

February 16, 2020
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Luke
Community Baptist Church
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Greer, SC 29650
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THE KING'S AUTHORITY Luke 19:45-20:8

There is a verse in 1 Corinthians 11:3 that has intrigued me for years. *But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God (1 Corinthians 11:3).* We just discussed this principle in the Adult Bible Fellowship class about marriage. The last part of the verse affirms the truth that is stated and illustrated all through the New Testament, especially in the Gospel accounts from Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, that the head of Christ is God.

Over and over in those accounts we read how Jesus, God the Son, appealed to God the Father as His authority. He often explained that He came to do the will of His authority. His classic statement in the matter is found in the Garden of Gethsemane setting where the Son agonizingly prayed to the Father saying, *“My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will” (Matthew 26:39).* While He was on earth, God the Son repeatedly demonstrated that His authority came from God the Father.

But notice also that, because He possessed divine authority, Christ is the head of every man. In real life that does not seem to be the case, does it? In fact, most people do not submit to Christ. A lot of people don't even know who He is or believe He exists. That does not mean that Christ is not their authority. Consider the third clause in the verse. A lot of wives do not acknowledge that their husband is their authority, but that does not change God's plan. At some point, every wife will be forced to agree with God. And in the end, as every sinner stands before Christ's white throne of judgment, every one of them will acknowledge the truth of this verse. Every knee will bow

and every tongue will confess that Jesus is their authority to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:10-11).

Jesus' authority is a key theme in Luke. He demonstrated that authority when He taught. Of course His divine authority was displayed when He commanded the elements of nature, dismissed demons, healed all manner of diseases, and raised the dead. In our text, we see the authority of Jesus displayed as He threw merchants out of God's house. That caused a bit of consternation for the people who thought they were in charge. They pressed Jesus to reveal the basis of His authority. Because Jesus was in charge (because He was the real authority), He refused to answer the principal men. His refusal left the wanna-be authorities stuck on the horns of a dilemma.

In this part of Luke's story, we are reminded that Jesus is the authority of God the Father on earth. He still is the King even though most people can't begin to understand His authority or submit to it. This text reminds us of Solomon's conclusion: *The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).*

Humans Question Their Creator (19:45-20:2).

King Jesus demonstrated authority when He defended His house (19:45-47). As we saw very briefly last week, Luke told us, *He [Jesus] entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold, saying to them, “It is written, ‘My house shall be a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a den of robbers” (vv.45-46).* No one should argue against the proof here that Jesus authoritatively drove out the thieves.

It is good for us to read the other accounts of such events in the similar Gospel stories. For example, Mark helped us understand that time intervened between Jesus' triumphal entry and the cleansing of the temple. *And he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple. And when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve (Mark 11:11).* Obviously then, when Jesus returned the next day, He was as ready to apply righteous indignation.

Putting all the Gospel records together to compare, we realize that King Jesus drove the merchants out of the temple in a display of righteous anger. His was anger as it should be. Jesus never lost His temper like we are prone to do. Jesus manifested divine wrath at sin and wickedness. Jesus had good and righteous motivation for overturning tables, driving out merchants, and forbidding them to return while He was present. Mark also wrote that Jesus *would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple (Mark 11:16)*.

Why did Jesus do that? What was it that so stirred His wrath? In our text, Jesus authoritatively declared the conflict when He said to the merchants, *“My house shall be a house of prayer.”* That was not just Jesus’ opinion. It was the authority of Scripture that indicates what God intended the temple to be. Jesus quoted some of Psalm 65:4, *Blessed is the one you choose and bring near, to dwell in your courts! We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, the holiness of your temple!* Or there is also the statement in Psalm 27:4, *One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple.*

A good indication of God’s intent for His house, the temple, is found in Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the first temple. He requested of God, *that your eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which you have said, “My name shall be there,” that you may listen to the prayer that your servant offers toward this place. And listen to the plea of your servant and of your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. And listen in heaven your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive (1 Kings 8:29-30).*

That picture or idea surely is not what Jesus saw when He viewed the temple after riding into Jerusalem in honor. Jesus plainly stated what fleshly men had done with the house of God: *“But you have made it a den of robbers.”* Humans had ruined God’s plan for the building.

This building was originally the second temple, built by Zerubbabal (536-510 BC). Ezra told a brief account of its construction in Ezra 1-6 about 50 years after the fact. That temple was a very modest building compared to the one Solomon had built, which Nebuchadnezzar destroyed almost 400 years later. Herod the Great remodeled this second temple that had been built by repatriated

Jews in about 516 BC. Herod spent millions over a ten-year period to win the Jew’s favor, which never came to pass.

