

The Authority of Jesus

by Alistair Begg

Jesus' last day of public ministry marks the end of his routine opportunities for ministry in Israel and sets the stage for his final days leading up to the cross, as he confronts the chief priests and teachers of the law with the demands of the gospel.

Duration: 45:53

Scripture: Isaiah 53:3, Zechariah 9:9, Matthew 3:11, Matthew 28:19, Luke 20:1, John 1:29

Topics: "Jesus Christ"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of preaching the Bible and staying true to its teachings. He highlights the contrast between Jesus' powerful and engaging preaching style and the dullness of the average preacher of his time. The speaker encourages listeners to open their Bibles and ensure that what they preach is rooted in scripture. He also emphasizes the need for every sermon to be evangelistic, leading people to understand the crossroads of their faith.

Transcript

We're going to read this morning from the Gospel of Luke chapter 20. I invite you to take your Bibles and turn to that as we read together. Luke 20, and reading from verse 1. One day as he was teaching the people in the temple courts and preaching the gospel, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, together with the elders, came up to him.

"Tell us by what authority you're doing these things,' they said. "'Who gave you this authority?' He replied, "'I will also ask you a question. Tell me, John's baptism--was it from heaven or from men?' They discussed it among themselves and said, "'If we say from heaven,' he will ask, why didn't you believe him? But if we say from men, all the people will stone us, because they are persuaded that John was a prophet.' So they answered, "'We don't know where it was from.' Jesus said, "'Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

Thanks be to God for his word.'" In going through these studies, we have been aware of the fact that Jesus and his followers have been moving inexorably and steadfastly towards Jerusalem. Luke made an annotation to that effect back in chapter 9. And we have been following along with Jesus as he approaches his destiny, as he makes his way to Jerusalem, where, by his own reporting to his disciples, he's going to suffer the beating and the spitting and the flogging and eventually a cruel death, and be laid in a tomb, and eventually rise on the third day. That journey to Jerusalem we now find completed.

And here, in chapter 20, we discover that a new day has dawned, and once again he is back in the temple courts. Chapter 19 ended with Luke letting us know that the religious authorities were still concerned to try and kill him, and all the more so as a result of the fact that the people were absolutely transfixed by the things that he was saying and doing. And the phrase that he uses--Luke uses--there at the end of verse 48 is that the people were hanging on his words.

So while the people were hanging on his words, the religious authorities were simply looking for a way to hang Jesus. And their motivation is clearly stated. They are looking for an opportunity to kill him.

Now, it's important that you recognize that, in light of this little incident which Luke now records for us here at the beginning of chapter 20. He introduces us to the scene by the general statement, one day as he was teaching the people. One day.

In other words, he's not specific in identifying the day, but when you look at the gospel records in Matthew and in Mark, as well as in John, it becomes clear that the day that is being described here that unfolds throughout chapter 20 is the third day in the Passion Week. What makes it peculiarly significant is simply this--that it is, in a very realistic sense, the last working day of Jesus. And some of you will have already retired, and you've had your last working day.

I don't know what you did on your last working day. Some of you may be anticipating your last working day, and you're thinking to yourself, I wonder what I will do on my last full day of work. The chances are that the answer is very little at all.

You spend most of your time eating large chunks of cake and moving from office to office, hoping that people have at least something marginally kind to say about you. Now, we don't want to misunderstand this statement, because Jesus is moving to, eventually, the great work for which he came--namely, the work of atonement. But in terms of the routine opportunities of the days that have led up to this, this is his last day of public mission to Israel.

This is his last day in the temple precincts. This is his last day of teaching and warning the Pharisees. Therefore, it should be no surprise to us that on this last day, we find Jesus among the people in the temple courts--the colonnades providing shelter from the elements, whether sun or rain or wind, the place where the teachers of the law would move freely, having their pupils around them, sometimes stopping and speaking to them in that transfixed situation, other times simply moving up and down.

