

1 Cor. 1:20-25
Luke 20:1-8, 20-26

March 31, 2019

Tuesday Answers To No One

Ultimate Authority

Last week Andrew spoke to us about Jesus' actions to cleanse the Temple in Jerusalem. (BTW quite a few of you wrote on the communication card your praise for his from preaching last week). The Temple was to be a house of prayer for all nations, yet religious leaders (the chief priests) had turned it into a market place, taking advantage of pilgrims who came to make sacrifices to the Lord and to pay their temple tax. They engaged in price gouging, both in the exchange rate for currencies and in sales of the sacrificial animals.

You recall the scene: Jesus drove out the moneychangers and animals. He created quite a disturbance. There is little doubt that the religious authorities were upset with him, to put it mildly. *"Every day he was teaching at the temple. But the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the leaders among the people were trying to kill him,"* Luke 19:47.

You see the chief priests and the teachers of the law had authority. The chief priests controlled all that happened at the Temple, the center of religious life for all of Israel. They even had armed guards who could be used to not only control crowds but to arrest heretics. The teachers of the law were the authorities on what the Scriptures said and meant. They provided the theological foundation for the priests. So when Jesus drove out moneychangers he challenged the chief priests, his actions accusing them of perverting the purpose of Temple worship. When he taught day after day in the temple courts he was challenging the official teachers of the Law, and they resented it. Of Jesus it was said: *"... the crowds were amazed at His teaching; because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law,"* Matthew 7:29. It was about authority.

Authority ... we deal with it every day. It's something very necessary to an ordered life. Without authority, and a right exercise of authority life becomes chaotic and unsatisfying, for family, for society, for any organization we may be in. Who holds authority in your life?

An office manager was complaining in their staff meeting that he wasn't getting any respect. The next day, he attached a small sign to his office door: "I'm The Boss!" When he returned from lunch he found that somebody had taped a note over his sign. It read, "Your wife called. She wants her sign back."

If you think you have authority try calling a stranger's dog. Roman historian Tacitus wrote: "If you would know who controls you, see who you may not criticize."

True Authority

Right there in the Temple area the religious authorities attacked Jesus – questioning his authority. Where does genuine authority come from - especially in matters of religion? Of course this wasn't the first time they had challenged Jesus. [He was accused of using the power of Satan to cast out demons and Jesus replied to his critics: *"If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand?"* (Mat. 12:22-28; Luke 11:15)]. They challenged his authority to forgive sins when he had said to a paralyzed man, *"Your sins are forgiven."* Jesus said then: *"But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.'* So he said to the paralyzed man, *'Get up, take your mat and go home,'*" Matthew 9:6.

So, here at the Temple, their first attack came in the form of an official challenge to the authority by which Jesus acted as He did. "Tell us, by what authority are You doing these things? Or who is he who gave You this authority?" But as is often the case, hostility was expressed in the form of a question. Theirs was not a question seeking information, but rather a calculated effort to discredit Jesus. These religious leaders wanted to embarrass Jesus in front of the people by challenging His authority. They were in effect demanding, *"Who do you think you are acting like you own the place?"* They were asking a question concerning his personal authority. They didn't realize that in a very real sense He did own the place (the Temple).

So they used a technique that has been perfected in Congressional hearings and political campaigns: pose a question so that no matter how he answered, he would be in trouble. If he said that He had no authority then who was He to be acting like a prophet and the people would know he was a fraud. But if he said that His authority came from God, they could accuse him of blasphemy and get Him in trouble with the Romans who were always looking out for trouble and rivals to their authority.

Proverbs 26:5 says, *"Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself."* (Reminds me of that anecdote of John Wesley on horseback, coming to a single lane bridge...). Wisely, Jesus never gave a direct answer to a trick question. So Jesus responded like this: *"I also will ask you one thing, and answer Me: The baptism of John--was it from heaven or from men?"* Jesus was saying, "The answer to my question is the same as the answer to your question."

