

The Gospel According to Mark - The Authority of God

Sunday June 30th, 2019

The Authority of God

Text: Mark 11:27-12:12

God is so good and that's why He is the one authority we can trust without reservation! We can trust He always has our best interest at heart!! I grew up in the 60's and 70's so I at times struggled with authority in my life! It was sort of the theme of that time and I'm afraid my generation has passed that attitude right on down the line! Today we're going to learn some interesting things about authority, especially God's authority and why it should be such a positive thing in our lives! Let's pray!

So let's begin reading our text for today, it's fascinating, very important to our lives and at the same time contains some fascinating humor in the life of Christ! We're going to begin with an incident Jesus had with the religious leaders of His day and then we'll read a parable of Jesus that will help us understand more about the authority of God in our lives. So let's dive in...

Mark 11:27 They arrived again in Jerusalem, and while Jesus was walking in the temple courts, the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders came to him.

Mark 11:28 "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you authority to do this?"

Mark 11:29 Jesus replied, "I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

Mark 11:30 John's baptism--was it from heaven, or from men? Tell me!"

Mark 11:31 They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?'

Mark 11:32 But if we say, 'From men'" (They feared the people, for everyone held that John really was a prophet.)

Mark 11:33 So they answered Jesus, "We don't know." Jesus said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things."

So if you ever thought of Jesus as only this serious, never funny, always somber person who had no fun in life, think again!! This is so funny! Jesus really messes with the people who were supposed to be God's representatives to the people, but who were in fact no longer representing God. Many of the priest had become very secular and other religious rulers had become extremely hypocritical and self-serving. On the other hand many of the Pharisees were very religious and extremely committed to the letter of the law, but this had become a very self-righteous enterprise and they thought themselves so much better than others. It was an "I'm so good and smart I deserve God's love and favor" attitude. Jesus many times used humor to put them in their place and to show them they didn't have all the answers. I love the way Elton Trueblood put it in his book on the Humor of Christ...

"Christ's major weapon against the Pharisaic attack was laughter, and He used it fully. The point at which they were most vulnerable was their manifest self-righteousness."

Jesus knew He would put the Pharisees on the defensive with His question because of John the Baptist's popularity with the people. In fact, Luke's gospel fills in the blank left by Mark in Luke 20:6

Luke 20:6 But if we say, 'Of human origin,' all the people will stone us, because they are persuaded that John was a prophet."

One of the things Jesus was able to uncover through this interaction with the Pharisees was their lack of commitment to the truth and their unwillingness to stand for the truth in the face of possible persecution! This attitude alone undermined their authority in the lives of the people. But authority was what the Pharisees and other religious leaders of the day so desperately wanted. Their problem was they demanded people recognize their authority because of their position, but were living lives that caused people to have no respect for their authority. The fact that Jesus was living a life which gave credibility to His authority really shook the established powers. They wanted to know by what authority Jesus had cleared the temple of the money changers! Their bottom line was being threatened and they didn't like that at all. They wanted to see His credentials. You might say this was their counterattack on Jesus after the clearing of the temple.

Jesus was so wise in His handling of this situation and refused to directly answer questions concerning the origin of His authority! What He does is share a parable that answers the questions raised and implies the Jewish authorities had broken their covenant with God and rejected the authority of God. It is a remarkable parable. You might wonder why this skirmish between Jesus and the Pharisees is so important to us today. This subject is important for us to grasp because understanding the concept of God's authority is vital if we are to live an effective Christian lives. It is my prayer for today that we leave here understanding the importance of allowing God full authority in every area of our lives, and please know when I say "allowing God full authority in every area of our lives," I am in no way minimizing the sovereignty of God or the fact He is ultimately Lord of all. What I am saying is what God has said over and over and what we see played out in Scripture in the lives of the Hebrew people, and we see the principles played out in our lives as well...

Isa 1:17 learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.

Isa 1:18 "Come now, let us reason together," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.

Isa 1:19 If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land;

Isa 1:20 but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword." For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

In other words, if we choose to do our own thing and reject the authority of God then the consequences will devour us like a sword. That's not God getting mad at us and striking us with a sword, it's simply the consequences of rejecting the authority of God in our lives. One more passage on this before we get to the parable Jesus uses to teach on this subject. One of the reasons God asked the Hebrew people to observe the Sabbath was to acknowledge His authority in their lives. Isaiah puts it this way in Isaiah 58...

