

ST JOSEPH THE WORKER
 ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH



Beware of the Scribes
Divine Authority and Wisdom:
An Exposition of Luke 20

Luke 20 showcases the supreme authority and wisdom of Jesus, navigating contentious religious debates and exposing hypocrisy. He raises a mirror to the religious elite, critiquing their attitudes, while praising the authentic faith of a poor widow. Jesus proves that the Kingdom of God values humility, sincerity, and generosity over pride and outward show. As we face questions and challenges, may we respond with the wisdom and truth modeled by Jesus.

Verses 1-8: Jesus' Authority Challenged

Jesus' authority is questioned by the religious leaders. In response, He asks them about the origin of John's baptism, effectively turning the question back on them and leaving them unable to answer.

Verses 9-19: Parable of the Wicked Tenants

Jesus tells the parable of wicked tenants, prophesying about His impending rejection and death. The religious leaders understand He is speaking about them and seek to arrest Him.

Verses 20-26: Paying Taxes to Caesar

The Pharisees attempt to trap Jesus with a question about paying taxes. Jesus, discerning their deceit, replies that we are to give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.

Verses 27-40: The Question about the Resurrection

The Sadducees, who deny resurrection, question Jesus about it. Jesus responds with profound wisdom, affirming the resurrection and God as a God of the living.

Verses 41-44: Whose Son Is the Christ?

Jesus questions how the Christ can be David's son if David calls Him Lord, confounding His critics.

Verses 45-47: Warning against the Teachers of the Law

Jesus warns against the hypocrisy of the teachers of the law who seek human approval.

Verses 1-4: The Widow's Offering

In contrast to the religious leaders, a poor widow gives all she has, displaying true devotion.

Luke 20 unfolds as a testament to the authority and wisdom of Jesus Christ. Challenged by the religious leaders of the time, Jesus reveals deep spiritual insight and turns the tables on His critics. This chapter illuminates Jesus' ability to rise above human

controversy, exhibiting divine understanding while condemning hypocrisy and promoting true devotion.

Themes

Authority of Jesus
Spiritual Wisdom
Hypocrisy and True Devotion
The Coming Judgment

Topics

Jesus' Authority Challenged
Parable of the Wicked Tenants
Paying Taxes to Caesar
The Question about the Resurrection
Whose Son Is the Christ?
Warning against the Teachers of the Law
The Widow's Offering

People

Jesus
Chief Priests and Elders
Disciples
Pharisees
Sadducees
A Widow

Locations

The Temple
Jerusalem



THE TEMPLE AT JERUSALEM

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Luke 20

The Authority of Jesus Questioned

1 One day as Jesus was teaching the people in the temple courts and proclaiming the good news, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, together with the elders, came up to him. **2** “Tell us by what authority you are doing these things,” they said. “Who gave you this authority?”

3 He replied, “I will also ask you a question. Tell me: **4** John’s baptism—was it from heaven, or of human origin?”

5 They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask, ‘Why didn’t you believe him?’ **6** But if we say, ‘Of human origin,’ all the people will stone us, because they are persuaded that John was a prophet.”

7 So they answered, “We don’t know where it was from.”

20:1–8 In this encounter with the Jewish leadership, Jesus is questioned about the source of his authority to do what he is doing in the temple. Jesus asks a counter-question that aims to provoke self-evaluation in his audience and concerns their view of the source of John the Baptist’s authority—whether it was from God or of human origin (cf. 1:76; 7:26–30). The leaders’ subsequent discussion expresses their dilemma and confirms their unwillingness to state the truth. In view of their refusal to consider the evidence that is already before them, Jesus refuses to answer them.

8 Jesus said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.”

The Parable of the Tenants

9 He went on to tell the people this parable: “A man planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time. 10 At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants so they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. 11 He sent another servant, but that one also they beat and treated shamefully and sent away empty-handed. 12 He sent still a third, and they wounded him and threw him out.

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

14 “But when the tenants saw him, they talked the matter over. ‘This is the heir,’ they said. ‘Let’s kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’ 15 So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

“What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? 16 He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.”

When the people heard this, they said, “God forbid!”

