

THE CHRIST IS DAVID'S LORD

Luke 20:20–47

Key Verses: 20:42–43

“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.”’”

What do you think about having a “lord” over you? Just the thought of it probably makes most of us bristle. Soon Jesus will tell his disciples: “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them...But not so with you” (22:25–26). Jesus doesn’t want any of us to lord it over others. He doesn’t want any of us to be enslaved, either (Gal.4). Yet, the Bible says Jesus himself is not only our Savior but also our “Lord” (41–44).¹ At first, the three discussions with him in this passage² seem like random teachings about various things. But as we look closer, they all converge around this truth, that Jesus is Lord. As Lord, he’s authorized to teach us how to live in this world (20–26) and what to believe about our future (27–40). As Lord, he’s got wisdom even greater than King Solomon (11:31), wisdom that none of his adversaries can withstand or contradict (compare 21:15). In fact, God made him even King David’s Lord (41–46). “Jesus is Lord” is a non-negotiable truth for us all. But what does it mean? How can we live with this faith? And why should we? May God speak to us through his word.

Look at verses 19–20 (ESV). Because Jesus has spoken against them, the religious leaders are seeking to arrest him right away. But he’s too popular. It says, “So they watched him...” Literally it means they’re “following him closely, inspecting him.” It adds that they “send spies” because, in dealing with Jesus, they want to steer clear of anything that would implicate themselves. They’re most interested in protecting their own positions. These spies are likely getting paid. They “pretend to be sincere,” hiding among his real followers, and seek to “catch him” in his words—to find some mistake, some weak point. Their goal is clear, to deliver him “to the authority and jurisdiction of the governor.” They want to create some charge against Jesus that the Roman governor Pilate will act upon. Then, when he gets arrested, no one can blame them. Very sneaky. Look at verse 21. They flatter his courageous, uncompromising truthfulness. Indeed, Jesus was no “people pleaser”; he was always out to please God. And for Luke, clearly teaching “the way of God” is important.³ It’s the way of repentance of sin and faith in Jesus, the way of forgiveness and the way of the Spirit.⁴ It’s also the way of following Jesus daily, the way of losing, the way of suffering, the way of the cross (9:23). It’s never a popular way; it’s a hard way that leads to life (Matt.7:14). Apostle Paul also taught this way, the way “through many tribulations” to the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22). Obviously these spies have heard about this “way of God.” But they have no intention of following it.

¹ Luke’s Gospel stresses that Jesus is for all the outcasts, but it also refers to Jesus as “Lord” more than any other Gospel writer (1:17,43,76; 2:11; 3:4; 5:8,12; 6:5,46; 7:6,13,19, etc.)

² Matthew and Mark recount four discussions (see Matt.22:15–46; Mark 12:13–37), but Luke omits the one about the greatest commandment because he has included it earlier (10:25–37).

³ Luke repeatedly mentions “the Way” in his other book, Acts (9:2; 18:25–26; 19:9,23; 22:2; 24:14,22).

⁴ 3:3; 17:3–4; 24:47; Acts 2:38; 5:31; 8:22.

Instead, they ask a disingenuous question. What is it? Look at verse 22. In Greek, the word “tribute” is more than a tax; it means a payment to someone higher, expressing submission and dependence. It’s really a hard pill to swallow. The Jews were proud of being God’s people, so they hated paying this tribute. With such a hot-button issue, Jesus’ enemies are pretty sure he’ll take the bait and say, “No, with such idolaters we should never compromise!” Then they can quickly turn him over to Pilate as a rebel against Rome. Even if he says, “Yes, we should pay it,” they can characterize him as yet another political sell-out, seeking his own position, and so poke a hole in his popularity and soon be done with him.

Look at verse 23. “But he perceived their craftiness...” It’s the same word used for the serpent who tempted the woman (Gen.3:1). Jesus can see right through these manipulative actors. What does he say? Read verse 24. “Show me a denarius. Whose likeness and inscription does it have?” They said, ‘Caesar’s.’” A denarius was a silver coin worth a day’s wages. It had the image of Tiberius Caesar on it, and an inscription that he’s the son of the Divine Augustus. In other words, to God’s people, that coin represented both blasphemy and idolatry. Taking a moment to hold up that coin for all to see, the message sinks in.

Then Jesus speaks. Read verse 25. “He said to them, ‘Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.’” He’s saying, “Well then, if we really belong to God, why hold on to that idolatrous coin?” To put it plainly, “Give Caesar back his dirty money.” For most people, paying such tribute is painful. But Jesus is saying getting rid of that coin is a good way to rid themselves of idolatry (cf. Col.3:5b). He also teaches to give “to God the things that are God’s.” What are those things? They are our worship, love, loyalty—even our very lives. Nothing in this world deserves these things from us—especially no earthly Caesar. But Jesus deserves it all. In fact, Jesus’ words here call us to repent. For him to be Lord of our hearts, we’ve got to repent of giving our hearts to money, people, or worldly things. They can’t catch Jesus in what he says, but they marvel at his answer and become silent (26). So nice.

