

## The Authority Controversy, Part 2

Luke 20:5-8

September 3, 2023

Well, we are back in Luke 20 and the authority controversy that erupted in Israel. And so you can turn to Luke 20 to see this authority controversy that erupted in Israel when Jesus came to the Temple, reclaimed the Temple for God. Last week I got through half my points, which was more than half of my sermon, and so I chopped it off right in the middle. And I've been able to go back to the shorter part of that half of the sermon and expand it even longer than it ever was. So I don't know if it's a cause for weeping and gnashing of teeth or great rejoicing, but let's start by reading the text.

Luke chapter 20 verses 1 to 8 says this. "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, 'Why did you not believe him?' But if we say from man, all the people will stone us to death,' for they're convinced that John was a prophet. So 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.'"

Before we just launch into the text and pick up where we left off last time, I want to pause for a moment. Set this up by having you hear Jesus' concern about spiritual authority. I want you to hear his concern about who it is you listen to, who it is you line up under, who it is you follow, who's teaching you ingest and digest, and the most important voices in your life. We can hear this concern of authority all the way back from the Sermon on the Mount.

So you can go to the end of Matthew Chapter 7 and take a look. As the Good Shepherd, Jesus is concerned about who you follow. He's concerned about the voice or voices that you listen

to. He's concerned about whose life you watch, whose habits you imitate. So concern about spiritual authority, this isn't a new thing for Jesus. It goes way back. It goes back to his teaching as Matthew records his teaching from his early ministry at the end of the Sermon on the Mount.

And find your way to Matthew 7 and verse 15. Jesus says this, "Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorn bushes or figs from thistles. So every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits."

Twice there Jesus says, once at the beginning, once at the end, twice he says you will know them. And he's referring to the false prophets, the false shepherds, the false teachers. You will know them, recognize them, by their fruits. You know what the challenging thing is about trees and fruits, about knowing a

tree by its fruits? Accurate assessment requires close proximity over time.

It's the same challenge in knowing teachers by their fruits. An accurate assessment requires close proximity over a sufficient length of time. You can't possibly know and examine and watch and assess and come to a right judgement about a man in his ministry, or a woman in her ministry, about a ministry movement, about the effect of a denomination or institution or a movement or a church. You can't know apart from close proximity and without sufficient time. Just as you can't know what kind of a tree it is without an up close examination, without sufficient time for the tree to bear its fruit.

According to Jesus, it's the same thing with teachers and teaching. And you know what makes that so difficult today? Our technology has allowed us to pay no attention to proximity. We don't feel the need any more to be close to anything or anybody. In fact, you can see sometimes we've seen this as a family before. You see families sitting at a restaurant, family of four, five, six, whatever. And each one of them has their cell

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phone out and they're looking down at their phones, ignoring everybody who's in their close proximity while they are connected to someone who is far, far away.

We think that we have done away with the need to be close, proximate, near. We don't need that anymore. We've advanced. We progressed beyond the need to be close in proximity. We're also, as I know you feel this all the time, but we're a society in a hurry. When my wife and I moved here from California, we were used to California highways, California driving, which is fast, dangerous. I kind of like it. Fast and dangerous, I got to admit, came here to Greeley and it was like, whoa.

My wife and I have noticed over the past almost nine years that we've been here, how many of our kind are moving here? Do you notice that? And people from these bigger urban areas are coming here and they're starting to lay on their horns, and they're being impatient and pushing. We are an impatient people. We're an impatient country. We want our food fast. We want our driving fast. We want everything fast. We want results now.

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If our Google search takes more than three seconds, we're like, what's wrong with this thing? Click, click, click, click. Renew, refresh, refresh, refresh. What's going on? We're especially in need to hear Jesus' warning. You must be close in proximity to see a teacher in his life and see the teaching. See the result of the teaching. See whether it produces good fruit or bad fruit. And you have to give it time. You have to be patient and wait.

It's one of the challenges that me, and the other elders feel, and other, wise older people in this church feel. When young people come in, they want answers now. They treat us like human Googles, human Wikipedias. "Just give me the answer. I just, just the words, is all. I wouldn't, I don't even need you, really, just if you could write it down, send me an e-mail, text it to me."

Jesus said, though, "Wisdom is vindicated by her children." Children take time to grow up, to see their character, to see what they're going to turn into. Wisdom is vindicated by her

children. It's going to take time. It's going to take close proximity to observe the fruit of wisdom.

Now, with that in mind, transition over to Mark's Gospel. Take a look at Mark's Gospel and turn to find your way to Mark 11:27. One book over to your right and we'll see in Mark 11:27 the parallel account to what we're studying in Luke, the section on the authority controversy. We read this in Mark 11:27, "And they came again to Jerusalem. And as he's walking in the Temple, the chief priests and the scribes and the elders came to him, and they said to him, 'By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?'" Very same thing as what we read.

And again, what do they mean by these things? Back up in the same chapter and look at verse 15, "As they came to Jerusalem, he entered the Temple, began to drive out those who sold those who bought in the Temple. He overturned the tables of the money changers, the seats of those who sold the pigeons. And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the Temple. And he was teaching them and saying to them, 'Is it not written.

My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations. But you have made it a den of robbers.'" Same narrative pattern as Luke's Gospel.

But notice in Mark's Gospel what is a, a bit different. Look what comes directly before the Temple cleansing and then directly after it. Back up to Mark 11, verse 12 and through verse 14. "On the following day when they came from Bethany, he was hungry and seeing in the distance of fig tree in leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on it. And when he came to it he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. He said to it, 'May no one ever eat fruit from you again.' His disciples heard it." Now skip over the tem, Temple cleansing account and right after that look at verse 20, says, "As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots."