17 Jesus looked directly at them and asked, “Then what is the meaning of that which is

20:9–19 This parable illustrates the source of Jesus’ authority as it covers the whole history of Israel and identifies the Son as the ultimate expression of the Father’s love for his people (v. 2; cf. 11:47–51). Though the parable is told to the people, it is directed against the leaders who are the tenant farmers and are distinguished from the people (20:16,19; cf. 11:52; Isa 5:1–7). The tenant farmers reject each servant, perhaps with increasing antagonism. The owner’s deliberation pictures the father’s patience, planning, and desire for a different response. The “son” is distinguished from the servants. The tenant farmers seem to conclude that the owner’s absence is permanent, so if the son is killed, they will finally own the land. The owner’s response—that these tenant farmers will be destroyed and that the responsibility for the vineyard will be handed over to others—draws a shocked response from the people (Lk 20:16). Jesus cites Psalm 118 to explain his ministry (cf. Lk 13:35). Jesus is the one who gives shape to the building of God’s people. Those who reject Jesus, therefore, face judgment (20:18; cf. Da 2:34–35,40,44–45). The specific focus of the parable becomes clear when the leaders, who are opposed to Jesus, react with further determination to get rid of him (Lk 20:19).

written:

“The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone’ [a]?”

18 Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.”

19 The teachers of the law and the chief priests looked for a way to arrest him immediately, because they knew he had spoken this parable against them. But they were afraid of the people.

Paying Taxes to Caesar

20 Keeping a close watch on him, they sent spies, who pretended to be sincere. They hoped to catch Jesus in something he said, so that they might hand him over to the power and authority of the governor. 21 So the spies questioned him: “Teacher, we know that you speak and teach what is right, and that you do not show partiality but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. 22 Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?”

23 He saw through their duplicity and said to them, 24 “Show me a denarius. Whose image and inscription are on it?”

“Caesar’s,” they replied.

25 He said to them, “Then give back to

20:20–26 Jesus is questioned about the authority of Caesar. In an attempt to trap Jesus, the leaders send spies to trick him. If Jesus sides with the Roman emperor, he is implicitly against the Jewish people. If he sides with the people against the Roman emperor, he is putting himself at risk. The spies attempt to disarm Jesus by flattery (v. 21). The tax they refer to is a land or poll tax paid to a foreign ruler. Jesus knew they were simply trying to trap him and asked them to show him a denarius. His reference to the image on the coin refers to the picture of Tiberius. The inscription read, “Tiberius Caesar, Augustus, son of divine Augustus.” Jesus’ answer is essentially, “Give back to Caesar what belongs to him.” As bearers of God’s image (Ge 1:26), however, we owe our ultimate allegiance to God. Jesus once again silences his opponents.

Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."

26 They were unable to trap him in what he had said there in public. And astonished by his answer, they became silent.

The Resurrection and Marriage

27 Some of the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Jesus with a question. **28** "Teacher," they said, "Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. **29** Now there were seven brothers. The first one married a woman and died childless. **30** The second **31** and then the third married her, and in the same way the seven died, leaving no children. **32** Finally, the woman died too. **33** Now then, at the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?"

34 Jesus replied, "The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. **35** But those who are considered worthy of taking part in the age to come and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, **36** and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection. **37** But in the account of the burning bush, even Moses showed that the dead rise, for he calls the Lord 'the God of Abraham, and the God of

20:27–40 The theme of authority continues in these verses as Jesus is now questioned about the resurrection and Moses' authority. The Jewish group called the Sadducees, only mentioned here in Luke's Gospel but mentioned more often in Acts (cf. Ac 4:1; 5:17; 23:6–8), also take a turn at trying to trap Jesus. They didn't believe in a final resurrection and only held to the authority of the first five books of the Old Testament. The Sadducees ask a question based on Moses' teaching of levirate marriage (Ge 38:8; Dt 25:5–10). The point of their question is to make belief in the resurrection look foolish as they paint a hypothetical scenario in which seven brothers marry a woman after each one dies, leaving a ridiculous picture of one woman with many legitimate husbands at the resurrection. Jesus' initial response distinguishes between "this age" and "the age to come" (Lk 20:34–35). Not all will participate in the blessings of the age to come. Furthermore, after the resurrection humans will be like the angels because like angels they will not marry and will never die. Thus, Jesus corrects their mistaken assumption that the age to come will simply be an unchanged continuation of this age. Jesus then argues from Scripture. In particular, he cites Moses' statement that the Lord is "the God of Abraham, the God of

Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ [b] 38 He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive.”

39 Some of the teachers of the law responded, “Well said, teacher!” 40 And no one dared to ask him any more questions.

Whose Son Is the Messiah?

