

The Heir Has Arrived

Luke 20:1-18

Manuscript and Discussion Guide for January 28, 2024

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After Jesus finished clearing the immoral commercialism and greed taking place in the Temple, He sat down to teach. A crowd formed quickly to hear what He had to say, and so did the religious leaders, who wanted to challenge Him with questions. Jesus was ready for their challenge, and had a question, a story, and a prophecy of His own. The point of Jesus' teaching still resonates with us today.

When I grew up and entered college, my parents had this unwritten rule for my brothers and for me: we would not bring a girl home for Christmas break unless she was the one. I dated Marsha for nearly four years and had never invited her home over Christmas break, and she knew why.

So, when I planned how to propose to her, on Thanksgiving weekend, a few weeks before Christmas break, I set everything up. I had the ring hidden out of sight and I asked her, "Would you like to go home with me on Christmas break?" Her eyes got wide; I knew she knew what that meant. But she didn't say anything.

So, I clarified it a little more by asking, "That is, if I can introduce you as my fiancé?" And then I said, "That is, if you will marry me?" And she said, "I don't know." Wait—that's not how this movie is supposed to go.

Now granted, if Marsha could come up here and tell you her side of the story, whenever we started talking seriously about marriage, I'd get cold feet, and sometimes I even broke up with her.

I told her I loved her and broke up 2 weeks later; I gave her a promise ring and broke up 2 weeks later. I had cold feet. She would say I had a cold heart.

So, when I proposed, she heard me saying we were going to break up 2 weeks later; I heard me saying, we were going to get married 6 months later.

So, I had some clarifying to do! And as I like to tell it, I talked her into saying “Yes!” And here we are, 43 years later, and am I ever glad she said “Yes!”

It’s easy to miss the true meaning of what someone might be trying to say to you.

This past week, somebody sent me a humorous quote that went like this: “When older people say to you as young parents, ‘Enjoy them while they’re young,’ they’re talking about your knees, not your children.”

You might want to clarify!

Well, if you could write a caption at the beginning of Luke 20, which is where we arrive today, you could write the word “Clarification.”

It’s a chapter of clarifying questions and answers. In fact, Bible scholars entitle what takes place now as “The Day of Questions.”

William Barclay, The Gospel of Luke (Westminster Press, 1975), p. 243

You’ll find nearly a dozen questions in **Luke 20**, and here’s one of the first questions we’ll cover today in **verse 1**:

One day, as Jesus was teaching the people in the temple and preaching the gospel, the chief priests and the scribes with the elders came up and said to him, “Tell us by what authority you do these things, or who it is that gave you this authority?”

Luke 20:1-2

By the way, chief priests, scribes and elders is code for the Sanhedrin—Israel’s Supreme Court.

And they’re not happy.

In the last 72 hours, Jesus has accepted the adoration of the people who declared Him to be King and Messiah. He’s cleared the court of the Gentiles, effectively cleansing the temple. He’s called the temple leaders “thieves or robbers”; He’s even referred to the temple as “His House.” “This is My House!” And now He’s now turned the temple into His private pulpit.

So, the Sanhedrin now show up to examine Jesus.

One author pointed out that the Jewish people would have been inspecting their Passover lambs during these few days to make sure lambs had no blemishes that would disqualify them. So, Jesus—the final Passover Lamb—is being examined and tested and He will indeed prove to be without sin.

John's Gospel account indicates that Jesus typically taught in what is commonly called, Solomon's Porch (John 10:23).



Solomon's porch was a covered area—a colonnade—that opened along the eastern side of the Court of the Gentiles.

Now that all the money changers are gone, and all the stalls of the merchants have been removed, traffic is no longer allowed to cut through here; it would have become quiet, worshipful, a "House of prayer and meditation and learning."

The Lord's voice would have echoed easily along that marble pavement and the nearby temple building itself.

Jesus has essentially reclaimed the temple for its original purpose.

Now at this point, the court is filled with people who've come to see and hear the Lord.



We have every indication that thousands of people had gathered and would have been eager to hear Him teach; this was a Passover season like none other.

But the Sanhedrin isn't happy at all. The priesthood is losing money by the hour with all the merchants scattered, but greater than that, they are losing face.

Jesus had called them thieves—earlier He had called them a brood of poisonous serpents.

