

Silencing the Opponents
Luke 20:19-26 (07-26-2020)
Ernie Godshall
Faith Bible Church
Evansville, IN

Kings and generals have used spies throughout history to get an advantage of their enemy. General Washington had an excellent ring of spies to inform him of the whereabouts and plans of the British. We're all familiar with the final words of a handsome twenty-one year old spy, Nathan Hale. The British captured him in the Long Island Sound and hung him in Manhattan. He allegedly said before his death: "I regret that I have but one life to give for my country."

And there are spies who work against their countries. Some are recruited by foreign countries to learn the secrets of technology or strategies. Robert Hanssen was a trusted FBI agent who became a spy for Russia from 1979 to 2001. He gave away national secrets to the KGB for large sums of money. He was arrested and tried in 2001 and is still serving 15 life terms without the possibility of parole. It was possibly the worst intelligence disaster in United States history.

This morning we have a spy story. They are all evil spies in service to Jesus' opponents, the Pharisees and the Herodians. How they function and how Jesus responds to them makes for high drama.

You'll remember Jesus had just told that blistering parable about the vineyard owner and the vine growers who beat, maimed, and killed the owner's messengers who came to collect some of the produce or fruit from the vineyard. Then he sent his son and they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. This parable showed the history of the Israel's leaders who persecuted and even killed the prophets God had sent to them to turn Israel away from their idolatry. Now God sent His Son, none other than Jesus Himself, to Israel and they are about to kill Him. These leaders knew Jesus was talking about them and would have slain Jesus on the spot except for His popularity among the people who were hanging on His every word at this point.

Luke 20:19 *The scribes and the chief priests tried to lay hands on Him that very hour, and they feared the people; for they understood that He spoke this parable against them.*

We'll divide this spy story into four parts: espionage, flattery and a "gotcha" question, Jesus answer, and silenced.

Espionage

Luke 20:20 *So they watched Him, and sent spies who pretended to be righteous, in order that they might catch Him in some statement, so that they could deliver Him to the rule and the authority of the governor.*

Matthew and Mark tell us how the Pharisees and the Herodians worked together undercover to trick Jesus into incriminating Himself with His words. The Pharisees and Jewish zealots were strong nationalist Jews, and the Herodians were politically friendly with the Romans. In normal times these were bitter enemies, but these weren't normal times. Both wanted Jesus gone.

Now watch how Jesus' enemies operate. First they carefully watch His every move, every word, and every action. They've got eyes and ears on their target. Then they plan a covert operation. They send spies from both parties to catch Jesus. They are the Pharisees' disciples according to Mark, and others loyal to the Herodians. Notice how these spies work; they pretended to be righteous. Oh, despicable pretentiousness. They put on a fake façade of piety to convince Jesus they were certainly sincere. I'm always a bit leery when people come along who are hyper-spiritual or even spouting Bible verses. Beware. Just because someone fills their book with Scripture references doesn't mean it's a good book. Every cult tries to come across as biblical with all kinds of Scripture references taken out of context to lure followers.

Once they are confident Jesus believes they are sincere, they proceed to try to trap Jesus into making a

statement that would render Him guilty of sedition. Then they could immediately have Him arrested and brought before Pilate to be judged and executed.

Flattery and a Gotcha Question

Luke 20:21-22 They questioned Him, saying, "Teacher, we know that You speak and teach correctly, and You are not partial to any, but teach the way of God in truth. 22 "Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?"

So here come these fake, pious frauds, filling their mouths with buttery flattery. They appeal to His pride and try to get Him to drop His guard. They don't know with Whom they are dealing and in their flattery they say a ton of truth. Jesus did speak and teach correctly. Everything He ever taught was straight or orthodox. He never propagated any false teaching. They were right, He never showed partiality to anyone. God's Word applies to all people equally. He didn't tone it down for the influential or rev it up for the country folk. He did pretty well blast the Pharisees, but they deserved it. He didn't hold back on Peter when He said, "Get behind Me, Satan." And they were right saying He did teach the way of God in truth. Nothing pressured Jesus to swerve from the truth. He never jumped on the latest bandwagon. He was orthodox, impartial, and truthful. And that's a standard for every teacher or preacher of God's Word.

The Jewish leaders are right in what they say, but they say it with malicious motives. One of our disadvantages is that we can't read a man's heart, but Jesus can. He knows exactly what they are doing. And as you go through life, you'll learn too that flattery is something people use to get an advantage over you. Part of discernment is not to believe all the glowing reports people spread about you.

Now these leaders bring the gotcha question, a yes or no question that they think will put Jesus on the horns of a dilemma. They must have worked hard to frame it just the way it is. "Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" Why this question? It was a hot button issue! Caesar had a poll-tax that every man from 14-65 and woman from 12 to 65 had to pay to Rome to finance Rome's many projects – the army, roads, aqueducts carrying water to remote places, security in the cities, safety in travel.

The nationalist Jews despised Roman occupation and hated paying these taxes. It reminded them they are under Rome's authority and that paying it was being disloyal to God and would bring God's judgment. This tax had been the cause of more than one Jewish rebellion. So if Jesus says yes, He would offend these Jewish nationalists and deny His own Messianic authority over Rome. If He answers no, He'll immediately be guilty of inciting an insurrection. So either the party of the Jewish nationalists would turn on him or the pro-Roman Herodians would immediately have Him arrested and taken before Pilate. Surely they have Jesus caught in this dilemma. All eyes are on Jesus. What's He going to say?

