

Luke's Gospel: Luke 20

Q & A with Jesus...

The authority of Jesus challenged (Luke 20 v 1 to 8)

“The chief priests and the scribes with the elders came up and said to him” (v 1) – Jesus didn’t look for these great debates with the religious leaders: he wanted to teach the people and tell them about God’s good news. Yet the questioners came to him, and he answered them with great wisdom and power. “Tell us by what authority you do these things?” (v 2) – Jesus showed great courage by boldly entering Jerusalem and driving out the corrupt merchants from the temple courts. Now the religious leaders wanted to know by what authority Jesus did such things – especially as he did not have traditional rabbinical training.

- The chief priests and the elders of the people come asking a seemingly straightforward question about Jesus’ authority. Why doesn’t Jesus answer them directly?
- What does Jesus’ reply and the subsequent discussion reveal about their true motives?

“Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man?” (v 4) – by replying with a question, Jesus did not *evade* their question. Instead, he used this question to explain who he is, and to expose their hypocrisy. If John was from God, then he was right in proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah – and if this was true, then Jesus had all authority. “They answered that they did not know where it came from” (v 7) – this response showed that they cared more about winning the argument than in knowing the truth. “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things” (v 8) – when they showed themselves to be insincere, Jesus refused to answer their question. Jesus had great compassion for sincere seekers, but not for cynical critics and manipulators. These men knew that John had said Jesus was the Messiah, but were not willing to accept it.

The parable of the wicked tenants (Luke 20 v 9 to 18)

- This parable is rich in meaning, given its allusion to Isaiah’s Song of the Vineyard (Isaiah 5 v 1 to 7). If the tenants are Israel and its religious leaders, who are the owner, the servants and the son?
- How are these religious leaders about to fulfil the scripture (Psalm 118 v 22, 23) Jesus cites in verse 17?

“Let it out to tenants” (v 9) – the tenants did not buy the vineyard, and they did not make it. They were allowed to work in it by a generous owner – yet they turned against the owner, and would one day answer for their rebellion. This parable tells us that God, the owner of all, is more patient with rebels than we would ever be, and that there will be a final day of reckoning.

“What shall I do? I will send my beloved son” (v 13) – the owner of the vineyard repeatedly tried to receive what was rightfully his from the vineyard and those who worked in it. They rejected each of the three servants he sent to receive what was due to him, so finally he sent his beloved son, thinking “perhaps they will respect *him*.” “This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours” (v 14) – the tenants foolishly thought they could benefit from killing the son who would inherit the vineyard. They were seriously wrong in this foolish assumption!

Verses 17 to 18: God is referred to as a “rock” (Psalm 18 v 2), and the “spiritual rock” that followed the Israelites in the desert was Christ (1 Corinthians 10 v 4), but to Israel Jesus became a “stumbling block” (1 Corinthians 1 v 23). Israel rejected her Messiah, but in his death and resurrection Jesus created the Church. To the Church Jesus is the “cornerstone” (Ephesians 2 v 20 to 22, 1 Peter 2 v 4, 5). And at the end of the age Jesus will come as a stone of judgment, destroying Gentile kingdoms and establishing his own glorious kingdom (Daniel 2 v 34, 44, 45)...

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Paying taxes to Caesar (Luke 20 v 19 to 26)

- Why did the scribes and chief priests try to trap Jesus? How did their question reveal their motives? Jesus not only avoids their trap, but also establishes an important principle. What do we owe our government, and what do we owe God?

“That they might catch him in something he said” (v 20) – public opinion had kept the scribes and chief priests from stopping Jesus. Now the enemies of Christ tried to turn the tide of public opinion against him by making Jesus appear to side with the Roman government. “Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar, or not?” (v 22) – Jesus’ dilemma with this question was simple. If he said that taxes *should* be paid, he could be accused of denying the sovereignty of God over Israel, thus making himself unpopular with the Jewish people. If he said that taxes *should not* be paid, he made himself an enemy of Rome. “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s” (v 25) – Jesus affirmed that the government makes legitimate requests of us. We are responsible to God in all things, but we must be obedient to government in matters civil and national. “And to God the things that are God’s” – the coin bears the image of Caesar, but we bear the image of God.

Sadducees ask about the resurrection (Luke 20 v 27 to 40)

- The Sadducees differed from their Jewish contemporaries because they rejected the idea of the resurrection. What motives lie behind their question to Jesus?
- How did the Sadducees display ignorance of both the Scriptures and the power of God? Why is it essential to know both the Bible and the power of God in order to avoid error?

“Neither marry nor are given in marriage” (v 35) – Jesus reminds the Sadducees that life in the resurrection is quite different from this life. It does not merely continue this world and its arrangements, but it is life of a completely different order (see Revelation 21 v 22, 23). “The God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob” (v 37) – Jesus demonstrates the reality of the resurrection using only the Torah; the five books of Moses, which were the only books the Sadducees accepted as authoritative. If Abraham, Isaac and Jacob did not live on in the resurrection, then God could not say that ‘He is the God of Abraham’, but would instead say, ‘I *was* the God of Abraham.’ “He is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him” (v 38) – this demonstrates that there is a resurrection, and life beyond, despite what the unbelieving and doubting Sadducees thought and taught. Jesus answered well, and both his friends and enemies recognized it.

Whose son is the Christ? (Luke 20 v 41 to 44)

- To a Jew in Jesus’ day, a descendant was always inferior to an ancestor. A son might call his father or grandfather ‘lord’, but never the other way round. Jesus quotes from Psalm 110 v 1 – so how *can* Jesus be both David’s ‘Lord’ and his ‘son? What does it mean for us to call Jesus ‘my Lord’?

In this passage Jesus noted that King David called the Messiah ‘his Lord’. This means that the Messiah is not only the Son of David (a popular Messianic title), he is also the Lord of David. See also Revelation 22 v 16.

Beware of the scribes (Luke 20 v 45 to 47)

- These verses are an indictment of the ‘scribes’ because of their concern for personal prestige and outward show – how does Jesus illustrate this point? What is their destiny (v 47)? In what ways can this happen within the church?

“Devour widows’ houses” (v 47) – this suggests the scribes pretended to help the widows, but instead used their position of trust to take from them. Perhaps they received gifts from well-meaning widows and mismanaged them. Perhaps they solicited gifts from widows with false promises. In that day, a Jewish teacher could not be paid for teaching, but he could receive gifts. Apparently, many scribes used flattery and manipulation to get big gifts from those who could least afford to give them – such as widows.