

REDISCOVER JESUS, PART 76: “JESUS IS GREATER”
LUKE 20:41-47
Ps. Eric Yee

Personal Introduction

Hi everyone, and happy new year! If you don't know me, my name is Eric and I'm a pastor at HMCC of Jakarta, and it's my privilege to preach the Word of God to us today.

Sermon Series Introduction

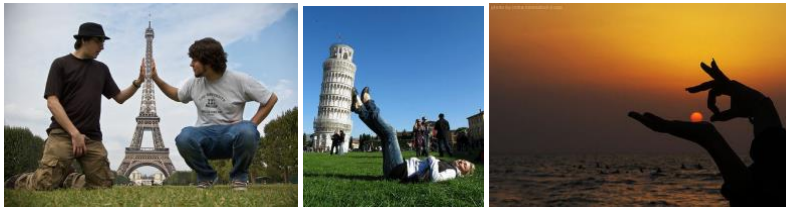
We're currently in Part 76 of our sermon series called “Rediscover Jesus,” where we're going through the Gospel of Luke together.

So let's get right into today's sermon: “Jesus Is Greater.”

Sermon Introduction

There's an interesting technique used in photography and videography called “forced perspective.”

It's a way of creating an *optical illusion* that makes things appear larger, smaller, closer, or farther away than they really are.¹



It can look like people look like *giants* next to the Eiffel Tower.

It can look like a person is *holding up* the Leaning Tower of Pisa with her feet.

It can look like a person is about to *flick* the sun with her finger.

People can get pretty creative, but in all these examples, we *know* that it's an illusion. We *know* that those people are *not* greater than the Eiffel Tower or the Leaning Tower of Pisa, and we *definitely* know that we're *not* greater than the sun.

But in our day-to-day lives, we often live under the *illusion* of a “forced perspective”—or rather a “self-imposed perspective” (so to speak). Many of us tend to think that we're *greater* than we actually are. And whether we're followers of Christ or not, we all have a tendency to think that *Jesus is not* as great as he really is.

So in today's passage, *that's* what Jesus is going to address.

The One Thing

***Jesus is greater than we think,
but we're not as great as we think.***

¹ “Guide to Forced Perspective Photography,” accessed on January 9, 2024, <https://shotkit.com/forced-perspective>.

Scripture Introduction

Turn your Bibles to Luke 20:41-47.

Just want to give a bit of context before jumping into today's passage.

This is Jesus' final week before his crucifixion.

He's made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Luke 19:28-44), and he's gotten the attention of the religious leaders in the temple through his authoritative teaching and actions (Luke 19:45-48).

Three times, the religious leaders ask question to try to discredit Jesus, but *three* times, Jesus leaves them marveling and silent in his response (Luke 20:1-40).

They dare not ask Jesus any more questions that only *increase* the credibility of Jesus and *decrease* their own credibility in the eyes of the people.

But if the *religious leaders* aren't going to ask him any more questions, *Jesus* now asks *them* a question.

So at the end of this back-and-forth exchange between Jesus and the religious leaders in the temple, *Jesus* now gets the final word—as he *reveals* more of who *he* is and as he *exposes* more of who the *religious leaders* are.

And that's where we are in today's passage.

Scripture Reading

Let's read Luke 20:41-47.

⁴¹ But he said to them, "How can they say that the Christ is David's son? ⁴² For David himself says in the Book of Psalms,

"The Lord said to my Lord,
"Sit at my right hand,
⁴³ until I make your enemies your footstool."

⁴⁴ David thus calls him Lord, so how is he his son?"

⁴⁵ And in the hearing of all the people he said to his disciples, ⁴⁶ "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, ⁴⁷ who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation."

This is God's Word.

Overview

We'll look at this passage in two parts.

- I. Jesus is greater than we think (vv. 41-44)
- II. We're not as great as we think (vv. 45-47)

I. Jesus is greater than we think (vv. 41-44)

Look at verse 41.

[⁴¹ But he said to them, "How can they say that the Christ is David's son?]

The “Christ” (or Messiah) simply means “the anointed one.” The Christ was the Savior whom God always promised to send to his people.²

And by *this* time in Jesus’ ministry, there was a growing recognition among many of the Jews that *Jesus* is the Christ.

When Jesus asked his apostles, “Who do you say that I am?” Peter speaks on their behalf in saying, “The Christ of God” (Luke 9:20).

And in Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the “whole *multitude* of his disciples” declare and celebrate the coming of the Christ—their messianic King—as they spread their cloaks and palm branches on the ground, shouting “Hosanna [or salvation has come!]” (Mark 11:9-10) and “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!” (Luke 19:38).

So here, when Jesus refers to “the Christ,” most of the Jews would have recognized that he is referring to *himself*.

There was also widespread recognition that the Christ would be a *descendant* of King David.

In the covenant that God entered with David, he declared this in...

2 Samuel 7:12-13 = When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

And all throughout the Old Testament, *this* covenant promise—that one of David’s *own* sons will establish the throne of God’s kingdom forever—is repeated over and over again (e.g., Ps. 89:3-4; Isa. 11:1, 10, Jer. 23:5; 33:17).

