

A Taxing Question

Luke 20:19-26

Pastor Arlyn

Message transcript

[00:00:00] We are back in our Luke Chapter 20 study today. The last time we were here, well, that was three weeks ago. And we ended on a thought that I think demanded more of our attention than we had time to give it. So I hope you took that thought home with you and pondered over that for a week or two or three. I know I have. Of course, I'm speaking about verse 18, which says, whoever falls on that stone (speaking of Christ, the cornerstone) will be broken. But on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder. Perhaps the meaning of that verse is lost to some. I assure you it is not lost to me. That verse has a lot of personal meaning to me. Because I for one know the sweetness and the preciousness of brokenness. You know what I mean? Have you been there? It really can be one of the most wonderful things that can happen to you. Brokenness. I've been there actually multiple times in my life. None more significant than my own conversion and salvation experience. I remember it as if it were yesterday. I remember I sat right back there in the corner of this very church, where my kids are sitting this morning. [00:01:24][84.2]

[00:01:26] Only the pews were green. And I remember the churning that was going on within me because I was a reckless and immature 17 year old that had just come off of one of the most rebellious weekends of my life. [00:01:46][19.6]

[00:01:46] My parents don't know that. Oh, they're here this morning. [00:01:49][3.4]

[00:01:50] OK, well, they know now. And I sat back there convicted in my heart over my sin, unhappy about the distance between me and God. And I fought my way through the song service and I fought my way through the sermon. And I fought my way through that first wave of altar call. But those of you who know Pastor Leighty, you know, one wave of altar call might not be all you get in a service. And for whatever reason, Pastor Leighty decided to tarry and linger. I mean, to me, the service was done. I made it. I got through there without going up front and giving my life to the Lord. I almost held out, until he said those words and I'll never forget them. [00:02:40][50.1]

[00:02:40] He said, I just feel like someone in this room is not content. And he went on to give his second altar call of the evening. And I just knew he was talking to me. [00:02:52][12.3]

[00:02:54] That convicted my heart and I felt the lord calling me up front to dedicate my life to him. I found in that moment the grace of God to be irresistible. The Calvinists are right. The grace of God is irresistible. And so that Grace called me forward. I walked the aisle with my head hung low. I felt lower than dirt. [00:03:18][24.4]

[00:03:19] But I came up here and I gave my life to Christ. I brought essentially verse 18 to the Lord. I came up to this altar and I collapsed in broken pieces of a broken life. And God took those broken pieces from that moment and began to piece them back together in a better sequence to make me as whole as he could make me. He's been working on that for a long time, so be patient with me. But, [00:03:47][28.0]

[00:03:49] I feel like every week that passes, every year that passes, the Lord makes me more and more whole. But the people, the men that we are dealing with in Luke Chapter 20, well, they are a different breed altogether. [00:04:03][13.6]

[00:04:07] They have no such intention of being won over by the Lord in this chapter. They mean entirely to be the ones that are doing the breaking. And their attempt continues in the rest of this 20th chapter of Luke, as they strike and strike Jesus over and over again with their words. [00:04:28][20.5]

[00:04:29] They're looking for some area of weakness in Jesus. Something that he says that they can use to exploit for their victory. But little do they know he had no weakness. And had he not handed them the material they needed to crucify him, they would have never been able to come up with a single reason to put him on the cross. He had to hand them even that. And so that's where we are beginning at verse 19 today. We're looking at an interaction between Jesus and these religious leaders, essentially. Let's take a look. Verse 19. And the chief priests and the scribes that very hour sought to lay hands on him and it wasn't to bless him, it was to arrest him. They want him out of the picture. They want him arrested. Ultimately, they want him dead. Reading on. [00:05:29][59.9]

