

## **The Gospel According to Luke**

Luke 20:19-26

**Reading:** Mark 12:13-17

**Parallel Passages:** *Matthew 22:15-22 and Mark 12:13-17*

Sermon #85

July 26, 2020

### **Jesus Exposes His Enemies' Hearts**

#### **Deceived By Human Desire**

Jesus had just spoken the parable of the wicked tenants of the vineyard of Israel and the religious leaders knew that He was speaking against them. They knew that they were the ones entrusted with the vineyard of Israel and that they were the ones killing the servants or the prophets of God and they were the ones about to kill God's only Beloved Son. Yet, their hearts were so hard or as the Scriptures says they had a "heart of stone" (Ezekiel 36:26) they were about to commit the most wicked murder the world has ever seen in service to the evil one.

As humans we may not fully understand why it has to be so; but we know the murder of Jesus as the one true and final sacrifice was within God's perfect plan, to provide salvation for His people. All sin, but one, can be forgiven by God the Father through God the Son to those who believe in Jesus and have a repentant heart. Jesus said blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and giving credit to Satan for that which is God's will not be forgiven. As recorded in the Gospel According to Mark, Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, <sup>29</sup> but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin" (Mark 3:28-29) Praise God, that all other sins are forgiven and yet, those who commit sins, that includes every human – including you and me, commits a crime against God's holiness and are in no way excused of their actions. They are forgiven their sins when they repent because God the Father sees these people through the lens of the perfect life of Jesus. However, the unrepentant, one might ask, why are they so opposed to Jesus? Mainly, they are out

for their own fame and fortune and to admit their sins means to admit the desperate need for a Savior. To avoid being convicted of their sin they deny Jesus. This allows people to come much closer to achieving their worldly goals without Jesus than they would be with Him. Simply put, Jesus was and is bad for business. For those with a heart of stone, their purpose is to remove Jesus from every aspect of life to avoid the conscience God placed in each person and deny there is such a thing as sin. We see this happening all around us as our society tears itself apart.

Here in Luke's gospel these wicked rulers understand that they cannot capture Jesus using a frontal assault for He has not violated Scripture and had the love and support of many people. Knowing that the people love Jesus and as Luke said, the people hung on Jesus' every word, for them to seize Him in public would turn the people against them; and this would risk their position and power. So, they continue their scheming and plotting for how they might kill Jesus and retain their power. Their plan at this point is to place spies in the midst of Jesus, posing as His followers. These spies begin to ask Jesus loaded questions hoping to catch Him in an answer that would be heresy or blasphemy or an answer in which Rome would take offense of and act against Jesus. In short, they would try anything to discredit Jesus. This behavior reminds me of when Joyce and I worked in Pakistan. There was a man who pretended he became a believer. For 5 years he gained the trust of both missionaries and national believers. However, in truth, he was part of the secret police and collected information. The day came when he turned over all his information of names, locations and systems; suddenly the secret police and military broke down doors, the alarm was sent out and everyone scattered and hid. Not everyone was able to do so and some were arrested and some killed. This is why we are to focus on the fruit of the Spirit or the absence thereof. This is why it is important for believers to publicly profess their belief in and allegiance to Jesus. As Jesus said be wise and <sup>15</sup> **“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but**

inwardly are ravenous wolves. <sup>16</sup> You will recognize them by their fruits.” (Matthew 7:15-

16) Knowing the Word of God, believing the Word of God and living the Word of God helps one to identify the true or the fake and false.

In today's passage Jesus takes the spies' question and answers it in such a way as to silence those spies and teach a godly principal to His true followers. His answer is so remarkable and simple, all His accusers fall silent and again His authority is seen. It is important to recognize here that Jesus refused to be sidetracked into debating political opinions where He would side with the religious leaders or Rome but He keeps on course with the mission given by God the Father that would result in salvation for sinners.

