

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

LUKE 20:20-21:38

One of my favorite movies is John Wayne's final film, "The Shootist." Wayne plays a gunslinger dying of cancer. He decides to exit this world on his own terms.

He invites three villains to meet him on his birthday - at the Metropole Saloon. He'll leave this world on the same day he arrived... And it's a classic shootout. The Old Duke guns down all three bad guys and goes out in a blaze of glory. It's a showdown for the ages.

And that's what we have in Luke 20.

Jesus orchestrates a showdown with three villains - the chief priests, the scribes, and the Jewish elders.

On Sunday He sent them an invitation of sorts. By driving the moneychangers out of the Temple, Jesus had upset *their power and their profits*. Surely, this would set up a confrontation in the Temple on Monday.

It was a theological shootout. The Jews squeezed-off questions intended to trap Jesus. He returned fire with wisdom from above. When the smoke cleared the bad guys were humiliated, while Jesus was glorified by all.

We pick up the action in 20:20... "So (the Jews) 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." They were hoping Jesus would slip up and say something that would be offensive to the Romans.

They could then let Rome do their dirty work.

“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...” Of course, this is phony flattery. The Jews will butter Jesus up, then stick Him with the butter knife...

And here comes their first trap... Verse 22, “Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?” This was a hot topic in Jewish circles at that time. The Roman poll tax was an existence tax. The assumption was that life was a right given to a person by Rome. But this flew in the face of biblical truth that life comes from God.

Either a “yes” or a “no” could get Jesus into trouble.

If He said, “Yes, pay the tax,” the Jews would portray Him as a traitor and Roman collaborator. Orthodox Jews would even accuse Him of idolatry. Since the emperor, who claimed to be a god, forged his image on the coins. Some hardcore Jews believed to use the currency to pay the tax was giving homage to an idol.

On the other hand, if Jesus said, “No, don't pay the tax,” they could accuse Him of treason against Rome. The Romans were tolerant of divergent religious beliefs, but unbending when it came to political loyalty. The Jews saw this as a perfect question to trap Jesus.

Verse 23, “But He perceived their craftiness, and said to them, “Why do you test Me? Show Me a denarius.” This was a small silver coin, the size of a dime. Jesus asks, “Whose

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

On one side of a denarius was the bust of the emperor. The caption read, "Tiberias Caesar, son of the divine Augustus." On the other side were the words, "Pontifex Maximus." Latin for "*High Priest.*"

The denarius was a coin dedicated to the emperor.

So "(Jesus) said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." But they could not catch Him in His words in the presence of the people. And they marveled at His answer and kept silent." And 2000 years later we are still marveling at Jesus' answer!

I love commentator Kent Hughes' summation, "The statement of our Lord was not only astounding the instant it was uttered, but it is even today universally acclaimed to be the single most influential political statement ever made in the history of the world!"

In the ancient world, coins were understood to be the property of the person whose image was on them.

Thus, Jesus is saying, "If this is Caesar's coin, give it back to him - but while you're at it, give to God what belongs to God!" And where do we find the image of God? It's stamped into each of us. Mankind was made in God's image and likeness. Jesus is saying, "Give your coins to Caesar, but give your life to God."

In this one brief, but amazing statement Jesus affirms both the **validity** and **limits** of human government. God is the

supreme authority, yet human government has its place. The Caesar in Rome has the right to lay claim to a citizen's money in the form of taxes - but God can rightfully lay claim to our very lives.

Round One of this final showdown goes to Jesus!

Verse 27, “Then some of the Sadducees, who deny that there is a resurrection, came to Him...” In the first century, among Jewish leaders, there were two major sects - the Pharisees and Sadducees. The Pharisees were conservative, while the Sadducees were liberal.

The Sadducees only considered the first five books of Moses as inspired by God. They denied the existence of angels, the afterlife, and even the resurrection of the dead... *And here it comes, you know it's coming... That's why they were sad-you-see.*

And it's the Sadducees who launch the next attack. “(They) asked Him, 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.” This was all spelled out in Deuteronomy 25, The Law of the Levirate. “Levir” is the Latin word for “brother-in-law.”

The Jewish Law said if a man died his brother was to marry his widow and sire a son to carry on his brother's name. This law is the backdrop for the story of Ruth.