[00:05:30] But they feared the people for they knew he had spoken this parable against them. So this is immediately following the parable of the vineyard, which we have covered in our studies. We've already studied that. Now, some of the parables of Jesus were high hanging fruit. It took a lot to mentally climb those trees and pick that fruit. Such was not the case with the parable of the vineyard. That was low hanging fruit. Indeed, the religious leaders knew full well that Jesus was directing that parable at them and that had them boiling. They are mad. Admitted, admittedly, it would be a tough thing to hear come out of the words of Jesus, from the mouth of Jesus. To hear him say what he said in the parable of the vineyard. You know, God had plans. God had big plans for his vineyard. But then he left you dopes in charge and you ruined the whole thing. That was pretty much the message of the parable of the vineyard. That was pretty scathing to them. They were irritated by that, to say the least. So the crowd is the only thing restraining the religious leaders at this point from arresting Jesus or putting him to death. Because the crowd is just too big right now. And right now, Jesus is just too popular with the crowd. That's going to change in a whirlwind in a very short period of time. But as of right now, he has the crowd backing him and supporting him. And this is all about optics. The Pharisees, the religious leaders, what they want to do is they want to embarrass him in front of the crowd. They want to weaken his reputation among the crowd. They don't want to frustrate, upset or alienate themselves from the crowd. So this is all about optics. It's, what can we do to make Jesus look bad in front of people? I would say that the world still tries to do a pretty good job of that. How can we make Jesus, how can we make Christianity, look bad in front of the people? And if we're being honest, some Christians make that very easy to do. [00:07:53][143.3]

[00:07:54] Not you, of course, not anyone in here. So, reading on. [00:07:58][3.9]

[00:08:01] Verse 20. So they watched him. Now you would find that terminology quite interesting if you were with us in our most recent Exodus study. It's there in Exodus chapter 12, verse six, the Lord commanded the Hebrews to pick their Passover lambs on the 10th day of Nisnon. They were to bring them into their homes and they were to keep them until the 14th day of Nisnon, the day when those Passover lambs were to be slain. And that is the word that verse six of Exodus Chapter 12 uses. It uses the word "keep." And as we pointed out in that study, that's the Hebrew word "mishmehreth," which means to continue watching, to observe, and to safeguard. What we have here in Luke, chapter 20, verse 20 is the Greek New Testament equivalent of that word. So, yes, we're studying the Passover, the first Passover, in our Exodus studies on Wednesday. And we're studying that last Passover of Jesus here in Luke Chapter 20. Last Wednesday, here's what we were talking about. That period between the 10th and 14th day of Nisnon, where the Jews were to select their Passover lambs and then keep watch over them for those five days. They were looking for blemishes within those lambs. They had picked them. They passed the initial inspection, but then they were to keep a very close eye on them to make sure they didn't catch something that they missed during that initial inspection. And also, of course, it was to protect that lamb that you picked from getting an injury, an acquired blemish, out there in the in the the pen. Whatever you call where the flock was. What was called? A fold. Out there in the fold, right? So that was all part of it. And here in Luke 20, we're in the same spot. This is the Passover that we're studying. We are somewhere between the 10th and the 14th day of Nisnon. And these events are matching up prophetically. As we look at Exodus 12, those five days of inspection. I had to do this for the Wednesday night crowd. I'll do it for you too. It is five

