

Studies in the Gospel of Matthew #60

The Authority of Jesus

Matt 21:23-32

Introduction:

1. Authority is a strong word, denoting power and privilege.
2. A person with authority exercises control over the lives and welfare of other people.
3. Society cannot operate without having some people in positions of authority; the alternative would be anarchy and chaos.
 - a. In the family parents have authority.
 - b. In school, teachers and administrators have authority.
 - c. In the community, the mayor, city council, police, and firefighters all have spheres of authority.
4. The conflict in this encounter between Jesus and the religious leaders was over the issue of authority, specifically Jesus' authority which they questioned and which they feared would threaten their own authority

I. The Circumstances for Protesting – vs 23

23 And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?

- This gives an introduction and background to the protesting by the enemies of Christ about Christ's authority.

A. The Place – “into the temple”

1. The attack came in the Temple.
2. The place that should have been foremost in honoring Christ was instead where He was cruelly attacked by His enemies.

B. The People – “Chief priests and elders”

1. It was the religious leaders who attacked Christ.
2. This fact has been seen before in Matthew.
3. In every age Christ is often vehemently attacked by religion.

C. The Provocation

- 2 things prompted this latest attack upon Christ by the religious leaders
 1. The Praise for Christ
 - a) *The triumphant entry was more than these religious leaders could stomach.*
 - b) *They wanted the praise of the people.*
 - c) *But Christ was stealing their praise.*
 - d) *Christ's coming into Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday resulted in the multitudes giving Him great praise.*
 2. The Purifying by Christ
 - a) *The cleaning out of the Temple by Christ really upset the religious leaders—so much so that they plotted to kill Him ([Mark 11:18](#)).*
 - b) *Since they could not kill Him yet because of His popularity, they decided to attack His authority.*
 - c) *Who did He think He was to come in and clean up the Temple?*

BYZ **Matthew 21:23** Καὶ ἐλθόντι αὐτῶ εἰς τὸ ἱερόν, προσῆλθον αὐτῶ διδάσκοντι οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι τοῦ λαοῦ, λέγοντες, Ἐν ποίᾳ ἐξουσίᾳ ταῦτα ποιεῖς; Καὶ τίς σοι ἔδωκεν τὴν ἐξουσίαν ταύτην;

II. The Character of the Questioning – vs 23

23 And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching ...

1. The protesters were very discourteous and rude.
2. They interrupted Christ in His teaching.
3. They did not care about what He was doing or that they were also being inconsiderate of Christ's listeners.
4. When we disrespect God and His way, we will also disrespect men.
5. These protesters disrespected God Incarnate and not surprisingly showed great disrespect for others.

III. The Contention in the Questioning – vs 23

23 And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?

1. The contention was not about the quality of Christ's teaching but about where He got His authority.
 - a) *This attack is a favorite of evil.*
 - b) *If they do not like you and cannot find fault with your performance, they question your legality to act in certain areas or (a more subtle attack) ask where you went to school.*
2. Since they cannot deny your work success, they will attempt to belittle you by attacking your credentials as though you are not qualified.
3. Sometimes pastors are attacked by dissidents in church this way.
4. The dissidents do not like the pastor assuming the authority of his pastorate to select speakers, dates of special meetings, order of services, etc. so they challenge his authority to do these things.
5. It is all just a subtle way of attacking a ministry.

IV. The Countering of the Questioning – vs 24-27

- Christ's response to the protesting inquiry was not what the protesters expected.
- It demonstrated that they could never attack Christ successfully. He always had the last word.
- Their attempts to belittle Christ resulted in their being dishonored instead.

