

Luke 20

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Warning Against the Teachers of Religious Law

Several groups from the governing Sanhedrin came to challenge Jesus. They were likely official representatives. **William Barclay** says: "This chapter describes what is usually called the Day of Questions. It was a day when the Jewish authorities, in all their different sections, came to Jesus with question after question designed to trap him, and when, in his wisdom, he answered them in such a way as routed them and left them speechless."

THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS QUESTIONED

(20:1.) One day as Jesus was teaching the people and preaching the Good News in the Temple, the leading priests, the teachers of religious law, and the elders came up to Him. (2) They demanded, "By what authority are You doing all these things? Who gave You the right?"

- The **teaching** was probably in the Court of Gentiles where there was ample room for all hearers. And Gentiles present could be included in the **teaching** sessions.
- Group one was **the leading priests, the teachers of religious law, and the elders. Jesus** was a threat to their authority and job security.

- They questioned His **authority**, His credentials to teach. Luke is writing to Theophilus, a governing official of **authority** and this question was important to Theophilus.
- The officials did not deny His teaching and miracles, but challenged His **authority** to be doing them since the questioners considered themselves the authorities on all matters religious. If he said that he had no **authority**, they could turn the people against Him.
- The second part of their question was **Who gave You the right?** If He claimed His **authority** came from God, they could accuse Him of blasphemy before the people.
- **Owen Crouch** identifies the threat: "This double- barrelled question was carefully constructed. "These things" allude to the "things" Jesus had done within the last day or two. His open claim to be king by riding on a colt as did ancient king David; accepting the plaudits of the crowd as a king does his subjects; cleansing the temple as though he were God's temple keeper; his signs and his teaching as though he were authorized to dogmatize the truth of God; His priestly control of who or what might pass through the temple; all "these things" were an offense coming from a rural, itinerant, unauthorized man from the masses. If the people could see the arrogant blasphemous conduct, his uncredited assumption of powers that didn't belong to him, they might loosen his grip on the people. If Jesus claimed his authority came from God they could demand immediate, visible, incontrovertible proof. If he failed to claim divine approval then the falseness of his behaviour would be manifest. If they could shake the affectionate, emotional tie of the people these "priests, scribes, and elders" could reestablish their authority and cast Jesus out."

(3.) "Let Me ask you a question first," He replied. (4) "Did John's authority to baptize come from heaven, or was it merely human?"

- Since these antagonists claimed to have credentials, Jesus was aggressive and asked them about the **authority** of **John** the Baptist. Was his **baptism** authorized by God? **John** had clearly pointed to Jesus as the Messiah.

(5.) They talked it over among themselves. "If we say it was from heaven, He will ask why we didn't believe John. (6) But if we say it was merely human, the people will stone us because they are convinced John was a prophet."

- This is a true dilemma or "two mind." Jesus has instantly taken leadership. Their choices were to admit they were wrong about **John** or be stoned by the **people**. Either they would be embarrassed or endangered.
- It is clear that the common **people** were not in tune with their religious overseers because the leaders were afraid of them.

(7.) So they finally replied that they didn't know. (8) And Jesus responded, "Then I won't tell you by what authority I do these things."

- The **authorities** refused to answer and Jesus used their example of not answering as a basis for refusing to answer their question to Him.
- Since they were only trying to trap Him, their question did not deserve an answer.

STORY OF THE WICKED FARMERS

(9.) Now Jesus turned to the people again and told them this story: "A man planted a vineyard, leased it to tenant farmers, and moved to another country to live for several years."

- **Jesus** now gives a parable against these hypocrites who were trying to trap Him. He directed it to the **people**.

- A **man** developed a **vineyard** and rented it to local **tenant farmers** to grow a crop. Then he left the area for some years. God had not contacted Israel for more than 400 years until Gabriel spoke to Zechariah. Luke 1:11.

(10.) At the time of the grape harvest, he sent one of his servants to collect his share of the crop. But the farmers attacked the servant, beat him up, and sent him back empty-handed.