And now He's taken over the courtyard and turned it into a classroom. They are thinking, "We must stop this; we have to shut this down! Who does He think He is?"

And that's the clarification they're after here: "By what authority have you taken over the temple?"

Now Jesus responds three ways:

- He asks *them* a perceptive question;
- then He tells them a convicting story;
- and finally, He applies some old prophecies to Himself.

And let me tell you, when He's finished, there will be no misunderstanding what He means; there will be no more need of clarification.

Here's the Lord's question back to them in verse 3:

He answered them, "I also will ask you a question. Now tell me, was the baptism of John from heaven or from man?"

Luke 20:3-4

In other words, where did this Old Testament prophet, John the Baptizer, get his authority to demand repentance and use baptism as a sign of preparation for the kingdom of God?

"Did he get his authority from God, or from you religious leaders?"

Now Jesus isn't just trying to avoid their question; He's not trying to be tricky here.

He knows that their answer to *His* question will answer their own.

Barclay, p. 244

How's that?

Well, John the Baptizer was the forerunner of the Messiah. He had introduced Jesus to the nation as ***"The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"*** (*John 1:29*).

Sounds like his authority is from God!

So, these religious leaders retreat a little way away and huddle up and talk it over!

Adapted from Davis, p. 134

Verse 5:

And they discussed it with one another, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say, 'Why did you not believe him?' But if we say, 'From man,' all the people will stone us to death, for they are convinced that John was a prophet."

As we say it in the South, the Sanhedrin is in a pickle. That saying comes from the 16th century, when "pickle" was a hot sauce and to be submerged in "pickle" meant you were over your head in a difficult situation.

Well, the Sanhedrin is over their head and the heat just got turned up!

Now verse 7:

So they answered that they did not know where it came from. And Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

Luke 20:7-8

Jesus effectively says, “I’m not going to pat you on the head like a little child who doesn’t know the answer because you know the obvious answer regarding John, the Old Testament prophet.

So, why don’t you sit over there without interrupting and listen while I tell everybody here a story.” **Verse 9:**

And he began to tell the people this parable: “A man planted a vineyard and let it out to tenants and went into another country for a long while.”

Luke 20:9

Stop for a moment. Everybody understood this context.

A vineyard was commonly rented out in Israel.

We know from history that along the Sea of Galilee there were vast estates owned by foreigners who lived some distance away but would lease their vineyards to farmers in the Jewish community.

William Hendriksen, Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke (Baker Book House, 1978), p. 891

So, everybody would have understood the Lord’s story because a vineyard was commonly rented out in Israel.

But even more significantly, a vineyard was a common reference to Israel. Israel was pictured in the Old Testament as God’s vineyard.

The prophet Isaiah said, **“The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel” (Isaiah 5:7).**

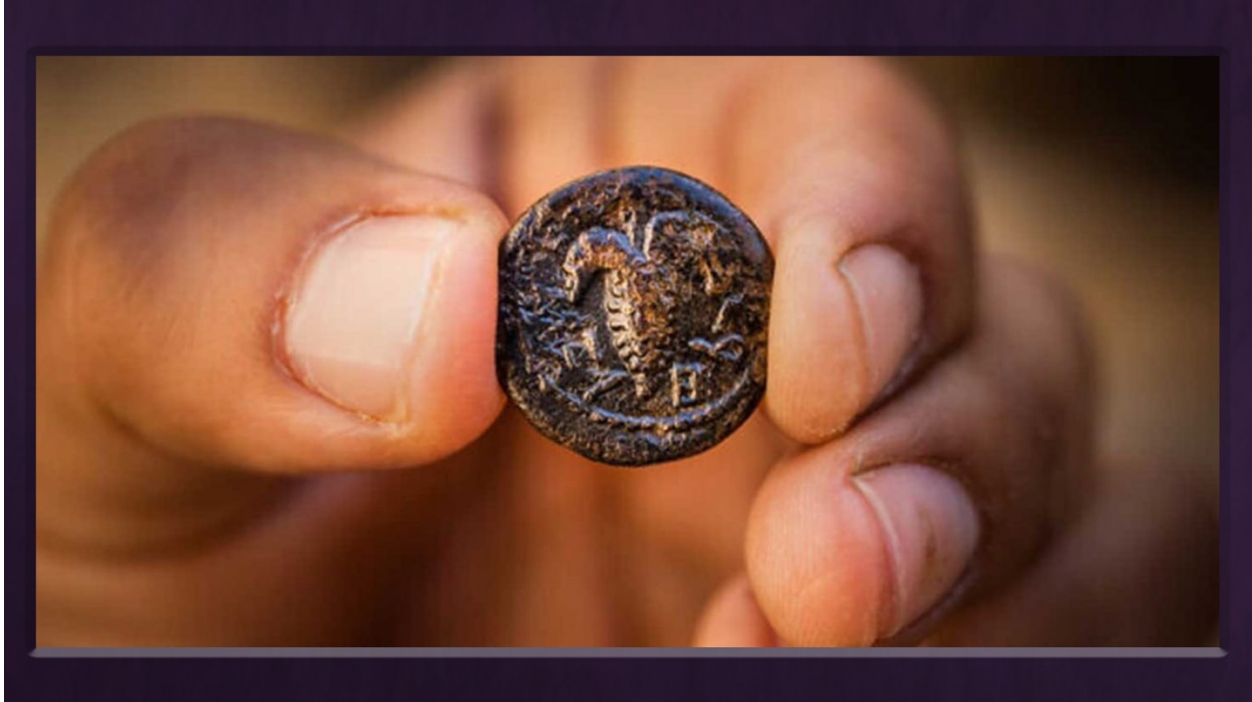
The Psalmist said this of God: **“You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it; it took deep root and filled the land” (Psalm 80:8-9).**

