those answering the question.

Jesus' answer – "give to Caesar what is Caesar's and God what is God's" – is perhaps one of his most misunderstood statements. Attempts have been made to make this phrase about the division of church and state, modern taxation, and so forth. While the Bible talks about these issues elsewhere, that wasn't Jesus' point here. He gave an answer that solved the dilemma perfectly – and puts the question back on us. What does belong to God? What does belong to our rulers? That's something we have to answer as we walk with God daily. Here, the issue at stake is not about taxes paid to a man who calls himself a god. It's Jesus solving the perfect riddle designed specifically to take him down.

Last week, we talked about the comfort that we can have knowing that God is unchanging, that He is our rock in our ever-shifting culture. This week, we see God is truly in control. He makes a way out of an impossible situation. There is nothing that stumps God, nothing beyond His reach. He sidesteps verbal landmines with ease. He healed the sick and cast out demons and quieted storms. In our celebration of Easter, we saw that God was in control even in the crucifixion. Jesus allowed it to happen, not because He wanted to die but because He wanted to save us, to make a way for us to be with the Father throughout eternity. As we'll see in the coming weeks, He was keenly aware of what was happening and saw it through to the end.

How aware are you that God is in control? Many of us live unconscious of God's involvement in our lives. Yet He is there throughout our days and nights. There is nothing that happens to us that surprises Him. We wonder why things happen sometimes, and yet God is never stunned. I think we grieve God with our choices sometimes, but God is not caught unaware.

Recently in our daytime Bible study, we had a good conversation asking if God knows what will happen before it actually occurs, why does He allow suffering? On a more personal level, why does He allow us to be in situations where we choose to sin, rather than keeping us from temptation? As we talked, we realized together that we often learn from our failures more than our successes. We learn more from tragedy than from the good times. That doesn't mean we desire to sin or desire tragedy, but we know that God can and will use them so that His people realize their brokenness and repent of their sin and turn to Him.

I've often heard the phrase said, "God will never give you more than you can handle." It's a misquotation of 1 Corinthians 10:13, which says, "God will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you can bear." God will never put us in a situation where our only choice is to sin. But God repeatedly puts His people into situations where it's far more than they can cope with. He gave the prophet Jeremiah the task of calling people to repentance, causing even his own family members to hate him...and Jeremiah was emotionally devastated. Paul was shipwrecked, beaten, imprisoned, stoned, and in constant danger. God constantly allows His people to face more than they can handle so that they will turn to Him, the One who truly is in control. And when we do turn, we find that God is far more adept at handling our problems and trials than we are. Nothing can shake Him. We can be confident that there will be much in life we can't handle, but God is willing to be the one who rescues and delivers us.

Second thing we see in this passage that relates to the first: ***God knows the future and is its author***. This passage is the first time the Sadducees show up in the Gospel of Luke. They weren't all that friendly with the Pharisees. They believed only in the Torah, the first five books of the Bible; they rejected the oral tradition and laws of the Pharisees. They didn't believe in resurrection and believed that material gain and comfort in this life was a show of God's favor. Most were priests and were wealthy. They also tended to have positions of authority. They didn't reject Jesus for the same reasons the Pharisees did, since Jesus only broke the Pharisee's understanding of the Law, not the Law from the Torah. But like the Pharisees, they coveted power and status, and Jesus threatened that.

So the Sadducees ask Jesus a question about a technical point of the Torah. Long story short...in ancient Israel, your family line was everything. It was how your name continued after your death. By law, if a man died without having any sons, his widow was to be married to his brother, and their firstborn son continued the first man's family line. We can't imagine marriage outside of a romantic relationship, but in that day, this arrangement not only protected a family's standing, it also protected the widow, who otherwise would have been left empty-handed. In the Sadducees' story, a childless woman whose husbands keep dying eventually marries her way through the whole clan. Who's she married to in the resurrection? The Sadducees thought this argument would show that resurrection was impossible, or at least ridiculous. (My first thought was that if I were the seventh brother, I'd be running away from this woman as fast as possible!)

But Jesus answers the question in an amazing way. He tells them straightforwardly about resurrection and the afterlife, stating that in the resurrection, people won't be married. Not only that, they can't die again. He goes on to quote Scripture, showing that God spoke about the forefathers of Israel in the present tense, even though they were long dead! Jesus uses the Scripture to show them there is life after death! Another impossible question answered.

