

## I. Introduction

Good morning! A little over a year ago, a friend told me about Alec Gerrard, a farmer in England who has an unusual hobby. Alec Gerrard's hobby is building historical models and, by itself, that is not so unusual. But what is extraordinary is that he has focused thirty years of effort on a single model - the most detailed and historically accurate model of Herod's temple ever made. As the model shows, the temple was built on top of a large platform, and the platform itself was constructed on a sloping mountain top.

Here is a photo of the temple layout as shown in Alec Gerrard's model. The temple itself is the tall white building in the center. But before you could enter the temple, you had to pass through the courtyards. When the Bible speaks of the temple courts, it is referring to these areas. Jewish teachers would stand in the courts and teach and their disciples and others would gather to listen to them.

In today's Scripture, we read about Jesus teaching in the temple courts. As we read, we can imagine Jesus standing in the temple courts, maybe in a corner spot, with a crowd gathered near to listen. Let's read Luke 20:1-26.



## II. Scripture Luke 20:1-26 (NIV)

[1] One day as he was teaching the people in the temple courts and preaching the gospel, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, together with the elders, came up to him. [2] "Tell us by what authority you are doing these things," they said. "Who gave you this authority?" [3] He replied, "I will also ask you a question. Tell me, [4] John's baptism--was it from heaven, or from men?" [5] They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Why didn't you believe him?' [6] But if we say, 'From men,' all the people will stone us, because they are persuaded that John was a prophet." [7] So they answered, "We don't know where it was from." [8] Jesus said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things."

[9] He went on to tell the people this parable: "A man planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time. [10] At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants so they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. [11] He sent another servant, but that one also they beat and treated shamefully and sent away empty-handed. [12] He sent still a third, and they wounded him and threw him out. [13] Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.' [14] "But when the tenants saw him, they talked the matter over. 'This is the heir,' they said. 'Let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' [15] So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? [16] He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others." When the people heard this, they said, "May this never be!" [17] Jesus looked directly at them and asked, "Then what is the meaning of that which is written: " 'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone'? [18] Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed."

[19] The teachers of the law and the chief priests looked for a way to arrest him immediately, because they knew he had spoken this parable against them. But they were afraid of the people. [20] Keeping a close watch on him, they sent spies, who pretended to be honest. They hoped to catch Jesus in something he said so that they might hand him over to the power and authority of the governor. [21] So the spies questioned him: "Teacher, we know that you speak and teach what is right, and that you do not show partiality but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. [22] Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" [23] He saw through their duplicity and said to them, [24] "Show me a denarius. Whose portrait and inscription are

on it?" [25] "Caesar's," they replied. He said to them, "Then give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." [26] They were unable to trap him in what he had said there in public. And astonished by his answer, they became silent.

### III. Teaching

The Jewish leaders had already decided to have Jesus killed. Jesus' bold entry into Jerusalem and His cleansing of the temple courts that we read about in Luke 19 had made them even angrier. But now, Jesus was standing in the temple courts teaching openly and there seemed to be nothing they could do about it because they were afraid of the crowds. Before they could do anything to Jesus, they had to find a way to discredit Him in front of the crowds, or catch Him opposing the Roman government. They needed either the crowds or the Roman soldiers on their side before they would dare to attack Jesus publicly.

So they are going through a series of attempts to trap Jesus with their questions. Some of them came to Jesus as He was teaching and asked (**Luke 20:2**), **"Tell us by what authority you are doing these things," they said. "Who gave you this authority?"** Now, it was obvious to anyone who had been paying attention that Jesus taught and did miracles with the authority of God. The miracles and the things that Jesus had said all demonstrated that Jesus was God come in the flesh. The chief priests, the teachers of the Law, and the elders who asked this question were not honestly seeking an answer; they were only looking for a chance to cause trouble for Jesus with either the crowd or the Roman authorities. Jesus knew this, so He did not answer immediately. Instead, He asked a question which exposed their motives. **Luke 20:3-4**, **"He replied, "I will also ask you a question. Tell me, John's baptism--was it from heaven, or from men?"**

It was a simple question and one might think that the religious leaders would be able to give a clear answer. But they did not even consider giving an honest answer; they only considered how Jesus and the crowd might react to whatever answer they gave. **Luke 20:5-7**, **"They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Why didn't you believe him?' But if we say, 'From men,' all the people will stone us, because they are persuaded that John was a prophet." So they answered, "We don't know where it was from.""** This response revealed that they were not seeking the truth, but only political advantage. Jesus rightly refused to answer their question after they refused to answer His.

