

The Authority Controversy, Part 1

Luke 20:1-4

August 27, 2023

Luke chapter 20 as we get into this section, I think I mentioned it a little bit last week, but we're getting into ah, the final section of Luke's Gospel. The, the last 20 percent, if you're keeping count of Luke's Gospel. And the section that we're into here, we're gonna see this happening over the next couple of chapters where Jesus is in confrontations with the religious leaders of the Jews. This whole section has to do with rightful and false spiritual authority. Right and wrong shepherding, a right and wrong instincts, right and wrong exercise of authority in ministry.

One concern that our elders have. It's a perennial concern. It's a, it's a continuous concern for us whenever people come to Grace Church, when people visit, when people join as they are here for some time. One of the concerns that we see and is

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raised often quickly is to see what their past experience is with shepherding, with spiritual authority.

Some people are shepherded well, but I would say that that's very few who come to Grace Church and they've been shepherded well. That they've got a good experience with, with biblical leadership, authority in the church. Most often people have been totally neglected with regard to shepherding or they have been abused in spiritual shepherding situations, heavy-handed shepherds, invasive harsh shepherding. A lot of times people who come near to us, you can tell that they have been beaten down, they're fearful.

Most often we see people who have been completely non shepherded and so they become their own authorities and their own shepherds and so they resent any inquiry into their lives, any concern about how they're doing spiritually, any question from the elders they resent and they consider that to be abusive and that's become pretty common today as well.

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What does rightful spiritual authority look like? What is good authority? How is it to be used? What is false authority look like? What is true spiritual abuse look like? Well, the text this morning as we get into the first eight verses of chapter 20 is about authority. At the beginning of the account, in verse 2 the challenge of the religious leaders, and also at the end of the account, we read this phrase which poses the question; by what authority? And that really is the most fundamental question of all, isn't it? Who has the right to tell someone else what to do, what not to do, how to live, how to act, what to say, what not to say? Who has the authority to come in and make changes?

We're reading about the return of masking. Have you heard this? Have you read this on the online? There are some colleges and businesses that are actually requiring masks due to, I guess new COVID variants and an uptick in cases, and we are all asking as we, I think we, COVID taught us to do, the pandemic taught us to do, says who? In other words, we're asking the question, by what authority? Who has the authority to tell me that I've got to put on a mask? Who's got the authority to tell me I have to shoot a vaccine into my body? Who has the right to tell me to pay taxes for that matter, or put my life on the line serving in the

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military? Who has the authority to command my speech or restrict my speech? Who has the right to command my behavior? Who has the right to command my conscience?

Ultimately, there's only one answer to that question. We Christians know the answer. It comes from Scripture. Ultimately, only God has authority. Isn't that right? Only God has authority, Romans 13:1 "For there is no authority except from God." And that is why Jude, after he spent his letter writing about something that he didn't want to, but he was compelled to. He wanted to write about the common salvation of Christians, but he was compelled to expose unlawful, fraudulent, immoral, the immoral manner in which false teachers commandeered religious authority for themselves and used it to abuse people, and take their money, and commit adultery, and all manner of vile things.

And he, Jude, ends with this benediction, "to the only God... be glory, majesty, dominion and authority before all time, now and forever." I'd say that's pretty comprehensive wouldn't you? Only one authority and it's God, before all-time began, now as well. So, whatever now is for you and then forever.

Pontius Pilot tried to coerce Jesus and get him to answer his questions, and in doing so he appealed to his own authority. As Jesus stood before his tribunal and Pilot said, "You will not speak to me?" Jesus was remaining silent. All these charges coming from the religious leaders, and Jesus said nothing. You won't speak to me. "Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you? Jesus answered, 'You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given to you from above.'" In other words, there is only one ultimate authority, Mr. Pontius Pilate. There's only one with the power of life and death and son it ain't you.

God, the eternal infinite one, he is the almighty creator. He is the holy lawgiver. He is the only just judge, and God has the right, by virtue of who he is, by virtue of his essence, by virtue of his person, he has the right and the only right to tell, to tell anyone, and to tell everyone what to do, how to live, how to speak. And I'll, I'll get invasive here, not me get invasive, God is, he has the right to tell you what to think, what not to think, what to like, what not to like.

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He has the authority to command your imagination, what you imagine, that's not your own territory. That's why we in Christ cast down imaginations and every high thing that exalted itself against the knowledge of God. We bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. Anything that we have or think we have that inner space, it's God's. And we're gonna give an account for everything that we think we have.