Jesus is there fulfilling the role of teacher. And it should be no surprise to us either as to the nature of what he is saying. What is he doing? Well, he's proclaiming.

Luke says that he's teaching the people, and he's preaching the gospel. He's telling them all about this message of good news. In other words, nothing has changed from the very beginning.

Back in chapter 4, Jesus says to his disciples, I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God. That is why I was sent. And some of you may never really have investigated the coming of Jesus.

And as we get to this Advent season, and perhaps someone has dragged you along, and you're here reluctantly, you said that you would come because it was the Thanksgiving Sunday, and you're saying to yourself, well, I've never really considered why Jesus came. Well, here's his testimony. I came, he says, in order that I might proclaim this message of good news.

When Levi had come to follow Jesus and put on that big party at his house in chapter 5, when the place was absolutely full of sinners, the Pharisees had been particularly concerned and complained to the disciples of Jesus, Why would your master be having a party or going to a party at the house when it is full of all these different kinds of tax collectors and sinners? And Jesus, hearing their question, said, I did not come to call the righteous, but I came to call sinners to repentance. In other words, the good news is only good news to those who are aware of the bad news of their own condition. That's why the good news is relatively irrelevant to a number who come routinely to Parkside on a Sunday morning.

Because your whole life is about good news. Anytime anybody asks how you are, you always say, Good. How's everything in the office? Good.

How's the family? Good. Well, to the extent that that is an honest answer, I rejoice with you. But the fact of the matter is, it isn't all good.

And in your heart of hearts, you know that there is that which is not good. But as long as you hang to everything being good, then what need for you of good news? Who needs rescued unless they know their life is in jeopardy? Jesus traveled about, Luke tells us in chapter 8 and verse 1, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. And when he did so, the tax collectors and the sinners were all gathering to hear him speak, and the Pharisees and the teachers of the law were all muttering about the things that he was saying.

Religious orthodoxy opposed to Christ, the unlikely people gobbling up his words. Now, when we think about Jesus performing in this way here in the opening verses of chapter 20--teaching in the temple courts, preaching the gospel--I can only assume that what he was saying to them was akin to what we find summarized later, actually, in Luke 24, when Jesus, in meeting the two individuals on the Emmaus Road, says to them, "How slow of heart you are to believe all the things that the prophets have written about me!" In other words, he says to them, "You haven't really been paying attention to your Bibles.' And so, beginning with Moses and the prophets, he explained all the things in the Scriptures that were said about him." So here we have him in the temple courts. What do you think he was doing? I assume he was doing the same thing.

He was taking the people back to their Bibles, and he was saying, you know, when Moses said this, this is what it meant. When the prophets said this, he was pointing to that, and moving their minds along the line until it suddenly dawns on them that here is the King who was promised. Here is the suffering servant about whom Isaiah wrote.

Here is the one who is to come, as per the prophecy of Zechariah, riding on the cold of a donkey. And as he does so, he sets a pattern for all who follow. What are you supposed to say to people when you teach the Bible? What do you come here for? You want me to give you tips on how to be a better husband? I can do that.

But so can many, including the Mormons. Do you want me to give you pointers that I've gained from some of my colleagues around here about how to balance your budget in a way that is relatively biblical? We can do that. Scotsmen know how to do that.

These things are not irrelevant, but they're not the main thing. What does Jesus do on his last day? Preaches the gospel. A young man writes to his bishop.

He says, Dear Bishop, I am going to preach my first sermon next Sunday. What should I preach about? The bishop wrote back, Preach about Jesus and preach about twenty minutes. No difficulty in understanding that, is there? We've certainly tried to do the first part.

We're not very good at the second. I must confess. Nevertheless, the Bible is a book about Jesus.