A Brilliant Answer

Luke 20:23-25 But He detected their trickery and said to them, 24 "Show Me a denarius. Whose likeness and inscription does it have?" They said, "Caesar's." 25 And He said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

He detected their trickery. Mark says their hypocrisy, Matthew their malice. Paul uses the word "trickery" of Satan's tempting Eve in 2 Corinthians 11:3, "As the serpent deceived Eve through His trickery...." God uses this word to warn us of false teachers who also use trickery to sell you their false teaching.

*Ephesians 4:14-15 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by **craftiness** in deceitful scheming; 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ.*

What can we learn? Always keep your antenna up. Stay well informed by Scripture to discern whether a book or author or YouTube speaker or latest movement is speaking truth or just blowing smoke to get you to buy their book or join their movement and send them your money.

In verses 24-25 Jesus responds and His answer is brilliant. Instead of



answering directly and falling into their trap, He uses an object lesson to set up suspense for His listeners. "Show Me a denarius." You can just picture them digging into their pockets to produce this Roman coin, which is worth a day's labor. The people gathered round on tiptoe, all ears, not wanting to miss a thing. "Whose likeness and writing does it have on it?" "Caesar's." Yes, the coin has the image of Tiberius Caesar and the inscription: "Tiberius Caesar, son of divine Augustus." The other side had "Pontifex Maximus." This proved the Jews were under Roman rule.

But Jesus doesn't stop there. He isn't a political figure. His kingdom is not of this world. He came from God and so He says, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." You have an earthly figure on that coin, but far more importantly you are made in God's image and likeness, God has full rights to your life, so give God what is His, your life. What is that? It is your worship, your faith, your love, your obedience. Love God with all your heart. Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Set your affection on things above, not on things on earth. Present your body a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God. As long as you are in this world under Rome's jurisdiction, give to Caesar what is his, but your highest loyalty must go to God. That's true of us as well.

Silenced

Luke 20:26 And they were unable to catch Him in a saying in the presence of the people; and being amazed at His answer, they became silent.

Look at these pious fakes, these hypocrites, as their faces blush in sheer embarrassment. Jesus has dropped a truth bomb on them and they have nothing to say. They have to go back to their leaders, the Pharisees and Herodians, empty handed, failing in their mission.

SO WHAT?

Let's go back to Jesus' answer about giving to Caesar what is Caesar's. J. C. Ryle wrote, "Few principles contain more deep wisdom than the famous one in this verse." God has told us clearly in Romans 13:1-7 we are to submit to the governing authority, since God ordained that authority to maintain law and order in society. We are to pay our taxes and give honor to whom honor is due.

Rom 13:1-2 Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.... 6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. 7 Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.

Rome was not a just and righteous government. They did many horrific things, such as crucifying enemies by the tens of thousands. But the Jews were living in Caesar's empire, for good or bad. They lived with the infrastructure that Rome had provided. God uses authority to maintain peace and order. They were even then living under the 200-year Pax Romana. Rome had imposed peace over the empire with a strong military to keep rebellion and rioting squelched. Troops were stationed along the 6000-mile border to keep enemies out. They had cleared the Mediterranean of pirates so Paul could sail from Palestine all the way to Rome without being captured by pirates and sold into slavery. All this peace was costly.

So God says, obey the law. God ordained human government to protect the people from enemies outside and to enforce the rule of law within the nation. That's what Law Enforcement Officers, God's servants, are all about. When the rule of law breaks down, you have anarchy like we're seeing today. Defund the police? Are you kidding me? I cringe when I see young rioters, male and female, all ethnicities, spitting, cursing, hitting, clubbing, throwing frozen paint bombs at police and burning down buildings. That is exactly why God ordained human government. Rome would never have tolerated it.

Honor your civil authorities. Let me assure you that when those red and blue lights turn on behind me and a policeman walks up to my window, I am the picture of perfect humility. "Yes sir, no sir, thank you sir." You never saw such a humble soul. That officer is God's servant. God sent him there. Yes, there are a few bad policemen, but by far they are good men doing their job. That's why we pray for all those in

authority, from the president down to the local law enforcement officer. Paul urges us to do that.

1 Timothy 2:1-3 First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, 2 for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. 3 This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior.

Scripture shows that God instituted three realms of authority: family, church, and government. When the government oversteps its realm of legitimate authority, like forbidding the church to preach Christ, then like Peter in Acts 4:19 we must obey God rather than man. Does the government have the authority to impose all these Covid-19 mandates on us? If you believe that is imposing on your personal freedoms, then you have to accept the consequences of disobedience. And in our great nation you are free to file a protest or write your representative and certainly to vote to change things. John MacArthur just wrote a blog on this issue of Christ or Caesar. The government does not have the authority to infringe on how the church is to worship, whether to sing corporately or not.

So what do you do when Caesar or Nebuchnezzar clearly get out of their lane and cross boundaries into the realm of worship, like the babbly King of Babylon did in Daniel 3? He built that ridiculous 90-foot high golden image and ordered everyone, "When you hear my rag time band start up, everyone must bow down and worship my image." The band started up and everybody hit the dirt, except for three young Jews. Neb was furious. "Didn't you hear me?" "Sure did sir. But we only bow down to our God, not to idols." "Then off to the fire you go." "That's okay. We know that our God can deliver us from your fiery chiminea. But even if He doesn't, we're still not bowing." And you know the rest of the story. When they came out, they didn't even smell like smoke. Plus, they were honored with the presence of Jesus walking with them in the fire. "It's cool in the fire, cool in the fire!"

Let's go back to these spies who are trying to pin down Jesus. The people were watching all this. The spies were amazed that their trick question didn't work. They were silenced and returned to their sponsors in defeat. You'd think their efforts to shut Him down would stop. But no, the Sadducees are lining up to ask Him another question, "Are there marriages in heaven?" But that's next week.