

The Gospel of Luke A Question of Authority

Luke 20:1-8

1. The Continuing Activity of Jesus (v.1a)

The continuing emphasis of Jesus preaching the gospel and teaching the people is crucial. This was His continual habit (Lk. 3:18; 8:1; 9:6; cf. Lk. 7:22). This was also a primary purpose of His during His ministry (Lk. 4:43), and it is from this that His followers are not to be distracted (Mt. 28:18-20).

2. The Confrontation by the Jewish Leadership (vs.1b-2)

A. Their Questions (v.2)

Jesus had just finished wreaking havoc upon the commercialized temple and He is asked to give an account for His actions, but the Jewish leaders are asking a very disingenuous question. The hand and blessing of God upon the ministry of Jesus was obvious by what He did (Jn. 3:1-2) and in what he said (Lk. 5:20-25).

B. The Motivation of Their Confrontation (Lk. 19:47-48)

All of Jesus' religious and political opponents had already made up their minds to destroy Him (Mt. 12:15; Mk. 3:6). Their hostility in questioning is indicated later on (vs.19-20), but it would be naive to see this question as anything other than an example of their insatiable agnosticism (Mt. 12:39; 16:1) or of their attempted rhetorical entrapment (Lk. 20:20, 27).

C. The Makeup of the Confronters (v.1b)

The makeup of this delegation indicate that this envoy was representing the Sanhedrin (cf. Lk. 9:22). The Sanhedrin had significant power, especially when the people supported them, even to put people to death (cf. Ac. 9:1-2).

D. The Goal of their Confrontation (v.2)

The religious leaders had already made it their standard argument that Jesus' power was from the devil. It is likely that they were trying to get Him to confess, plainly and publicly, His deity so that they could rile the crowd against Him or at least have the grounds to accuse Him (cf. Lk. 22:7).

3. The Counterquestion asked by the Lord (vs.3-4)

A. The Rules of the Game: You Answer Me First (v.3; cf. Mt. 21:22; Mk. 11:28)

Jesus regularly interacted freely with people, even those who would not believe, who came to Him with sincere questions (Mk. 10:21). But He also frequently turned the questions back onto those asking the question (Lk. 10:25-29).

B. The Question: Was John the Baptist a True Prophet of God? (v.4)

This group of individuals had the ability and responsibility to answer this question. They took the task of preserving religious purity very seriously (Mt. 26:65-66; cf. Deut. 13:1-5; 18:20-22).

4. The Clever Trap of Jesus' Question (vs.5-7)

While the question from Jesus is both simple and straight forward, it also puts His opponents in a very difficult situation because of the connection between Jesus and John the Baptist.

A. The Indissoluble Link Between John and Jesus (Lk. 3:15-16; Jn. 1:19-31)

John always denied being the Messiah, but he repeatedly announced that he was fulfilling of the prophetic office of the forerunner to the Messiah, and John pointed the people directly to Jesus.

B. To Answer Yes? The Leadership Rejected John (Mt. 3:7-8; 11:18 Lk. 7:30)

John the Baptist did not capitulate to the corruption of the religious system, nor did he offer his baptism to the self-righteous because their lives showed no hint of true repentance toward God. If they answer that John was from God, they would not only have to answer why they did not accept him, but they would have to answer why they have not accepted the one to whom he pointed.

C. To Answer No? The People Embraced John (Lk. 7:24-29; cf. Lk. 3:10-14)

To state publicly that John was a false prophet would be to pronounce upon him the condemnations of the Old Testament (Deut. 13:1-5). But because of the popular sentiment of the people, this declaration would have resulted in their own demise.

5. The Curt Refusal By Jesus To Answer (v.8)

Jesus refuses to answer their question. Were He to answer now, it would not only land on deaf ears but it would be used as justification for turning the mob against Him (Mt. 26:64-68; Lk. 21:67-71; cf. Mt. 7:6). The religious leaders had already consistently and publicly given an answer to their own question, that Jesus was not from God in spite of all testimony to the contrary (Lk. 11:15; Jn. 7:20; 8:52; cf. Jn. 3:1-2).