

Luke 20A

- As we ended last week at the end of Chapter 19, we had a few verse in that chapter left to tackle
 - And I left them for today, because as it turns out, they are an appropriate lead in to the early verses of Chapter 20
 - Jesus had just made his triumphant entry into the city on the back of a donkey
 - The crowds declaring Him to be the Messiah
 - And from this entry Jesus would spend most of His last week on earth at the Temple teaching the crowds
 - And in the evenings He would retreat to Bethany to sleep, only to return the next day
 - And had it not been Jesus' purpose to be put to death, it's conceivable this pattern could have repeated itself almost indefinitely
 - Because it was the adoring crowd that formed Jesus' protection from the Pharisees and the scribes who were conspiring to kill Him
 - Historians believe that the population of the city swelled to between 2-3 million people living in and around Jerusalem
 - This would also explain why Rome was especially nervous every year around Passover
 - Remember, these religious leaders had no weapons, no army or police force
 - The only way these leaders could take Jesus captive would be if they could gain the support of either the Roman army or the crowds themselves
 - So far Rome had shown little interest in taking Jesus captive
 - And the crowds weren't going to support any action against Jesus

- So the leaders were stuck
- In fact, the main reason that Jesus is taken captive at night in Gethsemane is because this was the best time to avoid the crowds
 - They might have rioted had the leaders made a move against Jesus in the Temple
- So now at the end of Chapter 19, we see Jesus entering the Temple for the first time since His triumphant entry

[Luke 19:45](#) ¶ Jesus entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling, [Luke 19:46](#) saying to them, “It is written, ‘AND MY HOUSE SHALL BE A HOUSE OF PRAYER,’ but you have made it a ROBBERS’ DEN.”

- As short as these verses are in Luke’s account, this is one of the best known scenes from Jesus’ final week in Jerusalem
 - Jesus walks into the Temple grounds, and here’s what he saw
 - The temple structure in Jesus day had actually been expanded well beyond the original design provided in scripture
 - The original design called for three principle areas within the temple
 - An outer court, commonly called the court of women
 - The Holy Place, where the priests sacrificed
 - The Holy of Holies – the mercy seat, the ark and God’s very presence
 - By Jesus’ day, Herod had enlarged Zurabbable’s temple to include a huge, majestic courtyard completely surrounding the Temple proper
 - This outer area was called the court of the Gentiles, because it was not technically part of the Temple
 - Only Jews could enter the Temple proper

- So the outer courtyard, not being part of the Temple structure, was open to all people, so long as they observed proper decorum
- It was in this outer court that Jesus began to throw out the money changers
 - On the week of Passover, the courtyard would have resembled a giant flea market
 - First you had the merchants selling the animals necessary for sacrifice on the Passover
 - Families might travel a great distance and not bring an animal for the required sacrifice
 - But even if they did bring one, it would almost always be found to be imperfect
 - Some spot or blemish would be found
 - But fortunately, there was a solution
 - The Priests were selling spotless lambs
 - The family would be instructed to take their imperfect animal to the priests who would accept it along with a fee as a trade in on a spotless lamb
 - So you had oxen, sheep and doves being sold literally in the hundreds of thousands to visitors who came to worship at the Temple
 - But the only money the Priests accepted within the Temple was the coin of Judea – Jewish shekel
 - So before a traveler could purchase an animal, they must change their money
 - Jewish priests would not handle Roman coinage with the image of a man on it because they considered it idolatry
 - But the common money of the culture was Roman, so it must be changed

- Fortunately, the priests had a money changing table nearby, so you could change your money at ridiculous rates
 - So the priests made money on the exchange of money, and then they made more money selling spotless certified lambs
- The real joke was that when the next family came into the temple with their imperfect lamb, and were sold the lamb that the previous family had just traded in
 - So the priests were making money hand over fist
 - It reminds me of another religious holiday that has turned from a celebration of God's mercy and grace into nothing more than a gigantic merchandising effort
- So as Jesus enters the court of Gentiles and witnesses this scene, He is stirred to respond
 - He declares that the Temple has become a den of thieves rather than a House of Prayer and God Himself declared it should be
 - This reference to thieves is directed against the priests themselves
 - It was the priests who have turned the Temple into a bazaar, especially at Passover
 - He drives out the money changers, but also all the priests who were engaged in this activity

[Matt. 21:12](#) ¶ And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves.

