

## Who is Most Important • Luke 20:40-47

It was big sports news when the University of Indiana fired its head basketball coach Bobby Knight. Knight had extreme defenders and extreme critics. If you were at all interested in college sports at that time you probably had an opinion.

The incident that led the university president to fire Bobby Knight started with a comment by Kent Harvey, a 19-year-old freshmen student. Walking across the Indiana campus he crossed paths with Bobby Knight and said, “What’s up, Knight?” instead of “Mr. Knight” or “Coach Knight”. Bobby Knight considered that to be disrespectful so he sought to correct him and took hold of his arm in the process. That was a violation of the university’s “zero tolerance policy” forbidding Coach Knight from having physical contact with students. One of the “winning-est” college coaches in basketball history lost his job.

Showing respect and being shown respect is a big deal. There have been wars between nations, business breakups, church conflicts, marriages ending in divorce and family members not speaking to each other, all over matters of respect.

Part of respect is acknowledging whether or not someone is important—and we all want to feel important! That is the theme of two back-to-back stories that Luke reported at the end of chapter 20 in his biography of Jesus.

It all happened on a day when some antagonists were asking Jesus a lot of tricky questions in order to trip him up, and they couldn’t. In fact, Jesus answered the questions brilliantly; so well, in fact, that they were silent. Jesus interrupted the silence by asking a question of his own. It was a rhetorical question. That is, he didn’t expect them to give an answer; he

planned to answer the question himself. We read about it in Luke 20:41-44:

*Then Jesus said to them, “How is it that they say the Christ is the Son of David? David himself declares in the Book of Psalms:*

*“‘The Lord said to my Lord:*

*“Sit at my right hand*

*until I make your enemies*

*a footstool for your feet.”’*

David calls him ‘Lord.’ How then can he be his son?”

Frankly, it can be hard to understand what Jesus was talking about. But that doesn’t mean it’s not important. Actually, there are a lot of things in life that are difficult to understand, at least at first, but are still important.

Jesus starts out by asking a Jewish crowd why they routinely refer to the coming Messiah as the Son of David. (Perhaps I should explain here that *Messiah* and *Christ* mean exactly the same thing.

*Messiah* is the Hebrew word and *Christ* is the Greek word. It’s like Los Angeles and The Angels—same meaning but different languages.)

The obvious answer to Jesus’ question is that “Son of David” is one of the many Hebrew nicknames for the Messiah, coming straight out of the Old Testament. In those days it was common conversation. It means that the Messiah must be a direct descendant of David, the second king of Israel,

whose dynasty ruled for nearly 500 years.

When Jesus asked why they called the Messiah the Son of David he wasn’t minimizing the importance of being a descendant of David. To the contrary, Jesus’ own biographies make a big

***Jesus expects his followers to love their enemies, to forgive those who have deeply offended them, to make sacrifices of time and resources and money, to pray and to beware of anyone who might cause another to sin.***

deal out of declaring and proving he descended from the famous king.

Jesus' question was a trigger for teaching them that the Messiah has to be a whole lot more than a descendant of David. Jesus wanted them to understand that the Messiah was far greater than they had ever dreamed or anticipated. He would be much more than merely a very good leader in the lineage of David. This was going to be very big news to his listeners. So Jesus quoted Psalm 110:1: "*The Lord says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."*"

David wrote this Psalm. In it he says that the Lord (God) spoke to his Lord (the Messiah). Whoa! Wait a minute! How could this possibly be? If the Messiah is a descendant of David 1000 years after David died, how could he be talking to God? That doesn't make sense. And why would David ever think to refer to one of his future descendants as his Lord?

"Lord" means "boss". It is a term that offers respect and acknowledges power, authority and superiority. It was used by children to address their fathers. It was spoken by soldiers when addressing or referring to their officers. Caesar insisted that people call him Lord Caesar. That became a problem for Christians, some of whom risked their lives by refusing to say, "Caesar is Lord." To call anyone Lord was to submit to that person's rule over you.

Jesus' point is that "David calls him 'Lord.' How then can he be his son?" It should be the other way around. The Messiah/descendant of David should call King David "Lord" because in that culture you would expect the Messiah (the younger) to refer to David (the older) as Lord. The whole thing just doesn't make sense.

Well, it doesn't make sense unless you understand that the Messiah is much more than just a descendent of David. He lived before David lived. He is the colleague of God himself. The Messiah is the Son of God. The Messiah is deity. If all that is possible then it would make perfect sense for David to refer to the Messiah as Lord 1000 years before the Messiah was born.

What we have here is the bedrock basics of Christian truth. The eternal Son of God lived for-

ever and ever and ever ago. He created the heavens and the earth. Then, one day he stepped down from the glories of heaven to come to our earth. When he did he took on a human body, a human name and a title. The name of this eternal Son of God became Jesus, and his title is Jesus the Christ, the Messiah.

Now, if this is all true, then Jesus is a whole lot more than a special religious leader. He is more than a Jewish prophet and rabbi. He is God! And, if he is God, we should all bow down before him as Lord. We should all show him respect. We should all submit to his rule in our lives. We should all call him Boss.

