

March 1, 2020
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Luke
Community Baptist Church
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SCHEMING AGAINST GOD'S WISDOM Luke 20:19-26

Fake news has been a hot topic for the past few years. The ideological divide in our nation has provided a hotbed for accusations on both sides, pointing the finger at the other side and blaming the opponent for reporting news that is not true. Actually, some of us have known for many years that a lot of the so-called news is twisted at best and outright fabrications at worst. We have pulled back from listening to the news almost completely, or have become very selective about our news sources.

The advent of Artificial Intelligence has made the problem of presenting untruth publicly a serious issue. One of the most current issues is the ability to use AI to so alter videos that it is now possible to create a video in which a person's head and voice are superimposed on a different body, creating a video in which it appears that a particular individual said or did something on camera that he or she never said or did. In fact, he or she was not even at that location. The simple word for all of this is "Lie."

We who love God and trust His Word are confident that the first lie came from Satan. He directly contradicted God when tempting Eve and flat out lied about what God said. He is such a pernicious liar that King Jesus, God the Son, said about him, "*He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies*" (John 8:44).

Because the religious leaders in Jerusalem were of their father the devil (as Jesus rightly, truthfully accused them), they were willing to lie, scheme, and twist truth in order to trap Jesus in His words. They wanted to trap Jesus so they could deliver Him over to the

authorities for execution. They needed some pretty solid and sordid evidence to do that.

The narrative in our text took place during the few days before the Passover feast, the last few days of King Jesus' ministry. The rulers eventually succeeded in turning Him over to the authorities for execution. It appears that there was almost a steady stream of lawyers and religious leaders coming up to Jesus while He was teaching, asking questions in an effort to trap Him. He, being God and of perfect wisdom, answered all the questions, disarmed every trap so deftly that even the lying schemers were impressed.

This incident from Jesus' life presents us with a precise example of how to use God's truth to answer the hard questions of life. That is called wisdom. Tim Challis rightly observed, "Wisdom is the application of the fear of God to life; it is living in such a way that we esteem God above all else." In his book titled, *The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment*, Challis went on to quote Bruce Waltke who wrote, "[Wisdom] is a way of thinking about reality that enables one to pursue what is good in life. Through wisdom, God reveals what the values of life are and how they may be achieved. Wisdom is the skill of living a godly life." (Bruce Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004, 76.)

The wisdom God gives is able and willing to address the difficult questions of life. God's wisdom is revealed, taught, and discovered only in His Word. In the simple reply, "*Give to God that which belongs to God,*" Jesus summed up much of the Old Testament teaching about honoring God supremely. Exercising such wisdom through the application of Bible truths is not that difficult. Which makes us wonder why so many professing Christians are satisfied with replacing the truths of the Bible with words of human contemplations and experience.

The Desire to Set the Trap (vv.19-20).

Jesus had to deal with some of the principal men who had unprincipled motivations. *The scribes and the chief priests sought to lay hands on him at that very hour, for they perceived that he had told this parable against them, but they feared the people (v.19).*

Luke revealed to us that the important people desired to apprehend the King. That is not a new revelation to us because the principal men along with the scribes and chief priests had always been opposed to Jesus. Their opposition was partly due to the fact that they feared the people were going to make Jesus the king. That meant that they also feared Rome's retaliation for such an uprising. At this point in history, the principal men had an uneasy truce with Roman authorities. If Rome retaliated for an uprising, it would spell the end of their authority over the people.

So the problem was actually a very pragmatic matter of who was in charge. Therefore, common, pragmatic human wisdom dictated it would be best to be rid of this "would-be" king.

More than that, the important people were driven by vengeance. From the outset of His ministry, Jesus kept exposing the hypocrisy of the religious leaders. He continued the ministry of John who warned them not to presume that their lineage in Abraham was sufficient to justify them before God. Jesus also pled with these religious people to repent of their sins and humble themselves.

But those self-righteous men were about as much the polar opposite of humility as possible. The scribes, Pharisees, chief priests, and principal men were arrogant boasters. They presumed and taught that God had chosen Abraham's seed alone to be saved, and that they were the prime examples of the chosen people. They were the standard Jesus taught against. When the people humbly listened to Him, Jesus taught, "*For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven*" (Matthew 5:20).

Therefore, the rulers understood that Jesus had just told a story that said God was going to take the kingdom away from them and destroy them because they were going to destroy God's Son. They were right. *They perceived that he had told this parable against them.* When religious people sense that someone is speaking truth against them, they can get very nasty. A large part of persecution against Christ's followers throughout history has been at the hands of religious authorities. The persecution of the various Inquisitions came from the organized church. But in our day, radical Islam and Hinduism are definitely religious people who definitely persecute Christ's representatives. And Humanism is religion, the worship and

deifying of man, which breeds the political arm of Communism, which persecutes millions of people.