God in creating the world he instituted, ever since the creation of the world, this concept of representation. He created mankind in his image to represent him, to exercise his dominion over all the earth and God has chosen for mankind to be justly governed. He's delegated due authority and he's done that in three realms. We know the family, very first human institution, the family. Also to human governments as families come together and organize. There's a tribal head, there's government. And then also to religious institutions, priestly institutions you might say, those who bring the people to God, who represent God to man and man to God.

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In our time, the religious institution that we're familiar with, that occupies our time, our life, our week, our service, our ministry, this is the one that he has chosen, it's the church. And Christ, the head of the church exercises his lordship and authority in and through local churches like this one.

And in Jesus day we know that in first century Palestine, the institution, religious institution there was the temple of Israel in Jerusalem. That is why this question of authority has come up, because Jesus has just visited the temple and without getting anyone's permission, without filling out any forms, without running this by any duly appointed authority, he came to the temple and he made some changes. They want to know what gives him the right to do that. That's where we are in the text.

Let's read it. Starting in verse 1, chapter 20 of Luke. "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 and said to him, 'Tell us by what authority you do these things, or who is it that gave you this authority?' He answered them, 'I also will ask you a question. Now tell me, was

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the baptism of John from heaven or from man?' And they discussed it with one another, saying, 'If we say from heaven,' he will say," well, "'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," but, "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.'"

You want a tip? Call it the ultimate life hack. Never try to set a trap for the Son of God. Not gonna work out well for you. It's gonna to backfire, big time. Proverbs 21:30, I love this verse. It says, "No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel can avail against the Lord." Don't try it. So that's application point number one. If you want to write that down your notes, don't try to set a trap for God. You can file that away, but there is more to see here as we go through the text. I'm just gonna give you several points to keep track.

Here's a first point for your notes, number one. The sinful interrogation of rightful authority. That's what we see here,

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the first two verses. The sinful interrogation, questioning of rightful authority. Of all the authorities in the temple we know one for sure was the right one. One for sure was speaking with the voice of God. One for sure had been commissioned by God. One for sure had come into the temple of his Father. This is Jesus' place. He is the rightful authority. And now any questioning of him in this, especially in this manner, well, we know right off the bat it's sinful.

So the sinful interrogation of rightful authority, back to verse one. Luke sets the scene for us. He says here, here's what it looks like. He says, "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," and you can stop there. He's just briefly setting the scene for us, just first of all, noting the relative time, one day, the location, which is the temple, and then the activity of Jesus. Namely, he's teaching the people he's preaching the gospel.

The one day most likely refers to the next day, that is the next day after the temple cleansing. So this is Tuesday of passion

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week the previous day says, starts in Luke 19:45. Jesus drove out those who are selling sacrificial animals. He turned over the tables of the money changers. He swept the place up. He got them all out of there. And having rid the temple of its corrupting distractions, he set, he then settled the place down, and he reclaimed the temple so that it could be used for its original purpose. My house is to be a house of prayer.

And what is he gonna do to make it a house of prayer? He's gonna make sure their prayers are well informed, by teaching, by telling the truth. So many people pray in ignorance. They pray according to error. They pray according to traditions. They don't pray according to the truth. That's why an expository ministry in a church is so vital. To make sure people have the proper interpretation and understanding of the truth from scripture in order that their prayer life will be well informed and they will be good stewards of their life and their ministry, their families and all the realms of their stewardship, so they can pray.

So he rid the temple of its distractions, he reclaimed the temple to be used for its original purpose, and he called the people back and spent the rest of that Monday teaching the people and preaching the gospel. It's reasonable to assume, then, that the temple authorities did not approach Jesus that day. They needed time to catch their breath, really recover from the shock, gather their wits about them, regroup, strategize, talk tactics with one another. How are we gonna, what are we gonna do with the Jesus problem?

So on Tuesday they go out and look for Jesus and they find him back in the temple doing what he came there to do. He's teaching the people, preaching the gospel. Matthew also tells us in Matthew 21:14 that "the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them." This is the rightful use of spiritual authority. As a shepherd, you use both parts of your staff. One end is for driving away the wolves and the hirelings. The other end is for gathering together the sheep. And when he brings the sheep together, what's he doing it for? Just to have a powwow? Just to get warm together?

