

Mark 11:27-33 (NKJV)

²⁷ Then they came again to Jerusalem. And as He was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came to Him. ²⁸ And they said to Him, "By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority to do these things?" ²⁹ But Jesus answered and said to them, "I also will ask you one question; then answer Me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things: ³⁰ The baptism of John--was it from heaven or from men? Answer Me." ³¹ And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?' ³² But if we say, 'From men' "-- they feared the people, for all counted John to have been a prophet indeed. ³³ So they answered and said to Jesus, "We do not know." And Jesus answered and said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

Our text this morning is covered by 3 of the 4 gospel writers. So we can glean a few details from Luke and Matthew that Mark doesn't give us.

Jesus returns to Jerusalem.

Saturday- Jesus arrives at Bethany and Bethphage and stays the night.

Sunday- Jesus attends the party thrown by Simon the leper. The crowd learns of Christ's presence and they show up to see both Christ and Lazarus.

Monday- The so called triumphal entry

Tuesday- Christ casts the vendors out of the temple

Wednesday- Is where today's text takes place.

Thursday- the disciples prepare for the Passover meal and partake of it with Christ

Friday- Christ was crucified

So Christ is in Jerusalem. We are told in the other Gospels that Christ is healing people and teaching them. We are also told that the Jewish leaders want to kill Christ, but they were afraid of the people. So that fear drives the leadership to trickiness. This morning we are going to look at a very great contrast. It is the contrast between **spiritual leadership and political leadership**.

What do I mean by political?

This is one of the definitions of the word political in the oxford dictionary- *relating to, affecting, or acting according to the interests of status or authority within an organization rather than matters of principle*

It is looking out for the interest of an organization rather than going by principles.

Why is it important to look at this contrast?

It is important because it is the difference between true Christianity and all of its imposters. It is a clear way to distinguish between the true and false leadership, the right and the wrong.

I don't think that it is a coincidence that this sermon is falling right in the middle of our presidential election. It seems that in every election there is a lot of talk about Christianity and Christian principles and Christian candidates. And because of that, we must be careful to keep our thinking straight. We can't confuse **political** leadership with **spiritual** leadership. Anyone elected to the position of president is a political leader in this country. He will have to compromise. He will have to give up something he thinks **is important** to gain something else he thinks is **more important**. If he is to be effective, he will have to cut deals. He cannot, and some would say **should not** enforce his minority morality on the majority. So, while it would be good to have a leader who spiritually leads his home, the office of president is not a spiritual position. It is a political position. If we are to think clearly, we must regard it as such.

I think it is foolish for spiritual leadership to endorse political candidates. In the end it only serves to harm the reputation of the spiritual leadership. Every failure by the candidate becomes a reflection on the spiritual leaders who endorsed the candidate. For instance, Billy Graham endorsed Richard Nixon. The immorality of Richard Nixon then became a reflection of Billy Graham's character. We cannot confuse spiritual leadership and political leadership. We can't mix the church and the world.

With that said, let's look at the marks of **political leadership**.

First we find that **public opinion** is a determining factor in political leadership. The Jewish leaders are afraid of the opinions of the crowd. We are told that in Luke. They would have taken Christ and killed him there and then. But they were afraid to do so **because the crowd admired Him**. Public opinion kept them from doing that which they wanted to do.

Now let's look at our text in Mark.

²⁷ Then they came again to Jerusalem. And as He was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came to Him. ²⁸ And they said to Him, "By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority to do these things?" ²⁹ But Jesus answered and said to them, "I also will ask you one question; then answer Me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things: ³⁰ The baptism of John--was it from heaven or from men? Answer Me." ³¹ And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?' ³² But if we say, 'From men' "--

they feared the people, for all counted John to have been a prophet indeed. ³³

So they answered and said to Jesus, "We do not know." And Jesus answered and said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

Now why did the leaders do what they did in front of the crowds? It is clear they wanted to influence the crowd with their dramatics. They wanted to convince the crowd that they had a legitimate obligation to get Jesus off the streets. But they couldn't do it if the crowd perceived they had no good reason to do so.

