



Controversy with Jewish Religious Leaders Luke 20

Introduction

Open confrontation between Jesus and the hostile leaders of the Jewish nation was inevitable. They had been sniping at Him since the beginning of His ministry and now they were plotting to kill Him. It was only a matter of when and how. Now that He was acclaimed by the populace as Messiah and teaching daily in the temple, they knew they must find a way to discredit and do away with Him.

Outline of Luke 20

- I. Controversy Over Authority - Luke 20:1-19
- II. Controversy Over Sacred and Secular Duty - Luke 20:20-26
- III. Controversy Over Resurrection - Luke 20:27-40
- IV. Controversy Over Deity - Luke 20:41-47

I. Controversy Over Authority - Luke 20:1-19

- A. Confrontation by Jewish Leaders - Luke 20:1-8; Matthew 21:23-27
 1. Questioning Jesus' authority - 20:1-2

During Passover week Jesus taught daily in the temple and preached the gospel, much to the chagrin of the Jewish leaders (Luke 19:47). On one of those days they confronted Him, demanding that He tell them by what authority He acted and who gave Him that authority. They desired control and, since Jesus was not under their control, they launched a verbal attack.

2. Countering the question - Luke 20:3-4

The question of authority is important, though not for the reasons the leaders asked it. Jesus did not need to defend Himself, nor was He ever in a defensive position. Jesus was and is the truth. He sought to bring to light the truth. Was He a "lone ranger", or an autonomous rabble-rouser? No, He was no self-styled prophet nor self-appointed messiah. So He responded to the religious leaders with His own question about authority. The answer to His question would answer theirs. *The baptism of John (the Baptist) -- was it from heaven or from men?*

3. Puzzling over Jesus' question - 20:5-7

The questioners suddenly found themselves on the defensive. Jesus' authority was from the same source

as John's. They had not accepted John the Baptist but because of his popularity they had not openly opposed him. Since he was a martyr, they dared not oppose him now and risk being stoned by the people. So they chose not to answer and retreated for the time being.

Do you realize that all power and authority is given to Jesus (Matthew 28:18)? Do you accept His authority? Do you live and work under His authority? How is this evident in your everyday life?

- B. Parable of the Vineyard - Luke 20:9-19; Matthew 21:33-46; Mark 12:1-12

After silencing the religious leaders, Jesus began to speak to the people, using a parable.

1. Vineyard owner's journey to a far country - 20:9-16

A certain man planted a vineyard and leased it to tenant farmers, or vinedressers. Then he went into a far country for a long time. The "certain man" represents God, the owner of the vineyard, and foreshadows Jesus, who went into a far country for a long time.

- a. The vineyard - verse 9

The vineyard is a picture of Israel (Isaiah 5:1-7). A grape cluster is the national symbol even today. *For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel (Isaiah 5:7). Isaiah describes the relationship God had to His vineyard.*

- He sings about it because He owns it (5:1).
- He prepared and planted it, built a tower and made a winepress. He expected good fruit from it. But he received wild grapes (5:2).
- He called the people of Judah to witness. What more could He have done to it (5:3-4)?
- Why did it yield wild fruit? What should He do? It is useless as it is (5:5).
- He will let it be burned and laid waste. He will not take care of it (5:5-6).

- b. The vinedressers - verses 9-10

The vineyard was committed to vinedressers, tenant farmers. As in other parables, the nobleman committed something of his to others. They were to take care of it for him. It did not belong to them, even though they began to think it did.

c. The servants - verses 11-12

Now at vintage-time he sent a servant to the vinedressers. The servants represent the prophets, such as Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Joel, Amos, etc. who looked for fruit for God but were instead ridiculed, ignored, mistreated and even killed. Elijah's life was threatened. Jeremiah was lowered into a filthy mucky dungeon and fed only bread and water. It is believed that Isaiah was put into a tree trunk and sawn in two by orders of wicked King Manasseh. There is reference to this in Hebrews 11:37.

d. The Beloved Son - verses 13-16

After sending many servants (prophets) to no avail, the owner said, *I will send my beloved son. Probably they will respect him.* But the vinedressers had other thoughts. They reasoned that if they killed the heir, the vineyard would belong to them.

So they cast him out of the vineyard and killed him. There is no doubt that this is what the leaders had in mind for Jesus. So Jesus asked the question, *Therefore, what will the owner of the vineyard do to them?* He also gave the answer, *He will come and destroy those vinedressers and give the vineyard to others.* At this the leaders spontaneously reacted, *Certainly not!* They understood the point of the parable: they were the vinedressers, and rather than having the kingdom by doing away with Jesus, the kingdom would be taken from them and given to others.

2. Application of the parable - 20:17-19

Jesus looked straight at the leaders and asked them the meaning of Psalm 118:22, *The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.* The Stone, or Rock, had been a name for God since Moses had first called God *the Rock* (Deuteronomy 32:4). David also called God *my Rock* (Psalm 18:2), as did Isaiah (Isaiah 17:10). The apostle Paul says that the Rock followed the Israelites in the desert and that the Rock was Christ (1 Corinthians 10:4). Is He your Rock? To reject Him is to reject the One who is the chief cornerstone (1 Peter 2:7).

Whoever falls on that stone will be broken. This stone is called a stone of stumbling in Isaiah 8:14; Jeremiah 6:21; Romans 9:33, 14:13; and 1 Peter 2:8. To stumble over Jesus, His deity, and His authority, as the Jewish leaders were doing, is to have a broken life that never works as God meant it to work.

But on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder. To reject the Son of God until judgment falls is similar to being ground to dust. How much better is it to receive Him, accept Him, and obey Him?

The leaders of the nation, the chief priests and the scribes, knew Jesus had spoken the parable against them. They wanted to arrest Him, but were afraid of the people. Do you recognize when the Bible describes you? Do you fight it or agree with it?