Jesus refused to answer the Jewish leaders directly, but then He told a parable that included the answer to their question and a devastating judgment against them. To understand the parable, we should first remember that Israel is called the vineyard of the Lord in the Old Testament. For example, **Isaiah 5:7** says, **"The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress."** These prophetic words are part of the Biblical background for the parable.

There is also some cultural background that is good to know. In the time of Jesus, it was common practice for wealthy landowners to lease their land to tenant farmers. The tenant farmers would work the land and take care of the crops. Then, at harvest time, they would send a portion of the harvest to the owner as payment of rent. This was a business model that would have been very familiar to all of the people in Jesus' time, and which is still common in some parts of the world today. Jesus drew from this background to tell a parable that represented God as a wealthy landowner and the Jewish leaders as tenant farmers who were entrusted to take care of a certain vineyard, the House of Israel. Of course, God was looking for a spiritual harvest of righteousness and salvation from Israel, not a physical harvest, but the parable gives a clear picture of how God is the true Master of all and the Jewish leaders were stewards who had been entrusted with a stewardship.

**Luke 2:10**, **"At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants so they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed."** The owner of the vineyard sent servants to collect the portion of the harvest that was due to him. But although the owner sent servants again and again, the tenants had no respect for the servants of the owner and they beat them and sent them away with nothing.



The servants who were mistreated by the tenants point to the Old Testament prophets who were so often treated badly by the leaders of Israel. Again and again, God sent His prophets to urge His people to repent of their sins and turn to Him, but the Jewish leaders rarely respected the prophets. Having gained power, the religious and political leaders often became arrogant and sought after their own gain rather than the things of God. This is very much like the tenant farmers in the parable who mistreated the servants sent by the owner because they wanted to keep the harvest for themselves.



**Luke 20:13, ““Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.'”** It is here that Jesus answers the question the leaders asked previously. They asked about the source of Jesus’ authority. Here, Jesus reveals that He is the beloved Son, and that He has come with the full authority of Father God. And Jesus tells them clearly what they are about to do to Him. **Luke 20:14-15a, “But when the tenants saw him, they talked the matter over. 'This is the heir,' they said. 'Let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.”** Here is a prophecy spoken within a parable. And, just a few short days later, the Jewish leaders succeeded in their plotting, and Jesus was beaten and killed, just like the son in the parable.



**Luke 20:15b-16, "What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others." When the people heard this, they said, "May this never be!"** Sometimes we have trouble understanding Jesus’ parables because we live in a different time and a very different culture. But the people there at the time immediately understood that Jesus was saying that the Jewish leaders would be judged by God and their stewardship would be given to others. Jesus is giving the Jewish leaders a pointed warning and yet another chance to repent. But their hearts were hard, and they continued to look for a chance to carry out their evil plans.

At the conclusion of the parable, Jesus combined references from Psalm 118, Isaiah 8:14, and Daniel 2:34 to show that the things that were about to happen were prophesied long ago. **Luke 20:17-18, “Jesus looked directly at them and asked, "Then what is the meaning of that which is written: "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone"? Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed.”** The builders are the Jewish leaders, and the stone, of course, is Jesus Himself who is the Savior of all who trust in Him, but who is also the Judge of all the earth.

The Jewish leaders understood very well that Jesus was pronouncing judgment on them. But instead of repenting, they plotted against Him even more, sending dishonest men as spies to try to trap Him with a question. **Luke 20:22-25, “Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" He saw through their duplicity and said to them, "Show me a denarius. Whose portrait and inscription are on it?" "Caesar's," they replied. He said to them, "Then give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.”** Roman law required that the taxes be paid, but the crowds hated the Roman taxes. The intent of the question about taxes was to trap Jesus by forcing Him to give either an answer that would enrage the Roman authorities or an answer that would anger the crowds. But Jesus saw through their plot and gave an answer that no one could condemn. In giving this answer, Jesus shows that we are to obey the government authorities, but that we are first and foremost to honor God.