What is this? Is Jesus lashing out at a tree because he can't get figs when he wants them? Is he just hungry and bit irritated that this fig tree, even though it's not the season for figs that the tree didn't recognize the master, the creator



of all things walking down the road and said, "Well pop, let me pop out a few figs." Obviously not. He is not taking out his frustrations on this innocent tree. Jesus is using the fig tree as an object lesson here to illustrate Israel to his disciples.

The nation, Israel had everything going for it. Every advantage from God, every blessing, every spiritual resource, the promises, the covenants, the Word of God revealed, written. Besides that, the physical protection and physical provision of God, blessing after blessing after blessing. But the nation failed to worship God exclusively, and thus the nation failed to bear the fruit of righteousness. And thus, the nation failed to obey its calling, which was what? At least this to be a light to the nations, to receive the nations into the Temple. That the Temple would be a house of prayer for all the peoples.

What Jesus wants his disciples to see here as they go from the Temple cleansing, and then they see the, the, they go toward the Temple. He curses the fig tree. On the way from Bethany down to Jerusalem, curses the fig tree. They go to the Temple, clear the Temple. They come back, go out of the city. They pass by in

the morning. They see the fig tree that he cursed the previous day withered to its roots. And then they go into the Temple, and there's this authority controversy.

What Jesus wants his disciples to see here is the reason that there's no fruit. The reason Israel failed to fulfill its calling the disease is not merely in the leaf or the branch. The disease isn't even in, just in the trunk of the tree. The disease goes all the way down, hidden beneath the surface to the unseen root. What root has been feeding this nation? What root has been nourishing the people? What root has been helping them grow healthy and strong and mature? Certainly wasn't the shepherds of Israel.

God indicted them. As we read back in Jeremiah 23, there's another text you can go to if you'd like to in Ezekiel chapter 34, Ezekiel 34. God indicted them all the way back in Ezekiel's day as well, Ezekiel 34:2 and following, Thus says the Lord God 'Shepherds of Israel who've been feeding yourselves, should not the shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, and you clothe yourselves with the wool, and you slaughter the fat ones. But

you do not feed the sheep. The weak you've not strengthened the sick you've not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness [in other words in severity] you have ruled them.'"

If the nation is dependent on, counting on that kind of leadership, to care for God's vineyard and to nourish the nation, feed its people, what hope is there for good fruit to grow? None at all. Verse 5, the results, so they were scattered. The sheep were scattered because there's no shepherd.

Oh, a lot of self-proclaimed shepherds. A lot of people wearing tags to say chief priests, elders of the people, Pharisees, scribes, a lot of people with education, a lot of people with wealth, a lot of people with prominence, power, authority. But there were no shepherds. They became food for all the wild beasts. The sheep were scattered, God says, they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. You know what that's a reference to? Idolatry.

They would go and commit idolatry all over the hills and mountains of Israel. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or to seek for them. So when Jesus curses the fig tree, he's illustrating to his disciples the deadness of the nation, and he is also showing how thorough the deadness is. And it goes all the way down to a diseased root, that which is meant to feed the nation, to nourish the nation. That is its spiritual leadership, they themselves are dead and rotten and dry and withered and diseased.

Bad religion is, as Hosea 4:9 says, it's like people, like priests. And as the prior verse Hosea 4:8 says, "The priests feed on the sins of the people." They are greedy for their iniquity. You want to know how to explain all these terrible evangelical scandals that keep showing up in the news? That's it right there. The priests feed on the sins of the people. They just eat it up, and they're greedy for the people's iniquity. Rather than confronting it, they start by letting it go. And after letting it go for a while, they start indulging in it. And after they have indulged in it for a little while, they embrace it fully and they are ruined, shipwrecked, destroyed.

People aren't off the hook here. God holds them accountable too. They're not simply victims. They bear responsibility as well. In fact, that's why Jesus tells the people, he bypasses all their leadership, he tells the people, "Watch out for false teachers." It's your job, your responsibility to watch out and be careful who you follow, who you listen to.

But as we see, there is an even greater guilt and a higher accountability that God does require of the shepherds. Anybody who takes on that mantle, anybody who takes on that role, you watch out, because God will hold you accountable for those souls. You bear an extra responsibility. Now, as you go back to Luke, chapter 20, you need to have that context in mind. This is how Jesus is thinking. This explains how he views what's going on in the Temple. This explains his great passion against all the profiteering, all the distraction, all the buying and selling and the money changing. This explains his offence at that.

It also helps us see why he did what he did and what's going on. What's at stake for all the false shepherds of Israel

when he does it? We started last time point one on, number one, the sinful interrogation of rightful authority. Remember the sinful interrogation? That's the interrogation of this Sanhedrin delegation. And they're coming to this rightful authority, the only rightful authority, without a doubt, is Jesus Christ in their midst, and they interrogate him. "One day, as Jesus was teaching the people in the Temple, preaching the gospel, chief priests, scribes with the elders came up, said to him, 'Tell us by what authority you do these things or who is it who gave you this authority?'"

Chief priests, scribes, elders, these men are the delegation from the ruling body of the Jews, the council of the seventy known as the Sanhedrin. It is their job, it really is their job, to examine leadership teachers and their teaching. But we also know from Luke 19:47, these leaders don't come with pure motives. They're offended. They want to kill Jesus. They're actually murderous in their thoughts. And it's not that Jesus, just that Jesus is bad for business. They see him as a threat to their power, to their influence and their position.