Isa 58:13 "If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the Lord's holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words,

Isa 58:14 then you will find your joy in the LORD, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob." The mouth of the LORD has spoken.

Isa 59:1 Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear.

Isa 59:2 But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.

As I said a few weeks ago, many times we make bad decisions but God gets the blame as if He were punishing us for making a mistake. Truth is, God simply is not going to bless disobedience, rebellion and sinful activity. He will forgive and greatly desires to help us get through the consequences that follow sinful behavior, but it's our choice. It's called the covenant formula: If - then! If we choose to repent of our sin and turn to God, then He will forgive and begin a wonderful work in our hearts, our minds and our lives! Sin separates us from God, but, as Isaiah said, God's arm is not too short to reach us, and if we cry out to Him, His ear will hear our cry and He will turn His face towards us.

But in our story, the Pharisees were more concerned with where Jesus got His authority to do the things He did and to teach the things He taught. You might be wondering the same thing and you might even be asking why you should acknowledge the authority of God in your life. That's a good question!

Before you allow God full authority in every area of your life it's only logical that you understand the reasons you should acknowledge the authority of God!

Reason #1: God is creator and as such has full authority over creation.

Mark 12:1 He then began to speak to them in parables: "A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the winepress and built a watchtower.

Then: The Hebrew people should have understood this concept. A person who planted a vineyard, had the resources to put a wall around it, dig a pit for the winepress and build a watchtower, would obviously be the owner of the property. The owner might hire workers to do some of the work, but at the end of the day the property owner had the authority to either do the work or order the work to be done. The Pharisees knew what God's Word said about God's authority. The Psalmist had said this...

Psa 24:1 Of David. A psalm. The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it . . .

Isaiah said this...

Isa 45:18 For this is what the LORD says-- he who created the heavens, he is God; he who fashioned and made the earth, he founded it; he did not create it to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited-- he says: "I am the LORD, and there is no other.

Isa 45:19 I have not spoken in secret, from somewhere in a land of darkness; I have not said to Jacob's descendants, 'Seek me in vain.' I, the LORD, speak the truth; I declare what is right.

What Isaiah quoted God as saying in that last verse is so powerful...

Isa 45:19 "I have not said to Jacob's descendants, 'Seek me in vain...'"

In other words, God is not playing guessing games with us or playing hard to get! No, He wants to be found, but we have to want to find Him! Seems like we read something about that just last week...

Jer 29:12 Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.

Jer 29:13 You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

Jer 29:14 I will be found by you," declares the LORD...

Now: Christians should understand this concept of God's authority over creation.

Paul put it this way in Colossians 1...

Col 1:16 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.

Col 1:17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Col 1:18 And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

Col 1:19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,

Col 1:20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

So what would be the answer to the question the Pharisees asked Jesus, "Where do you get the authority to do these things?"

"I own the vineyard, thank you very much!"

So let's look at another reason we should acknowledge the authority of God in our lives...

Reason #2: We have become representatives of God's authority in this world.

Mark 12:1... "A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the winepress and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey.

Mark 12:2 At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard.

Then: Solomon spoke about Israel, God's chosen people, and their God-given purpose to represent His authority in this world.

1 Ki 8:52 "May your eyes be open to your servant's plea and to the plea of your people Israel, and may you listen to them whenever they cry out to you.

1 Ki 8:53 For you singled them out from all the nations of the world to be your own inheritance, just as you declared through your servant Moses when you, O Sovereign LORD, brought our fathers out of Egypt."

1 Ki 8:54 When Solomon had finished all these prayers and supplications to the LORD, he rose from before the altar of the LORD, where he had been kneeling with his hands spread out toward heaven.

1 Ki 8:55 He stood and blessed the whole assembly of Israel in a loud voice, saying:

1 Ki 8:56 "Praise be to the LORD, who has given rest to his people Israel just as he promised. Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses.

1 Ki 8:57 May the LORD our God be with us as he was with our fathers; may he never leave us nor forsake us.

1 Ki 8:58 May he turn our hearts to him, to walk in all his ways and to keep the commands, decrees and regulations he gave our fathers.

1 Ki 8:59 And may these words of mine, which I have prayed before the LORD, be near to the LORD our God day and night, that he may uphold the cause of his servant and the cause of his people Israel

according to each day's need,
1 Ki 8:60 so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God and that there is no other.

Did you see that? The very purpose for God choosing the Jewish people.

1 Ki 8:60 so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God and that there is no other.

What a privilege they had been given. But what about us? What about now?

