

**Sermon:** Doing what is right in our own eyes!

**Reading:** Matthew 21:23-32

### **Introduction**

We live in an age where authority seems to have been undermined considerably in recent years. Grandparents would probably tell their grandchildren how different their school days were compared to today and the authority teachers once held.

Society discharges authority to some in order to maintain order within society for the good of everyone. Imagine how chaotic life would be if we had no rules to govern our actions and no laws to enforce behaviour. Driving for example would become a nightmare. What would our roads look like if everyone just did what was right in their own eyes!

When society neglects the ways of God, each person will simply do what is right in their own eyes and chaos soon descends. We first discover this phrase in Scripture in the book of Judges, where the nation turns its back on God and 'Each does what is right in their own eyes'. The nation descends into confusion, chaos and calamity until they reach the end of themselves and cry out to God in repentance and God restores them once again. We need to remember we are not our own authority, we are accountable to another and there is a higher authority in this world than the people.

In our reading we find Jesus being confronted by the chief priests who are demanding to know by whose authority does He do these things? Is Jesus doing what is right in His own eyes or does He have authority to do what He is doing? Lets see!

### **Context.**

Our reading today takes us into the final week of Jesus ministry. Chapter 21 is usually reserved for Holy Week as Jesus enters Jerusalem upon the colt of a donkey, as the crowds cry out 'Hosannah to the king'. The following day, Jesus enters the temple for prayer and discovers the temple courts have been turned into a market place. Taking up a chord He drives out the animals and overturns the tables of the money changes crying out, 'Stop turning My Father's house into a market' (**John 2:16**). Everyone is astonished at the audacity of Jesus, what right does He have to come into the temple and do such a thing? As of His actions, Jesus is confronted by the chief priests and the elders of the people who demand to know by what authority does Jesus have to do such a thing?

Jesus frustrates the priests and the elders even further in the discourse that follows (**See Matt 21:24-27**). As a result a plot is devised which sees an unholy alliance forming between the Pharisees, Sadducees, the Herodians and the Essenes. Normally these groups would not align together because of their theological and political differences. However Jesus' ministry threatens each of them, so this unholy alliance sets a series of events in motion, which will see Jesus hanging from a Roman cross by the weekend.

### **The confrontation**

What was the strategy this unholy groups employed to silence Jesus? It sounds simple but its ingenious, together they devised a set of questions which are impossible to answer, each one intended to trap Jesus into providing answers which would discredit Him publicly and have Him arrested and humiliated before the people who considered Jesus to be the Messiah. The questions related to Jesus' authority.

The chief priests were the first to ask their question. Jesus agrees to answer providing they answer His question. Jesus was not evading the question like a politician, but knew what they were planning and so turned the tables.

Jesus asked them a simple question relating to the authority of John the Baptist. This was problematic for the priests to answer because the people considered John to be a prophet sent by God. This backed the priests and elders into a theological corner for they knew, whatever way they answer the question, they will either have to face the wrath of the people, by discrediting John's authority as God's messenger or acknowledge that Jesus is the Messiah for this is what John proclaimed. John preached a message of repentance and told of people, 'I baptise with water, but among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie' (**John 1:26-27**). There was no mistaken who John was speaking about as he pointed Jesus out to them saying, 'Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world' (**John 1:29**). If the priests agreed John was a prophet of God they would also have to accept Jesus as the one John pointed to as the long awaited Messiah, because in John's own words he says of the Christ, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because He was before me' (**John 1:29-30**). Even though Jesus was born after John, he is acknowledging Jesus already was, as he was already before him! This is the same testimony as John the evangelist who proclaims, 'In the beginning was the Word and the word was with God and the Word was God,..... the Word made flesh who has dwelt amongst us' (**John 1:1; 14**).

You can see the dilemma of the chief priests and the elders of the people. If they say John was the forerunner to the Messiah they would have to acknowledge Jesus as Lord and bow down and worship Him. If they rejected John's testimony and authority they would face a revolt from the people. They responded in the only way they could saying, 'We don't know' (**Matt 21:27**). Jesus responds, 'Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things. (**Matt 21:27**).

### **Jesus authority**

The question of Jesus authority is as crucial then as it is in our day. For if we believe Jesus has authority we must accept this within the church and declare once again, loudly and proudly that Jesus is Lord and not simply pay lip service to the statement. So let us now consider the evidence on which we base this claim.

The gospel of Mark opens with this remarkable statement, 'The beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ the Messiah, the Son of God' (**Mark 1:1**). Does it get any clearer than this? Mark is saying I've got something amazing to share with you, its about a person, this person we know as Jesus and He is divine, the eternal Son of God. Mark's gospel provides us with a string of events which all show the authority Jesus has.

In chapter 1 of Mark's gospel we find Jesus teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum and the people are amazed at His teaching. They say, "What is this? A new teaching - and with authority!" (**Mark 1:27**). Jesus teaching is recognised as authoritative, unlike the teaching of the priests. He teaches with power and authority!

While Jesus is teaching in the synagogue, Jesus was confronted by a man who has an evil spirit. The confrontation is astounding because of what the demon says, consider these words, 'What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are - the Holy One of God!' (**Mark 1:24**). Even the demons recognise Jesus as divine and know the power and authority He has to destroy them. Jesus orders the demon to be quiet and to 'Come out of him'" (**Mark 1:25**). The people in the synagogue

are amazed, even the demons obey Him. Jesus demonstrates His authority for even the demons obey Him.