So **point 2**-we see political leadership depends upon **swaying public opinion**. It will use whatever strategy is necessary to sway the minds of the masses.

Third we see that political leadership must play **legal technicalities** to accomplish its ends. Look at the attack they level at Jesus. By **what authority** do you do these things? What **things** were they referring to? Well, Christ was teaching with authority. He was healing with authority. He was doing miracles with authority. He was clearing the temple with authority.

Now, look at the **things** Christ was doing. Do you think anyone in their right mind would have **any trouble at all** discerning **where** the authority was coming from to do all these amazing things? He was doing all these wonderful things prophesied in the Bible that the **Messiah** would do. He was doing all these things that the Jewish leadership was **powerless** to do. There was nothing sincere in the question this leadership is asking of Jesus. They are looking for a legal loophole. They were looking to be tricky and spring a trap on Christ that they can use to justify the horrible thing they have in mind.

Even the question itself is revealing. By what authority and who gave you the authority? The assumption in the question is that Christ must have **had authority**. No one could do what He was doing, no one could affect the physical reality with this spiritual power **without authority from somewhere**. The only question is, where is it coming from? The religious leaders want to say it is from the devil. But anyone looking on would say that is just stupid. Only someone with an agenda would avoid the obvious truth. Christ's authority was **clearly from God**. But it also bothered the Jewish leaders that Christ wasn't one of their card holding members. He didn't go to their seminaries. He didn't buy their books. He didn't sign their statement of faith. He completely avoided any of their so-called spiritual leadership. He needed none of it to do what He did. And that had to be very hard on them.

Fourth, we see that success in political circles is **measured pragmatically** rather than spiritually. We see all through the New Testament that the religious leaders

were obsessed with power and wealth. So success, to them, means **maintaining that system** that keeps them in power and wealth. That is their goal. And they think sacrificing Christ for that benefit is a reasonable thing to do. They never question that assumed goal. That never comes into their conversation. They never say, you know, maybe we should consider shutting down shop because we are doing a horrible job. Maybe we should surrender everything we have to Jesus, because He seems to have the endorsement of God. No. That never comes up in their business meetings. That would have been clear to anyone else, but it was not even a question to them. Because they were acting politically.

Fifth, truth is not a determining factor.

Look how they answer Christ's question.

The baptism of John--was it from heaven or from men? Answer Me.

Look at the process. Does anyone say- what do you think Joseph? Or what do you think Levi? What do we really think about this?

No, that isn't the question at all. These leaders weren't **looking for the truth** when they asked their question and they are not **considering truth** when they answer Christ's question.

Look at what they say.

³¹ **And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?' ³² But if we say, 'From men' "-- they feared the people, for all counted John to have been a prophet indeed. ³³ So they answered and said to Jesus, "We do not know."**

We need to look at that hard. This answer was crafted carefully for **its effect**, not for **its truthfulness**. These guys didn't want a debate. They didn't want correction. They didn't want to lose ground. They didn't want the truth to come out. They just wanted to dodge the consequences of the truth about themselves. We can't hardly go farther without asking ourselves the question, where do we do this?

Where in our relationships with God and with our spouses and with our parents and with our brothers and sisters in Christ do we reach this point? Where do we decide to answer a question with what will create the best situation for me rather than what is the truth? This is not to say that we owe all the truth to all the people. We see in our text that Jesus did not answer the question he was asked. There are times when prudence and discernment and wisdom are called for. But we must be very careful we don't become like the Pharisees, where we weigh what we say for its effect rather than for its truth.

How often we avoid the ministry we so desperately need by giving answers that will avoid exposing ourselves. How often our answers are aimed at creating a false perception than revealing a true reality. Our hearts really are the trickiest people we know.

What truth are we hiding this morning from people we know we can trust? What truth are we hiding from the people that God gave us to help us to overcome?

Now let's look at the realities of this situation. The religious leaders try to set a trap. The trap is in regard to Christ's answer of **who gave Him the authority** to do what He is doing. And this trap has probably been fueled by the fact that Christ just shut down a **major income center** for the religious elite.

