**Chapters 19:28-20:47  – Conflicts in the Temple**

*19:28-44: Jesus reaches Jerusalem*

Since the transfiguration in chapter 9, Jesus has been on his way to Jerusalem teaching about discipleship and demonstrating the presence of the Kingdom of God. He now prepares for his “triumphal entry” and immanent rejection and death. The story reads a bit like a spy story, with the disciples retrieving a colt and gaining permission from the owner by what is almost like a pass-phrase. Jesus has apparently organized His entry as a fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9,

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!

Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!

Behold, your king is coming to you;

righteous and having salvation is he,

humble and mounted on a donkey,

on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim

and the war horse from Jerusalem;

and the battle bow shall be cut off,

and he shall speak peace to the nations;

his rule shall be from sea to sea,

and from the River to the ends of the earth.

As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you,

I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.

Jesus positions Himself as the coming King who will restore peace to Jerusalem and set the prisoners free (again referring back to Luke 4:9-10).

As Jesus entered the city, His disciples spread their cloaks on the road (as sort of an ancient “red carpet”) and shouted out praises to God. They shout out the phrase "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!” The next phrase, “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” is a reminder of the message of the angels who announced Jesus’ birth, but instead of “peace on earth” there will be “peace in heaven.” Perhaps this is to foreshadow the result of the rejection of Jesus by the ruling class of Jerusalem that has been dogging Jesus since the beginning of His mission. Although the crowds (lower classes and outcasts) shout out praises to God and symbolically accept Jesus as king, the Pharisees reject the attribution. But praise to God and recognition of King Jesus cannot be silenced.

*19: 45-48: Jesus occupies the Temple*

Once Jesus reaches the Temple, His opponents are no longer the Pharisees and scribes, but the chief priests and scribes—those who are commissioned supposedly by God, but more realistically by Rome, to manage the Temple affairs. It is probably significant that the reference is to the “chief priest” (who necessarily were in collusion with Rome) and not to all priests.

Jesus’ first action in Jerusalem was to drive out the sellers in the courtyard. This is an assertion of His authority over the Temple (prerogative of the king), and His rejection of the official Temple rulers, on the grounds that they had replaced their duty to supervise the holiness of the Temple with an opportunity for predatory business practices, selling approved, clean animals for sacrifice (den of robbers). This act of violence creates a final schism between the common people who are spellbound by Jesus’ words and the chief priests, scribes, and elders who want to kill Him.

*20:1-19: the source of Jesus’ authority*

Jesus’ main activity in the Temple courtyard is teaching the people and preaching the good news (as He was ordained to do in 4:18). The chief priests and scribes, interrupt Him on twice – once to challenge Him and once to entrap Him with a question of pretended sincerity. Later the Sadducees (the more conservative religious party with closer association to the Temple than the Pharisees) try to entrap Him in a theological question.

The first interruption is the challenge to His authority. Jesus exploits the division between the people and the rulers and replies with a question that puts his questioners at even greater risk than the question they posed to Him. By refusing to answer about John the Baptist, they abandon their proper role as religious leaders and their right to demand an answer.

The parable of the vineyard is the real answer to their question about His authority. The parable was spoken to the people (vs. 9), but the scribes and chief priests recognized that it was spoken about them. In this parable the landowner seems to be a bit foolish. He continues to send servants to receive his due, even though they are beaten and eventually killed. Finally he naively and foolishly imagines that they will respect his son. The tenant farmers, equally foolishly, expel and kill the son in the hope of gaining title to the vineyard. The parable draws our attention to the incredible (seemingly foolish) patience of God in extending mercy to Israel time after time by sending prophets, whom they ignored, and persecuted. Even after repenting, they soon turned their backs on God and returned to idolatry and injustice. The whole Old Testament is a history of God’s mercy and Israel’s unfaithfulness. God’s final gambit is to send His only Son. He knows that the officials of the Temple and self-proclaimed righteous ones would also reject and kill Him; but in His mercy and love, God sends Him anyway. The result is not that they are rid of the rabble-rouser, Jesus, but that Jesus becomes the chief cornerstone on which they will be shattered, or under which they will be crushed – even after His death (and resurrection). Not surprisingly the response of the chief priests and scribes was to ignore the warning and try again to arrest Jesus.

*20:20-26: taxes to Caesar?*

The questioners come with a transparent expression of false admiration. Jesus doesn’t fall for it. The trap is to force Jesus either to forbid paying taxes which would give the opportunity to turn Him over to Rome as an insurrectionist or to endorse paying taxes to Caesar and recognize the rightfulness of Rome’s occupation of the land. Jesus does neither and simply points out that they have already been complicit in Rome’s economic control. The coin belongs to Caesar and to Caesar it must go. Implied is that the land and the people belong to God, and to God they must be loyal and obedient.

*20:27-40: marriage in heaven?*

The Sadducees were the more conservative made up of the aristocratic families of Jerusalem and Judea. They rejected some of the “innovations” of the Pharisees, interpreted the law more strictly than the Pharisees, and did not believe in the resurrection (among other things). Their question was designed to embarrass Jesus for His presumed inability to explain their conundrum. Jesus gives two answers. First, they misunderstand the nature of heaven and make false assumptions (as do we sometimes). Second, when God calls Himself the God of those who had long since died, it must mean that they were alive after death, because God is the God of the living, not of the dead.

*20:41-47: Jesus puts His opponents to shame*

 Jesus asks how the Messiah could be both the Son of David and David’s Lord. No one could answer. Jesus doesn’t bother to explain. We are meant to consider that the Kingdom of Jesus is eternal and extends to the whole earth, and that even though He inherits David’s kingdom, His authority and status far exceed that of David.

Jesus issues a final warning against the scribes because of their arrogance, injustice, and hypocrisy. They arrogantly seek recognition of their social status. Their position in society obligates them to seek justice for all. Instead they not only fail to enforce justice on the nation, but also actively pursue injustice by “gobbling up widow’s homes”. Finally they make long prayers as a pretense in their hypocrisy.

There is a clear division at this point in Luke. Jesus has warned that the kingdom will be taken away from the present caretakers and given to others. The Jewish people are not rejected here – only their leaders, who are consequently subject to a stricter judgment. They have been given an opportunity to repent, but respond only by trying to rid themselves of Him by killing Him. We also are called to follow him in humility, sincerity, and justice without worrying about our own position and entitlements.