

Passion Week: Tuesday – *The King Throws Down*
Luke 20:1-21:4

Introduction: The Passion week is so familiar to us (we celebrate it, at least in part, every year), but as is so often the case, familiarity can breed a loss of wonder, marvel, and even desire to understand. We come to the Tuesday of this week where Jesus possesses the Temple after cleaning house on Monday, and demonstrates His Messianic credentials in open air debate with the religious leaders of the day. These two days were a pivot point in the week, moving the crowds from a shout of "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord" to "crucify Him" a few days later. How did that happen? How did these days unfold? Were they simply God *causing* it, or was there something else at play? Over the next few weeks we want to celebrate Jesus' sacrifice on the cross AS GOD, the ONLY worthy sacrifice to satisfy God's requirements and restore sinners. But we also want to observe the way Jesus functioned as a FULL MAN, embracing the limitations of humanity without embracing a hint of sin, but used the same resources that we have (God's sovereignty, God's Word, the Holy Spirit). In doing this, Jesus is our great High Priest, one who is able to **sympathize with our weakness, the One who was tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin** (Hebrews 4:15). This is Jesus, who understands us because He lived our life, faced the reality of temptation, and intercedes for us.

Remember, that a few weeks before this, there was a desire on the part of the religious leaders to put Him to death (John 11:53), and a public statement made to inform them where He was so they could arrest Him (John 11:57). In other words, Jesus was a wanted and hunted man so that He had to be deliberate and wise with every move that He made. He healed Lazarus, which created a buzz in the Passover pilgrims in Jerusalem (John 12:9) and travelled with this group on the East side of the Jordan until crossing over the river to Jericho. Here He healed two blind men, saved Zacchaeus, and walked with the crowd until He came to Bethany, a small village just outside of Jerusalem, letting the crowds go ahead of Him letting everyone else know that He'd be arriving on Sunday. When Jesus crested the Mount of Olives riding the foal of a donkey, the crowds were overwhelming in their praise, and though the Pharisees and Sadducees saw Him, they could NOT ARREST Him because they feared a revolt of the crowds (mob rule is a strong rule). Now Jesus would come *daily to the Temple* (Monday and Tuesday) for a few **very specific reasons:**

- **Calling for National Repentance** - Jesus presented Himself as the long awaited Messiah to the nation in the most sensible place: God's Temple. He was the solution to the corruption of a self-seeking religion, the end of a ritualistic sacrificial system, and access to the long missing presence of God. His arms were open wide, like a mother hen to her chicks, willing to embrace them, but only on His terms (Matthew 23:37). This is the same today: the door of the gospel is wide open, but the way is narrow, since it is a call to lay down ones life, not simply adding Jesus to the status quo.
- **Teaching and Warning** - These were the last days of PUBLIC teaching, calling all those who would listen to follow Him, but also warning the people against the false teaching of a crippled religion. This is the summation of His final teaching in the Temple: follow me into life, or follow the teachers over you into death - the choice is yours.
- **Uniting the Sanhedrin (Pharisees and Sadducees) against Him so that they would come to the same conclusion at the same time** - Perhaps this is the hardest to see in the text without understanding the culture in which Jesus lived. The Sanhedrin was the highest ruling body in Judaism and consisted of 70 men, split between Sadducees (controlled the Temple, hated by the people, non-religious) and Pharisees (controlled the Synagogue, loved by the people,

separatists and experts in the Law). This groups rarely agreed on anything but had to come to consensus about Jesus to get Him on the cross. They also had to convince the Romans to execute Jesus, since Jews were NOT allowed to put anyone to death. Jesus had to be deliberate in His actions to stay away from arrest too early, using the fear of the people to keep His distance (see Luke 20:19), but also get them to arrest Him at the right time. **Remember, NO ONE took Jesus' life from Himself, but He voluntarily and willingly laid it down for His sheep** (John 10:18)

The answer to the question of why did the people embrace Him on Sunday and call for His death Friday: Monday and Tuesday. On Monday, Jesus lines up the Sadducees, and on Tuesday it was the Pharisees turn to take a licking.

