

Home Church Study Guide—June 27, 2010
Questions and Answers/ The Time Has Come (Luke 20-21)

There is much for us to learn, not only from the content of Jesus' teaching, but the wisdom of his every action. The tension is now fully evident. The leaders want to destroy Jesus. They eventually kill Him, but for now, they are desperately attempting to discredit Him. They are clearly not up to the task!

First, the religious leaders question His authority. His teaching was not consistent with their interpretations of the law. In their view, one had to base one's thinking on a former or present expert in the law (for example, them!) Jesus knows they will not accept his answer, for He has given it over and over. He is clearly working by God's authority, but they would not accept it. Because then they would have to explain why they had not submitted to his baptism. So they "punted" and answered, "We can't say." Clearly, they were not concerned about truth, but their own personal well-being. The crowd knew what Jesus had done in this acute display of wisdom. He answered simply "then I will not tell you where my authority originates." But knowing Jesus, you would expect a further reply, and He has one. He answers the question after all, but with a parable. This one cuts to the heart of the religious leaders. It is a story all would understand. A man planted a vineyard and allowed tenant farmers the right to tend and harvest the vineyard. He then sent servants to collect his fair share of the harvest. They were beaten and thrown out. So the owner of the vineyard sends his own son. He was killed so that the tenant farmers could claim the land as their own. The listening crowd was horror-stricken and shouted, "May this never be." But that is exactly what would happen, as Psalm 118:2 foretold.

It is so easy to sit back and condemn the religious leaders. But could this be us? Asked to faithfully give God what is rightfully His, do we, with hostility, jealously guard that which we have? Maybe we didn't kill the son, but if we think we can with violence take all of God's blessings and use them for our own well-being, are we any different? The next segment continues the theme of what is rightfully God's. In an attempt to trap Jesus, He is asked if one should pay taxes. This was a question that raised emotions to a fervor pitch. If Jesus said one should pay taxes, He would be considered a traitor by the people, and He would lose His popularity. If He said no, He could be handed over to the Romans as one inciting violence against them. But Jesus knew their hearts. His answer is a fascinating display of wisdom. He calls them to look at the coin and tell them whose image it bears. Then He answers, "Give Caesar what is his, but give God what is His." The real focus is on the second part of the phrase. Jesus dismisses the value of money—give it up to those who call for it. The Romans provide an economy that functions, so pay them their due. The point is to give to God what is rightfully His. There is a clear link to the preceding parable. Pay your taxes, but give God your life.

Now the Sadducees have prepared their best "shot". They think they have a question that cannot be answered. You can be sure they used it many times against those who believed in the resurrection, and no one was able to give a good answer. So they set up a situation of marriage where a wife has many husbands because of death. Jesus' response is interesting. His main concern is not with their question but with the issue of the resurrection. Their view of marriage was bound to their view of this life. Marriage is needed in this world, but there is a world to come that will introduce a new kind of existence. I don't know exactly what this means. I think we must be careful not to conclude too much about the nature of relationships in heaven because of this answer. Jesus' main concern is to show that their view of life is woefully short-sighted. It does not end at death, in spite of their cute question. God is a god of the living! It is ironic that on this point the Pharisees have to applaud Jesus. He has put the Sadducees in their place. "Well said, teacher" some responded. They could hear Him on issues with which they agreed, but could not hear him on issues calling them to repentance. Might that be us as well?

Well, this last dialogue shut the mouths of all of Jesus' critics. They knew they were outmatched. Jesus wasn't finished. He took that which they loved most—their supposed knowledge of Scripture, and demonstrated how little they knew. He asked them how Psalm 110:1, if written by David, could refer to the Messiah as Lord and He also be his "son." How could a descendent of David be his Lord? This didn't fit in the construct of their view of Messiah. It demonstrates that the Messiah was much more than an earthly descendent of David. He was far greater than David. Their rigid understanding of Scripture left them without an answer. Jesus took this occasion to speak of the leaders' authority. They began this episode in the life of Jesus questioning authority; Jesus ends the episode destroying theirs.

In Chapter 21, let's visit what Jesus teaches us about the nature of our lives. We have marveled at now the religious leaders manifested a complete lack of faith in God. Their focus on their own well-being and their own power led to the destruction of the city of Jerusalem. The "beautiful temple" was like a tomb of death. For all that it could have been, it became a symbol of Israel's well deserved judgment. We are told that one day the world will be likewise destroyed. Does

that have any impact on the way we live? Do we continue to invest our lives in that which we know will not last? When will the end come? We do not know. We do know that life is fragile, and whether the Son of Man returns within the next few minutes or we die suddenly and unexpectedly, the end has come. We are not called to live in fear of judgment as much as we are called to continual faithfulness. Many placed their faith in the temple as the ultimate sign of God's presence in their nation, thinking mistakenly that God would never desert His building. With their confidence in their approach to God rather than God Himself, they continued to live self-focused lives which led them to crucify the author of life. Might we, too, be guilty of the same sin? With confidence in our approach to God, we allow our lives to be directed by our fleshly desires. While we sing and pray of our faith in God, for too many of us our faith is in the financial dealings on Wall Street. We think we have our religion taken care of, but our hearts remain unchanged and focused on this world. This world does not deserve our trust. As surely as Jerusalem was judged, so shall this world be destroyed. Only God merits our faith and trust. When this world begins to shake and tremble as it meets its fate, will we be "weighed down" by its weight, or will we "stand up and raise our hands", knowing our full redemption is near?

Of course, this story has not ended. It has just begun. God's ancient purposes had been fulfilled by His faithful Son. Now world history would change. That which God had desired from the beginning He would now have—a people set apart for His purposes. All that Jesus had taught and done had been vindicated in His resurrection. He now hands off responsibility for the expansion of this new kingdom to His disciples. They would continue the story. What Jesus did in Luke, the church will do in Acts.

How does this story of Jesus impact you? I would highly recommend that you take the time to reread Luke—and do it in one sitting. Reflect on what you have learned from Jesus, and you will surely learn to love Him more. It is a marvelous story. It is our story. Jesus is risen! Hallelujah! Now the story must be told to all the world. Shall we keep the story of life to ourselves?

Questions for Home Church discussion

1. What questions trouble you most? At what level do you trust God to use your pain and struggle for good?
2. What can we learn from the parable of the tenants? How does it apply to us?
3. Have we given to Caesar what is Caesar's—but to God what is God's?