- **At harvest time** he sent a **servant** for his share of the **grapes**. The tenants **beat** the **servant** and **sent him back** to the landowner without the payment.

(11.) So the owner sent another servant, but they also insulted him, beat him up, and sent him away empty-handed. (12) A third man was sent, and they wounded him and chased him away.

- A second and third **servant** received the same treatment.

(13.) "'What will I do?' the owner asked himself. 'I know! I'll send my cherished son. Surely they will respect him.' (14) "But when the tenant farmers saw his son, they said to each other, 'Here comes the heir to this estate. Let's kill him and get the estate for ourselves!'

- The owner took the risk of sending his **cherished son** to collect his rightful portion.
- The **tenants** were even worse. They planned to **kill him** with the idea they would inherit the vineyard.

(15.) So they dragged him out of the vineyard and murdered him. "What do you suppose the owner of the vineyard will do to them?" Jesus asked. (16) "I'll tell you—he will come and kill

those farmers and lease the vineyard to others." "How terrible that such a thing should ever happen," His listeners protested.

- The son was **dragged out** of the **vineyard** and **murdered**.
- The rightful owner **will come and kill those farmers** and turn the **vineyard** over to others.
- The **vineyard** was Israel; the tenants were the national leaders; the servants were the Old Testament prophets; and the son was **Jesus**.
- The **listeners** hoped that the story would never play out (vs. 16), but it did.

(17.) Jesus looked at them and said, "Then what does this Scripture mean? 'The stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone.' (18) Everyone who stumbles over that stone will be broken to pieces, and it will crush anyone it falls on."

- The **cornerstone** for God's building was being **rejected** by those who professed to be the **builders**. [Psalm 118:22]. The leaders were rejecting the perfect **Jesus** who would be the chief **cornerstone** of the temple of God.
- This is the same as the tenants who rejected the owner's son in the parable.
- **Stumbling** over Jesus would **break** them, but the **stone** would completely destroy those who oppose.

(19.) The teachers of religious law and the leading priests wanted to arrest Jesus immediately because they realized He was telling the story against them--they were the wicked farmers. But they were afraid of the people's reaction.

- **The teachers of religious law and the leading priests** understood that **Jesus** was characterizing them as wicked tenants and they were angry enough to kill Him, but they were

afraid. At this point, the **people** were for **Jesus**. The leaders had to trap Him instead.

RENDERING TO CAESAR AND TO GOD

(20.) Watching for their opportunity, the leaders sent spies pretending to be honest men. They tried to get Jesus to say something that could be reported to the Roman governor so he would arrest Jesus.

- The **leader's** goal now was to turn Jesus over to the Roman **governor** (Pilate) for something that He said. While the **governor** was hated, they wanted to use His authority for their cause. To accomplish this, they **sent spies** who **pretended to be honest men**.

(21.) "Teacher," they said, "we know that You speak and teach what is right and are not influenced by what others think. You teach the way of God truthfully. (22) Now tell us—is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"

- Their question opened with flattery. They did not believe what they said. This shows the depth of their hypocrisy.

- **J.W. McGarvey** offers his paraphrase:

We see that neither fear nor respect for the Pharisees or the rulers prevents you from speaking the plain, disagreeable truth; and we are persuaded that your courage and love of truth will lead you to speak the same way in political matters, and that you will not be deterred there from by any fear or reverence for Cæsar."

- The spies then planted a question like Jesus had asked about John. Either way the question was answered would get Jesus in trouble. If He said that it was **right to pay taxes to Caesar**, then the people would turn against Him but if He answered that it

was not lawful, then He would be turned over to the Roman government.

(23.) He saw through their trickery and said, (24) "Show Me a Roman coin. Whose picture and title are stamped on it?" "Caesar's," they replied.

- Jesus asked His critics to produce a **coin** that would have been used to pay the taxes.
- They did not see the trap. Jesus asked whose picture was on it and they readily answered that it was **Caesar's**.