Jesus has every right to receive all the respect and honor and praise that can be given him. But he lets us decide. He lets us choose whether to honor him as the Lord of our lives.

There is a back-to-back story in Jesus' biography about people who didn't deserve respect but insisted on it anyway. They really weren't very important but they thought they were. Jesus warned his followers to beware of their hypocrisy in Luke 20:45-47:

While all the people were listening, Jesus said to his disciples, "*Beware of the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and love to be greeted in the marketplace and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. They devour widows' houses and for a how make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely.*"

Everyone was listening but these words were specifically addressed to Jesus' loyal followers. That's because Jesus has different—higher—expectations of those who are committed to him than those who are not. Jesus expects his followers to love their enemies, to forgive those who have deeply offended them, to make sacrifices of time and resources and money, to pray and to beware of anyone who might cause another to sin.

Jesus picked out of this crowd the teachers of the law, the Rabbis, as an example of how not to be. He said that they walked around in flowing robes; they loved being greeted in public;

they wanted the best seats in the house; they wanted to be honored by others in public; they stole widows' houses; and they showed off with really long prayers.

You may be wondering what's wrong with some of these things. Is it bad to wear robes or be greeted by name or get a good seat or be treated with honor or pray long prayers?

Actually, that all depends. The reason why we do what we do may be more important than the actual behavior. For example: Is it right or wrong to stay out all night? Ask any parent of teenagers and you will be told that it all depends. If staying out all night is to study at a friend's house it may be good. If it is to get drunk, it is definitely bad.

Let's try to understand the picture Jesus was painting of these religious teachers. Long robes in that culture usually meant that people didn't work for a living. Working people could not tend sheep, raise crops or build houses with long flowing robes. They lived off somebody else or somebody else's money. Christians work for a living. So, Jesus was critical of them.

They wanted to be greeted in public because they wanted everyone to treat them like they were really important. Apparently they thought they were better than others and deserved the best seats and highest honors. They lived for human praise; they counted themselves superior.

Their long prayers weren't to communicate with God. They were to impress people with how super religious they were. But at the same time they are acting so religious they are ripping off widows, taking widows' houses for their own benefit. Maybe they persuaded the widows to donate their houses to religious causes. Or, worse yet, it may be that they were the executors of the widows' estates and dishonestly transferred the assets of widows to themselves. This way they could wear their long robes and not have to work.

Jesus warned his followers to watch out for people who are trying to prove how important

they are at the expense of others. And the same warnings go to us:

1. Beware of people who talk religion but don't live righteously.
2. Beware of people who use their religion to rip off you or other people.
3. Beware of people who expect you to work but they won't work.
4. Beware of people who insist that they are more important than anyone else and who demand to be treated in a special way.

But there is another warning here as well: Don't be this kind of hypocrite! Don't be the kind of person who always has to be more important than others. Don't be the kind of person who wants others to always serve your needs. Think more about how to honor others than worrying about how others can honor you.

I guess it all comes down to pride. Pride can be a very dangerous virus in the human soul. Some of us express pride by demanding that others treat us special. Some express pride with symbols like the cars we drive, the houses we live in, the titles we accumulate or the awards we win.

Some express pride by wearing disguises; they won't tell you what they do or who they are—sort of an inner private pride.

Jesus invites us to not be like those hypocrites. Instead, be genuine. Be simple. Move past the pride of success

and its symbols to service. Be like Jesus. Take great satisfaction in blessing and honoring and respecting and serving others regardless of how they may treat you.

Sometimes I have conversations with people in which I really feel ignorant. They refer to authors I don't know about, musicians I have never heard of, business leaders who are rich and powerful but are unfamiliar to me or religious leaders I know nothing about. On my better days I admit that I have never heard of these famous and important people. But I have a self-imposed limit

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of admitting ignorance—only about six names in a row—because I am embarrassed. After that I just smile and nod my head and hope that they assume I know the famous and powerful and important people. One time a business man came right out and asked me how many presidents I have met. I told him that I did once shake Ronald Reagan's hand, but I doubt that he would have remembered me. Anyway, after such conversations I think to myself that I am not very smart, not very well read, not greatly connected, not very important.

But wait a minute. I know Jesus. He is the Messiah. He is the Lord. He is David's Lord. He is the Creator, the Lord of heaven and earth. He is the Lord of lords, the King of kings, the Boss of all bosses. He is more famous than anyone else.

So, what's important to me? Where do I get my sense of worth? Who and what matters most in my life? The answer is that I am a Christian. I am a follower of Jesus the Christ. Robes don't matter. Houses aren't a big deal. Being recognized at Target isn't the definition of what really

matters in life. At the end of life the score isn't counted by the number of presidents I've met. What matters most of all is the lordship of Jesus in my life.

So, what about you? What's most important? Who is most important? Where do you get your sense of worth and connection? May your answer resoundingly be JESUS!

Gracious God,  
 Thank you for giving to us your Son,  
 your only Son, who  
 came from the glories of heaven to the  
 realities of our earth  
 so that we might know him as Savior  
 and acknowledge and  
 follow him as Lord. May the Lordship  
 of your Son in our  
 lives be more important than anything  
 or anyone else.  
 We pray in the name of our Lord Jesus  
 Christ.  
 Amen.

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