

## The Last Word

**Text: Luke 20:1–8**

### Introduction

We have arrived in Jerusalem during the Passover. After a bittersweet triumphal entry, an announcement of Jerusalem's coming destruction, and the cleansing of the temple, Jesus now finds Himself in a confrontation with the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin consisted of 70 men made up of the chief priests, scribes, and elders. It was the supreme council and tribunal of the Jewish people during the time of Jesus, especially in Jerusalem. It functioned as both a religious and political ruling body.

In our study over the last couple of weeks, we have learned that from a biblical perspective, these are the haters of Jesus—citizens of the kingdom in the parable of the minas who refuse to submit to His kingship. This is a group of hard-hearted, spiritually blind men who loved the appearance of godliness and relished their power and influence. Like many other Jewish citizens of Jerusalem, they actually enjoyed a decent relationship with Roman rule—and they wanted it to stay that way. However, they knew Jesus posed a massive threat to all they loved and held dear. They hated Jesus and wanted nothing more than to get rid of Him.

I'm going to spend a few moments in **Romans 1:18–32**, but before I begin there, I want to make something very clear: the group we will focus on today is a **very distinct group of people**. These men are lost and blind, and truly have no heart to know and love the one true God. They are **not** genuine Christians struggling with assurance. They are **not** genuine seekers being drawn by the Holy Spirit to Christ. A clear parallel to our

context is that these are lost people who so love their flesh, their sin, and their place in life that they will deny Christ at every turn.

Let's turn to **Romans 1:18–32** and allow the Scriptures to define this people group for us.

**18** For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

(What does it mean to suppress the truth?)

**19** For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.

**20** For His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

*(General revelation)*

**21** For although they knew God (*in a general sense*), they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

*(General revelation is intended to incite gratitude and move people toward God)*

**22** Claiming to be wise, they became fools,

**23** and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

*(They chose to worship earthly things instead)*

**24** Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves,

**25** because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever!

Amen.

*(This is one of the most frightening thoughts—that God does not continue forever. There is a point where God will deliver one final warning)*

**26** For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions...

**28** And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind...

**32** Though they know God's righteous decree... they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

Our text today, **Luke 20:1–8**, gives us a front-row seat to witness a moment in history where this happened. In their obstinance and rebellion—time and time again—Jesus stood before them, preaching the truth, demonstrating miraculous power, and they chose every time to suppress the truth, continuing in their own righteousness, choosing to worship themselves, their positions in life, and the power they possessed. But now, **God will have the last word.**

## **I. The Conspiracy (vv. 1–2)**

“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 and said to Him, ‘Tell us by what authority You do these things, or who it is that gave You this authority.’”

This was likely on **Wednesday**, depending on which timeline of the Passion Week you ascribe to. After spending the night in Bethany, Jesus returns to a cleansed temple where He is walking around teaching the people and preaching the gospel—something the court of the Gentiles had been created for.

Knowing that they needed the crowds to turn on Jesus in order to destroy Him, the chief priests, scribes, and elders all conspired to trap Jesus by asking Him a question. It was a question about **authority**.

Authority is an important element of every society, but it was especially important in the religious realm of Judaism and how it related to the political world of Rome. Just about anything you did in Jerusalem at this time had to be authorized by someone. Without that authorization, you could find yourself in big trouble. Rome had very little tolerance for **mavericks**. Jesus was the Jewish maverick who, in the eyes of the Sanhedrin, posed a significant threat to their privilege with Rome.

They were hoping Jesus would incriminate Himself—either by claiming divine authority (blasphemy) or by defying Roman power (insurrection).

**Application:** Never try to outsmart an omniscient God. Remember Romans 1:22: “Claiming to be wise, they became fools.”

## II. The Counter (vv. 3–4)

“He answered them, ‘I also will ask you a question. Now tell Me, was the baptism of John from heaven or from man?’”

Jesus doesn’t dodge their question—He exposes their motive by asking one in return. His question, as we will see, puts them in the **same dilemma** they attempted to put Him in. Everyone in the crowd would likely have connected the dots and seen through the conspiracy.

His question is **brilliantly theological and strategic**. Remember, the Sanhedrin are trying to win over the crowds to destroy Jesus with their support. However, Jesus’ question brings the crowd into the discussion. He knew they believed John the Baptist to be a prophet from God.

If they answered honestly, it would answer their own question about Jesus. Why? Because **John affirmed Jesus' authority** as the Son of God.

### III. The Conundrum (vv. 5–6)

“And they discussed it with one another, saying, ‘If we say, “From heaven,” He will say, “Why did you not believe him?” But if we say, “From man,” all the people will stone us to death, for they are convinced that John was a prophet.’”

These men are stuck—not because they don’t know the answer, but because they fear the consequences of both options. If they admit John’s ministry was from God, they must also acknowledge Jesus’ authority—because John affirmed Jesus as the one sent from God and greater than himself.

This confession would resonate with the crowd, but it would also force the leaders to confess Jesus as Lord—something they were simply unwilling to do.

On the other hand, if they deny John’s ministry came from God, they risk turning the crowd against them—even to the point of being stoned—because the people were fully convinced that John was a prophet.

Their concern is not **truth**, but **optics and pride**.

They are **politicians in priestly robes**—governed by popularity and fear, not conviction or Scripture.

**Application:** Fear of man and love of power will always blind us to truth. Jesus calls us to humility and submission—and sometimes that involves admitting we’re wrong.

#### IV. The Coward's Response (v. 7)

“So they answered that they did not know where it came from.”

They take the coward's route: “*We don't know.*”

They would rather say nothing than risk losing this battle.

But remember what Jesus said in **Matthew 16:26**:

“For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?”

