

Authority Challenged!

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The religious leaders challenge Jesus' authority; Authority / Matthew 21:23–27

- › Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Introduction

When reading this text one might be caught off guard? The Elders and Chief Priests are asking Jesus this question: "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" What things? - is probably your question for today. Take note, last week you heard the parable of the vineyard, but today, we are in the middle of chapter 21 of Matthew's Gospel. You and I know that Jesus has authority from God, but his authority is challenged by the religious leaders. But why?

That's a good question and we have to look at the context of this text. When does this happen and really why does this happen? When reading any portion of Scripture, context is important. Very few of you know this, but there are times that I teach a High School theology class online, this semester that started we have been discussing context, and how context is key to understanding scripture. This is of no difference in today's text.

So let's first off look at the context!

Context

Jesus has just entered Jerusalem. Sure, he's been here many times before. This time though is different. This time he came in on a donkey and people were lined up shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" They were treating him as a king. They were excited to see him! Not everyone though, the Chief Priests and Elders, the religious leaders were quite troubled. They even began to ask, "Who is this?"

That Sunday evening, Jesus went into the temple and was disturbed at the sight of the vendor fair in the temple. Actually He was more than disturbed, He was angry. He was so angry when He saw this, He overturned their tables and cast them out. He says to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you make it a den of robbers.'" You can hear the anger in that statement. Why is he angry? He's angry because in the temple they are selling

animals and other things to be used as a sacrifice to hopefully attain the forgiveness of sins. He's angry because they are selling the forgiveness of sins? He's angry, because he knows forgiveness is free. And there is authority there—behind those words and actions.

Now it's Monday, in the morning when He was hungry and wanting a fig, He cursed a fig tree because it had not any fruit on it. He's back in the temple. Back in the place the day after He turned over the tables of money changers and cast out the vendors. Jesus was teaching. Now the Chief Priest and the Elders came up to Him as He was teaching and asked that question: "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?"

And with this question, really with two words "These things" the Chief Priest and Elders questioned Jesus' entire life and ministry, everything he ever did...the miracles, and everything He said and taught, including the forgiveness of sins. "By what authority, Jesus of Nazareth?"

Authority Questioned

This shouldn't surprise us should it. Many people question the authority of God. It's been going on not just for centuries...but really since the Satan deceived Eve, "Did God really say..." This questioning of God's authority, the authority of Christ shouldn't surprise us. As a fellow pastor says in his sermon, "It's what people do when pride and thirst for power and autonomy overtake them!"

The thing is, it isn't just the authority of God we question. We question and challenge authority from all areas that God provides and gives to us authority. Many blame the 60s which many will say is a representation of the full scale of the rejection of authority. Today is no different...there is blatant rejection of authority...#notmypresident #notmyrules You see the true human nature is the fact that we don't want to submit to authority, whether it's God's or anyone else's.

And the thing is you and I are no different? By what authority does anyone demand my allegiance and faithfulness? By what authority does the church demand my subscription to certain teachings and doctrines? By what authority does the church speak out on the moral laxity of the culture today - whether it be abortion, homosexuality, pre-marriage or even extra-marital sex. By what authority does the church commune some, but refuses to commune others? And yes I've heard all of these including this one, by what authority does Pastor stand up there and say, "I forgive you all of your sins?"

You see, what the Chief Priest and Elders did was nothing new, and what you and I do is nothing new. Questioning authority is certainly in our nature. We question the authority not only of God, but also...our parents, our teachers, our coaches, our bosses, our church leaders and pastors. We are guilty just as much as they are!

Jesus Responds

SO how does Jesus respond? Rather unexpectedly actually. He turns over the table on them. He answers the question with a question. I'll answer your question if you answer mine. "The baptism of John, from where did it come, from heaven or from man?" I picture them at this point going into a huddle and talking about this. In this question though, Jesus attacked both their pride and also their cowardly nature.

You see it was a question they couldn't answer. If they said "From heaven," they would have had to submit to John's calling them to repentance. But if they said, "From man," that would have riled up the people, because the people believed Jesus to be a prophet. These leaders feared the people. They were caught between pride and fear or really being a coward! They found themselves in a terrible place and they were not happy!

So how did they respond? Ignorance! They lied about John and his work. They simply had too much at stake to admit the truth!

The thing is Jesus wasn't just playing games with them. He was calling them to task and calling them to submit to his authority. He does it in the Parable of the Two Sons...and the Parable of the Tenants that you'll hear about next week! And He doesn't play games with you. He calls you submit to His authority as well...the authority that was given to Him as the "King of kings and Lord of Lords." This phrase means that He is Lord of all your life...your personal life, your marriage, your family, your work, your leisure, your worship, your church life, all of your life!

And yes, when you reject His authority and you do, and so do I. I confess that! He calls you and me to repentance. This is the very teaching that the Chief Priests, Pharisees, and Elders refused to acknowledge. They refused to repent. Yet He continues to call us to repentance. He continues to seek us out so that we fall on our knees to repent of the blatant disrespect of authority and questioning where it comes from. Ultimately all authority gets their authority from God Himself.

Context again

Context continues to be important. It's Monday of Holy Week and Jesus has divine authority over all of creation - and yes even those who question His authority. As we think about the context of when this takes place, context will tell us that in just days from this point, Jesus is going to submit to human authority, even to the authority of those who are questioning him. He's going to submit so that He will be crucified for the sins of the world- including those sins of questioning His authority!

When following the context of Holy Week and questioning of authority, Pilate asks the same question, "Where are you from?" Jesus says nothing and Pilate responds: "You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority (given to me from above) to release you and authority (given to him from above) to crucify you?" And Jesus says exactly as I inserted, "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given to you from above."

As Jesus makes his moves through Holy Week and submitting to human authority, your salvation is accomplished through that Holy Submission. Your salvation is accomplished through the submission of the one who possesses "All authority in heaven and earth." Isaiah writes in the Scriptures, "He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth."

Jesus was indeed like a lamb who was led to the slaughter house, because he didn't question where the authority was coming from...he submitted not only to the will of the political and religious leaders, he also submitted to the will of His Father, He knew where the ultimate authority stood. Jesus submitted to the authority of the political and religious leaders for you. Jesus submitted to the Will of the Father FOR YOU so that He could take your sins away on the cross.

Questioned authority

I'm sure many on the day Jesus was crucified were thinking again, by what authority did he do these things now that he's dead?

Authority Revealed

Yet that question does float around today, by what authority, yet, Christ's divine authority was revealed on the third day once again when God raised Him from the dead. Jesus holds victory over sin, death, and the grave. His victory throws open the doors of the kingdom of heaven to all believers repenting of their sins. You see "All authority in heaven and on earth" belongs to Jesus and He, by word, by bread and wine, by water, rules every aspect of your life with grace and mercy and forgiveness. And you, by the grace of God, "live and move and have your very being in Him."

The question that the Chief Priests and Elders asked of Jesus, the disciples heard and was answered for them before the ascension when He tells them this, "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." I am with you always because I have authority to be with you!

In Jesus Name. Amen.

- › Now may the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.