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Jesus just came and in one morning put a stop immediately to their Temple businesses. That's irritating and disruptive, but frankly, they could recover from that, that disruption. Jesus had done that once before. Come in, cleared the Temple, John Chapter 2. He'd done that three years earlier, and as we see at the end of Luke 19, they'd fully recovered. They're back in business. In fact, business was booming even more than before.

The real menace from the perspective of corrupt priests, corrupt false shepherds. It was the fact that Jesus had taken up, even more so, a teaching position in the Temple, and more concerning than that, he showed no signs that he would be leaving anytime soon. The authority of Jesus in clearing out the thousands from the Temple, in teaching God's word, in preaching, the gospel, in healing, sickness and disease, the authority of Jesus is obvious, it's undeniable, it's indisputable. Or is it indisputable? Not in their minds. In their minds they've got a bone to pick. They want to dispute his authority.

Religious leaders had the gall to challenge Jesus here, to demand his credentials. Maybe it was risky, but if they pulled it off, they would have succeeded in bringing Jesus under their authority. So it's worth the risk, they thought, with Jesus tamed, with Jesus wearing their bit and bridle, they can put their little world back into some semblance of order and get back to business as usual.

Not so fast. Second point, the humble imposition of regal authority. The humble imposition of regal, or kingly, authority. Jesus responds to their question, and his response imposes upon them his regal, or kingly, or messianic, authority. Look at verses 3 and 4. He answered them. I will also ask you a question. Now tell me, was the baptism of John from heaven or from man? Jesus is not being cagey here. He's, he's not simply being clever in answering them, he is answering their question. But in answering this question that they've asked in this righteous way, we can see that he is showing actually great humility.



He could have just declared where his authority has come from and who gave it to him. He just could have declared that outright. But in submission to God's word, showing submission to God's prophetic timing, acknowledging his connection with John, he's acknowledging God's will in sending John the forerunner. Turns out that the trap that they tried to lay, Jesus deftly disarms them, takes the trap out of their hands, sets it down in full view of everyone, and springs it on them.

They're like children before him. His wisdom is so superior, his knowledge and intellect is, is, is divine. They are so outmatched and they don't know it. This question he has posed to them has just totally flipped the script, put them on the defensive. And does he know that his question's going to do that to them? Oh yeah, he knows what it's going to do. I can imagine a faint smile coming on his lips as he asks them.

But here's his answer, even though his answer comes in the form of a question. by asking what is your view of John the Baptist and of his ministry? What Jesus is saying here is my authority, and John's authority, our authority comes from the

same place. So the real question is, do you believe us or do you not? That's what he's saying. That's how he's answering their question. He won't just simply give them an indicative, he gives them an imperative, too. Not only here's where my authority comes from, me and John, same, comes from God. But what are you going to do about it? Are you going to bow the knee? Have you bowed the knee? What's the evidence of your life?

Puts the religious leaders in a bit of a bind and awkward spot, in a bit of a pickle. Because first of all, just a few years earlier, this same Sanhedrin sent a similar delegation to this one, and they were there to ask John, John 1:22. But what do you say about yourself? Who are you? And John answered them, quoting about himself, quoting from Isaiah 40, verse 3, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness 'make straight the way of the Lord.'"

In other words, he's saying I am the prophet, the prophesied forerunner of the Messiah. I'm the forerunner. That's who I am. That's John's claim. When John backed his claim with biblical prophetic preaching, he came with a baptism of

repentance. He came with prophetic teaching. It was very clear John was more popular throughout the land of Israel and further and beyond than even Jesus was at that time.

In spite of what the original delegation learned back three years earlier. Didn't make a dent in the pride of these religious leaders in Israel. Didn't make a dent, didn't stop in their tracks one bit, didn't cause them to stop and take notice. After four hundred years of silence, we got a prophetic voice showing up. We need to listen, guys. The chief priests, the Sadducees, the scribes, the Pharisees, the elders, the prominent men of the people, they all wholesale, collectively refused to submit to John's preaching.

They refused to humble themselves and repent. They refused to submit themselves to John's baptism. We read in John or no, Luke 7, verse 30. The Pharisees, the lawyers, they rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by John. They rejected it, refusing to submit and obey, rejecting his ministry. Their outward action revealed their internal thoughts

and their judgement. They refused to believe God had commissioned John, plain and simple. Refused to believe it.

Refuse to believe God had authorized John's ministry. So the question is, were they justified in rejecting John? Did they have a point? Did they have a case to make? Do the religious leaders have a biblical reason for their judgement against John? Can they open Old Testament chapter and verse and point to here's why?

Because if they do have a biblical case to make, now is the time. Now is the occasion. Right here in public, in front of all these people, with this man who claims to be the Messiah coming after the forerunner has announced him standing right here. If they're really concerned about biblical fidelity, if they're really concerned about truth, about righteousness, if they really are the shepherds of Israel, concerned about the spiritual care of the people, the sheep and Jesus has just given them their chance. Clarify your position. Baptism of John? Two options from heaven, from men?

Well, that's review. Here's the third point, number three: The shameful revelation of hypocritical authority. The shameful revelation of hypocritical authority. The mask comes off in verses 5 and 6, and we see them as they really are. They discussed it with one another. That is to say they, they engaged in reasoning together. That's the word that's used there. They engaged in reasoning things out, considering different options, going back and forth. A little bit of private, a huddle, a private debate. Jesus asked a question and it's almost like you can picture them saying "one sec," and they go over to the corner and talking in the corner, right?