In verse 29 a case of conjecture is presented, “Now there were seven brothers. And the first took a wife, and died

without children. And the second took her as wife, and he died childless. Then the third took her, and in like manner the seven also; and they left no children, and died.” It reminds me of the woman who called her husband “Henry...” Why? Because he was the VIII. **[LAUGH TRACK]

Ever hear about the woman who thought she could have 16 husbands? At the wedding, the pastor said, “For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer.” At least the hypothetical woman in the story stopped at seven.

If this woman had actually existed, she would’ve been on The Jerry Springer Show. Or Nancy Grace would’ve wanted to do an interview. She would be asked why she hated men and killed off the seven brothers.

It reminds me of another gal who had a dream. An angel told her, “Prepare yourself for widowhood. Your husband is about to die a violent death.” The woman replied, “I have just one question, will I be acquitted?”

Here too is a woman who buried seven husbands.

The Sadducees finish their tale, verse 32, “Last of all the woman died also. Therefore, in the resurrection, whose wife does she become? For all seven had her as wife.” And I’m sure they snickered when they posed the question. *They didn't even believe in resurrection.*

“Jesus answered and said to them, “The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are counted worthy to attain that age, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage...” If you have a good marriage at present this is probably bad news. If you’re in a

bad marriage you just breathed a sigh of relief... *It's not forever.*

Human marriage was created as a portrait of Jesus' relationship with His church. In heaven, there'll be no marriage among humans. We'll all be married to Christ.

Of course, this doesn't mean there won't be intimacy among humans in heaven. I'd imagine in heaven the most casual friendship will be more heartfelt than the deepest marriage on earth. But heaven's dominant relationship will be with Jesus and His church.

Our marriage to the Master will be the featured attraction. The depth and intimacy we'll enjoy with Jesus will make human marriages unnecessary.

Jesus adds, "Nor can they die anymore, for they are equal to the angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection." Angels are immortal. They never die.

Resurrected humans have the same trait - they also live forever. Jesus calls us, "*sons of the resurrection.*"

One day, believers in Jesus will receive resurrected bodies, and no longer be subject to death and decay. Our bodies will be fit for the heavenly environment. As Paul writes, "When this mortal has put on immortality."

Then Jesus says in verse 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.' For He is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live to Him."

Jesus could've quoted numerous passages to prove the OT taught the resurrection of the dead, but the Sadducees only considered the five books of Moses as inspired by God. This is why Jesus takes His argument from Moses and Exodus 3 - the burning bush passage.

Here's Jesus' logic... If God is the God of the living, and He's also the God of Abraham; then Abraham who lived 2200 years ago must still be alive and kicking.

Verse 39, "Then some of the scribes answered and said, "Teacher, You have spoken well." But after that they dared not question Him anymore."

Spiritual six-guns have been blazing in the Temple. The religious crowds are dead to rights. Jesus is the Shootist still standing. But before He sticks his gun back in its holster Jesus has a question of His own...

"And He said to them, "How can they say that the Christ is the Son of David?" Remember the word "Christos" is the Greek word for the Hebrew "Messiah."

In Jewish theology, Messiah was God's Anointed, the eternal King who would come and establish Israel as an eternal kingdom. But there was an apparent contradiction Jewish theologians had not addressed.

Jesus points it out by quoting David in Psalm 110:1, "Now David himself said in the Book of Psalms: 'The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.'" Therefore David calls Him 'Lord'; how is He then his Son?" 2 Samuel 7:12 made it clear Messiah would be a

descendant of David. Yet David himself called the Messiah *his Lord*.

King David had many sons, but only one Lord. The only person greater than the King was God Himself.

Jesus is asking, "How can Messiah be David's Son *and* Lord? The only way he can be under David and over him simultaneously is if David's Son is also God?"

The Jews saw Messiah in human terms - as "*Son of David*" - but never considered Him as more than man. Here, Jesus introduces the biblical concept the Jews overlooked - the Messiah's deity. The Christ was God.

Their presuppositions of the Messiah were wrong.

Jesus tries to take them back to Scripture... *yet they refuse to go*. At this point, they stop questioning Him, and sadly never question their own assumptions. The Jews *grill Jesus* on Monday. On Thursday they *kill Him*.

After the big shootout with the Jews in the Temple, Jesus fires off one final round... Verse 45, "*Then, in the hearing of all the people, He said to His disciples, 'beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces, the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts, who devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation.'*" The Jews He'd just encountered were all show and no substance. They were hypocrites.