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No, to feed them, to bring them to good pasture, bring them besides streams of water, help them to drink and eat well, because he wants healthy, productive, fruitful sheep. So Jesus comes, teaches, preaches the gospel. He heals the people. He lifts their burdens. He's doing exactly as we have seen him do ever since the beginning of his ministry. He's been going through the cities and the villages of Israel. He's been proclaiming the good news of God's Kingdom. He's been casting out demons everywhere, healing the people of all their sicknesses, and diseases, and ailments, and maladies.

Wherever he went, Luke 9:11 says, he welcomed to the people, he spoke about the kingdom, he cured those who had need of healing. He loved them by teaching them, incessantly teaching them, they could never get enough of truth, because truth converts their soul; Psalm 19, truth revives the soul, it enlightens the eyes, it gives them hope, it sparks faith in them. They need the truth, but they also need practical burdens lifted. And so he was there to lift burdens.

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So as he's always done now he comes here and does the same thing in Jerusalem. And it says in Luke 19:48, all the people were hanging on his words. All those people remember Jerusalem is swelled with numbers because of the feast. They're captivated. They are spellbound. And remember, this is feast time in Israel. In Jerusalem, the city is packed with people. Jewish pilgrims have traveled from the far reaches of the Roman Empire to celebrate Passover at the temple and that means that many of these people from different parts of the Roman Empire, they are hearing Jesus teach, Jesus preach for the very first time. Their minds are being blown as they're hearing this.

Two days earlier quite a stir was caused when Jesus came into the city and he's riding on the, the donkey's colt and they can see this is, this is like Scripture lived out in front of me; fulfillment of messianic prophecy created this massive excitement. There's this anticipation that God is here to overthrow the Roman occupying force, restore Israel to a rightful place. Man I'm sticking around. I can't wait to see this happen. So all these pilgrims that are there from different parts of the empire, they're learn, they're, they're learning

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from Jesus, but they're also seeing what's happening, this, this electric excitement is flowing through the crowds.

And remember the locals, those who are, whether they're from Galilee or from Judea and living in Jerusalem or Bethany, places like that all of those locals are there to tell the visitors what Jesus had done, to tell about his significance, to kind of interpret him to them. We read this over in John chapter 12, verse 17 that the crowd that had been with him when he had called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead, they continued to bear witness. Remember this raising of Lazarus from the dead that the Pharisees and the scribes wanted to suppress.

In fact they hoped to just kill Lazarus. But remember, Jesus might just raise him from the dead again. So that's a bad plan. But they had been with Jesus when he had called Lazarus out of the tomb, raised him from the dead. They're there. They're there to explain to all the people. You haven't seen anything. You think this isn't, you think clearing the temple. I'll tell you what, raising the dead, I was there. And the reason why the

crowd went out to meet him was that they had heard that he'd done this sign. And so the Pharisees said to one another, you see that you were gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him. The whole world has gone after him. Just to show the Pharisees are not exaggerating their concern about the world going after Jesus.

John writes this next in John 12 verse 20 just to help us see, this is no hyperbole on their part. This isn't an exaggeration. "Now among those who went up to the worship at the feast were some Greeks." They've come a long way, traveled from Greece over to Jerusalem to worship at the feast. "So these came to Phillip, who was from Bethsaida and Galilee," and more of a Greek speaking place, "and asked him, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.'"

Greeks are just some of the pilgrims who would attend to the Passover feast fifty days later at the feast of weeks or also known as Pentecost. We read this list of pilgrims in Acts 2:9, they were there at that time: Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,

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Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt, parts of Libya, visitors from Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretins and Arabians.

Pharisees are not wrong. They are not exaggerating. The whole world is, according to what they're seeing in front of them, going after Jesus. He's got an appeal with people who speak every kind of language, come from every kind of a culture. Why? Because the truth cuts down beneath every culture, beneath every society; doesn't matter what language, what time, what place, the word of Jesus Christ gets to the heart of the human condition. Luke tells us that they were hanging on his every word, all those people. Now you would think that this would be a cause for joy and celebration in the temple. Messiah has come and the world is listening to him. This is the very purpose of Israel, is it not?

God intended Israel to be an evangelistic nation. We were singing some of those songs just earlier. God intended Israel to be an evangelistic nation, to call the nations of the earth, call them to come to the light. Isaiah says this. "I am the Lord." Speaking to the Messiah, he says, "I've called you in

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righteousness." "I've called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and I will keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the," pit, "prisoners from the dungeon, and from the prison those who sit in darkness."

