

Rejecting the King's Authority

Luke 20:1-8

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We return to the 20th chapter of the gospel of Luke, Luke chapter 20, and the next in the series of paragraphs and texts that we're looking at as we move through the final week of our Lord's life as He heads for the cross on Friday.

This is Luke 20:1-8. Luke 20:1-8. I will read it so that you have it in mind as we listen to what the Lord says to us through this event.

"It came about on one of the days while He was teaching the people in the temple and preaching the gospel, that the chief priests and the scribes with the elders confronted *Him*, and they spoke, saying to Him, 'Tell us by what authority You are doing these things, or who is the one who gave You this authority?' And He answered and said to them, 'I shall also ask you a question, and you tell Me: Was the baptism of John from heaven or from men?'

"And they reasoned among themselves, saying, 'If we say, "From heaven," He will say, "Why did you not believe him?" But if we say, "From men," all the people will stone us to death, for they are convinced that John was a prophet.' And they answered that they did not know where *it came* from. And Jesus said to them, 'Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.' "

This is a sad conversation. This is a final declaration on the part of Jesus that He has nothing more to say to Israel, to the leaders. He is finished with them. The issue that brings up this tragic final declaration by our Lord is the issue of authority. We understand the word "authority." We understand what it is to be in authority and to be under authority. "Authority" is a word that is packed full of significance. It denotes permission, power, privilege, rule, control, domination.

And our world is filled with it. We face it in our homes, fathers and mothers being given authority over the children. We face it in our schools. There are always those who are in authority over us. We face it in all of our work places. We face it in terms of governments that are responsible to make laws and enforce them, and wield them with authority. We're used to that. We're all people who are under authority, and in some cases we have some authority, as well. So we get it, we know what it means to have authority. We also know what it means to be under authority. All of us are both given some authority and under, generally, much more authority.

But when it comes to Jesus Christ, authority is a very different reality. In Matthew 28:18 Jesus said this, "All authority is given unto Me in heaven and earth." All authority. This is what it means to be absolutely sovereign. This is what it means to answer to no one outside yourself, to have all authority. Jesus demonstrated His authority in a number of ways.

In Matthew 7:29, at the end of the sermon on the mount after Jesus had preached that masterful evangelistic sermon, which began by dismantling the false religion of Judaism and ended by an invitation to enter the narrow way, the people's response was simply this, "He spoke as one having authority." That was absolutely unique. They weren't used to people who were their own authority. They were used to people who quoted somebody else, who identified with somebody else, who drew their authority from somebody else. But Jesus spoke as one who Himself is an authority.

Later on in Matthew's gospel, 9:6-8, it says "He had authority to forgive sins," an authority they understood belonged only to One, and that One is God. In the Matthew 10:1, it becomes apparent that He had authority over all the forces of hell, authority over demon power. In John 1:12, He claimed authority to save, that is authority to give life, spiritual life and salvation. In John 5:27, it says that He was given authority to judge all men. In John 10:18 He said, "I have authority to lay My life down, and I have authority to take it again." That is to say He had authority over death and authority over life, expressed wonderfully in Revelation as having the keys to death and Hades.

And John 17:2 tells us He has authority over all mankind. He is not under anyone but God, and He is in perfect agreement with God, as God. He has authority. He has a kind of authority that we know nothing about. He has absolute unilateral authority to do whatever He will, whenever He wills, with whomever or whatever He wills.

Maybe a simple way to understand the essence of this authority is to grasp two Greek words that can be translated "authority." The first one is *dunamis*, usually translated "power," it's the power from which the English word "dynamite" comes. *Dunamis* refers to the ability to do something, the ability to do it. The other word is *exousia*. *Exousia* is the word usually translated "authority" such as in this text where the word "authority" appears three times. This means the right to do something. To have all authority, then, is to have all power and all right to do everything and anything one wills to do.

He has the ability to do whatever He wants, and He has the right to do whatever He wants with whomever or whatever He wants, and this is having all authority. He has both *dunamis* and *exousia*. He has the power and He has the permission. He has it because He is God. And even though He is incarnate, even though He is God come in human flesh, even though He has lowered Himself as a servant, He still has the power and the authority to do precisely what God wills Him to do.

There are no limits to His power. No one can withstand His power. There are no limits to His ability. There are no limits also to His right. He has both the right and the ability to do everything He wills to do, and He wills to do what is in perfect harmony with the Father.