Oh, the Jewish leaders dressed the priestly part, talked the part, played the part... but they preyed on innocent people, and made a mockery of true worship.

And in Chapter 21, Jesus spots a few of the guys He'd just described. "And He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury..." In the Jewish Temple, there were thirteen offering boxes shaped like upside down megaphones. Each box accumulated money for a different purpose - *upkeep, charity, etc.*

And the rich liked to make a pompous show of their giving. They *gave to God, to attract attention from men.*

Yet Jesus' eyes were focused elsewhere... "And He saw also a certain poor widow putting in two mites."

A "*mite*" was the Jewish "*lepta*" - a coin worth one-eighth of a cent. From a strictly monetary point of view, these two mites were an inconsequential offering.

Yet Jesus saw it differently. "So He said, "Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all; for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had." Humans measure the value of an offering by the amount that's given, whereas Jesus measured it by the amount that was leftover. We focus on the *portion* of the gift, but God sees the *proportion*.

Actually, few people know the joy of true giving.

Real giving digs deep. As David once said, "Nor will I offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God with that which costs me nothing." From week to week, do you truly give to God, or do you merely leave Him a tip?

Verse 5, “Then, as some spoke of the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and donations...” The Temple in Jerusalem was a sight to behold...

Josephus the Jewish historian left us this eyewitness description, "The exterior of the Temple lacked nothing. It astounded both mind and eye. For, being covered on all sides with massive plates of gold, the sun was no sooner up that it radiated so fiery a flash that persons straining to look at it were compelled to avert their eyes, as from the solar rays. To approaching strangers, it appeared from a distance like a snow-clad mountain; for all that was not overlaid with gold was purest white."

Of the "donations" Jesus mentions, King Herod gave a golden vine, that had artistic clusters of grapes as tall as a man... The Egyptian king, Ptolemy, donated a golden desk... The Temple was a stunning sight.

But Jesus said, “These things which you see - the days will come in which not *one* stone shall be left upon another that shall not be thrown down.”

Jesus’ prediction came true when the Roman legion sacked Jerusalem in 70 AD. During the siege, one of the soldiers violated orders and threw a torch into the Temple. It caught fire and melted the gold that adorned the outer walls. Liquid gold ran into the crevasses between the stones, and greedy troops pushed over the stones to retrieve the gold. It fulfilled Jesus’ prophecy, "not one stone shall be left upon another."

You can see the toppled stones even today!

“So they asked Him, saying, “Teacher, but when will these things be? And what sign *will there be* when these things are about to take place?” In Matthew, the disciples expand on these questions. They also ask about the signs of Jesus’ second coming and the end of the age... That’s the scope of the next few verses...

Verse 8 “And He said: “Take heed that you not be deceived. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am *He*,’ and, ‘The time has drawn near.’ Therefore do not go after them.” Here’s the first mark on the timeline.

There will be *false christs* and *false claims*, but don’t panic. In this present age, the age of man, spiritual deception will be the status quo. And yet it’ll heat up...

“When you hear of wars and commotions, do not be terrified; for these things must come to pass first, but the end *will not come* immediately.” Here’s another precursor - *military conflict* and *mass chaos*.

What else would you expect from a world that rejects the Prince of Peace? Chaos and conflict become *run-of-the-mill* when mankind *runs-away-from-God’s-will*.

Verse 10, “Then He said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.”

Wars are not a sign in and of themselves - wars are common among sinful men - but when they’re fought on a global scale it’s the first sign the end is near. *Prior to 1914, we never had a world war. Now we've had two.*

“And there will be great earthquakes in various places, and famines and pestilences; and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven.” This same list appears in Matthew 24 where Jesus calls it, “the beginning of sorrows.” These could be events that occur in The Great Tribulation described in Revelation 6-19. Judgments that happen after the Church is raptured, or they could occur beforehand, or even both.

In fact, here’s today’s question, Is Mother Nature warming up for the end? Every year, we see similar catastrophes in increasing numbers: *floods, tornados, hurricanes, fires, earthquakes...* Was Covid-19 a “*pestilence*” or plague? How could it not be! Almost 2.9 million people died from complications of the virus...

In 2020 East Africa fought not only Covid-19, but a massive invasion of locust and subsequent famine.

The UN reports 690 million people now go to bed hungry. Global hunger is on the rise. 10,000 children die of hunger related causes each day. *Add it all up and I believe our world is full of signs of the last days.*

Verse 12, “But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and rulers for My name’s sake. But it will turn out for you as an occasion for testimony.”

