

Scripture Reading:

Luke 19:47 “And [Jesus] was teaching daily in the temple. But the chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people sought to destroy Him, 48 and were unable to do anything; for all the people were very attentive to hear Him.”

20:1 “Now it happened on one of those days, as He taught the people in the temple and preached the gospel, that the chief priests and the scribes, together with the elders, confronted Him 2 and spoke to Him, saying, "Tell us, by what authority are You doing these things? Or who is he who gave You this authority?" 3 But [Jesus] answered and said to them, "I also will ask you one thing, and answer Me: 4 The baptism of John--was it from heaven or from men?" 5 And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?' 6 But if we say, 'From men,' all the people will stone us, for they are persuaded that John was a prophet." 7 So they answered that they did not know where it was from. 8 And Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

"Questioning the Authority of Jesus"

Last week we saw Jesus enter the Temple to see if the leprosy of false worship He had driven out near the beginning of His ministry had returned.

- **It had:** And as we shall see in the coming weeks, the time for the destruction of City of Jerusalem is at hand

In striving to understand the application to our lives, near the end of that message, we considered two familiar kings, Saul and David. Both had fallen into grievous sin and we observed in them the two reactions that we see with the coming of Jesus as the only Savior down through all of history:

- **One of repentance and new life, the other a hardening heart that continues to turn from God.**

From the garden of Eden through the end of Revelation God comes with the Good News of the Gospel, telling men & woman, boys & girls, that God graciously provides for the forgiveness of sins, promising His people that He will dwell with them.

- **Those given the gift of faith respond with repentance and joy and those without faith are hardened in their sin.**

God came to Saul & David with this call for repentance and an invitation for life through His prophets: Both received the same admonition, but their reactions are quite different:

- **King David repents and turns to God as we can and should read about often in Psalm 51**
- **King Saul hardens his heart until he sits at the table of death dining with the witch of En Dor, a practice that we should avoid!**

This contrast is what we see the Apostle Paul explaining in the second chapter of his second Epistle to the Corinthians where he proclaims “thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved & among those who are perishing.”

- **Today, we are God’s prophets who carry the message of salvation, and Paul makes it clear that we present the Gospel to everyone!**
- **BUT, it should not surprise us to see different reactions...**

16 “To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death & to the other the aroma of life leading to life.”

- **Same message, but completely different responses:**

We see this down through history: Just outside the Garden of Eden, God has instructed the sons of Adam, Abel and Cain, how they were to approach God in proper worship: They were to bring a lamb to be sacrificed that would picture the work of Christ and remind them that they are dependent upon God for their salvation...

- **They were to know that there are NO ‘works’ which they could bring God to earn salvation!**

Abel believes God and brings the lamb, while Cain does not think it important to follow God’s commands and he presents the work of his hands in an effort to please God... One is accepted and the other is rejected!

- **This simple account helps us to understand the battle that has raged down through the ages.**
- **On the one hand God calls on men to submit to His authority and accept His gracious gift of salvation and new life.**
- **On the other is proud man who demands that God accept the work of his hands and be pleased!**

The 20th Century saw this battle reach a fevered pitch in our nation from the philosophical pronouncements of the humanist manifesto declaring that man can do it all, to the popular culture that has produced hundreds of variations on the classic line from Frank Sinatra: “I did it My Way.”

In Exodus, we see the contrasts in this battle clearly with the confrontations between Moses and Pharaoh.

- **Moses with all of his shortcomings and faults, is the man of faith who leads God’s people to the promised land.**
- **Pharaoh with all of his power and wealth is hardened in his sin and brings destruction on his nation.**

As we continue on in the history of God’s people we see Saul & David as the examples we have studied, but also the whole history of the Kings of Israel & Judah is divided among those who ‘did evil in the sight of Jehovah’ and those who ‘did what was right in the sight of Jehovah.’

- **All given the same promise of blessings that was delivered to David, with some smelling the sweet savor of life and others the stench of death!**

This battle and contrast is pictured for us in the wisdom literature where in the Book of Proverbs we have Lady Wisdom who brings life and Lady Folly who brings death.