How do we know that they said this? How do we know what their reasoning was? Obviously someone heard them, but I know of two former members of the Sanhedrin, two who were named in scripture who may have been there. One is Nicodemus, another is Joseph of Arimathea. Maybe they're the source of what was actually said in the huddle. They get back in the huddle, discuss it with one another saying verse 5, "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."

They have identified the two horns of the dilemma that Jesus has just caught them between. Clearly here there's no problem of their intellects. The faculties of their reason are functioning just fine, but they are putting their reason to work as we see, for a shameful purpose. What are they? Are they interested in truth? No. They're trying to protect their self-centeredness, their position, their means of an income, and they're covering over a very cowardly heart of hypocrisy.

Here's what we see when Jesus rips off the mask of their hypocrisy with just a simple question. First, you can jot these down as little sub points. But first, they don't care about the truth. They don't care about truth, which exposes this inquisition as unrighteous. They want to talk about the rightful use of authority, supposedly an inquiry into truth. It's all a sham. The discussion that ensues is not about what's true or false, not about what's right or wrong. It's about what they should say, what they should admit in public, out loud.

These men are calculating we see, they're also profane. For them, words are not for the purpose of glorifying God, used to testify to the truth. For them, their words are tools of manipulation. They're using words to manipulate people, measuring their words, figuring out what they should say, what they shouldn't say, protecting interests. They just want to get what they want.

Their mouths are not instruments of righteousness used in service to God. Their lips are used here for deception, for self-interest, for self-preservation, for self-promotion. Again, they do not care about the truth. Beloved, it takes time to see this in certain teachers that become popular in different parts of the country or around the world. It takes time to see this. But I've seen again and again, people that I have watched their ministries grow up, rise up, become prominent, become big names, big sellers, big conference speakers, and they come flaming down, ten, fifteen, twenty years hence, because at the heart, they were rotten.

And people can tell. You can listen to the content of their teaching and you can see in the content of their character. But you know what? People ignore that. Why? Because a lot of people think these guys are great. So it's again, voting by numbers, painting by numbers, "This guy's great."

By contrast, all that Jesus cares about is to tell people the truth. Jesus is a truth teller. He's a truth teacher. When he proclaims the truth, he didn't do it in secret only. He does it in secret, yes, but he also proclaims the truth in public. The truth doesn't run and hide from anybody. He's open to scrutiny. His teaching is open to examination. That's how every truth teacher acts. They put their teaching out there so the people can listen to it, look at their Bibles, see, "is this really what the text is saying? Be good, Bereans," we say.

Jesus puts all of his truth out there, all of his teaching out there, hiding nothing, saying the same thing in Galilee that he's saying in Judea that he's saying in Jerusalem, in the heart of the Temple. He's saying the same thing because he wants the truth to bring glory to the God who gave it.



So first, they don't care about the truth. Second, they don't care about authority either. They don't care about authority, and they've come forward claiming to be concerned about authority, about proper credentialing, and who should be authorized to teach in the Temple and, "Well, this whole clearing thing. This is an embarrassment, but we can get over that if you'll just fill out the proper forms. Submit to us."

Their concern about credentialing, about who should be there, who shouldn't. Proper use of authority. Pre, seems to presuppose an objective authority of God, seems to presuppose that they see accountability to God as important. What's actually revealed here is they don't care about God. These men fear man, not God. And so they're concerned about authority, that's a sham too.

But these men, and even though they have ascended into positions of spiritual leadership, their deepest concern is not about fearing God. Their deepest concern is not about, does not care about what he thinks, ultimately, they're not concerned

about giving an account to him and him alone. These are man fearers. They care what people think. And not be even because they really regard people, because they want to be able to get stuff out of them.

You say, but they're using people, they're robbing people. They're pitiless thieves, robbers. What evidence is there of that that they fear men? Well, actually, Luke has set us up to see it this way of recording Jesus' indictment of them in Luke 19:46. He called this a den of robbers, right? Dens are for hiding. They hide from people. They, they, they escape to the den to, as a refuge from justice.

These men turn the Temple into a den of robbers because like robbers they fear getting caught. They fear being exposed. They fear losing their position along with all this means of making money by cheating the people. Also notice both their concerns are about are about what the people think, not what about what God thinks, in verses 5 and 6. Verse 5, they're discussing it with each other, "If we say from heaven then he

will say, 'Well why did you not believe him?'" They didn't dare admit their unbelief in the hearing of the people.

They didn't want to risk a negative reaction from the public because the people were convinced. As verse 6 says, John was a prophet. And therein lies the problem. They're convinced, very strong verbal expression, by the way it emphasizes here a fixed position, deep, deep persuasion. These people are not budging from this point of view. People are standing, as it were, in hardened concrete in this position about John, believing John's a true prophet. There is no convincing them otherwise.

They're so convinced they obeyed his command to be baptized. All these people, the ones who are residents of Jerusalem and in this area, they went down to the Jordan to be baptized. Many other pilgrims who were living in Galilee, they went wherever Jesus was. They're going to be baptized in his name, came to where John was preaching up in the that area, came to be baptized.

By contrast, though political, religious establishment, spiritual shepherds of the nation of Israel. They rejected John's baptism, and that's a comprehensive rejection. They rejected John as a person, rejected John's entire ministry, rejected his call to repentance, rejected his role as Messiah's forerunner, all of it wholesale rejection. And they justified the rejection of John the same way they had dismissed the power of Jesus' miracles.

John, and Jesus too, they said neither of them are from God. They've been saying that for three years. They're not heaven sent. In fact, they are demonic. They're hell sent. They've been belched out of the bowels of hell. That's where they come from. They are, they're possessed by the devil. Jesus exposed that opinion. He said that quiet part of the rulers, the teachers, the, the leaders in Israel. He said that quiet part out loud when he's teaching the people and they're asking him about John the Baptist.

