

Luke 20 Rejected Grace and Mercy

This is the final week of Jesus' life and he knows it, so the way He chooses to spend it is all the more interesting.

If you remember from last week, Jesus came into Jerusalem riding on a donkey fulfilling the prophecy that the one who would save the people would come riding on a colt. A few people recognized what was going on, but many people didn't care and some actually opposed Him.

Then He came to the Temple, the object of worship came to the place of worship – but He wasn't received well there either. When He came in He found a bunch of merchants had set up shop and were trying to profit off of people coming to the Temple – so He threw 'em out like some kind of righteous, holy bouncer.

Now, with the end of His life just a few days away, He's right back in the Temple preaching the Gospel that was just rejected. So what I want you to see this morning is the incredible patience, grace and mercy of God.

Let's take a minute and define those terms because they get used a lot and I want to be very clear as to what I mean when we speak of them. Patience is easy, I think we all understand that, but what are grace and mercy?

Grace – Receiving something you don't deserve – a gift is granted for no reason on your part, there is nothing you did to earn or deserve it – you get a big gift out of the blue, it's not even your birthday.

Mercy – NOT receiving something you DO deserve – something bad is coming your way, something you have earned or do deserve or that it would be rational for you to receive and somebody else stops it from getting to you. I.e. you throw yourself on the mercy of the court.

Grace and mercy are similar concepts but they are still unique. Often, especially in things that relate to God, they are linked – mercy comes along and pulls us out of the pit we have gotten ourselves into, then grace spontaneously gives us more than we hoped for. Grace is in the right hand offering us something we don't deserve and mercy is in the left holding back what we should receive.

This morning we will see Jesus using that two handed approach in the Temple – though neither the city nor the Temple were ready to receive Him when He entered, He has come back to them and is preaching the gospel openly – in His mercy He has not destroyed the place for rejecting Him and in His grace He is continuing to offer them the gospel – the good news of salvation.

1One day, as Jesus [\[fn1\]](#) was teaching the people in the temple and preaching the gospel, the chief priests and the scribes with the elders came up 2and said to him, “Tell us by what authority

you do these things, or who it is that gave you this authority.”³He answered them, “I also will ask you a question. Now tell me,⁴Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man?”

That’s an important question, because although many people had received the ministry of John the Baptist, the leaders never really did. And John had something important to say about Jesus:

John 1:29-34

Did John hear from God or was He just full of himself and his own ideas? It’s an important question and the answer has enormous repercussions.

⁵And they discussed it with one another, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say, ‘Why did you not believe him?’⁶But if we say, ‘From man,’ all the people will stone us to death, for they are convinced that John was a prophet.”⁷So they answered that they did not know where it came from.⁸And Jesus said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.”

Because they refused to make a decision on *this* issue Jesus refused to let them make a decision about *Him*. Instead, He told them a parable about a group of people who rejected messengers like John.

⁹And he began to tell the people this parable: “A man planted a vineyard and let it out to tenants and went into another country for a long while.¹⁰When the time came, he sent a servant [\[fn2\]](#) to the tenants, so that they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed.¹¹And he sent another servant. But they also beat and treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed.¹²And he sent yet a third. This one also they wounded and cast out.¹³Then the owner of the vineyard said, ‘What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.’¹⁴But when the tenants saw him, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours.’¹⁵And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them?¹⁶He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others.” When they heard this, they said, “Surely not!”¹⁷But he looked directly at them and said, “What then is this that is written:

“‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone’? [\[fn3\]](#)

¹⁸Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.”

Everyone clearly understood what Jesus was saying – the nation of Israel had long been allegorized as a vineyard. In fact, the symbolism towered over them on the Temple itself. In his commentary on Luke, Kent Hughes describes a grapevine over 100’ tall that had been ornately carved around the door that led from the porch where this crowd gathered into the Holy Place. Herod had it carved as the Temple was built and covered the whole thing - branches, leaves, and

tendrils in gold. Wealthy Jews then began to add to it, making additional leaves and clusters of jewels to represent clusters of grapes.¹

So, it was obvious to everyone present what Jesus was saying – God was the landowner, Israel was the vineyard, and the leaders of the nation – both at that moment and historically, were the tenants. They were the ones who had consistently rejected the prophets, seen here as the servants, whom the Lord had sent – including, most recently John the Baptist.

The tenants in the parable took the son out of the vineyard and killed him, and in only a matter of days, the leaders of the nation would have Jesus led outside the city to be murdered on a cross. As a result, the work of God will pass on to other hands and in just a matter of decades; the church will be predominately Gentile – the vineyard will be taken away and given to others.