(25) "Well then," He said, "give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God." (26) So they failed to trap Him by what He said in front of the people. Instead, they were amazed by His answer, and they became silent.

- Jesus is saying to pay the tax. The Roman government had provided good roads, a postal system, courts, and a period of peace in the entire empire. Those who benefit from what the government offers should pay their share. But **Caesar** was not to be *worshipped*. That honor belongs to **God**.
- This batch of critics became **silent**. But there were others who knew they could win. Now it's their turn:

THE SADDUCEES AND THEIR RESURRECTION RIDDLE

(27.) Then Jesus was approached by some Sadducees—religious leaders who say there is no resurrection from the dead. (28) They posed this question: "Teacher, Moses gave us a law that if a man dies, leaving a wife but no children, his brother should marry the widow and have a child who will carry on the brother's name.

- **The Sadducees** were more *political* than *theological*. They did not believe in a coming **resurrection** and they accepted only the **law of Moses** as authoritative so they brought a question from Deuteronomy. They knew they had Jesus on this one. The place the **Sadducees** are alluding to is Deuteronomy 25:5:

"If two brothers are living together on the same property and one of them dies without a son, his widow may not be married to anyone from outside the family. Instead, her husband's brother should marry her and have intercourse with her to fulfill the duties of a brother-in-law. The first son she bears to him will be considered the son of the dead brother, so that his name will not be forgotten in Israel. (Deuteronomy 25:5-6 NLT)

This is the levirate or brother-in-law marriage. It has nothing to do with the tribe of Levi. It was extended beyond brother-in-laws to include close kin, as in the case of Boaz and Ruth.

The object of the levirate marriage was to assure that the new firstborn son should succeed in the name of the dead brother, whose name thereby might not be blotted out from Israel. This assured that the family property remain intact.

(29.) Well, suppose there were seven brothers. The oldest one married and then died without children. (30) So the second brother married the widow, but he also died. (31) Then the third brother married her. This continued with all seven of them, who died without children.

- The six **brothers** carried out their duties under the Law of Moses, but the plan failed. There were no **children**.
- This story did not happen, *it was purely hypothetical* and was meant to confound the opponent.

(32.) Finally, the woman also died. (33) So tell us, whose wife will she be in the resurrection? For all seven were married to her!"

- Since they did not believe in a **resurrection**, the question was not at all sincere.

(34.) Jesus replied, "Marriage is for people here on earth. (35) But in the age to come, those worthy of being raised from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage. (36) And they will never die again. In this respect they will be like angels. They are children of God and children of the resurrection.



- The Sadducees learned a number of Biblical lessons in a hurry. The first is that **marriage** is for this **age**, not the next (vs. 34). Their lesson was coming from the Son of God who knows both worlds.
- Jesus taught that **marriage** is not part of the life to come (vs. 35).
- Some action needs to be carried out in order to reach that blessed life (vs. 35). These Sadducees were not even trying because they didn't believe that it existed.
- There will not be **death** in that world because all are **children of the resurrection**.
- Now Jesus proves from the Law of Moses— that they claim to believe— that there **is** life beyond the grave.

(37.) "But now, as to whether the dead will be raised—even Moses proved this when he wrote about the burning bush. Long after Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had died, he referred to the Lord as 'the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' (38) So He is the God of the living, not the dead, for they

are all alive to Him." (39) "Well said, Teacher!" remarked some of the teachers of religious law who were standing there. (40) And then no one dared to ask Him any more questions.

- **Moses** spoke of the **Lord** as **the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob**. These men had died and been buried hundreds of years before, yet the **Lord** is **God of the living, not the dead**. This truth is in direct contradiction to a basic tenet of the Sadducees. [Exodus 3:6]
- **Some of the teachers of religious law who were standing there** liked what Jesus had said about the beliefs of their old opponents. They commented **"Well said, Teacher!"**
- Who challenges Jesus next? No one had the courage (vs. 40). That is not to say everyone was convinced.

