

By What Authority? (Luke 20:1-19)

We are studying the gospel of Luke. Today, we will look at 20:1-19. The title is "By what authority?"

1. By what authority?

1-8

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. ² "Tell us by what authority you are doing these things," they said. "Who gave you this authority?" ³ He replied, "I will also ask you a question. Tell me, ⁴ John's baptism--was it from heaven, or from men?" ⁵ They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Why didn't you believe him?' ⁶ But if we say, 'From men,' all the people will stone us, because they are persuaded that John was a prophet." ⁷ So they answered, "We don't know where it was from." ⁸ Jesus said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things."

Jesus was teaching in the temple. The chief priests and the teachers of the law asked, "By what authority are you doing these things?"

Let's first think, what are "these things". To find this out, let's go back to the previous section.

Luke 19:45-47

⁴⁵ Then he entered the temple area and began driving out those who were selling. ⁴⁶ "It is written," he said to them, "'My house will be a house of prayer' ; but you have made it 'a den of robbers.'" ⁴⁷ Every day he was teaching at the temple. But the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the leaders among the people were trying to kill him.

Jesus entered the temple, drove out those who were selling, and he was teaching the good news to the people. Not just once, but every day.

Luke wrote here "those who were selling." John, Matthew and Mark described them with more details, "men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and money changers". (John 2:14, Matt 21:12, Mark 11:15)

There is a place called “the Court of the Gentiles” inside the outer gates of the temple in Jerusalem.¹ Any foreigner who wants to worship the Lord can go as far as the outer court. There, those who sell cattle, sheep and doves for sacrifice, and money changers opened the market.

It is written about selling cattle, sheep and doves for sacrifice in Deuteronomy 14:24 and the following. It is not easy to bring animals for sacrifice from a distant place. Also there are many regulations for the animals offered as sacrifices. (Levi 22:17-25) If the sacrifice is not accepted, there is no point for them to come to the temple all this way. So, there are people in the temple who sell animals that match the regulation. People will buy them even if they may be a little expensive.

As for money exchange, in those days, Roman currency circulated. But in the law of Moses, shekel, the unit of Israel is used. (Ex 30:15) If they wanted to observe the law of Moses literally, they had to exchange the money into shekel.

So, selling cattle, sheep, doves and doing money exchange in the temple is not a dishonest business or taking advantage of people. Originally, they were the means to observe the law of Moses.

However, the temple was made a den of robbers. So, Jesus drove them out from the temple. But no one will stop their business so easily just because they are driven out once. Moreover, they believe they are doing it for the people to observe the law of Moses. Most likely they had a permission for their business in the temple from religious leaders. So every day they come to the temple, and were driven out. And they come again the following day, and were driven out.

Jesus entered the temple, drove out the merchants, and taught the gospel to the people, not just once, but every day. Of course, the chief priests and the teachers of the law were unhappy. So they questioned Jesus, “By what authority are you doing these things?”

Jesus didn’t answer them directly. Instead, he asked question; “Was John’s Baptism from heaven or from men?”

Jesus didn’t say this to escape from their trap and to drive them into a corner and drive them away. Jesus received their question and shows them the important truth that he is Christ and his authority as Christ.

¹ http://www.oocities.org/templegod_ark/

To understand this, let's look at John the Baptist.

The work of John is closely related to Jesus' nature as Messiah, Christ. John called himself the voice of one calling in the desert, "Make straight the way for the Lord." His role was to point to Christ, and prepare the people to receive Him. (John 1:19-34)

As John's influence became greater, people from all over Judea came to him to be baptized. There were even many Pharisees and Sadducees among those who came to him. (Matt 3:3-7)

People wondered if John might possibly be the Christ. (Luke 3:15) But he said, "I am not the Christ, but I am sent ahead of him," and he pointed Jesus and said, "He must become greater and I must become less." (John 3:28-30)

Jesus asked if John's baptism was from heaven or from men. Here Jesus implies that John's authority is from heaven and the authority of Jesus, whom John pointed as Messiah, is also from heaven. The chief priests and the teachers of the law couldn't deny John's authority was from heaven. And they also had no way to deny Jesus' authority was from heaven. But they didn't want to take it. If we notice there is contradiction in denying Jesus, but ignore it, then we will never be able to find out the truth.

Is John's baptism from heaven or from men? If they say "from heaven", then they must accept his authority and also authority of Jesus whom John pointed out. They don't want to do that. But they also cannot say it is from men. People are persuaded that John was a prophet, so if they say it is from men, they will get people's antipathy. So they try to escape from Jesus' challenge by answering "We don't know."

