

## Home Group Leaders Discussion Guide

### Luke 20:1-19

In the life of Jesus, we are now in Passion Week, so called as this is the week leading up to the crucifixion. All four Gospel writers give an extraordinary amount of ink to this final week, understandably so. The tension between Jesus and the religious leaders, as we will see, hits a fever pitch, culminating in His arrest and subsequent crucifixion. Jerusalem was abuzz since it was Feast season, Passover specifically. But there was extra excitement this year as Jesus' ministry had become well-known and the continued question as to whether He was the long-awaited Messiah was the overriding headline.

All this, of course, was much to the chagrin of the religious leaders. And most recently (see end of Ch. 19) Jesus had caused quite a disruption at the temple of turning over the tables of the money-changers, and driving the sellers out of the temple area.

Now in Ch. 20 we get to the religious leaders' (specifically the chief priests and teachers of the law) response. Their question/challenge to Jesus was, "*by what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you this authority?*" (20:2).

What is interesting is that Jesus did not return the question by asking them by what/whose authority they were functioning from. Or, perhaps He did, in a roundabout sort of way. Jesus did return their question with a question of His own. He stuck with the theme of authority, and asked them to state their opinion on what/whose authority John the Baptizer had functioned under. (By asking them if John's ministry of baptism was from heaven or from men is essentially asking by what/whose authority it came from.)

The leader's response was telling. Jesus had subtly made the distinction between John and His own ministry in contrast to the religious establishment. The religious establishment, it was assumed, had the God-sanctioned authority to weigh in on such matters that Jesus had just asked them about. The sheer fact that they couldn't give a coherent answer, and that their inability to do so was based on the fear of men, demonstrated how bankrupt the religious establishment had become. Any institution that is supposed to represent God (as the temple system was designed to), but is afraid of man, has lost its way and any authority and credibility it may have originally held. When such authority is lost, the vacuum that is created is usually filled with corrupt power, that ends up oppressing, if not abusing, people. Which is exactly what the Jewish religious system had degenerated into.

Jesus went on to illustrate this corruption and degeneration by way of a parable...what we know as the "parable of the tenants". The meaning of the parable was very clear to original hearers. The vineyard represented Israel, which was common Old Testament imagery. The landowner/person who planted the vineyard clearly represented God. The servants sent to collect fruit/proceeds from the vineyard represent the Old Testament prophets, sent time and time again to call Israel to repent over the centuries. The Son who the farmers/tenants kill was Jesus foreshadowing His soon-coming death, and putting it into big-picture context. Jesus

concluded the parable with a question and the answer to the question, *“What then will the owner of the vineyard (God) do to them (Israel, and especially—but not exclusively—the religious leaders)? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.”* (20:15b-16)

Notice the strong reaction of the hearers. *“When the people heard this, they said, ‘May this never be!’”* (20:16b) Notice “the people” not just the religious leaders. In retrospect, we see clearly that Jesus had in mind giving the “vineyard” (symbolic of the people of God...i.e. those who were under the reign and rule of God) to “others” meant that the Kingdom would become open to the Gentiles. The Jews, beyond just the religious leaders, took great exception to their exceptionalism being done away with. Not only would the religious leaders lose their fancy-schmancy elitist roles/positions, the unique distinction of Israel as God’s people was going to be changed. Israel, as a whole, and more acutely through her religious leaders, had been unfaithful to their calling. And the gig was about up.

A practical and relevant issue that this passage brings to the forefront is that none of us (individually or collectively) has any authority of our own. Authority is the sole possession of God and who He delegates it to. (That’s not to say we as humans don’t grapple for authority all the time...we certainly do. In fact, one way to interpret human history is as the struggle for power and authority). Yet, if we appeal to any authority other than God’s as our justification we are off-base and corrupt.

To go along with that (and these goes beyond the specific scope of this passage, but is VERY important nonetheless) the nature of God’s authority and power is LOVE. So the way God wields His power and authority is loving and good, which is the model for anyone operating with His delegated authority. Unfortunately, history demonstrates that more often than not, “religious authority” (be that Israel of old, or the church since) is wielded in ways that are inconsistent to the character of the God whom it represents.

This is why it is so important that we turn our attention and focus onto Jesus. He demonstrates the character of God. He functions with power and authority the nature of which confound those who operate with worldly power and authority. Worldly power operates under the premise that strength is about how much force can be exerted upon others. Jesus (i.e. the Kingdom way) operates on the premise of love, humility, service, sacrifice; of how much force can be withstood and absorbed. The epitome of this, of course, is seen in the cross, which we will get to in good time.

**Q. What positive “authority figures” have you experienced in your life, and what negative ones have you experienced? How would you describe the difference between the two types?**

**Q. Legitimate authority, when combined with selfish wants, leads to corruption (i.e. the tenants in this parable). How have you seen this in the world we live in? How have you, perhaps, seen it in your own heart?**

- Q. How do we/you discern legitimate authority versus illegitimate authority?**
- Q. What does Jesus teach us (by example in the case of the passage at hand) about how to deal with illegitimate or abusive authority? (\*Hint: Jesus uses wisdom and creativity—i.e. answering a question with a question. Also, we never see Jesus throughout His ministry take on corrupt authority with a full-frontal assault, but in a creative, subversive sort of way. What might that teach us about the means in which we are to accomplish Kingdom ends?\*)**
- Q. We all follow somebody or something. We give that somebody/something “authority” in our lives. We all know the “right” answer to the question of who we should follow/give authority in our lives to (Jesus). So, let’s ask this: who or what challenges Jesus as the ultimate authority in your life? How does that play out? (Also think through that question from a collective/communal perspective, not just a personal/individual perspective.)**
- Q. The parable of the tenants functions as a sort of commentary by Jesus on how Israel had performed in her calling to that point. What commentary might Jesus offer the church today as to how we’re doing in fulfilling our calling? (Try to focus on some positive and not just the easy negative.)**
- Q. Describe your experience of coming to terms with Jesus’ authority in your life.**
- Q. What do we learn, or what strikes you, about the heart of God (as portrayed by the owner of the vineyard) from the parable of the tenants? (\*Hint for HG leaders: if your folks don’t notice it themselves, point out how patient and trusting the landowner was. Patient as seen in not destroying the tenants immediately. Trusting as seen in giving responsibility of his vineyard to others to care for.\*)**