And throughout Luke’s Gospel account, it is *also* attested over and over again that *Jesus* is a descendant of David (Luke 1:27, 32, 69; 2:4).

[⁴¹ But he said to them, “How can they say that the Christ is David’s son?”]

So, if that’s the case, it seems *odd* that Jesus would ask, “How can they say that the Christ is David’s son?”³

Jesus is *not* denying that the Christ is David’s son. That’s already well-established in Scripture, and he *himself* previously *answered* to the blind man who cried out to him as “Jesus, Son of David” (Luke 18:38).

Rather, Jesus is challenging the assumption in the minds of the people that he, as the Christ, is *merely* David’s son.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus has been casting out demons, healing the sick, cleansing lepers, restoring the withered hand, making the lame walk, giving sight to the blind, calming the storm, raising the dead, feeding the five thousand, teaching with authority, and forgiving sins.

The people had *never* encountered a man like Jesus before. They are constantly left *baffled* about who Jesus is, asking questions like, “Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?” (Luke 8:25), and “Who is this, who even forgives sins?” (Luke 7:49).

Throughout his ministry, Jesus was showing that he, as the Christ, is *not merely* David’s son.

² Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, REC (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009).

³ From the parallel accounts (Mark 12:35; Matt. 22:41-43), we know Luke is summarizing a larger context of Jesus teaching those in the temple and dialoguing with the scribes, who were mostly Pharisees. Given the public context of the temple, Jesus intends this to be in the hearing of everyone; thus, in verse 41, Jesus can speak to the scribes (“them”) and refer to them as “they” in the hearing of others. Alternatively, “they” could just as easily refer to the general Jewish people because it was widespread knowledge that, according to Scripture, “the Christ is David’s son.”

And what he was showing in his *ministry*, he would now show them directly in *Scripture*—from *David's* own lips.

Look at verses 42-43.

[⁴² For David himself says in the Book of Psalms,
 “The Lord said to my Lord,
 “Sit at my right hand,
⁴³ until I make your enemies your footstool.”]

Here, Jesus quotes from Psalm 110:1 [which was read earlier in our service]. This was an explicit messianic psalm—that is, it was a psalm that made explicit prophecies about the coming of the Christ.⁴

David wrote this psalm “in the Holy Spirit” (Mark 12:36) and as “a prophet” (Acts 2:30), and he refers to two characters: “*the* Lord” and “*my* Lord.”

So who are these two “Lords”?

The first “LORD” is obvious if you flip back to Psalm 110:1 in your Bibles. There, you’ll see that it is printed in all capital letters, which is how most English Bibles translate the name “Yahweh,” which is the personal name for the one true God. So the first “LORD” is the Lord God Almighty.

The second “Lord” is *not* printed in all capital letters because it’s translating the name “Adonai,” which is a term that could be used for any kind of lord. But here, it refers specifically to the Christ (or Messiah), which is clear from the rest of the psalm.⁵

So in Psalm 110:1, David writes, “*Yahweh* said to my *Adonai*”—or “The Lord God Almighty said to *my* Lord (the Christ)”—“Sit at my right hand [which is the place of exaltation and power, *sharing* in *God's* authority and power⁶], until I make your enemies your footstool.”

And in that one verse, Jesus wants them to notice something very specific.

Look at verse 44.

[⁴² For David himself says in the Book of Psalms,
 “The Lord said to my Lord,
 “Sit at my right hand,
⁴³ until I make your enemies your footstool.”

⁴⁴ David thus calls him Lord, so how is he his son?]

David calls the Christ, his own *descendant*, “*my Lord*.” And then, Jesus asks his original question again: So how is the Christ *merely* David’s son?

⁴ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, REC (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009). Craig L. Blomberg (“Matthew,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, eds. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007], 83) writes: “No king of Israel was ever so close to God that he could normally be described, even metaphorically, as sitting at God’s right hand. Terrien (2003: 752) terms this ‘stupendous for the Hebrew mind,’ suggesting an ‘exceptional degree of intimacy between God and the new monarch.’ The triumph over the king’s enemies as he is arrayed in holy majesty (110:2-3) can possibly be taken of an earthly Davidic king, but 110:4 returns to language that seems highly inappropriate even for one as exalted as David (so also Carson 1984: 467). This ‘king’ embodies an eternal priesthood (110:4), whereas legitimate Israelite kings in the line of David came from the tribe of Judah, not the tribe of Levi, from whom priests had to descend. And in 110:5 Yahweh is said to be at this king’s right hand, rather than vice versa, as if God and king were interchangeable! Finally, this monarch will do what God alone is described elsewhere as doing: judging the nations and crushing the rulers of the whole earth (110:6).”

⁵ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, REC (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009).

⁶ Grant R. Osborne, *Luke Verse By Verse*, ONTC (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2018); and Thomas R. Schreiner, “Luke” in *Matthew–Luke*, ESV Expository Commentary 8 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021).

In order to understand Jesus' logic here, we have to understand that, in that culture, the father is always *greater* than the son, and the grandfather is always *greater* than the grandson, and so forth.

So, for example, regarding Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the minds of the Jews, it would have been *unthinkable* that Isaac or Jacob could be *greater* than Abraham because they *depended* on Abraham for their very existence.

