

Title: God says, that's Who!
Text: Luke 20.1-8
Theme: The authority of God in Christ
Series: Luke
Aim: I aim to help my people understand, love and submit to the glorious authority of Christ.

2 Samuel 23 records the last words of David who writes:

*The Spirit of the LORD speaks by me;
his word is on my tongue.
The God of Israel has said to me:
When one rules justly over men,
ruling in the fear of God,
he dawns on them like the morning light,
like the sun shining forth on a cloudless morning,
like rain that makes grass to sprout from the earth."*

If you have ever been under good authority, you know the blessing it can be. If you have experience with bad authority, you know the grief, confusion, frustration and contempt it can cause. David describes good authority in terms of beauty, delight, contentment and prosperity. When one rules justly over men (he does what is right, no matter what, he applies the rules consistently) and does it because he is accountable to God, that kind of authority dawns on people like the morning light. David tells us that good authority is like a beautiful sunrise and like the sun shining forth on a cloudless morning, which causes one to say, "wow, what a beautiful day." But there is more. Good rain causes grass to sprout from the earth. Just think of the colors that David has just referenced; greens from the grass, blue from the cloudless sky, reds and orange from the morning light and shining sun. Good authority can be settling, grounding, safe and beautiful.

Blessed is the family, the job, the church, the organization, the municipality that has such authority. And yet, the story of our world is the story how authority is so often abused, or when there is good authority, how it is rejected. This is the tragedy in Luke's gospel. Fearful leaders team up and scheme up to get rid of Christ.

Read Text:

In the end of chapter 19, Luke sets us up for what to expect. Jesus teaches, the crowds are engaged and listening, and the leaders are threatened and want to destroy Christ. What follows (chapters 20 and 21) are the specific accounts of what Jesus says and how it arouses the anger of the leaders until chapter 22 where they figure out how they are going to attempt to get rid of Jesus. So, we need to get used to the chief priests, scribes, elders, Sadducees and Pharisees who comprise the various groups who are uniting in their hatred of Christ and desire to get rid of him. These groups represent people who trust in themselves but their trust is sadly misplaced.

Look at verse 1. Notice all of the “who’s” in this text. Let’s name them: Jesus, people, chief priests, scribes and elders. Now the what. What is happening. Jesus is teaching, the people are listening. And the chief priests, scribes and elders come up to Jesus. That is they interrupt him. Now the “what.” What is Jesus teaching and preaching? He is preaching the gospel. This is what he has been preaching all along. At the end of Luke 4 Jesus is preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God and he says that this is what he has come to do. So, here he is still preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God. That is the good news that God is going to set up his kingdom on earth and will live with and rule over those who accept him. As I have been repeating week after week, and particularly last Sunday, this is the story of the entire Bible. There is the Kingdom of God vs. the Anti-Kingdom. The Anti-Kingdom is the sum total of all of the kingdoms of man that exist for their own glory.

Here is what life looks like in man’s kingdoms. Person or Group #1 has influence (money, connections, athletic skills, intellectual skills or boss). Person or Group #2 needs money, connections, athletic skills, intellectual skills or a job. Person #1 is also immoral and known to be disgusting to those who are close to them. Since Person or Group #2 needs Person or Group #1, Person or Group #2 (Company, political party, college athletic or educational department, employee, even religious org.) is tempted to ignore and cover-up because they need or want the influence. When you get on the inside you find out how much covering up goes on and how decisions are made based on what the fall-out will be, not on whether something is right or wrong. This is life in Man’s Kingdoms. And person or group #1 believe that because they are the ones with influence, they are the law or above the law, even God’s laws. Therefore, they are used to doing whatever they want. They are used to people needing their influence. But God’s Kingdom is not built on people who are large and in charge. It is built on Christ and his gospel, which is why Christ and his gospel threaten man’s kingdoms. It is also why Christ’s church and gospel are not dependent on, nor advanced by engaging with the methods of man’s kingdoms.

These leaders in Luke 20 thought they were in charge but Jesus was not impressed and they were threatened. Jesus was exposing them, and they were at risk of losing their influence. The chief priests, scribes with the elders came up and they challenged Jesus.