Well, tell us about John the what, what do you say about him? I mean, we're hearing one thing, all this whispering about

demon stuff. What do you say about him? Jesus said "among those born of women, none is greater than John the Baptist," Matthew 11:7 and, and Luke 7:33. Jesus gives the religious leaders' view of John. John the Baptist has come eating no bread, drinking no wine. You say he as a demon. He didn't live like anybody else. He's a crazy man from the desert. Look at how he dresses. Look at just look at him. He's nuts. He's insane.

Actually, his teaching makes too much sense to be insane because so really his rationality is there. His reason is there. That means he's from the devil. He's demonic. That was the stance of the religious establishment. They use that same tactic, right, when they discredited Jesus. They told everyone that Jesus performed his miracles by the power of who Beelzebul, right, by the devil's power.

So this, they were united in their rejection of John and then Jesus. And this represents collusion on their part. There's a conspiracy afoot. It's a strategy to, on their part of how they can justify denying John and then denying Jesus. Basically, they're saying since we can't deny the authority and the power,

let's shift the discussion in public and talk about the question of source.

These guys sound intelligent. Yeah, they sound like good Bible teachers and all that stuff. Yeah, I know they're healing. There's a lot of power in the miracles. Can't deny that. But let's not talk about any of that. Let's talk about where is this power coming from? What they say, what they do, it's by the authority of Satan. It's all through the power of his demons.

You know what that does to the people? Many of them maybe not educated enough to look it up for themselves, makes them fearful. Man, siding with John and Jesus means I'm, I'm siding with demons. That's what they want, intimidation. I find out that people have said about this church, and about my church back in California, and about the church that my friend Don Green pastors, and about other faithful churches. You know what they say about these churches that practice church membership, church discipline, expository preaching, they call us a cult. They say all that's cult like; they're cultists.

You know what they're doing when they're saying those things? They're not actually dealing with facts and texts. They're not actually dealing with evidence. They're using intimidation tactics to make you true sheep feel intimidated that you go to this church. They've done the same thing to churches, faithful ministries throughout the, the land, throughout history, they've done the same thing. Tried to misrepresent Paul as being against God, Jesus as being a, one who destroys Temples. Paul teaches people against the Temple, Stephen teaches people against the Temple. They try to miss, misrepresent them, and malign them, and align them with evil, malevolent forces.

Well, here in our text, that's what these spiritual leaders have chosen to believe. And now they knew, even though they believe that, even though they held that view, they couldn't say that out loud about John. Why? Why couldn't they say that about John out loud? Why couldn't they say that here when it's the opportune time to make their case? Why?

Because the people loved John. People loved John. They couldn't, couldn't deal with John's preaching on a textual level, on a biblical level. Couldn't deny the results, the effects of his ministry. Good fruits in the people, fruits of repentance. People loved John. Why? Because he stood up to Herod. People hated Herod. He stood up to Herod, called him to repentance, told him "You have your father's wife and this is not righteous." You know what Herod did? Threw him in prison and then lopped his head off. So John is a national hero.

People are so convinced John is from God that the leaders believed the worst would happen if they differed from that opinion and said it out loud. Look at verse 6, "All the people will stone us to death." It's an intensified form, intensified verb, *katalithazo*. *Lithos*, you know, referring to stones. So *lithazo*, *katalithazo*. *Kata* meaning down in, *lithazo* to throw rocks at, so "they will rain down stones upon us."

These guys are terrified of the people. Form of the conditional sentence. This, if we say then this will happen statement, that conditional sentence. The original portrays this



as an expression for what it really is, as an expression of fear. Something they see is not only possible, but it's a probable outcome, like it's going to happen when this confrontation is over.

In verse 8 we see that Jesus turns to the people and tells them a parable about the leadership that's over them. Tells him a parable at the conclusion of the parable. We read this in verse 19. Luke says, "the scribes and the chief priests sought to lay hands on him at that very hour." They wanted to grab him, silence him. They can't. They're so offended at this story that Jesus told that featured them. "For they perceived he told this parable against them [but what] they feared the people." *Phobas*, the word fear.

Now, whether or not the people certainly would stone them for this negative judgement about John, it's kind of beside the point. The real question is, so what? So what if the people react that way? I mean, human reaction is never what determines whether or not we are to testify to the truth. Whatever happens, happens. We tell the truth, speaking truth before God, leaving

the results to him. That is all that matters, get this, for one who fears God. But if you do not fear God and you fear men, fear anything else, all that's negotiable.

Having a grave fear of man problem. You know they could find salvation in what Jesus said. Don't fear those who kill the body, can't kill the soul. Don't fear all these people. I'll tell you who to fear. Fear him who can destroy both soul and body and hell. That's who you should fear.

Proverbs 29:25 says, "The fear of man lays a snare but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe." Because they fear man though, and not God, they're willing to compromise the truth. The mask is off. Their concern about authority is not really a concern about authority. They don't have a righteous concern about authority at all. They have a wicked and evil heart.

They are man centered, and because they're man centered, they are manipulators. By contrast, Jesus fears God. Jesus reverences God and we saw that clearly when he faced down thousands of men with great interest in staying put and he drove

them out of his father's house. He fears God. He wants the Temple treated as holy, not used for profane business and profiteering. Jesus is the consummate God fearer.

As a truth teller, as a God fearer, Jesus asks a simple and straightforward question. He's exposed the hypocrites for what they are. He's revealed their self-love, their deep-seated pride, and also their disdain for all other people. No matter what they may claim, they really don't care about the truth. They don't really even care whether Jesus' authority comes from God. That's not the issue.

