

Anatomy of Rejection

Luke 19:45-20:18

Introduction

Good Trouble: Not all **trouble** is created equal.

- Some people *cause trouble* because they're reckless and rebellious.
 - "I call them toddlers... or teenagers... which are just giant toddlers. Don't believe me, watch my three-year-old and thirteen-year-old get home from school and ask for goldfish as a snack."
- Sometimes, people cause **trouble** because it's necessary and right. For example...
 - On March 7, 1965, a group of 600 unarmed, nonviolent protesters marching from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, to oppose violent racism and systemic disenfranchisement of Black voters. As they crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge, they were met by a posse of county law enforcement and state troopers. The marchers were attacked with tear gas and beaten with batons, some knocked unconscious, including women. The day has become known as *Bloody Sunday*. One of those marchers, future congressman John Lewis, suffered a fractured skull. He would later say that there are moments when obedience to what is right requires "**good trouble**."

Jesus Disrupts: Sometimes we mistake Jesus' kindness and gentleness for passivity. When Jesus encounters injustice and he opposes it, he disrupts it. He challenges it.

- The same is true for your life! Jesus has come to *disrupt* your sin.
- He's not **submitting a proposal to renovate your heart**; he's demonstrating his **complete authority** and calling you to surrender. There can't be "business as usual" with Jesus.
 - The chasm continues to grow between those who receive Jesus' authority with joy and submission and those who reject it to their destruction.
- Today's progression: ① He **claims** authority in the temple → ② His authority is **questioned** by the religious leaders → ③ His authority is **rejected** by those in power.

How will you respond to the authority of Jesus?

1. Jesus claims authority over God's house (19:45-48)

^{19:45} And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold, ⁴⁶ saying to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be a house of prayer,' but you have made it a den of robbers." ⁴⁷ And he was teaching daily in the temple. The chief priests and the scribes and the principal men of the people were seeking to destroy him, ⁴⁸ but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were hanging on his words.

Problem: ⁴⁵ And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold

- Luke shares the briefest version of this **famous scene** (one of the few stories in all *four* gospels).¹ In **Matthew**,² we see more explicitly what they are doing: **exchanging currency** and **selling pigeons** (a sacrifice approved for poor people).³ He not only drive[s] out those who sold, but he **overturned their tables**. In **Mark**, he connects the corruption to the displacement of Gentiles who had come to pray.⁴ In **John**,⁵ we see just how intense his cleansing is as he makes a **whip** and dumps the profiteers' **coins on the ground**.
- In short, the temple leadership had set up a marketplace in the Temple's largest space, the Court of the Gentiles, displacing those who had come to pray.
 - ⁶ “And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant— ⁷ these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.” ⁸ The Lord GOD, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, declares, “I will gather yet others to him besides those already gathered” (Is 56:6-8). *Contra* prideful tax collector praying in public (Lk 18:11-14).
- **They turned the prayer room into a gift shop.**
- Pilgrims came from all over the Mediterranean to offer sacrifices at the temple as commanded in the Torah.⁶ **What happens when they arrive?**
- The religious leaders overcharge for sacrifices and currency exchange, using their religious authority to enforce their exploitation.⁷ Thus, he quotes Jer 7:11: you have made it a den of robbers.”
 - You show up from your long journey with your sacrificial animal, and the priest says it's not the right kind or has a blemish you can't see. So they suggest you buy this one we sell right here at the temple, and, of course, it's five times the normal rate (e.g., like buying food at an amusement park).

Temple: The temple was the visible manifestation of God's presence among the people, the center of their worship, and the place where they could commune with God.⁸

- It has now been cheapened. Its primary function replaced by commercialization.⁹
- **They turned God's presence into profit.** As a result, they missed the great treasure God offers.

¹ Along with the feeding of the 5,000, triumphal entry, passion, and resurrection.

² Matt 21:12-17

³ Lev 5:7

⁴ Mk 11:15-16. No it happens in this location because he cites Is 56:7 which describes the temple as “a house of prayer *for all peoples*.” The Gentiles could only pray in the Court of the Gentiles.

