



## Boxing Match at the Temple (Luke 20:28-47)

After His royal entry into Jerusalem, Jesus single-handedly cleared out the temple and exchanged fiery words with the religious leaders, sparking all-out war. The parable of the vineyard (c.f. Is 5:1-7) was a blow to their pride and hypocrisy. That was Round 1. Only Jesus' popularity stopped them from arresting Him. So now they come out to attack Jesus with everything they've got. The temple court has turned into a religious 'boxing match' arena. Each round starts with a question.

### A. Round 2 - Political Question on Roman Tax (20:20-26)

1. The temple authorities had two clear objectives: (1) They wanted to discredit Jesus, take away His public support and finish off His ministry. (2) They wanted to get Jesus on the wrong side of the Roman authority who could then put Him away. They worked out clever questions to corner Jesus into one or the other. And they sent 'spies' to trap Jesus (20:2), pretending to be part of the crowd. Who sent them? The Pharisees and the Herodians! (Mark 12:13; Matt 22:15-16) Normally they wouldn't even speak to each other. The Jews hated the Herodians who were partly Edomites, whom the Romans set over the Jews as their political puppets. The Pharisees were the religious elites who represented the Jewish sentiments. They firmly believed David's descendant must rule on the throne of David. They disdained the Herodians. But when people hate God, they are willing to form the most unlikely alliances.
2. First, they butter up Jesus, '*Teacher, we know that You say and teach rightly, and You do not show personal favouritism, but teach the way of God in truth: 'Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?' (v21-22)* Nobody likes to pay tax, but this tax was particularly offensive to the Jews under the Roman occupation. (a) Either answer will get Jesus in trouble. A 'yes' answer will turn the Jews against Jesus. A 'no' answer will put Him in prison by the Romans. It was a clever trap in the public arena of the temple, leaving Jesus no way out. (b) 'Is it lawful for us to pay taxes (*'phoros', tribute*) to Caesar?' This was not regular tax or customs duty, but personal poll tax payable to the Roman Emperor. God commanded every Jewish man 20+ years old to pay half a shekel to Him as redemption price (c.f. Ex 30:11-16) Mandatory poll tax to Caesar meant the Jews were forced to pay 'tribute tax to Caesar, which is owed only to God.
3. Jesus saw right through them – their disguise, intention, hypocrisy. He said, '*Why do you test Me?*' (v23) In 6AD Jerusalem was under Herod Archelaus, the son of Herod the Great. Archelaus was a brutal man. So, Jews asked for a Roman governor to rule over Jerusalem instead. Their request was granted and Archelaus was exiled. But when the new Roman governor came, he introduced further Roman taxes and circulated more Roman coins in the occupied territory of Israel.

Jesus asked for one of the coins from their pocket. 'Denarius' was a silver coin minted by the Romans, bearing the image of Emperor Tiberius. Jesus is saying in effect, '*You have asked for a Roman governor to rule over you and you have benefited from it. It means you have also committed to their money and taxation as well. And you are asking Me whether it is lawful to pay taxes to Caesar?*'

4. Jesus said, 'render' to Caesar what belongs to him, i.e. pay Caesar what is his due for the benefits you have received, living in the Roman territory. 'Pax Romana' (Roman peace 27BC-180AD) brought about the absence of war, security and advancement to the whole Mediterranean world so that the people could travel safely everywhere without needing a passport. (c.f. similar to the western nations post-WW2). Jesus is saying, '*Pay Caesar what is rightfully his due. It is the right thing to do.*'

With that question settled, Jesus now points out something far more important that they have neglected. Jesus asked them, '*Whose image and inscription is on your coin?*' They said, '*Caesar's.*' Then Caesar has a claim on his coinage that is in circulation. The question then becomes, '*Where are God's image and His inscription that is in circulation on earth?*' Not in the coin, but in men and women. Then God must have a right to you and me. Then the thing that we must rightly render to God is 'me'. Is God getting from you what is due to Him?

This was the bigger question Jesus was putting before them. At this point the bell rings, the Pharisees and Herodians retire. It is a brektime and this round is over.

## B. Round 3: Theological Question on Resurrection (20:27-40)

1. Now enter the Sadducees, the wealthy aristocratic priests of Jerusalem, who co-operated with the Romans. *They ran the temple and took most of the proceeds from the temple.* They were liberal and anti-supernatural and in their theology. They didn't believe in life after death nor in the resurrection of the body. They would say we live on in the memory of our loved ones. The Sadducees only accepted the first five books of Moses from the Scriptures and rejected the rest. Their hypothetical question is designed to attack the biblical teaching on resurrection and ridicule Jesus. They weren't really looking for an answer.
2. In the levirate marriage law, if a man died childless, his brother or the closest male kin, was required to marry his widow. The first son born to that marriage will legally be the dead man's son, who will carry on his name and inheritance. It preserved a man's name and his family from dying out (Dt 25:5ff, Ruth). In the Sadducees' story, all seven brothers at one time or another had been married to the same woman, in each case dying childless. Whose wife would she be when they all resurrect? Each brother would fight for her in heaven. What kind of heaven is that? It is a silly question.
3. Jesus says to them, *'Your problem is – one: you don't know the Bible, and two: you don't know the power of God.'* (Mk 12:24; Matt 22:29) Do we think heaven is like life on earth stretched out forever? Heaven forbid! If we are going to be what we are today forever, then it won't be heaven for any of us! No, we will go through a profound transformation. We will become like Jesus - sinless (1 John 3:2). Our relationships will go through dramatic changes. There will be no husbands and wives in heaven. Marriage is till death do us part. In heaven, we will be brothers and sisters. Jesus likens the next life to angels. They are not born, nor do they grow old, or marry and have children or die. In the next life, all our earthly relationships will be dissolved, and God will wipe away our tears. And entirely new united family without jealousy or competition will be formed, based on one relationship – each person's relationship with Jesus Christ.
4. Next, Jesus talks about their ignorance of the Bible. Sadducees only accepted the Pentateuch - Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Is 'resurrection' in the Pentateuch? Very simple. When God appeared to Moses in the burning bush, He said, *'I AM the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.'* (Ex 3:6, 16) Not *'I was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.'* It means Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are very much alive and in God's presence. God is still their God, and Moses is now joining this family of God. *If you believe in the living God, then you must also believe in the God of the living.* If you believe in God, the tombstone means nothing. But Jesus said, *'Those who are counted worthy to attain that age.'* (v35) Are you among those counted worthy? Only one relationship matters. Our relationship with Jesus.

