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Trick(y) Questions – Luke 20:1-26

Introduction – Jesus handles what appear to some to be “honest” questions and reveals who the Jewish leaders really are: fakes and cowards. Trying to trick Jesus into getting into trouble with the crowds or with the Romans, Jesus is able to turn their questions around and shame those who “*pretend to be righteous.*”

By What Authority? (vv1-8) – When Jesus came into the temple and started throwing things around, He was acting like someone who thought he was in charge. Now Luke records that Jesus is teaching in the temple and gains the interest and loathing of Israel’s highest class. The chief priests, scribes, together with the elders make up what is known as the Sanhedrin, the official judges of the temple and the people of Israel. In other words, Jesus was now playing with the big boys. They demanded to know who authorized Jesus to make such a mess of the temple. Dripping with irony, the rulers of Israel are asking the Ruler of Israel, “*who do you think you are, God or something?*”

Turning the Question Around – John, like all the other dead prophets, posed no harm to the Sanhedrin. They were glad to see him gone although they remained concerned about his ongoing popularity. Jesus uses their people-pleasing politics against them. If they will not discredit John, then they must accept John’s declaration of Jesus at His baptism (Luke 3:15-22, John 1:29). His royal status as the anointed One was publicly placed upon Him in His baptism with the descent of the dove and the voice from heaven. The Sanhedrin had already rejected John’s ministry (7:29-30). However, the crowd viewed John as a prophet. They were stuck; and Jesus knew it.

What Will the Owner Do? (vv9-19) – The parable of the vineyard emphasizes the status of “Son” which Jesus received at His baptism (v13, 3:22, 9:35). The parable is about Israel and every Jew would have known this (Isaiah 5:1-7). The parable tells the story of Israel’s unfaithfulness and rebellion as the Lord sent prophet after prophet, calling for Israel to repent and produce the fruit of repentance, but they refused. The consequence for killing the son brings the listeners up short (vv15-16).

Falling Upon the Stone – And then, calling upon the very same Psalm 118 which they had sung at His entrance the previous day, Jesus uses v22 as the punch line of the parable. Changing metaphors, the stone which is rejected will in fact be vindicated; it will be revealed to be the very cornerstone of the new Temple by the Master of the house. There are two possible outcomes from encountering this stone (and only two). Those who fall upon the stone in submission are broken unto salvation. But those who reject the stone will be crushed in eternal judgment.

This doesn’t go over very well with the established authorities (v19). When the gospel is delivered in such a way (Jesus’ way) it cuts and divides and requires a response, especially to those in places of power, influence and injustice. And if they killed the prophets, and if they killed Jesus, is it any wonder that we have seen 20 centuries of martyrdom, not the least of which the last century?

Whose Image? (vv20-26) – Luke makes very clear that these rulers pretended to be righteous (what a slam!). They cannot arrest Him at this point without inciting the crowd and they remain too afraid of the crowd. So they attempt to get Him to say something politically subversive. If good, devout Jews were observing God’s law, how could they pay taxes to a pagan overlord using coinage that depicted Tiberius Caesar and noted that he was son of the deified Augustus? And it was a trick question. It would either expose Jesus as a revolutionary or it would show the crowds that He really wasn’t declaring a kingdom on earth – something the Lord’s Prayer itself would deny.

The Other Side of the Coin – First Jesus asks for a coin (now, what are they doing with one of those dirty things anyway?). Second, Jesus gives an answer implying that taxes should be paid to Caesar, a point that Paul will reiterate (Rom 13:6-7). Jesus does not leave room for a tax revolt. Third, Jesus turns the question on its head and shows these hypocrites that they are to render that which bears the image of God to God. This would bring to mind Gen 1:26-28 and the priests and scribes would see that Jesus is challenging them to render themselves to God, and if He were the Son of God.... You can imagine, then, the awkward silence at that moment (v26).

Honest Questions or Tricky Questioners – You encounter both all the time. There are some who throw out honest questions about the faith. Be prepared to give an account for the hope that is within you (1 Pet 3:15). But learn wisdom, for there is a time where you should not throw pearls before swine. There is a time to answer in such a way that the hearer goes away saddened, or angry, or questioning still; this is the way of Jesus. And this is because Jesus is not only interested in giving

answers as though it was nothing more than propositional truth. Jesus is giving Himself, the Truth Incarnate, the Truth Absolute, the Truth Vindicated.

Your Own Heart - The chief priests and scribes marveled, but they were not moved (v26). Many people are impressed with Jesus' miracles, with His teaching, with His gracious examples, and yet do not come to the cross. That is a kind of marveling that leads to death. But there is another kind of marveling over these things, a kind of marveling which is a gift of God - it is faith in the greatest story and in the Son of Man which sees that the very stone which was rejected has become the chief cornerstone. It is faith that sees that nothing ever did thwart Jesus and nothing ever will.

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