But another group of enemies appear. Look at verse 27. The Sadducees were an aristocratic priestly class. As landowners, they lived off of farmers’ rent. They prided themselves on being rational, and preferred to focus on the Law of Moses to maintain social stability and keep themselves at the top. They didn’t like the doctrine of the resurrection, because with their wealth and power they wanted to enjoy the things of this world. Such people wouldn’t usually lower themselves to come to Jesus in person. But feeling the intense pressure of his popularity in their own backyard, they want to dismiss him as the uneducated Galilean they think he is. They’re confident their contrived story will blow him out of the water.

In verses 28–33 they ask him about the resurrection, because they’ve heard he’s been teaching it (11:31–32; 14:14). In their so-called “question,” they create a scenario based on the levirate law of marriage. A man marries but dies before he can have children. He has six brothers, and they all attempt, successively, to marry his widow. According to this law, it’s to produce offspring for their deceased brother. But they all die off in the process, including the woman herself. What a horrible story, especially for the woman. These Sadducees seem obsessed with

the question, “Who gets the woman?” Pretty sick. And their thought world is full of repeated marriage and death. Pretty dark.

How does Jesus respond? Read verses 34–36. Jesus gives a bright view of the future, based on the resurrection. It will not at all be a continuation of this life. Jesus calls it a new “age.” How does he describe it? First, he says that only those whom God considers “worthy” will get to be there (35a). All hypocrites, impostors, and self-righteous people will be excluded. Only those who humbly receive the grace of Jesus and follow him will be welcome. Next, he says no one there will marry or be given in marriage (35b). Why? It’s not because marriage is bad. Instead he explains, “...for they cannot die anymore” (36a). It means that to God, more children will no longer be necessary. Third, he says everyone there will be equal to angels and will be children of God, children of the resurrection. His words emphasize how worthy these people are to God. What a glorious hope! In contrast, Jesus is hinting at how unworthy these Sadducees are.

Then he explains that resurrection is in the very nature of God. Read verses 37–38. Nobody ever thought of using this phrase “the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob” to prove the resurrection. Only Jesus teaches that these men of God must be alive, because in his very nature, God is only the God of the living. Once again, his opponents are silenced. But some scribes there, who believe the resurrection in theory, mumble, “Teacher, you have spoken well” (39). And nobody else dares ask him any question.

Finally, Jesus asks his own question. Read verses 41–44. The most common understanding of the Christ was that he would be David’s son. So Jesus quotes here from Psalm 110, a psalm most familiar to Jews.⁵ Jesus again picks up on something no one has ever noticed. In this psalm, David calls the Christ his “Lord.” Jesus asks, “...so how is he his son?” This time, no one says anything: they’re all stumped. It’s not just about winning a debate. And the point is not whether the Christ is descended from David. Jesus wants us to know that he’s far greater than David’s son. He’s Son of the Most High God (1:32,35).

Even David calls him “my Lord.” His enemies’ problem is that they’re looking at him humanly. They see him as a mere man, critically and skeptically. But as Lord, Jesus is far more than a man; he’s actually God who became flesh (John 1:14). And by the mighty power of God, he’s about to be raised from the dead as our living Lord. The Bible says he “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” (Rom.1:4). It’s totally the wrong approach to come to him with criticisms or challenges. We need to come to Jesus in humble repentance until we can confess, like doubting Thomas did, “my Lord and my God!” (John 20:28).

There’s another truth about him. Read verse 42b. “The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand...’” In this Jerusalem temple, his enemies plot against him. But after his resurrection, God the Father will exalt him to his own right hand in heaven. There is no higher place. At God’s

⁵ In fact, it’s the psalm most alluded to in the New Testament (Matt.22:44; 26:64; Mark 13:26; Luke 20:42–43; 22:69; Acts 2:34–36; 5:31; 7:55–56; Rom.8:34; 1 Cor.15:25; Eph.1:20; Col.3:1; Heb.1:3,13; 7:11–28; 8:1; 10:12–13; 12:2; 1 Pet.3:22–24).

right hand, Jesus is fully vindicated by God the Father. At God's right hand, he's in the most intimate relationship with him. At God's right hand, he shares the Father's authority, glory, and power to reign. At God's right hand, he has eternal victory. At God's right hand, he pours out the Holy Spirit and ever lives to intercede for us.⁶ In our pride we're so ego-centric. We all need to look up at Jesus our Lord who's at the right hand of God, so that we can know him as "my Lord." It involves humbling ourselves to listen, obey, and serve him. It involves making him Lord of every aspect of our lives: our hope and direction, finances and priorities, affections and choices.

And there's one more truth about him. Read verse 43 again. "...until I make your enemies your footstool." Amid these hostile leaders, Jesus is holding onto this promise: God will make his enemies his footstool. God will give him complete victory. God will bring all things in subjection to him.⁷ Right now God is fulfilling this through the preaching of the gospel. In the end God will make it happen fully when Jesus comes again. Through Christ, the evil one and the last enemy, death will be destroyed (2 Thess.2:8; 1 Cor.15:26). We need to know our Lord Jesus is the ultimate Victor. By faith we share his victory and are not afraid of anyone (1 Pet.3:14–15). Verses 45–47 end with what people look like when they don't know Jesus as Lord: even in the guise of religion, they're living for their own glory.

Read verses 42–43 again. This Easter, may God give us new faith in Jesus as Christ our Lord, and a new decision to live fully under his lordship.

⁶ Acts 2:33; 5:31; Rom.8:34b.

⁷ 1 Cor.15:25–28; Eph.1:20–22.