41 Then Jesus said to them, “Why is it said that the Messiah is the son of David? 42 David himself declares in the Book of Psalms:

“The Lord said to my Lord:
“Sit at my right hand
43 until I make your enemies
a footstool for your feet.” [c]

44 David calls him ‘Lord.’ How then can he be his son?”

Warning Against the Teachers of the Law

45 While all the people were listening, Jesus said to his disciples, 46 “Beware of the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. 47 They devour widows’ houses

Isaac and the God of Jacob” even though the patriarchs had died by the time of Moses (Ex 3:6). Since God calls himself their God, the present existence of the patriarchs is implied, and his future promise for them still stands. Once again Jesus’ accusers have no answer, and this brings a close to their attempts to trap him before the people in the temple complex.

20:41–44 The issue of Jesus’ authority has been the dominant topic throughout the exchanges in this chapter. Jesus now questions the religious leaders about Scripture, demonstrating that as Lord he is the one with ultimate authority, not the temple hierarchy. Jesus’ question begins with the assumption that the Messiah will be a descendant of David. Jesus then cites Psalm 110 and argues that since David wrote the psalm, the person being addressed as “my Lord” is David’s Lord. The “right hand” of God is a common image in the Old Testament to indicate the power of God to rule and deliver (Ex 15:6; Ps 18:35; 44:3). The conclusion Jesus makes in Luke 20:44 does not deny the Messiah’s Davidic descent. It does show, however, that “son of David” does not capture all there is to say about the Messiah: he is Lord, as announced by David himself in Psalm 110.

20:45—21:4 After declaring his own authority as Lord, Jesus now turns to the condemnation awaiting those with corrupt authority: the teachers of the law (20:45—21:4) and the temple system as a whole (21:5–36). In Luke 20:45—21:4 Jesus’ condemnation of the teachers of the law

and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely.”

Footnotes

Luke 20:17 Psalm 118:22

Luke 20:37 Exodus 3:6

Luke 20:43 Psalm 110:1

comes in two parts that are linked with references to the livelihood of widows (20:47; 21:2–4). The self-focus of the leaders is evidenced by their disregard for the most vulnerable and is covered over with a facade of religious piety (20:46–47). The account of the destitute widow who hands over her last remaining coins to a corrupt temple system is of the destruction of widows’ livelihood. The widow’s poverty is accentuated (21:2–3): her two small copper coins are all she has to live on (21:4). Now she is destitute. The fate of the temple system is the topic of Luke 21:5–36.

Bible Study Questions

- 1. How does Jesus handle the challenge to His authority in this chapter?**
- 2. What does the Parable of the Wicked Tenants teach about God's judgment and grace?**
- 3. How does Jesus' response to paying taxes to Caesar influence your understanding of our dual citizenship (earthly and heavenly)?**
- 4. What can we learn from Jesus' teaching about the resurrection?**
- 5. How does Jesus' question about David's son demonstrate His divine wisdom and authority?**
- 6. In what ways does Jesus' warning against the teachers of the law challenge religious hypocrisy today?**
- 7. How does the widow's offering illustrate the principle of sacrificial giving?**
- 8. How can we apply Jesus' handling of difficult questions and confrontations to our own lives?**
- 9. How does the Parable of the Wicked Tenants speak to our responsibility as stewards of God's grace and gifts?**
- 10. How do you reconcile earthly responsibilities (like paying taxes) and spiritual obligations in your life, as taught by Jesus?**
- 11. How does Jesus' affirmation of the resurrection comfort and encourage you about eternal life?**
- 12. How does Jesus' interaction with the Pharisees and Sadducees challenge us in our approach to understanding and interpreting Scripture?**
- 13. In what ways does the warning against the teachers of the law prompt self-examination of our motivations and attitudes in religious practices?**

- 14. How can you emulate the widow's sacrificial giving in your life?**
- 15. How can Jesus' unflappable authority in the face of confrontation empower you in your personal and spiritual encounters?**
- 16. What can the Parable of the Wicked Tenants teach us about receiving and responding to God's messengers today?**
- 17. How can we balance our obligations to government authorities with our duties to God, as instructed by Jesus?**
- 18. How does Jesus' understanding and explanation of the resurrection impact your view of life after death?**
- 19. How can we guard against the kind of hypocrisy Jesus warned about among the teachers of the law?**
- 20. In what practical ways can you express sacrificial giving and total trust in God like the widow in the temple?**