When they said, "We don't know," not just Jesus but they themselves and even the crowd knew that they were dishonest. Jesus showed their hypocrisy openly. When they answered "We don't know," their real problem became clear. That is not the "authority" but the "submission". They say in order to accept Jesus, they need more proof, and they demand more proof. But what they are lacking is not the proof, but "love for God and submission to his will." Those who won't accept won't accept no matter what you say. Those who try to deny will deny, no matter what they see. That is the same today.

When they asked Jesus, they weren't trying to find the truth. They didn't ask the question because they desire to know more about Jesus. They were looking for something to criticize Jesus and opportunity to attack him. By doing

that, they tried to satisfy themselves by making others recognize them.

The chief priests clearly had their opinions, but as they were afraid of the crowd, they didn't tell about it. They didn't respond to Jesus honestly. This is more serious than having wrong opinions because of wrong understanding.

There is no one who understands the Bible, nor knows about the kingdom of God like Jesus. Jesus will not desert us just because our understanding is wrong. He will teach us the truth, and lead us to the right understanding. But if we don't respond to Jesus honestly we remain the same. And also no matter how well we understand the Bible in our head, if we don't respond to it honestly, Jesus cannot lead us. The matter is not the knowledge of the Bible, but is love for God and submission to his will.

Jesus drove out those who were selling cattle, sheep and doves, and money changers from the temple, and he preached the gospel about the kingdom of God. This implies several things.

One thing is the mission for gentiles. In the days of Jesus, there were already some gentiles who believe and worship God of the Bible. They also came to Jerusalem. They entered the temple, but they could only reach up to the outer court because of the regulation. However, the place, where gentiles were supposed to worship God, became the dens of robbers, the place for serving money. It was the chief priests and the teachers of the law who left the situation like that. Their awareness of mission for gentile was so little, probably none. Jesus cleared away the situation. The gospel is not just limited to a specific people or a specific area. But the gospel is for all people.

The other thing is the liberation of worship. As we saw before, they needed those selling cattle, sheep, dove and the money changers in the temple, in order to observe the law of Moses literally and rigidly. Jesus drove them out from the temple. Now the time has come when they can worship God without them.

At the well of Sychar, one Samaritan woman said to Jesus, "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus answered, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. A time is coming when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth." (John 4:20-23)

It is not because we observe the law literally and rigidly that we can

worship God. But we worship God in spirit and truth, because by the gospel we were saved, born again and have become people of God, and his word is inscribed in our hearts. (Heb 8:10) The Father seeks that kind of worshippers. Now is the time to worship Him in spirit and truth. (John 4:23)

2. By the authority of the Father

9-16

⁹ He went on to tell the people this parable: "A man planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time. ¹⁰ At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants so they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. ¹¹ He sent another servant, but that one also they beat and treated shamefully and sent away empty-handed. ¹² He sent still a third, and they wounded him and threw him out. ¹³ "Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.' ¹⁴ "But when the tenants saw him, they talked the matter over. 'This is the heir,' they said. 'Let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' ¹⁵ So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. ¹⁶ "What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others." When the people heard this, they said, "May this never be!"

In this parable, the owner represents God, the vineyard is the people of Israel (Isaiah 5:7), and the farmers are the chief priests and the teachers of the law.

The farmers insulted the servants, they wouldn't give the share of the harvest to the owner, and on top of that they killed his son, and tried to take his inheritance as theirs. This clearly shows what the priests and the teachers of the law were like at that time.

The primary work of the priests and the teachers of the law is to teach people the word of God and lead them to God.^{2,3} If the temple becomes a den of

² Priests are official ministers or worship leaders for the nation of Israel who represented the people before God and performed special religious ceremonies to atone for sins. (Lev 6:8-10) They also teach the law to people. (Neh 8:7-8) *Children's Ministry Resource Bible*, Nelson, 1993, p.1672

³ In the New Testament period the scribes were learned teachers and authoritative leaders, who were drawn from the priests and Levites, as well as the common people. <https://bible.org/seriespage/scribes>

robbers, it is their job to correct the situation. But on the contrary, they were blaming Jesus who did that job. Both the chief priests and the teachers of the law didn't think at all they were wrong.

If they listen to the parable, everyone knows that the attitude of the farmers and what they did were wrong. People who were listening said, "May this never be!" Jesus clearly showed the people what kind of mistakes the teachers of the law were making.

The teachers of the law noticed that Jesus had spoken this parable against them. But they didn't know what was wrong about them. So they tried to arrest and kill Jesus, just like the farmers killed the owner's son in the parable.

