

Confrontation with Jewish Leaders; The Parable of the Vineyard

Luke 20:1-19

*Luke 20:1-8: Now it happened on one of those days, as He taught the people in the temple and preached the gospel, that the chief priests and the scribes, together with the elders, confronted Him **2** and spoke to Him, saying, "Tell us, by what authority are You doing these things? Or who is he who gave You this authority?" **3** But He answered and said to them, "I also will ask you one thing, and answer Me: **4** The baptism of John—was it from heaven or from men?" **5** And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?' **6** But if we say, 'From men,' all the people will stone us, for they are persuaded that John was a prophet." **7** So they answered that they did not know where it was from. **8** And Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."*

Background Notes

The second half of Luke 19 gives us the events that took place on Sunday and Monday of our Lord's final week before the cross. The triumphal entry was on Sunday, and the second cleansing of the Temple was on Monday. Chapters 20 & 21 contain the events of Tuesday of that final week.

In Luke 20:1 we read that the Lord was teaching the people in the Temple and preaching the gospel - the gospel of the Kingdom. The Author of the literal Kingdom was still available, if only the leaders would receive Him as King. The Lord was teaching in the courts of the Temple (that He had cleansed the previous day), just as many rabbis did in that day.

At this point the Jewish leaders confronted the Lord, in an attempt to undermine His authority. In verse 2, they said to Him, "Tell us, by what authority are You doing these things? Or who is he who gave You this authority?" Obviously the cleansing of the Temple on the previous day was included in the words "these things." The Lord answered the Jewish leaders with a question of His own. He wasn't avoiding answering their question - in fact, He was giving them a clear answer. If they had answered His question about John the Baptist honestly, they would automatically have had a straight answer to their question.

Doctrinal Points

1. The Lord's question about John the Baptist answered His antagonists.

Verses 3-4: "But Jesus answered and said to them, "I also will ask you one thing, and answer Me: the baptism of John— was it from heaven or from men?" Was the baptism of John the Baptist from God, or was it a manmade ritual? This question created a dilemma for the Jewish leaders. If they said "from heaven," then they would condemn themselves, because they all knew that John had pointed to Jesus as the Messiah. If they said John the Baptist's ministry was only "manmade," and that John was not really a prophet of God, then they feared being stoned to death by the people for the sin of blasphemy, because the people knew that John the Baptist was a true prophet of God. So they lied and said that they did not know. The Lord therefore said, *"Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things" (v8).*

These Jewish leaders certainly knew that John the Baptist's ministry was not just a manmade operation, created to draw attention to himself. They knew that John the Baptist was a true prophet of God, breaking the silence of the four hundred intertestamental years in which no prophet of God had risen. But they did not like the message that John the Baptist preached because it condemned them.

They also realized that Jesus Christ had answered their question about His authority. It was the same authority as the authority of John the Baptist - the authority of God! The Lord's question about John the Baptist answered His antagonist.

2. The Lord's Parable of the Vineyard anticipated His murder.

Luke 20: 9-19: Then He began to tell the people this parable: "A certain man planted a vineyard, leased it to vinedressers, and went into a far country for a long time. 10 Now at vintage-time he sent a servant to the vinedressers, that they might give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the vinedressers beat him and sent him away empty-handed. 11 Again he sent another servant; and they beat him also, treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed. 12 And again he sent a third; and they wounded him also and cast him out. 13 "Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son. Probably they will respect him when they see him.' 14 But when the vinedressers saw him, they reasoned among themselves, saying, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours.' 15 So they cast him out of the vineyard and killed him. Therefore what will the owner of the vineyard do to them? 16 He will come and destroy those vinedressers and give the vineyard to others." And when they heard it they said, "Certainly not!" 17 Then He looked at them and said, "What then is this that is written: 'The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone'? 18 Whoever falls on that stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder." 19 And the chief priests and the scribes that very hour sought to lay hands on Him, but they feared the people —for they knew He had spoken this parable against them.

Notice, first of all, that the Jewish leaders knew the Lord spoke this parable against them (v19). They knew that they were the vineyard keepers, who had the responsibility of looking out for the owner's vineyard - the nation of Israel, God's vineyard. But they had failed, and as a result no fruit was produced.

The Jewish leaders listening to the Lord give this parable certainly would have known of the Parable of the Vineyard in the prophecy of Isaiah. It would be hard to miss the similarities and parallels. Isaiah 5:1-7: *"Now let me sing to my Well-beloved a song of my Beloved regarding His vineyard: My Well-beloved has a vineyard on a very fruitful hill. He dug it up and cleared out its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine. He built a tower in its midst, and also made a winepress in it. So He expected it to bring forth good grapes, but it brought forth wild grapes.*

'And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge, please, between Me and My vineyard. What more could have been done to My vineyard that I have not done in it?

Why then, when I expected it to bring forth good grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes?

And now, please let Me tell you what I will do to My vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it shall be burned; and break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will lay it waste; it shall not be pruned or dug, but there shall come up briars and thorns. I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain on it.'

For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are His pleasant plant. He looked for justice, but behold, oppression; for righteousness, but behold, a cry for help."

God expected spiritual fruit from His chosen people - but there was no fruit. Here in the Parable of the Vineyard in Luke 20, He placed the blame for the lack of fruit squarely on the shoulders of the Jewish leaders. They would not listen to the prophets, the servants in the parable. They persecuted the prophets, and they would not show respect to the beloved son of the vineyard owner. In fact, they killed the son, a clear prediction by the Lord that He would be killed by the leaders of the Jewish nation.

Verse 13: "Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son. Probably they will respect him when they see him.' But when the vinedressers saw him, they reasoned among themselves, saying, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours.' So they cast him out of the vineyard and killed him." The Lord was not only executed at the hands of the Roman government, He was killed by the Jewish leaders.

The Lord also predicted several other events in this parable. He predicted the divine judgment on Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Verse 16: *"He will come and destroy those vinedressers and give the vineyard to others."* He predicted that the vineyard would be given to "others" - either the Gentiles or a believing nation of Israel in the future. The Jewish leaders couldn't stand the implication of such a situation and said, *"May it never be."* But it will be!

The Lord quoted from Psalm 118:22, a messianic psalm that predicts that the stone that was rejected by the builders will become the chief cornerstone. The Lord, the true Messiah of Israel, would be rejected now, but He will become the key to the whole future of the nation and the world. At His first coming, those who rejected Him and His Kingdom would be broken over this Stone. At His second coming, those who had rejected Him and His Kingdom would be crushed to powder and scattered like dust. Read Daniel 2. The Lord's Parable of the Vineyard anticipated His murder.

Practical Application

If you stumble over that Stone, you will be broken.

Verse 18: *"Whoever falls [or stumbles] on that stone will be broken."* This is an awesome statement. There are no exceptions! If you stumble over Christ – if you do not accept His claims to be God and your only means of salvation - you will be broken.

You may stumble over Jesus Christ because of doubt. You may stumble over Him because you don't like His teachings. You may stumble because of rebellion, or lack of interest. It doesn't matter as to your problem. If you stumble over that Stone, you will be broken. You may not feel like you're broken and you may go through this life thinking and feeling like you have your act together, but in the end you will be broken.

If you stumble over that Stone, you will be broken.