

## THE AUTHORITY OF CHRIST QUESTIONED

**TEXT: LUKE 20:1-20**

### **INTRODUCTION:**

1. After our Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, He went to the temple and He taught the people, "and preached the gospel" (20:1).
2. At this time Jerusalem was packed with people that thronged the city for the Passover season.
3. The chief priests and the scribes had already determined to put Jesus to death, but it was His immense popularity which delayed their plans (19:47, 48; cf. 20:19, 20).
4. The chief priests and the scribes tried to discredit our Lord with the people, and with this objective in view they sent a delegation from the Sanhedrin, to challenge Him to state by what authority he was teaching in the temple, or by what authority did He drive the moneychangers and traders from the temple, or by what authority did He perform miracles, etc. (cf. 19:45-48).
5. The expression "came upon Him" (20:1) implies a confrontation, and their words were confrontational.

1. **AUTHORITY REQUIRED (20:1-8)**
2. **AUTHORITY REVEALED (20:9-16)**
3. **AUTHORITY REJECTED (20:16-20)**

### **I. AUTHORITY REQUIRED (20:1-8)**

1. The chief priests and the scribes and the elders asked two questions:
  1. "Tell us, by what authority doest thou these things?" (20:2a)
  2. or who is he that gave thee this authority? (20:2b).
2. In other words, our Lord was not part of any of their religious associations. He did not go to their schools or study under their rabbis, etc.
3. Our Lord answered their question with a question (20:3, 4). By asking them about the authority of John the Baptist, our Lord silenced His enemies.
4. They were on the horns of a dilemma, and were afraid to answer (20:5).
5. In fact, they were even afraid of being stoned to death (20:6).

6. They were scared to deny the baptism of John the Baptist, and yet they would not acknowledge that His baptism was from heaven, because that would mean acknowledging that Jesus was the promised Messiah.
7. G. Campbell Morgan said, “So we see them halting between expediency and convenience; and whenever a man halts there, he is doomed and damned, unless he repent” (*The Parables and Metaphors of Our Lord*).
8. But they would not repent, and they continued on in their stiff-necked opposition to Christ. They trusted in their own self-righteousness. They thought that they were too good to need repentance.
9. It is recorded in Matthew 21:31, 32, that our Lord said to these stubborn, proud religious hypocrites, “Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him.”
10. Since the religious leaders refused to answer our Lord’s question, He did not bother to answer their questions (20:7, 8).

## II. AUTHORITY REVEALED (20:9-16)

1. After He exposed their cowardice and their dishonesty, our Lord gave the parable of the vineyard (20:9-16).
2. The background to this parable is found in Isaiah 5:1-7.
3. The vineyard (Israel) had been planted “in a very fruitful hill” (Isaiah 5:1).
4. This vineyard gave every prospect of producing a bountiful harvest. The Lord carefully “fenced it” (Isa. 5:2), that is, He gave Israel the law.
5. He “gathered out the stones thereof” (Isa. 5:2). Stones in a vineyard impair growth. God removed the Canaanites and the other heathen from the Promised Land.
6. God “planted it with the choicest vine” (Isa. 5:2). Symbolically, this represents their spiritual heritage – the great Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the prophets; the law; and their numerous blessings and privileges.
7. Furthermore, God protected Israel from their enemies – “and built a tower in the midst of it” (Isa. 5:2). Proverbs 18:10 says, “The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.”
8. Isaiah 5:5 refers to the hedge and the wall God built for them, again symbolizing divine protection.