After this, they dared not to question Him anymore (20:40). They had no more nerve or ammunition. Round 3 was over. Now it is Jesus' turn.

## C. Jesus Questions their Theology and Practice (20:27-40)

1. **Jesus now confronts their theology, in particular their assumptions about the Messiah.** The Scriptures taught that the Messiah would come from David's line, thus 'Son of David' was another title for the Messiah. So, the Jews saw the Messiah in terms of narrow nationalism, someone similar to David in outlook and achievement, who will defeat all their enemies and re-establish the glory days of King David. They assumed the Messiah would be a purely human and a nationalistic figure - a freedom fighter and a hero.  
  
But Jesus pointed out, David called the Messiah, his descendant, 'my Lord' - '*Kurios*', '*Adonai*' (Ps 110:1). He was showing them that the Messiah was not David's son in a petty sense. He was Lord, greater by far than merely another David. Note Jesus was often called 'Son of David' (Mt 9:27; 15:22; 21:9).
2. **Jesus moved from exposing the error in their doctrine to questioning their religious practice.** *'Beware of taking the role of spiritual leadership for what you can benefit from it and covering up pride, greed and hypocrisy with religion.'* (v45) Jesus said some very severe words which are deeply challenging and disturbing, and He did it publicly. Those who are called to a leadership role in ministry need to read these words again and again because we can be in it with the wrong motive.

- a) They were in it for prestige. They wore long flowing robes, marking them out as 'leisurely scholars.' You can't do manual labour or move quickly wearing those robes. They loved receiving greetings of honour, big 'titles' and the 'special seats' in public events. Jesus warned against coveting the praise and the esteem of people. He said, 'Don't let anybody call you father,' and 'Don't take the best seat.'
- b) They were also in it for money. Widows were easy targets for fraud in those days, with no husbands to defend them. Often the cults latch on to lonely widows and take their money.
- c) Their worst problem was that they covered it all up with 'long pious' prayer. Jesus prayed all night many times. Here he is pointing to long public prayers aimed at displaying one's 'super-spirituality'. The combination of hypocrisy and abuse of privileged position will receive 'greater condemnation.' We all need to heed Jesus' warnings here and examine our motives.

3. **What do true worship and true worshipper look like?** Jesus not only taught in the temple, but also watched the worshipers present their offerings to the Lord. He saw what they gave and why they gave. Just at the gate of the women's court in the temple, sat thirteen trumpet-shaped offering boxes. The worshippers dropped their coins into the long neck-shaped offering boxes. (They did not have notes in those days.) The larger the offering, the larger the clanging noise of the coins travelling down the offering box. That's why Jesus taught, *'Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.'* (Matt 6:2)

After much noise from the clanging coins of the rich and respectable people's offerings, a poor widow came in with just two lepta. And for the first time, we catch a glimpse of a true worshipper. A poor widow was the poorest of the poor, and a *lepton* was the smallest of the Jewish coins. These lepta would have barely made any sound. But Jesus called his disciples together and told them, *'Did you see that woman there? She has given more than all others put together. She kept absolutely nothing back.'* (21:3-4).

Jesus doesn't look at how much our offerings can buy. He looks at what it cost us. That is what God is writing down in heaven's accounts. The rich people gave out of what was left over, but she has given all that was left. Jesus is saying, *'Here is true worship. Here is a woman who really loves the Lord with all her heart that she doesn't count what it cost her. She doesn't hold back anything from the Lord.'*

This is another 'Mary of Bethany' - just older and poorer, but just as beautiful in God's sight. God was not impressed with the magnificence of the temple or the expensive offerings of the rich that adorned it, which aroused constant wonder among the spectators, including his disciples (Mk 13:1). Jesus' verdict was that it was the 'den of thieves' (Lk 19:46, Mt 23:38) and all that awaited it, was judgment.

The public ministry of Jesus closes with this beautiful story of this poor widow, who loved God with everything.

#### D. Reflection

1. Are we counted worthy to attain to the next age? Nobody can fool Jesus. Do you have a true relationship with Him?
2. There are many religious people today, whose religion Jesus considers worthless. Then there will be nameless people who love the Lord with all their hearts, who are highly esteemed by the Lord.

In which category will you and I be found on that day?