

The Gospel of Luke

Lesson 21

Religious Quandary

Luke 20:1 On one of the days while He was teaching the people in the temple and preaching the gospel, the chief priests and the scribes with the elders confronted Him, ² and they spoke, saying to Him, "Tell us by what authority You are doing these things, or who is the one who gave You this authority?" ³ Jesus answered and said to them, "I will also ask you a question, and you tell Me: ⁴ "Was the baptism of John from heaven or from men?" ⁵ They reasoned among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say, 'Why did you not believe him?' ⁶ "But if we say, 'From men,' 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. ⁸ And Jesus said to them, "Nor will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

In this passage, the Lord is asked, "Tell us by what authority You are doing these things, or who is the one who gave You this authority"? The religious leaders ask this question because they hate the Lord and envy Him. They see His influence increasing, while theirs is waning. They resolve, if possible, to halt the progress of His teaching by attacking His authority. They should have looked into His miracles and compared His teaching with their own Scriptures; instead, they called into question His eternal commission.

Every Christian who tries to do good in this world must be prepared to be treated like the Master. He must never be surprised to find that self-righteous and worldly-minded people dislike his actions. The lawfulness of his godly behavior will be constantly called into question. He will be thought of as meddling in other people's affairs and as being a conceited troublemaker in the nation. They felt the same way about Elijah.

1 Kings 18:17 When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, "Is this you, you troubler of Israel?"

They felt the same about Paul.

Acts 24:5 "For we have found this man a real pest and a fellow who stirs up dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.

Wicked Farmers

Luke 20:9 And He began to tell the people this parable: "A man planted a vineyard and rented it out to vine-growers, and went on a journey for a long time. ¹⁰ "At the *harvest* time he sent a slave to the vine-growers, so that they would give him *some* of the produce of the vineyard; but the vine-growers beat him and sent him away empty-handed. ¹¹ "And he proceeded to send another slave; and they beat him also and treated him shamefully and sent him away empty-handed. ¹² "And he proceeded to send a third; and this one also they wounded and cast out. ¹³ "The owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect

him.' ¹⁴ "But when the vine-growers saw him, they reasoned with one another, saying, 'This is the heir; let us kill him so that 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 destroy these vine-growers and will give the vineyard to others." When they heard it, they said, "May it never be!" ¹⁷ But Jesus looked at them and said, "What then is this that is written: 'THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER *stone*'? ¹⁸ "Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust."

This parable is presented by Matthew, Mark and Luke in its entirety. This fact alone underlines its importance. Doubtless, the parable is especially meaningful to the Jews to whom it is addressed. But we must not confine its application to them. It contains lessons which must be remembered in all Christian fellowships for as long as the world stands.

The parable shows the deep corruption in human nature. The behavior of the wicked farmers is a vivid portrayal of man's dealings with God. It is a faithful picture of the history of the Jewish faith. In spite of privileges which no other nation had, in the face of warnings which no other people ever received, the Jews rebelled against God's lawful authority, refused to give Him His rightful dues, rejected the counsel of His prophets, and, at length, crucified His only Son. The Gentile Churches are just as unfaithful. They are called out of pagan darkness through infinite mercy, but they do nothing worthy of their vocation. On the contrary, they allow false teachings and evil behavior to spring up among them and crucify Christ again. It is a sad fact that in their hardness, unbelief, superstition and self-righteousness, the Christian churches, as a whole, are little better than the Jewish religion of our Lord's time. Both are described with painful accuracy in the story of the wicked farmers. In both, we may point to countless privileges misused, and countless warnings ignored.

Fear of People

Luke 20:19 The scribes and the chief priests tried to lay hands on Him that very hour, and they feared the people; for they understood that He spoke this parable against them. ²⁰ So they watched Him, and sent spies who pretended to be righteous, in order that they might catch Him in some statement, so that they *could* deliver Him to the rule and the authority of the governor. ²¹ They questioned Him, saying, "Teacher, we know that You speak and teach correctly, and You are not partial to any, but teach the way of God in truth. ²² "Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" ²³ But He detected their trickery and said to them, ²⁴ "Show Me a denarius. Whose likeness and inscription does it have?" They said, "Caesar's." ²⁵ And He said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." ²⁶ And they were unable to catch Him in a saying in the presence of the people; and being amazed at His answer, they became silent.

Our Lord's enemies pose the question, "Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" The question is so cleverly stated that it seems that he might have to reply to an impossible dilemma. Whatever answer he gives, it seems that he will offend one of the two parties; he must either offend the friends of the Roman supremacy or offend the zealots among the Jews.