Therefore, it is fair for us to conclude that the building Jesus cleansed was testimony to a man, and had been taken over by another man. What Jesus confronted was known as the “Bazaar of Annas.” Annas had formerly been the high priest. This was the same former high priest who would try Jesus in an illegal trial (John 18:13). Now he controlled the family business from outside the office of high priest.

The scheme was a money-maker for the family of Annas. They were selling sacrifices which technically was allowed by the law for pilgrims who had traveled to Jerusalem for the feast but could not bring an animal with them (Leviticus 27). Plus it was the priest’s prerogative to disqualify a pilgrim’s animal as not pure enough. It appears that much of the time the pilgrims’ sacrifice didn’t qualify and they had to buy an “acceptable” one. Furthermore, the required offering to the Lord had to be paid with the Hebrew shekel which required an exchange from the Roman coins (Exodus 30:11-14). The priests and merchants were charging exorbitant fees for these “services.”

Jesus drew on the authority of established Scripture to confront the offenders. He quoted God’s message that Jeremiah the prophet had given to the stubborn forefathers of these principle men. *“Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, ‘We are delivered!’ – only to go on doing all these abominations? Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, declares the LORD” (Jeremiah 7:9-11).*

In all honesty, the same kind of sin and offense is often perpetrated by the visible church in our day. Often the local church has been turned into some kind of bazaar or circus, a place to make money or a platform from which to become famous. Oh, but could we possibly be trespassing as badly as those ancient hypocrites? In the simplest of ways, we too make the house of God a den of robbers. Listen to Malachi’s reproof. *“Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing*

me. But you say, 'How have we robbed you?' In your tithes and contributions" (Malachi 3:8).

The King defended His house, and the King taught His truth. *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 (v.47).* Some details of what He taught are found in Luke 20-21, as well as Matthew 21:23-23:39; Mark 11:27-12:44, and John 12:20-50. Most of the leaders who soundly rejected Christ's truth from the beginning were intent on killing Him. It appears that every single leader was predisposed to kill Jesus, but there were some exceptions. John recorded, *Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue (John 12:42).* There is a legitimate question about "what" they believed or "if they believed unto salvation."

When Jesus taught and cleansed the temple, it naturally provoked a response from the human authorities who demanded answers (19:48-20:2). Human authority generally thinks that it is in charge, but as our text reveals, human authority, even at the highest level, is at God's mercy. The authorities wanted to nail Jesus, *but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were hanging on his words (19:48).* The principle people wanted to destroy Jesus but could not find a reason. Therefore, we see that during the first few days of Passion week, the leaders tried to trap Jesus in what He said.

Not only is God the authority over humans, but human authority seldom acknowledges its limitations. That was demonstrated while Jesus was teaching the truth. *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 (v.1).* To the very end, Jesus continued to teach the gospel, the good news about the kingdom of God.

The gospel Jesus taught in this situation would include the truth that sin is pervasive and all are guilty, even as John challenged the people to repent, turn away, from their sins. He surely taught that no amount of good works or law keeping was sufficient to atone for sin. Like, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees! He taught that people needed a substitute, the blood of the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world to pay the penalty for their sins. He

coupled that teaching with the fact that He is the Lamb, the Bread of life, the Light of the world, the way, truth, and life that leads to God.

Therefore, Jesus taught that every sinner needed to come to the end of himself/herself, humble themselves, take up association with the shame of Christ's cross and follow Him. This included the teaching that the spiritually poverty-stricken are blessed as they humble themselves, mourn for sin, hunger for righteousness, and become pure through God's grace. Those are words that describe the born again person.

Jesus taught the kind of truth that He knew the religious authorities rejected right to the point of death. But we are afraid to be associated with the gospel because it is still not acceptable among the self-righteous, the acceptable people of the world, those who are deemed successful in terms of the passing world.

It was similar in the King's world where human authorities demanded submission to untruth. They *said to him, "Tell us by what authority you do these things, or who it is that gave you this authority" (v-2).* Implied in this question is the fact that they had not authorized Jesus. Therefore, Jesus was not operating according to their "way," and their "way" was the only acceptable standard in Israel. Their way not only did not conform to the gospel, but it was opposed to the gospel. The **things** Jesus did were outside the acceptable bounds. **These things** included most recently the temple cleansing, in a broader sense, all that Jesus had been teaching, and even His miracles. Where did King Jesus get the authority to be King Jesus since the principal men didn't give it?

King Jesus Uncovers Truth (20:3-8).

As the confrontation turned out, the self-appointed authorities chose not to answer the King's question (vv.3-7). The King's question is recorded for us in verses three and four of chapter twenty. *He answered them, "I also will ask you a question. Now tell me, 'Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man?'" (vv.3-4).*

Jesus' answer was a brilliant strategy. He did evade the principal people's question. Rather, in Rabbinic tradition, answering a question with a question was an acceptable way to flush out truth.