It’s no coincidence that the grape vine had become the artistic logo, the brand, so to speak, for the nation Israel.

Clusters of grapes signified the blessing of God upon Israel.

In fact, just a few years ago coins were discovered near the Temple Mount. These coins had been minted more than one hundred years before the birth of Christ.

On one side is a palm tree and the word “Jerusalem”; on the other side is a cluster of grapes on a vine.



But there's something else going on here. Jesus is teaching in the courtyard and all you had to do is go down the plaza and you would see the doorway into the Holy Place.



That opening was nearly 100 feet tall, and flanking that opening were two columns, and on those columns was a magnificent grapevine made of gold. Its branches and leaves were sculpted out of solid gold. Clusters of grapes 6 feet long were sculpted into the vine. The

grapes were crafted using precious gems. Wealthy Jews would embellish this grapevine from time to time. Someone would donate gold for another leaf; another might add a jewel, or an entire cluster of precious gems.

Adapted from R. Kent Hughes, [Luke: Volume Two](#) (Crossway Books, 1998), p. 255

This grapevine was the symbol of God's ownership of Israel; He had pulled them out of Egypt and had planted them in the land of promise.

Now verse 10:

"When the time came, he sent a servant to the tenants, so that they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed."

Luke 20:10

Under normal business practices, were this to happen, law officers would immediately be sent over there, and these tenants would have been arrested and put into jail.

So don't miss the vineyard owner's patience here in **verse 11:**

"And he sent another servant. But they also beat and treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed. And he sent yet a third. This one also they wounded and cast out."

Luke 20:11-12

By the way, the word *doulos*, translated **servant**, is a term used in the Old Testament Greek translation for the prophets of God.

The nation Israel historically mistreated, ignored, mocked, and threatened them. Like Elijah, they put a price on his head. The queen told him he was as good as dead, and Elijah ran for his life.

Over the centuries, the servants of God have been sent out and they have been thrown out.

Now verse 13:

"Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son.'"

This is the same expression heard on the day Jesus was baptized by John. The Father's voice from heaven said: "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

Let me tell you, this parable is becoming prophetic.

"I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.' But when the tenants saw him, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours.' And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others." When they heard this, they said, "Surely not!"

Luke 20:13-16

This expression relates to the entirety of the parable, not just the final line. These people can't imagine the vineyard owner sending his son and the tenants committing murder.

Remember, the Sanhedrin has already decided to put Jesus to death. They've already been planning the death of God's beloved Son.

They will take Him outside the city, just like the heir of this vineyard, this beloved son.

Hebrews 13:12 says that Jesus died outside the city gate.

There's no missing the meaning here; no more need for clarification; the players in this dramatic parable are easily identified:

- The vineyard owner is God the Father.
- The vineyard is the nation Israel.
- The tenant farmers are the religious leaders.
- The servants are the prophets of God.
- The beloved son is Jesus, the son of God.
- And the "others" who are invited into the vineyard are the Gentile nations.

