

The Authority to Silence Fools

John 7:25-36

There was a great festival of the Jews underway, the feast of Booths or Tabernacles. All the Jews were obligated to travel to Jerusalem, but Jesus had refused to go with others of his followers, knowing that there were many Jews out to kill him. And then, after everyone else had left, he did go to the feast, secretly, as it were, as we saw in verse 10 last week.

And then half-way through the week-long festival, Jesus stood up in the temple and began to teach, astounding the Jewish leaders who were listening to him. They were amazed. How could he have learned so many things about God without a formal education?

All the while, those Jewish leaders wished to kill him!

Those circumstances would have been previously unimaginable to the Jewish authorities. Humanly speaking, it would be impossible, but Jesus was a master at seizing the moment, and by means of the protection offered by popular support, he remained safe. His time had not yet come to die. And though he came secretly, when the time was right, he stood to teach. And taught with authority. It was the authority to silence fools. And with that authority,

I. JESUS EXPOSES THE IMPOTENCE OF FOOLISH UNBELIEVERS.

The leaders of the Jews were impotent. They were powerless, unable to do anything to stop Jesus. Because they were foolish. They thought they knew so much, and actually they didn't know anything.

v.27

We know where he's from. His parents are Mary and Joseph. He's the carpenter's son, from Nazareth in Galilee! And if he were really the Messiah, no one would know where he was from.

But that isn't true, because the Scripture declared where the Messiah would be from, from the little town of Bethlehem. And they didn't really know where Jesus was from, because they didn't seem to know that he was from Bethlehem, nor did they seem to be aware of that prophecy at all.

And, of course, as we've seen the last couple weeks, he wasn't merely the son of Joseph. His mother, Mary, had conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, and gave birth to her first-born son before she ever had physical relations with a man. And these unbelieving Jews seemed to be steeped in ignorance of those great things.

Such is the nature of fools, the very definition of fools, who, in the words of Paul, "although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools."

Can you imagine how furious those foolish Jewish leaders must have been? Can't you just see them stewing in their minds, having wanted to literally kill Jesus but now not even able to make him keep quiet? You can just imagine the steam coming out of their ears, the nervous fidgeting of their hands. They were fuming. But impotent. The point is that,

A. Fools cannot silence the words of Christ.

Sometimes, WE get silenced. Sometimes, increasingly, in our own secular age, we as Christians are silenced. Christian high school students can't even pray at football games, employees in

the public realm can't mention the name of Jesus Christ in any way other than as profanity, and politicians can't speak about the absolute truth of God's law. Judges can't mention the ten commandments. Even preachers are coming under attack, those who believe the truthfulness of God's word and the continuing application of biblical morality. Under public pressure to conform to standards of our secularized religion, and under the pressure of their own listeners, they often remain silent.

And when we do speak, our society wishes to make sure that we only speak within the confines of our own buildings. That is, we are not allowed to enter into the public square. We are marginalized, ignored by the tolerant majority that is tolerant of everyone except those who believe in absolute truth. We can't take our seat at the table, so to speak, when issues of public morality are discussed.

But Jesus will not be silenced. And what we have in our text this morning is a personal example of what we read in, Is. 55:11 "So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it."

There is no question that when Jesus speaks, people listen, because he speaks with the eternal wisdom of God the father, he speaks with the unlimited power of the eternal deity. He is the word of God in the flesh.

And those who don't like it, well, they can't do anything about it.
v.25

The ones asking that question would likely be the less important Jews, those of lower status. But members of a great

majority. The common people, who are asking, "Isn't that teacher the one they are trying to kill?"

And of course, the answer is, "Yes." And the weakness of the Jewish leaders becomes obvious. They wanted to kill Jesus, but they couldn't even silence him.

So the ordinary people continued to question,
v.26

Now that second question might be translated more clearly, "The rulers do not really know that this is the Christ, do they?" The expected answer is, "No." They don't know who it is. They certainly don't believe that he is the Messiah. They are, therefore, fools.

Fools cannot silence the words of Christ. Not then. Not now. So even as we read the word, as we proclaim it truthfully and faithfully, that word will go forth and accomplish what God has been pleased to determine. And ultimately, that word of Jesus will be the foundation of the church, the church that shall always prevail. The church against which the gates of hell shall not prevail. The church that shall exist until Jesus returns in glory, for "Lo, he is with us even to the end of the age."