All they care about is themselves, which leads to an utter disregard of people, which brings them under Ezekiel's indictment of Israel's false shepherds that we read earlier. You eat the fat. You clothe yourselves with their wool. You slaughter these sheep. They don't care about truth. They don't care about authority either, which means third, here's a third point. They don't care about others, which is another way of saying they don't love anyone but themselves.

They don't love anyone but themselves. They don't care about others. They don't love anyone but themselves. When the mask comes off, this is the most revealing, this is the most shameful, ugly contour of their hearts. Their self-love, their utter disdain for others. These are bad shepherds. This is bad religion.

Listen, if these religious leaders had really believed the people had been deceived by John, if they really believed that, if they really believed that they were deceived now by Jesus. If they really believed that Jesus was teaching and preaching and performing miracles by the devil's power as spiritual shepherds of Israel wouldn't love dictate their actions and determine their behavior? In this sense, wouldn't love for people mean telling them what they really believe, telling them what their concerns are, making those public?

Why not quote John the Baptist side, his teaching? Explain to everyone where John has contradicted the Bible. Why not do the same and examine the teaching of Jesus? Obviously it's because they have really no biblical case. They've chosen their

position, they've staked their claim, and they are not budging from it.

We're going to see through a little conspiratorial planning later in the text that they try their hand at that with Jesus. They actually tried to bring text to his attention, thinking themselves quite clever. They got scribal support, rabbinical support. They've been studying the text, they know the traditions, and they're about to, to put it all into a ball and throw fastballs and curveballs in Jesus' way. You know what he's going to do with every single one of them. He's going to bust the stitching out of those balls. We'll see that as time comes.

By contrast, once again, the subject of Jesus' teaching and preaching is the Kingdom of God. His, the content of his teaching always has biblical themes, prophetic themes, themes of restoration and hope. He's there to go directly to the heart of the matter and preach to the heart and preach to the spiritual concerns and issues. He's not preaching politics and social issues. He's not trying to keep the Titanic afloat. Rearrange the deck chairs as it goes down. He's not on a speaking tour to

promote his new book, *Twelve Steps to Better Whatever*. He's not, he's not doing anything, he's teaching the people the Word of God. He is preaching the gospel. These people need salvation.

So what's revealed as they reason among themselves, as they decide what they'll say to Jesus? How they answer his question, their disregard for truth, their disregard for the actual question about authority, and their utter disregard for people. Jesus exposes hypocrisy, pride, self-love. As a truth teller and a God fearer and a Bible teacher, Jesus is a man of integrity, a man of principle, a man of unassailable character.

It's manifestly clear that these men are not men of principle. They're pragmatists. They're unprincipled hypocrites. They have no regard for truth. They don't, they do not fear God. They do not love people. They're willing to say whatever works. Whatever mollifies the people keeps them at bay so they can keep serving themselves.

So here's what we've seen so far. The sinful interrogation point one, was answered point two by the humble imposition of

Jesus' authority, his rightful authority, his regal authority. His attempt to answer the question that they had asked revealed point three, the shepherds of Israel were exercising hypocritical authority. And this brings us to a fourth and final point, the total disqualification of sinful authority.

The total disqualification of sinful authority. As these men consider how to answer Jesus, even as they correctly identify, there's only two options and they choose neither of them, they disqualify themselves for spiritual leadership. These are unreliable guides. That's what we need to see in verse 7.

So they answered Jesus after deliberating that they did not know where it came from. In other words, we're agnostic on this subject. We just want to be humble. There's, there, there's good views on either side. There's, there's people who have different opinions, but we, your shepherds, are going to, we're, we're going to stand back from it. We just want to be humble and just say, "Don't know."

Is that humble? They don't know? Is that true, that they're ignorant? We've already seen in their reasoning, this is not a problem of a faulty intellect. Is this an, an issue of a lack of evidence? All the evidence is right there before them. All the evidence, they've examined the evidence before sending a delegation to examine John's ministry in John chapter 1, always dogging Jesus' steps, watching his miracles, hearing his teaching. They know what this is about. They are not ignorant. They're not lacking evidence. They don't have a faulty intellect. Problem is not inability to understand.

The problem is the will to understand. It's a heart matter. They have a sinful will driven by an unconverted, unbelieving heart. And listen beloved, that's what religious agnosticism is really. It's a tactic. It is a cunning way of providing cover for cowardice.

Cowardice, by the way, is not humble in any way. Cowardice is self-centered, prideful, not willing to admit any fault. It's not humble, it's prideful. Intellectually, these men have



retreated into a den of agnosticism. They've gone into their cave.

They're hiding from the divine intellect that has just exposed them, flayed them open, spread them open as hypocrites and frauds. They can't deal with this. So Jesus on his, for his part, he refuses to play games with hypocrites. Those who hide like cowards, who won't engage in straightforward communication, who play games all under the cover of agnosticism. And so, in verse 8, he says, "Neither will I tell you."

Notice it's not "neither can I tell you," but "neither will I tell you." In his answer, he's identifying their error. It's not a problem of ability, it is a problem of will. They won't tell him, and so he's not going to tell them. They know the authority by which he does these things, they just refuse to admit it.

So Jesus, for his part, refuses to say anything more. Emphatic denial there in the text. Neither am I myself saying anything to you about the authority by which I operate. Neither

am I myself saying, it's a present tense verb, so it's like ongoing habitually. I'm not saying anything like, like now and continuing. I'm not saying anything to you about the authority by which I do these things.