Consequently - and this is the important point - consequently, Jesus never in His earthly life asked permission to do anything. Never. He never sought it from any normal channels in His ministry. There was no one higher, other than His own Father, and He said, "I always do what the Father tells Me to do. I always do what the Father shows Me to do. I always do and only do what the Father wills for Me to do." No matter what it was, there was no authority to whom Jesus went.

Now you have to understand, this is shocking in the experience of the Jews, to teach as He did in the sermon on the mount and basically attack every treasure of Judaistic, legalistic religion, and smash it, and to have no authority outside Himself is an outrageous thing to do. He went after their giving. He went after their fasting. He went after their praying. He went after their sacrifices. He went after

their self righteousness. He went after everything they considered sacred.

He went after the sum and substance of their entire religious system in His teaching and He quoted no rabbi. He had permission from no Sanhedrin. He had no rabbinical council to which He was answerable. He was not ordained in the appropriate way that all teachers and rabbis were ordained. And nor was His theology checked and signed off on by the Sanhedrin.

And even when He made a whip at the beginning of His ministry and threw all of the buyers and sellers out of His Father's house, He asked no one for permission to do that. He did not go to the ruling council of the temple, which was made up, of course, of the high priests, the chief priests, the chiefs under them, and all the rest of the people who ran that enterprise to get permission. He didn't go the Sanhedrin, the ruling body made up of chief priests, and scribes, and other official elders, Sadducees, Herodians. He didn't seek any permission when He did it the first time, nor did He seek any permission when He did it the last time, as we saw in our study last Sunday.

You remember, don't you, in 19:45, He entered the temple, began to cast out those who were selling, saying to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be a house of prayer.' You've made it into a robber's cave." And He cleaned them out. He didn't get any permission to do this. This is a total disruption of all that's going on there without any authority to do this. But He never sought human authority.

Now you have to understand that this is, in a sense, just another huge offense to the Jews who are in leadership in Israel. They are distressed, first of all, that He attacks their theology, attacks their credibility. He unmaskes them as hypocrites of the rankest kind. And now He gets physical with their very domain. And He teaches without any connection to any prior mentor or rabbi, and without credentials, and without ordination, which could only be given by the Sanhedrin. Such behavior is outrageous to start with, and such unauthorized behavior is doubly outrageous.

Jesus was His own authority. He spoke prophetically. He spoke truly. He rightly interpreted the Old Testament Scripture. He spoke the true Word of God. They even admitted that. He forgave sin. He healed sick people. He raised the dead. He cast out demons. And He did it without ever seeking permission from anyone.

Now the bottom line is this. He treated their entire religious system as if it was non-existent. He didn't care about the Sanhedrin. He didn't care about the chief priests. He didn't care about the councils. He didn't care about any popular opinion. He didn't care about anything. He was totally indifferent to the priests. He was indifferent to the rabbis. He was indifferent to the lawyers, the scribes, the theologians. He was indifferent to the sacrificial system. He was indifferent to the temple enterprise. He treated it as if it was non-existent. It had no bearing on His life. It had no bearing on what He taught. It had no bearing on what He said. In fact, He basically attacked it with a vengeance.

Now, you have to understand that the mounting hostility at this point is really immeasurable. He treats them all - and remember this, they lived to be elevated. They lived, these leaders did, to wear long robes, and tassels on their robes, and pretend holiness. They lived to fast in public, and put ashes on their head, and make their donations in the temple in full view of everyone while someone was blowing a trumpet to announce their arrival. They sought the chief seats in the high places, and to be elevated, and to be called "master" and "teacher" and "father," and all of those things.

It was all about elevating them, and Jesus literally treated them with the utter disdain. As far as He was concerned, they were non-existent. They had nothing to do with God. They had nothing to do with the kingdom of God. They had nothing to do with the true people of God. They were alien to the purposes of God and the life of God.

There's nothing more devastating and hard to swallow than being treated as if you don't matter when you think you really do. And you add all of the elements of this together and there is a fury inside of them to the degree that their souls are literally on fire with the flames of hatred. And it's escalating rapidly, and it explodes in a conflagration of crucifixion on Friday.

