

Title: Gotcha! ... Well, maybe not.
Text: Luke 20:19-26
Theme: The fear of a man is a snare
Series: Luke
Aim: I aim to show my people how the light of the world frees us to live in truth.

Many of us have seen interviews that were less about getting information and more like public muggings. They are known as gotcha moments. A reporter confronts the interviewee with some private allegation, obscure fact, designed to embarrass the one being interviewed. These hostile set-ups rarely facilitate a reasonable and healthy exchange of ideas in a thoughtful conversation. In order to set the interviewee up, the interviewer pretends to be sincere. They pretend to want to help get the story out, connect with the public, etc. And it often works, because many people have private contradictions. Many people are desperate to be viewed, heard, and made much of. Plus, the only thing that our depraved human natures like more than building someone up into an idol, is to tear them down so we can feel better about ourselves. Gotcha moments have worked on many. But you can't surprise Jesus. You can't find a discrepancy in Jesus. You should be aware that any gotcha attempt on him is going to be a gotcha in reverse.

Read Text:

This morning I am going to talk about money. If that doesn't make you nervous enough, I am also going to talk about politics. And no, it's not because I think the church is getting too large and I need to chase some people off, nor because I plan to retire next week and this is my chance to finally say what I really think. I am going to talk about money and politics because our text does. What do you get when you combine politics and money? A number of things for sure, but one of them is taxes. I am certain that there are a variety of opinions in this room on related topics as: the government and the rich, the government and the poor, the government and economic equality, and the government and business. But our text doesn't get into all of that but it does talk about taxes and guess what? Taxes in the time of Christ were not popular. In fact, given that Rome occupied Israel, they levied some pretty onerous taxes on Israel. And since the Jews were constantly worked up about things, they were not an easy people to govern. So, the more soldiers, the more attention, the more oversight Rome had to give, the more it cost Rome to occupy them. Rome occupied Israel and her other territories in order to get rich off the occupation. They were an immoral empire, who worshiped idols who were ruling over Israel. Therefore, when they levied taxes on Israel, the people of God were, by Roman law, required to give money to this pagan government, who used that money to perpetuate their pagan things.

In order to set off dynamite, you need a combination of nitroglycerin that is absorbed in some kind of a porous material like wood pulp or clay, a vehicle of ignition like a fuse and a source of ignition like a match, fire, or electrical spark. By the way, did you know that the Nobel Peace Prize was named after the Swiss Chemist Alfred Nobel, who invented dynamite? Taxes, particularly Roman taxes in Israel are like dynamite. This is a combustible combination. You have 1) a tax (which is generally unpopular) 2) paid to a foreign government (very unpopular) 3) that does very pagan things. Therefore, there were people who were saying that it was wrong to pay

taxes to Rome. In fact, any Jew who paid taxes to Rome was submitting to and supporting a ruler over them other than God and a pagan one at that. So now, the unpopular and emotional issue of taxes has a religious and even greater emotional component.

We are in the final week of the life of Jesus. The Holy Week or Passion Week is the most important week in human history. Every moment is measured. The actors are described in 19.47-48; Leaders, Jesus, and the people. The leaders have to get Jesus without getting blamed for it. They are seeking to get Jesus in trouble with Roman law (so they appear innocent), or making him appear guilty for breaking God's Law (so they can appear to be offended and get the people on their side. They are desperate and will do anything, even lie to pull this off. 19.47-48 is like the title. 21.37-22.2 is like the conclusion. In between are 5 scenes. Our text is the middle scene. Scene 1 (20.1-8) Leaders challenging Jesus. Scene 2 (20.9-19) Jesus challenging the leaders. Scene 3 (20.19-26) Leaders challenging Jesus again. (Our text) Scene 4 (20.27-40) Leaders challenging Jesus again. Scene 5 (20.41-47) Jesus challenging the leaders and warning of their condemnation.

It is Tuesday, April 4, A.D. 30. So much happens on Tuesday. Jesus is at his Father's House, the Temple. The exchange with the Chief Priests, Scribes, has already been testy. But now the opposition changes tactics, but not opinion. Their tactics reveal a doubling down of their position. They try to spring a trap with the unpopular issue of taxes. The response of Jesus is notable for how he evades their scheming, but also for what he says. Therefore, there are two points in the sermon. 1) What happens when you pretend to be sincere. 2) What Jesus says about politics.

1. **What happens when you pretend to be sincere.** (20-26)

A. **You lie to get what you want.** (20)

The scribes (Pharisees) and chief priests (Sadducees) who are often like republicans and democrats are strangely united and they caucus in order to come up with a plan to trap Jesus. They send spies who pretend to be sincere. A spy is someone who is pretending to be something he/she is not. He tries to gain your trust in order to discover things about you in order to use them against you. The actual scribes and chief priests are not going to flatter Jesus. They have to get others to do their dirty work. The entire scene is a trap. It is lying built on a plan to snare Jesus so they could deliver him up to the authority and jurisdiction of the governor (think Pilate). Why was this so important when Rome gave some authority to the Sanhedrin to rule Israel under Rome's rule? The answer is, the Sanhedrin did not have authority to carry out capital punishment. Only Rome could do that and they wanted Jesus executed. So, they devised a plan in which they were all complicit in a lie. What happens when you lie to get what you want? You will believe your own lies to the point where you will even lie to God.

