

The Church of the Servant King
Survey of the Bible Series
The Gospel of Luke

SB_20_Opposition from the Religious/Political Mafia of Israel

Jesus Questioned (20:1-8)

Picture the circumstances. Jesus has just cleansed the Temple of corrupt men who were extorting money from those Jews who were trying to comply with the Mosaic Law. These corrupt men were in league with the religious leaders of Israel who had opposed John the Baptist and Jesus and who were even trying to destroy Jesus. In the meantime Jesus was “teaching daily in the Temple” (19:47). What would the common Jew have thought of Jesus’ teaching if Jesus had allowed this religious “mafia” to continue to practice extortion and make a mockery of the spiritual significance of the Temple and the activities that occurred within the premises? Jesus had to distance Himself from this group and He had to purge the Temple of those who had no regard for the spiritual welfare and future of Israel.

When challenged by the powerful and corrupt religious leaders of Israel regarding His authority for having purged the Temple of its corrupt occupiers, Jesus gives us a glimpse of His brilliant mind with a logic that trapped His adversaries. Jesus knew that the common Jew had great respect for John the Baptist. However, the religious mafia did not approve of John’s message since John had taken away some of the allegiance of the common man and discredited the religious/political types whose system (derived from a distorted interpretation/application of the Mosaic Law) enslaved the Jew and kept Israel from achieving her spiritual purpose. Jesus indicated that He would answer their question regarding His authority if they would answer His question regarding John’s authority. This placed them in a dilemma. If they said that John’s authority was from heaven, then they would be admitting that they had opposed God. If they said his authority was from man, then they would be denying him to be at least a prophet and would have encountered fierce opposition from the common Jews. They punted, so Jesus deferred also.

The Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers (20:9-19)

The parallel passage in Matthew’s Gospel account is found in Matthew 21:33-46. There are a few subtle differences between the two accounts, e.g. compare Matthew 21:41 to Luke 20:16 where Matthew indicates that the religious leaders answered their own question, yet Luke indicates that Jesus answers His own question. However, the differences do not detract from the basic point of the parable.

Obviously, Jesus was speaking of the nation of Israel that had been carefully prepared by God to be His fruitful vineyard (Is 5:1-7). The care of the vine (Israel) had been delegated to the nation’s religious leaders. However, they failed to acknowledge the Master’s (the Heavenly Father’s) authority over them and treated His messengers and prophets badly. They would ultimately even kill His Son, Jesus, outside Jerusalem (outside the vineyard).

In verse 16, Jesus makes a prediction that the vineyard would be given to others. Matthew’s account indicates that the “kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation [Μαθηματικη] nation or people] bearing the fruits of it” (Matt 21:43). Many have interpreted this to be a prophecy of the Church which would consist of Jew and Gentile since the Church is on some occasions referred to as a nation (1 Pe 2:9-10). However, I do not believe that Jesus was necessarily predicting the Church here. Rather, I believe that He is referring to that future group of Jews (from the point in time of His public ministry) who will in fact believe in Him. Jesus was using the term “nation” in the same sense as the term “generation” in Matthew 23:36. Because of their rejection, that generation of Israel would never be able to experience the kingdom. However, a future generation will respond to Him in faith (Ro 11:26-27) and experience the spiritual and

physical blessings of kingdom. Jesus will be the chief cornerstone of the future kingdom (Lu 20:17 cf. Psa 118:22).

The Pharisees Question Jesus in an Attempt to Trap Him (Luke 20:20-26)

In the parallel account in Matthew 22:15-22, Matthew mentions that the Pharisees sent “their disciples” and the “Herodians.” It must have been this group that Luke refers to as “spies.” Unlike most of the Jews, the Herodians openly supported the reigning family of Herod and its pro-Roman bias. Little is known of the Herodians, but it is believed that they held that it was right to pay homage to Rome so as to obtain the friendship of Rome. They were not a political party, nor were they a religious sect. They differed from the Pharisees in this regard. The Pharisees opposed Rome and all attempts by Rome to intrude on the Jewish way of life. A common enemy (Jesus) makes strange bedfellows. Later they even lie and misrepresent what Jesus said (Lu 23:2) in spite of the fact that they could not find any fault with His words (Luke 20:26).

Principle: The self-righteous person will always compromise integrity when his/her agenda is threatened. The self-righteous person will attempt to justify the means with the desired end result. (Example: a political person in government or in business has an agenda that he/she defends with vehemence and disdain for those who dare to challenge or question that agenda).