Now let me give you the setting. Jesus has ended His brief Galilean ministry after ministering in Judea predominantly for the last year of His life. He has come down to the Passover in Jerusalem, came down east of the Jordan Cross, came through Jericho, came up the hill to Jerusalem. He is now in the city of Jerusalem.

He arrived in the area of Jerusalem on Saturday A.D. 30 in the month of Nissan in preparation for dying on Friday, which is the day that Passover lambs are slain. And He is the true Passover lamb, would be slain on that day in that year, exactly the year that Daniel prophesied. But it is Saturday when He arrives in the Jerusalem area. He goes to the family that He knows and loves: Mary, Martha and Lazarus. Stays at their house in a village called Bethany, two miles east of Jerusalem.

He stays there with them Saturday night. On Sunday, the word is out that He's there. Massive crowds come out of Jerusalem and the surrounding villages and they come to Bethany to see Him and to see Lazarus, whom He raised from the dead several weeks earlier. That's what happened on Sunday. He stayed in Bethany and the crowds came to Him.

On Monday, He rode triumphantly into Jerusalem, as you know, on the colt, the foal of an ass, to fulfill Zachariah 9:9, that the Messiah would enter Jerusalem "riding on the colt, the foal of a beast of burden." He comes through the eastern gate. He is hailed by the massive crowd as the Messiah. The great parade then ends at the temple, which is just inside the eastern gate. He just gets in the gate in this mass of humanity and He's right there at the temple site. That's Monday.

Monday ends, then, at the temple. It's twilight. It's in the evening, and so He leaves Jerusalem, works His way back through the crowd, returns to Bethany to spend the night with Mary, Martha and Lazarus and His apostles.

Tuesday, He comes back in the morning in a holy fury. The last sight that He had on Monday night was the temple. And as He came through the eastern gate after the triumphal entry and looked at the temple, He would have seen the disastrous cacophony that the robbers were perpetrating in the place that was to be God's house. That image remained in His mind as surely overnight and in the morning He came back with a vengeance. In holy fury He came in and threw out the wretched, wicked desecraters of His Father's house.

While that was going on, some boys in the temple, we are told by one of the other gospel writers, were hailing Him with shouts of "Hosanna," further incensing the leaders. Just imagine, while He's throwing them out, boys are hailing Him with "Hosannas." And so they escalate the necessity to murder Him to stop this unrelieved desecration of their sanctimonious religion.

They cannot tolerate one who has overthrown their false worship, unmasked their rabid hypocrisy, and done what He's done without permission. After cleansing the temple on Tuesday, He goes back to Bethany. On Wednesday, He returns.

So, in 20:1, it is Wednesday. If you have a MacArthur Study Bible it says "Tuesday." We need to fix that. We will. Then you'll have to buy another one. Well, you can fix it yourself. It's Wednesday. He returns again to the city. He comes back into the temple, clean now. They didn't come back, which speaks of the power that He wielded. He's now cleansed it and He's going to become its center. The Lord has come to His temple. As the prophet said, "He would come suddenly to His temple." He has come to His temple.

It's Wednesday morning when He arrives. And He comes to teach, verse 1, "It came about that on one of the days - " namely on Wednesday when you compare all the accounts " - while He was teaching the people in the temple and preaching the gospel." It's time for some truth in the temple. It's time to run out the liars, and the fabricators, and the manipulators, and the false teachers, and the hypocrites, and the frauds, and the fakes. It's time for some truth. It's time for God's true teacher, and God's true Word, and God's true gospel of salvation. It's time for the real good news. And so He comes and He becomes the center of attention.

Back in verse 47, remember, it said, "He was teaching daily in the temple; but the chief priests and the scribes and the leading men among the people were trying to destroy Him, and they couldn't find anything that they might do, for all the people were hanging on His words." And they continued through these few days to hang on His words.

If you look at 21:38, chapter 21 ends saying, verse 37, "He was teaching in the temple," and then verse 38, "All the people would get up early in the morning *and come* to Him in the temple to listen to Him." So this was His daily routine. Wednesday, Thursday for certain, Friday the events of the trial takes place and His crucifixion. So here on this Wednesday, He comes back to bring truth to a place where there's been nothing but lies, to bring God's genuine message to a place where there's been nothing but a satanic counterfeit and deception. And so He comes teaching the people in the temple and preaching the gospel.