Flushing out truth is exactly what Jesus intended to do. Then, too, Jesus had already told these men or their representatives on several occasions that His authority was from His Father in heaven. How many times had He said things like, “*I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not receive me.*” (John 5:43)? Or “*God the Father has set His seal on the Son of Man*” (John 6:27). Or “*And this is the will of Him who sent Me . . .*” (John 6:39).

Jesus’ authority was already well-established. In a similar way, the principal people’s resistance to God’s authority was also well-established. Jesus went back to the beginning of His ministry and pulled out proof, evidence of the leaders’ problem. The religious authorities were unsure about John’s ministry from the outset. They sent representatives to check him out and John greeted them with, “*You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham*” (Matthew 3:7-9).

These same leaders who resisted Jesus refused to accept John as the authoritative spokesman for God sent to them by God. But the people were convinced John was a God-sent prophet. Now because Jesus drew out evidence against them, they were stuck. This is what the Bible means when it claims to be able to reprove us (2 Timothy 3:16). It draws out the evidence in our lives that we need help and change.

The Bible still speaks to us as the words of King Jesus. The Scripture is our authoritative word. When it draws out the evidence against us, we need to respond in repentance, confession, and be corrected. Too often we try to reason against Jesus’ word to us like the religious leaders did. Notice the hypocrites’ conclusion when Jesus posed the revealing question. *And they discussed it with one another, saying, ‘If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say, ‘Why did you not believe him?’ But if we say, ‘From man,’ all the people will stone us to death, for they are convinced that John was a prophet.’ So they answered that they did not know where it came from (vv.5-7).*

They were too proud to admit they were wrong about John. At the same time, they were too concerned for the people’s approval. Therefore, they chose not to answer.

Of course, King Jesus knew that was how the leaders would have to respond. And based on their conclusion not to answer, Jesus also chose to conceal truth from them (v.8). At the moment, Jesus chose to conceal truth He had previously revealed on various occasions. *And Jesus said to them, ‘Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things’ (v.8).* Again, Jesus was not trying to evade the truth. Rather, He was proving that He was actually the authority who was in control and had the prerogative to conceal the truth from people who rejected truth.

This is a vivid picture of “truth” famine we mentioned last week. Remember that Jesus had already said regarding Jerusalem in general, “*Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes*” (Luke 19:42). The leaders would not listen, so Jesus would not teach. But what about the masses of people in the crowd? We read in 19:48 that *all the people were hanging on his words.* Literally, the words mean they were hanging on to His lips, a metaphor picturing the people listening intently to what He was saying. This is the same kind of statement that revealed the people’s response early in the King’s ministry: *and they were astonished at his teaching, for his word possessed authority (Luke 4:32).*

We do well to remember that in this setting Jesus was teaching the gospel as well as answering the arguments of the leaders (20:20-47). At the same time, Jesus was condemning the rebels for rejecting Him (20:9-18). We should realize then, that this is not that unusual of a scenario. We know from our own experience that it is not strange for people to be intently interested in the truth of the gospel but not accept it unto salvation. So, too, the people who were hanging on every word from Jesus didn’t repent of sin and believe unto salvation. In fact, it appears that, within a couple of days, many of these people would shout “Crucify Him.” We also know that after His resurrection Jesus met with as many as 500 followers, but on Pentecost (50 days after Passover) only 120 followers were gathered. That is not very many comparatively.

This is all in keeping with the picture of thousands of people clamoring after Jesus until He required that they be intimately associated with Him (i.e. eat His flesh and drink His blood), at which

point many “disciples” left Him (John 6:66). Listening intently does not even guarantee that the people understood what Jesus was saying. King Jesus has authority to withhold understanding according to His discretion.

On one hand, inability to comprehend the King’s truth is a natural consequence of the sin principle. God’s rule is that, *The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:14)*. On the other hand, there are times when King Jesus enforces supernatural consequences so that people who have repeatedly rejected His truth can no longer grasp it. That is what Jesus referred to in the Kingdom Parables context. *“Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: ‘You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive. For this people’s heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them’” (Matthew 13:14-15)*.

We close with a challenge for all of us to be very careful to listen to God’s Word as we read it and hear it preached. It is good for us to be taught, proven wrong, corrected, and instructed in self-discipline. Some of the most religious people in Jesus’ day could not understand what they were hearing. Most of the people in Jesus’ day found His words intriguing but could not grasp the truth unto salvation. We are privileged to have heard the good news of the gospel and understood it through the grace God offered us in Christ. We are also privileged to tell the good news to others whether they understand it or not. Keep telling the good news because it is backed by the Supreme Authority of the universe. Our responsibility is not to force people to submit to Christ. Our responsibility is to explain the wonderful privilege of submitting to Christ.