

The Authority Controversy, Part 2

Luke 20:1-4

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 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.'"

His teaching unparalleled in its depth, penetrating and incisive in the power of wisdom, divine in its authority. Matthew 7:29 says he taught 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.

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.

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.

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 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?

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.