What happens when a government tries to silence the words of Christ? What happened in Russia, for example? Did the church die? Did it cease to exist? When the Communists outlawed Christianity among other religions. What about China, then the government forced the church underground. What about North Korea, where Christians are still being killed just for being Christians! Afghanistan. Pakistan. Does persecution, even unto death, put an end to the church of Jesus Christ? No it doesn't, for fools cannot silence the words of Christ. And similarly, as we saw

last week as well,

B. Fools cannot seize Christ against his will.

Nothing happened to Jesus, nothing, that went against his own divine purpose and the predetermined secret will of God the father. Nothing happened to Jesus that caught him off guard. Nothing caught him by surprise. And nothing happened that he wished to stop. Nothing.

v.30

He stood up and preached publicly at this great festival of the Jews, all the while knowing the Jewish leaders wanted to kill him, and no one laid a hand on him. And why not? From a human perspective, they were too afraid of the crowd, too afraid of inciting trouble with the masses of people. From a divine perspective, as we are told infallibly, "his hour had not yet come."

So they couldn't shut him up. And they couldn't seize him. Even though they tried!

v.32

They just couldn't stand it. The one they despised so greatly was getting all the attention. And they couldn't do anything about it!

But there was something else they couldn't do, something else unbelievers still can't do, in their foolishness.

C. Fools cannot understand what Jesus taught.

For the Apostle Paul declares in,

1 Cor. 2:7 "But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, 8 which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known,

they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 9 But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him." 10 But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. 11 For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. 13 These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. 14 But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. 15 But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. 16 For "who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ."

When Jesus taught at the feast of Booths, the Jews, many of them, were still natural men, men without the spirit of God. And they couldn't grasp what he was proclaiming.

Some of the common people did understand, but not fully, for even though they listened to Jesus, they still expected a Messiah.

v.31

But the Jewish leaders understood nothing.

v.35-36

They could put no spiritual meaning on Jesus' words, thinking that he was just talking about escaping somewhere, getting away from them. And they mocked him, in a way, wondering if he was going to set up his kingdom among the Greeks. Little did they

realize that their words of mockery were actually a glorious prophecy, for the kingdom of Jesus would go to the Greeks, to all the nations. No longer would the nation of Israel lay claim to being the kingdom of God. God's kingdom would extend to all the nations of the world, as it does today.

Surely it is still true now, as it was then, that those who reject God, those who live in foolish and stubborn autonomy, seeking to be the Lord of their own lives, will not be able to understand what Jesus taught.

Not unless God the father enables them. "The man without the Spirit does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

Foolish unbelievers are still impotent, ultimately, because God is still sovereign. And we are assured of this, by the promise of Scripture,

Rom. 1:18 "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them."

Let's take it a step further, in studying Jesus' teaching at this great Jewish festivals. Not only were the Jewish leaders unable to silence him, he would turn that around.

II. JESUS SILENCES FOOLISH UNBELIEVERS.

Jesus got the upper hand, totally and completely. First, by revealing who he is, right in the face of his fiercest opposition, right in the middle of the temple in the middle of this high and holy Jewish festival.

A. Jesus boldly identifies himself.

v.28

I believe Jesus is using irony there, essentially mocking them for thinking that they knew him. The sense would be thus, "So, you think that you know me, and you think that you know where I am from!" Actually, Jesus communicates, you don't know me at all. You don't know anything about me at all. Not anything about my divine origin.

v.28 "I have not come of Myself, but He who sent Me is true, whom you do not know."

This is review for us. Look at,
v.16

Jesus identifies himself as one sent from God! But not just a god, THE God. The one true and living God. The one God who is true, meaning that all the other gods are false.

Now, that was a bold statement, bordering on arrogance if Jesus were not God himself. Jesus stands up in the midst of those religious leaders, in the midst of their own temple, and declares that he is the representative of truth. And he said to those self-righteous Jewish leaders, "You do not know the God who sent me."

In the language of our day, that was very intolerant, wasn't it? That was a statement that would absolutely enrage the philosophical and metaphysical elite in our age. It would sent the intellectual and, I might add, political, leaders into a tizzy. It was a truth claim. A claim to possess absolute truth, the one thing our enlightened age has considered to be non-existent.

Such claims do silence fools. They silence foolish objections, or at least reveal them to be just that, foolishness.

There are lots and lots of people today to whom these words apply. There are lots and lots of religious people, even people identifying themselves by the name “Christian” who do not know the truth, who do not know Jesus. Who do not know God the Father.

But Jesus says, “I know him.”

B. Jesus clearly identifies his father who sent him.

v.28-29

Jesus will reach a climax in these sorts of statements in, John 10:30 “I and My Father are one.”

Ultimately, I will declare this truth to you, that the truth of Jesus Christ will silence all his enemies. I will declare this to you, that the kingdom of Jesus Christ shall be over all, that every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord.