The *son* is to honor the *father*, not the other way around. But here, we have David *himself*—who is considered the *greatest* king of Israel and who is the *father* of all his descendants—we see *him* honoring his own descendant by calling him *his* “Lord.”

In other words, David is acknowledging that his son is *greater* than he is.⁷

So how is it that David can call his own son—who should be regarded as *lesser* than him—how is it that he can call him his “Lord,” who is clearly *greater* than him?

How is this possible? How can the Christ simultaneously be David's *son* and David's *Lord*?

That is the question that Jesus is laying before the religious leaders and everyone else who is listening to him.

The religious leaders give no response, implying that they don't know the answer, and Jesus himself does not give an explicit answer to his question.

So Jesus leaves them with this puzzling question to sit on.

But *after* Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension, all of his disciples *finally* understood the answer.

First, they understood the *event* that Psalm 110:1 refers to. When they saw Jesus *ascend* into heaven to sit at God's right hand, they finally understood that Yahweh saying to the Christ, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool”—that was fulfilled in Jesus' *ascension* (Acts 2:34–35; 1 Cor. 15:27; Eph. 1:22; Heb. 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2).

Second, they understood the *trajectory* of the Old Testament as it began to *reveal* more and more of *who* this Savior Christ would be. The Christ was to be a son of *Adam*, a son of *Abraham*, from the nation of *Israel*, from the tribe of *Judah*, and a king from the line of *David*. But then, God also began to reveal that the Christ could not be *merely* any of those things.

For example, every Christmas season, we inevitably read from the book of Isaiah, which talks about how the Christ will be born and sit on the throne of David *forever*, and how he will be called “Mighty God” (Isa. 9:6-7).

This was *not* hyperbole for just a *mere* human king who would be godly and reign for a very long time. No, this was beginning to *foreshadow* that the Christ would be *God* himself incarnate as a man who would literally sit at God the Father's right hand to reign forever because he himself is God the Son.

In short, they realized that Jesus is *both* fully *man* and fully *God*. The Christ is not only the *human* son of David, but he is also the *divine* Son of God (Rom. 1:3-4).

That is how he can be simultaneously David's *son* and David's *Lord*.

Now, we need to recognize that this was *not* a conclusion that was *easy* for Jesus' disciples to accept. We have to remember that the Jews were strict *monotheists*, meaning that they believed that there is only *one* true God, and to worship anyone besides God is blatant *idolatry*.

What could cause them to accept that Jesus is not only fully *man* but also fully *God*?

⁷ R. C. Sproul, *A Walk with God: An Exposition of Luke* (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1999), 369; and Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, REC (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009).

Scripture and history tell us that it was the fact that, three days after his crucifixion, Jesus *resurrected* and appeared to his disciples. They *touched* him. They *ate* with him. They *stayed* with him for 40 days. They *watched* him ascend into heaven.

Jesus' *own* mother and brothers started worshipping him as God. Even *Saul*, the strict *Pharisee* and renown *persecutor* of Christians, said he encountered the risen Christ and even *he* began to worship Jesus as God.

In fact, *after* Jesus' resurrection, his disciples were so convinced of his *deity*, the early problem in church history was *not* that they had trouble believing that Jesus was fully *God* but that he was fully *human* (1 John 4:2; 2 John 7).⁸

Of course, they never stopped being monotheists—and to be clear, Christians *are* monotheists—but they began to *recognize* the doctrine of the Trinity that has been in Scripture all along. That is, there are three persons in one God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

In creation, God, his Word, and the Spirit of God are all present—and he says, “Let *us* make man in *our* image” (Gen. 1:26). And we see this idea of God's creative and re-creative work done through his Word and Spirit throughout the rest of the Old Testament (Ps. 33:6, 9; 104:30; Isa. 44:3; 55:10-11).

We also see texts that indicate dialogue between the Father and the Son (Gen 1:26; Ps. 2; 110; Isa 49:3; cf. Mark 12:35-37; Heb 1:5-14),⁹ like the one that Jesus mentions in Psalm 110.

In fact, when the early church fathers turned to Psalm 110, they saw the doctrine of the Trinity clearly expounded in verse 1, where the *Holy Spirit* is speaking (through David) concerning the *Father* speaking to the *Son*.¹⁰

So the doctrine of the Trinity was *indicated* throughout the *Old* Testament and it finally became *clear* in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, which is expressed *definitively* throughout the *New* Testament (Matt. 3:16-17; 11:27; 28:19; Luke 10:22; John 1:1, 14; 5:23; 14:9; 17:1-8; Rom. 9:5; 1 Cor. 8:6; Phil. 2:6; Col. 1:15-19; Heb. 1:2-3; 1 John 5:20).

