

Title: Storm Warning
Date: February 21, 2021
Subject: Walking with Jesus Christ to the cross, empty tomb and beyond: Tuesday in public
Scripture: Luke 20:1 – 21:4

The view of storms from an airplane is amazing. At night, above the clouds, see flashes of lightning inside them and to the horizon 200 plus miles away. During the day, watch as cumulonimbus clouds build. It's a different story in a four-passenger plane. This was my experience coming home from the convention of Alliance churches held in Calgary, Canada. Back then Council included US and Canadian churches.

The pilot was a traveling evangelist. Two pastors and I were passengers. I was selected because I was the smallest of the pastoral staff where I was the youth pastor. We'd landed in Scottsbluff, Nebraska on the way back to Lincoln. When we took off again, the pilot called our attention to a quickly developing squall line in front of us that stretched from horizon to horizon. There was no way for the small plane to go over or around. The pilot said the best alternative was to return to Scottsbluff, spend the night and travel the next day.

That solution was better than the risk of storm damage or getting airsick again. That happened to me on the way up to Canada. The others noticed I was turning green and gave me an airsick bag. Next, how to dispose of it? The pilot explained how. Suffice it to say, someplace over the Black Hills...bomb's away.

Jesus had told his disciples a storm was brewing. He endeavored to prepare them for the coming events – his leaving, arrest, trial, crucifixion as well as his resurrection. The disciples would feel like they were back on the storm-tossed sea when Jesus was sleeping in the boat and they questioned if he cared for them (Mark 4:38). They'd again have questions, be concerned for their safety, and wonder what Jesus was going to do.

We come to Tuesday of Holy Week, known as the busy day. The Synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke give more details about this day than any other day of Christ's life and ministry. Jesus spends time in the temple for his last public ministry. Later he'll be on the Mount of Olives in private with his disciples.

Tuesday was like a massive stormfront. Jesus experienced the brute force of fierce opponents as they let loose with their thunder and lightning in the form of questions.

#1 the chief priests, teachers of the law and elders about Christ's authority READ Luke 20:1 - 8

The first group to approach Jesus were the chief priests, teachers of the law and the elders. Biblical scholar A. T. Robertson writes of them, "It was very common to test a rabbi with hard questions...the Sanhedrin (Jewish ruling council) were within their rights in challenging the ecclesiastical and scholastic (scribal) standing of Jesus" (A Harmony of the Gospels, p. 160). They were the ones to check the doctrine of teachers.

It's necessary on a church level to make sure teaching fits with Scripture. I'm grateful for men like Jim and Cliff, our current elders and others, who take this seriously.

However, the men questioning Jesus had ulterior motives. It was nothing new. They'd been plotting against Christ throughout his ministry. These men despised Jesus and wanted to get rid of him. They wanted

Jesus to say something that could be considered blasphemy to break his power, marginalizing him with the crowd and hopefully get rid of him forever.

“Where did you get the authority to teach and do miracles?” Jesus’ response “Fair question. I’ll answer it...if you’ll answer my question. Where did John the Baptist get his authority?” The religious leaders were in a quagmire. If they said, “From heaven,” Jesus would ask why didn't they believe John. If they said, “From men” they'd face the crowd’s wrath because they believed John was a prophet. They gave Jesus the only answer that made sense – “We don't know.” This was fine with Jesus. “Then I won't answer your question either.” The leaders sighed in relief they didn't have to admit anything that would alienate the crowd.

However, Jesus wasn't going to let them off so lightly. He told three parables to indicate their empty religious professions. Luke gives one while all three are in Matthew. The first involves a man with two sons. The first son said he wouldn't work in the vineyard, but changed his mind and went. The second said, “Sure daddy. I'll go” but didn't. Jesus asked, “Which did what his father wanted?” The leaders answered, “The first.” Jesus reprimands them for not paying attention to John’s teaching and repenting. Meanwhile, tax collectors and prostitutes, the lowest form of sinners in their minds, enter the kingdom of God because of their trust in him.

The second parable was a rich vineyard owner. When he sent servants to get his share of the crop, the tenants beat, mistreated and killed them, including his Son. They’d be severely judged. Jesus indicated the kingdom of God would be taken away and given to people who produce its fruit (Matthew 21:43). The attackers’ blood pressure rose and their hearts beat faster as they gritted their teeth in anger. They knew Jesus was condemning them, accusing them of not having real connections with God, of rejecting the one sent from God. They wanted to arrest Jesus but were afraid of the crowd.

The third parable was a king preparing a wedding banquet for his son. Those invited refused to come and mistreated the king’s servants. He harshly punished them. He had his servants get others to come and enjoy the banquet. The gracious host provided wedding clothes for them, emblematic of God providing robes of righteousness to people who come to him in faith. The point was the leaders wouldn’t accept God's gift.