It's an amazing day, this day. By the way, the teaching runs all the way to the end of chapter 20, all the way to the end. There's even more in chapter 21, but I think what you have in chapter 20, the whole chapter is basically the content of His teaching this day, on Wednesday. This teaching is so important that there's more of it in Matthew and Mark, it's such an important day. It's His final time to teach, His final time to speak.

And to the people, He preaches the gospel. To the people, He teaches the true Word of God. This is grace. This is compassion. This is sympathy. This is tenderness. This is patience. This is endurance. This is mercy. And this is His turf. One final few days to call Israel to repentance, to call Israel to salvation. He has no interest in bringing about social reform, political reform, military reform, not to an unbelieving nation. And so He comes to teach the truth and to preach the gospel.

And Mark tells us He did it while walking around, in and around that great courtyard in the temple, with all of its locations and colonnades and courts. He moved in this vast crowd, always the leaders

were there, always trailing Him. 19:47 says, "He was teaching daily in the temple, the chief priests and leading men among them were trying to destroy Him, couldn't find anything they might do for all the people were hanging on His words."

They wanted to find something to trap Him with. They couldn't and they were afraid of the people. This was a rabbinic way to do things. You walked, and you moved, and you reacted, and you interacted, and there was dialogue, and there was disputation. And that's how He taught.

What was He saying? Well, He was teaching the people. What was His message? Well, probably the same it tells us in Acts 1:3. He was "speaking of things pertaining to the kingdom of God." It wasn't about politics. And it wasn't about economics. And it wasn't about civility. And it wasn't about those things the people wanted the Messiah to bring to them. It was issues of the kingdom.

He probably talked about sin, the wretchedness of it, and the folly of hypocritical religion, which couldn't deal with sin. He probably taught about judgment, the inevitability of divine judgment and hell. Probably talked about righteousness, the hopelessness of trying to achieve righteousness on your own. I'm sure He talked about humility, the need for bankruptcy of spirit, and brokenness, and a contrite heart. And He talked about love, the compassionate love of God for sinners. And He talked about the possibility of peace with God, and entering into the kingdom, and eternal life, the hope of glory.

He probably also talked about the folly of false prayers, and vain repetition, and doing superficial religious deeds, and being seen by men and being satisfied with that, rather than having God's approval. He probably talked about false humility, and spiritual pride, and maybe talked about the cost of following Him, self-denial, taking up your cross.

Perhaps He talked about persecution, the suffering of one who identifies with Him. Maybe He talked about the Scripture, the Word of God, about honesty, about forgiveness, about true riches, about faith, about grace, mercy, all those things, all a part of *euaggelizomai*, the verb, preaching the gospel. Talked about all the matters that had to do with salvation.

And they listened. But the leaders were there, and they couldn't take it, and they were just looking for some way to get Him, and trap Him, and they were having a very hard time doing it. At the end of chapter 19, it didn't take long for them to do something because they were so infuriated, the middle of verse 1, we come to the first point I want you to notice in this event, the confrontation, the confrontation. "The chief priests and the scribes with the elders confronted Him."

Ephistēmi is the Greek verb. It means "to attack, to come upon, to pounce on." It's inevitable. They can't contain their outrage. And they're trying to restrain themselves, and they do it by forming a question that masks their real hostility in a sort of theological case. But they come after Him with a vengeance.

Please notice, it is the chief priests and the scribes with the elders. It's really important. The chief priests would encompass the high priests, the one that was immediately under the high priest, kind of a captain of the priests from which high priests were selected, who had responsibility to oversee just about everything. Then there would be ranking orders of priests, priests who were over the priests who were doing their two-week service there per year. There were all kinds of authorities and

dignitaries. They're collectively represented in the chief priests.

Then the scribes represent the theologians. Many of them were Pharisees. Not all of them were Pharisees, many of them were. And the elders would be the remaining ones, including - the chief priests would be made up of mostly Sadducees, the elders would be some Sadducees, probably some from the Herodians, some from the Pharisees, they would constitute the Sanhedrin, the group of 70 men who were the reigning group over the affairs of religion.

So a delegation comes to Him of this collective body. And what is so interesting about it is this. These are divergent groups. The Sadducees had their own views. The Pharisees had very diverse views. The Herodians had their own views, very diverse again. They are all very diverse groups who agree on one thing: We want this man dead. The whole religious establishment is unified on this account. All divergent groups are commonly united in the desire to kill their Messiah. If that doesn't tell you how far from God Judaism was, I don't know what would. They couldn't agree on much, but they could agree on this. They wanted Jesus dead. It's a good lesson. All false religions have their own diversities, but all false religions agree in taking a position opposite the gospel of Jesus Christ.