And so, by virtue of being *co-eternal* with the Father and the Holy Spirit, the *divine* Son of God has always *preexisted* David, and therefore he has always been *greater* than David.¹¹

⁸ David Mathis (“Jesus Is Fully Human,” December 15, 2016, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/jesus-is-fully-human>) writes: “That Jesus of Nazareth was truly and fully human was plain enough to those who saw and heard and touched and shared life with him (1 John 1:1). No one questioned his humanity during his ministry. What was not apparent at first, and revealed carefully and convincingly in his life and resurrection, was that he also was God. But it wasn't long after his ascension that questions came from the opposite direction. His closest disciples, who knew his humanity full well, worshiped him as God (Matthew 28:17), but the first generation of Christians started from a different place. They began with him as God, and tended to struggle with the fullness of his humanness. The first heresy the fledging church faced was that he wasn't truly man (1 John 4:2; 2 John 7).” Coleman Ford (“Christological Controversies in the Early Church,” <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/christological-controversies-in-the-early-church>) writes: “Another early Christological error to arise within the church was Docetism, which challenged the biblical testimony of Christ's full humanity. The Apostle John warned against this error, noting that some refused to acknowledge “that Jesus Christ as come in the flesh” (1Jn. 4:1-3). Ignatius of Antioch (d. 110) likewise warns against this erroneous view when he warns the church in Ephesus “do not so much as listen to anyone unless he speaks truthfully about Jesus Christ” (*Ign Eph* 6.2). Ignatius affirms that Jesus was “both flesh and spirit, born and unborn, God in man, true life in death, both from Mary and from God, first subject to suffering then beyond it” (*Ign Eph* 7.2). There was no reason to suffer for Jesus, as the apostles and martyrs had done, if Jesus too had not suffered in the flesh.”

⁹ Scott R. Swain, “Doctrine of God – The Trinity,” Lecture, Systematic Theology: Scripture, Theology Proper, Anthropology from Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte, 2018. He also mentions texts that display a triune naming of YHWH (Num 6:23-27; 2 Sam 23:2-3), and that association of the name and glory of YHWH with a promised Davidic king (Isa 52:13; Jer 23:5-6), “whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days” (Micah 5:2, 4; Ps 109:3 LXX). He also quotes B. B. Warfield as a summary of the matter: “The Old Testament may be likened to a chamber richly furnished but dimly lighted; the introduction of light brings into it nothing which was not in it before; but it brings out into clearer view much of what was in it but was only dimly or even not at all perceived before. The mystery of the Trinity is not revealed in the Old Testament; but the mystery of the Trinity underlies the Old Testament revelation, and here and there almost comes into view. Thus the Old Testament revelation of God is not corrected by the fuller revelation that follows it, but only perfected, extended and enlarged.”

¹⁰ Matthew W. Bates, *The Birth of the Trinity: Jesus, God, and Spirit in New Testament and Early Christian Interpretations of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 27.

¹¹ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, REC (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009).

So what about *us*? What do *you* think about Jesus?

If you're not a follower of Christ, then perhaps you think Jesus was *merely* a gifted teacher, a good example, or maybe even a prophet.

But Jesus is *greater* than you think. He is the *divine* Son of God who became the *human* son of David to be the Christ that nobody expected. He came to *serve* rather than to *be* served. He came to suffer and die in the place of underserving sinners, so that all who repent of their sins and believe in him as Lord and Savior will *not* perish but have eternal life with him.

There is *nobody* greater than Jesus. He *alone* has the name that is above every name (Phil. 2:9), and he is the *only* name under heaven by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

If you're brushing Jesus off as anything *less* than the *only* God and Savior to be worshipped, then I urge you to reconsider.

C. S. Lewis, author of *Mere Christianity*, once famously said:

Christ says that He is 'humble and meek' and we believe Him; not noticing that, if He were merely a man, humility and meekness are the very last characteristics we could attribute to some of His sayings.

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.¹²

No other man throughout the history of the world has had such a *universal* effect, where people throughout millennia and across the globe *have* been, are *currently*, and will *continue* to worship him as God.

Whereas some people think that religion is on the decline in modern culture, what is actually in decline is *inherited* religion—that is, religion that you are born into because that's part of your national or ethnic identity. But what is *not* on the decline is *chosen* religion—that is, religion that is based on a personal decision.¹³

- In the US, among all religions, only evangelical Protestants (or Christians) are gaining more converts than they are losing.¹⁴
- In East Asia, Christianity grew from 11.4 million Christians (or 1.2 percent of the population) in 1970 to an estimated 171.1 million Christians (or 10.5 percent of the population) in 2020.¹⁵
- In Africa, Christianity grew from 12 million Christians (or 9 percent of the population) in 1910 to an estimated 630 million Christians (or 49.3 percent of the population) in 2020.¹⁶

¹² C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 51-52, Kindle.

¹³ Peter Berger, Grace Davie, and Effie Fokas, *Religious America: Secular Europe? A Theme and Variation* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2008), 33-34, 40-42, referenced in Timothy Keller, *Making Sense of God* (New York: Penguin, 2016), 26, Kindle.

¹⁴ Timothy Keller, *Making Sense of God* (New York: Penguin, 2016), 26, Kindle.

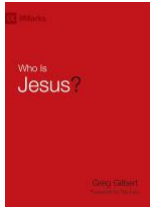
¹⁵ "Christianity in Its Global Context, 1970-2020: Society, Religion, and Mission," Center for the Study of Global Christianity, Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, June, 2013, <https://www.gordonconwell.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/13/2019/04/2ChristianityinitsGlobalContext.pdf>, 22, referenced in Timothy Keller, *Making Sense of God* (New York: Penguin, 2016), 26, Kindle.