A. The Requirement in the Countering – vs 24

24 And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things.

- Christ now puts the pressure on His attackers with a requirement or condition to His answering their question.
 1. It was a sanctified requirement
 - a) *It was only fair that they also answer His questions.*
 - b) *Thus they could not argue with this requirement.*
 2. It was a supportive requirement – vs 25

25 The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? ...
 - a) *This question was not an evasion of the subject but was in fact a question that answered their question.*
 - b) *If John's baptism was from heaven, then what John said of Christ has the authority of heaven, too.*
 - c) *Thus this will answer the question about Christ's authority.*

B. The Reasoning about the Countering – vs 25-26

- Christ put the critics on the spot and they did some reasoning together about how to answer Him.
- They actually did not want to answer the question by Christ.
 1. The Reasoning about the Faith Problem – vs 25

25 The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him?
 - a) *They did not want to be put on the spot publically about their unbelief about John's ministry*
 2. The Reasoning about the Fear Problem – vs 26

26 But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet.
 - a) *To say John was only of men would jeopardize their standing with the people.*

BYZ **Matthew 21:24** Αποκριθεις δε ο Ιησους ειπεν αυτοις, Ερωτησω υμας καγω λογον ενα, ον εαν ειπητε μοι, καγω υμιν ερω εν ποια εξουσια ταυτα ποιω.

BYZ **Matthew 21:25** Το βαπτισμα Ιωαννου ποθεν ην; Εξ ουρανου η εξ ανθρωπων; Οι δε διελογιζοντο παρ' εαυτοις, λεγοντες, Εαν ειπωμεν, Εξ ουρανου, ερει ημιν, Δια τι ουν ουκ επιστευσατε αυτω;

BYZ **Matthew 21:26** Εαν δε ειπωμεν, Εξ ανθρωπων, φοβουμεθα τον οχλον· παντες γαρ εχουσιν τον Ιωαννην ως προφητην.

C. The Response to the Countering – vs 27

- The question put the critics on the spot. So they said, "We cannot tell"
 1. A False Response

27 And they answered Jesus, and said, We cannot tell.

 - a) *This was not an honest answer.*
 - b) *They had enough facts to know if John's ministry was of heaven or of men.*
 - c) *But they would not admit it.*
 - d) *They were more afraid of the shame of confessing the truth (it would expose their unbelief) than of telling a lie.*
 2. A Foolish Response

27 And they answered Jesus, and said, We cannot tell. And he said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.

 - a) *In front of the multitude at the Temple, these religious leaders confessed ignorance of one of the most important personages to come on the scene in hundreds of years in Israel.*
 - b) *They boasted themselves as being the all-knowing people about matters of religion and yet could not answer a question about the most important ministry to come to Israel in centuries.*
 - c) *In trying to keep from shame, they gained more shame than they were trying to escape.*

D. The Result of the Countering – vs 27

27 And they answered Jesus, and said, We cannot tell. And he said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.

1. Because the critics could not (would not) answer the question about John, Christ was under no obligation to answer their question; and they could not complain.
2. They had tried to put Him on the spot and ended up being shamed as a result.
3. The refusal to answer the critics' questions emphasizes the truth that God does not reveal important spiritual truths to evil hearts.
4. Spiritual knowledge is kept from unbelievers and from the mockers.
5. You respect God or you will walk in ignorance about God.

BYZ **Matthew 21:27** Καὶ ἀποκριθέντες τῷ Ἰησοῦ εἶπον, Οὐκ οἶδαμεν. Ἔφη αὐτοῖς καὶ αὐτός, Οὐδὲ ἐγὼ λέγω ὑμῖν ἐν ποίᾳ ἐξουσίᾳ ταῦτα ποιῶ.

BYZ **Matthew 21:28** Τί δὲ ὑμῖν δοκεῖ; Ἄνθρωπος εἶχεν τέκνα δύο, καὶ προσελθὼν τῷ πρώτῳ εἶπεν, Τέκνον, ὕπαγε, σήμερον ἐργάζου ἐν τῷ ἀμπελῶνί μου.

BYZ **Matthew 21:30** Καὶ προσελθὼν τῷ δευτέρῳ εἶπεν ὡσαύτως. Ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν, Ἐγὼ, κύριε· καὶ οὐκ ἀπήλθεν.