- You can better appreciate why Jesus was so incensed
 - Here are the men who were to be consecrated, set apart to be the men to intercede on behalf of God's people before the altar
 - These were the men assigned the responsibility to care for the needs of Israel, and to serve them in the name of YHWH
 - And here they were stealing from these people

- Taking advantages of people who were especially trusting of them as men of God
- Now if you know your Gospels, you may know this is not the first time Jesus has done this kind of thing
 - In John's Gospel we are told that on an earlier Passover, Jesus entered the Temple and drive

[John 2:13](#) ¶ The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

[John 2:14](#) And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers seated *at their tables*.

[John 2:15](#) And He made a scourge of cords, and drove *them* all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables;

[John 2:16](#) and to those who were selling the doves He said, "Take these things away; stop making My Father's house a place of business."

[John 2:17](#) His disciples remembered that it was written, "ZEAL FOR YOUR HOUSE WILL CONSUME ME."

- Though the circumstances sound very similar to the later example, it's merely because the time of year was the same and the behavior of the priests hadn't changed
- I love John's description because we see how Jesus did it
 - I wonder did he calming begin to make his whip without saying a word
 - Eventually, when it was ready, he attacked the money changers and sellers
 - It must have been quite a scene
- Consider this...if Jesus was willing to drive priests out of the courtyard of the gentiles in His day with a whip for stealing from the people
 - What do you suppose He thinks of men today who use their positions of authority within the church to profit at the expense of the people they serve?
 - I think the answer is obvious enough

- We need to always be ready to question the motives and intentions of any man of God who makes a point to mix ministry with commerce
- Just like these, priests, anytime a man's role in ministering to God's people becomes his mechanism for enriching himself at the expense of the people's trust, his behavior is to be condemned

[Luke 19:47](#) ¶ And He was teaching daily in the temple; but the chief priests and the scribes and the leading men among the people were trying to destroy Him, [Luke 19:48](#) and they could not find anything that they might do, for all the people were hanging on to every word He said.

[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, [Luke 20:2](#) 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?"

[Luke 20:3](#) Jesus answered and said to them, "I will also ask you a question, and you tell Me:

[Luke 20:4](#) "Was the baptism of John from heaven or from men?"

[Luke 20:5](#) They reasoned among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say, 'Why did you not believe him?'

[Luke 20:6](#) "But if we say, 'From men,' all the people will stone us to death, for they are convinced that John was a prophet."

[Luke 20:7](#) So they answered that they did not know where *it came* from.

[Luke 20:8](#) And Jesus said to them, "Nor will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

- As I mentioned in my introduction, the leaders of Israel were desperate to kill Jesus
 - Just in that fact alone you can see the evil in these men's hearts
 - They were driven by murder in their hearts against God's anointed one
 - You need not have any clearer proof that these men were of their father, the devil, a murderer from the beginning
 - But it was the crowd that protected Jesus
 - Though I'm not sure they even realized they were his protection
 - They may not have been aware of how much the Pharisees wanted to destroy Jesus

- But in any case, they were God's means of preserving His Son from harm until the appointed moment
- The scene Luke describes next is especially dramatic
 - This event occurred on the Wednesday before Jesus' death
 - This is the day before his death, the same day on which He will later celebrate the Last Supper
 - Luke says Jesus is teaching in the Temple as usual
 - But more than that, we're told He is preaching the Gospel
 - This phrase can only mean one thing
 - Jesus is proclaiming the meaning of the Messiah, and He would have been declaring Himself to be the one
 - Imagine to be in the audience and to be preached the Gospel from the Author of our Salvation Himself!
 - And to hear this kind of message in the Temple a few days before Passover
 - Could anyone within earshot fail to grasp the significance of this teaching?
- Well, yes, the leaders of Israel still couldn't grasp the truth, as was God's plan
 - And Luke describes this entourage approach Jesus on Wednesday
 - Luke gives us the list of people: chief priests (there was more than one at that time), the scribes, and elders
 - There was only one group within Jewish society that consisted of all three of these groups
 - It was the Sanhedrin – the ruling body of the nation
 - This group ruled the Jewish people under the authority of the Roman authorities
 - The fact that they arrived in this way in the Temple means that they were conducting an official inquiry into what authority Jesus had to be teaching

- Under Pharasitical rule, no one could teach unless they could substantiate where they obtained their learning
 - Their authority to be a teacher of the scriptures came as a consequence of who taught them
 - Remember how Paul established his authority before the Jewish crowd in Jerusalem

[Acts 22:3](#) ¶ “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated under **Gamaliel**, strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God just as you all are today.