What is a false religion? A false religion is any religion by any name that is not consistent with the gospel of Jesus Christ, whether it's Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism or some aberrant kind of Christianity. All false religions agree on being anti-gospel. This is the greatest attack always on the truth.

So they all collectively come together to be anti-Christ. And they will, by the way, at the end of the age. World religions will unite against Christ. They're such cowards, though. They really don't know how to handle this deal. They don't want to reveal the truth of their own minds and hearts and their own convictions. So they try to trap Jesus. Verse 2, "They spoke, saying to Him, 'Tell us by what authority You're doing these things, or who is the one who gave You this authority?'"

Now let me just give you a little footnote. They lived in a world where authority was a huge thing. There was - this is sort of like a pentagon hierarchy, very complex. There were people in charge of branches for festivals, people in charge of music, trumpets, bakeries, salt, wood, drink offerings, casting lots, burnt offerings, water, signs, incense, curtains, robes, everything. There was this pecking order from top to bottom, all the way up to the high priest, and under him the captain of the temple, who was next in rank, and all the other ranking people. And you just didn't move unless you had authority.

And they all collectively come together because they've all basically been trashed. And they can all agree that this is an outrageous man who is doing outrageous things who pays no attention to them, and they think the question they need to ask is a question about authority, because they think the people will understand this. "Tell us by what authority You're doing these things?"

What things? What things? Well, some have suggested teaching. That's fair. You couldn't teach in the temple unless you had been ordained by the Sanhedrin. Some people think that the miracles, and you remember He did some miracles, the blind and the lame, you remember, were coming to Him, and He healed them. But that really isn't the issue here. What has caused them to ask this question is the cleansing of the temple. That's "these things." How dare you take over this place? "These things" meaning the triumphal entry, the claim that you are willing to accept as the Messiah. You come in, You clean the place out, and then You take it over. By what authority?

And I think that's what they're referring to because back in John, or John chapter 2 at the beginning of His ministry when He cleansed the temple the first time, when He first came, "The Jews therefore answered and said to Him, 'What sign do You show us seeing that You do these things?' " What permission do You have to do this? It's the same question again. They wanted to know where He got permission the first time. They want to know where He got permission this time. By what authority, and just who gave it to You?

Now everybody understood that. Everybody understood that. All the people understood that that there were rules and there were elements of authority that had to be consulted. They also knew that Jesus always claimed His authority was from God. He always said that. He said, "I do what My Father tells Me to do. I do what My Father shows Me to do. I do the will of My Father." I think they would have hoped that He would say, "I have My authority from God," to which they would have responded, "Blasphemer, blasphemer," and stoned Him.

And so they asked the question. He was so indifferent to authority. You know, even a footnote, even the rabbis had not just an ordination, but it was pretty typical for a rabbi to wear a hat to signify who his mentor was. So your hat identified whoever you linked up with. Maybe Jesus didn't even wear a hat. They were so concerned about authority.

And Jesus' response exposes them for what they really are. We go from the confrontation to what we'll call the counter-question. Verse 3, the counter-question, "He answered and said to them, 'I shall also ask you a question and you tell Me.' " This is traditional rabbinic style. Good teachers always do this, but this is classic rabbinical style. You answer a question with a question to force the student deeper into the issue, the dilemma. Jesus is not evading the answer, He's unmasking their hypocrisy.

They know where His authority has come from, He has said it many, many times. They know that. They're just trying to get Him to say it so they can accuse Him of blasphemy and kill Him. But instead of answering their question, He exposes their hypocrisy. They're supposed to be the great teachers of Israel. They're supposed to know all the answers to all the issues. They're supposed to be the leaders of the people. They're supposed to have a pervasive omniscience about all the spiritual theological issues. So He says, "Let Me ask you a question."

By the way, Jesus did this a lot. A lot. He did it in chapter 5, chapter 6, chapter 11. He'll do it again in chapter 20, where He answers a question with a question. He says this, verse 4, "I'll ask you a question, you tell Me." Here's the question. "Was the baptism of John from heaven or from men?"