V. THE PARABLE OF THE SINNING SONS – vs 28-32

- Christ followed up His response to His critics' inquiry about His authority with two parables, which revealed the character of the critics. Christ exposed them as evil men with these two parables.
- The first parable especially exposes the hypocrisy of these critics
- The parable is abt 2 sons who were both told to go work in the vineyard
- One said he would not work in the vineyard but later repented and went to work; the other son said he would work in the vineyard but did not.

A. The Command for the Sons – vs 28, 30

28 But what think ye? A *certain* man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard. **30** And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not.

1. The warrant for the command – vs 28 – “man had two sons”
 - a) *The warrant or authority for the command is in the fact that the man giving the command was the father of those whom he commanded.*
 - b) *Fathers are above sons in the matter of authority.*
2. The work in the command – “go work”
 - a) *The word translated "work" means "labor" (Thayer).*
 - b) *This is not easy work. Perspiration is involved.*
 - c) *Likewise, God's commands are not easy to do.*
 - d) *They involve industry and labor.*
 - e) *If you are looking for an easy road in life without difficult duties, you will not be employed in service for God.*

3. The when of the command – “go work today”
 - a) *The emphasis is on "today."*
 - b) *Thus there is urgency in the command.*
 - c) *Anyone connected with agriculture knows there is often urgency in farm work.*
 - d) *"Make hay while the sun shines" expresses the urgency principle well.*
 - e) *Likewise we need to be urgent about spiritual matters.*
 - f) *We must work "while it is day; the night cometh, when no man can work" ([John 9:4](#)) and "Now is the day of salvation" ([2 Corinthians 6:2](#)).*
4. The worth of the command – vs 28 – “go work”
 - a) *There is value in work.*
 - b) *Not only is there value in work from the standpoint of production and income, but work is therapeutic.*
 - c) *It is much better to have a person work than play.*
 - d) *With all the emphasis on games and sports today, work has lost out on emphasis.*
 - e) *That is tragic and has left a bad mark on the character of young people.*

B. The Conduct of the Sons – vs 29-30

29 He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went.
30 And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not.

- The conduct of the sons in regards to the father's command was not the same.
 1. The conduct of the first son
 - a) **First, His Refusal** – “I will not”
 - (1) The response of the first son was blatant rebellion.
 - (2) There were no excuses, courtesies, or apologies in his answer.
 - (3) It was contemptuous rebellion.
 - (4) It represents those who are out and out sinners.
 - (5) They unashamedly disobey God's commands. They show no respect for God or His Word.
 - b) **Second, His Repentance** – “afterward he repented”
 - (1) The contemptuous refusal by the first son was retracted later.
 - (2) He repented of his evil and then went to the vineyard to work.
 - (3) Going to the vineyard to work was evidence of true repentance.
 - (4) Many claim repentance but their conduct does not evidence it.
 2. The conduct of the second son
 - This son's conduct appeared to be good but in fact was worse than the first son's conduct.
 - a) **First, his dishonesty** - "I go, sir, and went not"
 - (1) The second son lied.
 - (2) He promised to go immediately but had no intentions of going.
 - (3) He showed great zeal but it was just words, not works.
 - b) **Second, his deference.** "Sir"
 - (1) This second son sounded so respectful.
 - (2) He used such nice words, but they were simply cosmetics.
 - (3) He was a slick talker, but he was not a walker.
 - c) **Third, his disobedience.** "Went not"
 - (1) Regardless of all his nice sounding words, he did not go and was thus disobedient.
 - (2) The religious leaders of Christ's time belonged in this category.
 - (3) They could talk it but they did not walk it.
 - (4) That is why Christ called them hypocrites for a hypocrite is one who says one thing but does another.
 - (5) In the final day of judgment, God will rip off the masks of hypocrisy and reveal the “went not” of many who said “Sir” and appeared zealous to obey God. “Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” ([Luke 6:46](#)).