Therefore, how is it possible to preach the Bible without preaching about Jesus, and how is it possible to talk about Jesus without confronting men and women with the crossroads that Jesus brings to us by dint of his whole life? So Packer, in his book *The Quest for Godliness*, says, If one preaches the Bible biblically, one can--incidentally, if one preaches the Bible biblically--because there's a way to preach the Bible unbiblically. Did you know that? People say to me, Well, he was preaching the Bible. But was he preaching the Bible biblically? What does that mean? Well, you can use the Bible as a springboard for all kinds of ideas, can't you? Look around in here and find something that fits your fancy, and then launch a rocket off it.

People go out and say, That was amazing, wasn't it? Remarkable what he got out of that! Well, of course it was, because he put it in before he got it out. That's why I say to you, Open your Bible. See if it's in.

Because if it isn't in, it shouldn't be coming out. And if one preaches the Bible biblically, one can't help preaching the gospel all the time, and every sermon will be at least, by implication, evangelistic. In other words, that the people there who are listening to the Bible being taught are saying to themselves, I understand there's a crossroads here.

Of course there is. And Jesus, one day as he was teaching--the last day of his full-blown opportunity for ministry--he is doing what he has called us to do, go into all the world and preach the gospel, make disciples. That's what we're doing.

Now, in the midst of this proclamation, he is met with a delegation. You will see them there, the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders. The way in which Luke describes this little trio suggests that this is an official delegation.

Three component parts of the Sanhedrin, namely the ruling council of the Jews, the chief priests--that would comprise a small group, incorporating the present ruling high priest, former high priests, and a number of social dignitaries, the individuals who were responsible for the custody and the operation of the temple religious services. They were joined by teachers of the law--in your Bible it may say scribes--the scribblers, those who were scribbling down all the details and the minutiae, trying to figure out exactly what everything meant. And they, in turn, were accompanied by the elders, and there were elders in every town or city, representative of groups of families, and these people brought the issues before the members of the populace.

And this little group comes in order that they might address Jesus. The way in which verse 1 ends suggests a kind of encounter, doesn't it? And the chief priests and the teachers of the law, together with the elders, came up to him. Whether Jesus was standing or sitting or whether he was moving, you have the impression that this little party comes and interrupts him.

And so Jesus has to say to his group, Hang on just a minute. Yes, what is it that you have in mind? The proclamation is met by a delegation that is apparently there to conduct an investigation. Verse 2, tell us by what authority you are doing these things.

Who gave you this authority? Now, you'll notice that the emphasis is on these things. What would these things be? Well, you see, if you don't read your Bible, you wouldn't have a clue what these things are. And here's a perfect illustration.

Somebody is at the Bible study, and someone says, Well, I like to think that these things are... And then he pulls something completely out of the air. And someone else says, No, I thought that these things was more... And before you know what you've got, you're dealing with these things, which have got nothing to do with the things at all. Now, there's no magic to this.

There's no mystery in this. What were the things that Jesus had most routinely been doing? Well, first of all, he had come riding into Jerusalem, right down the main street, on a donkey. And these religious authorities understood the Old Testament.

They knew what Zechariah 9-9 said. They knew that it said, Your king will come to you riding on a donkey. And they're saying to him, Who gave you the authority to come riding down the main street on a donkey? What do you think you are, the fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy? And furthermore, what about this thing you just did yesterday, coming into the temple precincts and clearing the whole place out? All of our opportunities for enterprise blitzed in a moment.

And also, what about this teaching that you're doing? Every time we come upon you, Jesus, it's the same old stuff. The kingdom, the kingdom, the kingdom. Become members of the kingdom.

Get off your religious throne. Bow down before me. Become members of the kingdom.

Who gave you this authority? Now, it's interesting that they would ask that question, isn't it? Because the most striking thing about the work of Jesus, in comparison to the average preacher of the day, was that the average preacher in the synagogue was no good, in the sense that all he ever did was mumble and bumble through the old stuff in such a way that the people just fell asleep. But when this Galilean carpenter came on the stage, when he gathered the crowds around him, the people are nudging one another, saying, You know what? I never heard this kind of thing. And you know what? It sounds as though he means it.