The son in the parable represents Jesus. Here Jesus also indirectly answers the question, "By what authority are you doing these things?" The son is essentially different from the servants. He has the authority like the Father. He is not like a prophet who proclaimed the word received from God. His word itself has the authority. He is the last and greatest messenger. (Heb 1:2)

The scene in which the son was thrown out of the vineyard and killed describes very well how Jesus was rejected by Israel, handed over to the gentiles, and crucified as a criminal.

Let's make a brief conclusion. God once entrusted God's people to the priests and the teacher of the law. God gave them responsibility to teach people God's word and lead them to God. Israel was supposed to follow the Lord and be blessed. By watching it, the gentiles were to be drawn to the Lord and be added to God's people. However, just like the farmers ignore the servants sent by the owner, the chief priests and the teachers of the law didn't listen to God's prophets. Just like the farmers killed the son, they arrest Jesus, handed him over to Pilate and crucified him. But that is not the end of the story. The owner came back to the vineyard, killed those farmers and gave the vineyard to others.

3. By the authority of the King of kings and the Lord of lords

17-19

¹⁷ Jesus looked directly at them and asked, "Then what is the meaning of that which is written: " 'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone' ? ¹⁸

Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed." ¹⁹ The teachers of the law and the chief priests looked for a way to arrest him immediately, because they knew he had spoken this parable against them. But they were afraid of the people.

Isaiah 8:13-15

¹³ The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread, ¹⁴ and he will be a sanctuary; but for both houses of Israel he will be a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. And for the people of Jerusalem he will be a trap and a snare. ¹⁵ Many of them will stumble; they will fall and be broken, they will be snared and captured."

The Lord himself is the stone on which unfaithful Israel will be broken to pieces.

The son the farmers threw out and killed and the stone the builders rejected both refer to Jesus. But the death of Jesus doesn't end in death. Jesus resurrected. Just like the rejected stone becomes the capstone, the death of Jesus shows His glory and victory. And he will come back as the King of kings and the Lord of lords. Those who stumble over Jesus or reject Jesus will be broken to pieces. Those who try to pull Jesus down will be crushed and a total smashup. Just like the stone the builders rejected will be in the very important position at the completion of the temple, Jesus will receive praise, honor and glory at the completion of the temple. (Rev 5:13)

"By what authority are you doing these things?" By the authority of the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the Lord was putting in order the temple. The Lord is still getting ready the temple, His church, His people.

When the temple was completed, King Solomon prayed like this:

⁴¹ "As for the foreigner who does not belong to your people Israel but has come from a distant land because of your name -- ⁴² for men will hear of your great name and your mighty hand and your outstretched arm-- when he comes and prays toward this temple, ⁴³ then hear from heaven, your dwelling place, and do whatever the foreigner asks of you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your own people Israel, and may know that this house I have built bears your Name. (1 King 8:41-43)

How do the foreigners know the holy God? First, they will see the Israelite society, and notice that it is consist of totally different moral standards and values from theirs. They will be surprised at their wisdom and understanding. And they will find that the wisdom and understanding comes from the law of God. (Duet 4:6)

When they come to know the people of Israel better, they realize that the Israelites worship God who is totally different from their gods. They realize the God of Israel is always near them. And they feel the nature of God which is pervading the life styles of Israelites. And soon, they will also like to know their God and draw near to God and start to worship Him. (Deut 4:7)

"Whatever God is doing in and through Israel itself must ultimately impact the nations, for that is the reason for Israel's existence in the first place."⁴ God longs to reconcile people to himself, not only Israelites also all nations. "He does so is by living in the midst of his own people in such a way that they attract others."⁵ They will become a model community of God's character through doing righteousness and justice.

After Jesus' cross and resurrection, after Pentecost, who is carrying the mission? It's Church. Each local church is supposed to be a model community of God's character in the area. We, NLIF are one of them. We are a part of His Mission.

The Lord says, "I am very jealous for Jerusalem. I will return to Jerusalem with mercy, and there my house will be rebuilt. It is not by social power nor by human ability, but by my Spirit." (Zech 1:14, 1:16, 4:6)

Let's expect the Lord's revival, spiritual awakening will happen in churches all over this country this year. And for that, let's pray it will start with us, this church. Pray that we will be filled with the Lord's Spirit, full of His life and will live by His power. "Experiencing the Life, changing lives."

⁴ Christopher Wright, "The Mission Of God's People", Zondervan, 2010, p.74

⁵ Ibid, p.129