I think that Jesus used the idea of an image here to point to something very important. Jesus was asked about whether it was right to pay taxes to the Roman government, and Jesus replied by telling them that they should give the denarius to Caesar because it has Caesar’s image on it. But then Jesus continued and said they should give to God what is God’s. How can you tell that the denarius belongs to Caesar? by the image. How can you tell what belongs to God? I would suggest that the same answer applies. You can tell what belongs to God by the image.



Of course, all things ultimately belong to God by the right of creation. God created the heavens and the

earth and holds all things in His hands. But here, Jesus is speaking of the things of God in a narrower sense, based on the idea of the image. The denarius bears the image of Caesar. But then, what bears the image of God? I think Jesus would have us look back to Genesis. **Genesis 1:26-27, “Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”**

Where is God’s image found? In mankind, the final and highest work of His creation as described in Genesis. Human beings are created in God’s image and they are given dominion over the earth. By introducing the idea of the image in His answer to their question about taxes, Jesus is pointing back to Genesis and asking them to consider the true nature of human existence. This relates closely to the parable about the tenants. Mankind was given dominion over the whole earth, and the Jewish leaders were given dominion over Israel. But the earth does not belong to man and Israel did not belong to the Jewish leaders. We are stewards, like the tenants in the parable, we are each entrusted with our own vineyard to rule over, but ultimately, it all belongs to God.

“*Imago Dei*,” is a Latin term meaning, “the image of God.” The Latin term is often used by theologians when they discuss the nature of man. Michelangelo’s famous painting of the *Creation of Adam* depicts God as having a human form and Adam being created in His image. It is a powerful work of art, but I am sure that Michelangelo was well aware that when the Bible says man was created in God’s image, it is not talking about physical form. In **John 4:24** and elsewhere, the Bible teaches us clearly that, **“God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.”**



But if “*Imago Dei*,” is not about physical appearance, then what is it about? And what are the implications of man being created in the image of God? There are many books about this subject and we have only a few minutes today, but I want to share a couple of key points. First of all, all human life is sacred because all human beings are made in the image of God. The great value of an individual human life does not come from any of the things the world values or from what an individual accomplishes. Instead, every human life is precious simply because every human being is made in the image of God. These days it has become popular to talk about things like quality of life, as if the importance of living came from whether life was comfortable or fun. But this misses the most important fact. Every human life is sacred, because we are created in the image of God.



And all of our gifts and abilities come from God and should be used for God’s glory. Are you a singer? Then sing to the glory of God. Are you a painter? Then use your creative gift for God’s glory. Are you in business? Then conduct your business with honesty and integrity so that people will praise God. Are you a teacher? Then teach the children about the goodness of God and His love. Everything we have or are is received from God as a stewardship and is returned to Him when we use it for His glory.

In **Luke 20:24-25**, Jesus said, **“Show me a denarius. Whose portrait and inscription are on it?” “Caesar’s,” they replied. He said to them, ‘Then give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.’”** What belongs to God? We do. All we have and all we are is God’s, because God’s image is stamped on us. We are made in the image of God. We love, because **(1 John 4:16)**, **“God is love.”** We create new things, because **(Genesis 1:1)**, **“God created the heavens and the earth.”** We are interested in spiritual things because **(John 4:24)**, **“God is Spirit.”** It is His image in us that makes us long to be like Him.

The sins of mankind have greatly damaged the image of God in mankind, but though it is damaged, it is not erased. And, if we trust in Jesus and follow after His ways, one day the likeness of God in us will be fully restored. When we look to Jesus, we see the true and unblemished image of God, because He is God come in the flesh. **Colossians 1:15** tells us, **“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.”** And **Colossians 1:19-20**, adds, **“For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.”**

#### **IV. Conclusion**

God made peace with sinful man and reconciled us to Him through the blood of Jesus Christ, shed on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. And, as we follow Jesus and trust in Him, we become like Him and the image of God becomes more and more visible in our lives. Let's close for today with **Romans 8:29-31**, **"For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?"** Let's pray.

#### **V. Closing Prayer**