All those sayings are metaphors for the effect of sin. Sin blinds the eyes. Sin makes us prisoners in the devil's dungeon. Sin puts us in darkness. We need light, which is a metaphor for salvation, life. Isaiah 49:6 says, "I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." And now Messiah has come. Israel, look, the Messiah has come. Malachi 3:1, "The Lord whom you seek, he's suddenly come into his temple" and it's a day for joy and for rejoicing and celebration. The kids got it.

They were running around singing Hosanna, Hosanna as he's clearing the temple. And that is just twisting the knife for these religious leaders. Why? Because they are false. Instead of them rejoicing, we read in Luke 20 verse 1, and here's where you can cue the Darth Vader Imperial March theme. It says, "The

chief priests and the scribes of the elders came up" in verse 2 they said to him, "Tell us," They're commanding him, "tell us by what authority you do these things, or who is it that gave you this authority."

Chief priest, scribes, elders, those are three component parts of the Sanhedrin. So this is a delegation from the ruling body of the Jews, which is the Council of seventy, the Sanhedrin. Many of them are Pharisees, but some of them are Sadducees. The Sanhedrin is presided over by the top guy who will break a tie in case of a tie vote. It's the Chief Priest, Caiaphas in this case. This is a delegation from the Sanhedrin and as we said from the beginning, the question that they asked about authority, it's actually not the wrong question. Yeah, it's said in the wrong spirit, but it is a right question to ask. They are the duly appointed authority, the Sanhedrin, and they have the right and the duty. They've got a God-given responsibility actually to examine leadership, and examine influence, and examine teachers teaching.

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They have seen many of these would be messiahs come and go, and they stir up the people to action and turn them into rebels and zealots that eventually are put down by the Romans and killed, but all the while bringing a lot of bloodshed on all the people. So it is part of their job to examine teachers and their teaching, to see what they're saying, to see what their influence is. So the problem is not with the question itself, the problem is not in the intent to examine, the problem, frankly, in a word, is them. They are the problem.

They use their God given, divinely delegated authority in a dishonest and insincere and hypocritical way. How is that? It's to protect their interests, selfish interests. We know from Luke 19:47, we can see very clearly there, these men want him dead. It's not righteous. They can't simply arrest him though. They can't drag him off to prison, have him executed. They can't have him assassinated. Such actions would really undermine the appearance of legitimacy that they had before all the people, and they need to keep up appearances.

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The chief priest refers to a group or an order that worked for and represent the interest of the current ruling high priest, who is Caiaphas, his high priestly family, dignitaries that are corrected to the priesthood. As we said last time, these chief priests, the high priestly family, all theological liberals, they're morally corrupt. They're driven by greed, love for money, but they are the custodians of the temple and as the custodians of the temple, they're not too happy about what Jesus did the previous day.

It's really messing up all their business connections. It's really putting all their, the contracts that they've created with those who sell the animals and change the money, put all those contracts in jeopardy of them being out of contract. The scribes, many of these are Pharisees, but others are Sadducees or others just neutral, if there is such a thing. But they're academics. They're the legal theological scholars. They have studied the Bible. They've interpreted the Law of Moses. They know the Scripture. They're, they advise those whom they work for in matters of law, matters of policy and procedure. But the scribes are there, and especially accompanied, accompanying the chief priest.

They are there to provide legal cover, biblical cover, for their, their duties. They're like backup and they assure the people, they assure everyone that the traditions of the Pharisees, the policies, the priesthood, the policies of the temple, all those are biblically justified. We can find chapter and verse for everything that we do. So scribes assure everyone God is on the side of these religious authorities. You need to listen to them because the Bible says so.

In reality, they are just there to legitimize whatever the chief priests paid them to legitimize. The elders, these elders were respected lay leaders in the community. In Israel's history, the elders are tribal heads who exercised oversight. They judged the different tribes of Israel, Simeon, Benjamin, Judah, Issachar, all those different tribes of Israel they exercised authority in, in those cities and towns. They had roles of giving judgment, deciding cases; whether in the synagogue or sitting at the city gates.

But in Jerusalem, this is the big stage. This is like you got the lower courts, but this is like the Supreme Court. These guys, well respected, accomplished, studied, informed, and these men sat on the Sanhedrin to provide judicial oversight for the whole nation. Now the matter of concern for the chief priest, the scribes, the elders. What is it? Verse 2, "these things," "these things." It's intentionally broad, but these things in context refers to everything Jesus has been doing over the past couple days.