Clarity Through Open Air Debate

Taking the day as a whole, there were three challenges to Jesus and His authority on Tuesday in the Temple recorded by Luke. There was one predominant reason for these challenges: they were trying to get Jesus to SAY, ADMIT, and CLAIM that He was king so that they could claim insurrection against Caesar and have a one way ticket to death. This was the one reason that they could go to Pilate with for death, since insurrection against Rome was not tolerated at all. In other words, they could not kill Him just because they did not like Him, there had to be a reason.

Now, this was absolutely an acceptable mode of interaction in the culture. Open air debate was not only tolerated, it was welcomed in places like the courts of the Temple. In certain cultures, you display masculine prowess in different ways: arm wrestling, boxing, dance-offs, or what I read recently in early 1900's Germany it was knife fights that would leave men scarred for life (but feeling quite manly, I guess) In Jewish culture, if you really wanted to show your greatness over another you put him to shame in open debate. In fact, to today at modern Yeshiva's (where academic training takes place), a room will be full of 2 sided desks where debate will take place. A rabbi will throw out a question having to deal with an implication of the Law (*a man steals a loaf of bread, takes a bite, thinks better of it, puts the bite back - did He break the Law of stealing?*). They will debate for a good amount of time, and then switch sides to sharpen their understanding of the Law and practical applications. Jesus knew this type of debate and was a master at it (as an aside, so was Paul in his writings of Romans where he anticipates questions and answers them: *may we sin that grace would abound?! May it never be!* Rom. 6:1)

Here is what we want to point out about each debate. Questions were posed to Jesus to try to get Him to incriminate Himself, but He not only knew what they were doing (Luke 20:23), He engaged in a culturally acceptable way. In doing this, He not only showed His Messianic prowess and credentials, but put them to **open shame**. This culminated in the desired outcome at the end of Tuesday evening:

"And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to put Him to death, for they feared the people."
Luke 22:2

Challenge #1 – Who's Authority (20:1-8; cf. Matt. 21:23-27; Mark 11:27-33)

Luke 20:1-8 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 ² and said to him, "Tell us by what **authority** you do these things, or who it is that gave you this **authority**." ³ He answered them, "**I also will ask you a question**. Now tell me, ⁴ Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man?" ⁵ And they discussed it with one another, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say, 'Why did you not believe him?' ⁶ But if we say, 'From man,' all **the people will stone us to**

death, for they are convinced that John was a prophet." ⁷ **So they answered that they did not know where it came from.** ⁸ And Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

Notice that it was a group of Pharisees asking a question about authority. The hope was that Jesus would incriminate Himself like He did a few months earlier when He declared that He and God the Father were One (John 10:30), which caused them to want to stone Him. If He had made a statement of authority that would have been contrary to the rule of Rome or Caesar, their trap would have been sprung. But notice that Jesus followed cultural protocol and answered a question with a question. John the Baptist was still a popular figure among the people, and was only strengthened by his martyrdom at the hands of Herod. Here we see the leaders **fear of the people**, not merely for reputation but for their life itself. When they were unable to answer His question, it not only silenced His accusers, but it also would have infuriated them because they were shamed in open debate.

Challenge #2 – Is Caesar King? (20:19-26; cf. Matt. 22:15-22; Mark 12:13-17)

Luke 20:19 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.** ²⁰ 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. ²¹ So they asked him, "Teacher, we know that you speak and teach rightly, and show no partiality, but truly teach the way of God. ²² Is it **lawful** for us to give tribute to Caesar, or not?" ²³ But he perceived their **craftiness**, and said to them, ²⁴ "Show me a denarius. Whose likeness and inscription does it have?" They said, "Caesar's." ²⁵ He said to them, "**Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.**" ²⁶ 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.**

Apparently gluttons for punishment, another group came right after this (after a parable against them we will get to). This time they upped the ante, sending **spies to butter Him up with sincerity to CATCH HIM** in something that would incriminate Himself. Note that this was a continue of compromise for the religious leaders who would no longer operate according to THEIR OWN law, because they hated Jesus so much. Their question was designed to cause Him to say something **directly against Caesar**, which would have paved the path to bring Him to Pilate. Jesus answer was genius, understanding the Law and the motives of people. Taking a coin, he asked who's likeness graced it, to which they had to give the obvious answer. We have rightly have drawn implications for our paying taxes in America (less than a month to get those in, btw), but note what was really going on here. He turned a crafty crowd to silence, moving people from feigning sincerity to true marveling. Far from avoiding the question, He answered it truthfully, understanding the true nature of our life in an world system that is perpetually set against us. Paying taxes to Caesar recognized God's sovereignty over the nations, and submitting to a pagan ruler was the ultimate expression of submission to a holy God.

