

“THROUGH THE BIBLE”

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One of my favorite movies is “[The Shootist](#)” - John Wayne’s final film. 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, they’d want to confront Him in the Temple on Monday.

And it was a theological shootout. The Jews squeeze off questions intended to trap Jesus. He returns fire with wisdom from above. When the smoke clears the bad guys are humiliated, and Jesus is glorified by all.

The action starts in verse 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 wanted Jesus to 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...”](#) This is phony flattery. The Jews plan to butter Him up, then stick Him with the butter knife. They want to catch Jesus off guard.

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. The Roman poll tax was an existence tax. The assumption was that life was a right given by Rome. This flew in the face of the Bible. God is the author of life. Either a “yes” or a “no” answer could get Jesus into trouble... If He said, “[Yes, pay tax,](#)” the Jews would portray Him as a traitor and Roman collaborator. Orthodox Jews would even accuse Him of idolatry. Since the emperor claimed to be a god and his image was on the coin, some hardcore Jews believed to pay the tax was to pay homage to an idol. On the other hand, if Jesus said, “[No, don't pay tax,](#)” they could report him to the Romans, and accuse Him of treason. Rome was tolerant of divergent religious beliefs, but it was unbending when it came to political loyalty. For the Jews this was the perfect question to use 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 was the bust of the Roman emperor. The caption read, “[Tiberias Caesar, son of the divine Augustus.](#)” On the other side were the words, “[Pontifex Maximus.](#)” which is Latin for “[High Priest.](#)” Obviously, the coin was 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 still marvel!

I love Kent Hughes' comment on this verse... "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 every 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? Its stamped into the life of 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 amazing brevity Jesus affirms both the *validity* and *limits* of human government. God is the supreme authority, yet government has a place. The Caesar in Rome had the right to lay claim to a citizen's money in the form of taxes - but God has the right to lay claim to all of our 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 *the Sadducees*. The Pharisees were conservatives. The Sadducees were the liberals. 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*... That's why they were *sad-you-see*.

These were Sadducees who launch this second 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 *The Law of the Levirate*. "Levir" is Latin for "brother-in-law." Deuteronomy 25 details the custom. If a man died his brother was to marry the widow and sire a son to carry on his brother's name. This law is the backdrop for the story of Ruth.

Verse 29 "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." This scenario reminds me of the woman who called her husband "Henry..." Why? Because he was the VIII.

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 she had actually existed, this woman would've been on *The Jerry Springer Show*. I'm sure Nancy Grace would've wanted to do an interview. She'd ask why she hated men and killed off seven brothers. Did you hear about the gal who had a dream. An angel appeared to her and announced, "Prepare yourself for widowhood. Your husband is about to die a violent death." The woman responded, "I have just one question - will I be acquitted?" Here too is a woman who had it in for husbands...

The Sadducees finish their tale in 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." I'm sure the Sadducees snickered when they posed the question. They didn't even believe in the 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're in a good marriage this is probably bad news. If you're in a bad marriage you just breathed a sigh of relief... *It's not forever*.

Marriage was created as a portrait of Jesus' relationship with His church. In heaven, we'll still be intimate with other humans. Probably, the most casual friendship in heaven will be more heartfelt than the deepest marriage on earth. But there'll be no marriages between human beings. The dominant relationship in heaven will be our relationship with Jesus. Our marriage to the Master is 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. In this respect humans are equal. We'll also live forever.

Jesus calls us *“sons of the resurrection.”* One day, we’ll receive resurrected bodies. We’ll no longer be subject to decay. When an astronaut walks on the moon he needs a suit fit for the lunar environment. Likewise, when we reach heaven we’ll need a body appropriate for heaven. As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15, *“Our mortal bodies will put on immortality.”*

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 consider the 5 books of Moses as inspired by God. This is why Jesus takes His argument from Moses and Exodus 3 on the burning bush. And here’s His logic... If God is the God of the living, and He’s also the God of Abraham - then 2200 year old Abe 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-shooters have been blazing in the Temple. Religious people are dead to rights. Jesus is the Shootist still standing. But before He sticks his gun back in its holster He has a question of His own... *“And He said to them, ‘How can they say that the Christ is the Son of David?’* 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 that the 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 called the Messiah his Lord. King David had many sons, but only one Lord. The only person greater than the King, *or His Lord*, was God. So Jesus is asking the obvious, *“How can Messiah be David’s Son and his Lord... unless his Son is also God?”*

The Jews saw the Messiah in human terms - the *“Son of David”* - but they never considered Him as more than man. Jesus introduces a biblical concept the Jews overlooked - the deity of Messiah. The Christ was God. Their traditions about the Messiah were wrong. Jesus tries to take them back to Scripture – but they refuse to go... At this point they stop questioning Jesus, but sadly they never questioned their own assumptions. The Jews *grilled Jesus* on Monday. On Thursday they *killed Him*.

After His shootout with the Jews, 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 leaders of Judaism were all show and no substance. They were hypocrites. *They dressed the part – talked the part – played the part* – but they preyed on innocent folks, and made a mockery of true prayer.

