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THE GOSPEL OF JESUS

OUT OF CONTROL MATTHEW 21:23-45

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Given the events of this past year and the content of this study, I've been thinking about the subject of authority a great deal this week
1. Authority is defined as the power or right to give orders, make decisions, and enforce obedience
 - a) Another word we might use is control
 - (1) Similar definition – the power to influence or direct people's behavior or the course of events
 2. We are comfortable with these things in small doses
 - a) We are willing to give up a little bit of control in certain situations
 - (1) Growing up our parents told us when to be in at night and what chores to do
 - (2) We go to work and to school – told what time to be there and what our responsibilities are
 - (3) We obey speed limits and stop signs and stand in line at the grocery store
 - b) But by in large – we are part of a culture that celebrates independence and individuality
 - (1) Unless we've served in the armed forces or done some prison time, for most of our lives we have been the ones in control
 - (2) We are extremely uncomfortable with the idea of anyone having too much power and control over us
 - (3) Understandable considering the suffering throughout history under dictators that controlled every aspect of their citizens lives
- B. The common Jewish man or woman in Jesus' day certainly didn't have the same level of freedom that we have today
1. There was a hierarchy of power – there was government control and cultural control
 2. There was the power that the Roman Empire wielded over you and then there was the power that the Jewish leaders wielded over you
 - a) A key component with authority and control is the ability to enforce obedience – the people feared the Jewish leaders because they could cut them out of society
 - b) At the Feast of the Tabernacles - ***John 7:12 Among the crowds there was widespread whispering about him. Some said, "He is a good man." Others replied, "No, he deceives the people." 13 But no one would say anything publicly about him for fear of the leaders.***

- c) Then in John 9, After Jesus healed a man who was blind from birth, his parents weren't even willing to tell the Jewish leaders what happened "because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who already had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue."

(1) In a society like this, the only people that have some level of freedom are the ones in control –once you have that control over the people will not easily give that up

C. Keep that in mind as we look at John 2:18 – very beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry

1. ***John 2:13 Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14 And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers doing business. 15 When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables. 16 And He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!" 17 Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up." 18 So the Jews answered and said to Him, "What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?" 19 Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."***

2. In other words, "who gave you the right to do this?" Prove you have the authority.

a) Jesus spends the next three years of His ministry doing exactly that. And His ministry will culminate with His death and His resurrection,

3. In our last few studies – Jesus has returned to Jerusalem for the Passover and again, He goes into the temple and again, He cleans house declaring "you have turned what was supposed to be a house of prayer for all nations into a den of thieves."

II. A QUESTION OF AUTHORITY

A. After Jesus cleans house, He returns to the temple the next day and the chief priests and elders are waiting for Him

Matt 21:23 Now when He came into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people confronted Him as He was teaching, and said, "By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?" 24 But Jesus answered and said to them, "I also will ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things: 25 The baptism of John—where was it from? From heaven or from men?" And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' 26 But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the multitude, for all count John as a prophet." 27 So they answered Jesus and said, "We do not know." And He said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

1. "Who gave you this authority?" There it is again. The life changing question everyone will have to answer that everyone has to come to terms with
2. It is the primary question of salvation and the primary question of sanctification
 - a) What level of authority does Jesus have in our lives? How far does His authority reach?

- b) To what extent does Jesus have permission to rule over our lives. To direct and decide and influence and control.
- B. The Jewish leaders asked this question three years ago and they are still searching for the answer. Has Jesus failed to give it to them?
 - 1. What authority do you really have? Who gave it to you? Fair question.
 - 2. ***Matt 7:28 And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, 29 for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.***
 - 3. Jesus makes the claim in ***John 5:26 For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, 27 and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man.***
 - 4. ***John 10:17 "Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. 18 No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father."***
 - 5. ***John 17:1 Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, 2 as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him.***
 - a) Jesus didn't hide where His authority came from.
 - b) ***Matthew 28:18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.***
 - c) The authority that He taught with and the authority by which He forgave sins and welcomed people into the family of God and also judged unbelief was established by His ability to heal the sick and His ability to raise the dead and His ability to cast out demons and His ability to control the wind and the rain
 - (1) If someone knocks on your door and yells "police, open up!" What do you want to see? Evidence!
 - (2) And that is exactly what Jesus provided. For three years, teaching with authority and displaying His authority. What proceeded Jesus into Jerusalem – news of His power over death.
- C. The proof was there. The evidence was clear.
 - 1. For the Jewish leaders, it wasn't an issue of truth. It was an issue of control. Power over the people.
 - 2. They had the power; they had the control and they were not willing to give it up.
 - 3. That is why they hated Jesus and wanted to destroy Him. They had convinced the people that they had God given authority over them and then someone shows up who actually does.
 - a) Jesus never asked them to approve His teachings or sanction His healings. He didn't even ask for their advice or approval. Jesus went about His mission and ignored them and that infuriated them.

