

Luke 20 (Part 1): 1- 26 •

Conversations with the Religious Leaders

Teacher: Pastor Paul LeBoutillier
Calvary Chapel Ontario

All right, we're in Luke chapter 20 here on Sunday morning. We're going through the Gospel of Luke here on Sundays, and we're in that period of time that is the last week before the cross. And there are scholars that like to try to figure out when some of these events took place in the course of that week, and they've come up with, I think their best guess is that the conversations that we're about to read here in chapter 20 happened on Tuesday of that week.

I don't know how accurate that is, but it's interesting, nonetheless. And what this chapter records for us is a series of challenges that were leveled at Jesus by the various religious groups who are trying, of course, to catch Him in His words, to find some kind of an accusation against Him and/or to make him look stupid. It's a pretty tough thing to do when you're talking to God in human flesh, but they gave it a try.

We're going to hear arguments from the chief priests, the teachers of the Law, the Pharisees, the Herodians, and so forth. So anyway, begins this way, chapter 20, verse 20 verse 1.

“One day, as Jesus was teaching the people in the temple and preaching the gospel, the chief priests and the scribes with the elders came up ² and said to him, “Tell us by what authority you do these things, or who it is that gave you this authority.” (ESV)

And the reason they're asking that question is because of what happened in the last chapter, which was Jesus came riding down the hill, the Mount of Olives on the foal of a donkey, right? And all the people began to praise and literally recite aspects of a Messianic Psalm.

Psalm 118, which they knew was all about the Messiah, and you'll remember they came to Jesus, the Pharisees, telling Him, telling His disciples to be quiet because this was all going on.

And then after that, Jesus came down into the city, into the temple area, saw that the outer courts of the temple was filled with the buying and selling of animals and the changing of money, and it says in a different Gospel that He made a whip out of ropes and drove the animals out of that area, overturned the tables of the money changers and threw them all out saying, this is to be a place of prayer. You've turned it into a marketplace and a den of thieves and so forth.

And so, the religious leaders are coming to Jesus now and saying, who in the world gave you that kind of authority to just waltz in here and to do all of this stuff? Which is really interesting because they're talking to God. Think about that for just a moment, would you?

They're talking to God and they're saying, who gave you the authority? Can you imagine asking God that question? Oh, well, anyway. I mean to them, Jesus is this simple carpenter from Nazareth who lacks any academic degree or any kind of learning, He's not part of their groups, and this and that.

I want you to notice how the Lord responded. Verse 3, *“He answered them, I also will ask you a question.”*

Now, please understand, He's not skirting their question. He's actually going to answer it, but He's going to do it in the form of a parable. But for right now, He's wanting to test the genuineness of their desire to dialogue, because they're coming to Him and they're asking a question, which would suggest on the outside that they want to talk.

But you see, every time someone asks you a question, it doesn't mean they want to talk. It means perhaps they just want to argue, or there isn't a real open exchange that is being desired. It is just, there is deceptive reasons behind it. And so, this is why Jesus says, all right, I'll ask you a question, right?

And what He's essentially saying by that is, I'll tell you everything you want to know, but first you tell me an answer to this question. And He says here in verse 4, *“was the baptism of John from heaven or from man?”*

And what He's asking is, did God call John to baptize out in the Jordan or was that his own idea? Did he just come up with it on his own and think, gee, that would be fun. I'm going to go out and be in the river and baptize people. And so they discussed it. It says here in verse 5,

“...they discussed it with one another, (and he said, well let's see here) “If we say, (his calling was) ‘From heaven,’ (then Jesus is going to say, well then)

‘Why did you not believe him?’⁶ “But if we say, (It was) ‘From man,’ (which, by the way, is what they believed okay?) all the people will stone us to death, for they are convinced that John was a prophet.”⁷ So they answered that they did not know where it came from.”

And again, they lied. So, they're lying. They believe John was not from God. And so, they're saying, but we don't know. And the only reason they're doing that is to protect their hides because they figured the people would create an uproar. So, you can see what's going on here, can't you?

