

Jesus Answers His Critics

PHBF 03.06.10

TEXT: Luke 20:1-21:4

SCR. READING: Luke 20:1-8

****Words for kids: Jesus, question, critics**

SERIES: From the Manger To the Cross For the World

Churchill answers his critics

Nancy Astor: "If you were my husband, I'd flavor your coffee with poison." Churchill: "If you were my wife, I'd drink it."

Bessie Braddock: "Mr. Churchill, you are drunk." Churchill: "Yes, Bessie, I am, and you are ugly. But in the morning I will be sober."

Not quite what Jesus was up to in this chapter. Yes, He's answering critics, but not with clever putdowns. It's a demonstration of His wisdom and authority. More importantly for Luke, it's an explanation for what follows—namely, Jesus' execution. From time to time you'll hear someone say that Jesus' lifestyle was more significant than His teaching. Well, I might agree if it weren't for the fact that it was His teaching that got Him killed!

JESUS SILENCES HIS QUESTIONERS (20:1-40)

Jesus' authority challenged (1-8)

Jesus is actually answering their question. If they will answer His question about John, they will have their answer about where His own authority came from. John's testimony shows where he believed Jesus' authority came from (3:16). Like insolent rebels, they refuse to change their minds. And like irresponsible cowards, they won't go on record publicly to protect their people from this unauthorized teacher.

The story isn't about Jesus' ability to avoid hard questions or outwit people. Rather, it shows that Jesus' opponents are not sincere seekers with a few unresolved doubts; they are hard-hearted opponents of heaven. He doesn't accuse them directly. He doesn't have to; they incriminate themselves. Their attempt to undermine His authority backfired! They only undermined their own.

APP: Some people want to remain agnostic about Jesus. Rather than face the facts—or even ask themselves why they are so resistant to Him—they park on "I don't know." Why? Because they aren't really

concerned about the facts. They are concerned about the practical effects on their life.

APP: Often, people's objection to Jesus isn't in the intellect; it's in the will. At times, further discussion with people is useless. But lest we get too self-righteous, let's remember that we do this, too. EX: hearing and not applying the word – service in the church, giving

Jesus does answer their question... with a story.

Parable of the wicked tenants (9-18)

[Read vv 9-18.]

The parable operates as an allegory at several points. The owner is God, the vineyard is God's people (cf. Is 5:1-7), the tenants are Israel's rulers, the messengers are God's prophets, and the owner's son is Jesus. The whole parable pushes Luke's narrative forward—i.e., it helps readers interpret this whole chapter and the rest of the story in Luke and Acts.

Israel – especially the nation's leaders – has repeatedly rejected God's messengers, and now they are about to reject His Son. Don't miss the irony in verse 19. They despise Jesus for applying this prophecy to them, but their reaction moves them toward fulfilling it! They are so offended when Jesus accuses them of trying to kill the son, they try to kill Him.

APP: Notice Jesus' distinction from the other OT prophets in the parable. He is not simply an especially favored servant. To describe Him accurately requires a whole new category altogether, shifting from "servant" to "son." Significantly, this was Jesus' own self-understanding. He is the one who put himself in this distinct category.

Because Israel's leaders reject God's Son, God is going to reject them. The "others" who receive the vineyard (v 16) are the disciples, the new leaders who take over headship within God's people. The former tenants – Israel's religious leaders – have proven unworthy, and Jesus has trained new leaders to replace them.

But the Son they reject will win in the end. This is all exactly as the Scriptures foretold (Ps 118:22).

APP: Everything rises and falls on Jesus (vv 17-18). Though rejected by His own people, He will become the foundation of God's kingdom (the cornerstone). Furthermore, He will be the focus of judgment in the future—those who rejected Him will be crushed.

APP: Jesus challenges His critics from the Bible (cf. v 17 – Ps 118:22; v 25 – Gen 1:26-27; v 37 – Ex 3:6; vv 42-3 – Ps 110:1). It might not be trendy, but it's definitely safe. Do you have this kind of confidence in the Bible? Do you go to the Bible first for your answers? Do you trust what it says? Are you confident that it answers the questions of critics?

Paying taxes to Caesar (19-26)

[Read vv 19-26.]

The flattery is meant as bait. They are saying, "Jesus, we love it that you always tell the truth no matter who might get offended. Even Rome." After their flattery (v 21), they set the trap: "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar?"

The people hated paying the Roman poll tax for both economic and religious reasons (since God was their true ruler). If Jesus said "No," He would likely be arrested and charged with sedition. If He said "Yes," He would lose popularity with the people. They have skewered him on the horns of a dilemma.

Jesus' answer surprises and confounds them. Why? And why did He seek out a coin to make that point?

- He seeks out a coin from them to make the point that they are already entrenched in Caesar's social system, which is fine, but it contains a critical implication. If they are willing to use Caesar's money to transact business, it's their obligation to render payment for his services. Caesar has provided them with coinage, civil order, religious liberty, political protection. They are immersed in Caesar's world, and it's only reasonable that they pay him for his benefits. It's a mild indictment, an "it's only reasonable" argument.

APP: Separation of church and state. The government has specific duties (protection of citizens, care for poor) and the Christian is to render Caesar his due (prayer, taxes, respect). This is one reason we pray regularly for our government leaders.

- But there's a deeper point, and a more indicting one Jesus seeks to make. Just like this coin bears Caesar's image and thus belongs to him, so that which bears God's image belongs to Him. "Render to Caesar the coins which bear his image, and render to God yourselves which bear His image." It's a profound answer, but it's more than profound. It's an indictment and a rebuke. Jesus is charging them: "You need to be less concerned about giving your money to Caesar and more concerned about giving yourselves to God."