III. THE TABLES HAVE TURNED

- A. They knew the answer to the question they asked, and that is exactly why Jesus wouldn't play their game

1. Instead, He exposes their hearts with a question of His own. "I will answer your question if you will tell me if John was sent by God or was he operating under his own authority?"
 - a) The "baptism of John" was the entire ministry of John. At one point, all of Israel was seeking out John. In their eyes, he was a prophet sent by God.
 - b) In fact, Herod was afraid to kill John, even after John called out his sin to his face, because the people believed John was a prophet
 - c) The Jewish leaders think to themselves "If we say he was a prophet sent by God then that means his message was from God. Jesus is the Messiah! But if we say he was acting on his own, then we will lose our credibility with the people.
 - (1) Isn't that the mind of most politicians? No personal convictions. No desire for truth regardless of cost. Instead "What do the people want to hear so that I can stay in power?"
 2. When truth takes a back seat, when we have to carefully navigate around that is a sure-fire way to know that we are on the wrong side of God.
 - a) When we love our position, or our platform more than we love the truth – we are on the wrong side of God
 - b) How could God's men with God's authority prioritize their position over the truth – because they were neither
 3. These men had spent 3 years ignoring the reality of who Jesus was. There was nothing that Jesus could do that would cause them to bend a knee. They always demanded another sign.
 - a) Jesus alludes to this in His parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. The rich man pleads from Hades, please Abraham, send Lazarus to warn my family. - Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent. But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.' "
 - b) Control, power, authority – those were their gods. Those were the alters at which they bowed, and truth was just a threat to their idols.
- B. How do they answer Jesus' question?
1. We don't know. Liars! They do know, they are just not willing to accept the truth.
 2. The truth changes everything. It flips the balance of power.
 3. But because they are unwilling to accept the truth, Jesus is unwilling to answer their question
 - a) And He is silent before them.
 - b) There comes a time in Jesus' trial before the chief priests and Pontius Pilate where He remains silent. If they had any idea the eternal ramifications of this, they would have fallen to their knees and begged for forgiveness
 - (1) Genesis 6:3, "God said, "My Spirit will not always strive with man." In Hosea 4:17, God said, "Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone." In Isaiah 63:10, God says, "This people has so long rebelled against Me and vexed My holy Spirit, that I have now determined to fight against them."
 - c) We are often discouraged by the Spirit's conviction. Don't be! Whom the Lord loves, He corrects. Be far more concerned when you don't fear His conviction any longer.

IV. TWO PARABLES OF JUDGEMENT

- A. Jesus shared two parables – but He is no longer reasoning or contending with the Jewish leaders. These are parables of judgement

28 “But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, ‘Son, go, work today in my vineyard.’ 29 He answered and said, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he regretted it and went. 30 Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, ‘I go, sir,’ but he did not go. 31 Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said to Him, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you. 32 For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him; but tax collectors and harlots believed him; and when you saw it, you did not afterward relent and believe him.

1. Father signifies authority – one son says he will be there and never shows up, the other says he won't, but in the end he went.
 2. Jesus explains the parable – You have said “When the Messiah comes, we'll be ready! We'll follow Him! We'll go with Him! We have a seat at the table. We'll be at the feast.”
 - a) Of course, we will be there. We are God's men doing God's Work!
 3. Then you have a group of outcasts, the unclean. The tax collectors and prostitutes which represented the worst of the worst. They knew they were cut off from God. It was clear that they didn't have a seat at the table.
 - a) If you asked them if they had a place in the Kingdom of God, they would have said no way - but when they received the invitation, when they heard there was forgiveness and acceptance through this man called Jesus, they came running!
- B. That is the difference between religion and relationship
1. We can pretend to obey God but never actually live under His authority. We can fool a lot of people in the process. Our lives can look moral and upstanding, but if we have never relinquished control, when we stand face to face with God He will declare I never knew you.
 2. Then there will be others who are the outcasts of our society. The drug addicts, the prostitutes, who live lives of rebellion but one day, hear the message of the Gospel, and they willingly give over their lives to Jesus. They relinquish control and become children of God.
 - a) We are so afraid of losing control, giving up authority, until we realize that when we are in control, our lives are out of control.
 - b) That's why sinners are one step closer to salvation than the self-righteous.
 - c) We are happy to relinquish control to others that know what their doing. We don't take the scalpel from the doctor's hand or the flight stick from the pilot. We trust that they are doing a better job with us than we could.
 - (1) Yet we fight with an all-powerful, deeply loving God to retain control over our own lives – it just doesn't make sense
 3. It gets even worse for these Jewish leaders