days. Use your fingers if you have to. 10th, 11th, 12th, 13th, 14th. Five days. Pretty much five days of inspecting that lamb. That's where we are, in the same period. We're in that same five day period in the life of Jesus. And what are the religious leaders doing? They're watching Jesus, they're observing Jesus, they're scrutinizing him. They're looking for fault. Now, they're not safeguarding him, as the Old Testament Hebrew would be at this time. They want to out him. They want to oust him, I should say. But they are doing the same thing. They are examining this lamb, Jesus, that Paul refers to in First Corinthians as our Passover that was sacrificed for us. They are watching and observing this lamb, looking for blemishes. So, I mean, we are in like the exact same spot in our Old Testament and New Testament studies. I don't know, does that sound like it's just too much of a coincidence to you? It does to me. I didn't plan this. I'm not that smart. I could not have made this work. But here we are. We're essentially in the same place in our Wednesday studies and our Sunday studies. The Old Testament, as I told that Wednesday night crowd, and I use that word crowd very loosely. Yeah. You all kind of hung me out to dry on that one, didn't you? Oh we'll be there Wednesday night. Sure we will. It was only me and Maggie here. That was it. No, I'm kidding. There were more than that. But I will have to use that word crowd loosely. As I told the Wednesday night crowd, what we see in Exodus twelve is actually prophecy about Jesus. Religiousl, as far as the rituals are concerned, who cares? We wouldn't need that. There was a bigger purpose for those religious rituals in the whole Passover deal. It was all about prophecy pointing to Jesus. I know it doesn't look like it when you read it, because in Exodus twelve, what you have is prophecy in the form of religious ritual. We're like covering a lot of ground we did on Wednesday night. I didn't intend that. But here we are. We're in the same spot. So prophecy in the form of religious ritual. What you have in Exodus twelve is the prophecy. What you have in Luke Twenty is the beginning of the fulfillment of Exodus Chapter twelve. So I find that extremely interesting. I think that was a God thing. I don't think I could have pulled that off. Reading on in verse 20. They watched Jesus and sent spies who pretended to be righteous. You know, that's never going to be a good thing, pretending to be righteous. There are many of them among us. Again, not in this church, but in the Christian organization worldwide. We have many people just like this. They're spies or those pretending to be righteous. That's such a waste of time. They're not fooling anyone. They're certainly not fooling the Lord. But they pretended to be righteous, that they might seize on his words in order to deliver him to the power and the authority of the governor. The statement and question that we'll read in versus twenty one and twenty two here is all staged. It's a setup, it's a great big show, it's a trap. [00:14:04][363.3]

[00:14:05] They're hoping that Jesus falters in his reply so that they can seize his words in order to seize him, to arrest him. In verse two, which is previous ground to us, these religious leaders have questioned Jesus about his authority and now in verses 21, in 22, they questioned Jesus about his ethics or his integrity. Now, remember, these are actors. These [00:14:35][29.9]

[00:14:37] are [00:14:37][0.0]

[00:14:41] hypocrites. That's literally the word in the Greek. Hupocretes, which means someone who wears a mask, a play actor. These are actors that are in league, in affiliation with, the religious leaders. All of them. The Scribes, the Pharisees, the chief priests, you name it, they've all got a hand in this bag. I don't know who these people were that they sent into this situation with these questions, but they're all in this thing together. Verse 21. Then they asked him saying, teacher, we know that you say and teach rightly and you do not show personal favoritism, but teach the way of God in truth. You know, your doctrine is sound and you're a straight shooter. You don't care who's in the room. You're just going to give the truth. Man, we love that about you, Jesus. [00:15:39][57.8]

[00:15:42] Pfft. Please. Sorry if I spit on you. Please. Give me a break. [00:15:46][4.1]

[00:15:46] There must be a sandwich coming because that was two pieces of buttered bread right there. [00:15:50][3.4]

[00:15:51] They are using flattery to try to get Jesus to let his guard down and not guard his words quite so much. But we all know that flattery only works on fools. The Lord is not going to fall for flattery. Just like you

wonderful, amazing people here at Anchored Fellowship, the best of the best, the cream of the crop, would never fall for anything like that. Flattery. You're no fools. You're wise. Best group of church people I've ever seen. By the way, I am looking to take a vacation in the near future. Would that be OK? [00:16:25][34.6]

[00:16:28] Did it work ok? [00:16:30][2.0]

[00:16:30] I'm just kidding. But I illustrated the point. Flattery is something that usually works because fools walk right into it. You say some kind words about them and then they'll be more susceptible to your opinions or your ideas that you're interjecting. And perhaps this would work for Jesus, except for the fact that he knows all about their pretenses. He knows their intentions. He knows their hearts. And so he's going to see right through it right from the beginning. Here is their devious question. Verse 22. Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not? This is a taxing question. Did you see our sermon title? This is a taxing question. We're studying about taxes this morning. Lord, help us. Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Now, of course, they're not talking about Roman law. Roman law is this: pay taxes or else. You know, here comes the spear. Pay taxes or else. That's not what they're on about here. [00:17:39][68.6]