The point I really want you to notice here though is how *once again, Jesus is showing grace and mercy* – He is proving that He is patient and longsuffering. God sent messenger after messenger to try to reach Israel while they wandered away from Him, but they resisted the messengers. In fact, their resistance kept increasing over time as we see in parable.

Did you notice the progression? The first servant was simply beaten, the next was beaten and treated shamefully, the third was wounded and cast out, and finally, the son was killed. **The more God tried to reach out to them the more rebellious they became.**

The same sun that melts the wax hardens the clay. Repeated exposure to God’s truth will either break you or harden your resistance.

That’s true in evangelism, but it’s also true in the daily lives of Christians. If God is trying to get your attention on some matter you only have two options – you can receive His instruction, or you can reject it. It’s been my experience that God usually tries to reach us several times on an issue, that’s one way we know it’s Him – the issue just keeps coming up. If you’re not sure it’s Him, just ask Him to make the matter clear, He will be patient with you. But eventually you’re going to have to face the issue and take a stand – you can’t avoid it like the leaders attempted to do with His question about JTB – if you refuse to decide whether or not He’s speaking, don’t be surprised if He stops speaking at all.

God is patient with us – VERY patient, but He won’t allow us to keep Him at bay forever. Sooner or later you will have to make a commitment – are you for Him or against Him? And you need to know that those who are against Him **will** be punished.

It’s not a very popular message today, and it wasn’t back then either:

[19](#)The scribes and the chief priests sought to lay hands on him at that very hour, for they perceived 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 he said, so as to deliver him up to the authority and jurisdiction of the governor.[21](#)So they asked him, “Teacher, we know that you speak and teach rightly, and show no partiality, [\[fn4\]](#) but truly

¹ Kent Hughes, Commentary on Luke, 255.

teach the way of God.²²Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar, or not?”²³But he perceived their craftiness, and said to them,²⁴“Show me a denarius. [fn5] Whose likeness and inscription does it have?” They said, “Caesar's.”²⁵He said to them, “Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.”²⁶And 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.

Do you ever run into something like this? The subject of your faith in Christ comes up and people all the sudden have the “**BIG**” questions they want to throw out – like they’re going to trip you up and make you look like a simple fool because they’ve become such expert theologians and philosophers since they saw something on Discovery channel or the History channel or since they saw the DaVinci Code?

See, Jesus is trying to communicate the truth to these guys and all they want to do is throw out their “big” questions. If this has ever happened to you, notice here how Jesus responds – He answers their question with wisdom and then He brings things right back around to their own personal knowledge of God. He does it here and He’ll do it again in just a minute when a second group tries their question.

They asked Him whether it was OK to pay taxes or not – should they, as ‘good’ Jews, pay tribute to Rome or should they refuse to recognize any power over them other than God? Potentially it’s a pretty explosive question, but Jesus quickly defuses it.

He asks whose likeness, or your translation might say whose image is on the coin? The word in Greek is *eikon* – from which we get the Latin and the English word icon or image. Whose image is on the coin? Caesar’s – so give to him the things bear his image.

But there’s a catch - do you remember what God said in the very first chapters of the Bible? He said that mankind was made in *His* image – that we bear the image of God. So give to Caesar the things that bear his image, but give to God that which bears His image. The government might lay claim to part of your paycheck, but God lays claim to your entire life and you should give it to Him.

You see, He answers the question at hand, and brings it back around to your personal relationship with God.

Now it’s the Sadducees’ turn:

²⁷There came to him some Sadducees, those who deny that there is a resurrection,²⁸and they asked him a question, saying, “Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies, having a wife but no children, the man [fn6] must take the widow and raise up offspring for his brother.²⁹Now there were seven brothers. The first took a wife, and died without children.³⁰And the second³¹and the third took her, and likewise all seven left no children and died.³²Afterward the woman also died.³³In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had her as wife.”

[34](#)And Jesus said to them, “The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage,[35](#)but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage,[36](#)for they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons [\[fn7\]](#) of the resurrection.[37](#)But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the bush, where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.[38](#)Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him.”[39](#)Then some of the scribes answered, “Teacher, you have spoken well.”[40](#)For they no longer dared to ask him any question.

[41](#)But he said to them, “How can they say that the Christ is David's son?[42](#)For David himself says in the Book of Psalms,

“The Lord said to my Lord,
Sit at my right hand,
[43](#)until I make your enemies your footstool.’

[44](#)David thus calls him Lord, so how is he his son?”