1. What kind of people are threatened by the Kingdom of God? (1)

The answer is pretty simple: The kind of people who are threatened by the Kingdom of God are people who try to be their own king and want to rule others. In God’s kingdom, God shares his authority. That is how are called to view authority. Look for ways to share it. The last person you want in charge is the person who does everything he can to be in charge. Jesus said that if you want to lead, you have to follow. You want to be first, be last. The best rulers are servants. Being the boss is not leading by telling everyone what to do so you get your own way, it is leading by example. But Man’s kingdoms are marked by people who suck in authority and wield it to punish anyone who disagrees with them.

In the OT, there were 3 primary leadership roles that influenced the nation; prophet, priest and king. The role of the prophet was to represent God to the people by giving (preaching or writing) them God's Word. The priest was to represent the people before God. The priests were from the tribe of Levi who did not have their own land, but lived among the tribes in order to teach them God's Law, raise sheep for and take their turns in serving in the Tabernacle and then the Temple. However, by the time of Christ, the chief priests had become a collection of men who used this office to enrich themselves and exalt themselves. Instead of representing the people before God, they tried to be God over the people and use the people for to enhance their glory and comforts. Most of the chief priests were in the Sadducee tradition who did not believe anything in the Old Testament beyond Genesis through Deuteronomy. They did not believe in the resurrection or in miracles. They were often at odds with the Scribes who were generally in the Pharisees camp. Together, the Sadducees and the Pharisees made up the Sanhedrin, which was the ruling body that Rome left in place to take care of domestic things. Rome wanted two things: Taxes and peace.

Jesus was seen as a threat by the rulers because the gospel of the Kingdom of God exposed these men for what they were and Jesus did not cooperate with allegiance to their kingdoms. This is currently taking place in China. President Xi Jinping has been increasing his efforts to stop Christianity because Christianity embraces God above the state. Christians do not organize armies and create political movements that seek to undermine the state and are some of the best citizens in that they do not take bribes or participate in corruption. But they are still a threat because Jinping wants his kingdom to be the ultimate kingdom.

Jesus drove these guys crazy because he refused to pretend that they were all that. How do you respond when people question you or disagree with you? Does that threaten you? How do you respond when you don't get your way? Or when you do not get the respect you want? Is that a problem for you? It clearly was to these guys, so much so, that they all got together scheduled to show up together in their uniforms, pomp and attire came as a small army in order to publicly intimidate Jesus.

Man's kings and kingdoms are empty, shallow and temporary. These men were hollow leaders and they hated Jesus for exposing that. Contrast that with the account in Luke 7, where the Roman centurion in Capernaum had a servant who was about to die. This centurion was so concerned about his servant (good authority) that he sent word to Jesus to see if he could come and heal his servant. Then the centurion thought that his request was too presumptuous, so he sent some friends to request that if Jesus would just say the word, then he knew his servant would be healed. Jesus marvels at this! This is a beautiful picture of authority. The Roman centurion occupies a position of authority and he uses it to care for his servant and even to build a synagogue for the community. He also recognizes that there is another authority that has a power that he does not understand. He is in awe of it, and respects Christ. If only these Jewish leaders would have done the same. But, they are so hung up on and threatened by their own hollow authority that they refuse to recognize the true One before them.

2. People who challenge Christ fail to challenge themselves. (2-7)

These guys are in a pickle. They do not have true authority. Rome could take it away. The people could rebel. Jesus is exposing it. But their position is their identity and glory and Jesus is not impressed with them. Look at the bondage that these men are in. They all got together and came up with a plan to challenge Christ in front of the crowd. They anticipated what they thought Jesus would say and no doubt had a rebuttal all planned. So, they executed their plan of trapping Christ and then they walked right into their own trap.