Their response to Jesus is this clear sort of a thing saying, we're not here to have an open and genuine conversation with you, and that's not what this is all about. And so, Jesus responds by saying to them in verse 8, fine “....*Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.*”

Now, here's the point. He's going to turn to the people and He's going to tell a parable and He's going to answer their question, but He's going to do it to the people who genuinely perhaps even want to know. And that's the way Jesus treated people.

When there was a two-faced thing going on, or there wasn't a real desire to hear truth, He didn't respond, but when people genuinely wanted to know, He was more than willing to convey things to them. So, He's going to turn now to the people and look what it says in verse 9.

“And he began to tell the people a parable...” (Now, all these religious leaders that ask these questions, they're still there. They're hearing what's going on, but He's addressing the people now.

And He begins by saying this, He says) “...*A man planted a vineyard and let it out (or, if you will, leased it out) to tenants and went into another country for a long while.*”

Now, this is interesting. The Jews who were listening to this parable would have instantly known that He was talking about Israel, because throughout the course of the Old Testament, and this by studying the Old Testament, vineyards are often the picture that we get of Israel in the Old Testament. All right.

It helps to have a little Old Testament background as you go into a parable like this. So, the Jews would have known, okay, this isn't about us. This is about Israel. So, what do we got going on here?

A man planted a vineyard. In other words, he owns the land. He's the owner of the vineyard, but he leased it out to workers to work the vineyard during the course of the year. And by the way, this was a common sort of a practice, back in those days. And a man might own several properties, but there's too much for him to work so he hires tenants to work the land, and then they have like a 60-40 split when the harvest comes in and the landowner returns at the harvest and he says, all right, where's my cut, here's your cut.

And it's all arranged and it's all great. And this is the way it goes. All right. That's the thing. It says here, he went to another country for a long while during the course of the growth of season of the vineyard, verse 10,

“When the time came, he sent a servant to the tenants, so that they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. (And that's basically his cut) But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. ¹¹ And he sent another servant. But they also beat and treated him shamefully and sent him away empty-handed. ¹² And he sent yet a third. This one also they wounded and cast out.”

Now, this is a picture of the prophets that God sent to Israel over the course of the years that we read about again in the Old Testament, who came to speak the Word of God to Israel and how they were shamefully treated every time they showed up and gave the Word of the Lord. And then in verse 13, the parable goes on, and this is where Jesus answers the question of the religious leaders. I want you to take note of this. It says,

“Then the owner of the vineyard said, ‘What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.’”

And again, this is where Jesus' is answering the question, by what authority are you doing this? And they all know what's going on here. Jesus is telling this parable, and He is the son in the parable, the beloved Son of the owner of Israel, if you will. And He is now being sent and the authority that He has comes from the Father and He comes now with that authority. And then He goes on to prophesy what the people are going to do to him. Look at verse 14.

“But when the tenants saw him, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir. (In other words, he stands to inherit the whole thing. So) Let us kill him, so that the inheritance (will) may be ours.’ ¹⁵ And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them?”

Verse 16. *“He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others...”*

Again, Jesus is prophesying. He's prophesying His own death. If this, in fact, is happening on Tuesday of what we call passion week, then you've got Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. Friday is the day that Jesus dies on the cross. So, He's like three days prior to His death on the cross He is prophesying through this parable that the tenants, which are a picture of the religious leaders, are going to, in fact, throw Him out of the vineyard, which is a picture of throwing him out of the city of Jerusalem, if you will, and they're going to kill him there.

But it is also a prophecy about judgment that awaits them because He says right there, *“what then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and destroy those tenants.”* That's what, so Jesus is also giving a prophecy about the judgment that awaits them for what they do. And now again, the religious leaders knew this was about them.

They knew that they were the tenants in the story. They knew that Jesus was the Son of the vineyard owner, and the vineyard owner is God, the Father. They knew that they understood this. And that's why it says at the end of verse 16, that, *“...when they heard this, they said, surely not.”*

And that's a way of saying, there's no possible way this could be about us. There's no possible way that this fits us, because they knew that Jesus had spoken it about them, and they were so blind they assumed he was 100 percent wrong about this sort of a thing.

