

## LUKE 20 QUESTIONS, QUESTIONS, AND MORE QUESTIONS

After His triumphal entry into the city of Jerusalem, Jesus continued to be the popular favorite of the multitudes who were thronging Jerusalem because it was the Passover-season (verses 1-8). It was this popularity which delayed the crafty intentions of the rulers of the people, for they had already determined to put Jesus to death. But first, they had to bring Him into discredit with the people. With this in mind, they sent a deputation from their chief court – the Sanhedrin – to entrap Jesus in His talk, by bringing Him into conflict with the Jewish or Roman rulers. They challenged Him to state by what authority He was receiving such honors as the Messiah, or driving the merchants from the Temple, or performing His miracles. Their question was framed with subtle skill: “By what authority doest thou these things? or who is he that gave thee this authority?” They placed Jesus in a dilemma. If He should claim that authority had been delegated to Him, then he might be accused of disloyalty and of schism in supplanting the recognized “authorities” of the Jewish state; and if He should claim inherent Divine authority, as if He were God Himself, He might be condemned for blasphemy.

But see how Jesus skillfully silenced His enemies! He answered them with a question which involved them in a counter-dilemma: “The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or from men?” They could not say, “From heaven”; for they had rejected John. And they dared not say, “From men” – for they feared the people, who regarded John as a prophet. So they tried to escape from this awkward situation by cowardly replying that they did not know. But Jesus did more than merely silence these men; He also answered them. His question was no irrelevant riddle, by which He delayed the necessity of a reply. He implied that the authority of John was Divine, and that His own authority was the same; but as they were afraid to deny the Divine authority of John, they were also powerless to deny that of Jesus. He further implied that if they had accepted the message of John, they would have been prepared to accept Him as well. In the same way as these men of old, the modern enemies of our Lord also declare that they want more proofs of His authority, and they demand more evidence; but what they really lack is love for God and submission to His will!

To the malicious challenge of His enemies, Jesus replied – claiming Divine authority for Himself, and condemning the rulers for their guilty unbelief (verses 9-18). He now added a parable, which more clearly stated His claims, and which more solemnly rebuked these hostile rulers, and pronounced judgment upon the nation that they represented. He told the story of a landowner who

### Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ *The priests and scribes question Christ's authority – verses 1-8*
- ❖ *The parable of the vineyard and its wicked caretakers – verses 9-19*
- ❖ *Jesus answers questions, and asks one of His own – verses 20-47*

established and equipped a vineyard, and then let it out to tenant-farmers. He went to live far away; and as rent, he expected a certain portion of the vintage. When he sent for the fruit, however, his messengers were abused and killed. At last, his own son was sent; and he, too, was slain. So the man determined to come and execute justice upon those wicked tenants, and to deliver his vineyard to occupants who were more worthy.

This parable was so plain that even Jesus' enemies perfectly understood its meaning! The landowner was the Father; the vineyard was Israel; the tenant-farmers were the rulers, to whom the nation had been entrusted; the servants were the prophets that were repeatedly sent to summon the people to repent, and to render to God the fruits of righteousness. And as for the son – that was Jesus Himself! He enjoyed a unique relationship with God, which was distinct from the prophets and all human messengers. The death of “the heir” was His own approaching crucifixion, and the return of the landowner was the coming visitation of Divine judgment – when Israel would be cast aside from the spiritual vineyard, and the Gentiles would be called in.

Here Jesus was emphasizing His own rejection, and the guilt and punishment of the Jewish nation. He declared, however, that His death would ultimately result in His exaltation and triumph. He was “the stone which the builders rejected,” which “was made the head of the corner!” He also warned His enemies that all who remained obstinate in their unbelief would stumble on that stone, that all who would reject Him would be “broken to pieces,” and that all who would attempt to drag down that stone would be ground into powder and scattered as dust.

The rulers had been defeated, discredited, and disgraced; but they had not been discouraged (verses 19-26). In their first question, they had utterly failed to bring Jesus into any unlawful opposition to the religious courts. So now, by a new question, they attempted to draw from Him an answer which would either make Him unpopular with the people, or else bring Him under the condemnation of the civil rulers. They asked him a question relating to the payment of tribute to the Roman government. The more conservative Jews held the position that God was the ruler of Israel, and that it was possibly wrong to pay taxes to support a heathen state. The more liberal Jews sided with the Herods, who owed their power to Rome. Therefore, the enemies of Jesus sent to Him representatives from both parties – Pharisees and Herodians. Thus they were certain that they could catch Him this time; for if He should avoid offending one party, He would surely displease the other.