Next we discover Jesus entering Peter's home and find Peter's mother-in-law is in bed sick with a fever. Jesus goes up to her and takes her by the hand and helped her up. The fever leaves her immediately, and she began to wait on them **(Mark 1:31)**. This is remarkable as there is not a hint of weakness in body remaining after suffering from the fever, Peter's mother in law is fully restored, immediately! Jesus authority also extends beyond fevers to physical illnesses and diseases, as a man comes to Jesus with leprosy and begged Him on his knees to heal him, "If you are willing, You can make me clean" **(Mark 1:40)**. Jesus says, He is willing and the man was healed and cleansed of his leprosy.

### **Anyone know a good carpenter!**

One of my favourite scenes in Mark's gospel is the healing of the paralysed man. The man's friends carried him to the house where Jesus was staying, but they couldn't get to Jesus because so many people were gathered in the house. The friends were not going to let this stop them, hoisting their friend to the roof, they broke through the ceiling and lowered the man before Jesus. It's a wonderful illustration of the friends determination and faith in Jesus to heal their paralysed friend. As the paralysed man lay on the mat before Jesus, He says, "Son your sins are forgiven" **(Mark 2:5)**. This caused a sharp intakes of breath amongst the teachers of the law who were also present. "This is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" **(Mark 2:7)**. Only God has the power and authority to forgive sins, not man!

Immediately Jesus knew in His spirit what they were thinking and said to them, "Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to this paralysed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, "get up, take your mat and walk'? But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.' So he said to the man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God saying, "We have never seen anything like this!" **(Mark 2:8-12)**.

Jesus demonstrates His authority and power again in chapter 4 of Mark's gospel. Here we discover the fishermen are in a panic during a storm, as a huge swell blew up around them. Jesus rebukes the storm, telling the wind and the waves, "Quiet! Be still" **(Mark 4:39)**. Immediately the wind and the waves obey Him, and are stilled. The terrified disciples in the boat are left asking each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" **(Mark 4:41)**.

Mark's gospel clearly points out from the very beginning Jesus' divinity and His authority Authority in His teaching and preaching unlike the teachers of the law and priests

Authority over demons and to drive them out and even the demons obey Him

Authority over fevers and illness and the power to restore to full health immediately

Authority over diseases like leprosy and restores lost flesh and bone

Authority to forgive sins, completely

Authority over nature, rebuking the wind and waves and they obey Him.

How much evidence do sinful men need to show Jesus identity as divine and what He does is by His own authority, for there is no authority greater than His. For the Scriptures are clear, 'All authority in heaven and on earth is given to Jesus Christ' **(Matthew 28:18)**

Indeed Jesus is speaking to a stubborn and sinful generation who demand signs, but the only sign they will be given is the sign of Jonah. And what more is needed than someone rising from the dead? **(Matt 16:4)**.

This is to be the most amazing sign of all, as Jonah was dead for three days in the fish, so the Son of man will be killed and will raise again on the Third day, conquering sin and death. The grave was conquered, the tomb remains empty and Jesus is risen. Now all authority on earth and heaven belongs to Him.

Do we take this statement seriously? Does Jesus have authority over our lives? Does Jesus have authority in our churches? Should this not at least make us think twice? It bemuses me how quickly a church can follow the teachings of men and dismiss those of Jesus. Do we believe God is Sovereign? Do we believe He has power and authority over all things? **(Col 1:15-17)**. Or do we believe governments or virus is more powerful and has greater authority? Jesus reminds us saying, 'Do not be afraid of those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul. Instead fear the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell' **(Matt 10:28)**. God is the one who will call time on our lives and not before time. He is Sovereign even over my very breath.

I got thinking this morning what if the stats we see daily on the BBC which promotes a culture of fear every day highlighting rates of infections (by the way these are not deaths). Imagine if the BBC reported the rising numbers each day, who actually died without hearing the gospel of Christ, what would our reaction be then? Would not the church be more motivated into action of evangelism? Should we not live with a greater hope in life recognising the authority of Jesus over all things, whether they be great governments or tiny viruses. This leads us to our next parable.

### **Parable of the two sons**

The elders and chief priests are now silent, Jesus continues teaching in parables and this time its one about two sons **(Matt 21:28-31)**, This parable is as relevant for the church today as it was for the elders of Jesus day. This is meant to shock the elders and priests awake from their apathy. Jesus tells them we enter the kingdom not by what we say but by how we respond to the Father. One son obeys his father and the other does not, but the fruit of obedience is in action not in lip service only. Showing a reluctant obedience to God is still honourable, rather than saying we will follow, and we will obey, but never intending to. There is no integrity in that. If we are Jesus church surely we are to follow His commands and not live in rebellion and lip service only. If Jesus is the Head of the church and has all authority, should we not be more concerned to adhere to His teachings and commands, living in faith? The parables end showing some will miss the kingdom because they reject the authority of the Son, now that is sobering indeed.

### **Summary**

This is not a time for the church to be cowering behind locked doors and living in fear but a time when we need to grow a backbone and return back to God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength. Maybe then the world will see a church that believes what the Scriptures teach, when they see we have the courage to stand by what the Word teaches. May we have courage in life and no fear of death as we have a resurrection hope.

May God raise up a generation of Godly leaders who have the courage and faith to live their lives in the ways of God and turn this nation back from fear and anxiety which has gripped the hearts of many, to one of joy and delight in trusting in the God who promises even to raise the dead, through the saving work of Jesus Christ. Now that is good news because our God has been given all authority and power and He is the Head of the Church. Do we truly acknowledge Him as Lord of our lives and our churches? **Amen.**