



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Gospel According to St. Luke

Chapter 20

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Introduction

- The main point of this chapter is that the religious leaders tried to attempt to discredit Jesus with the people and to trap Him into convicting Himself with the Roman authorities by making treasonable and disloyal statements
- They challenge Jesus by asking Him a series of three questions:
 1. On His authority to teach as He does (22:2)
 2. On the payment of Roman taxes (20:22)
 3. On His understanding of the Resurrection (20:28-33)



Introduction

- Jesus will respond by defeating their traps and will ask two questions of His own on their understanding of two passages from the Psalms: Psalms 118:22 (Luke 20:17-19) and Psalms 110:1 (Luke 20:41-44)
- He identifies the passages with Himself
- The chapter ends with Jesus' condemnation of the scribes, Luke 20:45-47



Introduction

Chapter Outline:

- Religious Leaders Question Jesus' Authority 20:1-8
- The Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers 20:9-19
- A Question about Paying Taxes 20:20-26
- The Sadducees Question Jesus on the Resurrection 20:27-40
- The Son of David and the Lord of David 20:41-44
- Jesus' Warns About the Hypocrisy of the Scribes 20:45-47

Religious Leaders Question Jesus' Authority 20:1-8



- Probably the events related in this chapter took place on Tuesday
- The first day of the week, Palm Sunday, was the day of the public entry into the city
- The purification of the temple took place on Monday, on which day also the barren fig tree was cursed
- We are now considering the events of Tuesday
- St. Augustine says the evangelist St. Luke did not mention the going of Christ to Bethany after His purifying the temple and His return and also His dealing with the barren fig tree, and His words to His disciples who were amazed on seeing the fig tree wither

Religious Leaders Question Jesus' Authority 20:1-8



- Jesus wanted to teach the people and tell them about God's good news and didn't look for these great debates with the religious leaders
- They came upon Him evidently with hostile intent
- Jesus' triumphant entry on Palm Sunday and the revive that was caused by His presence in Jerusalem and the Temple, provoked religious leaders' great anger
- In addition, Jesus had claimed especial power in the Temple in the last two or three days
- One of which is that He had publicly driven out the money-changers and sellers and buyers from the court

Religious Leaders Question Jesus' Authority 20:1-8



- He had, in addition, forbade the carrying vessels across the Temple (Mark 11:16), and had allowed the children in the temple to shout "Hosanna!" to Him as the Messiah
- Jesus showed great courage; now the religious leaders wanted to know by what right Jesus did such things
- They made quite sure that Jesus, in reply, would claim that He had received a Divine commission
- Had He made openly such a formal claim in reply to their question, it would have been their opportunity to convict Him out of His own mouth of blasphemy

Religious Leaders Question Jesus' Authority 20:1-8



- If those leaders had come to inquire about the truth, the Lord would not have hesitated to reveal Himself according to their books
- And He could have mentioned to them countless prophecies about the truth of His mission, and could have assured them He is the Messiah
- At the same time by replying with this question, Jesus did not avoid their question
- Instead, He used the question to explain who He is and to expose the hypocrisy of the leaders
- 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

Religious Leaders Question Jesus' Authority 20:1-8



- Their first attempt to trap Jesus is a failure
- This response showed they were not sincere seekers of truth
- They cared more about winning the argument against Jesus than in knowing the truth
- Therefore, Jesus has turned their trap back upon them
- Since they fear the peoples' response to a negative answer, they refuse to answer Jesus, and He in turn refuses to answer them
- Their reason for their refusal to answer again illustrates their self-serving hypocrisy

Religious Leaders Question Jesus' Authority 20:1-8



- When they showed themselves to be insincere seekers, Jesus refused to answer their question
- Jesus had great care and compassion for the sincere seeker, but not for cynical critics and manipulators
- If we want answers from Jesus, we must deal rightly with the truth that has already been revealed
- These men knew that John said Jesus was the Messiah, and were not willing to accept it
- St. Cyril comments on Jesus's response by saying, "They were unworthy to learn the truth and to see the pathway that leads directly to every good work."

The Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers 20:9-19



- In response to their hostility to God's plan for man's salvation through their rejection of Him and the mission of St. John, Jesus tells a parable to the crowd, though He was mainly addressing the priests
- The absence of the fuller detail in St. Matthew and St. Mark shows that St. Luke's report was not derived from them, but probably from a version, orally repeated, of that which they reported more fully
- St. Ambrose says on *for a long time*, "He was absent for a long time, lest His coming to require His fruit might seem too early"
- *went into a far country*, God is present in every place

The Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers 20:9-19



- He does not stop shepherding His people, for His care is there continuously
- But His words saying that He left to *a far country*, is an expression of the free will He granted His people
- He has given the vineyard to the tenants, giving them the absolute freedom to act, as if He has left them and went far away
- Landholders often rented out their property to tenant farmers who had to share a percentage of the profits from the harvest with the owner of the land

The Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers 20:9-19



- The *vineyard* was used in the Old Testament as a picture of Israel (Isaiah 5:1-7)
- In this parable, the tenants, the *vinedressers*, represented the religious leaders among the Jewish people
- They were allowed to work it by a generous owner – yet they turned against the owner, but one day they would answer for their rebellion
- *a servant*, The prophets of the Lord, His messengers, whom He sent to them, to urge them to bring forth *some of the fruit*
- Bringing forth good fruit in their lives, fruits of righteousness

The Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers 20:9-19



- But the Jews mocked these messengers of the Lord, despised their words, and mistreated them, 2 Chronicles 36:16
- We may also say the first servant the Lord sent to collect for His account is the natural law that God has granted to humanity, even before the Law of Moses
- Man broke this natural law, a matter made very clear in the killing of Abel
- Cain killed his brother out of envy instead of the brotherly love
- The men of faith, before the law, lived through many hardships due to malicious people

The Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers 20:9-19



- The owner of the vineyard repeatedly tried to receive what was rightfully His from the vineyard and those who worked it
- But they mistreated the second *servant* just as they had done to the other one and continued in their abuses and misconduct
- The second *servant* represents the Mosaic law
- Moses suffered from the Jews, due to their constant grumbling
- The third slave offered by the owner of the vineyard is the prophecy; for there has been sent a group of prophets, urging the people to repent
- But these prophets were faced with persecution

The Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers 20:9-19



- They rejected each of the three servants he sent to receive what was due to him, so finally he sent his *beloved son*, thinking “*Probably they will respect him*”
- The words represented here by Jesus possess the deepest doctrinal value
- These words, under the thin veil of the parable-story, answer the question of the Sanhedrim (verse 2) “*Tell us, by what authority are You doing these things? Or who is he who gave You this authority?*”
- The renters of the vineyard foolishly thought they could benefit from killing the son who had or would inherit the vineyard

The Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers 20:9-19



- They were seriously wrong in this foolish assumption
- Jesus uses the parable as a metaphor predicting His death at the hands of the Jewish religious authorities, their eventual loss of authority as God's representatives to His people, and their destruction
- This parable tells us that God, the owner of all, that He is more patient with rebels than we would ever be, and that there will be a final day of judgment
- We can also understand that His going out of the vineyard to be killed, could mean His rejection
- The ungrateful wicked ones cast Him out of their hearts

The Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers 20:9-19



- The Lord Jesus asked them, *what will the owner of the vineyard do to them?*
- The Lord did not wait for the answer to justify what destruction would befall them and the loss of their authority as God's representatives to His people
- *Certainly not!* The religious leaders understood the parable immediately and objected that Jesus compared *them* to the rebellious and foolish tenants
- In their blindness they thought, “This could never be us”

The Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers 20:9-19



- Jesus is identifying the rejection of the son in the parable and Himself as the "Stone" rejected by the "builders," who are the religious authorities
- *The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone*?, Jesus is quoting verbatim from Psalms 118:22 because this Psalm described the coming of the Messiah to Jerusalem, and Jesus had been officially presented to Israel at the Triumphal Entry
- The hostility of the Jewish leaders showed that this Messianic *stone* was being *rejected*, even if He was initially greeted with hosannas

The Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers 20:9-19



- *The stone*, was used at the building's corner to bear the weight or the stress of the two walls
- It was the stone which was essential or crucial to the whole structure
- Jesus is often likened unto a stone or a rock in the Bible
- He is the rock of provision that followed Israel in the desert (1 Corinthians 10:4)
- He is the stone of stumbling (1 Peter 2:8)
- He is the stone cut without hands that crushes the kingdoms of this world (Daniel 2:45)

The Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers 20:9-19



- This rejected stone, thrown away out of the city, has come to be the cornerstone on which the church is founded, that embraces Jewish members as well as Gentile ones
- The vinedressers are now described as builders, and the murdered son is reproduced under the image of a corner stone tossed aside as useless

The Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers 20:9-19



- In the first part of the picture, the earthly humiliation of Messiah is portrayed when the stone is laid on the earth
- In the second, the stone falling from the top of the building represents the crushing of all earthly opposition by Messiah in His glory
- Anyone who comes to Jesus will be *broken* of their pride and self-will, but those who refuse to come will be crushed by Christ in judgment
- St. Augustine thinks those who fall on it and are shattered are the ones who rejected Him when He came down
- But if the cornerstone falls on them, they will be crushed, and it refer to those who died in their sins, with no repentance

The Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers 20:9-19



- The scribes and chief priests certainly understood His references to Scripture and the power of His teaching
- They long to arrest Him on some serious charge; but they did not dare for the people, joined by the Passover pilgrims, had exalted Him
- But their feeling was intensely resentful and they felt their power and influence was slipping away from them
- These last parables were attacks on them
- And by the image of the corner-stone, He told them that in killing Him they will not be done with Him, for that in the end they will be completely crushed by His power

A Question about Paying Taxes

20:20-26



- Public opinion had kept the religious leaders from arresting Jesus
- Now they tried to turn the public opinion against Him by making Jesus appear to side with the Roman government
- *they watched Him*, What He said, and what He did, and where He went, that they might take an advantage against Him
- Knowing from their earlier confrontation that Jesus can recognize them, the chief priests send their agents in their hopes to trap Jesus
- First, they attempt to flatter Jesus

A Question about Paying Taxes

20:20-26



- This flattery and their plot to trap Jesus emphasize their hypocrisy, malice and wickedness
- They hoped Jesus would be impressed by their empty praise
- But even though they are insincere, their statements concerning Jesus are true
- 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 and making Himself unpopular with the Jewish people
- If He said that taxes *should not* be paid, He made Himself an enemy of Rome

A Question about Paying Taxes

20:20-26



- When Herod the Great's son, Archelaus, was deposed by the Romans in 6 AD, the Romans imposed direct rule by a Roman governor over Judea and began to collect an annual tax on all people
- In Jesus' day the Roman denarius bore the image of the emperor Tiberius (ruled 14-37 AD)
- Payment of the tax had to be in the Roman currency because it represented the people's submission to Roman rule
- Some Jewish patriots refused, not wanting to recognize Roman rule as legitimate
- Most others reluctantly paid it

A Question about Paying Taxes

20:20-26



- The payment of the Roman tax was a sensitive political issue in first century and will become the trigger point of the Jewish Riot against Rome in 66 AD that will result in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD
- Therefore, if Jesus condemns the tax, He is encouraging the people to reject Rome's authority over Judea and the Jews, and He could be arrested by the Romans
- And if He agrees that the tax bearing the image of the Roman emperor should be paid to the Romans, many who follow Jesus and believe He is liberator-Messiah who will free them from the pagan Romans, will be disappointed