⁵ Some dispute as it occurs early in his ministry (Jn 2:13-22).

⁶ Cf. Lev 1–7. Outside evidence of priestly corruption, as the high priests send servants to seize tithes through violence (Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.8.8). Cf. also Qumran evidence: “They rob the poor of my people” (Damascus Document).

⁷ Later Rabbis admit that price gouging had happened (e.g., *b. Keritot* 8a).

⁸ Cf. 1 Kgs 8:27-30

⁹ Like a gift shop at a *Notre Dame*.

- The church is not the temple, but the principle remains. Be wary of the preachers and pundits who turn worship into a means of wealth.¹⁰
- Jesus is not anti-temple; he is anti-sin. He is *for* the temple being used *for* its holy purpose, not diminished for carnal gain.
 - *The same is true of us. When Jesus flips over the greedy tables in your life, when he drives out the sin in your heart, he is not against your prosperity; he is infinitely for your joy. He loves you so much that he wants you to experience God's presence and purpose and refuses to let sin ruin that.

Authority: Jesus doesn't ask permission to cleanse the temple; he exercises ownership over it. **Jesus is greater than the temple** (Matt 12:6). In fact, Solomon's temple is a temporary pointer to the greater reality of Christ.¹¹

- The temple was the place where heaven and earth met, but now they meet in Jesus. No longer do the people go to a building to dwell with God; He has come to dwell with us in Christ.¹² **What the temple symbolized, Jesus embodies.**
- Access to God is no longer limited by the sacrifice you can afford, but guaranteed by the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ, our permanent mediator.¹³
- Jesus walks into *their sphere of influence* and shows that it really belongs to him (e.g., Terrell Owens, Cowboy Star).
 - If I come home from a trip to an unauthorized party in my house, I can walk in and kick everyone out because it's *my house*. I have **jurisdiction and authority**.
- This whole moment is **an indictment of Israel's religious leadership and a declaration of Jesus' authority**. The temple is *his house*.

People Respond: If he was out of line, he would have been arrested and charged, yet the chief priests and the scribes and the principal men of the people who were seeking to destroy him could do nothing!¹⁴

- The people welcomed him, hanging on his words.

Since they can't touch him, they question him. Their question reveals their rejection.

2. Rejecting authority often hides behind questions (20:1-8)

^{20:1} One day, as Jesus was teaching the people in the temple and preaching the gospel, the chief priests and the scribes with the elders came up ² and said to him, "Tell us by what authority you do these things, or who it is that gave you this authority." ³ He answered them, "I also will ask you a question. Now tell me, ⁴ was the baptism of John from heaven or from man?" ⁵ And they discussed it with one another, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say, 'Why did you

¹⁰ Cf. Druski megachurch sketch

¹¹ *Type*

¹² 1 Kgs 8:10-11, Jn 1:14

¹³ Heb 9:26, 10:11, 10:19; 1 Tim 2:5

¹⁴ Rather than welcoming him with joy, the powerful leaders feel threatened, helpless, and confused that this itinerant prophet is embraced as a King and that crowds flock to see him. It's one thing for him to be popular in the village synagogues of the surrounding regions, but to command a crowd in the very courts of the Temple!

not believe him?’⁶ But if we say, ‘From man,’ all the people will stone us to death, for they are convinced that John was a prophet.”⁷ So they answered that they did not know where it came from.⁸ And Jesus said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.”

Questioning Jesus: When a question isn’t a question. Asking my children, can you empty the dishwasher? I’m not conducting a survey. I’m exercising authority.

- What’s the question about? **Authority.**¹⁵ “Tell us by what authority you do these things, or who it is that gave you this authority.” What gives you the right? How dare you?
- They are not genuinely interested in the answer; they are using this conversation as a less-than-subtle way to challenge his authority.
- Be careful when you question God. Discipleship is not a negotiation; it’s surrender. The Bible starts with a snake questioning what God says.