These cunning men proposed their artful question: “Is it lawful for us to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?” Should Jesus say, “Yes”? Then He would cease to be a popular favorite among the populace, for the people loathed the hateful oppression of Rome. Should He say, “No”? Then His enemies would hurry him away to the Roman governor and the cross, as a traitor and a rebel. The dilemma

seemed complete. Yet Jesus not only escaped the snare; but also, in His reply, He enunciated a law for all time: “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s!” He declared that those who accept the protection and privileges that a government provides are under obligation to support that government.



Christianity should never be identified with any particular political party or social theory; but as far as it is consistent with the Word of God, Christians should always take their stand for loyalty, good order, and obedience to the law.

It is not the entire essence of life, however, to “render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s.” One must also render “unto God the things that are God’s.” This latter higher allegiance also includes the former. The enemies of Jesus suggested that there was a conflict of duties here, but He showed that there is actually perfect harmony. However, we must be aware of the ever-present danger of forgetting God, and of failing to remember our obligations to Him of trust, service, worship, and love. The true basis for citizenship is devotion to God, and no political theory or party-allegiance can be taken as a substitute for loyalty to Him. Thus the enemies of Jesus were answered and rebuked, and His followers were given guidance for all the coming years.

Jesus had foiled the scribes and the chief priests in their plan to entrap Him in His public teaching. He was now attacked by the Sadducees (verses 27-40), who were the priestly and most powerful party among the Jews. They denied the immortality of the soul, and they believed neither in angels nor in spirits; they represented the modern materialists. It is to be noted that the question with which they approached Jesus was not one which referred only to immortality, but specifically to the resurrection of the body. They proposed the case of a woman who was married successively to seven brothers – from each of whom, she was separated by death. And then they asked, “In the resurrection therefore whose wife of them shall she be? for the seven had her to wife.” They hoped that Jesus would either deny the orthodox belief as to the resurrection, or that He would make some statement which would contradict the Law of Moses – in accordance with which, the successive marriages had been made. They implied that this accepted Law was inconsistent with the belief in a resurrection. In His reply, Jesus declared that in the resurrection, life will be regulated by larger laws than those which are known in this present age. Those who will share the glory of that age, and who will experience the blessedness of “the resurrection from the dead,” will be immortal in soul and body. Marriage, which is now necessary for a continuance of the human race, will no longer exist. The relationships in that life will be higher and more blessed than even the most sacred relationship of this present life.

Jesus had defeated His enemies in debate. They had come to Him with a series of crafty questions, designed to discredit Him as a public teacher and to secure some ground for His arrest. To each of these questions, He had given a reply by which his foes had been unmasked and condemned. Then He asked them a question (verses 41-44). It was not only intended to forever silence His foes (although it did accomplish this; for henceforth, no one ventured to meet Him in public discussion), nor did Jesus desire to further humiliate His enemies. In the presence of the people, He had already shown them to be ridiculous, contemptible, impotent, and insincere. His real motive now was to ask a question, the answer to which would embody the chief of all His claims – namely, the claim that He was truly God as well as Man. On this occasion, therefore – in the presence of both the rulers and the people – He made the defense which can never be broken or forgotten, as He definitely demonstrated from Scripture that the Messiah was described by the inspired writers of Scripture as a Divine Being.

As the long day of public controversy drew to its close, it was not strange that Jesus turned to warn the people against these spiritual enemies who had been seeking to defeat Him, and who were determined upon His death (verses 45-47). These supposed leaders and guides could not be followed safely. They had shown themselves to be unworthy of their place and power. The people had to look elsewhere for true teachers. The scribes were the professional teachers of the day – the trained expositors of the Law – and most of them were Pharisees. Of all men, they were the most bitter enemies of Christ. They were jealous of His power; they were angry at His claims; and finally, they were goaded to desperation by their humiliating defeat at His hands. Upon these men, Jesus pronounced the most stern condemnation. His words are recorded at length by Matthew. In the brief summary of the discourse that is made by Mark and also here by Luke, we find only a few short sentences that sketch three principal features in the character of these unworthy leaders of religious thought. The first is their vanity – their ambition for display and for high position, and their love of flattery. The second is their cruel greed, which is expressed by our Lord in the suggestive clause, “who devour widows’ houses.” The third was their shameful hypocrisy; they are described as men who “for a pretence make long prayers.” It has always been remarked that the most bitter denunciations of Jesus were addressed to the men whose outward lives were the most respectable, and whose religious professions were the most loud. This does not mean, however, that open vice and flagrant sin are better than selfish and proud morality; but it does remind us of the fact that great religious privileges and the possession of revealed truth involve solemn responsibilities, and that hypocrisy and pretense are abominations in the sight of the Lord!

*Lord Jesus, we praise You as the Chief Cornerstone, and as David’s son and David’s Lord – God and Man in one – Who sits at the right hand of the Father! Amen.*