Do you know what? I think we have to respond to this. And when you read the Gospels, you find that again and again the writers are telling us that the people were amazed at the speaking and preaching of Jesus, and the answer was because he spoke with authority and not in the way that their routine teachers of the law were delivering their Saturday sermons. Now, it's hard for these individuals to disguise the fact that their investigation is actually an opposition.

They're not there to ask a serious question. They're actually there to try and trap Christ. And their opposition is an ugly mixture of hypocrisy and jealousy.

They know that their stuff is futile in the face of his remarkable preaching, and it is issued in their hearts in a hostility which is just bursting out of them. They are looking for a way to try and kill him. After all, here they are, and the people could see them coming into the temple courts.

The folks in the general population would have looked and said, You know, there goes authority! Because after all, they had the basis for authority in the purity of their birthright. That's what gave them the opportunity to become high priests. In their education, that's what allowed them the prospect of being the scribes and the teachers of the law.

In the fact that if you like, they were the Jerusalem bluebloods. Therefore, their family background assured them the prospect of becoming elders, like their fathers and their uncles before them. And when they moved through the town, people said, The chief priests and the scribes and the leaders and the elders, and here they all go.

And this group comes and confronts a Galilean carpenter and says, Excuse me, we just had a question. Who put you up to this? What do you think you're doing? Who do you think you are? Tell us what is the basis of your authority. Let's see your driver's license.

That's really what they're saying. Rabbinic Judaism demanded that authoritative preaching had to be sourced in the right kind of being set apart. And the best they could understand this, Jesus had not had the correct kind of training.

He should have had the legitimate certification, and so they felt duty-bound to say to him, Could we please see your license for this? But their investigation, as I said to you, is a thin disguise for their opposition. Each of these individuals is opposed to the news of the kingdom of God, and for one very good reason--because it demands of them that they get off their religious thrones and kneel before Christ. It demands that they get off their religious thrones and kneel before Christ.

But these individuals apparently know best. Do you know best? Are you one of those people? Hey, I know! Don't tell me! No! I'm telling you, I know! Don't tell me anything! Which of us is not in relationship to some things said that, and had our wives burst our inflated ego with a very small pin and see us shrivel up on the couch in acknowledgment of the fact that what we think we know we don't really know? I know who'll win! No, you don't. They just lost, doofus! I know how to get there! No, you don't! We're seventeen miles wrong already on the basis of your Mr. Know-it-all stuff.

These things are marginal. But this is in relationship to eternity! The person saying, I know that this is wrong. I just know! Now, every individual like that, no matter the time nor the place, is often the same individual who declares themselves to be very open-minded.

Oh, no, I'm open to every idea. I'm open to every idea. In fact, before I came here, I was just over at the other religious center for the so-and-sos, and last week we went to the such-and-such, and actually next week we're going to another whole deal, and I, frankly, I'm open to it all! Let them come one, let them come all! I mean, this is the democratic principle, this is the opportunities of America, these are the privileges of the republic, this is freedom! So you're open to everything? Yeah.

Are you open to the idea that nobody comes to the Father except through Jesus Christ? Oh, no, well, I'm not open to that. Well, I thought you were open to everything. Well, I'm open to everything except the possibility that this Christ is King, and that I'm gonna have to get off my throne and kneel at his feet.

See, the basis of their opposition did not lie in their intellects. The basis of their opposition lay in their wills. The issue of a man or a woman before the demands of the kingship of Christ is not ultimately intellectual.

It is finally moral. It is a matter of the will. I refuse.

I know best. God is a liar. I am true.

Now, that's what's going on here. You say to yourself, well, it's interesting. It's all locked in the past.

Here we have the religious authorities, and they are opposed to what? Well, they're opposed to the gospel. Isn't that what they're opposed to? They're opposed to the gospel. I'm going to take a digression here, for those of you who'd like to come with me.