Through all things and at all times Jesus stays true to His mission. However, as fallen and sinful people we are tempted by the things of the world and can lose track of the path God calls us to. The evil one will try to divert us not on the obviously wrong things but on the trivial things to take our focus off of God. Unusually, it is not a choice between good and obvious evil, but good verses best or right verses the pragmatic. As at the time of Christ, it is also true for us today; we can over emphasize the importance of politics. The people of Jesus time very concerned with Rome's occupation, their inept leadership and internal political struggles. We are experiencing extreme internal political struggles and breakdown of the foundation of our society. We need to remember as believers, who are sojourners, traveling though this world with a focus on Christ and heaven, and we need to stay rooted in Christ, living for His glory and being obedient to share His gospel. As Christians living in a broken world and led by governments and leaders who do not know Christ and seek their own power, fame and wealth how are we to live? How are we to live in the United States when it is tearing itself apart politically? How are we to live in a difficult time in New Mexico under the whims

and rules of a governor not base on science or facts; rules that openly discriminate against churches and Christians? How are we to live with our society that says the truths of God are not only absurd but are meant to hurt people and their self-imposed freedoms? For the answer to these questions, please stand and hear the Word of God with eternal power and truth.

## **Scripture Reading**

### **Opening Prayer**

This short encounter between Jesus and the leadership and their spies is found in Matthew, Mark and here is Luke. We learn some important facts from each record. To better understand we need to briefly understand each of the groups found in this passage.

### ***Those involved within this short passage of Luke 20:19 to 26***

Some background information on who some of these groups are can be found in your bulletin and in the sermon notes online.

- Scribes and chief priests (Lk. 20:19)
- Spies or those who pretended to follow Jesus in order to discredit Him.
  - Pharisees and Herodians (Mt. 22:16 & Mk. 12:13)
  - Sadducees (by implication in Mt.16:6)
- Followers of Jesus and the audience to the observed the exchange between the spies and Jesus.
- Jesus the Teacher of eternal truth, only Begotten Son of God the Father and the long-awaited Messiah or Christ.
- Caesar; ruler of the Romans Empire which occupied and controlled Israel.
- God; the Creator of everything that exists.

## **Motivated By Evil** (v. 19-22)

The first thing we can take note of as we read verses 19 to 22 is the hypocrisy of Jesus accusers. Read beginning at verse 19, “The scribes and the chief priests sought to lay hands on him at that very hour, for they perceived that he had told this parable against them, but they feared the people. <sup>20</sup> So they watched him and sent spies, who pretended to be sincere, that they might catch him in something he said, so as to deliver him up to the authority and jurisdiction of the governor. <sup>21</sup> So they asked him, “Teacher, we know that you speak and teach rightly, and show no partiality, but truly teach the way of God. <sup>22</sup> Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar, or not?” The scribes were to interrupt the laws of God to help the people know how God commanded them to live. However, they added many man-made laws that hindered people’s relationship with God. They themselves were to be obedient to God and live for His glory, but they failed because of their selfish ambitions. They were in truth enemies of God.

Because they were afraid of the people they would not openly act against Jesus, they were men of deception and hidden sin. They decided the best approach was to flatter Jesus in order to trap Him. They begin by saying something they absolutely did not believe, yet the scriptures prove to be true, “Teacher, we know that you speak and teach rightly, and show no partiality, but truly teach the way of God.” Jesus is not swayed by these words; He is not taken off His guard for He knew the nature of every one of these men’s hearts. If they believed that Jesus is not swayed by others or shows not partiality to others, if they really believed He taught the true way of God, they themselves would have become His followers. If they believed what they said, they would themselves not have feared the people. Another piece of hypocrisy is that it was obvious to Jesus, but hidden from the people, their evil intentions and that they lied to hid their true purposes. It is interesting to me

that a religious leader, who claims belief in God would thinking lying is justified to bring about the result God desires. I grew up in a house where my mom lied all the time, she even lied when there was no reason to lie – so I grew up thinking lying was OK if it got what you wanted or served your purpose. However, once God saved me several of my weaknesses and styles of sin were brought forth and only by the power of God the Holy Spirit was I able to overcome them. So, it is obvious to me these men do not serve God and certainly do not have God's Spirit within them. This is like so many people today; they say Jesus is a good teacher or prophet and yet, they do not change in any manner.