[00:17:39] They want to know if paying taxes to the Romans violates Old Testament scripture, Old Testament, biblical law. Here's what they're asking. Is it biblical for us Jews to pay taxes to the Romans? [00:17:56][16.6]

[00:17:57] It's a great question, it's a loaded question. Here's their thinking. All the Jews hated paying Roman taxes. Go figure. So if Jesus says, you know, the Romans, they aren't that bad. [00:18:14][16.7]

[00:18:16] Look at all the services that this government affords to you. You should pay your taxes to the Romans with joy. Just enjoy the governmental services that they offer. Now, if he said that, he's going to upset the crowd, because no one in the crowd likes taxes. They're all waiting for the Messiah to come and deliver them from the Roman bondage, therefore, the Roman taxes. But on the other side of it, if Jesus says, no, don't give a cent to those gentile Roman dogs. Fight the taxes, resist the taxes, resist the government. That's what they want to hear. But it's especially what they want to hear, because if he says that, then they can immediately turn Jesus over to Pontius Pilate and charge him with sedition and attempted insurrection. Right. He's leading a movement, an insurrection. So that's what they're hoping for. But really, they think any way that he goes here, [00:19:19][63.1]

[00:19:21] they're going to get a victory either [00:19:22][1.2]

[00:19:24] in the affections and the influences of the crowd, or they're going to get this thing done and get him delivered to the Romans as being a seditionists and an insurrectionist. It has been said that there are only two things that are certain in life. Death and taxes. [00:19:40][15.6]

[00:19:42] But at least the cost of death does not go up every time the Congress meets. Now, I think taxes have always been one of those hot button topics, and I think it always will be. Maybe it's a topic that you wrestle with too. Some Christians get on that kick where they feel like we as Christians shouldn't have to pay taxes. Because those tax dollars are going toward things that we don't like and we don't approve of. And I can understand that argument. Where they lose me is when they begin to make those poor attempts at trying to convince you scripturally that we Christians shouldn't pay taxes. And so they'll pull out some out of context scripture like, didn't Jesus say we're not of this world? Well, then what are we doing paying this world's taxes? You know, we should be free from that. Now, that may sound good, but that's pretty poor exegesis. That is not interpreting the scriptures properly or fairly. We know what the scriptures say about government, don't we? We may not like it. We don't have to like it. But we know what the scriptures say. We submit to those that have that governmental authority over us until we are commanded or forced to do something that is against God's laws. Then that's when we resist, right? We all understand that whole concept and principle quite well. And I can't make you feel something positive about something that I don't feel positive about. So I can't convince you that taxes are a good thing when I myself don't like taxes very much. But let me share this with you, because it may help you out a

little bit in your perspective. You may feel like in the United States we are overtaxed. I would say amen to that. But consider this, compared to the Romans, we're nothing. We had nothing on the Romans, when it came to taxes under Roman government. There were all sorts of taxes that tallied up and became a pretty steep overall tax rate for the people that were living under Roman rule. There was, first of all, the poll tax, which was the tax for you to live. That was you were being taxed to breathe Roman air, right? That was where it began, the poll tax. On top of the poll tax, there was the income tax, which was a flat 10 percent rate. Now, if that was all of it, it wouldn't be so bad. But we're just getting started here. Then there was the road tax. The road tax. I mentioned the Roman road system last Sunday. That was actually quite a ginormous thing because up until that time, no other government had provided a road system for their people. But the Romans did that. They provided a complex and just really thorough road system for all of those under the Roman rule. [00:22:47][184.0]

[00:22:47] Essentially, they connected the known world with roads. In 700 years, they laid fifty five thousand miles of road. And they were so good at it that they would do it in solid stone, in layers of solid stone. [00:23:04][17.2]

[00:23:05] So good were they, that there are still Roman roads today that exist that are over 2000 years old, two millennia. And they're still in existence today. And 2000 year old old Roman roads two thousand years later, still look better than Route 70. [00:23:29][23.5]

[00:23:29] Amazing. So they were really good at it. Maybe in two thousand years, Route 70 will be done with construction and I won't have anything to complain about. So, they put so much work and so much expense into the roads, that's why they were so good, that's why they're still with us today. But that costs money, a lot of money. They poured a lot of money into that. And that money came out of the people's pockets. There was the Roman road tax. [00:23:54][24.8]