For he is, and what I proclaim to you is true. Absolutely true. Just as true for you as it is for me. Just as true today as it was 300 years ago. And if there are any who do not believe that truth, then I must say to you that you are doomed to an eternal condemnation that awaits all those who reject this truth. Jesus is Lord. Jesus is the son of God. Jesus is God. And in him, and in him alone, there is life.

1 John 5:11 “This is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. 12 He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.”

Acts 4:12 “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

Therefore, in truth, I declare to you,

Act 16:31 “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.”

I am not afraid of any objections that anyone would bring to the gospel of Jesus Christ. I myself might not have the answers, for I surely do not have all the answers, but I am not intimidated by any question, any objection. Because this word is true! It doesn’t depend upon me or my wisdom or insight. It doesn’t depend upon the church. It is true. Perfectly true. Without error. For this word is God’s word, and God’s word is truth. Because God is truth.

And I will stand upon that foundation of truth as long as I live, and I shall stand secure. And that confidence in truth, the existence and reality of truth, is what silences foolish unbelievers. So when such men come to me with their objections, in one form or another, I will always say to them, “How do you know what you believe is true?” How do you know it’s truth?

And the answer? They don’t know.

But I do know what I believe is true, because Jesus Christ is the way the truth and the life. And Jesus says, “He who sent me is true...I know him, for I am from Him, and he sent me.”

I hope that you realize how practical that is, when someone asks you a question about your religious beliefs that you can’t answer. Don’t be defensive, for as my old high school soccer coach use to say, “the best defense is a good offense.”

Go on the offense. “How do YOU know that what you believe is true?” That’s what you need to ask others. “How do you KNOW that what you believe is true?”

How do you KNOW? What is your certainty? What is the ground of your confidence? Apart from Christ, they will have no such certainty, for Jesus silences foolish unbelievers.

And with that,

III. JESUS PROCLAIMS HIS OWN WORK.

In other words, Jesus declares who he is and what he came to do. He defines it himself. He himself declares that he will go back to the father.

v.33

A. Jesus declares his ascension.

This doctrine doesn’t get enough attention today, which is why there are such bad doctrinal positions as is represented by the title of a very popular book some years ago, “Satan is alive and well on planet earth.” The premise of that book is that Jesus’ current position is not a position of reign and rule, that his kingdom does not yet exist, that he does not presently rule as king, and that, in fact, the highest authority on earth is Satan.

But that just isn’t so!!! Satan is certainly alive on planet earth, and is certainly a roaring lion looking for whom he may devour, but he is not WELL. Not in the sense of having authority above that of God.

Actually this is what we read of Satan’s authority,
James 4:7 “Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”

And this is what we read about Jesus Christ and his authority.

In Ephesians 1:19 we read of,

Eph. 1:19 “...the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power 20 which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.”

Actually, in that passage, Paul is praying that the people in Ephesus might know “the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.” We certainly need to pray that today, for the church of Jesus Christ today. That we would know that power.

And therefore know, really know, and be absolutely convinced, and completely,

Rom. 8:38 “...persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

That’s the practical benefit of knowing, really knowing the doctrine of Jesus’ ascension, isn’t it? And we need that assurance. We need to know that Jesus is seated at God’s “right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named.”

We need to know that in this church. We need to know that when we pray for one another. We need to know that when we are afflicted by troubles, any sort of suffering or sorrows, or trials of any kind. This is what we need to know to encourage one another. We need to know, and be absolutely convinced, that Jesus has ascended to the right hand of his father in heaven, and that he reigns over every detail of their lives. Because that faith, and that faith alone, will be sufficient to sustain them. And that faith, and that faith alone, will be able to sustain us in whatever circumstances come to us.

It's the doctrine of providence, that God governs all his creatures and all their actions. In the words of our Confession, "God the great Creator of all things doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions and things, from the greatest even to the least, by his most wise and holy providence, according to his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and unchangeable counsel of his own will, to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy."

All of that comes as a consequence of understanding Jesus' own words,
v.33

And then,

B. Jesus defines an eternal separation among men.
v.34

Later, he would say,
John 8:21 "I am going away, and you will seek Me, and will die in your sin. Where I go you cannot come."

One of the great doctrines of the Christian faith is simply this, that Jesus will separate men. He himself calls them the sheep

and the goats.

Mat. 25:31 "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. 32 All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. 33 And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. 34 Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world...' 41 "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels:

And I proclaim these things to you who know Jesus, as a grand encouragement. An encouragement for the life which is to come. And an encouragement for life in the present age. In whatever the circumstances of life you find yourself today, these words are true. Jesus did stay on earth just a little while longer after speaking the words of John 7. And then he went back to his father in heaven who had sent him. And there he now sits, reigning as king, preserving and governing all his creatures and all their actions, until the last enemy that will be destroyed is totally and fully. So that you can have the confidence that nothing "shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."