

# Family Worship Booklet



God tells us that Ezra read from the book of the Law,  
day after day, and that the people of God  
were filled with joy!

## Friday – Luke 20:19-26 – Give to Caesar and God what is their's.

The trap had been set for Jesus, but he turned it on its head and entrapped the hunters. They had said of Jesus that he speaks and teaches rightly and that he shows no partiality, and that is exactly what Jesus does now. He is not swayed by either fear or favour, and answers the question asked of him, in a straightforward way. In doing so, he gives us the path we are to walk in our dealings with those who would seek to do us harm. Look them straight in the eye and call out their deviousness.

Jesus frames his response, as he frequently does, in the form of a question. He is calling these deceivers to walk knowingly into the trap they have set for him. I wonder if the Pharisee entrappers looked at the Herodian entrappers with a suggestive look of 'how will he answer this?' The Pharisees, if they answered, would have done so through clenched teeth, because they definitely didn't want to acknowledge any tax obligation to Caesar. Whoever answers Jesus' question, it opens the door, as Jesus knew it would, for him to make the point that their taxes are to be paid to Caesar, and their tithes and offerings are to be returned to God.

The real beauty about Jesus' response is its simplicity. He totally avoids getting caught up in a political discussion and focuses on the tangible coin. That enables him to draw the obvious implication from Caesar's image, and none of them could deny his conclusion. They have all accepted and are using these coins as their daily currency, and, as such, are indicating their willingness to submit to Caesar's rule, whether they like it or not. Jesus' focusing on the key issue is something we should always bear in mind.

But there is more to Jesus' simple answer, because the question he was asked related to the lawfulness of Jews paying tribute to Caesar. Lawful in the sense of God requiring it. His answer indicates that, in the providence of God, the Jews are the emperor's subjects and that doesn't negate their responsibility to God. Something that Jesus himself is going to demonstrate, as, in obedience to God, he is going to submit to the sentence of death pronounced upon him by the Roman governor Pilate in a few days.

## Thursday – Luke 20:19-26 – The trap is set.

Yesterday, we saw the beginning of a planned attempt to entrap Jesus. Now, let's work through the details. A combined spy ring composed of Pharisees and Herodians approach Jesus. These will be men who probably have never met Jesus, so as not to arouse his suspicion, and they will have the proven ability of telling lies plausibly. This is a cleverly devised, military-like operation. Every detail of their approach will have been talked through in advance. Nothing will have been left to 'chance'.

They begin by complimenting Jesus, an attempt to put him at ease, and throw him off his emotional guard. What they say about Jesus and his character is true, which shows that they were well informed by those who had sent them; but their words are spoken from hearts that are perniciously false. The question they ask concerns the appropriateness of paying taxes to Caesar. This is remarkable, given that these Pharisees and Herodians have a polar opposite view on the legitimacy of Roman taxes being collected from Jews. But it shows what lengths they are prepared to go to, in order to entrap Jesus. You couldn't make it up. This may be the first time, but it won't be the last time in these days leading up to the crucifixion of Jesus, that opposing parties will come together to attack Jesus.

Jesus, though, is wise to them; he sees what they're doing. Luke says, "he perceived their craftiness" and is not having it. He meets this stealth attack head on and asks for a denarius. The denarius was a small silver coin with the emperor's head, name and title stamped on it. It was worth a day's labour and was used to pay the Roman poll or head tax. One is immediately produced and Jesus asks a child-like question, about whose image and inscription is on it. That presents the entrappers with a problem. It's a question which must have aroused the thought that they, the hunters, were now being hunted; but since they have come to Jesus they can't remain silent, especially when the answer is staring them in the face. They have to respond and they do. Tomorrow, we will see what transpires.

There is a lesson here for us. We need to be alert that there are people who would seek to do us harm, and we must be aware that they will often use compliments to disarm us.

## Monday – Luke 20:9-18 – Jesus confronts the Jews.

In this parable, Jesus confronts the Jews about what they are going to do with Him. He speaks of an international businessman who plants a vineyard and enters into a contractual agreement with several farmers, whereby they will then cultivate and sell most of the crop as their income. I say most of the crop, because the farmers are to pay for their tenancy with produce.

In due course, the owner sends one of his representatives to collect the rental 'fee'; but instead of paying him what they owe, the farmers get together and physically abuse the man sent to collect the produce. So, he returns to the businessman empty-handed and emotionally traumatised. This isn't acceptable. The vineyard owner is surely going to have these men arrested, but he doesn't; he gives them a second opportunity to fulfil their tenancy contract and sends another representative. The farmers physically abuse this man as well and send him back with nothing. Surely the businessman will not let this stand; he must go to the authorities. But, again, he doesn't. In fact, he sends another representative to collect what is owed to him. One would think that these highly aggressive farmers will come to their senses, stop this abuse, and pay what they owe. But no, they not only abuse this third man, but they also physically wound him before sending him away. What's the vineyard owner going to do? Is it worth the possible risk of someone losing their life over collecting what is owed to him? He considers it and decides not to send another representative, but his own beloved son instead. Surely the tenant farmers won't dare lay a finger on the businessman's son. But that is exactly what they do; in fact, having contrived to kill the owner's son, they take him outside the vineyard, and they murder him. Their warped reasoning being that if they kill the owner's son, then there will be no one to inherit the vineyard and they will claim ownership of it when the owner dies. It's brutal. Theft, violence, conspiracy, and murder. Then the question is asked, 'what will the owner of the vineyard do?' The answer is given - he will destroy the farmers and give the vineyard to others.

