

Luke 19:45-48, 20:1-8
June 21, 2020

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: Authority is a fundamental question of life. We all have to decide who governs us at the individual level. Let's think about this.

- When you were a child, who had authority over you? [Parents]
- When you became a teenager, were your parents still your authority? [Most will say yes]
- When you became a believer, who became your authority? [God, through Jesus]

Transition: Last week, we processed the story of Jesus coming down the Mount of Olives on a donkey, while the crowd laid down their cloaks as he rode and praising Him with "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" If you recall, some Pharisees asked Jesus to **rebuke His disciples**, which He refused to do! The problem that these Jewish leaders faced was that Jesus and HIS AUTHORITY confronted THEIR AUTHORITY. This explains all of the run-ins Jesus tolerated when the Pharisees kept trying to accuse Him of violating the Law. Or when they accused Him of blasphemy. They are now at the point that they want to kill him.

Jesus understands that He has full authority from His Father. And in our next passage, we will see Him assert that He has authority over the Temple when He says, "MY HOUSE will be a house of prayer." Buckle up! Let's begin.

BOOK:

Jesus at the Temple

⁴⁵ Then he entered the temple area and began driving out those who were selling. ⁴⁶ "It is written," he said to them, "'My house will be a house of prayer' (Isa 56:7); but you have made it 'a den of robbers.'" (Jer 7:11)

⁴⁷ Every day he was teaching at the temple. But the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the leaders among the people were trying to kill him. ⁴⁸ Yet they could not find any way to do it, because all the people hung on his words.

The Authority of Jesus Questioned

20 One day as he was teaching the people in the temple courts and preaching the gospel, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, together with the elders, came up to him. ² "Tell us by what authority you are doing these things," they said. "Who gave you this authority?"

³ He replied, "I will also ask you a question. Tell me, ⁴ John's baptism—was it from heaven, or from men?"

⁵ They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Why didn't you believe him?'" ⁶ But if we say, 'From men,' all the people will stone us, because they are persuaded that John was a prophet."

⁷ So they answered, "We don't know where it was from."

⁸ Jesus said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things."

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

The problem the Jewish leaders faced is the same problem we've all had to face who come into contact with Jesus: ***His authority confronts our authority.*** "By what authority" is a fundamental question of life each of us must answer. Will we live our lives under God's authority or under some human authority, be it yourself or someone else?

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 1, pp. 255-257)*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Denunciation (vv. 45–48). Jesus lodged in Bethany that night (Matt. 21:17) and came into the city early the next morning. It was then that He cursed the fig tree (Mark 11:12–14) and cleansed the temple for the second time. (See John 2:13–22 for the record of the first cleansing of the temple.)

The court of the Gentiles was the only place in the temple that was available to the Gentiles. There the Jews could witness to their “pagan” neighbors and tell them about the one true and living God. But instead of being devoted to evangelism, the area was used for a “religious marketplace” where Jews from other lands could exchange money and purchase approved sacrifices. The priests managed this business and made a good profit from it.

Instead of *praying* for the people, the priests were *preying* on the people! The temple was not a “house of prayer” (Isa. 56:7); it was a “den of thieves” (Jer. 7:11). Campbell Morgan reminds us that a “den of thieves” is a place where thieves *run to hide* after they have committed their wicked deeds. The religious leaders were using the services of the holy temple to cover up their sins (see Isa. 1:1–20). But before we condemn them too harshly, have we ever gone to church and participated in religious worship just to give people the impression that we were godly?

Jesus remained in the temple and used it as a gathering place for those who needed help. He healed many who were sick and afflicted, and He taught the people the Word of God. The hypocritical religious leaders tried to destroy Him, but His hour had not yet come and they could not touch Him. In the days that followed, they argued with Him and tried to catch Him in His words (Luke 20), but they failed. When His hour came, He would surrender to them and they would crucify Him.

The courageous Son of God had set His face like a flint and come to Jerusalem. During His last week of ministry, He would courageously face His enemies and then bravely go to the cross to die for the sins of the world.

He still summons us to *be courageous!*

Jesus had already told the Twelve to expect conflict and suffering when they arrived in the Holy City. “The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day” (Luke 9:22). Jesus knew fully what was coming, and He was not afraid.

In this chapter, you meet the three groups of religious leaders (Luke 20:1) and witness their conflict with Jesus. They challenged Him because He had cleansed the temple and called them “thieves.” They tried to catch Him in His words so they could trump up some charge against Him and have Him arrested as an enemy of the state.

But there was more to this series of questions than mere guile. The word translated “rejected” in Luke 9:22 (and also Luke 20:17) means “to reject after investigation.” It was required that the Jews carefully examine the Passover lambs from the tenth day to the fourteenth day to make sure they had no blemishes (Ex. 12:1–6). Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God (John 1:29), was watched and tested by His enemies during that final week; and yet in spite of what they saw and learned, they rejected Him.

However, Jesus was also examining them! For as they questioned Him, He questioned them, and their responses revealed the ignorance, hatred, and unbelief of their hearts.