They demand Jesus tell them where he got his authority from? Jesus does not play their game. These men have already disqualified themselves as leaders by their rejection of John the Baptist. If they refused to believe that John was from God, then of course they are going to reject the Messiah that John came to prepare the way for. So Jesus says in response, tell you what, I'm going to ask you a question. These guys were not prepared for that. They were the ones who were large and in charge. They were the ones who called this meeting and were demanding answers. They were the ones who thought they could demand a response from Christ. But is that true? No. God does not answer to us. God owes us nothing and yet gives us everything we need, not necessarily everything we want.

So, Jesus asks, was the baptism of John from heaven or from man? Read verse 5, what do you see? Does anyone go, "hmmm, you know, that is actually a good question. I think we need to be willing to consider the possibility that he has a point here. That John dude was a straight shooter and we didn't like it at the time, but he may have been right. What if the baptism of John was from heaven and we were too full of ourselves to admit it? Do you see any of that? What do you read? These men are not able to freely discuss the question based on its merit. Immediately they frame their possible responses based on the public's reaction. When your answers are pre-determined by the anticipated reaction of others, you are not in a healthy conversation because you are not free to speak the truth. This is what we hate about so much of politics. What do the people want to hear?

This is so insightful. Verses 5-7 take us inside the closed room conversation. Here we get to see who these guys really are and what they really believe. There is no pursuit of truth. There is no willingness to examine the evidence. There is fear of their duplicity being exposed. They come off looking really bad, because they are.

Beloved, do you see what I try to do when preaching through these accounts? We love Jesus. Therefore, we naturally want to identify with him and defend him in these conflicts. Our instinctive response is to want to scream at these men and say, "who do you think you are asking Jesus who he thinks he is?" We get irritated and rightly so. But we need to know this about our own hearts. We are all born with a desire to be our own God and get our own way. That desire is still present even after salvation waiting for the full effects of sanctification to kill it. So, before I jump on the Jesus side of the field, I need to look for the log in my own eye. Is this me? Do I answer people based on how I think they will react, or am I free to speak the truth? There are plenty of examples of people talking out of both sides of their mouth based on

their audience and of course people who will use their words like a dumpster fire to destroy everything.

So they answered that they did not know where it came from.

Hypocrisy has taken away the voice of many. They can't answer Jesus with the truth because they are unwilling to face it themselves. Think about the position they are in. Jesus exposes them so they can see themselves, face themselves, repent and embrace Christ. That would come with a cost. Anyone who does that would likely be censured out of the Sanhedrin, run out of their synagogue and ostracized in society. However, what is all of that compared to eternity? What is all of that compared to being able to sleep at night with a clear conscience? What is all of that compared to being with Christ, who when you hear him in huddled conversations, there is no political expediency, word-smithing, spinning or walking back comments. Instead, in Christ there is life-giving, soul-feeding light and truth. What a contrast.

If these leaders don't know if John's ministry was legit or not. That means that they are saying that it is possible that John was right. And John endorsed Jesus. How then can they know that Jesus is wrong? If they really don't know, then John could be right and if John was right then Jesus was right. These guys are empty. The only thing in their core, is love of self. In the end,

3. **Jesus does not answer to us, we answer to him.** (8)

Their "no comment" to Jesus is met with "no comment" in return. He owes them nothing. Later in this chapter, Jesus does actually answer the question (41-44). He is not afraid to speak the truth and he is not trying to find an excuse not to say it. He knows that he is dealing with hard-hearted people and he is simply not going to indulge them and play their game.

I think there is some good wisdom here as well. These men were not interested in the truth, they just wanted to play a game of "gotcha." You have likely been in a similar situation. There is some wisdom to simply asking the person, is there anything that I can say that will satisfy you? If not, then there is probably no reason to continue the conversation. Perhaps another time when we can actually make some progress.

In the end, Jesus does not answer these men because he does not answer to them. They and all of us, answer to him. That is the reality of the hierarchy, the authority of God, but it is also an incredibly beautiful reality. Who would you rather have as a boss? These guys who do not know how to speak the truth or Jesus, who will die so that you can live? In just a few days, the nation of Israel faced a choice. Who will they follow? These hollow leaders, or Christ? Tragically, they picked the ones who could not defend them. Please do not make the same mistake.