B. **You will lie to God and believe that you are right.** (21)

These guys are speaking the truth, even though they are lying. That sounds like a contradiction, but here is what I mean. What they are saying is the truth. "We know that you speak and teach rightly." You are a straight shooter. You tell it like it is. That is actually true! However, they don't believe it. If they believed it, they would not pretend to be sincere. So, even though they are saying what is true, they are falsely representing themselves. They don't believe what they are saying. They go on to say, "You show no partiality, but truly teach the way of God." If that were true, then why are they trying to trap him? And they are definitely trying to trap him. Now, they spring the trap.

"Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar, or not?" These guys were talking about taxes, like the poll tax that went directly to Rome. The argument went like this: If you paid the tax, you were acknowledging that Caesar was your ruler, and God's people should never acknowledge a power over them other than God. So, are the people of God exempt from taxation like this to a foreign power?" Whose side you are on Jesus? Are you with Israel or are you with Rome? Their pretense to sincerity is now obvious. No matter what Jesus said, they had him in a trap and they could act shocked and offended either way. In fact, since they had plotted this entire scene in private, I'm pretty certain that they had rehearsed what they would do depending on the answer he would give. But what they did not anticipate is how Jesus responded. What happens when you lie to God? You will get caught in your own lies.

C. **You will get caught in your lies.** (22-26)

This is such a classic Jesus response. He asks for a coin. Actually, he asks for a specific coin, a denarius. A denarius equaled a day's wage for a common laborer. Either they produced the coin, or someone in the crowd did. Then he asks whose image is on the coin. Literally, *"Whose likeness and inscription does it have?"* The denarius in that time had the image of Tiberius on the one side with the inscription, "Tiberius Caesar, Augustus, son of divine Augustus." On the back side it had a picture of his mama, Livia, portrayed as a goddess of peace with the inscription, "high priest." To the Jews who were offended at any image or picture of the divine, there was plenty to be offended about with this coin. However, they were using the coin. They probably had a lot of them from their little operating company in the temple that Jesus messed up a couple of days before. So, it's pretty difficult to pretend to be all offended at paying a tax when by your very use of the coin, you are acknowledging that you live under the state and power of Rome and you use its currency. When you use the currency of another country you are part of the system. You live in a land that is under the jurisdiction of Rome. Rome is your state and since you use the currency of Rome, it is obvious that you acknowledge this even though you may not like it.

These guys had already determined that Jesus was guilty, now they were looking for evidence, even if they had to fabricate it, to support their position. Jesus clearly says, to give to Caesar the things that belong to Caesar and to God what belongs to God. However, at the trial of Christ before Pilate (a couple of days later), they accuse Jesus of *"forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar and saying that he himself is Christ."* (Luke 23.2) That first line is a bold-faced lie. He said the opposite. These guys have nothing on Jesus. They can't lay a charge against him, so they

resort to lying. They are so desperate to defend the Law, that they egregiously and publicly break it. It is not just ironic, it is tragic. The scribes were defenders of the Law. In order to convince Pilate to crucify Jesus, these defenders of the law break the law. They bear false witness and they do it, publicly, deliberately, knowingly and pre-meditated.

Are these guys wrong? Yes. Are they willing to admit it? No. Are they even willing to admit that it is possible that they could be wrong? No. Why not? Is it because they would lose face? Is it because they would lose power? Is it because they would lose positions and appear to be disloyal to a tradition? Stubbornness is not a minor issue. These guys doubled down so much they executed the perfectly innocent, Son of God on a cross instead of being willing to admit their own bold-faced lies. Some of the worst evil you will ever find hides behind a religious resume.

What marks a person in the kingdom of heaven? Being poor in spirit (humility). Blessed are those who mourn (over their sin). Blessed are the meek, the merciful, the peacemakers. (Matt 5). What is first base in coming to faith in Christ? It is admitting that I am a sinner. I have a heart that is prone to sin. I cannot trust my own heart. I need to be distrustful of me and trustful of God. I need to be trustful of others who give evidence of the fruit of the Spirit. For me it's not a matter of "could I be wrong" but I need to assume that I am probably wrong. What if you had that posture when you approached conflict? What if someone else who has conflict with you, approached you with that posture?

How you respond to conflict, is like a CT scan for your spiritual health. When you seek to be threatening, accusatory, intimidating, argumentative, belligerent, unteachable, then who do you identify with in this text? Who is like that? The people who crucified Christ. Again, why did they do that? They were unwilling to admit that it was possible that they could be wrong. That led them to breaking the command not to take the name of the Lord in vain, not to murder, and not to bear false witness. Self-righteousness is not a minor issue. Here, the self-righteous lied, they believed their own lies and they called God a liar. (Same pattern in 1 John 1.6-10). And that is a dangerous place to be.