I mean, talking about his procession into Jerusalem. He's made quite a stir, meddling in temple affairs, more to the point, though, he had driven away the vendors of the temple. He's even gone further than that. Not just, not just with this zealot impulse of purity or whatever that is, but he has taken up a teaching position. He started to speak things that are very much in contrast with what everybody else has been saying. He is an unvetted nonresident teacher and he's taken up residency in the temple. He started teaching the people. He is there without prior authorization. And here's the problem, without prior authorization from them.

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Now they would say if we're to make their case for them the chief priest, they're simply trying to serve the people. We just want to care for the people. We want to help them obtain their lambs for sacrifice and oxen; want to make the pigeons available too, because of all the poor that just don't have the means, they need to worship God too.

So we're providing them a service. We provide a currency exchange. So none of that godless foreign money that are all stamped with pagan idols. None of that makes it into the temple coffers and pollutes the coffer and purity of the temple. We don't wanna allow any of those foreign coins with lower silver content to rob the temple of God; we got a temple to maintain. We got to keep up the beauty. We got to keep up the experience for all of you. We just care.

That's certainly what they said. That's certainly how they were able to sleep at night with their actions. But no one, not the common man. None of them were fooled by their sanctimonious, pious words of justification. They could see right through it. Everyone knew what was going on in the temple was robbery. They

complained. There's a lot of records of complaint of the exorbitant rates that they charged. This approved vendors list that everybody had to use for getting their animals from the chief priest. They charge outrageous prices, exchange rates for foreign currency, also outrageous. All of it's a scam and people know it.

So when Jesus comes in and throws out the scam and the scammers, man, he is the people's man. Certainly they do like Jesus. They're hanging on all his words. But we know that just because they're hanging on his words, it doesn't mean it's always for the right reason, right? Few days later, they're gonna say "crucify him." Truth didn't go very deep with them.

But back to the chief priests. They had their own business interests to protect. They're obligated by contract to provide booth space for temple vendors so they could sell their animals, so they exchange currency without any molestation from zealots, like this man, without fear of rioting or uprisings from among the people. These chief priests had contractual obligations to uphold, and all of that kept the money flowing. It lined their

pockets by keeping their business partners happy, content. So concerned about protecting their interests, they got to deal with this Jesus problem.

They can't kill him, can't have them assassinated, can't have the appearance of an unlawful arrest. But they can try to undermine him in public. They can try to delegitimize him, expose his lack of credentials, his lack of authorization, show everyone he's got no authority to do what he's been doing, to teach what he's been teaching. And what they want to say, we're in charge here, and you failed to get our permission. But that sounds a little bit too wagging the finger in the face like the school marm, right?

I'll bet, in fact, that if Jesus had rode in on Sunday, parked his donkey in front of the temple's business office, and obtained a permit or signed a contract on a booth, I'll bet the chief priest would have cut him a pretty good deal. They knew about him. He was no mystery to them. They'd love to be able to put their stamp of authority and their imprimatur on his ministry, because in that case, his entire messianic claim, the

whole messianic movements would come under the ages of their authority. He'd be beholden to them. For a price they'd be willing to grant him their support.

But listen, we know this. He'd never do that. The thought never crossed his mind. And you say, well, Travis, why did it cross your mind? Well, because I'm sinful and I think of what sinners do. He'd never do that. The thought to seek their permission, come under their authority never crossed his mind. How could it? How could the one who commands the wind in the waves, who banishes sickness and disease, who cast demons out with a word. How could he seek permission from men? How could the one who has power of life, creates eyesight, can, heals congenital birth defects, creates food for thousands, overcome death by raising the dead? How could he put himself under any lesser power, any a lesser authority?

Would such a thought ever cross his mind to seek their permission? It is his temple, not theirs. It belongs to his Father. He is the custodian of the temple, not them. And he's come to take charge of his Father's house. We read this from

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Psalm 62, verse 9 earlier. But listen to it again, and this time from the CSB, the Christian Standard Bible. "Men are only a vapor; exalted men only an illusion." The men aren't the illusion, right? It's their exaltation above anybody else.

That's the illusion. And that's how Jesus sees all these important men as they stroll through the temple dressed in their long, flowing fancy robes. Going from dinner party to dinner party. Moving through the temple courts according to pecking order like little ducks arranged in order of importance, title, human authority. Just a bunch of men playing dress up, puffing out their chest, acting important. And as they approach him with somber faces, he's thinking, weight in the scales and they go up and together. All these guys, less than a vapor.