This was a **deliberate evasion**.

There is **no neutrality** with Christ.

Refusing to answer is still an answer—and a dangerous one.

#### V. The Conclusion (v. 8)

“And Jesus said to them, ‘Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.’”

Jesus is **not avoiding** their question—He essentially answered for them with His counter-question. Everyone there knew He had been teaching and acting on divine authority from the beginning. That wasn't the real question.

The real question was:

**What are you going to do about it?**

Are you going to suppress the truth in your pursuit of your own unrighteousness?

Or are you going to lay your cloak before Him in complete submission and worship?

This is **a judgment**: they had enough light through John and rejected it. So Jesus gives them no further revelation.

### **Isaiah 63:10**

But they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit; therefore He turned to be their enemy, and Himself fought against them.

### **Jeremiah 11:7–8a**

“I solemnly warned your fathers... yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but everyone walked in the stubbornness of his evil heart.”

### **Jeremiah 11:11**

“Behold, I am bringing disaster upon them that they cannot escape. Though they cry to Me, I will not listen to them.”

He has given His final word.

**It is the time of their cutting off.**

They are being given over to their sinful desires.

## **Conclusion**

The question still stands today:

“By what authority?”

We know the answer — **Jesus has all authority.**

- **Matthew 28:18** – “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me.”

- **Authority over Nature** – Matthew 8:26–27
- **Authority to Forgive Sins** – Matthew 9:6–7
- **Authority over Demons** – Mark 1:27
- **Authority to Teach** – Mark 1:22
- **Authority in His Name** – Acts 3:16
- **Authority Over All Things** – Ephesians 1:21
- **Authority to Give Power and Authority** – Luke 10:19

That question has been answered.

**The real question that remains is this:  
What are you going to do about it?**



## CG DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What stood out to you most from this sermon? Why?
2. Why was the Sanhedrin so threatened by Jesus? What were they trying to protect?
3. How does understanding Romans 1:18–32 help us better interpret the religious leaders' actions in Luke 20:1–8?
4. Why did Jesus ask the question about John the Baptist's authority instead of directly answering their question? What does that reveal about Jesus' wisdom?
5. Have you ever struggled with submitting to Jesus' authority in a specific area of your life? What did that look like, and how did God work in your heart?
6. Why is fear of man such a powerful trap, even for religious leaders?
7. What's the danger of avoiding hard truths about Jesus or choosing silence when it comes to His claims? How is "I don't know" sometimes a form of rejection?
8. The Sanhedrin cared more about their position and influence than the truth. Where are you tempted to value personal comfort over faithfulness to Christ?
9. Jesus had clearly demonstrated His authority throughout His ministry. Why do you think some people—then and now—still reject Him despite all the evidence?
10. Jesus ultimately refused to answer the Sanhedrin because of their persistent unbelief. What does this teach us about the danger of hardening our hearts toward God?
11. Where is the Holy Spirit calling you to submit more fully to the authority of Jesus this week? How can this group encourage and pray for you in that?

**Day 1 – Read: Luke 20:1–2**

**Devotion:** The religious leaders weren't interested in discovering truth — they were defending territory. Jesus' teaching, miracles, and temple cleansing had threatened their control over the religious system. So they demanded credentials, hoping to discredit Him.

But the question reveals more about their hearts than about Jesus. When we demand God explain Himself before we obey, we reveal that we're not seeking truth but control. True faith surrenders to Jesus' authority, not on our terms, but His.

**Reflection Questions:**

1. In what areas of your life are you tempted to demand explanations before obeying God?
2. How does trusting in God's character help you surrender control?

**Day 2 – Read: Luke 20:3–4**

**Devotion:** Jesus' counter-question isn't avoidance — it's exposure. By bringing up John the Baptist, He puts the leaders face-to-face with a decision they had already refused to make. If they affirmed John's authority, they'd be forced to admit Jesus' divine mission.

The question confronts us too: Do we really believe Jesus has divine authority over our lives? Or do we accept parts of His ministry while rejecting the parts that threaten our autonomy?

**Reflection Questions:**

1. Are there teachings of Jesus that you struggle to submit to? Why?
2. How can you practice obedience even when it challenges your preferences?

**Day 3 – Read: Luke 20:5–6**

**Devotion:** These men knew the truth. But fear of public backlash held them hostage. Rather than wrestle with the implications of John's prophetic role or Jesus' claims, they calculated risk.

We may not face literal stoning today, but the fear of man is just as real — rejection, discomfort, loss of reputation. Spiritual paralysis can result when we prioritize safety over obedience.

**Reflection Questions:**

1. How has fear of what others think affected your obedience to Christ?
2. What is one practical way you can grow in fearing God more than people?

## Day 4 – Read: Luke 20:7

**Devotion:** Their ignorance was not innocent — it was strategic. “We don’t know” was a safe answer, a way to avoid conviction. Yet this willful blindness would have eternal consequences.

God is patient, but when we repeatedly reject His truth, we risk growing numb to it. Conviction ignored today may not return tomorrow.

### Reflection Questions:

1. When have you been tempted to avoid conviction by ignoring God’s truth?
2. What spiritual practices help you stay soft and responsive to the Spirit?

## Day 5 – Read: Luke 20:8

**Devotion:** This may be one of the most chilling moments in the Gospels: Jesus refuses to answer. Their unbelief wasn’t due to lack of evidence, but lack of willingness. Jesus had shown them enough.

God’s silence can be a form of judgment — not that He’s absent, but that He gives people over to their chosen blindness. We must not presume upon grace. When God speaks, we must respond.

### Reflection Questions:

1. Are there any areas where you’ve been ignoring God’s promptings?
2. How can you cultivate a posture of readiness to respond to God’s voice?