Isn't this fun – it's like they're trying to play stump the Messiah.

Once again, a seemingly hard question is asked, Jesus defuses it, and moves to the real issue at stake – your personal relationship with God or understanding of Him. And then, here, Jesus actually takes things up a notch and points out another error in their thinking about the nature of the Christ.

His motive here is not oneupsmanship, I think He is seriously trying to help people see the error of their ways, and even if He is not able to sway those who hold these views, He is at least helping others to see the errors in the logic involved.

Now, bringing this home once again, consider this – If God is willing to answer the insincere, baited questions of cynics, how much more willing is He to answer your honest questions?

I know you have them. I did, and still do at times.

I remember making a list in high school of all this stuff I thought was really serious and keeping it all to myself because I thought I was really intellectual and I had come up with these questions that other people weren't asking and I didn't want to ask them in front of my friends because I didn't want to shake their 'simple faith.' But I had skeptical questions, like – where did Cain get his wife?

Now, maybe you don't struggle with issues like that – but I am *certain* that at some point you have had some questions about God and the Christian faith. **What do you do with those questions**, do you just sweep them away, lock them in the closet and pretend they don't exist and hope nobody asks you about them, or do you take them to God and seek out answers? *If God is willing to answer the questions of critics who are trying to trip Him up, certainly He is willing to answer yours.*

And don't think that just because you don't have all the answers that you must be wrong or your position is weak. If there is one valuable lesson that has been coming out of all the creation vs. evolution arguments over the past 20 years it's been to highlight the fact that the evolutionary camp has to operate on at least as much faith as the creationists. It's pretty humorous to watch a movie like **Expelled when Ben Stein** is interviewing these people asking "OK, how did organic life begin – we know you say it evolved, but what started evolving?" And to hear them respond, in all sincerity that it suddenly happened on the backs of crystals, or that perhaps some other intelligent alien life form 'seeded' life here – like we're somebody's galactic garden, they planted a little seed and look what grew out of it!

Don't be intimidated when people like that ask you hard questions about your faith – they're operating on an awful lot of faith too!

Now, of course, you have to be prepared for the fact that some of your questions will require you to walk by faith – to trust God – that not every question has an immediately available answer. And you also need to be remember that even when God provides the answers, what He really wants is for you to draw closer to Him. He's after intimacy more than intellect – though that always remains a part – you don't just check your brain at the door of the church.

So if you have questions, seek out the answers – take them to God, and do a little bit of research – Proverbs speaks over and over again about the value of **seeking out** wisdom. If you have questions *ask them* and be prepared to answer the questions *people are asking you* – don't just veg out and watch the Olympics or get lost in Lost – if the questions are really important, **seek out answers**. And if I can help or one of the other pastors can, let us know – we'll be happy to help you find answers – we might not do the work for you, but we'll at least help you find the right places to look. Email me if you want.

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[45](#)And in the hearing of all the people he said to his disciples,[46](#)“Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love greetings in the marketplaces and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts,[47](#)who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.”

So we end out the chapter with a warning – Jesus has been kind, gracious, merciful, patient, with these men up until now. But He also issues people a warning so that they don't mistake his patience for permission. He does not approve of the scribes – these religious leaders who are leading others astray. He marks them and calls them out boldly.

It's OK for you to do the same thing. I have no problem telling my son that someone is behaving like a fool. If we are driving down the highway and a motorcycle blows past us weaving in and out of traffic at 80+ miles and hour – I tell my son, that person is being foolish. I don't want him to think that kind of behavior is cool – I want him to understand it is foolish and there are consequences for that foolish behavior so I point it out to him, label it, and tell him to watch out for it.

That doesn't mean I don't like them, doesn't mean I hope they get hurt, doesn't mean I don't want them coming to the church. Same thing with Jesus - He loves people, wants to see them saved, reaches out repeatedly to them, but some people just harden themselves over and over again until no hope remains. And even as Jesus reaches out to people and exercises patience with them, He never condones their sin – forgiveness is offered, but it must be received. If it isn't a greater condemnation will come.

This is the God we serve, this is God who is calling out to you – the God who has hunted you down and is speaking His truth into your life right now forcing you to face the question: will you trust Him? Will you ask Him your questions and will you draw near to Him?

Let's pray.

Thank you for your grace and mercy – thank you for not giving up on us, but for coming to us time and time again

Help us not to mistake your patience for permission – speak to us clearly about our lives and your desires.

Softens our hearts, keep us from hardening

Answer our questions – help us to trust.