Question for a Question:³ He answered them, “I also will ask you a question. Now tell me,⁴ was the baptism of John from heaven or from man?”

- Jesus responds with his own question. This is (1) a common Rabbinic method, (2) one of Jesus’ favorite tactics,¹⁶ (3) a simple way to refute their argument.
 - By making this about John the Baptist, he’s making this about himself, but without being direct about it.
- Aside from Jesus, John the Baptist is the most significant figure in the Gospels. He was a popular preacher, drawing crowds into the wilderness and calling them to repent.
 - But John made it undeniable that his ministry was meant to set the stage for the Messiah. He was a forerunner. Whatever heights he achieved, Jesus would surpass. Whatever baptism he performed, Jesus would exceed.¹⁷
 - John (and those who heard him) undoubtedly knew and believed that Jesus was greater than John.
- What they believe about John will tell him all he needs to know about what they believe about him (sort of “asking for a friend”).¹⁸
- And these chief priests and elders know the same thing (that’s why they hesitate to answer). **They know that if they admit John’s baptism was from heaven, they are admitting that Jesus’ authority is divine.**¹⁹

Dilemma: They have **two** options, so they go to the **Family Feud huddle** to come up with their final answer.

- (1) Admit that God had sent John with power and authority.
 - But then they will have to admit that they didn’t follow him: ‘Why did you not believe him?’ (notice how the word “believe” is used here; it’s not *intellectual*, it’s *volitional*). What is true of John is even *more* true of Jesus!

¹⁵ Matt 10:1, 7:29, 9:6, 28:18

¹⁶ Mk 2:23-26, 10:18; Lk 10:25-37, 14:3; Matt 12:11-12, 22:17-22, 22:41-46

¹⁷ Lk 3:4-6, 16; Jn 1:26-27; Acts 19:4

¹⁸ Also avoids pride and gives them an out.

¹⁹ Where was John the baptist’s “baptism” (i.e., ministry, authority) from? Is it from heaven or just another human invention? Did he come with divine power or merely human popularity?

- (2) If they say John's authority was just a function of his charisma and human ability, then they will anger the crowds (the people could tell John was sent from God).
- It's a coward's dilemma. **They are not concerned with truth; they are only concerned with the consequences.**
- They had no real doubt that John and Jesus had divine authority. The question was whether they would admit the truth and act accordingly.
 - If they admit the truth, they have to admit they failed to submit to God's authority.
 - If they maintain the charade, they will lose face among the crowd; they will no longer have popularity, influence, and power.
 - The biggest challenges for most people are not over issues where the Bible is unclear, but over issues where the Bible is very clear, and **people don't like it**²⁰... "Whenever Scripture challenges some of our deeply held beliefs, as it often does, we have a choice. **We can challenge the Bible, or we can let the Bible challenge us**" (Wilson).
- They refuse to admit that Jesus is who he says he is because they are **unwilling** to relinquish power and control. They are too afraid to anger the crowd and stand on their convictions. **They're politicians more than spiritual leaders.**

In-Between Truth and Obedience: To receive God's help means to relinquish control.

- Many of us are afraid, because he has all authority, he can ask anything.
 - That would be scary if he were a harsh and capricious King, but he is not only just and powerful, he is loving and kind.
- The truth demands more than they're willing to pay; yet the crowd is too powerful for them to stand in their convictions, so they're stuck with nothing.
- "I would like to buy about three dollars' worth of gospel, please. Not too much – just enough to make me happy, but not so much that I get addicted. I don't want so much gospel that I learn to really hate jealousy and lust. I certainly don't want so much that I start to love my enemies, cherish self-denial, and contemplate missionary service in some foreign culture. I want ecstasy, not repentance; I want transcendence, not transformation. I would like to be cherished by some nice, forgiving, broad-minded people, but I myself don't want to love those [different than me] – especially if they have messy lives. I would like enough gospel to make my family secure and my children well behaved, but not so much that I find my ambitions redirected or my giving too greatly enlarged. I would like about three dollars' worth of gospel, please" (Carson).
- That, unfortunately, is often our way. **We want Jesus to bless us, not direct us. We want Jesus to co-sign on our desires, not have authority over our lives.**

They refuse to answer because they already know the truth and the cost of admitting it. So Jesus stops asking questions and starts telling a story. Because when authority is questioned long enough, it is eventually rejected.

