

March 8, 2020
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Luke
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
© 2020 David J. Whitcomb

TRAPPING THE TRAPPERS Luke 20:27-47

George Orwell's well-known story *Animal Farm* is an allegorical novel about how the animals on Mr. Jones' farm rose up in rebellion against the old farmer. They took over the farm and set up their own system of government. However, as the story progresses, the reader soon learns that government under the dictator Napoleon the pig was far worse than living under Mr. Jones' authority. Orwell later affirmed the reader's suspicion that his story was an allegory of the Bolshevik rebellion and life under the tyranny of Stalin in Russia.

The religious leaders in Jerusalem were like the animals on Mr. Jones' farm. They rejected the principle of the pagan Romans ruling over them, though they could not reject the reality. They simply chafed against it all the time. They had long before rejected the idea that God was their authority. Oh sure, they talked like God was their authority, but words were cheap and easy back then just like they are now. In life and practice most of the religious people were self-righteous. Jesus warned His followers that their righteousness would have to exceed the self-righteousness of the religious elite (Matthew 5:20).

Because the religious authorities had rejected the authority of God, they had to reject the authority of God the Son. That is why they kept asking Him about the source of His authority. They were determined to live like they wanted to, and no teacher from the hills of Galilee was going to change that. Therefore, the religious leaders decided to trap Jesus into saying something to offend either the Roman rulers or the masses of people, or preferably both. That would

be their way of getting rid of this "pest" who kept exposing their sins with truth.

In this part of Luke's account of the Lord's work, we see that first the wealthy, and probably more powerful, Sadducees sent their representatives to try to trap Jesus. Second we see the scribes, the lawyers, who were generally part of the Pharisee sect, were swept into the fray when Jesus asked them a confounding question. In both cases, Jesus, Creator and Master, befuddled the religious authorities. In both cases, the trappers were caught in the trap. In both cases, we learn that the authoritative word of God is able to explain some of the most confusing issues with which finite human wisdom wrestles. We should be assured that whatever the riddle is in our lives, God's wisdom has an answer.

God of the Living (vv.27-38).

Luke wrote, *There came to him some Sadducees, those who deny that there is a resurrection (v.27)*. These people not only disbelieved the resurrection but they chose by their question to make a mockery of it. Their question flowed from a presupposition about what Scripture teaches.

Before we get into the actual question, it is important for us to understand a little about what motivated these guys. The Sadducees were a political/religious sect. It is difficult to draw definitive conclusions about the group because most source information is sketchy. Josephus, the Jewish historian, offers a few pages of references to the group. The Mishnah, the first written record of Jewish oral traditions, adds some light to who or what the Sadducees were. Then there are a few descriptive statements like this one in the other Gospels and Acts.

The Sadducees show up most obviously during the Hasmonaean rulers where they enjoyed some authority. Then again under Herod's rule they were a significant voice in the Sanhedrin. All priests were Sadducees, but not all Sadducees were priests. That means that this party, these people were responsible for the Bazaar in the temple. It stands to reason then that they had been most offended at Jesus for cleaning out their "circus" twice.

As a group, the Sadducees were more political and linked more closely with Rome than were the Pharisees. They were generally isolated from the public and treated the people rudely. In fact, it appears that the Sadducees were more afraid of the masses of people than were the Pharisees. In light of these characteristics, we might conclude that while the Pharisees tried to trap Jesus into saying something to anger Rome, the Sadducees tried to get Him to say something to anger the people.

Their beliefs determined their actions and attitudes. The leaders in this sect believed that only the Pentateuch (first 5 books of the Bible) were the supreme word of God, and the rest of the Old Testament was a commentary on the Torah (Pentateuch). They rejected the idea of the resurrection, the afterlife, rewards or judgments, angels and demons. They were basically humanists, believing that a person had a good life based on his or her own work and merits.

By the few interactions we have with these people in the Gospels and in Acts, we can see that they proved the principle that much of what we think and how we argue is based on presuppositions. They posed a ridiculous question to Jesus because they presupposed there is not going to be a resurrection in the future. It is a reminder that Christians, of all people, must be sure that our preference and presuppositions are based on Scripture. To appeal to human authority and experience will create a spiritual quicksand. It is okay to have preferences, but we need to identify them as preferences.

As a result of their presuppositions, the Sadducees invented quite a conundrum. They came to Jesus, *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"* (vv.28-33).