Those listening to Jesus are shocked at what they have just heard, for they know exactly who Jesus is pointing the finger at. They know the owner represents God, the tenant farmers are the Jews, the owner's representatives were the Old Testament prophets, and that Jesus is the beloved son. Their shocked reaction, though, arises from their total self-centredness. They're not consumed with grief at what was done to the owner's men, nor the brutality of the son's murder; it's the fact that the vineyard is taken away from the farmers and given to others that deeply disturbs them. They have just been told that the Kingdom is going to be taken from them and given to the Gentiles. That's just unthinkable to them.

## Tuesday – Luke 20:9-18 – The cornerstone.

We return today to this parable in which Jesus talks about tenant farmers who murder the vineyard owner's son. Yesterday, we left the scene with those listening to Jesus, astonished, deeply shocked, at what they had heard. The idea that the Kingdom is going to be taken from them, the Jews, and given to the Gentiles, is just incomprehensible.

Jesus now responds to that astonishment. He looks the crowd straight in the eye. It is as though he is giving them an intense stare so that they will engage with what he has to say even more. Because what he is going to say will be devastating for them, and they need to hear it.

Jesus quotes Scripture to them. We should daily be listening to God as He communes with us through His Word, but there are occasions, maybe even seasons, when God will bring the Scriptures to bear in a very clear way upon our souls, and we need to be prayerfully open to it.

Jesus cites Psalm 118 verse 22. It is the same Psalm the multitude had sung as Jesus had ridden into Jerusalem on the colt. No one would miss the irony. The verse speaks about a stone. A 'stone' that will be rejected by the builders. That's a reference back to the killing of the vineyard owner's son. But instead of this 'stone' being discarded outside the vineyard where he is taken to be killed, it will be picked up and placed in the most prominent and important part of a new building that will be constructed. Jesus is telling them that they will kill him outside the city walls and discard him as being useless in terms of the kingdom they want to see built; but that he will rise again to be the most important stone in the Kingdom that God will build. As the cornerstone, Jesus will govern every angle of the foundation that will be laid, meaning that the entire structure will be erected on and around him. Matthew, citing Jesus's quoting Psalm 118 verse 23, writes, "this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes". (Matthew 21:22). Isn't that wonderfully true!

But there is more, Jesus says that there is a destructive element to this stone. As with a physical stone, when one either falls on one from a height or has a stone fall on them, the result is death. Jesus the cornerstone can be rejected, but there is a consequence to doing so, and it is unbelievably and eternally serious. If a stone were to fall on you and end your life, that is nothing in comparison to what Jesus is talking about here. For Jesus is speaking here of eternal separation from God to experience just horrific punishment. Praise God that by faith you will not experience that. Pray for those whom you know and love, who have yet to profess that gift of faith in the cornerstone, that God will save them and soon.

## Wednesday – Luke 20:19-26 - The threat to Jesus reached 'code red' level.

The previous parable and Jesus' application of it ignites a new level of hatred towards him. Throughout his ministry, the Pharisees had constantly been after him, seeking to catch him out. But their critical interest in him enters a new level of heightened animosity. Their objective has also escalated to the point where they are now actively discussing how they can 'lay hands on him'. Of course, that had always been a possibility throughout his ministry, but now it's moving to becoming a genuinely credible threat and marked by an immanency that didn't exist before. We are entering a 'code red' stage in terms of the threat to Jesus' life.

The only thing (beyond the sovereign will of God) that is holding the scribes and Chief priests back from acting immediately to arrest and kill Jesus is their fear of how the people might react. The huge wave of messianic euphoria that had carried Jesus into Jerusalem several days earlier is still being talked about in the coffee shops and bazaars of the city. The leaders of the Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin, can't ignore that. Jesus is a threat, but so far, he hasn't done anything that would kick off an insurrection, although his ejection of the temple traders would have sent shock waves throughout the city. So, these men need to be careful that they don't do anything that will inadvertently led to igniting such a rebellion. It's a fine line they find themselves having to walk, though their anger is rising by the hour.

Their discussions led them to devise a plan which they hope will get the result they want. The tactic they came up with is to hit Jesus with a double attack aimed at entrapping him. If the first doesn't work, then surely the second will. The Pharisees will go in first, and, if they're unsuccessful, then the Sadducees will form the second wave of attack. I use the word 'attack', but it is a very subtle covert operation.

The Pharisees send in men along with a few Herodians (Matthew 22:18). The involvement of the Herodians is interesting. They were a small non-religious, political party, who supported the dynastic rule of Herod, including its acceptance of Roman rule. This meant that they favoured the Roman Tax system because of the benefits it gave to Herod's delegated governance. This brought them into direct conflict with the Pharisees, who completely rejected Roman rule in any guise and its taxes, which they deemed to be 'unlawful' for God's people. So, it is something to see these men working hand in hand together to entrap Jesus.

Tomorrow we will see what they do.