I am reminded of what C. S. Lewis wrote in *Mere Christianity*, which was based on a series of BBC radio broadcasts. Lewis put forth this argument, let me read, *“I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. ... Now it seems to me obvious that He was neither a lunatic nor a fiend: and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that He was and is God.”* (Lewis, C. S., *Mere Christianity*, London: Collins, 1952, pp. 54–56) It would be well worth your time to read Lewis' many writings for he was a man, who once saved, had great insights concerning God.

I have learned that to come to an understanding of what a person really believes you not only listen to their words, but their behavior over time will reveal what they truly value and believe. Here these Scribes and Priests were living out what they truly believed; they did not believe Jesus was the Messiah, even though His teachings proved true, they believed He was their enemy and they did believe He was a threat that needed to be eliminated.

We, you and me, must also consider how our behavior reveals what we value and believe. Do our words reveal our hearts or do we hide our true beliefs behind insincere words? Do our actions, our behavior, support the words we use? St. Francis of Assisi is attributed with saying, “Preach the Gospel at all times, use words if necessary.” He knew words and behavior must go hand-in-hand. We are called to preach the Gospel of Jesus at all times and people will take notice if our behavior supports our words. If one is a hypocrite and their words and behavior do not match, not only do they hurt themselves, but damage the Kingdom of God. Just as in our passage this morning, these Scribes and Priests claimed to be servants of God while at the same time planning the death of God’s beloved Son. Their behavior revealed who they really were and what they really believed. They were deceivers and liars and **not** sons of God, but sons of Satan. If you think me harsh, listen to what Jesus said, of these people on another occasion, as recorded in John. Those who listened to Jesus and pretended to believe, but in their hearts they were incensed by what Jesus taught. They said to Jesus, <sup>39</sup>“ ‘Abraham is our father.’ Jesus said to them, ‘If you were Abraham’s children, you would be doing the works Abraham did, <sup>40</sup> but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. <sup>41</sup> You are doing the works your father did.’ They said to him, ‘We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father—even God.’ <sup>42</sup> Jesus said to them, ‘If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent

me. <sup>43</sup> Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. <sup>44</sup> **You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires.** He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. <sup>45</sup> But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. <sup>46</sup> Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? <sup>47</sup> Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.' ” (John 8:39-47) The lesson we are to take away from Jesus' teaching is this; Jesus speaks the truth and He is from God the Father of truth. On the other hand, the Jewish leaders speak lies and they are from their father the devil because he speaks lies.

My prayer for us is that we deal justly and honestly and speak the truth in love, just as God does. We must never consider what will happen by telling the truth. But we should consider and know this; a lie may in fact get us out of certain consequences for the time but lies will always come back and at some point, you will be exposed. Further, when one speaks lies, they are speaking as the devil does. Instead, we must always consider what the right thing to do is and the right things to say and do not concern ourselves with the outcome – for the outcome will be as God desires.

Having flattered Jesus, the spies now ask a question meant to trap Him. Their hope is Jesus will either offend Rome or the people. In verse 22, they ask, **“Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar, or not?”** This reminds me of the question, “Have you stopped beating your wife?” If you answer “Yes”, then you use to beat your wife, which is terrible. If you answer “no”, then you are still beating your wife, which is worse. Verse 22's questions was a reminder that paying taxes to



Rome was an everyday reminder to the people that Rome occupied and controlled Judea and had authority over the people.

