

The Gospel of Luke

Lesson 25: Temple Confrontations and the Olivet Discourse -- Luke 20:1–21:38

The temple courts are crowded, and Jesus has set up shop in the middle of them. Day after day in this final week He teaches in the very place where His enemies hold the home-field advantage, and they come at Him in waves. First the chief priests and scribes demand to know who gave Him the right to do what He is doing. Then they send spies pretending to be sincere, hoping to catch Him in a word about taxes that will hand Him over to the governor. Then the Sadducees arrive with a clever riddle about a woman and seven husbands, designed to make the resurrection look absurd. One delegation after another tries to trap Him, and every single time He walks out of the snare and leaves them standing there, unable to answer Him in return.

But this is not merely a contest of wits. Underneath every exchange a deeper claim is being pressed. The vineyard has tenants who have beaten the servants and are about to kill the son, and the owner is coming. The stone the builders rejected is becoming the cornerstone. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is not the God of the dead but of the living, and the dead are raised. David himself calls his own son Lord. Quietly, relentlessly, Jesus is telling these men exactly who He is and exactly what they are doing, even as they sharpen the knives. He is the rejected Son, the cornerstone, the Lord at God's right hand, and the day of reckoning is closer than they think.

Then comes the moment when His disciples, like tourists in any age, gape at the temple's massive stones and rich offerings, and Jesus says the unthinkable: not one stone will be left on another. From that startling word flows the long, sober discourse of Luke 21, where Jesus speaks of armies surrounding Jerusalem, of a generation that will see these things, of distress on the earth, and of the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. It is a passage that has confused and frightened many readers, and one that careless teachers have turned into a calendar of the end. We will handle it with care, because Jesus meant it not to feed our speculation but to make us watchful.

Tucked into the middle of all this thunder is one of the quietest scenes in the Gospels. A poor widow drops two small copper coins into the treasury, all she had to live on, and Jesus says she has put in more than all the rich. In the same breath He warns about scribes who devour widows' houses while making long prayers. Power and pretense are exposed; humble, total devotion is honored. Read these chapters slowly. Watch the Lord answer His enemies, weep over a city, and notice a widow nobody else saw, and ask what it means to be found faithful and awake when He comes.

Group Discussion: Over and over in these chapters Jesus is approached by people who are not really seeking the truth but are looking for ammunition, hoping to trap Him in His words (20:20,

20:26). Why do you think genuine questions and merely clever or hostile questions lead to such different outcomes when they are brought to Jesus? What is the difference between coming to the Scriptures to be taught and coming to them to win an argument or excuse ourselves?

Personal Reflection: Jesus watched a poor widow put in two small coins, all she had to live on, and saw something the wealthy donors completely missed (21:1-4). When you give of your money, your time, and your energy, are you giving out of your abundance, the leftovers, or are you giving in a way that actually costs you and reflects real trust in God? What would it look like this week to offer God not just a comfortable portion but genuine, sacrificial devotion?

Read Luke 20:1-21:38

Study Questions

1. When the Sadducees, “who deny that there is a resurrection” (20:27), try to make the resurrection look ridiculous, Jesus answers that those raised “cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection” (20:36), and that God “is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him” (20:38). What does this passage teach about the certainty and the nature of the resurrection, and how does it correct both those who deny life after death and those who imagine it as merely a continuation of this present life?
2. Jesus repeatedly silenced people who came to Him with questions designed to trap rather than to learn (20:20-26, 20:39-40). When you come to God’s word, do you tend to come looking for the truth that will change you, or for support for what you already wanted to do? What is one area where you may have been reading Scripture to win an argument or quiet your conscience rather than to be taught and corrected?
3. In the parable of the wicked tenants, the owner finally sends “my beloved son,” whom the tenants kill so they can seize the inheritance, and Jesus declares that the owner will “give the vineyard to others” and that “the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone” (20:13-17). What does this parable reveal about who Jesus is, about the rejection He knew was coming, and about God entrusting His vineyard, His kingdom and people, to a new people in Christ?
4. When the spies tried to trap Jesus over taxes, He held up a coin bearing Caesar’s image and said, “render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (20:25). Caesar’s image was on the coin, but the image of God is stamped on you. What does it look like, practically, to give God the things that are God’s, your whole self, this week, and where are you tempted to give Him only a portion?
5. Jesus warns the people, “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love greetings in the marketplaces and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, who devour widows’ houses and for a pretense make long prayers” (20:46-47). What does this strong warning teach about the difference between true devotion to God and religious performance, and why does Jesus reserve such severe judgment (“they will receive the greater condemnation”) for those who use religion as a mask?

6. A poor widow put in “two small copper coins” while the rich “put their gifts into the offering box” out of their abundance, and Jesus said she “put in more than all of them” because she gave “all she had to live on” (21:1–4). Jesus measured the gift not by its size but by what it cost and what it revealed about her trust. What does this say about how God sees your giving, and where might God be inviting you to a deeper, more costly trust rather than a safe, leftover faith?
7. When David, by the Spirit, calls the Messiah “Lord” (“The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand”), Jesus asks how the Christ can be both David’s son and David’s Lord (20:41–44). What does this teach about the identity of Jesus as more than a merely human descendant of David, and about His present session and reign at the right hand of God, begun when He ascended and was seated as Lord and Christ?
8. Jesus told His disciples that they would be handed over, persecuted, betrayed even by family, and hated for His name’s sake, yet He promised, “I will give you a mouth and wisdom,” “not a hair of your head will perish,” and “By your endurance you will gain your lives” (21:12–19). When following Jesus has cost you something, in a relationship, at work, in your reputation, how have you responded, and what would it look like to trust His promises and endure faithfully rather than shrink back?
9. In the Olivet Discourse Jesus says, “when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near,” calls these “days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written,” foretells that the people “will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive,” and that “Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled,” adding that “this generation will not pass away until all has taken place” (21:20–24, 21:32). He also speaks of “the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory” (21:27). How should we rightly understand this passage: which words point to the historical destruction of Jerusalem that “this generation” would actually live to see, and how does that judgment differ from the final coming of Christ and the end of the age? How does a careful reading guard us against turning these signs into a datable end-times calendar?
10. Look back across these two chapters, from Jesus’ authority in the temple, to the rejected cornerstone, to the widow’s coins, to His call to “watch yourselves” and “stay awake at all times, praying” (21:34–36). Through all the confrontation and all the warning, Jesus is forming a particular kind of heart in His people. Name one specific way you sense Jesus shaping you through this passage. What is the single truth from Luke 20:1–21:38 that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Psalm 110:1, the Lord seated at God’s right hand, which Jesus quotes about Himself; Acts 2:29–36, Peter declaring that the risen Jesus is now seated as Lord and

Christ; Daniel 9:26–27, the prophecy of the city and sanctuary being destroyed; Matthew 24:1–35 and Mark 13:1–37, the parallel accounts of the Olivet Discourse for comparison; 2 Peter 3:3–13, the certainty of the Lord's final coming and the call to holy and godly lives while we wait.