Persecution of Christians is also a sign of the end.

The book of Revelation tells us the Great Tribulation will be a bloody day for believers... Yet whether Jesus’ prophecy occurs before or after the rapture, whenever a Christian is attacked for his or her faith, it’s like God putting a microphone

in their face. *Persecution* very often turns into an opportunity for *proclamation*.

Jesus says, “Therefore settle *it* in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist.”

When persecution does arise the believer’s job is to bear his back. God’s job is to put words in his mouth.

I’ve never been physically persecuted for my faith, but I’m sure it’s hard to be brave and articulate at the same time. Jesus promises us if we take care of the courage, His Spirit will supply us with wisdom to speak.

Next Jesus gives us an ominous warning, “You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will put *some* of you to death. And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake.” Folks who follow Jesus in [The Great Tribulation](#), will pay a steep price, even martyrdom. This is why if you can’t live for Him today, don’t think you’ll die for Him then.

There are places in this world where persecution is alive, but it doesn’t compare to the fiery trials ahead.

And in verses 18-19, Jesus encourages believers who live in the end times, “But not a hair of your head shall be lost. By your patience possess your souls.”

Next Jesus takes up the question His disciples asked Him earlier. *What about the destruction of the Temple?*

He says, "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her. For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people." The history of Jerusalem's fall is tragic...

The Romans cut off its supply lines and laid siege for five long months. The historian, Josephus, was an eyewitness to the atrocities. He tells of approximately 600,000 Jews who died of starvation. Their bodies were tossed over the walls at a rate of 4000 per day.

Josephus writes, "Wives would snatch the food from husbands, children from fathers, and - most pitiable of all - mothers from the very mouths of their infants..."

Old men were beaten, clutching their food, and women were dragged by the hair, concealing what was in their hands. There was no compassion... children were actually lifted up with the fragments to which they clung and dashed to the ground." The situation was so desperate Josephus watched one woman kill her own son, roast his body, eat half of it, and store the rest.

He writes again, "Children... with swollen figures, roamed like phantoms through the market and collapsed wherever their doom overtook them."

Josephus even tells a story of Jews who swallowed their money, then surrendered to the enemy. When a prisoner was seen picking coins from his excrement the rumor spread that the Jews were "full of gold."

The Roman soldiers started gutting their prisoners in search of the loot. Josephus concludes, "No other city ever endured such miseries, not since the world began." *And the worst may still be ahead for the Jews.*

Many folks see in Jesus' words a picture of a last days battle for Jerusalem. Notice these predictions are for "*the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled...*" All things were not fulfilled in 70 AD, thus I believe this is a reference to [The Great Tribulation](#), when the end times Antichrist will surround Jerusalem as the Romans of old did. These predictions are not just *in the past*, but they're also *in the future*.

Verse 24, "*And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations.*" Over a million Jews were slaughtered by the Roman legion in 70 AD.

In addition, Rome took 95,000 Jews into slavery.

And what has happened to Jerusalem since 70 AD is a sad and grueling story... [Sixty-five years later in 135 BC the Jews revolted again. A man named "Simon Bar Kochba" fought a guerrilla war against Rome and briefly took possession of Jerusalem.](#) Incidentally, the Jewish leaders who rejected Jesus hailed Bar Kochba as their Messiah. He was the first *false Christ*.

Bar Kochba even tried to rebuild the Temple, but his revolt was crushed when 580,000 Jews were killed.

This time the Romans built a Temple on the Jewish Temple Mount to the pagan god, Jupiter, and renamed Jerusalem "Aelia Capitolina." It became a capital crime for Jews to enter their own former capitol city. For the next five centuries Jerusalem remained under Roman or Byzantine control. Jews were scattered worldwide.

In 637 AD with the rise of Islam, Muslims captured Jerusalem and renamed it al-Quds, or "the holy." From 637 to 1917, except for a few brief periods during the Crusades, the city of Jerusalem was ruled by Muslims.

For 1300 years the former Jewish capital was governed by Gentiles, while Jews lived in dispersion, scattered among the nations... **until our generation.**

It's only in modern times that God has brought His people back to their ancient homeland. Today's Jewish control of Jerusalem is probably our most definitive biblical sign that we are living in the Last Days.

For verse 24, "And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled."