The Sadducees Challenge Jesus Regarding the Resurrection (20:27-40)

As we have studied previously, the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection. However, since their writings have not survived, little is known about them except what rival groups said about them. The Sadducees were aristocratic and dominated the higher echelons of the priesthood. They based their beliefs solely on the Pentateuch and did not accept the authority of any other Old Testament book. They also rejected the oral traditions that had grown up around the interpretation of the Law which the Pharisees (the common-man group) accepted. Rejecting the resurrection and an afterlife led to a view that heaven would simply be an extension of those things on earth that men most enjoy. Therefore, they did not believe in rewards or punishment in the life to come. They might be considered the liberal faction in religious Judaism of our Lord’s day.

These views put them in direct conflict with Jesus. No doubt, they found His teaching threatening their beliefs and power. Jesus presented Himself as the Messiah Who would rule in the coming kingdom and He challenged prevalent attitudes toward money and social status. Most likely, the question that the Sadducees pose to Jesus has been posed to the Pharisees on previous occasions. The law that is the basis of the Sadducees’ question is found in Deuteronomy 25:5-6 and is known as the law of the levirate marriage.

In His rebuke, Jesus quoted a statement that God had made to Moses at the burning bush in Exodus 3:6. Jesus’ point is that if Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had died without any afterlife, then God would not have used the present tense “I am”, rather He would have used the past tense “I was”. Also, Jesus refers to the status of angels in heaven because the Sadducees denied their existence. This was a double slam of the Sadducees. The crowds certainly understood Jesus’ point for they were “astonished”. Furthermore, Jesus presented His case from the Pentateuch which was accepted by the Sadducees.

Jesus Poses a Riddle to the Pharisees (20:41-44)

Jesus asks the religious leaders to identify the Christ. Jesus’ response to their answer indicated that the Messiah had to be more than the earthly son of David since David ascribed deity to Him (Ps 110:1). In that Psalm, David referred to the Messiah as “my Lord.” His critics were completely silenced.

Jesus Warns His Disciples of the Scribes (20:45-47)

On previous occasions, Jesus has denounced the Pharisees and religious leaders (Lu 11:39-52) and even warned his disciples regarding their teaching (Lu 12:1-3). However, those occasions were more private than public. In Luke 20, Jesus is in Jerusalem just a few days before the Passover during which perhaps thousands of Jews had made a pilgrimage to the city and crowds were present everywhere Jesus went, especially to the Temple (Lu 19:45-47). Jesus pointed out that these men were motivated by approbation lust and self-righteousness in that they loved the important seats and other places of honor (cf. Lu 11:43). They enjoyed the respect that was shown them and the public greetings in the marketplaces.

- The “long robes” (v. 46) is likely a reference to the extra long tassels on the corners of their outer garments in obedience to Numbers 15:37-41 and Deuteronomy 22:12. These tassels were designed to remind Israel of the Law, not to serve as an outward show of professed humility. God intended for the Law to be impressed upon their heart (Prov 6:20-21).
- The love for “greetings in the marketplaces, the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts” is a reference to the fact that these men were motivated by approbation lust and self-righteousness. They enjoyed the respect that was shown them and the public greetings in the marketplaces. Matthew’s account notes that they coveted the title “Rabbi” by which ordinary people showed regard for their “wisdom.” Luke’s account also indicates that they made long prayers just for the pretense of humility (v. 47).
- The reference to devouring widow’s houses (v. 47) indicates the lust for money that this religious/political group possessed (cf. Lu 11:42; 12:13-21; 16:19-31; 18:9-14, 18-23; 19:45-48; 1 Tim 6:10). They imposed burdensome requirements upon even those who had little.
- They will receive the greater condemnation because they were in the position of greatest influence and they used it to exploit others instead of serve them (cf. Lu 12:48b; Jas 3:1).

Principle: A man’s effectiveness in the spiritual realm is measured by how much Christ is magnified and duplicated in others not by how much he is recognized. The truly humble man in ministry knows that his ministry is only being effective when others incorporate the self-discipline and humility in their lives to become like Christ whether anyone ever says a word of encouragement or thanks to him or not. The fruit is in the changed life not the words. The Pharisees desired accolades, not changed lives. They bolstered their positions by people’s inability to keep their interpretations of the Law and the people’s homage paid to such “leaders” who could allegedly keep such strict requirements. They built themselves up on the failure of others.