Verse 17, *“But he looked directly at them and said, “What then is this that is written: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone?””*

Now, here's what's interesting about that. Jesus is quoting Psalm 118. Do you remember I told you that that's the actual, that's the very same psalm that the children of Israel were singing as Jesus came down the Mount of Olives riding on that colt just a couple of days before?

That's where they're singing that whole thing about save now, and as He comes down and, *“blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord”* and so forth. Very same Psalm.

Jesus now quotes it to speak of the fact that God prophesied that the very building of God, in other words, the Kingdom of God would be founded upon a

central cornerstone, but yet that cornerstone would be rejected by the builders. And so, he's basically saying, well, then why is it that God prophesied that the cornerstone would actually be rejected? And so, He's using, again, this messianic Psalm to explain why and how He, as the Son in the parable, will be rejected.

And he goes on in verse 18, and this is a very important verse. To say, *“Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.”*

And this is interesting because Jesus is now taking this picture of the chief cornerstone, which is a building block, in fact the building block of the Kingdom of God, but He's changing the symbolism of it a bit here to use it as a stone of judgment now. And this is actually, this statement about the stone breaking and crushing. Do you understand that this is a connection to the prophecy again of the Old Testament?

It is so important. Can I just pause for a moment to say, it's so important for you guys, for all of us to understand what the Old Testament has to say about these things, because it connects to the New. I got a note from a gal just this last week who started, I think she's a fairly newish Christian, doesn't attend our fellowship, but started listening to some of our stuff online, and she was just thrilled. She said, she wrote me a note and said, when I first got saved, everybody told me, don't worry about reading the Old Testament.

It won't help you at all and there's nothing to learn there. And she goes, she said, for a while I believed it, and then I just decided to start studying through the Old Testament. She said, it is incredible how it is opening my eyes, and there's this connecting thread between the Old Testament and the New. This is an example right here where Jesus talks about the stone that crushes and breaks. Do you understand that this is a connection to a prophecy that is given or revealed in the Book of Daniel?

Do you guys remember that Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, had some pretty incredible visions in a dream about the kingdoms of the world? And there was one particular dream he had of this enormous statue that represented the various kingdoms of man that dominated the world scene and eventually how those kingdoms were destroyed. But he didn't know what the vision meant, and he called in his wise men, and they couldn't, yeah, we don't know.

Well, there's this guy named Daniel, and Daniel comes in and he says, yeah, the Lord is the One who gives the interpretation of these things, and here's the

interpretation. He tells him the whole interpretation of what it means. And again, it's this picture of these world dominating powers. But at the end of this thing, there's this stone. There's a stone. And let me show you how Daniel interpreted that for Nebuchadnezzar. It goes like this. He says,

Daniel 2:34-35 (ESV)

As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

As you looked, (and he's talking to Nebuchadnezzar here) a stone was cut out by no human hand, (That speaks of the divine nature of this stone) and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together (Look at this) were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

In other words, here's this picture of a stone that crushes this judgment stone, if you will, for those who have tripped and stumbled over the chief cornerstone that God established, right? For His entire Kingdom. And this whole idea of the cornerstone is one that then continues on through the New Testament. The Apostle Paul writes about it. Let me show you where that happens. It's in Ephesians chapter 2. Paul writes this,

Ephesians 2:19-21 (ESV)

So, then you are no longer strangers and aliens but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

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Isn't that beautiful? And then Peter also writes about the cornerstone when he says in 1st Peter, chapter 2, beginning at verse 6 for it stands in Scripture. And then he quotes Psalm 118.

1 Peter 2:6-8 (ESV)

For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," and "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

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Wow! The chief cornerstone, the rock, the stone upon which the entire Church, the Kingdom of God is built, rejected by man, precious to God.