That's what's strikingly apparent in their challenge, when they say in verse 2, "Tell us by what authority you do these things, or who is it gave you this authority." You know what they're acknowledging tacitly? His authority. They can't help it. They're compelled to acknowledge his authority. Why? Because there is no one like this man. There's no one who speaks like

him. There's no one who acts like him. There's no one who flexes his power like him. One man driving out thousands from the temple complex. Never seen anything like this. When Jesus forgave the paralytic early in his ministry, restored his ability to walk as well. The crowd saw it. Says they were afraid.

In Matthew 9:8, "they glorified God." Why? Because he had given such authority to men. They identified the source of that authority. It's divine. This is otherworldly. This is an alien invasion of a different authority than I've ever seen. When he cast out demons, Luke 4:36 says, "They were all amazed and said to one another, 'What is this word? For with authority and power he commands demons and they come out!'" "The crowds marveled," Matthew 9:33, "saying, 'never was anything like this seen in Israel.'"

They could expand that and say never was anything seen like this in all the earth, in any age, at any time. His teaching unparalleled in its depth, penetrating and incisive in the power of wisdom, divine in its authority. Matthew 7:29 says he taught

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the people "as one who had authority," present possession, "not as their scribes." What did their scribes do? Kept quoting other authorities. According to Rabbi so and so, according to what I read here in the tablet, according to what I read here, according to this, according to that, according to this, according to that. We do that too. According to this commentator, according to this theologian, we, I do.

I quote people of more standing and stature than myself, people who have studied far longer, done the hard work. I rely on people. We can't help it. That's what we are, human beings. We don't have all knowledge. We're limited. Not this man. This man spoke from God as if he came from God, as though he had his source in the essence of God himself, which is what made arresting him so difficult.

We read the one failed attempt arresting Jesus in a previous feast, John 7:44. "Some of," some of, "them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid their hands on him." The chief priest," sent officers, and "the officers came back to the chief priest

and the Pharisees, who said to them, 'Why didn't you bring him?'
The officers answered, 'No one ever spoke like this man!'"

It's like, easier for you to say. You try arresting him. You tell me how that goes. This illustrates it, doesn't it? The point that we're trying to make here, which is about the sinful interrogation of rightful authority. Why is it sinful? Because these men are coming with ulterior motives. How do we know that? Well, for one, because in the previous context, it says they want to kill him. They want to destroy him. They wanted him dead, but also because right here, in our context, there he is. He's teaching the word of God in this very public setting.

Rather than examine the substance of his teaching, which is expressed in plain language, taking his actual words to the Scripture and comparing Scripture and Scripture. Rather than examine the facts, rather than look at the evidence, rather than looking at the prophetic texts, instead they prefer to niggle over paperwork. They prefer to, to complain about his lack of getting their permission.

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They need to see him come under their authority. That's their issue. They envy his popularity and they resent his authority that his teaching is true, that his exegesis is correct, that his interpretations are accurate; his applications in furtherance of godliness, that they promote holiness and godly piety, that has been demonstrated over his entire ministry, publicly, in every place, that's being proven now, and it would be proven beyond question, once again throughout the environs of the temple over the entire coming week.

That his miracles are valid, that they're legitimate, that they've been examined and verified by the priests, those who are the public health examiners. That too has been proven over his entire ministry. No one denies the validity of his miracles. The best his enemies can do is try to shift public attention and make the argument about something else. It's just throw out red herring after red herring and make it about that. And so what they try to do, the best they can do, is slander him. They can't deny his power, but they can say, well what's the source of his power. He cast out demons by Beelzebul the ruler of demons, the prince of demons.

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Keep that in mind, beloved, that the more you speak with the master's voice, the more you follow his example, the more you pursue righteousness in your life, the more you use any authority you have or any influence you have to lift people's burdens and to help them. The more you speak the truth to them and get personal with it, because you love them, don't think you're gonna get thank you notes, awards from the community.

There will be those, sure who at superficial glance will appreciate it, but they don't want you to go too far, get too serious. The closer you are to the truth in what you say, the closer you are to the tone of scripture in the way you say it, the more faithful you are to press the claims of Christ to every unbelieving conscience. They will hate you for it, not love you.

It's only Jesus' sheep that hear his voice and respond to the truth and come near. And that's why we here in this church love the truth. We love to be told the truth. We love to be confronted with the truth, in order that I may repent in light of the truth. But JC Ryle says this, it says, "they hated Christ and envied him, as his influence was increasing and theirs was

waning." That's the problem. They're losing hold of their grip upon the people. Then Ryle says this, "Every true hearted Christian who tries to do good in this world must be prepared to be treated like his master."