[00:24:01] So we had, let's see, the poll tax, the income tax, the road tax, now here's some new ones. [00:24:10][8.9]

[00:24:11] There was a harbor tax, there was an import tax, a ground tax, a fish tax (which charged per fish that you caught), a fish net tax (which charged per fish net that you used). There was a car tax (which charged per wheel that you had, needless to say, wheelbarrows were very popular back then. One wheel, cheapest thing you get, probably couldn't afford the taxes on a two wheel cart. So you had a wheelbarrow). So once you paid all of those taxes and you looked at your bottom line, there was one tax left, the heart attack. All right, that was a reach. That was a pretty poor joke. But but you see, they were really in a lot worse shape than we are as far as taxes go. This was a big issue for them. This was a dicey question. It was a taxing question to answer about taxes. And Jesus needed to watch where he stepped on this one, because there were a lot of people with opinions. Verse 23. But he perceived their craftiness and said to them, why do you test me (You don't think I'm on to you? You don't think I know what you're doing)? Verse 24. Show me a denarius. [00:25:24][72.9]

[00:25:25] That was a silver coin. With Caesar's image on both sides of the coin. Caesar's image. And it was a day's wage for the average worker or soldier. That was essentially a day's wage. And I don't know what you make per day. Maybe seventy five bucks. Maybe one hundred. Maybe one fifty. Two hundred. [00:25:49][24.6]

[00:25:50] Three hundred. I don't know what you make per day. But that's what is being represented when this denarius was asked to be raised. Show me a denarius. Then Jesus ask whose image and inscription does it have? They answered and said, Caesars, of course. Caesar's. Roman money, Caesar's picture is on the coin. Verse 25. And he said to them, render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God, the things that are God's. Verse 26. But they could not catch him in his words in the presence of the people. [00:26:33][43.2]

[00:26:33] Remember, this is all about optics. They couldn't trip him up in the presence of the people. And they marveled at his answer and kept silent. [00:26:43][9.8]

[00:26:45] Now, why was this response from Jesus so brilliant? [00:26:49][3.6]

[00:26:52] Because he has basically told the Jews that they do need to be paying their Roman taxes. And I told you that was not expected to go over so well. [00:27:07][14.6]

[00:27:08] So what is it that Jesus has done here that has disarmed this Jewish crowd and prevented them from working themselves up into a frenzy, and prevented Jesus from losing his influence over this Jewish crowd? What is it that he said? [00:27:27][18.5]

[00:27:28] How did he do that? Well, the answer is in the question he gave. He said, whose image is on that coin? Now, if you know something about Jewish culture, or Old Testament scripture, you know there was such a thing as the second commandment. Do you remember what the second commandment was? Thou shalt make no graven images. [00:27:58][30.2]

[00:28:00] That was a law given to the Jews that existed at the very beginning of the Jewish nation, civilly and religiously. [00:28:09][8.9]

[00:28:11] That law was with them the whole time. And they never misunderstood what that law meant. The law didn't say don't make graven images of just me. And they never took it to mean that. [00:28:23][12.2]

[00:28:24] They always took it to mean that they were not to make any graven images of God, or people, or animals. And if you research the culture, if you researched the history of the Jews, you'll find out they were sticklers on that. They would not make graven images of God, or people, or animals. Of course, in God's thinking, [00:28:49][25.1]

[00:28:51] the temptation existed in making those graven images that they would worship those graven images. Also in God's thinking was the fact that no matter what they made, it would be a poor representation of him. So if they were making images of God, they would fail miserably. I feel like that's the case with all of our pictures of Jesus that we have on our walls. Now, I'm not saying I'm against those things. I'm not saying you can't hang pictures of Jesus or have angel figurines or anything like that in your home. I won't take it that far. But I will just say this. We understand as a people that those pictures of Jesus. Well, there were no cell phones back there to snap those shots, there were no artist making their renderings, so all that we have of Jesus would be poor guesses at what he really looked like, poor representations of who he really who he really was and is. So, [00:29:52][61.0]