II. Controversy Over Sacred and Secular Duty - Luke 20:20-26

A. A Taxing Question - Luke 20:20-22

The leaders stepped back, but keeping an eye on Jesus, they sent "spies", their prize students, appearing to be honorable persons with a good question.

They began respectfully enough. *Teacher, we know that You say and teach rightly, and You do not show personal favoritism, but teach the way of God in truth.* That much was true. They could (should) have stopped there. But they then asked Him a loaded question designed to put Him in an impossible position. *Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?* The emphasis was probably on "us", referring to all Jews. If He said "no" it was not lawful, they could accuse Him of treason against Rome. If He said "yes", it was lawful, they would accuse Him of being against His own people and siding with Rome. At that point they hoped the people would repudiate Him. Taxes are never popular, but money paid to Rome to maintain its rule over them was especially repugnant.

B. A Wise Answer - Luke 20:23-25

Jesus exposed their motive by saying, *Why do you test Me?* He took a silver coin, a Roman denarius, and asked whose image it bore? They answered, "Caesar's". Jesus told them to *render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.* This is the abiding foundation of the separation of church and state, two spheres which are not mutually exclusive, but mutually operative and cooperative. The Roman Empire was ruled by Caesar, giving him the power to collect taxes from its citizens. Likewise, there are things that belong to God and which require a Christian's obedience to Him.

C. Responsive Silence - Luke 20:26

The spies had fallen into their own trap. They marveled at His answer even as they searched for a retort. None was possible so they *kept silent.*

Whose image did the Jewish people bear? Had not God created them? The Bible states that all were created in His image (Genesis 1:27). Likewise, if the coins you use represent the authority of government in your life, does not your body represent the authority of God in your life?

III. Controversy Over Resurrection - Luke 20:27-40

A. The Sadducees' Question - Luke 20:27-33; Matthew 22:23-28

The Sadducees were the pragmatists of their day, denying the supernatural: angels, miracles, and life after death. That is why they were "sad-you-see".

Using Moses as a backdrop for their sarcastic question, the Sadducees set up a ridiculous hypothetical situation intended to make Jesus look foolish. It was one bride for seven brothers. With no children, whose wife would she be in the resurrection?

B. Jesus Affirms Resurrection - Luke 20:34-38; Matthew 22:29-33

Jesus used their question to teach, trying to reach the Sadducees. First He told them they were greatly mistaken because they did not know two things.

1. Scripture - Matthew 22:29

You are mistaken, not knowing the scriptures. How many mistakes would people today avoid by simply knowing the scriptures?

2. Power of God - Matthew 22:29

Nor did they know the power of God over death. Yet Jesus had raised Lazarus publicly just the week before.

Jesus then gave three facts (Matthew 22:30-33):

- a. Marriage belongs only to people and only in this life.
- b. Some people will be resurrected from the dead to die no more.
- c. These people will be children of God, equal to angels.

Jesus again used Moses in His argument. At the burning bush, it was made clear that the dead are raised. God had revealed Himself as *the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.* (Exodus 3:6). Since God is the God of the living and not the dead, those patriarchs must be living, *for all live to Him.* To God, everyone is living somewhere.

C. Result - Luke 20:39-40; Matthew 22:33

When Jesus taught He got results, usually of two kinds. Along with the crowds, some of the scribes were impressed and said, *Teacher, you have spoken well.*

The rest dared not question Him anymore since He was gaining support from their own ranks rather than losing it as they intended. Do you believe the words of Jesus? Are you looking forward to resurrection and eternity with Him?

IV. Controversy Over Deity - Luke 20:41-47

A. Jesus' Question to the Religious Leaders - Luke 20:41-44; Matthew 22:41-46

It was Jesus' turn to ask a question. *What do you think of the Christ? Whose son is He* (Matthew 22:42)? They answered, *The son of David.* Then, perhaps turning to the crowd, Jesus spoke, *How can they say that the Christ is David's son* (Luke 20:41)? Christ is the Greek word for Messiah. God promised King David a descendant who would sit on his throne and rule Israel. Everyone knew that the Messiah would come from David's line.

Quoting from Psalm 110, Jesus asked how David, speaking in the Spirit, could call his son his Lord, *The Lord said to my Lord, sit at My right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool.* The answer had to be that David's son would become David's Lord. But if they gave that answer they would acknowledge the deity of Messiah, and since the people thought Jesus was Messiah, they would worship Him as God. This would present an even worse dilemma for those who wanted to destroy Him. Since they could not answer, the questions ended.

B. Jesus' Warning to Disciples - Luke 20:46-47

1. Hollowness of appearance - 20:46

Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes. An old adage says that appearances are deceiving. Some people love the show of religion, such things as robes, titles, public recognition, special favors, seats on the fifty yard line, invitations to banquets. These things have no substance.

2. Hypocrisy of deeds - 20:47

Behind the scenes the scribes were acquiring property from trusting widows, getting their names on deeds, becoming prosperous through the people they should have been serving. In addition, they made long pretentious prayers. Jesus calls His followers to a different lifestyle.

3. Greater condemnation - 20:47

It is bad enough to be one thing and pretend to be another. It is bad enough to deceive and exploit others. But to do it under the guise of religion puts a person in a special category deserving of what Jesus called *greater*

condemnation. Do you want to be in that category? I surely do not. Let us search our hearts and confess any hypocrisy or hidden motives as we claim to serve the Lord.

Applications

1. Will you praise Jesus now as David's Lord and yours?
2. How can you get to know the word of God better and avoid error in your thinking or living? Will you read it daily, share it with others, memorize it, and ponder it?
3. In what situation will you believe in the power of God to raise you above the circumstances?