#2 the Pharisees and Herodians ask a political question READ Luke 20:20 - 22

The spies were to keep a close eye on Jesus, what he was saying and doing, hoping he’d make a mistake. The other accounts state they were sent by the Pharisees and Herodians who were usually separated by political and religious beliefs. Pharisees were descendants of devout Jews who joined the Maccabean freedom fighters almost two centuries earlier. They continued to be passionate nationalists who hated occupation by Rome. The Herodians were influential Jews aligned with King Herod meaning they were supporters of Rome.

The two groups had formed an unholy alliance united by a common enemy - Jesus. They ask a political question, but first try to butter him up – “You teach the way of God in accordance with truth” -- then hit him with the hammer. “Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?” The hope is Jesus’ answer will get him in hot water. A “no” would lead to the Herodians reporting him as disloyal to the government. A “yes” and the Pharisees discredit him with people. They thought they had a win-win.

Jesus asks for a coin used for paying the tax. "Whose portrait is on it?" "Caesar's." "Then give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." Jesus objected to emperor worship by saying taxes belong to government, but worship belongs to God. He also pointed out their failure to give what should have been given to God. Insight from study Bible note: "There are obligations to the state that do not infringe on our obligations to God" (NIV Study Bible note, Mark 12:17). Duty to government and duty to God are not mutually exclusive. Jesus walked the fine line. We can walk the fine line of God and country.

They failed to trap Jesus. They were astonished, walking away with their tails between their legs.

#3 Sadducees about the resurrection Luke 20:27 - 40

Enter the Sadducees, a small group from the upper crust of society, but politically and religiously powerful. They controlled the high priesthood and the majority of the Sanhedrin. Almost everyone was a priest and they were in charge of overseeing the temple. They held unorthodox beliefs as they didn't believe in a resurrection of the dead, a future life, angels, demons or a spiritual world.

They have a theological query about the resurrection which is fascinating since they didn't believe in one. It seems to be their "go to" question and was likely asked of Pharisees numerous times to stump them. Why not pull it out of the hat and watch Jesus squirm as the idea of the resurrection is shown to be ridiculous?

They hooked the question to the Mosaic command that if a man dies and his wife has no children, she's to marry the next oldest brother. In their scenario, a woman had seven husbands. Each died without a child. The widow was passed from one brother to the next. The brothers all died and finally the woman died. The question, "Now then, at the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?"

Jesus tells them they're in error because they don't know the Scriptures (Ouch!) or the power of God. (Ouch!). He adds they're badly mistaken. Triple ouch! They lack understanding because they lack exposure to truth. The proper explanation is God is the God of the living, not of the dead, for to him all are alive. People who partake in the resurrection are God's children and God will provide for them. "Marriage, he implied, is important in this world, where death makes it necessary to preserve the race. The next world, however, is not merely an extension of present conditions. Eternal life is not prolonged physical life - it is a new kind of life. The conditions of earth will be superseded by new and different conditions" (teaching manual for Mark, p. 88).

These questions weren't asked in private. Crowds were listening in and they were astonished at Christ's teaching and pleased he was showing up the religiosity. Next up was a moral question. It came from an expert of the law who was a Pharisee. Matthew's narrative says he tested Jesus with a question. See what Mark reports.

#4. Expert in the law about the greatest commandment READ Mark 12:28 - 31

Some of the rabbinical schools sought to expand the 613 laws received by Moses into hundreds, even thousands of rules and procedures. Others tried to consolidate them into one sentence. The latter group irked the first group who thought there was no way to differentiate the importance of the commands.

Jesus begins with the central creed of Judaism -- there is one God who is to be loved with the moral nature, emotion, intellect and energy. He expands the second commandment from its original context (Leviticus

19:18) where the Pharisees interpreted it as being okay to love your neighbor but hate your enemy. Jesus enlarges the boundaries of loving our neighbor to include all people.

The expert in the law appreciated Jesus' answer. The text has him say in verse 32 "Well said." The English lacks a little...maybe a lot. It should be understood as "Beautiful! Excellent!" The man concedes what Jesus said is true, commends Jesus and adds supporting evidence.

When Jesus said, "You are not far from the kingdom of God," he was inviting the man to come closer and cross the line to embrace the gospel, which is Jesus. It wasn't enough for the man to be close. He needed to be in. There are some who are very devout and religious, lead good moral lives, read the Bible, pray, become a church member, know a lot about God, but they haven't fully come to him. They might understand that they need Jesus and even want Jesus but haven't yet taken Jesus, accepting his gift of eternal life he offers.