The rest of you can sit quietly and wait until I get back on track. This is not difficult to understand, but some of you will regard it as an honors course, in which case, come along. Will you notice this? That the religious establishment of first-century Palestine was opposed to the message of the gospel.

What I want to suggest to you--and you are sensible people, and you must read, think, study, and consider--what I want to suggest to you is this, that as unpalatable a notion as it may be to us, large chunks of contemporary Christianity are equally opposed to the gospel. And that is why they have no authority at all. That is why men and women, if they have a brain in their heads, sit and listen to the kind of material that comes from pulpits, and they're saying, I'm not sure exactly what is being said here, but it has no cut, it has no bite, it has no authority whatsoever.

So you're able to absorb it and to move on, simply to allow it to wash over you. It's nothing like this Galilean carpenter who strides amidst the people in the colonnades and arrests them and causes them to think, No, this is a benign Christianity. This is an all-is-well.

Pull the flag up. Have an apple pie. Let's go home.

Just relax. Why is it that so much contemporary American Christianity is gutless, is devoid of authority? I'm gonna tell you, not the whole answer but part of the answer, and I'm gonna make it clear to you. The reason that so many who stand in the pulpits of our land speak with so little authority concerning Christ is because they have turned their backs on the authority of the Bible, because they have had a massive wholesale shift concerning the authority and sufficiency of Scripture itself.

Now, if you doubt this, you just need to listen up. Orthodox Christianity calls for men and women to submit their hearts and their minds and their wills to this essential truth that God in the Scriptures has revealed himself in such a way as to discover that the very words of Scripture are possessed of an authority, because they are not founded in the personal opinions of the writers. And I have to enforce this this morning, because as I listen to people talk and as I have younger men come around to ask me about the nature of biblical ministry, we have to be saying again and again that the Scriptures are not the product of personal insights--of the personal insights of the prophets.

You see, this is what people say. Well, you know, Isaiah lived six hundred years ago. Therefore, Isaiah lived six hundred years ago.

That's a long time ago. I mean, he didn't have a telephone, they hadn't split the atom, they didn't know the law of gravity, they hadn't a clue whether the world was round or flat or whatever it was. No one had gone to the moon.

We are now all those years beyond that. Therefore, what possible relevance could the words of an ancient prophet six hundred years before Christ possibly have to contemporary dwellers in the twenty-first century? That's a good question. And if you don't know the answer to it, you're stuck.

Because if you argue that what you have in the Bible, in the pages of Scripture, are books that are simply the product of the imaginations and the personal insights of the authors, then we can view their words as limited by human fallibility and their view of the world as being locked in a moment in time, in which case

we may safely and legitimately overturn their insights by fresh insights of our own. So take, for example, a classic illustration. The matter of homosexuality.

The Bible clearly condemns the acts and participation of homosexuality. What is the answer on the part of men and women? But that was written so many years ago. That was two thousand years ago.

That was a product of the insights of those men in those days. And if those men had lived in these days, if they had had all the benefits of our lives, then they would never have said the things that they've said. Therefore, our personal insights can now overturn their personal insights.

But my dear friends, if they were not personal insights, but if they were the very words of God breathed out, theopneustos, then we have no legitimate basis to do anything with them at all except to understand them, to believe them, and to apply them. Why is the church so vague on the matters of sexuality? Because of a massive loss of confidence in the authority of the Bible. Why does it not know what to say in answer to the questions of contemporary culture? Because of a massive loss of confidence in the Bible.

And listen! When the authority of the Scriptures collapse, the authority of Christ collapses with the Scriptures. How can you have an authoritative Christ out of an unauthoritative Bible? How do you do it? Because this is the book! We have the living Word, Christ, at the right hand of the Father. We have the written Word in Scripture.

We do not have Jesus presently, physically amongst us to verify things. What has he left to us? He has left to us the Bible. When will men and women marvel at authority? When it is an authority that is not the authority of human personality, but it is the authority that comes out of a solid conviction that here, in this book, God has spoken.