If Christ says that **God has given Him the authority** to do what He is doing, which is obviously the truth, the leaders would have used their political power to get Jesus accused of blasphemy, for which they were allowed by the Hebrew law to kill Christ. This would have provided them an excuse in the minds of most Jewish citizens, if the claim were true, to have Christ killed by the Romans, however that needed to be accomplished. And they could use this charge to change public opinion against Christ. So that was the trap.

Now Jesus had already told them by what authority He did things. So it isn't like He was **afraid** of them or their opinion. But He was not **required** to step into their trap. He knew they were not sincere followers asking a sincere question. They want to kill Him and Christ is not going to help them do that.

So Christ very shrewdly asks them a question in return. He brings up the authority of John the Baptist. It is the perfect question. If they say that John the Baptist had the authority of God, then the religious leaders condemn themselves for not receiving Christ. John the Baptist endorsed Christ.

If they say John the Baptist was acting under the influence of the devil, the people are going to revolt. Because they knew that John the Baptist was of God. What Christ did with His question was display the fact that **the religious leaders were not fit to lead**. They, by their own admission, did not have the ability **to discern** if John the Baptist was sent by God. Immediately anyone in the crowd should have had the ability to know that the Jewish leaders were charlatans. They were reprobates. They were fools who were not sent by God. Because they could not discern the simplest things, the most elementary things.

Now we looked at political leadership. Now how about spiritual leadership? Let's look at Christ. How did His leadership differ?

First, Christ never looked to the crowds to determine what He would say. He never concerned Himself with the popularity of what He was saying.

John 8:37-47 (NKJV)

³⁷ "I know that you are Abraham's descendants, but you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. ³⁸ I speak what I have seen with My Father, and you do what you have seen with your father." ³⁹ They answered and said to Him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham. ⁴⁰ But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this. ⁴¹ You do the deeds of your father." Then they said to Him, "We were not born of fornication; we have one Father--God." ⁴² Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me. ⁴³ Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. ⁴⁴ You are of *your* father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and *does not* stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *resources*, for he is a liar and the father of it. ⁴⁵ But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me. ⁴⁶ Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me? ⁴⁷ He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God."

We see here that Christ speaks the things that His Father says. Christ's source of speech was nothing like the religious rulers of His day. He spoke the truth. Sometimes He withheld the truth. But it was not because He was afraid of its affect. He was not trying to hide it for his selfish benefit. He knew that telling the truth would not help the good but would only aid the evil.

Jesus clearly told people that He was given authority by God. But He was not going to say that in this situation. So we see it is not the truth He was withholding **for fear of the people**. But He was withholding the truth from those who were **not seeking the truth**.

Spiritual leaders tell the truth because **it is** the truth. They don't take surveys of popular opinion. They don't care if it is going to make them unpopular. They don't care if it is going to cut down their funding source. And they don't care if it is going to make the fur fly in their relationships. Truth is disturbing. Truth is disruptive. And while not every truth needs told at every time, there is much truth that must be told.

I saw a news clip this week where Voddie Baucham was being interviewed on a news show in Texas during the time when Sarah Palin was running for office. He is a Baptist pastor in Texas. The news caster asked Voddie if he thought it was a good thing that feminism was growing a foothold in Christian circles. He said this. **No I do not. Not at all. We're about the gospel. The culture doesn't dictate truth. The gospel's what dictates truth. My job is not to be a political pundant or a political activist. My job is to be a pastor and proclaim the truth of the gospel as clearly as I possibly can.** Then the people on the show started making fun of him and his outdated views on women's roles. He went on to say, **my job is not to translate into working class families. My job is to be honest with the text. And the text says,** and then he goes on to quote scripture. And he says **"I will not violate the teaching of the text in order to somehow sound more appropriate to the culture. I am a herald of the truth of the gospel. And my job is to teach the gospel according to what the authors have said. Not according to what I think the culture wants to hear.**

This guy is my hero. That is spiritual leadership.