Now everybody here knew about John. We're talking about John the Baptist, right? John the Baptist, the prophet who was out in the wilderness of the Jordan River baptizing people with a baptism of repentance, preparing them for coming of Messiah. You remember how the book of Luke begins? The angel comes to Zechariah and says, "You're going to have a child even though you're barren and you're very old. Your wife, Elizabeth, and you are going to have a child. The child is going to be the forerunner of the Messiah."

They had the child. The child was John. John grows up, announces the Messiah is coming. John prepares the people for the coming of Messiah by calling for baptism. Come out here, confess your

sin, symbolically go into the water symbolizing a cleansing from sin as you prepare your own heart for the coming of Messiah. All of Judea flocks out there to John. These people are all being baptized because they want to be ready when Messiah comes.

One day Jesus shows up. John says, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” John baptizes Jesus. The voice of the Father, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

The baptism of John speaks of his whole prophetic ministry. The baptism of John is not just talking about the actual act of baptism. So when our Lord says, “Was the baptism of John from heaven or from men?” He’s saying the ministry of John, his call for repentance and appropriate baptism to outwardly demonstrate that repentance really was a proselyte baptism. It was asking a Jew to say you have to treat yourself as if you are a Gentile, because this kind of baptism was used when Gentiles wanted to join the Jews in their worship.

Since they were outsiders, there was a rite they went through. He’s saying, “You have to treat yourself as a Jew as if you were an outcast Gentile, and confess your sin, and repent of your sin, and go through a ceremonial demonstration of it.” This was the baptism of John. In order to be ready for Messiah, John points to Jesus as the Messiah. You can read all that back in Luke 3. It’s all there in detail. I won’t take time to go through it.

So the question’s pretty simple. Was this work of men or was it of God? Did it come from heaven or from men? Now this is an impossible dilemma, impossible dilemma, for them. They want to say it came from men. That’s problematic. They do not want to say it came from God. They don’t believe that. They hate that idea.

Back in Luke chapter 7 they are on record as taking a position on John the Baptist, when all the people, verse 29, “when all the people and tax gatherers heard *this*, they acknowledged God’s justice, having been baptized with the baptism of John.” So the populous all went out and went through this baptism saying, “Yes, we want to be ready. Yes, we want to confess our sins and repent. We want to be there when Messiah comes to set up the kingdom.”

But, Luke 7:30, “The Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God’s purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John.” They rejected it. They weren’t going to do it. That would have been an admission that they were outside the covenant. That would have been an admission they were outside the kingdom. They were not holy. No way would they do that. So their answer is, “John is not of God, it is of men.”

So Jesus puts them on the horns of the dilemma. “Was the baptism of John from heaven or from men?” By the way, Mark 11:30 in the parallel account said, “Jesus then said, ‘Answer Me.’” Just turning the screws a little. So they’re stuck between the proverbial rock and a hard place. You either admit that Jesus is the Messiah, or you deny that John the Baptist is a prophet of God. You can’t admit that Jesus is the Messiah. That’s impossible. But you better not deny that John is a prophet, because that has serious consequences. What are they? Verse 5, “They reasoned among themselves.” Interesting word in the Greek, means “to deliberate.” In the parallel passage in Matthew 21:25 he uses a different word which means “to dialogue.” So they deliberated and they dialogued.

And they were saying, "If we say 'From heaven,' He will say, 'Why didn't you believe him?' " If John is a prophet of God who had a ministry from heaven, why didn't you believe him? Why didn't you believe him when he said Jesus is the Messiah? "But - " verse 6 " - if we say 'From men,' all the people will stone us to death, for they're convinced John was a prophet."

Why would they stone them to death, for what? For blasphemy. They'd reach back into the Old Testament, places like Exodus 17:4, Numbers 14:10. They would accuse them of blasphemy by calling a prophet of God not a prophet of God. So we've got a real problem here. "If we say it's from heaven, then we have no excuse for believing in Him. If we say it's from men, they're going to stone us to death."

Now, you can get from that the fever pitch of this crowd, can't you? This lets you know how volatile this crowd was in terms of their temporary excitement about Jesus. So they can't tell the truth. So what do they do? Verse 7, "They answered that they did not know where *it came* from." They give no answer. So much for their pretended omniscience. It was their duty to be observers of truth in matters of religion. They self indict by being unwilling to answer the question. "We don't know." There is no way they can escape the dilemma again. Jesus does this to them, as I said, many times.