The principal people were angry for Jesus exposing their sin again. They were so angry they wanted to apprehend Him. But they could not do their deed because they were afraid. They did not lay hands on Jesus at the time because they were afraid of the people. Again they feared an uprising. How ironic that the very men who laid merciless legal burdens on the people, feared them. Typically, fearful, insecure rulers are oppressive.

The story reminds us also that it is possible for principal men to use unprincipled methods. *So they watched him and sent spies, who pretended to be sincere, that they might catch him in something he said, so as to deliver him up to the authority and jurisdiction of the governor (v.20).*

The self-righteous rulers sent pretentious spies to spy on Jesus. Spies are incognito watchers. They are people looking for evidence while trying to keep other people from seeing what they are doing. In this case, the spies pretended they were seeking answers or seeking truth.

Jesus was so spot-on when He assessed these people as being of their father the devil (John 8:44). Satan is the father of lies because he is a liar from the beginning. Therefore, he covers the truth about himself and presents himself as a messenger of truth. The most dangerous people in the world are not murderers, tyrannical dictators, or even leaders of religions that are clearly, obviously false. The most dangerous people are those who come very close to truth, even speaking about the truth of God, while actually promoting human wisdom. God describes them as, *such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).*

They hoped to catch the King. The pretentious curiosity seekers were subtly laying a trap. Their goal all along was to deliver over Jesus to the Roman authorities. On one hand, they could not execute a citizen in Judah. On the other hand, being liars and deceivers, they

could claim that they were not the ones who killed Jesus. Therefore, they had to catch Jesus in words that would condemn Himself.

The purpose for the rulers to catch the King in their trap was so that they could deliver Him up. One Greek word is translated *deliver Him up*. The word (*paradidomi*) means to hand over, to transfer from a person's hands or authority to another person's hands or authority. Therefore, our English, *to deliver over* is a good translation. It is the same word that describes John being cast into prison (Matthew 4:12).

The leaders did not desire to execute Jesus themselves. They were too obedient to their laws to do that. Consider their argument to Pilate. *Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law." The Jews said to him, "It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death" (John 18:31)*. Jesus warned many times that He would be delivered over (Matthew 17:22; 20:18; 26:2, and over 20 more references to His being delivered). Indeed, Judas did for the rulers what they desired to do but could not. The word is also often translated *betray*. The Bible records many times in plain words the sin of Judas betraying Jesus. *Judas said, "What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?" And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. (Matthew 26:15)*.

Here is a very important principle. Jesus taught, *"A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master" (Matthew 10:24)*. Therefore, men motivated by Satan just like religious rulers will deliver over the followers of Christ to persecution and execution (Matthew 10:17). Even near relatives (brothers, fathers, children) will deliver over Christ's followers to persecution and death. History is replete with evidence that Jesus spoke perfect truth in this prophecy. He was eventually apprehended and crucified. And almost from the day of His founding of the Church at Pentecost, His followers began to pay the same price. The attacks and carnage against the King's people continues to this day. Some researches estimate that persecution against Christians is at an all-time high. Some of our people have personally known Christians who were forced to meet in the woods in all kinds of weather while they lived under God-hating Communist regimes.

And we sit comfortably in our churches and sing our songs without thought or meaning, and listen to therapy sermons that make us feel better about ourselves, if it was actually convenient for us to

attend the meeting. So-called Christians who permeate our culture would never consider making a sacrifice for Christ who was delivered over for them. They think that pouring over the word of God in order to be taught, shaped, and spiritually strengthened by Him is asking too much. Hungering and thirsting for righteousness does not feel good to them.

The Attempted Trap Foiled (vv.21-26).

What rank hypocrisy those leaders demonstrated! They began to lay the trap for God the Son by words of flattery. *So they asked him, "Teacher, we know that you speak and teach rightly, and show no partiality, but truly teach the way of God" (v.21)*. If the Teacher taught truth, why did they resist Him? This was an incredible lie. There is no question that God the Son spoke the truth, taught rightly, and showed no partiality. There is no doubt that Jesus truly taught the way of God. He did not withhold rebuke and correction of the religious leaders. Nor did He demand the impossible from the weak. He fulfilled the prophecy perfectly: *A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory (Matthew 12:20)*.

But this flattery was a bold-faced lie. If they really believed this, the hypocrites would have repented of their sins in sackcloth and ashes. Merely addressing Jesus with the title of respect "Jesus" was rank hypocrisy when they really intended to kill Him. We think of Jesus' earlier rebuke, *"Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?" (Luke 6:46)*.