Coming into the New Testament we are immediately shown the same contrast in the Christmas account which we rightly focus on at this time of the year. God has given light to the world, sending His own Son as the baby in the manger who would save His people from their sins.

When this news reaches Jerusalem, we see again the same two reactions:

- **Faithful Saints like Simeon and Anna hold the baby Jesus and praise God with prayers that we still sing today!**
- **When news of a new King being born reaches King Herod he is ‘troubled’ and all of Jerusalem with him.**

Just as we saw with Cain & Pharaoh & the wicked Kings and Lady folly: Those who hate God love death!

- **And in the case of Herod it brings the death of all the children under two years of age in Bethlehem in his attempt to kill Jesus, something we will look at in more detail next week**
- **Also standing in stark contrast with Herod are the Wise Men who come seeking the Savior to offer gifts and worship Him.**

It is important that we remember this battle and the contrasts between the sheep and goats if we are going to properly understand what is occurring in our text this morning.

- **The same contrasting reactions to the Good News we see down through history are here in the Temple as Jesus teaches:**

At the end of chapter 19 we see those who want to destroy Jesus and those who are listening to Him: “And [Jesus] was teaching daily in the temple. But the chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people sought to destroy Him, 48 and were unable to do anything; for all the people were very attentive to hear Him.”

- **What I want us to focus on this morning is how Jesus approaches the goats, those who are rejecting the message of life**

While there are important lessons here, we must remember that we are not learning how to be a successful debating club...

- **We need to see the heart of Jesus and also to see how wise He is in dealing with those who are skeptics and haters of God.**

First we must remember that the heart of Jesus is broken over the state of these religious leaders and those who are following them. This should be our attitude toward the lost as well:

As Jesus approached Jerusalem He lamented over them with these chilling words, “If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. 43 For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, 44 and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation.”

Jesus understood the state they were in and where they were headed without repentance. Such **MUST be our attitude toward the lost as well.**

Whether it is family members who reject the Gospel that we are with at a family reunion or crowds that we might casually have contact with at a ball game or sport’s bar, we must always have at bottom a heart that is weeping over their lost estate!

There is a dramatic example of this when the Apostle Paul weeps for the Jews in Romans chapter nine: “1 I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, 2 that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, 4 who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; 5 of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God.”

- **The second lesson is that we must be crying out TO them!**

Jesus is proclaiming the Good News in the Temple for all to hear. This is what brings the religious leaders to him with questions about His authority! If Jesus had just come to privately worship or was only talking softly with those who wanted to listen to Him there would have been no conflict with these leaders: All would have been quiet at the Temple!

- **Jesus was not only upsetting the money changers tables, but the whole system of man-centered religion they had established.**

Again we see this priority with Paul as he moves on in Romans to quote the Prophet Joel in chapter ten: "13 For whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." 14 How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? 15 And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!"

- **Jesus was bringing glad tidings of good things, but these leaders sought to kill Him!**
- **Unable to mount a direct attack because of the attention Jesus drew from the people, they come with trick questions instead!**

This should NOT surprise us when we remember the history given in the Old Testament, with Cain & Pharaoh and those wicked Kings who did NOT want to hear what the Prophets had to say to them!

We can learn some very important lessons as we consider how Jesus handled this situation, BUT as we search for today's applications, we again have those two cliffs to avoid -- *kids, remember the picture of driving down that road?*

I will use the example of attending a family reunion, but we need to remember this can apply to ANY situation where we come into contact with those outside of the Church:

- **First, IF we are being faithful as Christians we should NOT be able to just blend in!**
- **We should be asking Wilberforce's classic question: If there was a trial held to determine if you were a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?**

So that is the cliff on the right: We must not avoid important discussions at a family gathering or even conflict because we don't want to upset other family members, or worse still, we don't want people to think badly of us or that we are weird!

- **But what is the other cliff?**
- **Well, to put it quite bluntly, we are not to be obnoxious!**

Understanding that the Gospel is offensive to those who are lost is important: But, that must NOT become an excuse for US to be obnoxious and offensive in the way that we say or do things.

If there are plans for a big fancy family photo, it would be inappropriate to wear a T-shirt with a clever Christian slogan on it so it would show up in the picture!

If you were attending a wedding reception, it would be inappropriate to grab the microphone when the toasts are being made and begin warning those present about the dangers of hell fire!