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 Temple there were 13 offering boxes shaped like upside down megaphones. Each box accumulated money for a different purpose. The rich made a pompous show of their giving. They *gave to God* to attract *attention from men*. But Jesus’ eyes were focused elsewhere...

“And He saw also a certain poor widow putting in two mites.” The *“mite”* was the Jewish *“lepta”* - worth an eighth of a cent. From a strictly monetary viewpoint the 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.’”*

Human judgment measures the value of a offering by the amount that's given, but Jesus measures it by the amount leftover. Humans focus on the *portion* of the gift, but God sees the *proportion*. Most people tip God from their surplus. Few people know the joy of truly giving to God. Real giving digs deep. As King David said, "Nor will I offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God with that which costs me nothing." From week to week, do you give to God, or merely slip Him a tip?

Verse 5, "Then, as some spoke of the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and donations..." The Temple 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, with clusters of grapes as tall as a man... The Egyptian king, Ptolemy, donated a golden desk... The Temple and its amenities were a reason to rave. 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." His prediction came true when Rome sacked Jerusalem in 70 AD.

During their siege of the city, 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 the greedy Romans toppled the stones to retrieve the gold. It fulfilled Jesus' prophecy, "not one stone shall be left upon another."

"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's account the disciples expand on the questions. They also ask about the signs of Jesus' second coming and the end of the age... That's the scope of His discussion in the next 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'll 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.

But 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 do you expect from a world that rejects the Prince of Peace? Chaos and conflict become *run-of-the-mill* when you *run-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, but when they're fought on a global scale – it's the first sign the end is near. Prior to 1914 we'd never had a world war. Since then we've had a pair.

"And there will be great earthquakes in various places, and famines and pestilences; and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven." Revelation 6-19 describes global cataclysms that will rock the planet in the 7 years between the rapture of the church and the coming of Jesus. Here's today's question, *Is Mother Nature warming up for the end?*

We just celebrated the one year anniversary of the monster quake that leveled Haiti, killing 200,000 people. The first decade of the 21st Century has seen massive flooding, tsunamis, snow storms, and earthquakes. Since last summer devastating floods have occurred in China, Pakistan, Australia, and Brazil. The recent flooding in Australia covered an area the size of France and Germany combined. The flooding has farmer's worried.

As for the other signs Jesus mentions...

Famine... The World Bank estimates that 925 million people suffer from hunger and malnutrition. Every day 16,000 children die of hunger related causes - that's 1 child every 5 seconds. Global hunger has increased.

Pestilence... From cholera in Haiti - to AIDS in Africa - to mad cow disease in Europe - to the H1N1 flu in the US - pestilence runs rampant.

In 1992 Time magazine ran a story, "The Weird Weather Phenomenon." The article quoted a New Yorker stuck in a violent winter storm. He said, "I feel like I'm caught in something biblical. You know, one of the great plagues. I'm expecting to see Noah's ark floating up Third Avenue." *Add it all up and perhaps something biblical is occurring...*

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." When a Christian gets persecuted it's like God putting a microphone in their face. *Persecution* always turns into an opportunity for *proclamation*. I believe the persecution spoken of here is also associated with the last days. Revelation 6-19 tells us of an all out assault against anyone who dares to witness to the truth of the Gospel. It's a bloody time for believers.

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 arises our job is to bear our backs, God's job is to put words in our mouth. When a believer is under the gun it's hard to be brave and articulate at the same time. Jesus is saying you take care of the courage and His Spirit will supply *just the right words at just the right time*.

He warns, "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." In the Great Tribulation believers are abused. Yet Jesus returns for a *Glorious Bride*, not a *battered wife*. This is one reason I'm pre-trib. The Church is snatched up prior to the Tribulation. I spent last week's snow storm in sunny Southern California. My flight left Atlanta, Sunday at 4:00 PM. It started to snow a few hours later. I joked. "It was like the rapture. I went up, then the judgment came down."

And part of God's judgment will be severe persecution. People will still follow Jesus in the GT, but they'll pay a terrible price - even martyrdom. This is why if you can't live for Jesus today, don't think you'll die for Him then. Today's persecution doesn't compare to the fiery times ahead. In verses 18-19, Jesus encourages these end time believers, "But not a hair of your head shall be lost. By your patience possess your souls."

Next He takes up the question His disciples asked Him. What about the destruction of the Temple... "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." It's sad to read the histories of the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

The Romans cut off Jerusalem's supply lines, and laid siege to the city for five long months. Josephus was eyewitness to the atrocities. He tells us approximately 600,000 Jews died of starvation during the siege. Their bodies were tossed over the walls of the city 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 witnessed one woman slaughter 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 tells the story of some Jews who swallowed their money, then surrendered to the enemy. When a prisoner was seen picking gold coins from his excrement the rumor spread that the Jews were "full of gold." The Roman soldiers started gutting their prisoners in search of loot. Josephus concludes, "No other city ever endured such miseries, not since the world began..." And Jerusalem is still not out of the woods... Many people see in Jesus' words a picture of the Battle of Jerusalem in the last days, when Antichrist surrounds Jerusalem as the Romans of old. These predictions may not just be in the past. 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 Rome in 70 AD. In addition, the Romans took 95,000 Jewish survivors into slavery. Because the Jews rejected Jesus as their Messiah, God rejected them. And what's followed through the centuries is a sad, but interesting story.