And where we cannot fathom it, and where we do not understand it, one day it will become clear. And where we do not like it, still it will niggle at us and challenge us. There is a huge difference, my dear friends, between seeing the Bible as a religious book of deep human insight and the Bible as the inspired revelation of God.

Listen, dear ones, if you think for more than a nanosecond that I and my colleagues with me want to give my life to studying a book that it is the product of merely deep human insight as a result of some people that rumbled around over the last four thousand years, surely not! What point in that? There is a huge difference between viewing the Bible as that and viewing the Bible as the inspired revelation of God. What does the Bible say it is? It says it's the inspired revelation of God. Well, then, are we gonna bow before the Bible, or are we gonna make the Bible bow before us? There is a huge difference between viewing the church as a company of religious people who pool their experiences and ideals.

Oh, yes, we go along to so-and-so's church. Yes, we love it there. Well, we have a wonderful time.

We pool our resources and pool our ideas, and it's wonderful. You mean it's similar to the bowling club? Oh, yes, it is, I suppose. I mean, they go down there, and they usually bowl a little, and then they sit a little, and they pool their ideas and their resources.

In fact, they took some Thanksgiving baskets over to old Bill, who broke his thumb in a dreadful bowling accident only seven days ago. Yes, they're just pooling their ideals and their resources. And of course, I know that's what you're doing down at the church.

So for whatever reason you feel that you have a responsibility or a right to come and impress upon me the opportunity of coming to church or doing anything like that, I'm sorry, I go to the bowling club. I go to the gardening club. I go to the cricket club.

I go to the golfing club. I don't go to church. Why should I? The church, as best as I understand, is a company of religious people who pool their ideals.

I'm not religious. Now what do you say? You say, Oh, well, I guess I'd better go look for somebody who is religious. No.

The church, the Bible says, is the called of God. It is built on the foundation of the prophets and the apostles. There is a vast difference between Jesus as a religious genius and a spiritual guide, and Jesus, the Son of God, incarnate.

Now listen, my dear friends, I'm not trying to be provocative or bombastic or anything like that. Do you realize how many people in pulpits in North America believe that Jesus was a religious genius and a spiritual guide, but they do not believe that he was the incarnate Son of God? So they may as well be Mormons, because they're not Christians. Well, you see, that's terrible, because just last night I heard the Church of Latter-day Saints giving away the Holy Bible.

They must have said it ten times in the space of two minutes. And if you call this number, you can have a Holy Bible. You can find in the Bible this.

You can find in the Bible that. Is the devil an angel of light, or what is he? You don't find him on the T giving away some book, How to Get to Hell in Ten Easy Moves. No, he's on the TV giving away the Bible.

Because there is a difference--a radical difference--between Jesus as a spiritual genius and a unique guide and Jesus as the Son of God incarnate. Who are you following? There is a huge difference between sin as a lingering imperfection in our moral natures and sin as a breach of God's moral law. And our jurisdiction operates on the strength of that.

The whole structure of law and order in America was built on the idea of the law of God. It was built on the Ten Commandments. Now we've got to throw the Ten Commandments out of everywhere.

You can't put them here, you can't put them up there, you can't refer to them, you can't do anything at all with them. Why? Because our view of sin now, such as it is--and sin, of course, is just a Christian neurosis--our view of sin is just, we've got some little inconsistency in our evolving psyche, and if we can just get little Johnny to suck on these sweeties for another half an hour, then probably he's gonna come out as good as gold and perfect as ever. And the idea that there is a moral law which has been established by the God who has revealed himself and that sin is a breach of God's moral law--which is the reason why you can't do certain things and why you must do other things--is completely bogus.

That's where we live our lives. The confusion isn't in the mall. The people in the mall don't care.

The confusion's in the church. You go to churches around here and listen when the Scriptures is read, and I'll tell you what they say, because I hear them on the radio. Our reading this morning is from Luke 20, verses 1-8.