Challenge #3 – Is there a resurrection? (20:27-44; cf. Matt. 22:23-33; Mark 12:18-27)

Luke 20:27 There came to him some Sadducees, those who **deny that there is a resurrection,** ²⁸ and they asked him a question, saying, "Teacher, **Moses wrote** for us that if a man's brother dies, having a wife but no children, the man must take the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. ²⁹ Now there were seven brothers. The first took a wife, and died without children. ³⁰ And the second ³¹ and the third took her, and likewise all seven left no children and died. ³² Afterward the woman also died. ³³ **In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had her as wife.**" ³⁴ And Jesus said to them, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, ³⁵ but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage, ³⁶ for they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection. ³⁷ But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the bush, where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. ³⁸ Now he

is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him." ³⁹ **Then some of the scribes answered, "Teacher, you have spoken well."** ⁴⁰ **For they no longer dared to ask him any question.** ⁴¹ But he said to them, "How can they say that the Christ is David's son? ⁴² For David himself says in the Book of Psalms, "' The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, ⁴³ until I make your enemies your footstool.'" ⁴⁴ David thus calls him Lord, so how is he his son?"

The Sadducees wanted a piece of this action, so they entered the fray. We said last week that the Sadducees denied the resurrection of the dead as well as only accepting the Pentateuch (the first 5 books of the Bible) as having any kind of authority (this is not unlike today, where people like certain parts of the Bible but reject others. We hold to what 2 Timothy 3:16 says, that **all Scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable for teaching, reproof, for correction, and training in righteousness** - there is nothing new under the sun with this way of thinking.) The challenge posed had to do with marriage in the resurrection (which they denied!). The scenario was a woman who had been married, but her husband died, so a brother kinsman redeemer married her, and down the line until the 7th brother stepped up (makes you wonder if someone was poisoning the soup!). Jesus answer was both practical and Biblical:

- On a practical level, there will be no marriage in the resurrection since we will be equal to angels, created beings who cannot procreate. This not only shows us that marriage is temporary for us (since we will be married to Christ one day), but this seemingly complicated question was sorted out.
- On a Biblical level, Jesus showed the proof of the resurrection in the Pentateuch, which is no easy thing (Psalms, yes; Prophets, easy; Law, not so easy). He showed that God is a God of the living, not the dead. His IS, not He WAS. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who are alive in Him.
- On a loving level, notice that He called out the Sadducees at a belief level. When talking about the resurrection, He pointed out that it was those who were **worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection of the dead**. He was letting them know that not only did they have a wrong view of the truth, they were OUTSIDE of it. Their silence was not only because they did not know how to answer, their silence was because they did not want to yield.

Calling by Laying Down a Dividing Line

In the middle of these challenges to trip Jesus up, He took opportunity to teach the people positively. As He was approaching the cross, Jesus tested the willingness of His followers in a clearer and narrow way. There were far more in the crowd who followed Jesus for all kinds of different motives, but the reality was that their faith was shallow, like water on a plate. As He ramped up what it would cost to follow Him, followers began peeling off (see John 6), distinguishing who were true followers and who were pretenders. Notice that in this parable, Jesus is not just calling out the religious leaders, He is giving a call to **all the people** as to who they would follow.

Call by the way of analogy (20:9-16)

Luke 20:9 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. 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. ¹¹ And he sent another servant. But they also beat and treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed. ¹² And he sent yet a third. This one also they wounded and cast out. ¹³ Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send **my beloved son**; perhaps they will respect him.' ¹⁴ 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.' ¹⁵ And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? ¹⁶ He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others." When **they heard this, they said, "Surely not!"**

The purpose of parables was to teach a lasting, Biblical principal but also keep its meaning hidden from the masses. It seems here that the people fully embraced what He was talking about, including the religious leaders who knew the parable was against them. The story was about an owner of a vineyard who left the fields to tenants chosen by him to care for the property. When the owner sent servants in three successive attempts to reap the harvest, the tenants shamed, harmed, and sent them away without fulfilling their part. Finally the owner sent His Son, **His beloved Son**, who the tenants decided to kill and keep the inheritance for themselves.