"He must never be surprised to find that self-righteous and worldly-minded people dislike his actions. The lawfulness of his behavior will be constantly called into question. He'll be thought of as meddling in other people's affairs and is being self-conceited and a troubler in Israel." Jesus promised that, didn't he? Don't be surprised when all men hate you because of my namesake. "In the world you will have trouble. But take heart," he said, "I've overcome the world."

Here's the second point, and I promise you these get shorter. Second point. The humble imposition. The humble imposition to impose the humble imposition of regal authority. Regal, R E G A L. Kingly authority, if you prefer. Jesus responds, and as he responds, he imposes his kingly authority in verses 3 and 4. "He's answered them, 'I also will ask you a question. Now tell me, was the baptism of John from heaven or from man?'" Some

people think that Jesus is evading the question here. He's dodging the leadership's question.

He's not doing that. He, he is being indirect. And that's intentional. He sees through their false pretense, their insincerity, their questioning. But he does intend to bring these men to the right answer, and this is the perfect way to do that, by the way. Along the way he will expose them as frauds. But that is not the main point. The main point is to answer their question. Still, as he leads them to the right answer, he does it in such a way as Edersheim says, "so that the cunning and the cowardice that prompted these questions is gonna be there, It's gonna be exposed, revealed for what it really is."

So why is John the Baptist the perfect test case, answering the question about his own authority? What's the deal with John the Baptist? Why raise this question about their assessment of John's ministry? Let me give you several things to see here. First, false religious leaders, they like to speak in the general. They like to stay in the realm of the abstract. They don't want to get pinned down too well, but Jesus wants to get

specific. He wants to be concrete. Baptism of John from heaven or from man? Well, that's simple. Simple question. John, true prophet or not; true prophet commissioned by God or false prophet who deserves to be dead? Answer, speed round.

Second thing, false religious leaders they want to talk about policy and procedure, administrative oversight, appropriateness. They don't like to deal with Scripture. They don't want to be, examine evidence through the lens of biblical truth, thinking about sin and righteousness, truth and error. Jesus forces them to look at biblical prophecy. Consider the power, the truthfulness of John's prophetic ministry. See if his ministry and if the fruit of his ministry matches up with the prophetic texts. Let's examine the facts. They don't want to do that.

So first, false religious leaders, they like to speak in the general and abstract, not the specific and concrete. They want to talk about policy, procedure, tone, administrative things, but not actual authoritative texts. Third thing false religious leaders they want to keep the discussion, kind of among the elites, among the educated, duly qualified to address these

complex issues of temple procedure. Jesus wants to have this conversation publicly, in front of everybody. He thinks the issues are actually quite simple, simple enough for these simple people to respond rightly, to see truly, to respond with obedience while their, review, leaders refused to obey.

Jesus was teaching the people about the true nature of the very, of the character of John's ministry. He said this back in Luke 7:28. He said, "I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John. Yet he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." And then he says this, when all the people heard this," "Wow. Those who are in the kingdom of God, least in the kingdom of God, greater than John the Baptist. Well, that's great. Why? Because, "when all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they declared God just, having been baptized with the baptism of John."

They're like that guy is a prophet. There has been no prophecy in Israel for 400 years. But I've read the Old Testament. I can tell you that guy sounds a lot like the Old Testament, and he's calling me to go down and say that I am just as dirty as a

Gentile. I need to be baptized in that water and be prepared for the coming of the Lord. The Messiah's coming. I'm going, you going, I'm going. Let's go.

But the Pharisees, the lawyers, the scribes, they rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him. Rather than hearing the voice of prophecy, rather than hearing God's authority through John's ministry, they discounted it and said, who is this guy? Uneducated. Uncouth. What's he wearing anyway? I mean, look at those clothes. He still got locust hanging in his beard. Gross.

They get really uncomfortable when Jesus brings up John; asks them to address the source of his authority. Why is that?

Because John is the forerunner. To, the forerunner to whom? To the Messiah. To Jesus. These same men, we have to realize they had sent a delegation from the Sanhedrin about three years earlier. Right before Jesus cleanse the temple for the first time. That made a mark on them. But they had set a delegation back then.