Let us listen for the Word of God. Is that the right preposition or not? Not. Let us listen to the Word of God.

The Bible doesn't contain the Word of God. The Bible is the Word of God that you can't get out of it. If it's just the Word of man, then why are we even here in the first place? There's a huge difference between seeing the cross as a symbol of martyrdom and self-giving and seeing the cross as a divine act of atonement and reconciliation.

And there's a huge difference between seeing the Christian life as the application of moral and ethical standards to social and individual life and seeing the Christian life as the product of regeneration by which we become partakers in the divine nature. And the fact that there are at least a few this morning who are sitting listening to all of this and saying, you know, I don't even know why the distinction would be important, points to the gravity of our predicament. Oh, I don't expect everybody to agree.

I don't expect even everybody to understand. I suppose I hope that perhaps in ten or fifteen years' time, when I'm long gone, somebody will dig up a tape and say, you know, that made perfect sense. I only wish we'd listened.

Because biblical Christianity right now is engaged in a life-and-death struggle for its very existence, right here in America. Biblical Christianity is engaged in a life-and-death struggle for its very existence. We know that Christ is victorious.

We're not in any doubt about the outcome, but the fact of the matter is, the confusion is rampant. And where is it all sourced? The issue of authority. Isn't that it? Well, who are you to say what? Who is he to do this? What's he showing up for on a donkey? I mean, who told him he can come in and clean the temple out? Who is this? Show us your driver's license! Jesus says, I'm not intimidated by you guys.

I was here when I was twelve. When Mary and Joseph came to get me, they said, It's time to go home now. And I said, Didn't you know that I have to be in my father's house? And you guys know that in the question that I'm gonna raise to you right now concerning the baptism of John, you know, because some of you were present, that the Spirit of God alighted on me as a dove, and a voice came from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son.

Listen to him. So instead of me getting all tied up with your question--which is a trick question--let me just turn the tables on you, and let me ask you a question. You want to talk about authority? Then hey, let's just take John the Baptist's baptism.

Answer me a question. Was it from heaven or from men? Now, Jesus is not evading the question. The reason that he asks this question--and you'll need to think about this, but I think you'll get there--the reason he asks this question is because the right answer to his question is the correct answer to their question.

If they can come up with a right answer to the question he's asking them, then they will have already answered the question that they are asking him. Because the authority of John the Baptist and the authority of Jesus are completely interwoven. So he says to them, Let me just ask you, The baptism of John, heaven or men? And then in verse 5 it says, And they discussed it among themselves.

You bet their life they did. They went in a holy huddle real fast. I can just hear one of them saying, I told you that was a dumb question! Why don't you go ahead and ask that question in such a categorical way? You set us up.

You could have asked a better question than that. Well, if you're so smart, you ask the questions. Well, I will.

The asks the questions. And so, what are we going to say? If we say it was from heaven, he'll say, So why didn't you believe him? If we say it was from men, the chances are the people will rise up and stone us, because they're absolutely clear that John the Baptist was a prophet. So said somebody, Why don't we just say, We don't want to answer that? Or why don't we do an Ollie North on it? Why don't we do, I can't recall? And somebody said, No, don't say, I can't recall.

Don't say, We don't want to answer that. Somebody said, Well, why don't we just take the fifth? Somebody said, Take the fifth? Well, let's take the fifth. He said, Hang around, you'll find out.

Now says someone, We'll just say, We don't know. We'll just say, We're agnostics. We don't know.

Do you know how many people come to Parkside and walk out the door, and your only comfort is this? That you don't know? That's what allows you to go away every Sunday, untouched, unchanged. On the one hand, you're Mr. Know-it-all, but when the pressure comes, your retreat is, I know nothing! You're like Shoots on Colonel Klinkin, or whatever that thing is. Hogan's Heroes.