Suppose for a moment, though, just for the sake of argument, just for the sake of learning, suppose for a moment these men really don't know the answer. There really is a problem of ability. Rather than refuse to be pinned down to an answer, which is really what's going on here. But if they really are ignorant, what does this tell us? Tells us that by their own admission, they have no business being in charge, do they?

It's their job to know. They shouldn't be in positions of authority, running the Temple, acting as custodians over the Temple, qualifying or disqualifying teachers and teaching. If they are ignorant and incompetent, they're not qualified. They have said so. But if they're not ignorant, which is clearly the case, then these men are duplicitous, hypocritical, and again, they have no business in positions of spiritual authority.

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In either case, they have totally disqualified themselves, and they've done that publicly in front of everybody on their own home turf, by the way. Look, we all know what's going on here. These men are lying, and Jesus has no interest in engaging with liars.

These men are willing to play fast and loose with the truth, and they are unwilling to state their position openly about John and do that publicly, J.C. Rile said, "lies like this, it may be feared, are only too common among unconverted men. [He goes on to say this.] Thousands will say anything rather than acknowledge themselves to be in the wrong. Lying is just one of the sins to which the human heart is most naturally inclined, and one of the commonest sins in the world." End quote.

So the Lord's question has exposed them as inept and corrupt. Their plan to entrap him has backfired. Psalm 9:16, "The Lord has made himself known, has executed judgment, and the wicked are snared in the work of their own hands." It's exactly what's happened.

So Jesus is not going to waste time with them. He's not going to debate with those who engage dishonestly and sincerely with false pretense. He has higher priorities, he has better and more productive things to do, and he's going to get to them. One purpose of the Gospel writers in recording this inquisition, by the way. All three synoptic Gospel writers record this. Matthew, Mark and Luke record this, this, this same account.

But this account, the interrogation of Jesus, the controversy over his authority is questioning by Israel's leaders. It demonstrates the illegitimacy of Israel's leadership. It shows them to be false shepherds, thoroughly corrupt and therefore utterly unjust, totally unreliable. They are the bad root at the, at, at the bottom of that fig tree that Jesus cursed.

They're diseased, they're bad, they're dead, and they cannot produce any fruit. So if Israel's chief men, nation's leadership, Israel's shepherds, if they cannot be trusted to come to a right conclusion about John the Baptist, one that

everybody else in the land came to a right conclusion about, if they can't be trusted to come to a right conclusion about him, if their view of John is so diametrically opposite of that of the people, and they refuse to admit they're biased against John, how can they be trusted for any future judgement? More pointedly, and more immediate to the purpose of each Gospel writer, why should the readers these Gospels take any position that agrees with the false shepherds of Israel?

They all say he's not Messiah. This should show you that whatever they say, you kind of want to take the opposite position. They're corrupt hypocrites. They're blinded by pride. They're motivated by greed and envy. Why side with them against John, a true prophet? And why side with them against Jesus, who is the true Messiah, the Savior of the world, the savior of our souls? To deny him is to go down with these hypocrites, down to the bottom of the lake of fire.

There's another chief purpose among all these Gospel writers. They want the readers to see what true authority looks like. They want their readers to see in Jesus how authority is

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to be used, how the rightful use of authority does the will of God teaches God's word, shepherds God's flock, cares for God's people. God expresses his heart for his scattered sheep. Back in Ezekiel 34, verse 11, he says, "behold, [I] I myself will search for my sheep and seek them out. [He goes on elaborates. In verse 16 he says] I'll seek the lost."

I'm going to do everything these false shepherds failed to do. I'm going to seek the lost. I'll bring back the strayed, I'll bind up the injured, I'll strengthen the weak, the fat and the strong I'll destroy, but I will feed them in justice. And he goes on and he says, all this he's going to do all this righteous shepherding, all this kind, tender, strong, straightforward truth telling, shepherding.

God will do, Ezekiel 34:22 and following, he'll do this through the Messiah. "I'll rescue my flock. They shall no longer be a prey. I will judge between sheep and sheep, and I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David. He shall feed them. He shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the Lord will be their God, and my servant David shall be Prince among them. I

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am the Lord. I have spoken." By His grace, beloved you and I Christians, we are numbered in this flock. We're following the voice of one Shepherd and we're under his pastoral care.

Now as we draw this to a close, I'd like to take a moment and draw out maybe some implications of this section of Scripture so you can know how to apply this for yourself and so you can also help others apply this as well. I want to bring us full circle back to what we noted at the beginning of the sermon, something Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. He said in Matthew 7:15, "Beware of false prophets," false teachers, false shepherds. They come to you in sheep's clothing. They claim to be expositors. They claim to be Bible teachers. They claim to be pastors. They claim to be evangelicals. And on paper, it's what it looks like.

Jesus says they come in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. True shepherds pattern their lives after Jesus Christ. They follow those who follow him. They're like Paul, who calls people to imitate him as he follows Christ. And so true shepherds are truth tellers and God fearers and Bible

teachers, and they are willing to look you straight in the eye and tell it as it is.

They don't rejoice in offending you or anybody, but they are willing to risk offence because they're men of integrity. They hold fast to principle. They're unconcerned about pragmatic outcomes. They're men of unassailable character, and they're less concerned about the fragile feelings of arrogant sinners and more concerned about showing real love and speaking the unvarnished truth of God. Why?

Because the truth feeds sheep, and it drives away wolves. So many of you have rejoiced in finding Grace Church to be a sound gospel preaching church. You've been good Bereans. You've compared what we say from the pulpit and in the different teaching venues to the Word of God. I know that some of you have had questions and said, hey, what is this really what the Bible teaches? And can you help me to understand this? That's being good, Bereans.