3. Rejecting the Son is the final act of rebellion (vv. 9-18)

²⁰ E.g., miracles, judgment, sex

⁹ And he began to tell the people this parable: “A man planted a vineyard and let it out to tenants and went into another country for a long while. ¹⁰ When the time came, he sent a servant to the tenants, so that they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. ¹¹ And he sent another servant. But they also beat and treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed. ¹² And he sent yet a third. This one also they wounded and cast out. ¹³ Then the owner of the vineyard said, ‘What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.’ ¹⁴ But when the tenants saw him, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours.’ ¹⁵ And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? ¹⁶ He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others.” When they heard this, they said, “Surely not!” ¹⁷ But he looked directly at them and said, “What then is this that is written: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone”?’ ¹⁸ Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.”

This Parable.²¹ Don't press the metaphor too hard, but understand the *point* clearly.

- **God** is the **owner** or master of the vineyard.
- God's **people** are the **vineyard**.²²
 - *The vineyard belongs to God, even when others manage it.*
- The **tenants** represent Israel's **religious leaders** (e.g., chief priests, scribes, elders, etc.).
 - They are entrusted with the care of the vineyard, not ownership. They are accountable for its fruit. **Leadership is stewardship, not possession.**
- The **servants** are the **prophets** sent throughout the history of God's people, warning them to repent.
- The **beloved son** is **Jesus** himself.
 - The language of beloved son is familiar from Jesus' baptism and transfiguration.²³
- The **murder of the son** is the coming **crucifixion** of Jesus.
 - Just like the tenants killed the son *outside* the vineyard, Jesus would be crucified outside Jerusalem.
- The **destruction** of the tenants is God's just **judgment** for those who reject his authority and the coming of his Son.

Conclusion

Rejection: The leaders are *incredulous*: “Surely not!”²⁴ Spoiler alert, they know he's talking about them: The scribes and the chief priests sought to lay hands on him at that very hour, for

²¹ Jesus often uses parables to explain the nature of the KoG. E.g., Matt 13:24, 31, 33. In one sense, these are metaphors to explain the Kingdom. But these aren't simply “earthly stories with heavenly meanings.” He had already taught the gospel clearly and confronted the Pharisees directly. The parables create a paradox. They explain the KoG more clearly to those who understand it, but it isn't easily understood by those who don't believe.

²² Cf. Is 5

²³ Lk 3:22, 9:35

²⁴ Μὴ γένοιτο

they perceived that he had told this parable against them, but they feared the people (Lk 20:19).
“I think he’s talking about us... duh!”

- They don’t believe God would take their “vineyard.”
- ¹⁷ But he looked directly at them and said, “What then is this that is written: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone”? ¹⁸ Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.”
- “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone” (Ps 118:22).
 - Second most quoted OT passage in NT (behind Ps 110:1) and most repeated metaphor.
- They misunderstand: you don’t decide *whether* Jesus is the beloved son of God, the cornerstone of God’s plans.
 - ¹¹ This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. ¹² And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (Peter, Acts 4:11-12).²⁵
- You only decide whether you will be humbled by him in repentance, or crushed by him in judgment.
 - “Rejection of Christ is not an amoral decision; it is itself an instance of sin. This is a message that our religiously pluralistic society today finds just as offensive as did first-century polytheistic society. To reject Christ *is* to stumble and sin” (Jobes).
 - Rejecting Jesus, the only way to God, is done at your own demise and peril.
 - You will meet Jesus either in repentance that breaks you or judgment that crushes you.
- He will disrupt your life one way or another, will it be in salvation or in destruction?

²⁵ Before the Sanhedrin after healing a lame man at the temple gates and being arrested for preaching that Jesus had risen from the dead.