33 “Hear another parable: There was a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country. 34 Now when vintage-time drew near, he sent his servants to the vinedressers, that they might receive its fruit. 35 And the vinedressers took his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another. 36 Again he sent other servants, more than the first, and

they did likewise to them. 37 Then last of all he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ 38 But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.’ 39 So they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him. 40 “Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?” 41 They said to Him, “He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons.” 42 Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord’s doing, And it is marvelous in our eyes’? 43 “Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. 44 And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.” 45 Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them. 46 But when they sought to lay hands on Him, they feared the multitudes, because they took Him for a prophet.

C. Again, Jesus turns to the familiar to explain the Spiritual

1. Israel was covered with vineyards at this time so this would be something they would immediately relate to
2. A man owns land and he decides to plant a vineyard on it. He plants a hedge around it, builds a winepress and a constructs a tower (used for security and storage) – idea here is this vineyard has everything anyone needs to run a successful operation. The landowner did things right.
3. He does what many landowners did during this time – leased out the vineyard to vinedressers. These men would run the vineyard and pay the landowner a commission off their sales.
 - a) This was a great opportunity for them. They had everything they needed to be successful but when the landowner sent a servant to collect his share of the profits, they beat him
 - b) So the land owner sent another servant and the killed him immediately
 - c) Then the land owner sent a third, and they tortured him to death
 - d) Finally, the landowner sent his own son, thinking surely they will listen to him – and when the son arrived, they took him outside the vineyard and killed him.

D. The meaning of the parable is obvious to us

1. The landowner sending messenger after messenger – far more then they deserved – and finally sending his own son
2. But the Jewish leaders didn’t get. When Jesus asked what should happen to these vinedressers they said “Kill these miserable men and give the vineyard to vinedressers who will give the landowner his due”
 - a) They felt the anger of injustice rising up in them. Just as David did for the lamb that was killed. But what they didn’t realize was they were the vinedressers. They were the villains in this story.
3. With that, they are condemned by their own words.
 - a) And it all comes back to an issue of authority. This is God’s vineyard and He has given us everything we need in Christ. He wants us to flourish and even though we have rebelled against Him, He still sends messenger after messenger into our lives.
 - b) Will we give Him the authority in our lives He rightly deserves? Will we fall on Him for forgiveness, or will His justice fall on us?

It is a basic doctrine of the New Testament that after His resurrection the Man Jesus was declared by God to be both Lord and Christ, and that He was invested by the Father with absolute Lordship over the church which is His Body. All authority is His in heaven and in earth. In His own proper time He will exert it to the full, but during this period in history He allows this authority to be challenged or ignored. And just now it is being challenged by the world and ignored by the church.

The present position of Christ in the gospel churches may be likened to that of a king in a limited, constitutional monarchy. The king (sometimes depersonalized by the term "the Crown") is in such a country no more than a traditional rallying point, a pleasant symbol of unity and loyalty much like a flag or a national anthem. He is lauded, feted and supported, but his real authority is small. Nominally he is head over all, but in every crisis someone else makes the decisions. On formal occasions he appears in his royal attire to deliver the tame, colorless speech put into his mouth by the real rulers of the country. The whole thing may be no more than good-natured make-believe, but it is rooted in antiquity, it is a lot of fun and no one wants to give it up.

Among the gospel churches Christ is now in fact little more than a beloved symbol. "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name" is the church's national anthem and the cross is her official flag, but in the week-by-week services of the church and the day-by-day conduct of her members someone else, not Christ, makes the decisions.

A W Tozer