Now: Jesus spoke about God's authority in the Christian's life and how we are chosen to fulfill our God-given purpose to represent His authority in this world.

Mat 10:1 He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.

Mat 28:18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.
Mat 28:19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
Mat 28:20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

James C. Denison stated this in the Holman Bible Dictionary...

"The church and its ministry possess genuine religious authority only as they serve the mission of Jesus in faithfulness to the Bible and in building up the church (Matt. 28:18-20). The Christian accepts the truth of Scripture as authoritative by faith, and the command of Scripture as authoritative in obedience, and so demonstrates love for the Lord (John 14:15)."

Paul speaks of his God-given purpose to represent God and His authority in this world...

Eph 3:7 I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power.

Eph 3:8 Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,

Eph 3:9 and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.

Eph 3:10 His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms,

Eph 3:11 according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

With this authority comes responsibility. Notice that the owner sent for a share of the crops grown there.

James 1:18 He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

John 15:15 I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

John 15:16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last...

You see, we have been given authority...

To reach others

To build up others

To protect others

To seek their deliverance and their healing

To speak on the behalf of those without a voice

And this leads us to one final thing we must understand about acknowledging God's authority in our lives. We kind of touched on this early in the message...

Reason #3: When we reject the authority of God in our lives it causes us to fall into moral and spiritual darkness.

Listen to the rest of Jesus' parable...

Mark 12:1... "A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the winepress and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey.

Mark 12:2 At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard.

Mark 12:3 But they seized him, beat him and sent him away empty-handed.

Mark 12:4 Then he sent another servant to them; they struck this man on the head and treated him shamefully.

Mark 12:5 He sent still another, and that one they killed. He sent many others; some of them they beat, others they killed.

Mark 12:6 "He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, 'They will respect my son.'

Mark 12:7 "But the tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.'

Mark 12:8 So they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard.

Mark 12:9 "What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.

Mark 12:10 Haven't you read this scripture: "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone ;

Mark 12:11 the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?"

Mark 12:12 Then they looked for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken the parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd; so they left him and went away.

Then: The religious leaders of Israel had rejected the authority of God in their lives and it led them to fall into moral and spiritual darkness of the worst kind. This had happened before.

2 Ki 17:13 The LORD warned Israel and Judah through all his prophets and seers: "Turn from your evil ways. Observe my commands and decrees, in accordance with the entire Law that I commanded your fathers to obey and that I delivered to you through my servants the prophets."

2 Ki 17:14 But they would not listen and were as stiff-necked as their fathers, who did not trust in the LORD their God.

2 Ki 17:15 They rejected his decrees and the covenant he had made with their fathers and the warnings he had given them. They followed worthless idols and themselves became worthless. They imitated the nations around them although the LORD had ordered them, "Do not do as they do," and they did the things the LORD had forbidden them to do.

And their rejection of God's authority in their lives was about to lead them to commit unthinkable injustice. On the day Jesus told this parable they wanted to arrest Him, but were scared of the people. But remember this about sin: Once you allow it to take root, it will grow. It will take you further than you ever thought you would go, make you pay more than you ever thought you would have to pay and will keep you longer than you ever dreamed you would have to stay! These religious leaders would soon order the execution of Jesus, the very Messiah and Lamb of God their sacred Scriptures had said would someday come! You see, in our story, Jesus was the son of the vineyard owner who was killed by the tenants. Well what about today?

Now: There are many today who do not want authority in their lives. They desire to be their own authority in all things. And of course we do not have to acknowledge God's authority because we've been granted the freedom to reject His authority, however, we do so to our own peril. We face the same decisions today as did the people in Jesus' day. The writer of Romans says it so clearly...

Rom 1:20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

Rom 1:21 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Rom 1:22 Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools

Crime can almost always be traced back to a rejection of authority! Without authority we head down a path that leads to anarchy. Without the authority of God in our lives, we begin a not-so-slow decent into a world of darkness, destruction, and lawlessness. Without authority, there is no standard. Without a standard, anything goes. When anything goes, nothing is sacred anymore. At this point, life loses value.

So what's the answer? Acknowledge the authority of God in your life! Acknowledge He uses His authority for good in our lives because He created us! He created us on purpose for a purpose! And realize when we

reject His authority in our lives we are also rejecting His love, grace, mercy, wisdom and provision. But here's some really good news...If you've not been acknowledging God's authority in your life, you can start today by heading these words from God in 2nd Chronicles...

2 Chr 7:14 if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

2 Chr 7:15 Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place.

Let's pray!