Our Lord's questions centered on four different men.

A Question about John the Baptist (Luke 20:1–8)

The cleansing of the temple was a dramatic event that both captured the attention of the people and aroused the anger of the religious establishment. The fact that Jesus daily made the temple His headquarters for ministry only made the members of the Sanhedrin more indignant, so they decided to question Him. “What authority do You have to do these things?” they asked. “And if You do have authority, who gave it to You?”

Authority is important for the success of any social, political, or religious organization; without authority, you have confusion. The chief priests claimed their authority from Moses, for the Law set the tribe of Levi apart to serve in the sanctuary. The scribes were students of the Law and claimed their authority from the rabbis whose interpretations they studied. The elders of Israel were the leaders of the families and clans, chosen usually for their experience and wisdom. All of these men were sure of their authority and were not afraid to confront Jesus.

They wanted to push our Lord into a dilemma so that no matter how He answered, He would be in trouble. If He said that He had no authority, then He was in trouble with the Jews for invading their temple and acting like a prophet. If He said that His authority came from God, then He would be in trouble with the Romans who were always alert to would-be messiahs, especially during Passover season (see Acts 5:34–39; 21:37–39).

Note our Lord's wise approach as He turned things around and put them completely on the defensive. First, He asked a question (Luke 20:3–8); then He gave a parable (Luke 20:9–16); and finally, He quoted a prophecy (Luke 20:17–18). In each of these approaches, He revealed the sins of the nation of Israel.

Their past rejection (vv. 3–8). Jesus took them back to John the Baptist for two reasons. First, John had pointed to Jesus and introduced Him to the nation (John 1:15–34), so their rejection of John was actually a rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Second, it is a spiritual principle that if we disobey truth we already know, God cannot reveal new truth to us (see John 7:14–17). Why answer their question when they had refused to submit to John's message?

Now it was the religious leaders who were in the dilemma! No matter what answer they gave, they were in trouble, so they decided to “play dumb” and not answer at all. They were deceitful in asking the question and dishonest in the way they avoided answering it. Even if Jesus had given them an answer, their hearts were not prepared to receive it. If they had disobeyed God's message given by John the Baptist (Luke 7:24–30), they would disobey the message given by God's Son. That was the theme of the parable Jesus told.

Martin, J. A. (1985). Isaiah. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 254-255)

B. Jesus in the temple (19:45–21:38)

Jesus cleansed the temple, disputed there with the religious leaders (20:1–21:4), and then told His disciples what would happen in the end times (21:5–36).

1. JESUS' CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE (19:45–46) (Matt. 21:12–13; Mark 11:15–17).

19:45–46. Jesus cleansed **the temple** twice—once at the beginning of His ministry (John 2:13–22), and again at the end of His ministry. Matthew, Mark, and Luke recorded the latter but

said nothing of the former. Because of Jesus' role as Messiah, His bringing ceremonial cleanliness to the nation was logical at both the beginning and the end of His ministry. In both cases His teaching in the temple was disregarded by the religious leaders.

Jesus quoted from Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11 as **He** was **driving out** the people **who were selling** in the temple. Mark adds that the buyers and money changers were also driven out, as well as people who were apparently taking shortcuts through the temple compound in their business dealings (Mark 11:15–16). Money changing was done because only certain coinage was then accepted in the temple from those who bought animals for sacrifices. The religious leaders made money off the system of buying and selling animals for sacrifice (thus making the temple **a den of robbers**). Also they led the people into mere formalism. A pilgrim traveling to Jerusalem could go to the temple, buy an animal, and offer it as a sacrifice without ever having anything to do with the animal. This led to an impersonalization of the sacrificial system. The commercial system was apparently set up in the area of the temple which had been designated for devout Gentiles to pray and so was disrupting Israel's witness to the surrounding world.

2. JESUS'S TEACHING IN THE TEMPLE (19:47–21:38)

The two parts of this section—Jesus disputing in the temple (20:1–21:4) and His teaching His disciples (21:5–36)—are bracketed by an introduction (19:47–48) and a conclusion (21:37–38). The introduction and conclusion show that the people were amazed at His teaching and liked to listen to Him, whereas in contrast the chief priests, leaders, and teachers of the Law wanted to kill Him (19:47).

a. The crowd's delight (19:47–48).

19:47–48. Jesus taught daily in **the temple** to the delight of the crowds. They **hung on His words**, but the religious **leaders** wanted **to kill Him**. **Yet they** feared the crowds (cf. 20:19; 22:2; Acts 5:26).

b. Jesus' disputing in the temple (20:1–21:4) (Matt. 21:23–23:37; Mark 11:27–12:44)

As a logical outcome of Jesus' cleansing of the temple, the religious leaders again rejected Him, and conflict arose. Jesus had upset the normal "religious" atmosphere of the temple, which led the religious leaders to question His authority.