¹⁶ "Christianity in Its Global Context, 1970-2020: Society, Religion, and Mission," Center for the Study of Global Christianity, Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, June, 2013, <https://www.gordonconwell.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/13/2019/04/2ChristianityinitsGlobalContext.pdf>, 22, referenced in Timothy Keller, *Making Sense of God* (New York: Penguin, 2016), 26, Kindle.

Regardless of era, geography, ethnicity, culture, or socio-economic status, people from all kinds of diverse backgrounds, locations, and generations have claimed to have a personal encounter with the living Christ who has forever transformed their lives as the only Lord and Savior.

Jesus *cannot* be ignored. Almost every major religion has something to say about him because how could you *not* have anything to say about the One who has *forever* changed the landscape of the world?

Jesus is far *greater* than you think.



If you're interested in learning more about who Jesus is, I'd recommend reading through the short book *Who is Jesus?* by Greg Gilbert. We have it available for free in our digital library.

I'd also encourage you to discuss it with members in our church. I'm sure they would love to have those conversations with you, and even read and discuss through one of the Gospel accounts in the Bible with you.

And I pray that, through a life of repentance and faith in him, you would *receive* Jesus as he truly is—fully God, fully man, King of kings, Lord of lords, the only Savior for sinners, and the only One worthy of our worship.

If you're *already* a follower of Christ, I guarantee that Jesus is *still* greater than you think.

- How could the *finite* ever contain the *infinite*?
- How could the *creature* ever comprehend the *Creator*?
- How could we ever understand the weight of *our sin* and the suffering of *our Savior*?
- How could we ever grasp the *worthiness* of the divine Son of God and the *preciousness* of his blood being poured out for us?

No matter how great we think Jesus is, he is *still* greater *by far*.

But when things seem to be going *well* in our lives, many of us are prone to *forget* that Jesus is *greater* than the things of this world that are passing away. We tend to get *proud*, thinking that somehow *we*, by our *own* greatness, accomplished this life for ourselves. We can so easily be deceived by the illusion that *Jesus* is small and *we* are big.

If that's us, we need to *repent*.

"Turn your eyes upon Jesus; look *full* in his wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of his glory and grace."

But it's not just in *high* times when we're prone to forget Jesus, but it's also in *hard* times. When our comforts are stripped away, when we suffer pain and loss, when we feel that we're all alone, we may find that all we have left is *Jesus*.

And it's been said that "You don't realize Jesus is all you *need* until Jesus is all you *have*" (Tim Keller).

In those times of rock bottom, when we feel like we're at our lowest, the difference between hopelessness or hope, misery or consolation, bitterness or assurance, is whether or not we *truly* believe that Jesus is *greater* than our problems, our thoughts, our feelings, or anything else in this world.

This is not *diminishing* any of our problems or pain, but this is putting Jesus in *proper* perspective in our lives.

Oftentimes, when we feel pain or we fear for the future, we have the tendency to *crop* Jesus out of the picture. We imagine our lives in the present or the future as if Jesus is *not* there—or if he *is* there, he doesn't make much of a difference.

We're essentially deceived by the same illusion—that *Jesus* is small and *we* are big. So if *we* can't figure out our problems and cope with our pain, then *Jesus* can't really help us either.

But as we look to the *cross* and the empty tomb, we see that Jesus *really* is *sovereign* over all things and working *good* in all things. And that's why he says to us, "In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). Therefore, Jesus *truly* is the *greatest*, and if *we* are truly *united* to him by faith, then *he* should make all the difference in our lives when we go through hard times.

So first, Jesus is greater than we think; and second...

II. We're not as great as we think (vv. 45-47)

Look at verses 45-47.

[⁴⁵ And in the hearing of all the people he said to his disciples, ⁴⁶ "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, ⁴⁷ who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation."]

So Jesus has *revealed* more of who *he* truly is as the Christ, and he now turns to *exposing* more of who the *religious leaders* truly are. And he focuses on "the *scribes*" (or "lawyers" or "experts in the law"), whose job was to give scribal, authoritative interpretations of the Old Testament Law.

In the hearing of *all* the people, Jesus now *warns* his disciples to "*Beware* of the scribes." Basically, don't be like them; don't imitate them. And then Jesus begins to describe their condemnable pattern of life.

We can make four observations about the scribes.

First, the scribes were concerned with *outward* appearances.

The "long robes" here were expensive cloaks that reached down to the feet. They were a mark of high social status, for no one who *worked* would hinder themselves with such long clothing.¹⁷

So the "long robes" were an *outward* show of their success, perhaps implying that God was blessing them materially because he was pleased with their way of life.

The "long robes" could have *also* been in reference to the tassels that some Jews wore on the hems of their clothes as a way of remembering God's commandments (Num. 15:38-39). But even so, the purpose would have been very similar—to make an *outward* show of their devotion.¹⁸

In either case, it was all for *show*. They liked to "walk around" in these long robes because they wanted *others* to see—to see their *apparent* success or devotion.