A little background might help; there had been some resistance over the years to paying taxes and other Roman imposed laws. About 15 years before this event, there was a small rebellion against Rome by those called the Zealots. In fact, one of Jesus' followers was known as Simon the Zealot, and this was not Simon Peter. The Zealots were extreme Jewish nationalists who resisted Rome's domination. It was in light of these events that tensions often were at an elevated level between Jews and Romans. It was in these volatile circumstances the Jewish leadership found an opportunity to trap Jesus. If Jesus answered the Tribute Tax was not lawful, then they would have grounds to arrest Him as someone opposing Rome. If Jesus answers yes, then they can use this to stir up the Jews opposed to Rome against Jesus. Jesus had a mission to accomplish and He was not about to let these deceivers take him off course. So, our Lord turns the tables and reveals the hearts of those confronting Him.

### **Trapped By Their Own Deceit** (v. 23-26)

It is clear by Jesus' response that He knew these Scribes and Priests were spies and He knew their deceitful hearts and what they were attempting to do. Reading at verse 23, "But he perceived their craftiness, and said to them, <sup>24</sup> 'Show me a denarius. Whose likeness and inscription does it have?' They said, 'Caesar's.' <sup>25</sup> He said to them, 'Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.' <sup>26</sup> And they were not able in the presence of the people to catch him in what he said, but marveling at his answer they became silent."

An important fact is that it was the Jewish leadership who collected the Tribute Tax paid to Caesar. People entering the Temple had to pay a tax of ½

Shekel, but the Jewish leadership had to pay tax to Rome in denarius. So, when Jesus says, “**Show me a denarius**” He is also pointing out that the Sanhedrin who collected the temple taxes and other taxes paid Rome in denarius. It was the elders, chief priests and scribes who made up the Sanhedrin. It was the Sanhedrin who collected this tax from the people for Rome. This Tribute Tax had to be paid for with the silver denarius the money of their Roman occupiers. The tax was over and above their other tax responsibilities of the people of Judea. It was paid with one silver denarius per male. When Jesus asks them for a denarius, He was exposing the hypocrisy of their question. It stands to reason, those who possess the denarius also possess the answer to their own question. They were, in fact, saying it is lawful to pay the Tribute Tax to Caesar because they were the ones with pockets full of denarius coins. Rome viewed Augustus Caesar as divine and Tiberius, his son also as divine. Because the Jewish leaders collected the Tribute Tax, which was a tax paid in honor of the divine Caesar, they were money collectors for a false deity and they were not caring for the things of God. What is more, in the discourse that immediately follows, Jesus in essence charges them, together with the Sanhedrin, with being about the business of Rome rather than about the business of God.

Jesus continues saying to them, “**Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.**” Jesus is saying you are the collectors of Rome’s taxes, so, pay Caesar the things that are his, but you need to give God what is due Him. Jesus shows that there are two kingdoms; man’s and God’s. These leaders by their actions and the fact that they are carrying denarius coins indicates they in truth served and are in the pockets of Rome. As Jesus had said earlier in chapter 16 of Luke, <sup>13</sup> “**‘No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.’**” <sup>14</sup> **The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him.** <sup>15</sup> **And he said to them, ‘You**

are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.’ ” (Luke 16:13-15) The leaders are exposed as servants of Rome and man’s world and their desire for power. The deception of the Scribes and Priests does not work and just the opposite is the result; their deceitful hearts are revealed and their efforts to retain power has alienated them with Rome. So, Luke ends this exchange with, <sup>26</sup>“And they were not able in the presence of the people to catch him in what he said, but marveling at his answer they became silent.”

It is important for us to see that in this confrontation, Jesus eludes the trap set by the Jewish leaders and teaches His disciples. First, He is not going to get sidetracked and be lured into a political debate over where a Jewish citizen has any responsibilities when it comes to the Roman occupation. He instead turns the attention of everyone to whether or not they are living out their responsibilities that they had toward God.