I imagine the Sanhedrin is stunned; you could've heard a pin drop as Jesus delivers the verdict. And He does so by quoting old prophecies and applying them to Himself in **verse 17:**

But he looked directly at them and said, "What then is this that is written: 'The stone that he builders rejected has become the cornerstone?'"

Luke 20:17

The Sanhedrin—the religious leaders, those who were supposed to build up and lead the nation correctly—have rejected the cornerstone.

They wanted the benefits; they wanted the produce; they wanted the power; they wanted whatever God would give them, but they ultimately rejected the Son of God.

The world just did that not long ago. There was a universal celebration of Christmas, but no manger scenes were allowed on public property.

Barton, p. 452

Christmas carols could be heard by Bing Crosby but nothing from a church choir.

The world had a birthday party without inviting the guest of honor.

Let me tell you, if people threw a birthday party today without inviting the birthday boy, the birthday boy would probably sue them for emotional distress.

But Jesus isn't going to sue; He's planning to suffer; this is His plan. He is the Final Passover Lamb.

There's something else significant about this prophecy Jesus mentions here; when Jesus was riding into Jerusalem, you might remember that people were singing from **Psalm 118:26**.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Psalm 118:26

They changed the lyrics and applied it to Jesus.

And now Jesus pulls another verse out of Psalm 118, applying it to Himself as Messiah. These are the lyrics of **Psalm 118 verse 22**:

The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

Psalm 118:22

This was a declaration of Christ's preeminent authority. He is the cornerstone, not only of the house of Israel, but the cornerstone of the future kingdom. The apostle Paul even used this of the Lord as the cornerstone of the church (Ephesians 2:20).

God hasn't rejected Israel forever, but during this time when Israel rejected His Son, **Romans chapter 11** tells us, He is now allowing others into the vineyard: Gentile believers, in this dispensation of the church age.

Believers of all nations, who because of their faith in Christ as their Messiah, Paul writes, allows them to be grafted into the branches. In the analogy of this parable, we get into the vineyard, and we're grafted into the vine, which is, in reality, Jesus Christ our Lord.

By the way, a cornerstone played the most important role in architecture. It was the most important stone in a building. It became the reference point by which every part of the building was measured.

Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Luke* (Zondervan, 2012), p. 459

It governed every angle in the foundation and the building itself.

Lenski, p. 984

That's another way of saying that the cornerstone became *the* authority, *the* correct standard for *all* of life.

Now with that, Jesus issues a severe warning here as he brings out another Old Testament prophecy from the Book of Daniel; He says to them here in **verse 18**:

“Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.”

Luke 20:18

The verb here for crush can mean, “to grind into powder.”

This is a serious warning. The time of patience will one day be over. The owner of the vineyard is planning to bring holy justice to everyone who rejects His beloved Son.

Don't misunderstand God's *delay* as your *deliverance*; don't misunderstand His *patience* as *indifference*.

This crushing stone the prophet Daniel refers to in Daniel 2 is the Messiah who will one day crush every nation and every person who rejected Him.

Jesus is warning His audience then and He's warning this audience today that He will keep these prophetic promises.

In the meantime, we should be moved by the incredible patience of God. God is incredibly patient with the world today.

Martin Luther, the reformer said some 500 years ago in his rather blunt manner, “If I were God and the world treated me like it treated Him, I would kick the wretched thing to pieces.”

There's an honest theologian for you.

God's patience with the world's unbelief of Christ has lasted 2,000 years.

Let me ask you: how long has He been patient with your unbelief? Are you trying His patience today?

The good news is, if you're still alive and breathing, His invitation is still open. Make Him your Passover Lamb, ask Him to take away your sin and claim Him as your Messiah and King.

Even for believers today, remember He is your cornerstone. Let Him determine the angles of your life; let Him be the measurement for what is right and wrong; let Him be the standard for what is straight and true.

Two observations now in closing:

First, this scene demands a personal decision.

Don't make the same one they did.

Second, this scene deserves our passionate devotion.

Don't withhold your service to Him and praise to Him. He is indeed the Beloved Son, the Passover Lamb who died to take away your sin and mine. He is the King who is coming for us one day.

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