Second, the scribes desired *recognition* from others.

They "love[d] greetings in the marketplaces" because they were greeted respectfully as "Rabbi" or "Master" or "Father."

They loved "the best seats in the synagogues," where they sat in the front and faced the congregation, and they loved "the places of honor at feasts," which were to the right or left of the host at the center.¹⁹

¹⁷ Grant R. Osborne, *Luke Verse By Verse*, ONTC (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2018); and Leon L. Morris, *Luke*, TNTC (Nottingham, England: IVP Academic, 2008), 311.

¹⁸ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, REC (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009).

¹⁹ R. Kent Hughes, *Luke*, PTW, rev. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

Third, the scribes practiced *injustice* against the vulnerable.

They “devour widows’ houses.” In the ancient world, the widows had little to no income and had no power in the courts.²⁰ They were among the most vulnerable in society and thus were often the victims of injustice.

That’s why *all* throughout Scripture, God calls his people to take care of them (e.g., Isa. 1:17; Zech. 7:9-10). In fact, the book of James tells us that “religion that is pure and undefiled before God” *includes* “visit[ing] orphans and widows in their affliction” (James 1:27).

But instead of visiting to take *care* of widows, the scribes were taking *advantage* of them. Perhaps they were “abusing the widows’ hospitality, defrauding them of property, stealing their dowries, taking their homes as pledges of loans they could not repay, or overcharging for legal services.”²¹ Perhaps they were persuading widows “to give more money to their ministry than they really could spare.”²²

At the end of the day, we don’t know *exactly* how the scribes took advantage of the widows, but the fact that Jesus uses the word “devour” gives the imagery of a hungry animal killing and eating its prey.

But what made this injustice *particularly wicked* is the very fact that the *scribes* were the ones doing it. The widows would have looked to them as their respected religious leaders. They would have trusted them and looked to them for comfort and prayer.

But instead, the very people who were supposed to protect and provide for the widows were the very people who “devoured” and exploited them.

Ministerial sins—or sins done in the name of “ministry,” especially by those in leadership positions—are particularly wicked...

- because of the nobility of their position,
- because of the vulnerability of those they minister to,
- because they should know better from God’s Word,
- and because of the public impact their sin has on others.²³

And this leads us to...

Fourth, the scribes made *pretentious* prayers.

They “for a pretense make long prayers.”

There’s nothing *inherently* wrong with long prayers. Jesus himself sometimes spent the whole night in prayer. Sometimes, we pour out our hearts to God all night amidst what we’re going through. Sometimes, we pour out our hearts to God in a simple cry of “Help me, God!” or “Thank you, Lord!” And of course, the

²⁰ R. C. Sproul, *A Walk with God: An Exposition of Luke* (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1999), 372.

²¹ Grant R. Osborne, *Luke Verse By Verse*, ONTC (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2018).

²² Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, REC (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009).

²³ WLC 151 states: “Q. What are those aggravations that make some sins more heinous than others?

A. Sins receive their aggravations,

1. From the persons offending; if they be of riper age, greater experience or grace, eminent for profession, gifts, place, office, guides to others, and whose example is likely to be followed by others.

2. From the parties offended: if immediately against God, his attributes, and worship; against Christ, and his grace; the Holy Spirit, his witness, and workings; against superiors, men of eminency, and such as we stand especially related and engaged unto; against any of the saints, particularly weak brethren, the souls of them, or any other, and the common good of all or many.

3. From the nature and quality of the offence: if it be against the express letter of the law, break many commandments, contain in it many sins: if not only conceived in the heart, but breaks forth in words and actions, scandalize others, and admit of no reparation: if against means, mercies, judgments, light of nature, conviction of conscience, public or private admonition, censures of the church, civil punishments; and our prayers, purposes, promises, vows, covenants, and engagements to God or men: if done deliberately, willfully, presumptuously, impudently, boastingly, maliciously, frequently, obstinately, with delight, continuance, or relapsing after repentance.

4. From circumstances of time, and place: if on the Lord’s day, or other times of divine worship; or immediately before or after these, or other helps to prevent or remedy such miscarriages: if in public, or in the presence of others, who are thereby likely to be provoked or defiled.”

length of prayers can be anywhere in between a few words and all night. A prayer simply needs to be as long as it needs to be.²⁴

So, Jesus is *not* saying that making long prayers is bad. Rather, he is saying that making *pretentious* prayers—or prayers that are intended to *impress* other people—is bad.

Now, even though Jesus points out various issues with the scribes' pattern of life, it could arguably be boiled down to one word—*hypocrisy*.

The word “hypocrite” literally means “actor,” like an actor in a play; it’s a person who *intentionally* plays a role.

Even while they are “devour[ing] widows’ houses,” they “make long prayers” in synagogues and other occasions to *show* people how serious they take their faith and how devout they are in their followership of God.

After committing “social injustice of the worst kind,” they turn around and give the *outward* appearance of devotion to God.²⁵

But it’s all a *show*. It’s all a *pretense*. It’s a *dead* faith. It’s a *false* devotion. Or, again, in a word, it’s all *hypocrisy*.