Okay, guys, from heaven or from men, I know nothing! Well, when we were making our way to church, Smarty Pants, you sure knew a lot then about why it was a waste of time going, and there's nothing there of interest or significance. But you let your tail between your legs on the way out, and what have you to say for yourself now, bright guy? Well, I don't know. I don't know.

I don't know. But they did know, and so do you. See, there is enough evidence before you to trust in Christ.

There is enough evidence before you to bow your knee before his kingship. It is not that you don't know. It is that you are smart enough to understand that the answer to the question jams you in a corner, and you don't like the corner that you're in.

Aldous Huxley was so good--I love Huxley for at least being honest enough to say this--he said, I chose not to believe in God because it was for me, my unbelief, a means of political and sexual liberation. Huxley was not saying, I could find no basis for belief in God. He is saying, I chose not to believe in him.

And under the disguise of agnosticism, you come and you go. My dear friends, there is coming a day when you will not be able to use that defense, because you will stand before the gaze of the risen Christ, look into his eyes, and tell him why you chose not to believe in him. And that, the Pharisees understood.

And that is why they were in such a dreadful predicament. The root of their problem was not their intellect, it was their will. Jesus is essentially saying to them, If you don't recognize authority when you see it, then no amount of arguing is going to convince you.

We saw that back in 16. If they don't listen to Moses and the prophets, then they're not going to be convinced even if someone rises from the dead. And the reason for their opposition is the same reason for men and women's opposition today, and that is that they knew that they must bow before the lordship of Christ.

And so, while pretending to really want answers to the questions, their minds and their hearts and their wills remained closed to the one answer, because they knew that the answer was in opposition to their desires. Incidentally, as I close, this is an indication of how to respond to some of your friends and neighbors when they come with their cynical opposition to the gospel. Some of you phone up in great distress, Oh, my wife was asking me these questions last night, and I couldn't answer her questions.

Or my boss was asking me these dreadful questions about Noah and the ark, and John and the whale, and who was Cain's brother, and who did he marry, and what was his sister-in-law like, and so on. And I find myself, I didn't know what to say at all. What should I do? I just say, Just tell him, Go to bed.

You say, Well, that's not a very good answer. It's the best answer I can think of right now, because you know what? They're not conducting an investigation. They're mounting an opposition.

You remember, they went into one town in Luke chapter 4, and the town refused to welcome them, and the disciples, who'd been listening carefully to Jesus, said to Jesus, Hey, Jesus, shall we call down fire and consume them? And Jesus says, No. No, don't let's do that. But you know what? Let's go to another town.

Well, Jesus, why don't you stay and argue them into submission, Christ? You're the Son of God. You know everything. All power has been given unto you.

Why wouldn't you stay and argue them into submission? The same reason? That he may come and plead at your heart's door and stir you with a pursuit of his love, but he's not gonna put up with your ridiculous intellectual mumbo-jumbo. Because the issue is not your intellect, the issue is your will. That is not to say there aren't intellectual questions.

But the thing that keeps a man and woman from faith is not the challenge to our minds, it is the challenge to our morals. And the Pharisees knew it, and so they refused to go forward. We need, then, to learn to say to the person who is a humble inquirer--in which case it may be me saying to you this morning--that you will not truly confess Jesus Christ until you're willing to bow to his authority as your Savior, your Lord, and your Teacher.

Until you're willing to bow to Christ as your Savior, Lord, and Teacher, you will never confess him to be the Messiah. So it becomes a moral question. Will I bow my will to Christ, or will I stand in proud defiance and slip out again under the disguise of my agnosticism? Let us pray together.

God our Father, grant that everything that isn't true may be forgotten, that everything that is unhelpful may be so clouded in our recollection that it doesn't trouble us. And all that is of yourself, reach into our hearts, and grant us no peace until we get off our own throne and bow down before Christ and see him enthroned as Lord and Savior and Teacher, and then stand to our feet and declare his kingship. Accomplish your purposes, God, we pray, as we cry to you in Christ's name.

Amen. That concludes this message. Thanks for listening to Truth For Life.

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