This verse means when Jews take control of Jerusalem from the Gentiles it'll mark a major turning point in God's plan for mankind. Gentile domination will end, and God will fulfill all His promises to Israel.

And this occurred on June 6, 1967, at the end of the Six Day War, General Moshe Dayan led his Israeli paratroopers into

the Old City of Jerusalem, and in a bloody battle took control of Jerusalem from the Arabs.

On that day, for the first time in 1900 years Jerusalem was back in Jewish hands. The capital city of King David was now out from under Gentile rule.

Yet sadly, Moshe Dayan made a mistake. Though Jerusalem was under Israeli military authority, to pacify the Arabs, he partitioned the city into four quarters - the **Armenian, Christian, Muslim** and **Jewish** sections.

Each quarter retained the ground most holy to its religion. Armenians controlled Mount Zion and the Upper Room, Christians the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. The Jewish Quarter stretched to the Wailing Wall. And the Muslims took control of Temple Mount.

Today, though Israeli soldiers still patrol the area of the Temple Mount, the religious activities conducted there are under a Muslim authority called the WAQF.

And one of the rules imposed by these Muslims is a prohibition of Bibles on Mount Moriah. You're not supposed to bring a Bible where the Temple once stood. Yet I've heard of some sneaky pastors doing it anyway.

Today though, Jerusalem is no longer *"trampled by Gentiles,"* and it's a sure sign God is returning His focus to the Jews. The return of their Messiah is near!

Verse 25 tells us, *"And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts*

failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.”

This is definitely the period yet future, *The Great Tribulation*. These judgments will serve a dual purpose: God will *punish the world* and *purify the Jews*.

And this last seven years of intense judgment ends with the return of Jesus. “Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.”

Jesus came to earth the first time humbly, but He'll come again in power and great glory. He'll return to right all wrongs and establish His promised Kingdom!

I say, “Come quickly, Lord Jesus!”

For verse 28 tells us, “Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.” When you see *the rise of global conflicts*, and *Israel back in her homeland*, and *Mother Nature erupting with natural disasters*, and *the increase of plague and pestilence* don't get depressed and hang your head, *look up!* Lift up your head! Jesus is coming. Our longed-for redemption is drawing near.

“Then (Jesus) spoke to them a parable: “Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. When they are already budding, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near. So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near.” There are two possible interpretations here...

Jesus may simply be saying that just as the greening of a plant's leaves is a sign of changing seasons, the signs He's mentioned in these verses indicate the end.

Or there could be more to it... In Scripture, the fig tree is often a symbol for Israel. Jesus could be saying, a sign of His return is the rebirth of the Jewish state.

The revival of the modern Israel is unprecedented in world history. It's nothing short of a miracle. How can a people scattered and homeless for 1900 years manage to retain their identity, nationalism, language, culture, religion, and come back together to form a nation?

Where are the Hittites or Philistines today? Yet a fig tree has re-blossomed in the land given to the father of the Jews, Abraham. I believe Israel's rebirth is a sign Jesus is coming soon. It's true, "God's timepiece is not a Bulova, or Omega, or Rolex - it's the nation Israel."

For "Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place." And here's the most provocative part of Jesus' prophecy.

If the budding of the fig tree is the rebirth of the nation Israel; then the generation of Christians that see the miracle are the ones who'll be raptured by Jesus.

And that would mean us! In 1948, Israel became an independent state. In 1967, the Jews took Jerusalem. And our generation has been eye-witnesses to both...

Verse 33, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away." Here Jesus is being emphatic.

He's saying you can take this promise, as well as all of God's promises - to the bank!

“But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly.

For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth.” Jesus has preached a sermon to His disciples. He's warned them of what's in the future, now He calls them to action. *Don't get lulled asleep by the world's distractions. No party on Earth is worth missing the marriage supper of the Lamb.*

“Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

Notice, we are promised an escape! You don't have to live through God's judgment of this earth. Before *God's wrath* comes down, the Church will rise up.

At the second coming Jesus *mops up*, but at the rapture, He *snatches up*. We need to be ready. *Watch and pray*. We should always stay in communication with headquarters. Don't get distracted by this world.

Verse 37, “And in the daytime He was teaching in the temple, but at night He went out and stayed on the mountain called Olivet. Then early in the morning all the people came to Him in the temple to hear Him.”

Jesus and His disciples were probably camping in a Garden called Gethsemane. The countdown to our salvation is ticking now... The cross is on the horizon.