This is not the same as "Seven Brides for Seven Brothers." This is one bride for seven brothers. Where did they come up with this

crazy idea, and why did Jesus bother to entertain it? Actually, the initial principle comes from the Law of Moses. The question was rooted in the instruction about levirate marriage found in the law, which the Sadducees claimed to honor.

The Law allowed, *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. And the first son whom she bears shall succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel (Deuteronomy 25:5-6).*

This is called the law of the levirate marriage, but it has nothing to do with Levites. It was God's provision for keeping the family inheritance in the Promised Land within the respective families. The Ruth and Boaz story illustrated this law very well. Boaz, who was in the same family as Elimilech, redeemed his land, which also included his daughter-in-law Ruth. Boaz agreed to raise up seed for his relative (either Mahlon or Chilion) a son of Elimilech. The law was clear enough and was sometimes followed.

However, the Sadducees' full question reveals their mockery of the law. Because they did not believe in life after death, and did not believe in resurrection, the whole question was foolishness to them. Their plan was to embarrass Jesus in the presence of the people when He would be unable to explain a righteous solution to such a complex situation.

The Sadducees were wrong and their trap sprung on themselves when Jesus gave an eternal answer to a very earthy question (vv.34-38). First, God the Son reminded His hunters that life is passing. In this, He shed perfect light on the real problem. *But Jesus answered them, "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God"* (Matthew 22:29). It was a very blunt, direct, hurtful accusation. These were religious leaders of the people who prided themselves in knowing the Pentateuch. Jesus clearly stated that they didn't really know Scripture at all because they were void of God's power.

The problem was that, though the Sadducees were very religious, they were also natural men. The problem with that is, *The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for*

they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:14). Those men were like the multitudes of religious people in our day who comment freely on the Bible without knowing what it says. Such lack of God's power results in heresies, false teaching, and lifestyles that are actually in conflict with the truth of the Bible they claim to believe.

To those earthy men, Jesus explained the truth of the matter. *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."*

Here Jesus made it plain that there is a difference between the people of this age and the people of the "resurrection age." In typical life (not every situation), marriages are arranged and people get married. But among all those people living "normal" life are those who *are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead.* The people considered worthy of the resurrection are people made righteous through faith in Christ's atonement.

Jesus was talking about the difference between the sinner and the saint, the saved and unsaved, the redeemed and unredeemed. His statement was a direct warning to the Sadducees whose self-righteousness, like that of the scribes and Pharisees, would keep them out of eternal life. Recipients of eternal life (resurrection kind-of-people) won't need marriage. Ours will be an eternal life, an angel-kind-of-life. Life in the divine environment is unlike anything the sons of this age can experience.

At this point, the Sadducees might have been ready to answer, "Yeah, but you are presupposing a resurrection and we who hold to the Law of Moses (Pentateuch) don't believe the law teaches that!" Jesus wasn't finished with His argument. He went on to explain that the big difference, and the reason for resurrection, is that God is eternal. *"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. Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him" (vv.37-38).*

This answer should cause us to think it was odd that the supporters of Moses didn't believe in resurrection, because he did. Jesus referred them back to their Bible where they could read God's own words in Exodus 3:6: *And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God (Exodus 3:6).*

God's use of the present tense verb in this statement is significant. If Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were non-existent (no life after death) as the Sadducees taught, God would have used the past tense, "I **was** the God of your father . . ." But God said that He still is the God of men whose bodies died 500-1,000 years earlier. Obviously, God was saying that there is life after death and, therefore, resurrection! No doubt. Therefore, *Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him.*

This is a serious reminder that because God is eternal, we who He makes in His image will live somewhere forever. Where will you spend eternity? Who do you recognize as your authority? If you are like the self-satisfied, self-righteous, self-governed Sadducees, you will spend eternity in the same condemnation they share. Far better to fall before King Jesus and submit to Him as your Savior in order to enjoy eternal life with the resurrected.

This question led to another. Jesus asked the next question according to Luke's account.

Who is David's Lord (vv.39-47)?

Jesus, the Christ, pointed out that David called Christ the Lord (vv.39-44). This statement followed compliments from hypocrites. When Jesus silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees were delighted. But they were still Jesus' subordinates and here the subordinate approved of their Superior's conclusions. *Then some of the scribes answered, "Teacher, you have spoken well" (v.39).*

At other times, mixed up, confused, dishonest, Scripture teachers congratulated God the Son for holding a right view. *And the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him" (Mark 12:32).* What incredible arrogance! It was as though they said, "Yay God, You got the right answer?" According to who? Even in their so-called

compliment, the lawyers' arrogant pride was obvious. Of course, part of this response was a put down of the Sadducees because the scribes, who were generally Pharisees, hated their opponents the Sadducees.