- So a man’s authority in the eyes of the Jews came as a function of who imparted the man his knowledge
- So the leaders ask Jesus who gave Him his authority
 - Of course the answer is that Jesus’ authority came directly from the Father
 - He didn’t need the authority granted by men
 - Rather Jesus is Truth
 - All authority to teach in truth comes from Jesus, who is the Word
 - But Jesus won’t humor these men and their evil hearts
 - Because their purpose in asking the question is not to discover truth
 - It wasn’t as though had Jesus given them the answer that would have said, “Oh, that’s fine. Thank you.”
- So Jesus answers their question with a question
 - Now this practice isn’t as evasive as it may sound
 - It was a common tradition among rabbis to answer a question with a question

- Dr. Fruchtenbaum tells of a Jewish story when a Gentile asks a Jewish rabbi why do you always answer questions with another question?
- And the rabbi responded, “Why not?”
- Jesus’ question in response is was the baptism of John from God or men
 - By baptism, Jesus means his ministry
 - So in other words, Jesus is asking the leaders to answer the same question about John’s ministry
 - Basically, Jesus’ is daring them to come down firmly on one side or another on who John was
 - Now remember by this time John had been murdered by this time
 - And in the eyes of many Jewish faithful, he had been venerated as a martyr
 - So even among the non-religious or unbelieving Jews, John probably was still seen as a hero for opposing Rome and dying under Roman occupation
 - So Jesus’ question was a loaded question
 - Which we can see by looking at the Pharisee’s thoughts recorded by Luke
 - They knew that if they attributed John’s ministry to heaven, then they would lose all credibility among the crowd
 - Because they had rejected John’s ministry
 - And John himself had been a vociferous critic of the Pharisees – calling them vipers
 - So they couldn’t say they agreed with John’s ministry
 - On the other hand, they couldn’t say he was a fraud
 - Because the crowd had decided he was a hero and a true prophet

- So they risked losing all credibility with the crowd if they went against John
 - So they were stuck
- Now Jesus asked this question for a greater reason than simply embarrassing the leaders
 - Had the Pharisees said John was a fraud, they would have discredited themselves in front of the crowd, yes
 - But if they had said that John's ministry was from heaven, then Jesus would have simply told the Pharisees that He received His authority from John
 - After all, it was John who had baptized Jesus
 - And it was at that time Jesus had received His anointing by the Holy Spirit
 - But because the Pharisees had refused to answer, Jesus could safely refuse to answer them
 - After all, how could the Pharisees indict Jesus for His silence when they themselves were taking the same tactic
 - The result was that Jesus silenced the Sanhedrin in front of all the people

[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.

[Luke 20:10](#) "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.

[Luke 20:11](#) "And he proceeded to send another slave; and they beat him also and treated him shamefully and sent him away empty-handed.

[Luke 20:12](#) "And he proceeded to send a third; and this one also they wounded and cast out.

[Luke 20:13](#) "The owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.'

[Luke 20:14](#) "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.'

[Luke 20:15](#) "So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What, then, will the owner of the vineyard do to them?"

[Luke 20:16](#) “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!”

- Jesus moves directly into telling this parable in response to what had just occurred with the Pharisees
 - When we try to make sense of a parable, we need to begin by looking carefully at how a parable is constructed
 - This means examining the players and the setting – any details that seem important
 - And then we look back into scripture to find parallels to help us understand those details
 - Jesus tells this parable immediately after the inquisition of the Sanhedrin had failed in its attempt to undermine Him in the eyes of the people
 - And as we will learn a few verse later, it’s clear that Jesus is teaching this parable as an indictment against the Pharisees themselves
 - In the parable there are 4 main characters
 - First, there is the one who owns the vineyard
 - Second, we have the caretakers of the vineyard – the vine growers as Jesus calls them
 - Third, there are slaves – three slaves to be precise
 - Finally, there is the vineyard owners son
- The basic situation of the parable is fairly simple
 - A vineyard owner wants has gone away from his vineyard for a time
 - While he’s gone he wants the vineyard to produce fruit, so he leaves it in the care of vine growers
 - Obviously, the vine growers are to attend to the field and make sure it produces fruit
 - But the ultimate purpose that the owner has in making this arrangement is to bring a return of that harvest to himself