In verse 23, Jesus has detected their trickery, a word found only five times in the New Testament. It is the same word translated here as craftiness and used to describe Satan's cunning in tempting Eve in II Corinthians 11:3.

2 Corinthians 11:3 But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity *of devotion* to Christ.

The Lord is probably in view of two parties among His hearers. One party consists of the Jewish zealots. To them He says, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's." The other party consists of the worldly Herodians. To them He says, "and to God the things that are God's."

Whose Wife in Heaven

Luke 20:27 Now there came to Him some of the Sadducees (who say that there is no resurrection), ²⁸ and they questioned Him, saying, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that IF A MAN'S BROTHER DIES, having a wife, AND HE IS CHILDLESS, HIS BROTHER SHOULD MARRY THE WIFE AND RAISE UP CHILDREN TO HIS BROTHER. ²⁹ "Now there were seven brothers; and the first took a wife and died childless; ³⁰ and the second ³¹ and the third married her; and in the same way all seven died, leaving no children. ³² "Finally the woman died also. ³³ "In the resurrection therefore, which one's wife will she be? For all seven had married her." ³⁴ 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 the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; ³⁶ for they cannot even die anymore, because they are like angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection. ³⁷ "But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the *passage about the burning 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 the God of the dead but of the living; for all live to Him." ³⁹ Some of the scribes answered and said, "Teacher, You have spoken well." ⁴⁰ For they did not have courage to question Him any longer about anything.

Unbelief is an old thing. Some Sadducees, who do not believe in a resurrection, come to him and ask a question. Even in the Jewish religion, the faith of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, the assembly of Moses and Samuel and David and the prophets, we find that there are bold unblushing skeptics. If unfaithfulness like this exists among God's special people, specifically the Jews, what must the state of the pagans have been?

We must not be surprised when we hear about pagans, deists, heretics and free-thinkers rising up in the church and drawing disciples after them. We must not think that it is some rare event. It is only one of many evidences that man is a fallen and corrupt being. We should not wonder that so many people call into question the truths of the Bible. Rather, the marvel is that in a fallen world, the sect of the Sadducees should be so small. Bold pagans, like Porphyry, Julian, Hobbes, Hume, Voltaire and Payne arise from time to time to make a stir in the world; they produce no lasting impression. They pass away like the Sadducees. The great evidences of Christianity remain, like the pyramids, unshaken and unmoved. The gates of Hades will never prevail against the Lord's truth.

LORD and Lord

Luke 20:41 Then He said to them, "How *is it that* they say 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 A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET.'" ⁴⁴ "Therefore David calls Him 'Lord,' and how is He his son?" ⁴⁵ And while all the people were listening, He said to the disciples, ⁴⁶ "Beware of the scribes, who like

to walk around in long robes, and love respectful greetings in the market places, and chief seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets, ⁴⁷ who devour widows' houses, and for appearance's sake offer long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation."

Observe in this passage what a striking witness the book of Psalms gives to Christ's divinity. We read that after patiently replying to His enemies' attacks, the Lord in turn asks them to explain the expression found in Psalm 110:1 in which David speaks of the Messiah as his Lord.

Psalm 110:1 The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at My right hand Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet."

The teachers of the law are unable to answer this question. They do not see the great truth that the Messiah is to be God as well as man and that although as a man, He is David's son, as God, He is to be David's Lord. Their ignorance of Scripture is exposed for everyone to see. Professing to be teachers who possess the key of knowledge, they are shown as people who cannot explain their own Scriptures. We may well believe that out of all the defects of the Lord's malicious enemies, none are as galling as this one. Nothing kills a man's pride as to expose in public his ignorance of a subject about which he considers himself to be an expert.

We probably have very little idea how much deep truth the book of Psalms contains. No part of the Bible is better known in the letter and so little understood in the spirit. We err greatly if we suppose that it is nothing but a record of David's feelings, David's experience, David's praises or David's prayers. The hand that held the pen is generally David's but the subject matter is often something far deeper and higher than the history of the son of Jesse. The Psalms, in a word, is a book full of Christ. It includes Christ's suffering, Christ's humiliation, Christ's dying, Christ's resurrection, Christ's coming the second time and Christ's reigning over everyone. Both advents are present, the coming in suffering to bear the cross and the coming in power to wear the crown. Both kingdoms are present, the kingdom of grace during which the elect are gathered and the kingdom of glory during which every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord. Let us always read the Psalms with a special reverence.