A Question about Paying Taxes

20:20-26



- Not for a moment did these spies deceive Jesus
- Knowing what was in them, and being a discerner of the thoughts and intents of their hearts, Jesus clearly saw their purpose
- Jesus reversed the trap
- Since the tax had to be paid with Roman currency that bore the image of Caesar, then the coins belonged to Caesar
- Paying the denarius was simply giving back to Caesar what was his
- Jesus affirmed that the government makes legitimate requests of us

A Question about Paying Taxes

20:20-26



- We are responsible to God in all things, but we must be obedient to government in matters civil and national
- Essentially, Jesus said they recognize Caesar's civil authority when they use his coins, therefore they are obliged to pay him the taxes he asks for
- *to God the things that are God's*, Everyone has the image of God impressed upon them
- This means that we belong to God, not to Caesar, or not even to ourselves
- According to St. Cyril of Alexandria, God does not require of us anything that is temporary and corruptible

A Question about Paying Taxes

20:20-26



- God rather requires willing, obedience, submission, faith, love and the sweet fragrance of good work
- *they marveled*, They thought that escape was impossible for Him; and yet He instantly shatters their plan to pieces
- According to their own rule “He whose image is on the coin, is the king of the land”, so that there is no need for Him to give any opinion whatever about it
- By using these coins they all admitted that ‘they had no king but Caesar’

The Sadducees Question Jesus on the Resurrection 20:27-40



- This is the only occasion related in the Gospels where our Lord comes in direct conflict with the Sadducees
- They were a small but very wealthy and powerful sect
- The Sadducees were the religious party that was for the most part composed of the chief priests
- They did not believe in a physical resurrection of the dead like the Pharisees
- They only observed the precepts of the written Law in the Five Books of Moses, unlike the Pharisees who also followed the oral Law

The Sadducees Question Jesus on the Resurrection 20:27-40



- The Sadducees counted among their supporters the wealthy and the aristocracy
- They were the main opponents of the Pharisees
- According to the Law, a man was forbidden to marry his brother's wife if she had borne children to his brother
- But an exception was made if the brother died without an heir
- In that case, it was his closest kinsman's obligation to marry the widow and give his deceased kinsman an heir, Ruth 4:5
- The Sadducees propose an extreme hypothetical case of a woman who married seven times in turn to seven brothers

The Sadducees Question Jesus on the Resurrection 20:27-40



- They hoped to show that the idea of the resurrection was nonsense
- At the conclusion of their story, they ask whose wife she will be in the resurrection
- This question about the husband of the “Sevenfold widow” was one of the materialistic objections to the Resurrection, which had often been discussed in Jewish schools
- If Jesus had given the answer which satisfied the Pharisees that the woman would be the wife of the *first* husband—they would have gained a great triumph by their question

The Sadducees Question Jesus on the Resurrection 20:27-40



- This question is not merely theoretical
- There will be many in heaven who have had more than one spouse, for any number of reasons
- Jesus here told us that jealousy and rejection will have no place in heaven
- So, He instructs them in reverse order, telling them they do not understand the Resurrection nor do they understand Moses
- First, Jesus reminded them that life in the resurrection is quite different from this life

The Sadducees Question Jesus on the Resurrection 20:27-40



- It does not merely continue this world and its arrangements, but it is life of a completely different order
- It is eternal where there will no longer be any need to produce more generations of the living and therefore, there is no longer any need for marriage
- Marriage is, according to our Lord's teaching, but a temporary appropriate to preserve the human race to which death would soon put an end
- But in the world to come there will be no death and no marriage

The Sadducees Question Jesus on the Resurrection 20:27-40



- Second, Jesus reminded us that life in heaven is eternal and shares some characteristics of the existence that angels now experience
- *Neither can they die any more*, The record of this teaching is peculiar to St. Luke
- Equal with the angels in spirituality, purity and immortality; Matthew 22:30; no death; no marriage
- We will be called, *sons of God ... sons of the resurrection*
- These are titles not given to angelic beings in the New Testament