That leads to the final point, the condemnation. The confrontation led to the counter-question, and finally the condemnation. This is one of those really sad, sad statements. "Jesus said to them, 'Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.' " That is just tragic. Jesus is saying essentially, "Based on what you've done with the information you have, I'm not giving you anymore. It's over."

While teaching the people, preaching the gospel to the people, He has absolutely nothing to say to the leaders. They knew the ministry of John. They knew Jesus claimed that He, as well as John, came from God. John and Jesus were inseparable. You take one, you get them both. There was no point in casting pearls before pigs. They rejected all the light willfully, no reason to give them more. This is judgment on the religious leadership of Israel, judgment.

Later in 22:66, "The Council of elders of the people assembled, chief priests and scribes - " there they are again, same group, later " - they led Him away to their council chamber saying, 'If You are the Christ, tell us.' But He said to them, 'If I tell you, you will not believe; and if I ask a question, you will not answer. But from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God.' " All that's left for you is judgment. "And they all said, 'Are You the Son of God, then?' " And finally, this is all He would say, "Yes I am." And what was their response? "What further need do we have of testimony? We heard it ourselves from His own mouth. Kill Him."

It doesn't do any good to tell them anything. They're so fixed in their unbelief. 23:8, "Herod was very glad when he saw Jesus; he had wanted to see Him for a long time, because he had been hearing about Him, was hoping to see some sign performed by Him." 23:9, "He questioned Him at some length; He answered him nothing."

Herod thought he was a pretty important guy. Jesus never answered any question he asked. Nothing to say. Nothing to say. This is judgment. This is Genesis 6:3, "My Spirit will not always strive with man." There is an end to God's patience. This is Nehemiah 9:30, "Thou didst bear with them for many years, and admonished them by Thy Spirit through Thy prophets: yet they would not give ear:

therefore Thou didst give them into the hand of the peoples of the land.”

There comes a time when God says, “I have no more to say to you.” Isaiah reiterates it, Isaiah 63:10, “They rebelled, they grieved His Holy Spirit: therefore He turned Himself to become their enemy. He fought against them.” Jeremiah chapter 11, very similar, a couple of verses, verse 7 and 11, “For I solemnly warned your fathers in the day that I brought them up from the land of Egypt, even to this day, warning persistently saying, ‘Listen to My voice.’ ” They didn’t. Verse 11, “Therefore, thus says the Lord, ‘I’m bringing disaster on them which they will not be able to escape; and though they will cry to Me, yet I will not listen to them.’ ”

You remember Luke 19:41, “When He approached the city, He saw it and wept, and said, ‘If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes.’ ”

To the people there is still mercy extended, the gospel extended, the message extended. And on Pentecost there will be 3,000 who believe and thousands more after. But for the leaders, it’s over. It’s over. And even the resurrection, when He arises from the dead, they will not believe, but will fabricate a lie to cover it up.

I would think even in a congregation like this, this morning, there are those who are like the people, the Lord is still reaching out. There are those who are like the leaders, the door is shutting for good. How many times can you hear the gospel and reject the gospel before the Lord says, “I have no more to say”? Don’t let that happen.

As we come to the cross this morning, make sure that your knowledge of the Christ who is crucified is personal, and intimate, and life-transforming, and not just historical.

Our Father, as we come now to Your table in these final moments, we express our concern, our deep concern, for the hearts and lives of those who are here, that we might be a congregation with a true knowledge of You. Religion can be such a great hiding place for hypocrites. We pray, Lord, that there would be an exposure of any hypocritical heart and that anybody who is not right with You would live in fear that the end would come and You would say, “I have nothing more to say to you,” and judgment would turn the light out, and leave only abiding darkness.

Before that ever happens, for those who have heard, and heard, and heard, and resisted, and resisted, and resisted, may this be that day when they truly repent and embrace the gospel. And as we who are Christians come to the cross, may we realize that this hatred, this bitterness that led these men to incite this once seemingly loyal crowd into screaming, “Crucify Him, crucify Him,” as horrible as it was, was the greatest act of grace ever accomplished.

For in their hatred and in the killing of the Son of God came the sacrifice for our sins. And while we loathe what they did to our Savior, we love what You did through Him. And so we come with grateful hearts and penitent hearts to remember His death for us. Amen.

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