APP: How many things in our lives would find their rightful place if we would devote ourselves wholly to God? The demand of the gospel is that you surrender EVERYTHING. Have you done it yet?

Sadducees ask about the resurrection (27-40)

[Read vv 27-40.]

Their ridiculous story is designed to show the incompatibility of the law of Moses with belief in the resurrection. They have latched on to an obscure law (levirate marriage, Dt 25:5-10) which was rarely if ever seen in daily life, and they have pitted it against the idea of an afterlife.

But instead of being left speechless and embarrassed, Jesus silences and embarrasses them. His answer has two parts. First, He exposes a critical fallacy in their argument. They have assumed that a future age – if any – would operate under the same social constructs as this one. "Everything there is going to remain just the same as it is here." Jesus rejects this by pointing out a rather obvious feature of the resurrection age—people there don't die anymore (v 36). And so, to answer their ridiculous story, there is no longer any need for marriage. Why not?

- 1) No more need to fill the earth via procreation (Gen 1:28).
- 2) We will never be alone; the fellowship and companionship that marriage was designed to provide (Gen 2:18) will be found in God and the family of believers.
- 3) Sexual impurity will no longer tempt us (1 Cor 7:1-5).
- 4) We will be fully sanctified.
- 5) The living reality of Christ's love for His people will be set before us, eliminating the need for the shadow which marriage provides in this life (Eph 5:32).

All of this turns the Sadducees clever scenario into a farce. Their question designed to show the absurdity of belief in a resurrection is itself shown to be absurd. It's like someone saying, "I sure hope my Medicare carries over into heaven."

APP: There will be a resurrection. Are you prepared to give account? The resurrection to life is only for those "considered worthy" (v 35). Not everyone can look forward to that blessed state.

For the second part of His answer, Jesus definitely proves that there is a resurrection. To make His point, He reaches back to the books of Moses, but not to an obscure corner of the Pentateuch like the Sadducees did. He goes right to the story of the burning bush, one of the most well-known passages in the whole Law.

The key phrase He finds there is this: "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob" (Ex 3:6). How does this prove the resurrection? Well, in the most obvious sense, dead people can't have a God; and from God's perspective, no one really dies (v 38).

But Jesus is saying something more significant and insightful than that. These familiar phrases from the OT evoked thoughts of God's special covenant with the Patriarchs, a covenant that wasn't fully realized in their lifetime. As the special covenant-making God of the Patriarchs, He still has some promises to keep to them. Only if there is a resurrection will they experience the fulfillment of God's promises to them. He is the original Promise Keeper, and He'll keep His promises even if He has to bring people back from the dead to do it.

APP: God keeps His promises.

JESUS ESTABLISHES HIS IDENTITY (20:41-44) **[Read vv 41-44.]**

The Hb titles/names in Psalm 110 read: "Yahweh says to Adonai." It means "The LORD (the God of Israel) says to David's Lord (the Messiah)."

If the Messiah is David's son, why does David call him "Lord"? ANSWER: Though the Messiah is the son of David, He is also greater than David, according to David himself. (NOTE: Luke's full answer to this question is recorded in Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:30-36. Jesus demonstrated exactly HOW He was superior to David through His resurrection. For now, Jesus' question remained unanswered, a riddle for His followers to puzzle over.)

JESUS UNMASKS HIS OPPONENTS (20:45-21:4) **[Read 20:45-21:4.]**

Jesus' opponents looked pretty impressive on the outside. But actually, they were a spiritual wreck. They don't really love people (v 47a) – they devour widows' estates. And they don't really love God (v 47b) – all their piety is a sham.

What was their main problem? They don't worship idols like their forefathers, they zealously study God's Law, they are really into their religious practices. **Pride (v 46)**. They don't do these things out of love for God or gratefulness to God. They do them to control God by earning His favor (which can't be done), to eliminate their need for Him, and to impress people.

But this widow who puts her whole offering in the collection? Now here is an example of true virtue. It's a gripping example of someone who rendered to God what is God's. She loves God so much that she would give her whole life away, with no one noticing but God Himself.

APP: God does not evaluate our gifts by their size but by their cost. It's HOW we give that matters most, not WHAT we give. As one writer put it: "He does not count, he weighs" (Bock). Or, in the words of another, "What matters is not the amount that one gives but the amount that one keeps" (Marshall, quoted in Morris).

APP: This is the good news of the gospel. Whom does God notice? Those who come in poverty, abandon all they are and have to Jesus, and take what He offers in return. It's a great trade.

2 Corinthians 8:9 *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.*

FINAL APP: Jesus answers His critics, asserts His own identity, and unmasks His opponents. Who are you? A critic? If so, will you think about His claims, His authority, His wisdom? The evidence demands you make a decision one way or the other. A “we don’t know” answer like the scribes and elders just won’t work.

Are you one of the hypocrites Jesus hammers in 45-47? Trying to impress people? Afraid to admit to yourself or to anyone else that you’re a mess inside and you need God? Won’t you let your guard down?

Christian friend, do you see Jesus’ irresistible authority and confounding wisdom? Worship Him. Trust Him. Surrender anew to Him.

[Song: “I Stand in Awe” chorus, 2x]

Benediction:

Numbers 6:24-26 ²⁴ *The LORD bless you and keep you;* ²⁵ *the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;* ²⁶ *the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.*

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