BYZ **Matthew 21:29** Ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν, Οὐ θέλω ὑστερον δὲ μεταμεληθεὶς, ἀπήλθεν.
 I will not (ou thelō). So many old manuscripts, though the Vatican manuscript (B) has the order of the two sons reversed. Logically the “I, sir” (egō, kurie) suits better for the second son (Matthew 21:30) with a reference to the blunt refusal of the first. So also the manuscripts differ in Matthew 21:31 between the first (ho prōtos) and the last (ho husteros or eschatos). But the one who actually did the will of the father is the one who repented and went (metamelētheis apēlthen). This word really means “repent,” to be sorry afterwards, and must be sharply distinguished from the word metanoēō used 34 times in the N.T. as in Matthew 3:2 and metanoia used 24 times as in Matthew 3:8. The verb metamelomai occurs in the N.T. only five times (Matthew 21:29, 32; Matthew 27:3; 2 Cor. 7:8; Hebrews 7:21 from Psalm 109:4). Paul distinguishes sharply between mere sorrow and the act “repentance” which he calls metanoian (2 Cor. 7:9). In the case of Judas (Matthew 27:3) it was mere remorse. Here the boy got sorry for his stubborn refusal to obey his father and went and obeyed. Godly sorrow leads to repentance (metanoian), but mere sorrow is not repentance.

C. The Comparing of the Sons – vs 31-32

- After telling the parable, Christ compared the conduct of the two sons in order to expose the evil of these religious leaders who were His constant critics.
 1. The questioning in the comparing – vs 31

31 Whether of them twain did the will of *his* father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.

 - a) **First, the reason for the catechizing.**
 - (1) The reason was to get His listeners to listen.
 - (2) Catechizing requires the listener to listen and respond.
 - (3) It is a good teaching method and Christ was a great teacher.
 - b) **Second, the response in the catechizing.** "The first"
 - (1) This was the correct answer but it was also a condemning answer, for the answer condemned these religious leaders, for they were like the second son who was nothing but talk.
 - (2) They could speak it well, but they did not do it.
 2. The commendation in the comparing – vs 31

"Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you"

 - a) *The publicans and sinners were represented by the first son who unashamedly refused to go to the vineyard but later repented.*
 - b) *The publicans and sinners have repented, something the religious leaders have not done.*
 3. The compassion in the comparing – "before you"
 - a) *The compassion is in the fact that Christ did not say, "Instead of you."*
 - b) *Hence, He still left the door open for His critics to repent.*
 - c) *This was great compassion indeed.*
 - d) *It was great grace to give these rascals a chance to repent.*
 4. The condemnation in the comparing – vs 32

32 For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen *it*, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him.

 - a) *Here Christ makes the application plain.*
 - b) *These hypocritical religious critics of Christ rejected John's ministry and message.*
 - c) *But the publicans and sinners—the bad ones—believed John's message and repented.*
 - d) *This condemns the religious leaders, for they looked down on the publicans and sinners, but in truth they were worse in God's sight than those flagrant sinners because they would not repent.*
 - e) *The condemnation is increased by the fact that they did not repent in spite of the excellence of John's ministry and the example of the repenters.*

BYZ **Matthew 21:31** Τίς ἐκ τῶν δύο ἐποίησεν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πατρὸς; Λέγουσιν αὐτῷ, Ὁ πρῶτος. Λέγει αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, ὅτι οἱ τελῶναι καὶ αἱ πόρναι προάγουσιν ὑμᾶς εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ.

BYZ **Matthew 21:32** Ἦλθεν γὰρ πρὸς ὑμᾶς Ἰωάννης ἐν ὁδῷ δικαιοσύνης, καὶ οὐκ ἐπιστεύσατε αὐτῷ· οἱ δὲ τελῶναι καὶ αἱ πόρναι ἐπίστευσαν αὐτῷ· ὑμεῖς δὲ ἰδόντες οὐ μετεμελήθητε ὕστερον τοῦ πιστεῦσαι αὐτῷ.