- **Our words and actions are to be the ‘fragrance of Christ’**
- **Our presence should be no different than if Jesus Himself had attended!**

In fact, one of the best ways to judge whether we are saying and doing the right things, is to keep the fact that Jesus is right there with us in mind!

- **Remembering that will cause us to be more bold at times and to curtail inappropriate behavior at others.**

So in these early verses from chapter 20 we have Jesus confronted by His enemies and we can learn some important lessons... Thinking again of a family reunion, this might be the atheist uncle who wants to pick a fight, just looking for ways to embarrass you as a Christian while he had the chance!

This example in our text is instructive here because we have a situation where Jesus does NOT give an answer to a question that has been asked in order to cause trouble.

- **It is a strong reminder that we are obligated only to give honest answers to honest questions!**

These religious leaders were NOT seeking to know the truth about the authority of Jesus...

- **They were seeking to trap Him, potentially setting up a big conflict with the Roman officials or turning the people against Him**

Jesus does not take the bait and instead turns and asks them a ‘trick’ question of His own... One they cannot answer without getting themselves into trouble!

They quickly dodge the question and then Jesus simply does the same.

Could Jesus have given them an answer to their question? Of course, but it would have been what the Proverbs refer to as casting pearls before swine... The pigs would not appreciate the value of the jewels and just get them all muddy!

- Obviously, this type of discourse requires us to be wise, discerning and thoughtful in how we interact with people.

There might be that uncle who is looking to pick a fight that we should avoid, but at the same event there could be an Aunt, who is truly troubled by a recent death in the family, coming with what on the surface seems like a stronger attack – saying how can we believe in a God who allows evil –

- But here we should discern a real opportunity to share the Gospel with her: Presenting Good News in her time of great need!

There is no simple formula or ‘how-to’ book that can be written to guide us in each situation... We must learn from the example of Jesus and learn to trust in the Lord’s leading: Again we have examples from the Christmas account to consider:

- With the Wise Men, God told them to go home a different way to avoid further contact with King Herod.
- We have the Angel telling Joseph to flee to coming attack, even though these same angels could have protected Jesus

At other times, we see Saints like John the Baptist or the Apostle Paul confronting rulers full well knowing that it would cost them their lives.

- We must learn to trust God for the discernment to know when it is time to avoid a conflict and when we must do battle.

While this exchange with Jesus and the religious leaders is given in all three synoptic Gospels, along with the parable about the wicked tenant that will follow next week, it is Matthew who adds one other insight Jesus gave as a warning to the religious leaders which can also help us discern if we are being faithful...

It shows us the heart of Jesus who did not simply ignore those who came to trick Him, but sought to give them cause to ponder their action. At the same time, it is also a parable that can help us discern whether we are being truly faithful to Jesus!

Matthew 21:28 "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."

**Again Jesus calls everyone to repentance: Not just with words but with actions:
'if you love me keep my commandments!'**

Jesus has told us that the fields are white unto harvest and desires that we go forth to serve the Lord of the Harvest by bringing in the crops.

It is often easy while here at church or a conference or camp to get all fired up and tell Jesus, I am going to go work in the field to save the lost!

- **But then we get out in the world and suddenly we pull back and don't do the work that is required**

At the same time, others may be overwhelmed here at Church when they hear the Great Commission or with challenges at a conference or a camp thinking they could never do what Jesus is asking them to do.

- **And yet when they go out into the world they end up quietly sharing the Gospel as they should!**

May we seek the wisdom from God to know which opportunities we are to take and which traps we are to avoid.

And may we be sons and daughters that not only tell the father we will work in His field that is ripe unto harvest, but also be the faithful ones that go forth and do the work that needs to be done!

Communion Meditation:

**Proverbs 9:1 "Wisdom has built her house, She has hewn out her seven pillars;
2 She has slaughtered her meat, She has mixed her wine, She has also furnished her table. 3 She has sent out her maidens, She cries out from the highest places of the city,
4 "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!" As for him who lacks understanding, she says to him, 5 "Come, eat of my bread And drink of the wine I have mixed. 6 Forsake foolishness and live, And go in the way of understanding."**