#5 Jesus asks a question about his authority Luke 20:41 - 44

Now it's his turn to ask a question. It's a question about the identity of the Christ, about his identity. He directs the question at the Pharisees while they're gathered together (Matthew 22:41). It may mean they're milling around in the temple and Jesus called out to them or they'd huddled together to figure out what to do with Jesus and he approaches them, in essence tapping them on the shoulder because he has a question.

"How is it that they say the Christ is the Son of David?...David calls him *Lord*. How then can he be his son?" The Pharisees and people knew the Christ would be David's descendant. They were at a loss to explain how David could address the Christ as *Lord*. Jesus said it's simple. The Christ is more than David's descendant. He's also the Son of God and therefore David's Lord. He is fully God and fully human.

#6 Jesus' warning to the crowd and his disciples Luke 20:45 - 47

No one dared to ask Jesus any more questions (Matthew 22:46, Mark 12:34, Luke 20:40). That was okay with Jesus. He doesn't need more questions. He has a lot to say and says it. He warns about the teachers of the law and Pharisees which includes the chief priests and all in positions of religious authority. Matthew presents the full-on attack at length. They're guilty of many sins – greed, arrogance, selfishness, demanding, power hungry. Most were "hypocritical, envious, rigid and formalistic" (NIV Study Bible note on Mark 2:16).

Seven times Jesus labels them as hypocrites and being full of hypocrisy and wickedness. He calls them blind guides and fools five times. They're snakes and a brood of vipers. Not exactly how to win friends and influence enemies. He says they're only concerned with external appearances to be seen by people and not internal righteousness - "being like whitewashed tombs which look beautiful on the outside but inside are full of dead man's bones and everything unclean" (Matthew 23:27). Most devastatingly he cries out, "You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to...How will you escape being condemned to hell?" (Matthew 23:13, 33).

It's easy to slip into hypocrisy. We get familiar with the ins and outs of the Christian life, church, and expectations of people. We can talk a good game. We begin to focus on the appearances and externals because they're easier to do than working on building the inner life. It's easier to slap some whitewash on the outside.

Jesus said to clean the inside of the cup. Then the outside will also be clean. Be concerned about what we allow into our heart and soul because out of the heart proceed the issues of life. Take the time to dig into God's word and pray and seek what he wants.

Also watch out for those who apply the “Christian” label to themselves to cover up their true intent. Wolves in sheep’s clothing. Jesus attacked these men as willing to kill and hurt his followers.

#7 the widow and her offering Luke 21:1 - 4, Mark 12:41 - 44

The public ministry of Jesus closes with him in the part of the temple where women were allowed. All could come to this area to place their offering in one of thirteen megaphone shaped funnels. It wasn’t secretive as people could watch others walk up with their offering and they used coins which make noise. He calls to his disciples to give his observations. The rich make a show, giving out of their wealth, probably what they could spare. They’d throw the coins into the metal receptacles for extra effect. People would notice and think they were so generous. The poor woman gave out of her poverty, putting in all she had, two small coins, the least valuable at that time, like two pennies. Jesus commended her, giving another life application. The Bible tells us “For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have” (2 Corinthians 8:12).

A. W. Tozer said, “In God's sight, my giving is measured not by how much I give, but by how much I have left over after I make my gift. Not by its size is my gift judged, but by how much of me there is in it. No one gives at all until he has given all. No one gives anything acceptable to God until he has first given himself in love and sacrifice.”

Jesus reached a turning point. A. T. Robertson put it this way: “The Pharisees and Sadducees had withdrawn in terror at the explosion of the wrath of Jesus and even the disciples were at some distance as Jesus sat alone by the treasury. It’s useless further to plead with his enemies. The task now remains to get the disciples prepared for the Master's death and the time is short and they as yet have completely failed to grasp the fact or the significance of his death and the promise of his resurrection on the third day” (A Harmony of the Gospels, p. 172).

Sometimes people take incredible risks during storms. Such was the case with John Blase. A bomb cyclone, a rapidly intensifying winter storm, had struck the Denver area. John recounts, “The blizzard conditions made the highway to the Denver airport almost impossible to see. Almost. But when it's your daughter who's flying home to visit, you do what you have to do. You pack extra clothes and water (just in case you get stranded on the highway), drive very slowly, pray without ceasing, and last but not least, trust your headlights” (Our Daily Bread, February 8, 2021).

Jesus was the one taking all the risks. It would end with him giving his life for us so we could have a right relationship with God and live with him forever because our sins have been taken away. He did so because of his extravagant love for us. He knew what was ahead and would ask the disciples to trust him. He asks us to do the same since he is the light to show the way.