The Sadducees Question Jesus on the Resurrection 20:27-40



- The angels are here introduced because our Lord was speaking with Sadducees, who (Acts 23:8) denied the existence of these glorious beings
- The angels have a body so perfect, that they are subject neither to the law of marriage nor to death
- Jesus will continue to prove His point on their failure to understand the Scriptures in His exchange with the religious leaders in 41-44

The Sadducees Question Jesus on the Resurrection 20:27-40



- The Sadducees set aside the authority of the prophets and all sacred books except the Five Books of Moses
- So, Jesus will argue with them and will demonstrate to them the reality of the resurrection using only the five books of Moses
- Even he, Moses, is especially clear and definite in his teaching on this point of the resurrection, though they pretend he is not
- *Moses showed in the burning bush*, Jesus refers to what God told Moses to tell the children of Israel concerning the identity of God who sent Moses to liberate His people in Exodus 3:15-16 from Moses' experience of the bush that did not burn up

The Sadducees Question Jesus on the Resurrection 20:27-40



- God would never have called Himself *the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.* if these patriarchs, after their short lives, had become plain dust
- God cannot be the God of a being who does not exist
- *for all live to Him*, St. Luke alone adds the words
- They are of great value; all life depends upon our relation to God
- We live to Him, and in Him
- And so when He reveals Himself as the God of those who have passed from earth, He witnesses that that relation continues still
- They are not dead, but are still living unto Him

The Sadducees Question Jesus on the Resurrection 20:27-40



- Jesus has shown that the Sadducees do not understand the meaning of resurrected life nor do they understand that the Torah of Moses contains evidence for belief in the resurrection
- The Sadducees, who believed that they were the authoritative interpreters of the 5 Books of Moses and the "shepherds of Israel," must have been highly insulted
- The scribes, most of whom are Pharisees, believed in the Resurrection and could see clearly the great wisdom and spiritual depth of our Lord's reply
- *some of the scribes*, While *all* of them would rejoice, only some of them would have the honesty to express their approval

The Sadducees Question Jesus on the Resurrection 20:27-40



- Truth will always offend some, but others will value it
- The Sadducees are astonished at the authority of Jesus' teaching and His ability to defeat them
- Unlike the religious leaders who refuse to acknowledge Jesus authority, the crowds continue to respond favorably to His teachings

The Son of David and the Lord of David 20:41-44



- After successfully dealing with the three questions of His adversaries, Jesus now asks them a question; 'Do you really know who I AM?'
- Jesus tested their notion that they already knew all about the Messiah
- He asked them to consider that they may not know everything about the Messiah and may have something to learn
- Lately, in a form of parables, Jesus had told the people that He was Messiah

The Son of David and the Lord of David 20:41-44



- For instance, His words in the parable of the "wicked vinedresser;" in the parable of "the minas;" in His late acts in the temple - driving out the sellers and buyers, allowing the children in the temple to welcome Him with Messianic greeting, receiving as Messiah the welcome of the Passover pilgrims and others on Palm Sunday as He entered Jerusalem
- And in some of these parables He had clearly predicted His approaching violent death
- Now, Jesus was aware that the charge which would be brought against Him would be blasphemy, that He had called Himself, not only the Messiah, but Divine, the Son of God, John 5:18, 10:33; Matthew 26:65

The Son of David and the Lord of David 20:41-44



- He was eager, then, before the end came, to show from an acknowledged Messianic psalm that if He was Messiah - and unquestionably a large proportion of the people received Him as such - He was also Divine
- The words of the Psalm 110 indisputably show that the coming Messiah was Divine
- He pointed out to them that this was the doctrine taught in their own inspired Scriptures
- Quoting Psalm 110:1, Jesus noted that King David called the Messiah his *Lord*

The Son of David and the Lord of David 20:41-44



- This means that the Messiah is not only the *Son of David* (a popular Messianic title), He is also the *Lord of David*
- As Revelation 22:16 says, He is both *the root and offspring of David*
- The future king that David writes about in Psalms 110:1 is one the angel Gabriel spoke of who will not only inherit "the throne of David his father", but will also "rule over the house of Jacob forever and of his kingdom there will have no end" (Luke 1:32-33)
- St. Peter makes a similar argument in Acts 2:25-34
- He demonstrated that they cannot correctly interpret the Scriptures