(41.) Then Jesus presented them with a question. "Why is it," He asked, "that the Messiah is said to be the son of David? (42) For David himself wrote in the book of Psalms: 'The LORD said to my Lord, Sit in the place of honor at My right hand (43) until I humble Your enemies, making them a footstool under Your feet.' (44) Since David called the Messiah 'Lord,' how can the Messiah be his son?"

- Now it is Jesus' turn to ask a **question**. It was commonly believed that the **Messiah** would be a **son of David**. But **David** also calls this Messiah-son **Lord** in Psalms 110:1 NLT

The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit in the place of honor at My right hand until I humble Your enemies, making them a footstool under Your feet."

- How can these be reconciled? How could the Christ be **David's son** and **David's Lord**? **Barclay** has a well written answer: "Really what Jesus was saying here was, "You think of the coming Messiah as Son of David; so he is; but he is far more. He is Lord." He was telling men that they must revise their ideas of what Son of David meant. They must abandon these fantastic dreams of world power and visualize the Messiah as Lord of the

hearts and lives of men. He was implicitly blaming them for having too little an idea of God. It is always man's tendency to make God in his own image, and thereby to miss his full majesty."

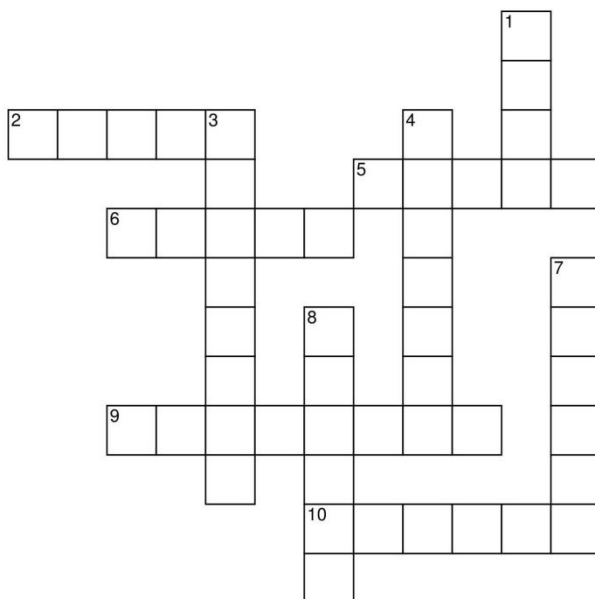
WARNING AGAINST THE TEACHERS OF RELIGIOUS LAW

(45.) Then, with the crowds listening, He turned to His disciples and said, (46) "Beware of these teachers of religious law! For they like to parade around in flowing robes and love to receive respectful greetings as they walk in the marketplaces. And how they love the seats of honor in the synagogues and the head table at banquets. (47.) Yet they shamelessly cheat widows out of their property and then pretend to be pious by making long prayers in public. Because of this, they will be severely punished."

- Jesus was teaching His own **disciples**, but the large group called the **crowds** were listening, too. All were being warned to **beware of these teachers of religious law!** They were known by:
 - Their special **robes**.
 - Their **love to receive respectful greetings as they walk in the marketplaces**.
 - Their love of the **seats of honor in the synagogues**.
 - Their love of **the head table at banquets**.
- Yet they **cheat widows out of their property**.
- They **pretend to be pious by making long prayers in public**. **They will be severely punished.** This will be a vastly different outcome than having a ruling place in heaven.

Luke 20

New Living Translation



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ACROSS

- 2 Who gave you the _____?
- 5 "No one _____ ask Him any more questions."
- 6 The leaders sent them to trap Jesus.
- 9 The farmers _____ the heir to the estate.
- 10 The leaders wanted to arrest Jesus but were _____.

DOWN

- 1 "Whose _____ will she be in the resurrection?"
- 3 Jesus saw through their _____.
- 4 Did John's authority to _____ come from heaven?
- 7 The critics were _____ as Jesus' answers.
- 8 His picture was on a coin.