2. **What Jesus says about politics.** (25-26)

Jesus makes a political statement here. Here is an example of political theology. How, our understanding of God, his gospel, his Word and his kingdom inform and frame the way we think about politics. Jesus says something political to an audience that was very engaged politically and not united politically. The zealots wanted to violently overthrow the Romans and restore Israel to her political and military supremacy. They had some success when Judas Maccabees led a rebellion in Israel about 200 years before against Antiochus IV (Seleucid Dynasty, part of the remnant of Alexander the Great's empire). This was a military, political and spiritual renewal that also attacked the Jews who were "liberal compromisers" and in co-hoots with Antiochus. So, now a similar situation is at hand, only Rome is the occupying force and there are Jews, like the Sadducees who are the "liberal compromisers." The zealots and others who have sympathies in that direction are looking for a Messiah who will rid them of oppression and

make Israel the superpower of the world. The response of Jesus would have been disappointing to this part of the crowd because they wanted a political and military Messiah, not a Redeemer.

A. Jesus clarifies two kingdoms

Jesus talked about giving to Caesar what he is due and then to God what he is due. For his entire ministry Jesus has been preaching about the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Christ. The kingdom of God is already, but not yet. Already, are we in the kingdom of God as followers of Christ. Not yet, do we experience the kingdom in its fullness like we will. Therefore, for now, we are in two kingdoms. Jesus clarifies this; Caesar's domain (world's governments) and God's domain (the things that belong to God). God is the ruler over all things and carries out his rule for now as Creator and Sustainer and has established the family and governments for that purpose. Jesus asks whose likeness is on the coin? It is Caesar's. Whose image does Caesar reflect? His Creator. But God is also Redeemer. And for those who are redeemed, he carries out his role as Redeemer through the rule of the church. The rule of the church is not exercised through nor enforced through civil governments. Do you want this government creating a confession of faith for the entire nation that every citizen must embrace?

Jesus does not unpack this here. But we see how we have dual citizenship. We are eternal members of God's Kingdom, and temporary members of man's. These two categories make sense for us because we see from other Scriptures how the unbeliever is only in man's kingdom and how the believer is in both.

B. Jesus describes responsibilities for both kingdoms.

We give to Caesar what belongs to him and to God what belongs to him. We give to Caesar what belongs to him BECAUSE we are under God's rule. Jesus does not call us as members of God's kingdom to overthrow or overtake man's kingdom. It is not the job of the church to use the arm of the government to advance the gospel. Who oversees the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Table? Congress? No. The local church. There are two kingdoms. But, does our ultimate allegiance to God's kingdom

C. How does God's kingdom influence Man's kingdoms?

How should we live now as ultimate citizens of God's kingdom in the temporary, dysfunctional, kingdoms of man? Option 1 – Cut ourselves off from it all. Option 2 – Attempt to take it over. Option 3 - Carefully live in both. The NT describes believers who do not confuse the two kingdoms, but who live in both. How do we do that? That is going to look differently depending on what the government looks like. We should love, value, support and be good citizens of the earthly kingdom we live in. If possible. It is not always possible, but, at the same time, our greatest love and our highest allegiance is to Christ and his kingdom. Our ultimate allegiance to Christ compels us to be good, honorable citizens now. We can do that in at least 4 specific ways:

- 1) Pray for your government.

- 2) Be informed from the Scripture what does and doesn't belong to Civil Government (like prosecute murderers and thieves, but not force conversions) and what does and doesn't belong to the Church (like preaching the gospel, regenerate membership, ordinances, but not raising an army).
- 3) Give to Caesar what you must and where you can. Taxes, voting, lobbying, lawyering as needed, communicating with your representatives, school boards, running for office, work for the government, pursue law enforcement, serving in the military and doing so to make much of Christ, the gospel and point people to the real eternal kingdom.
- 4) Speak up for God and the gospel in the public arena.

Ultimately man's kingdoms will fail. They will collapse. The kingdom of our God and of his Christ is forever. So, we seek to influence man's kingdom now, knowing that our eternal citizenship is secure in Christ.

Have you ever had someone in your life who is a constant source of irritation and conflict? Perhaps you got to the point where you decided, I really don't need this, I'm going to get another job, or I've tried my best, I simply need to move and get different neighbors. There are some things we can control, but then, there are other things we can't. We may have to put up with difficult people because we need the job, or we can't move at this time. Doesn't Jesus amaze you! I would think that at times like this, he would talk to his Father and say, "can you remind me again, why I agreed to come here? Did you tell me how irritable, cantankerous, nasty and miserable these people are?" Why would Jesus put up with all of this nonsense?

Because he chose to come and live a perfect life, even under fire, and immense disrespect so that he could go to the cross in your place. Jesus is an amazing example of grace under fire. But he is more than that. He is Redeemer who has come to give his life for us. His dying was not just when he was scourged and nailed to a cross. His entire life was a surrender of his rights in order to be our sacrifice. That is our Redeemer. This is the One we trust in and follow.