The Son of David and the Lord of David 20:41-44



- Their failure in responding to Jesus' counter questions implies that they can no longer teach the Law with authority
- For the second time on this day, they had brought to themselves great shame by publicly confessing their ignorance respecting matters of primary importance
- The first time was when they 'did not know' whether the Baptist was an Impostor or a Prophet; they 'could not answer a word' to a most obvious question as to the Messianic hope which they put forward as the very center of their religion

Jesus' Warns About the Hypocrisy of the Scribes 20:45-47



- Jesus' condemnation of *scribes* for their hypocrisy is similar to His condemnation of both the Pharisees and scribes in 11:39-52
- St. Matthew, follows the great denunciation of the Sanhedrim authorities with the other rabbis, Pharisees, and public teachers and leaders of the people; it fills the whole of chapter 23
- But St. Luke briefly summarizes them because the details may not be quite interesting to his Gentile readers
- Ct. Cyril of Alexandria says in their description, “What was their custom? They walked in the streets beautifully clothed, dragging with them a pompous dignity to catch the praises of those who saw them.”

Jesus' Warns About the Hypocrisy of the Scribes 20:45-47



- *The best seats*, They demand the special benefits of status and privilege
- Widows were especially vulnerable if they didn't have any living sons to support them
- Perhaps the scribes pretended to help the widows, and instead used their position of trust to take from them
- Or, they received gifts from well-meaning widows with false promises and mismanaged them
- Jesus proclaims that the judgment for their heartless acts against the poor will be severe

Jesus' Warns About the Hypocrisy of the Scribes 20:45-47



- *For a pretense make long prayers*, The scribes thought they were more spiritual because of their long prayers
- *long prayers*, To cover their wickedness, pretending great devotion and religion
- St. Cyril of Alexandria comments on this and says, “The Savior of all did not permit his worshipers to act so shamefully. He said, “When you pray, do not babble as the heathen do. They think that they will be heard for their many words.” He commanded them to be humble and not lovers of boasting. He commanded them not to pay any regard to the desire of empty glory but rather to seek the honor that comes from above, from God. In such ways, he deposits the knowledge of his mystery.”

Jesus' Warns About the Hypocrisy of the Scribes 20:45-47



- The scribes represent a complete contrast to the picture of how a disciple should live – as a servant, as a child, as one carrying a cross
- Jesus said we should notice what they do, as well as what they say – and especially that we should notice their *destiny*
- St. Cyril of Alexandria comments, “The passions of the Scribes were the love of vain glory and the love of gain. The disciples should avoid these hateful crimes.”
- Jesus warned the disciples to keep them free from disgraceful faults

Discussion



- How does Jesus handle the aggression of the religious leaders?
- How did Jesus respond to them – 20:3-4? Why not answer them directly?
- Explain the lesson the parable of the vinedresser was intended to teach.
- Explain the illustration of the stone – 20:17-18. What verse is quoted here?



Discussion

- How did the Jewish leaders react to the parable? Why – 20:19-20?
- Why did the religious leaders send spies?
- What applications should we make today of Jesus' teaching on taxes?
- What was the main point of the lengthy story the Sadducees told Jesus?

Discussion



- Who is "considered worthy" Luke 20:35?
- For what reason did Jesus refer to Moses, Luke 20:37?
- Why did Jesus describe God as "the God of the living", Luke 20:38?
- How can we guard against misinterpreting Scripture, as the Sadducees did in Jesus' day?



Discussion

- For what reason does Jesus quote the words of David to His listeners, Luke 20:42-43?
- Why could Jesus' opponents not answer His question, Luke 20:44?
- How did Jesus say proud people would be treated for their actions, Luke 20:47?