20:1–8 (**Matt.** 21:23–27; **Mark** 11:27–33). The religious leaders asked Jesus where His authority came from. **The chief priests** were the temple officials; **the teachers of the Law**, often called "scribes," were made up of both Pharisees and Sadducees; and **the elders** may have been laymen who were political leaders. They asked two questions: **By what authority** was He acting, and **who gave Him this authority?** (Luke 20:2) The first question dealt with the kind of authority Jesus was using. Was He a prophet, a priest, or a king? No doubt the words **doing these things** referred to His cleansing the temple. The second question dealt with who was backing Him. Did Jesus believe that He was acting on His own or was He acting for some group?

Jesus responded with **a question**. He asked them about the authority behind **John's baptism**. The religious leaders had disapproved the baptizing work of John, for John had humiliated them and had taken away some allegiance from their religious system (Matt. 3:7–10). Because the crowds venerated John the Baptist, the religious leaders were afraid to deny his authority and

therefore refused to answer Jesus' question (Luke 20:7; cf. 19:48). So **Jesus** therefore refused to **tell ... by what authority** He had cleansed the temple. The implication was that He was doing His work with the same authority—God in heaven—by which John the Baptist baptized.

Butler, T. C. (2000). Luke (Vol. 3, pp. 320–322). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

E. The Agent of Glory and the Place of Glory: Cleansing the Temple (19:45–46)

SUPPORTING IDEA: *The rejected king of glory condemned the gory business of the temple and restored God's place of worship to its rightful glory.*

19:45. Having viewed the temple from the Mount of Olives, Jesus finally entered the city. For Luke, the first appearance in the city comes in the temple, the place where God's Messiah would be expected to appear. Did he find worship of God and praise for the grace and mercy of the saving Lord? Oh, no! He found secular business in the sacred precincts. The religious establishment had cornered the market on sacrificial lambs and birds and on changing money into the coins that were acceptable for temple offerings and purchases. The Pharisees and Saducees placed wealth above obedience. Jesus had to get rid of this. His Father's house must be pure and holy. Exit businessmen. Enter worshippers.

19:46. What authority did Jesus have for such actions? He had Scripture on his side. Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11 combine to show God's intent and the Jewish leaders' result. God established the temple as the place where his presence could be experienced and witnessed by the people. There his people could converse with him in prayer. Out of this conception of the temple grew the Book of Psalms with its prayers for all kinds of life situations.

But legalism had set in. Jewish rabbis established interpretations of laws and interpretations of interpretations. To be sure of obeying the law of sacrifice, a person felt obliged to purchase an animal at the temple. Other similar activities increased until commerce replaced conversation with God. The temple not only had commerce; it had a commercial monopoly. As usual with monopolies, prices rose to outrageous heights. Jesus described such monopolistic, price-gouging commerce as robbery. God could not stand for this. Exit commercial activities and animal stalls. Enter the royal king to reclaim his house for prayer and worship. The king had come not only to seek and to save the lost. He had come to save the temple from the thieves who occupied it.

F. The Glory Overrides Human Plans: Plotting and Listening (19:47–48)

SUPPORTING IDEA: *Jesus maintained control of his future even as the Pharisees plotted his death and the crowds stood spell-bound waiting for his moment of action.*

19:47. The cleansed house of prayer became Jesus' classroom. Here he taught the disciples and the crowds about God's kingdom. The Jewish leaders ignored his teaching. They had one goal—to destroy him. They revealed their true nature as people who opposed and rejected the one who visited them in the name of the Lord.

19:48. The power block's plotting could not succeed. It was not yet God's time. God used the power of popular appeal to keep the religious leaders at bay. The people hung on every word of Jesus, spellbound by his authority and his unique style of teaching. The religious leaders dared not cause an uproar among the people. Then Rome would interfere. They would lose all power just as Jesus had predicted. So the stage was set. When and how would the passion predictions of the Messiah come true? In what way would this be a victory for the religious establishment? In

what way would it be a victory for the sovereign plan of God to seek and to save the lost? How would the disciples react? How would the crowd respond?

MAIN IDEA REVIEW: *Jesus Christ is the king whom God sent to seek and save the lost, but his coming was only preliminary to his return to heaven to wait until the final coming when he will be revealed in all his glory. Death in God's time awaited him in his first coming to earth.*

The Compassionate Savior

Why did Jesus come? Jesus made his mission clear as he invited himself to a tax collector's home. He came to seek and to save the lost. Still, Jewish religious leaders bickered with him over who was lost. They felt secure in their religious system in which they controlled all authority and power.

Finally, Jesus approached Jerusalem. He looked at the holy city in its unholy state and grieved for it, pronouncing judgment on it and its inhabitants because they had rejected him, the one who represented God's visit to the city.

Entering the city, Jesus went to reclaim the temple because it had given way to legalistic religion and secular commerce. He drove out the businessmen and restored the order of prayer and worship that God intended. The king had momentarily reclaimed his home, but soon he would go to the far country; his prophecy of destruction would come true. The religious leaders were even then plotting his death.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Lk 19:45-20:8). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.