And it goes on saying in verse 19, if you look with me there, *"The scribes and the chief priests sought to lay hands on him at that very hour, (they were mad. They were mad at what He said, and they thought we've got, we've got to arrest this man, so they sought for a way to arrest him right then and there) for they perceived (look at this) that he had told this parable against them, but they feared the people. ²⁰ So they watched him and sent spies, who pretended to be sincere, that they might catch him in something that he said, so as to deliver him up to the authority and jurisdiction of the governor."*

You can see they decided to change their tactics. They'd been doing a frontal assault and they decided, and we're going to, we're going to get some people to just blend in with the crowd and they'll act like they're his big fans.

They're on the but maybe they even have a big J on their jersey as they go out in the crowd. We're all about Jesus, but then they're going to ask Him things that the purpose behind it is to trip Him up and get Him to say something. So here we go.

Verse 21. *“So they asked him, “Teacher, we know that you speak and teach rightly, and show no partiality, but truly teach the way of God.”* So, you see they're buttering their bread on both sides.

Verse 22. Here's their question. *“Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar, or not?”* Okay. What they're asking is, should we pay taxes to the Romans or not?

See, this was a hot button issue. culturally speaking, because the Jews were under Roman dominion at this time. The Romans had conquered them, and because they conquered them, they had to pay taxes to the Roman government, and they hated it. They despised paying taxes.

Any self-respecting Jew, when you bring up the subject of taxes, would roll their eyes, spit on the ground, and say, blah! So, this was one of those things. This is one of those questions.

So, they start off by going, Jesus, we know you're the guy. What do you think? Should we pay taxes to Rome or not? And the Jews figured, we got Him. Because if He says, yeah, you should pay taxes.

Well, then all the people are going to go, what? You see, they had an expectation that the Messiah would liberate them from their bondage to Rome, not go along with Rome in any way, shape or form. So, if Jesus came out and said, yeah, you should pay your taxes, then the religious leaders knew that He would be very unpopular with the people.

If, however, Jesus said, no I don't think you should pay taxes to Rome, they would have scurried right along to the governor's palace and said, we got a guy out here who's preaching treason. You better pick Him up, because He's telling the people not to pay their taxes to Rome.

They figure, either way, we've got Him. We got Him. He is trapped, right? By the way, did you know that it's tough to trick God? I was just wondering if you, yeah, anyway. Verse 23. People still try. We even do it in our prayers sometimes.

Verse 23, *“But he perceived their craftiness, and said to them,²⁴ “Show me a denarius. (By the way, a denarius was a very common Roman coin that was roughly equal to a working man's daily wages. All right?*

And He says, so I imagine somebody in the crowd probably goes, yeah, I got one right here. Lifts it up and He says, *“Whose likeness and inscription does it have?” They said, “Caesar’s.”*”

His response in verse 25, *“He said to them, “Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.””*

What a great response. Because He basically, He says, okay, on that coin, whose image is on there? Caesars? Well, give to Caesar whatever has his image on it, but give to God whatever has His image on it. What has God's image on it? You, right? You. You and me.

We were created in the image of God, so give it to God, right? Belongs to Him. We belong to Him. Money belongs to man. God couldn't care less. But that which is of God belongs to God, and it is even more so true for you and I.

All humankind belongs to God from the standpoint that we all bear the image of God, but you and I have an even stronger connection to Him in the sense of His in the sense of belonging to Him. You know that, right? Because not only were you created in His image, you’ve been bought by His blood.

Peter talks about it in his first letter, first chapter, when he says, *“you, (and he's talking to believers here) you were ransomed from the feudal ways inherited from your forefathers and not with perishable things like silver or gold, rather with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.”*

Isn't that beautiful? Your life is not your own. Doubly so, it belongs to God. Give to God what has His image on it and give to God what He paid for because you've been bought and paid for.

You can see here verse 26 tells us, *“And they were not able in the presence of the people to catch him in what he said, but marveling at his answer they became silent.”*

These guys completely failed poor guys. And we will see next week if the next group gets any traction, but don't hold your breath.