[00:29:55] think about this, when Jesus makes this statement, I almost can sense the conviction fall on the crowd. Whose image is on this coin? [00:30:03][8.8]

[00:30:06] Oh, that's right, we're not supposed to have graven images. [00:30:10][3.3]

[00:30:11] And here we all are carrying these coins with Caesar's face in our pockets all day long. [00:30:18][7.0]

[00:30:20] And we're using those coins to provide for our living. [00:30:23][3.0]

[00:30:25] And maybe they were trying not to think about it. Maybe they truly didn't think about it. But let me tell you something, I am not speculating wildly on this one. If you just look at the Jewish history that involves the Romans, you'll see that right up until the time of Christ, they were still sticklers on this whole image thing. Twice it happened that Pontius Pilate came into Jerusalem with images. First of all, he rode into Jerusalem with a flag that had an image of Caesar on the flag. And that liked to burn the whole city to the ground. The Jews got in an uproar. They threatened to revolt. They threatened war. Pontius Pilate threatened to have those Jews

killed. They all lay down and said, go ahead, kill us. Because otherwise we're not going to permit this image in Jerusalem. Later on, Pontius Pilate did the same thing again when he put [00:31:30][65.3]

[00:31:33] an image with a tribute to Tiberius Caesar on the shields there at the Antônio Fortress. And once again there was a revolt, there was a scuffle, there was an uprising. And that created a great tension between Pilate and the Jews. But also, more importantly, between Pilate and the Caesar. He was literally on his third strike at the time of the uprising during the trials of Jesus. That's why Pilate was trying to fly low under the radar. [00:32:06][33.1]

[00:32:08] A little Pilate/pilot and aviation joke there, but it went all over your heads. [00:32:13][5.1]

[00:32:15] Oh, good. That one didn't. Good. So in all seriousness, don't miss the implied full statement here. The Roman coin thing. [00:32:27][12.6]

[00:32:29] The Roman coin that you're holding, it was created in Caesar's image, it bears the image of Caesar. But whose image were you created in? You were created in God's image. [00:32:46][16.8]

[00:32:48] So the coins with Caesar's image, that can go to Caesar. But the souls that were created in God's image, those are to go to God. That's what Jesus is saying. The coins with Caesar's image, let him have them. Who cares? It's just money. If he wants it that bad, he can have it. But your soul belongs to God and you should be giving your soul to God. Who cares about the money? It's just temporary. It's just earthly. So according to Jesus, that's what matters. Not where your money goes, but where your soul goes. This was the original separation of church and state right here, as Jesus is pointing out two things here. Number one, you have an obligation that is earthly. That includes an obligation to your government. That includes an obligation to your fellow man and woman. But more importantly then that, number two, you have an obligation that is heavenly. You have an obligation to God. And Jesus is holding that up as the far more important truth. [00:33:57][69.2]

[00:33:59] It is true the government has the right to collect your taxes. *Insert groan here.* But it's equally true that God has the right to collect your worship. [00:34:10][11.0]

[00:34:12] The government has the right to your revenue. But God has the right to your reverence. The government has the right to some of your money. But God has the right to all of your soul. [00:34:24][11.9]

[00:34:25] So. Does anyone have a dollar bill in here. [00:34:29][3.4]

[00:34:30] Of course not, Christmas just ended, we're all broke. Well, let's pretend that someone in here has a dollar bill. You hold that dollar bill up. Who's on that dollar bill? [00:34:40][10.1]

[00:34:44] Washington. So give it to Washington. [00:34:46][2.2]

[00:34:48] If Washington, D.C. wants it that bad, let Washington D.C. have it. [00:34:54][5.6]

[00:34:55] It's just money. Who cares? The important thing is who gets your soul. [00:35:01][6.2]

[00:35:03] God created you in his image. You ever think of that, like, just, God can be seen in you? You were created in his image. And that means that your life should be fully devoted to the Lord. Give yourself to God. Be his. [00:35:03][0.0]

[1997.5]