9. God “also made a winepress therein...” (Isa. 5:2). Anticipating a great harvest, God “made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes,” but it brought forth wild grapes.
10. “Wild grapes” are literally, “rotten” grapes.
11. The meaning is clear – God had blessed the nation Israel like no other nation on the face of the earth, and He expected fruit.
12. But all He got was rotten fruit!
13. Allow me to make an application. The Lord built His church. He has given us His Word, and the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.
14. He is expecting fruit. Are you a fruitful Christian?
15. With this familiar “song” (Isaiah 5:1) in mind, our Lord used the same imagery as the prophet Isaiah. God planted Israel in a good land.
16. Our Lord explained that God “let it forth to husbandmen, and went into a far country for a long time” (Luke 20:9). Husbandmen were tenant-farmers who paid rent to the owner of the vineyard.
17. Here in this parable, the husbandmen represent the leaders of Israel who exercised authority over the people.
18. Our Lord said that “at the season” (harvest time) the lord of the vineyard “sent a servant to the husbandmen, that they should give him of the fruit of the vineyard: but the husbandmen beat him, and sent him away empty” (20:10).
19. Next, he sent another servant: “and they beat him also, and entreated him shamefully, and sent him away empty” (20:11).
20. “And again he sent a third: and they wounded him also, and cast him out” (20:12). These “servants” represent the prophets, whom God had sent throughout Israel’s history to call the people to repentance and obedience.
21. But the people of Israel rejected the prophets, and the prophets were abused, mistreated, imprisoned, and often put to death.
22. Hebrews 11:37, 38 says, “They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.”
23. In His parable, our Lord was reminding the chief priests and scribes of the shameful way the leaders of Israel mistreated the prophets.
24. In a display of mercy and grace, instead of removing the wicked husbandmen, and having them put to death for their crimes, the owner of the vineyard sent his “beloved son,” hoping that “it may be they will reverence him when they see him” (20:13).

25. Mark 12:6 says, “Having yet therefore one son, his wellbeloved, he sent him also last unto them, saying, They will reverence my son.”
26. If this son is his only son, and his beloved son, then this son obviously represents the Lord Jesus Christ. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son” (John 3:16).
27. These husbandmen conspired to kill the son, saying, “This is the heir: come, let us kill him, that the inheritance may be our’s. So they cast him out of the vineyard, and killed him” (20:14, 15).
28. Jesus asked, “What therefore shall the lord of the vineyard do unto them?” (20:15).
29. And He answered His own question, “He shall come and destroy these husbandmen, and shall give the vineyard to others” (20:16).
30. “And when they heard it, they said, God forbid” (20:16b). In other words, “Perish the thought!”
31. This is the only time we see this expression in the Gospels, but the apostle Paul used it often. “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid” (Romans 6:1, 2).
32. “What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid” (Romans 6:15).

### **III. AUTHORITY REJECTED (20:16-20)**

1. After telling them the parable, verses 17 and 18 say our Lord beheld them, and said, “What is this then that is written, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner? Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.”
2. Our Lord quoted Psalm 118:22 and Daniel 2:34.
3. “The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner” (Psalm 118:22).
4. “Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces” (Daniel 2:34).
5. By applying these Messianic prophecies to His parable, our Lord was implying that the Jewish leaders were the husbandmen who killed God’s prophets, and were planning on killing Him also.
6. Furthermore, our Lord warned them that there would be terrible consequences for their sin – “He shall come and destroy these husbandmen, and shall give the vineyard to others” (20:16a).

7. The chief priests and the scribes understood exactly what our Lord meant. Verse 19 says that “they perceived that he had spoken this parable against them.”
8. You would think that these men would heed the warning, that they would consider their ways and repent. But they had gone too far in their unbelief and in their hatred towards Christ.
9. They had reached the point of no return. In fact, when we read Matthew’s account we see that they unwittingly pronounced their own judgment (Matt. 21:40, 41).
10. Because of their hypocrisy they would receive “greater damnation” (Luke 20:46, 47).

### **CONCLUSION:**

1. Up by the Niagara Falls, there is a sign that says, "Point of no return."
2. If a boat goes beyond that point, it is too late and the people in the boat will perish because the rapids are too swift and the current is too strong to turn back.
3. Those who pass that point are carried over the falls to their death.
4. It is at that point that no one could turn back -- they have reached the "Point of no return."
5. The Jews in Jesus’ day had reached that point of no return (cf. 19:41-44; 20:16).
6. Oftentimes, individuals reach the point of no return. Genesis 6:3 says, the LORD says, “My spirit shall not always strive with man.”
7. Proverbs 29:1 says, “He, that being often reproveth hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.”
8. It is foolish and it is dangerous to wear out God’s patience.