All of a sudden these leaders were facing a dilemma themselves – right there in front of the crowd. The problem for the religious leaders was that John the Baptist was very popular. The people had thronged to hear his message of repentance, had believed, and received his baptism as a symbol of their change of heart. But the religious leaders had not. Now what were they to say? *"... If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?' But if we*

say, "From men," all the people will stone us, for they are persuaded that John was a prophet." And here they were trying to confront another popular preacher.

Their dilemma might be humorous if it were not so tragic. Nowhere do they express an interest in what the truth is, only in the consequences of their answer. With the crowd there it might be unwise to deny that John's authority was from Heaven. They took the coward's way out: "So they answered that they did not know where it was from." Oh but they did know. But they would not say; and so their answer reveals their utter disregard for the truth.

So Jesus simply answered them, "... Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things." Their rejection of Jesus was not because of a lack of knowledge but because of unwillingness to accept the truth of who he really is. He consistently offers truth out of love.

Jesus doesn't owe an explanation to anyone for anything He does. He is the Son of God after all. Jesus illustrated his authority by the manner in which he arrived in Jerusalem ... humble and riding on a colt of a donkey. Jesus appeared meek and mild, yet within him was and is the power of God. 1 Cor. 1:25 "For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength." "Authority without wisdom is like a heavy axe without an edge, fitter to bruise than to polish." – Anne Bradstreet

Jesus wasn't afraid of the Romans or the religious rulers. Even the demons shudder when they see Jesus. He has authority and power: power to heal, power to raise from the dead, power to transform lives ... He even has power to transform your life.

Speaking of authority and power: An old lady returned home from a church service to find an intruder in the process of ransacking her house. "Stop!" she yelled. "Acts 2:38!" (which says, "Repent in the name of Jesus Christ...") The burglar stopped in his tracks while the old lady called the police. As he handcuffed the burglar, the officer asked, "How come you just stood there? All the old lady did was quote a Bible verse."

"A Bible verse?" the thief replied. "She said she had an axe and two .38s!"

Who's Your Authority?

Who has authority in your life or over your life? It was not that the religious leaders did not know who Jesus was, but that they would not accept his authority. We are in the sinful state that we are in today, not because we do not know that God exists, but because we have refused to acknowledge his authority over our lives. Are you accountable to anyone? Are you willing to be accountable to Christ?

The truth is we would rather be like God than to be answerable to Him. Sin rejects God's authority and seeks to live autonomously. It's been said that ... "Mediocre men [and women] want authority without accountability." - Ed Cole.

Even after we become Christian we continue to struggle with God's demands on our lives. We struggle with what it means to allow Christ to truly be "the Lord of our lives." Do you realize that Jesus claims authority in every area of our lives? We suffer tragic physical, emotional, and spiritual consequences because we do not want Jesus to be the Lord of our whole lives, just sections of it. What sections of your life are still running away from the authority of Christ: your personal relationships; your responsibilities for misdeeds; your uncontrolled emotions or anger; your sexual addictions; your wallet or purse? Is there some other area of your life that still awaits Jesus' authority? "Until the will and the affections are brought under the authority of Christ, we have not begun to understand, let alone to accept, His lordship," -Elisabeth Elliot.

Jesus is the Word of God, spoken to us in the flesh as He walked this earth, healing and teaching and even dying for our sake. His words are recorded in Scripture, handed on to us from 2,000 years of Christian experience. We cannot separate the Word of God from the words of God. Any one of us who relies on the words of God is tempted to go off on a tangent if we forget this undeviating standard of exposition, namely, that no individual experience is of value unless it is up to the standard of the Word of God. The Bible not only tests experience, it tests truth. "The Bible tests all experience, all truth, all authority by our Lord Himself, and our relationship to Him personally" - Oswald Chambers.

Does he have authority over your life? "*Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works,*" John 14:10 ESV.

Trust him ... trust him with your life. Jesus exercises authority wisely because He is accountable to His Heavenly Father.