The 19th century Anglican bishop, J. C. Ryle, said this:

No sin seems to be regarded by Christ as more sinful than hypocrisy. None certainly drew forth from His lips such frequent, strong, and withering condemnation, during the whole course of His ministry.²⁶

In the Gospel accounts, only *Jesus* uses the word “hypocrite” and he *never* uses it to describe notoriously sinful people like tax collectors and prostitutes. Rather, he *only* uses it to describe the *religious leaders*, calling them “actors”—people who are *pretending* to be something before *others* that they *know* they are *not* before *God*.²⁷

And so, what is the consequence of such a hypocritical pattern of life?

Look at verse 47.

[⁴⁵ And in the hearing of all the people he said to his disciples, ⁴⁶ “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, ⁴⁷ who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.”]

“They will receive the greater condemnation.” This was a *particular* warning to *religious leaders*. Scripture makes clear that such leaders are “those who will have to give an account” to God for how they kept watch over the souls of those entrusted to their care (Heb. 13:17), and that those who teach God’s Word “will be judged with greater strictness” (James 3:1).

But this was also a *general* warning to *all* who practice hypocrisy in their lives. If a person is *satisfied* with *hypocrisy* in this life, then that person should expect nothing less than *hell* in the afterlife.

We should heed Jesus’ *strong* warning here because it is from the very person who will one day judge each of us for how we lived our lives.

²⁴ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, REC (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009).

²⁵ Grant R. Osborne, *Luke Verse By Verse*, ONTC (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2018).

²⁶ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels, Luke* (1858; reprint Cambridge: James Clarke, 1976), 2:346, quoted in Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, REC (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009).

²⁷ H. B. Charles, Jr., “Trapped By Tradition” (sermon, Shiloh Church of Jacksonville, October 22, 2019), <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/trapped-by-tradition/id973263701?i=1000454490319>.

God *hates* hypocrisy because it lies about who *we* are, and it lies about who *he* is.

- It lies about who *we* are because we are *pretending* to be something before *others* that we *know* we are *not* before God.
- And it lies about who *God* is because in thinking of *ourselves* to be great and trying to get *others* to think that *we're* great, it leaves little room for anyone to know that *God* is great.²⁸

It's been said that "No person can foster the impression that he/she is great, then exalt a great God."²⁹ Hypocrisy *cannot* acknowledge the greatness of God because it is so consumed with perpetuating our *own* greatness in the world.

So what about us?

For the scribes, hypocrisy came out through their concern with outward appearances, their desire for recognition from others, their practice of injustice against the vulnerable, and their long pretentious prayers.

Perhaps we can relate to some of those, but I want us to know that those are *not* the *only* ways that hypocrisy can come out.

Let me describe three other ways hypocrisy can look for us.

[Three potential ways hypocrisy can look for us:

1. We pretend not to struggle.]

First, we pretend not to struggle.

To be clear, it is *not* hypocrisy to struggle, but it *is* hypocrisy to *pretend* that you don't struggle.

Everyone struggles with *something*.

- We struggle at work, with singleness, in marriage and parenting.
- We struggle with parents, in-laws, friendships, church.
- We struggle financially, emotionally, mentally, with our health.

And if everything else seems to be going well in our lives, *all* of us struggle with *sin* all the time. We struggle with selfishness, pride, lust, greed, idolatry, idleness, unbelief, unforgiveness, bitterness, resentment, gossip, flattery, and so forth.

Yet, for some reason, we feel the need to present ourselves to others as people who don't struggle, who don't need help, who are put together, who have no problems, who are totally fine.

And as we all know, if we're being honest with ourselves, that's simply *not* true. Perhaps we're thinking that we're *protecting* something—our reputation, our family, or even God—but Jesus doesn't think such pretending is praiseworthy at all. Rather, he *condemns* it.

[Three potential ways hypocrisy can look for us:

1. We pretend not to struggle.
2. We act differently at home, church, and work.]

Second, we act differently at home, church, and work.

At church, maybe you come off as the most patient and loving person who always has a listening ear and a comforting Scripture. But at home, maybe you lose your temper and start speaking to your spouse or kids in a such a harsh way that you would not speak to any other human being.

²⁸ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, REC (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009).

²⁹ Joseph T. Bayly, *Out of My Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993), 174, quoted in R. Kent Hughes, *Luke*, PTW, rev. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

Or at work, maybe you are very proactive and willing to go the extra mile, inspiring your co-workers to give their all to meet their targets. But at home, you're passive and unwilling to really engage with your family members and you're just complacent with the status quo.

Of course, we wear different hats in different contexts. We have different roles and responsibilities at home, church, and work. The nature of our relationships is different in each of those contexts. That's understandable, but that's *not* the issue.

The issue is regarding our *character*.

- It is hypocrisy to be consistently impatient at home but consistently patient at church.
- It is hypocrisy to be consistently proactive and hardworking at work but consistently passive and lazy at home.

And if that resonates with you, perhaps you're already trying to *rationalize* your inconsistent character as being due to physical tiredness, the people around you, or some other factor. Granted, those may all *influence* our behavior, but the more fundamental question is rather simple—*who* are you?

If you're a *Christian*, then you ought not to be rationalizing and justifying your inconsistent character, but you ought to be repenting and resolving to conform your character to that of Christ.