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So many of you have rejoiced in finding this church. You've come to rest under the spiritual care of men who are like this. Truth tellers, God fearers, Bible teachers, not perfect men, but men who are on that growth, on that trajectory, to continue telling the truth, fearing God and teaching His Word.

Men who are willing to look you straight in the eye tell like it is. There may be a few among us who resent straightforward truth telling, but that is the, far, the exception and not the rule at all. It's a joy to pastor here. It's a joy to serve here. Most of you love the truth. You're aiming to follow the same pattern for yourselves to be confident, truth tellers, joyful God fearers, competent, skillful Bible teachers. Wherever the Lord sends you, it's what you want to be.

But beloved, and I want to say this to you with love, you have to be willing to risk offending family members and offending friends and coworkers and offending neighbors and acquaintances who have taken up residence, spiritually speaking, in dens of robbers, bad churches. You have to be willing to

offend the people that you love who are in your orbit, in your sphere of influence. You have to be willing to tell them the truth, that they have come under false shepherds, people who are willing to say whatever pleases people, to get them into the seats and keep them entertained and keep them giving.

Or maybe they've come under the, they've, they've entered into a den of agnostics, the cowardly and the cunning who want to avoid all risk by avoiding any certainty, by not teaching anything deeply. "Oh, there's no way to know. There's just no way to know. Doctrine has been debated for centuries, and there's good men on all sides. In fact, those who express certainty about doctrine, they're just arrogant and prideful. They want to be right all the time. They're spiritual Pharisees. So I've chosen a higher path. I've retreated to the refuge, being confident in my den of ignorance, certain in this cave of agnosticism. I stand firmly right here knowing nothing."

Beloved, your friends, family members, coworkers are going to churches just like that. Not saying every church out there is like that, but many are like that. The devil has proliferated

bad religion. It's been his tactic ever since the beginning. The majority out there is bad. So if you just look at the percentages it, chances are you've got to talk to people in your life who are under this bad religion.

I don't recommend beloved going in, swords drawn, slaying pharisaical hypocrites with your sword of the Lord, smiting theological Philistines with a great slaughter. That's not what you're to do. But you can't sit idly by and affirm them either. You need to lean in to your friends, neighbors, family members. You need to look at the churches they're going to. Listen to the sermons that they're listening to, hear the podcasts that they're downloading, and at least offer to help to extract them from a deadly spiritual situation.

I'm not being dramatic when I say this. Their immortal souls really are at stake here. You found a good church. We're so thankful for that. These elders, these church members, we rejoice to embrace all, all Christians, people searching, people seeking, people having questions. We want to bring all of you under the shepherding care of this church, want to partner with

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you in gospel fellowship. But all of you church members, you have a duty now.

It is a matter of righteousness. And I want to look each one of you in the eye. And I am right now, even though my glasses are very fuzzy and I can't see eyeballs. If I'm looking at you in the eye, and if you think I'm looking at you, I am. You have a charge to take what you're learning here. Live under the authority of Jesus Christ. His authority in your life must be meaningful.

It has to come into your life and disrupt your comfort and your ease. It's got to stir things up a bit in your life. If you come in and out of here every week and you just feel comfortable and nothing changes, check your spiritual pulse. Better yet, have someone around you, a mature Christian, check your spiritual pulse. This authority has to be to make a functional difference in your life.

So let us all, following after the Lord Jesus Christ, let us endeavor to be fearless truth tellers, zealous God fearers.

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Skillful, growing in our skill and competency and teaching the Bible, willing to look people straight in the eye as Jesus did and tell it like it is. We're gonna speak the truth in love to people. We're gonna leave the results to God, we're gonna tell them nonetheless. And if you're tempted at all to think it unloving to call people out of bad churches and bad religion, just go back to this text.

Just go back to this. Reflect on Jesus cleansing the Temple knowing that even if many of those money changers and sellers of goods and everything in the Temple, even though they may have not felt loved and affirmed by Jesus on that day, ahh they were being loved by Jesus. They just didn't have the eyes to see, the ears to hear, the heart to understand.

That's what we need to pray for, is that by the Spirit God would go before us and prepare the hearts of the people we talk to. We come to them in gentleness and love, but man we have got to shoot straight with people. Do not leave your loved ones to burn because they've been under bad shepherding false shepherds. I love you so much. And through you, I love all the people that

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you know. I want them to know the truth. I want God's Word, his, to be vindicated, his gospel to be vindicated, that it truly comes with power and changes the life. That's what we want to see for all the people that we know, right? Amen. We want to see them knowing the Lord be saved from their sins and sanctified by his Word. Let's pray for that now.

Our Father, we love you so much, but we pale so far in comparison when we compare our love for you to the love that Jesus Christ had for you. He is the consummate example, authority. He's truth teller, God fearer, Bible teacher, and we so much want to be just like him. We pray that by his direction, by his authority over us, that's used rightfully and righteously in our lives to shape us, to mold us, to sanctify us. We pray that by the indwelling Holy Spirit that you would make us more like him, that we would speak more like him, that we'd care for people in our lives and not leave them comfortable in bad religion.

That is, that is the, that is the utmost hatred to treat people and their churches with indifference when we know the truth. So

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we pray that you would help us to be good students, loving, truth tellers, with the hearts of shepherds, with the minds of theologians, thinking deeply about your Word. We pray that you would sanctify us by the truth, renew our minds, and transform our lives so that we would live consistently with the things that we're calling people to obey from your Word and pray that you would go before us and win many for the cause of Christ, for the cause of his gospel. It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.