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Greeley

In fact, you can turn there just quickly. John 1:19, John 1:19. This is very early on in the ministry of Jesus. He's ministering in Jerusalem around Judea at the very start of his ministry and John the Baptist is baptizing. He's conducting his ministry.

He's prophetic and says in verse 19, John, chapter 1. "This is the testimony of John, when the Jews," this is the Sanhedrin, "sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' He confessed, did not deny, but confessed, 'I am not the Christ.' They asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I'm not.' 'Are you the prophet?' He answered, 'No.' They said to him," Well, "'who are you?' You got to tell us, because, 'We have to give an answer to those who sent us.' See, they're a delegation coming from the Sanhedrin. 'What do you say about yourself?'

"He said, 'I am the voice of one, crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said.' (Now they have been sent from the Pharisees). They asked him, 'Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?' John answered them, 'I baptize

with water, among you,' though, 'stands one you do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.'

"These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing. The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and he said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.' I myself didn't know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel.'

"And John bore witness:" he said, 'I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' I have seen, I have borne witness that this is the Son of God.'"

What else happened in those baptismal waters? As Jesus came up from the baptismal waters and "the Spirit descended upon him

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like a dove, the heavens opened and a voice came from heaven of God the Father saying, 'This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.'" John claimed to be the voice predicted by Isaiah 40, verse 3. The voice that cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord." That means this Jesus is the Messiah. He is the one who ranks higher than John as attested by the Holy Spirit and the voice of God the Father.

So if John, you can go back to Luke 20. If John is a true prophet of God, if he is commissioned and sent by God, and John says Jesus is the Messiah, well, all questions are answered, aren't they? By what authorities does Jesus do these things? By divine authority. Who is it who gave Jesus this authority? God did. So, chief priests, scribes, elders, down on your knees, bow before Jesus the Christ in worship with total allegiance, with wholehearted devotion. Nothing but thanks coming from your lips. Nothing but unqualified obedience coming from your hands and your feet. This Jesus is your rightful king. It's God's Messiah.

But they're not bowing, are they? For the audacity of questioning their king, they deserve to be cut down on the spot,

put to the sword, executed for their insolent behavior against this royal authority. Instead, Jesus doesn't do that. This is not the time for that. He puts a question to them. He treats them like thinking men. He gives them a chance to respond rightly to truth, gives them a chance to repent.

Such remarkable patience in him, isn't there? Such kindness, gentleness, condescension to these sinners. He truly is meek, even when he deals with the most wily of men, the most vile of motives, these religious leaders and their cunning and their cowardice. They deserve to die. Instead, he talks to them, tells them the truth. We've been seeing the sinful interrogation of Jesus rightful authority. We've seen here the humble imposition of Jesus regal authority.

Those first two points in our outline, they show all of us what true spiritual authority really looks like, how it's used, how spiritual leaders ought to wield the authority that's delegated to them by Christ, the right use of spiritual authority. This is a shepherding authority. It is driven by love. Love for God and fear for him, and love for people.

There's a shepherding concern here to straightforwardly and sternly deal with wolves and hirelings to drive them away from the flock of God, but always provide a safe refuge for the sheep, teach them the truth, to lift their burdens, to heal their diseases, all the things that God sent the Messiah to do. Jesus is the safe guide, the perfect example, and the trustworthy Lord.

When we come back to the text next week, we'll cover the final two points and we'll see a drastic contrast with false religious authority, the false shepherds of Israel who had commandeered spiritual authority and were using it to enrich themselves. We're gonna see their hypocrisy made plain; very clear to us, their sinfulness, their pride, their arrogance, their stubbornness, and their unbelief.

So come back next week for a very cheery sermon on a bunch of sin. But we'll wrap it up with the example of Jesus Christ. Let's pray, shall we?

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Grace

Our Father, we thank you so much for the time that you've given us in this text. We thank you for the shepherding of the Lord Jesus Christ. We love you, oh God, because who Jesus is, how he acts, how he speaks, it's just a, a representation, a manifestation of you, of your compassion for sinners, your love for people, your mercy, your grace, but at the heart of it, there has to be divine authority at work.

And we see that so clearly in the ministry of John the Baptist, pointing to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah, and pointing us all, no matter what tribe, tongue, nation we come from, no matter what language we speak, no matter what culture we were raised in, no matter what background we have, no matter what sins we've confessed, no matter what time we live in, he is the one and only Savior. And that's why there is no other name under heaven by which men must be saved but the name of Jesus Christ, who you by your grace have made our Savior and Lord, we thank you in his name. Amen.