That means, if physical tiredness is a factor that's contributing to you responding in a certain negative way, then as a Christian, what can you do to change that?

- Do you need to set an evening routine?
- Do you need to set limits to your work?
- Do you need to commit to regular exercise?

If certain people around you are contributing to you responding in a certain negative way, then as a Christian, what can you do to change that?

- Do you need to seek counsel?
- Do you need to have a hard conversation?
- Do you need to pray?

Again, it is *not* hypocrisy to struggle. But at the same time, if you do nothing about your inconsistent character at home, church, and work, it's not *really* a struggle. That's just getting more comfortable pretending and blaming and justifying. And *that's* hypocrisy.

[Three potential ways hypocrisy can look for us:

1. We pretend not to struggle.
2. We act differently at home, church, and work.
3. We have different standards for ourselves and others.]

Third, we have different standards for ourselves and others.

This is when we tell others to do what we're unwilling to do ourselves. For example...

- You tell others to read the Bible and pray, but you don't.
- You tell others to forgive, but you're not willing to forgive.
- You tell others to have the hard conversations, but you're not willing to have those conversations yourself.

We *know* the right thing to do, which is evident in us telling *others* to do the right thing. But then, we have all the reasons in the world for why we're not doing what we're telling others to do—our schedule is more packed, our pain and hurt is worse, our situation is unique.

Of course, there are *extreme* cases that may be unique in some way. But in *general*, do you see yourself as the constant *exception* to what you say?

Again, this is different than *struggling* to do what you say. Even the apostle Paul says, “For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing” (Rom. 7:19). We *all* struggle to *always* do what we say, so *that*, in and of itself, is not hypocrisy.

Rather, what makes this hypocrisy is the double-standard.

- It’s the parent that says to their child, “Do as I say, not as I do.”
- It’s the government leader who enforces the law but thinks that he’s above the law.
- It’s the Christian who rebukes sin in others but privately indulges in sin.

It’s this “I’m the exception” mentality, where we hold ourselves to a different, more lenient standard than we hold everyone else around us to.

But even a *child* knows that this is wrong.

- If you run a red light, they will call you out on that. Why? Because you taught them that we should stop at a red light.
- If you don’t wash your hands with soap, they will call you out on that. Why? Because you taught them that we should always use soap when we wash our hands.
- If you start raising your voice and using words you shouldn’t be using, they will call you out on that. Why? Because you taught them that doing and saying those things are not loving to others nor honoring to God.

And how we *respond* when we’re called out in these moments, whether by a child or anyone else, will be very revealing.

Hypocrites rationalize and excuse themselves from the standard they hold others to, but *Christians* repent and submit themselves to the same standards as others.

So those are three ways hypocrisy can look for us.

Now, what’s scary is that *hypocrisy* happens to be one of those sins that *religious* people are prone to commit.

We want to present *God* as holy, good, loving, kind, and trustworthy, but we know that *we’re* not. So rather than going through the long and hard process of *sanctification*, in which *God* promises to make us more like himself, we’re tempted to take the more immediate and easier path of *pretending*, in which *we* work hard to cover our sins and exaggerate our goodness.

All the while, perhaps we *justify* this hypocrisy as wanting to be a good witness for God, or not wanting to stumble anyone. But such a hypocritical pattern of life does *not* glorify God and it does *not* help others.

In fact, it completely *undermines* the gospel that we say we believe in.

- The gospel says that we’re sinners. Hypocrisy says that we’re good.
- The gospel points to the perfect work of Christ on our behalf. Hypocrisy points to our own works that we want others to see.
- The gospel leads to worship of God and grateful joy. Hypocrisy leads to worship of self and self-righteous pride.

Nothing *undermines* the gospel like hypocrisy, which is why Jesus condemned hypocrisy so harshly.

Conclusion

Still, the reality is that, if you’re a Christian, you probably struggle with hypocrisy. And part of the reason that Jesus speaks so frequently about it is because he *knows* that we *will* struggle with it.

But we must know that hypocrisy is an *illusion*. There is no pretending with God, and Jesus makes that clear.

And what’s more, if we trust in the gospel, we don’t *need* to pretend.

The gospel shows us that Jesus *knows* that we are *not* great. That's *why* he came. The *divine* Son of God was born to be a son of David to be our great Savior.

Whereas the *religious leaders*, who thought they were great, devoured and exploited their own people. *Jesus* as the greatest came to die for us and credit his greatness to us.

Whereas the religious leaders exalted themselves over others in order to serve *themselves*, *Jesus* as the greatest humbled himself to the cross in order to serve undeserving *sinners*.

So that now, for those who admit that we are *not* as great as we think and that *Jesus* is greater than we could ever think—for those who repent of their sins and believe in *Jesus* as their Lord and Savior—we are now *precious* in God's eyes. We are his chosen children. We are his redeemed people. We are his sanctified bride.

We don't *need* to pretend to be what we are not. But our greatest joy and comfort is found in *embracing* who we *truly* are as we are united to the greatest, *Jesus Christ*, by faith.

The One Thing

***Jesus is greater than we think,
but we're not as great as we think.***