We have a great example of how not to be sidetracked by political issues. Jesus stays the course and focuses on God’s Kingdom not the kingdom of men. I do not know how it is for you, but the current contentious political environment is difficult. With the 2020 election coming around the corner, where should my focus be as a Christian? First, I must realize that I do have responsibilities as a citizen to uphold the laws of the land, to live peacefully and to pay my fair share of taxes. As a citizen of the United States, I have the responsibility to vote. These and other things fall on me as a citizen. However, I must not get sidetracked on political issues. Second, I want to make clear that our society is not Christian. America when it was founded was influenced by Christian principals, but this does not make America a Christian nation. As a nation we have been moving away from Christian principles for many years. Those who make important

decisions in our country, for the most part, are not Christians, nor are the decisions coming from a Christian worldview. This then brings forth an important question, “How am I to live in a society that is non-Christian and becoming ever more anti-Christian? I render unto Caesar or my country, the things that are Caesar’s and render unto God the things that are God’s. When these two kingdoms are in conflict, I obey God rather than men. We are given an example of what God expected from the Apostles in the Book of Acts and by application what God expects from you and me. The Apostles were arrested for preaching the Gospel of Christ in Acts chapter 5, <sup>27</sup> “when they had brought *the Apostles*, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, <sup>28</sup> saying, ‘We strictly charged you not to teach in this name (*Jesus Christ*), yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.’ <sup>29</sup> But Peter and the apostles answered, ‘We must obey God rather than men.’ ” The Apostles knew the price for stand firm in the faith and ultimately most gave their lives as a testimony to Christ.

The key to living in a society that is non-Christian and even at times anti-Christian is to not fear man. The religious leaders were caught up in worrying what people thought and desiring to keep their power by capitulating to Rome. What is popular must never drive ones thinking or behavior. As Peter said, ‘We must obey God rather than men.’ ” Obey the Lord even if the whole world goes a different direction. Render unto God the things that are God’s; to be true Christians, we are slaves of our Lord and owe Him our loyalty, obedience, trust and love above everything else in this world. As a church we are to live for the glory of God as individuals, as families and as a community. We strengthen each other in a lost world. We need Jesus and the Holy Spirit and we need each other. When we enter heaven may we hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.” (Matthew 25:21)

The **Pharisees** were a Jewish sect that influenced the religious and social thought which controlled much of Israel's political and religious government during the Second Temple period. They were a much larger group than the Sadducees, After the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 A. D., the interpretations of scripture and the man-made rules of the Pharisees became the foundation for the liturgy and ritual that is followed today by Rabbinic Judaism.

The **Sadducees** were a Jewish sect who had control of Jewish law and temple ritual in Judea during the Second Temple period until the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 A.D. Most were of the upper social and economic echelon of Judean society. As a whole, they fulfilled various political, social, and religious roles, including maintaining the Temple in Jerusalem and controlled important positions such as the chief priests and temple priests. The group became extinct sometime after the destruction of Second Temple.

Longstanding social and religious conflicts took place between Pharisees and Sadducees, which were made exacerbated by the Sadducees tendency to side with Roman rule. There was conflict between those who favored Hellenization (the Sadducees) and those who resisted it (the Pharisees), Secondly, conflict existed between those who emphasized the importance of the Second Temple with its rites and services, and those who emphasized the importance of living according to Mosaic Laws. A third point of conflict, specifically religious, involved different interpretations of the Torah and how to apply it to daily Jewish life. Lastly, of great interest to the common person, was conflict regarding whether or not there is resurrection of the dead.

The **Herodians** were a sect of Hellenistic Jews that were hostile to Jesus' claim to Messiahship. They thought Herod the Great was the Messiah and therefore desired an Israel led by Herod's family. In the New Testament they are often mentioned in the gospels with the Pharisees in opposing Jesus. Herodians were a political party who distinguished themselves from the Pharisees and Sadducees because of their support of Herod the Great, who they felt was the rightful King of the Jews. The Herodians wanted political independence for the Jewish people. Unlike the Pharisees, who sought to restore the kingdom of David, the Herodians wished to restore a member of the Herodian dynasty to the throne.

The **Scribes** were originally hired by the leaders of the Pharisees and Sadducees to record what they dedicated to be recorded. They gradually grew into a class of scholars who taught and interpreted Jewish Law. In general, they were opposed to Jesus because of His threat to the power structure and class structure of Jewish society.

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