In 135 BC the Jews revolted again. A man named "*Simon Bar Kochba*" fought a guerilla war against the Romans, and took brief possession of Jerusalem. Incidentally, the Jewish leaders who rejected Jesus, hailed Bar Kochba as their Messiah. He was the first *false messiah* or *false Christ*. Bar Kochba even tried to rebuild the Temple, but the revolt was crushed when 580,000 Jews were killed. This time the Romans built a Temple to the pagan god, Jupiter, on the Temple Mount - and renamed Jerusalem "*Aelia Capitolina*." It became a capital crime for a Jew to enter the city.

For the next five centuries Jerusalem was under Roman or Byzantine control, until the rise of Islam. Muslims captured Jerusalem in 637 BC, and renamed it *al-Quds*, or "the holy." From 637 to 1917 Jerusalem was ruled by the Muslims - except for a few brief periods during the crusades. For the next 1300 years Jews lived in dispersion - scattered among the nations - until our generation. Its only in our day that God has brought the Jews back to their ancient homeland.

And Jewish control of Jerusalem is probably the most definitive biblical sign that we're living in the Last Days. Verse 24, "And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled." This means when Jerusalem is controlled by Jews the times of the Gentiles end. Jesus will fulfill His promises to Israel.

On June 6, 1967, at the end of the now famous Six Day War, Israeli General Moshe Dayan led his paratroopers into the Old City of Jerusalem. In a bloody battle they took control of Jerusalem from the Arabs. For the first time in 1900 years Jerusalem was back in Jewish hands. The City of King David was out from under Gentile domination. Yet sadly, Moshe Dayan made a mistake. He placed Jerusalem under Israeli military authority, but to pacify the Arabs he partitioned the city into four quarters - the **Armenian, Christian, Muslim** and **Jewish** sections. Each quarter retained the ground considered most holy by its religion. The Armenians controlled *Mount Zion and the Upper Room*. Christians controlled the *Church of the Holy Sepulchre*. The Jewish Quarter stretched to the *Wailing Wall*. And the Muslim Quarter included the *Temple Mount*.

Today, though Jewish soldiers patrol the Temple Mount, the religious activities conducted there are under a Muslim authority called the WAQF. One of the rules imposed by the Muslims is a prohibition of Bibles on the Temple Mount. You're not suppose to bring a Bible on Mount Moriah. Yet I've heard of some sneaky American pastors doing it anyway. In a sense, Jerusalem is still being trampled by the Gentiles - *though their feet don't fall quite so heavy today*. There's one certainty, when Jesus returns He'll end all Gentile jurisdiction over Jerusalem. He'll make the city the capitol of His Kingdom. Jesus will rule the world from Jerusalem.

Verse 25 "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 describes the period known as *Great Tribulation*. It serves a dual purpose: God *punishes the world and purifies the Jews*. This 7 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 the first time in humility. He kept a low profile. He comes a second time in power and glory. *He comes to kick butt, take names, and start breaking kneecaps*. He'll right all wrongs! I say, "Come Lord Jesus!"

Verse 28 "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 conflict... and Israel back in their homeland... and Mother Nature erupting with natural disasters... and the rise of plague and pestilence...* Don't get depressed and hang your head... look up... lift up your head! Jesus is coming soon. All the longed-for perks of our redemption are near.

Verse 29, "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 of this passage... Jesus may simply be saying just as the greening of the leaves is a sign of the changing seasons, the signs He's mentioned indicate the end.

Or there could be more to it... In Scripture the fig tree is a symbol for Israel. He could be saying, a sign of His return is the rebirth of the nation. The revival of the modern state of Israel is unprecedented in the history of the world. A people scattered and homeless for 1900 years have retained their identity, nationalism, language, culture, and religion. Where are the Hittites or Philistines? Today a fig tree has blossomed in the land. I believe it's a sign that Jesus is coming soon. Never forget, "God's timepiece is not a Bulova, or Timex, or Rolex – it's the nation Israel."

"Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place." Here's the most provocative part of Jesus' prophecy. If the budding of the fig tree is the rebirth of Israel then the generation of Christians that see the miracle are the ones who'll be raptured by Jesus. That means us. In 1948 Israel became an independent state. In 1967 the Jews took Jerusalem. We're the privileged witnesses of these events.

Verse 33, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away." When it comes to the end times events, what God has promised He's sure to fulfill. You can take His promises to the bank! Don't worry about God's faithfulness. Worry about yourself... "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." 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 there is an escape! You don't have to live through God's judgment. Before *God's wrath* comes down, *God's Church* will rise up. At the second coming Jesus *mops up*. At the rapture He *snatches up*. And this is why the Church needs to be ready. *Watch and pray*. Keep your eyes on Jesus. Don't get caught up in the entrapments of this world.

We'll close in 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." They were probably camping in a Garden called Gethsemane. Time is ticking now. The cross is on the horizon.