The reality is that the subordinates were embarrassed. *For they no longer dared to ask him any question (v.40)*. The Sadducees were so thoroughly embarrassed that Jesus had revealed their ignorance of Scripture they preached, that they didn't dare ask any more questions. At this point we need to consult Matthew and Mark in order to fill in some blanks that don't even appear in Luke's account. Matthew and Mark recorded that after Jesus silenced the Sadducees, a scribe (lawyer) asked about the most important command. The Pharisees probably wanted to show up the humbled Sadducees by trapping Jesus themselves. But, at the same time, Jesus also silenced the Pharisees and lawyers (Matthew 22:46).

Therefore, Jesus took up the questioning which would prove that He is the authority sent from God. Now the Perfect One would question the sinners. *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?" (vv.41-44)*.

Why did Jesus even bother to question the religious leaders? Did He want to humiliate them more? No, the topic of the question makes us realize that this was one more, if not the last, opportunity for the rulers to respond to an invitation to accept the Christ for who He is. They were wicked, deceiving, terrible people, but Jesus loved them enough to plead with them one more time.

The root issue in the question is the deity of Christ. Jesus Christ's deity, that Jesus of Nazareth was co-equal with God the Father, was the stumbling stone for the rulers. It still is the stumbling stone. Either we accept Jesus as the chief cornerstone of the Church or we reject Him to our own condemnation. No one can be redeemed, forgiven from sin, if they reject the truth about Jesus. Jesus desired for His enemies to come to the knowledge of truth, and so one more time He presented Himself as God incarnate.

So Jesus first posed this question recorded in Matthew's account to the Pharisees. *Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, saying, "What do you think*

about the Christ? Whose son is he?" They said to him, "The son of David" (Matthew 22:41-42). Luke recorded Jesus' reply which is a challenge to believe in Christ the Son of God. *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?" (vv.41-44)*.

The Old Testament makes it clear that God promised that Messiah, the Christ, would be born in David's line (1 Samuel 7:12-14). Psalm 89:3-4, Amos 9:11, Micah 5:2 all promised that Messiah would be born in David's line. That would allow for people to refer to Christ as "Son of David," not as literal son, but born in the lineage of David. That is what the blind men shouted and Jesus didn't tell them they were wrong (Matthew 9:27). The lineages of both Mary and Joseph prove that Jesus was born in David's line.

So here Jesus quoted Psalm 110:1 pointing out that Messiah would have all the authority of God the Father. He is sitting at the right hand of God, the place of authority. He is enjoying complete mastery of His enemies. Most important, the Messiah was born in David's line as man, but David called Him "Lord" as God. It was Jesus' claim to this reality that the wicked rulers finally used as evidence to execute Him. They chose not to accept Christ's final invitation.

Therefore, Jesus warned His followers to beware of self-appointed lords (vv.45-47). This was the Christ warning the people He loved. *And in the hearing of all the people he said to his disciples (v.45)*. On one hand, it was a warning for all the people. On the other hand, this warning was specifically for the disciples. Simply put, they were to be careful not to emulate the hypocritical leaders.

Consider the warning. Jesus said, *"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, who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation" (vv.46-47)*. Jesus warned that the religious hypocrites appear to be honorable. They dress in a way to attract favorable attention. They like to walk around in long robes (v.46). They make long prayers (v.47).

But they are hypocrites. Even though they are sinners on the inside, they look honorable in order to receive men's praise. *They love the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts (v.46)*. They demand the best seats. They try to look honorable. But their prayers are pretentious (v.47), and they are devouring widows' houses (v.47). It only makes sense for Jesus' followers to beware of people like this. The word means that we should watch out for them and avoid them. We definitely don't want to become like them. But it is not our responsibility to level retribution on them. Jesus already promised that *they will receive the greater condemnation (v.47)*.

The powerful, self-sufficient rulers were determined to subvert the authority of Christ. In the end, He proved to be so much their superior that they were silenced. Like Job, we are to become speechless before the majesty of our Maker. We will embrace God's Messiah as He is (the Son of God, coequal with God), or we will live in eternal condemnation. "Who is Jesus?" or Pilate's question, "What shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" is the most important question in eternity.