True spiritual leadership only cares about accurately representing God. They may not like conflict any more than the next guy. They may not like rejection any more than the next guy. They may not like being controversial or being misunderstood. They may not like a lot of things that come with representing God. But they are unwilling to sell out the truth for anything the world has to offer.

True spiritual leadership tells people what they **need to hear** in spite of what **they want to hear**. They represent **God no matter how high the price is for doing so**. They don't refer to polls. They don't factor in what it will do to attendance or ratings or popularity. Cool is not a factor to these people. They know that they will answer **only to God** and they live accordingly.

The beauty of true spiritual leadership is that it is much simpler. There is no burden to be cool or sophisticated. One doesn't need to be quick on one's feet. One doesn't even need to be all that creative. He or she only needs to know what **God wants** and **do it** and **proclaim it**.

Wisdom will show us that we don't need to reveal truth to everyone who asks. Some will want to know truth only to harm us. Christ was not quick to reveal truth to those folks. But sincere seekers Christ was fairly quick to reveal truth to. Sometimes He would test them. But He would always give them what they needed to follow Him.

So true spiritual leadership has a lot less considerations. We can look to God and ask What do you want?. That is all we really need to know. Now, at the end of our passage Matthew adds something that Mark doesn't.

Matthew 21:28-32 (NKJV)

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.

We have to keep this text in context. Jesus gave it to show the Pharisees their own failure. That is what the parable is about.

In our family we found that some of our kids would be **very agreeable** about doing their chores, but they were **very slow** in getting them done. And we had children that would **fight us tooth and nail**, but at the end of the day their chores **were done**. It was easy to like the ones who showed the least defiance more. But it was unfair. **Performance** is what matters in the end. It doesn't matter what you say. At the end of the day **what you do** proves more of what you are. That is what this parable is about. The religious leaders had all the talk. They postured themselves as being the ones who would get things done. But we find they weren't at all interested in doing what God says.

But we have the whores and the tax collectors. They appear to care nothing about what God says about **how to live**. They appear to have no concern about what God wants. If you were playing the video you would get the impression that they had no chance at all with God. But they seem to **turn on a dime** and suddenly they **care intensely** about pleasing God. They want to honor Him. They want to follow Him. And they will do anything for Him.

It is interesting that Jesus brings John the Baptist into this discussion. The rulers were those in the parables saying, yes we will serve you. Yes we will prepare the way for the Messiah to take over. Yes we care about your kingdom.

But then John came and they hated Him. They rejected him. They would not listen to Him.

But the lowlife of the society came to John and repented of their sin. They showed themselves to be the true followers of God.

That should have had an effect. It should have driven the leaders to humility. They too should have repented. But they, instead, continued to remind God of all the sins that they had not committed.

This morning, where do **we** stand? Are we the ones that talk all day long about serving God, but we refuse to obey in the simple tests he puts in front of us day to day? Or are we the ones that **don't really look all that promising**, but we just can't seem to find a way to live in disobedience?

Do we look at the polls and measure our every response against **what the best outcome will be for us**? Or do we simply inquire about what God wants and do it?

In our relationships with each other, and others, do we choose carefully what we say, measuring only the effect it will have in producing for us a peaceful profitable environment? Do we poll our minds to see what people want to hear before we speak?

Or do we only inquire with God to find out what the people need to hear?

Are we leading our families and those we have influence with **politically**? Or do we lead them **spiritually**, saying what **God says** without regard for the price that might cost us?

Spiritual leadership delivers the truth, no matter what the consequences of delivering that truth are. Spiritual leadership must have discernment, but not use discernment for lowering the cost of delivering the truth. We must use it for determining what God wants said and to whom. Spiritual leadership will not back down in the face of conflict.

We need to look at our leadership decisions this week.

Where are we **twisting** or **withholding the truth** for our own advantage, **to keep the peace**, or to **avoid a negative response** or to **gain a positive advantage**? That is not spiritual leadership. **Tactfully** telling truth may be a part of spiritual leadership. Choosing the **best time** to say it may be spiritual leadership. But withholding truth that needs told is not spiritual leadership.

I think this is the application we need to make from our text this morning.