The meaning is clear: the owner is God, the tenants were Israel, the servants were OT prophets, and the Beloved Son is Jesus Christ, who would be killed by these tenants in a few days. They had reached a **fork in the road**, where they were either going to follow Jesus or the comfort of their current life. Many were hindered from following Jesus because they **feared being put out of the synagogue** (see John 12:42-43), which would have meant a radical change of life, friendship, and comfort.

Call by the way of reality (20:17-18)

Luke 20:17 But he looked directly at them and said, "What then is this that is written: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone"? ¹⁸ Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him."

Jesus clarified this call not only by way of analogy, but by way of Biblical prophecy. He looked at them, the crowd, and recited Psalm 118:22, which again is a Messianic Psalm but one that predicted this kind of rejection. Rejection would be met with judgment, resulting in being broken and crushed by God's justice.

This is hugely instructive for us today. We begin to try to make Christianity palatable for everyone, lowering the standard so that it does not offend anyone, that as long as someone believes in God and is a nice person they must be a follower of Jesus. This is exactly the way of thinking that Jesus was destroying. These were moral people, religious people, committed people that were ripe for rejection. **But hell will be full of good people.** Only those who acknowledge their sinful wickedness can turn from themselves and trust in Jesus. He clarified this in one last interaction that we'll look at today.

Caution Through Warning of Corrupted Religion

We said that this was a day about countering the Pharisees, the main spiritual leaders of the people. The Pharisees saw themselves as gate-keepers of the Law, not only in how they interpreted the Law but who was actually keeping it correctly. Jesus had already condemned them with one stroke of pointed truth:

For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribe and Pharisees, you will NEVER enter the Kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:20

The Pharisees taught that morality, or keeping the Law to a certain degree would breed salvation. Works salvation is one of the most prevalent and dangerous heresies that this world has ever seen. It places the burden on us, trying to make ourselves acceptable to God. There is no measure of righteousness produced in or by ourselves that CAN EVER restore us to God. It is only through the work of Jesus, repenting of our sin, and placing our faith in Him that can save us. Jesus pointed this out by calling out the way the Pharisees worked and called the people to reject it.

Beware of False Teachers (20:45-47)

Luke 20:45 And in the hearing of all the people he said to his disciples, ⁴⁶ "**Beware** of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love greetings in the marketplaces and the best seats in the synagogues and the places

of honor at feasts, ⁴⁷ who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation."

The Pharisees were the epitome of narcissism, with everything being about themselves and measuring everyone else by what they thought and believed. They lead people down a path of destruction by putting heavy burdens that no one could keep (even themselves). This was especially seen in the way that they **devour widows houses**, which as Jesus looked up during His teaching saw this take place.

Beware of False Teaching (21:1-4)

Luke 21:1 Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box, ² and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. ³ And he said, "Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. ⁴ For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."

We have often seen this as an example of sacrificial giving, but that is not the point of this passage (sacrificial giving is seen clearly in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9). This was a clear picture of wicked people controlling a wicked religion taking advantage of those they were supposed to care for. The widow giving all that she had to live on was an **example of how works righteousness corrupts**. If we believe that what we DO is a foundation for our standing with God, we will be compelled to do things that are foolish for the **complete wrong reason**. A widow, from a desire to please God, gave all that she had to live on, it was an indictment on leadership who called her to do what they were unwilling to do themselves. God rejects our righteousness! He rejects our moral attempts at satisfying Him. He accepts us on the terms He sets alone, and that is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus alone.

So here is the fork in the road moment this morning. Are we savoring Jesus Christ in light of our sin and His love for us? Is the fact that God knew our sin before the foundation of the world and still wanted us in His family, to the point that He sent His Son to suffer and die reason to rejoice? Or are we still holding onto the belief that we have to DO good to be accepted? The door is wide open in the gospel, but the way is narrow. Jesus came to clarify that truth.