Having attempted to butter up the all-knowing God, the worldly-wise men presented their question that was intended to trap. *Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar, or not?(v.22)*. On one hand, "lawful" has reference to God's law (or probably in this case the leaders' interpretation of God's law). The Jews believed that Israel was God's land. God had given it to His people.

But Israel was now under the rule of pagan Gentiles who collected taxes from God's chosen people. Then the pagans used the taxes for bad stuff. Surely that was not according to God's law. On the other hand, it was required by Roman law that the Jews paid the hated taxes.

That created the horns of a dilemma. If Jesus said that it was against God's law to pay taxes to pagan Gentiles, the people would be happy, but Rome would not be happy. If Jesus said that it is lawful to pay tax to the Romans, the king and governor would be satisfied, but the people would rise up in anger. What could Jesus possibly say to answer truthfully?

This dilemma required God's wisdom. And what wisdom He demonstrated! A very short synopsis of what Jesus teaches us by His reply is, "Just do Bible truth." The King was not fooled. *He perceived their craftiness, and said to them, "Show me a denarius. Whose likeness and inscription does it have?" They said, "Caesar's." He said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (vv.23-25).*

Jesus, being divine, clearly perceived what the hypocrites were up to. While it is true that His divine wisdom allowed Him to perceive, it is also true that simple Bible wisdom is sufficient to reveal the same kind of hypocrisy. In disarming the trap, Jesus displayed the coin with Caesar's image on it. The people affirmed that the image was indeed Caesar's and Jesus informed them that his image meant the earthly coin belonged to the earthly ruler Caesar. He had a right to demand it.

What the entrapping Jews didn't seem to remember is that Caesar had the right to collect that coin in taxes even according to God's instruction in the Old Testament. Solomon, also an earthly king, taught His son, *Fear the LORD and the king, and do not join with those who do otherwise (Proverbs 24:21)*. So give to the earthly king the honor and respect he deserves.

But that same kind of advice got Jeremiah imprisoned and eventually killed. God sent Jeremiah to tell the fearful Jewish people who were about to go into exile in Babylon to *Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare (Jeremiah 29:5-7)*. They were to give to Caesar that which is Caesar's.

But the other side of the coin (literally) was the requirement to give to God what belongs to God. The coin bore Caesar's image and was his coin. I bear God's image, therefore, I am God's. While I belong to God, and everything belongs to God, God's plan allows for support of the government. In fact, that is the basic wisdom of God for every age – even ours. God requires us to, *Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor (1 Peter 2:17)*.

More specifically, God still requires us to give Caesar's stuff to him, when God instructs, *Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God (v.1). . . . Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed (Romans 13:1,5-7)*.

And if Caesar ever makes demands contrary to God, submit to God. For example, it is never God's will to crucify an innocent man (except of course to pay the price for sinners' guilt). Did King Jesus resist human authorities when they acted illegally? *When He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly (1 Peter 2:23)*. When it is absolutely impossible to obey God and man, obey God. But that is actually a very rare case. The cases seem common when we override God's wisdom with our own wisdom.

In the end, after Jesus exposed the spies' intent, even the sinners had to marvel at God's wisdom. *And they were not able in the presence of the people to catch him in what he said, but marveling at his answer they became silent (v.26)*. Of course sinning hypocrites could not trap the Living Truth of God in a lie. In that they marveled at Jesus' answer doesn't mean that they were convinced that He was the Prophet sent from God. They still hated Him, but for the moment there was nothing they could say.

If we are representing Christ well, our words and actions should have the same effect. This is especially God's instruction to the pastor or person in capacity of leading Christ's followers. God instructed Pastor Titus, *Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good*

works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us (Titus 2:7-8). God really intends for His spokes people to be able to silence the opponent of truth. Sadly, even when the opponents are silenced, they seldom embrace the truth.

This is also God's instruction for all followers of Christ. *For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people (1 Peter 2:15).* Actions still speak louder than words. Wise actions speak the character of Christ loudly.

Christ the King is the perfect example of God's wisdom in action. Sadly, not all of Christ's representatives exercise the wisdom of God. While it is true that we are all weak, all plagued by fleshly fallacies, and, therefore, all given to sin too often, we have little excuse for not knowing God's principles of wisdom.

The problem is twofold. First, we do not spend enough time exposing ourselves to the truths of the Bible (like Proverbs). That failure will leave us deficient in our knowledge of God. Deficiency in knowing God results in deficiency of wisdom. It is still true that *the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction (Proverbs 1:7).* It is also true that *the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight (Proverbs 9:10).*

The second part of the problem is that because we are not familiar with God and His wisdom, we do not live according to His goodness. In those cases, our lives do not only fail to silence the ignorance of sinners, but we give them more reason to reject and criticize God's truth. If we are really followers of Christ, we should be living out Christ's wisdom daily.