- It is not merely to give the vine owners something to eat
 - The main purpose in making this arrangement is for the benefit of the vineyard owner
 - The vine growers merely benefit by association
- The vine growers are an ungrateful and dishonest lot, as it turns out
 - They think of nothing but themselves, and act as if the vineyard was theirs to do with as they please
- Then the owner sends his slaves, one at a time
 - Each of the three slaves brings the same message
 - The owner expects to receive what he is owed from the vine growers
 - But in each case the vine growers don't want to hear it and they beat the slaves and send them away without any of the fruit
- Finally, the owner decides to send his beloved son
 - The hope here is that they would finally show the owner respect because he had been gracious enough to send his own son to them
 - To send a son in this way communicated the highest degree of mercy and grace
 - Considering what these ungrateful men had done to the slaves, the owner would have been right to send armed men to arrest the vine growers
 - To send his son instead, was beyond expectations
 - But to add insult to injury, the vine owners murder the son
- As Jesus tells this parable, imagine the scene around him
 - The court of the Gentiles is filled with people, and animals and noise
 - And now the leaders

- And everyone is likely in rapped attention to Jesus' parable
 - And as Jesus is teaching it, awareness begins to grow among everyone as to who he's talking about
 - The details in the parable are too specific
 - The situation in the moment with the Sanhedrin in attendance and the confrontations with Jesus
 - Tensions running high
 - Then as the parable ends, it becomes clear that Jesus is calling these leaders of Israel murderers
 - Yet he's done so in such a subtle way that He can avoid being accused by them in an unfair way
- Because this is what Jesus had just described
 - The vineyard owner was God the Father
 - And though He owned the vineyard, he had to leave it for a time
 - This is reflected by God separating Himself from Adam and all mankind after sin entered the garden
 - And more specifically, as we know already, the vineyard is a classic picture of the nation of Israel, God's chosen people
 - Now God has left the care of his vineyard to men, and in particular, to the leadership of His people
 - And these leaders have led Israel astray
 - This failure extends all the way back to the time of judges and grows to its height in the years leading up to the exile in Babylon
 - After Israel's return to the land in the centuries that followed, the evils of their leadership returned until the day of Jesus
 - Along the way, God sent men to Israel reminding them of their obligations to Him

- These slaves were the prophets, who called out for the leadership of Israel to remember they were to serve God and not idols of their own hands
- They were sent to collect on the thing the leaders owed their land owner – the glory that was due God
 - But of course the prophets were rejected
 - The prophets of Israel can be divided into three distinct groups
 - First you have those sent to the Northern kingdom: Elijah, Elisha, Jonah, Amos, Hosea
 - Then you have the prophets sent to the Southern Kingdom: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Joel, Micah, Nahum, Zachariah, Daniel, Ezekiel, Malachi
 - Finally, you have the prophets who spoke in Jesus day before the crucifixion, most notably John the Baptist and the disciples of Christ
 - And of course, you have Jesus Himself as the Father's Son
 - Which means you have yet another incident here of Jesus predicting his own death
 - And once again He says that the direct cause of His death is the Jewish leadership of the nation of Israel (not the Romans)
- And with all that imagery made so clear to the crowd as well as the Sanhedrin, we hear the crowd's response
 - May it never be
 - They are not going to stand for the leadership bringing down the one they have decided must be the Messiah
 - I wonder how close this moment came to a riot in the temple grounds

- As we'll study next week, the leadership leaves absolutely convinced that the only solution is to murder Jesus
 - And that desire is made even greater, ironically, by the fact that Jesus has called them out to be murderers
 - Next week, we will finish chapter 20 with two more inspections by the religious leaders on that same day
 - As the spotless lamb of God is inspected in the temple to see if it is worthy of the sacrifice that must take place