Jesus is almost nonchalant in the way He speaks about the afterlife. To Him, this is not conjecture; it's a reality He knows. Even for those of us who have studied the Bible, there's only so much we can say about the resurrection at the end of time. Beyond the Bible, it's a mystery. We make informed guesses. But Jesus' answer showed that He *knows*. The future is not a secret to Him. He speaks about the resurrection not even as one familiar with it by study, but as the One who is its architect.

This is not to say that every event in the future is predetermined by God to play out without our involvement. God has given us a mind and a will, and God calls on us to use them to serve Him faithfully. But we know that God's victory is secure. God's Kingdom is in our midst and is expanding each and every day, and one day we will know God's Kingdom in all its fullness. There is no doubt that God will accomplish what He plans. The fact that He is in control means that He has the ability to achieve His ends, and His knowledge of the future means He knows the ends He means to achieve.

This too should be a comfort to us. We live our lives by faith. But what makes that faith worthwhile? If God doesn't know the future, then our faith is in jeopardy. We could believe only to find out, whoops, I guess God got it wrong...no hope, no resurrection, no new heaven and new earth. But God *does* know the future He is creating and has planned and will bring to fruition. We can be confident in our faith because we aren't heading into the great unknown. God has shared with us two things in which we place our hope. The first thing He has shared is a vision of eternity, a future where believers are resurrected to eternal life with Him without suffering or sorrow or sin, where He is our light and we are forever in His glorious presence. The second thing He has shared is Himself. Through Jesus Christ, we know that God is faithful to His promises, that He is kind and loving and wants none to perish, but all to turn away from sin and enter into eternal life through Him. His very person, His being, gives us assurance that the future He has promised will come to pass, even if we don't know all the details.

The final point we learn today jumps out of the second: ***God's plans have been in place since the beginning***. Jesus answered His opposition so effectively that no one dares ask Him anything else. So He asks His own question from Psalm 110! In that psalm, David writes, "The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." Who is David talking about? The rabbis didn't have a clue. Some thought it was Abraham or Moses or another ancient figure. It was a guessing game, and David provided no clues. But through a riddle, Jesus shows that David was referring to the messiah. Everyone believed that the messiah was going to be a descendent in David's line; the Old Testament makes that clear. But in the psalm, David speaks about "my Lord" in the present tense. How is the messiah alive in David's day – and how is he David's lord and master – and yet also David's descendent?

Jesus is sharing something incredible about Himself...He is not only the promised messiah but God Himself, the Son of the Father, the second person of the Trinity, who existed before David was even born. Subtle clues to the pre-incarnate Christ are scattered throughout the Old Testament...hints that Jesus was the One with whom Jacob wrestled, hints that He was the One that spoke with Moses face to face on the mountain. Here, Jesus ties the clues together in Himself. He who has existed with the Father eternally has now come to Earth as a descendent of David to rescue us and bridge the gap between the Holy One and our sinful selves.

We could talk all day about the mystery of the Trinity and Jesus' incarnation. But for today, it's enough to say that God knows the future, but He's also been working throughout the past to bring about salvation. The gospel of John tells us that all things were made through Jesus; Jesus says, "before Abraham *was*, I *am*." Our salvation through Christ has always been a part of God's plan. God chose the Israelites as His people and gave them the law precisely to show us that the law itself doesn't give life or freedom from sin...only God can do that. And as Romans 5:6 puts it, "at just the right time, while we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly." Jesus' life and death and resurrection were not just a good idea at the time. God has been working throughout all of history to bring His plans to fruition, each piece at its proper time, and Jesus has been involved with the Father's work since the very beginning.

On a personal level, this means that God has a redemptive plan for our pasts as well. If there's nothing in your past that troubles you, you haven't taken a close enough look at yourself. On the other hand, many people are so condemned by the guilt in their personal history that they feel that God must hate them. And there's nothing farther from the truth. Even the worst past can be redeemed by God. God knows that past, and what's more, He was there. Perhaps He was hidden by the shadows of disbelief or sin or ignorance, but He was there. The whole of our lives are under His dominion – past, present, and future. He has been in control since the very beginning, and God is redeeming the whole of history. Be confident, as Jesus said in John 5:17, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working." He will not stop until death is destroyed and all is reconciled under His authority and all who would come to Him are safely at home with Him.

What Jesus shows us in this passage, in the incredible way He handled those opposed to Him and His ministry, is that God truly is in charge. We can trust Him. We can put our faith in Him. We can go to Him with any worry or concern on our hearts. We can turn from our sins and hand them over to Him, knowing He will do just as He promised and separate them from us as far as the east is from the west. He is sovereign. He is in control. And He holds you in the palm of His hand.