

“And In This Corner”

Luke 20:1-8

Perhaps one of the little known facts about Carl is that during college needing some extra credits he took an ornithology class. The class had over 200 students studying all varieties of birds. For the final exam the professor had on his desk a stuffed bird. However the only part exposed was its legs. A cloth was draped over the rest concealing what kind of bird it was. As students took their seats the professor explained that they would each get the opportunity to march by the desk and examine the features of the bird’s legs and then describe in writing what they knew about the bird – its distinct features, habitat, migration pattern, feeding habits and so on.

Carl took his turn gazing at the revealed features and like the rest of the class set out writing his exam. Time went by quickly as he wrote and wrote and wrote. The hour was up and the professor called for all the students to put down their pens and turn in their exam on his desk. But Carl sat there writing and writing and writing. Only he and the professor remained in the lecture hall as everyone else filed out. Fifteen minutes passed and the professor looking up noticed Carl still writing and writing. He told Carl to turn in his paper. Carl kept writing and writing and writing. Another fifteen minutes passed and the professor now quite put out demanded that Carl turn in his exam or he would fail the course. Carl put down his pen, collected his belongings and went down to the professor’s desk.

Standing there with exam in hand he asked the professor if he knew who he was. The professor responded by saying he couldn’t possibly know who he was with over 200 students in class. Carl said “good” picked up the pile of exams that lay on the desk and stuffed his in the middle of the pile and placed them all back on the desk for the professor. He turned and began to walk out of the auditorium. Exasperated at his actions, he asked Carl who he

thought he was. Carl turned to face the professor, lifted up his pants to expose his legs and asked “you tell me?”

Okay, so that isn’t a true story, but it serves to illustrate our passage today found in Luke 20:1-8 where I invite you to turn this morning.

I’ll just go ahead and say it now, the response of the religious leaders to what Jesus did a day early by cleaning out the Temple led them to ask Him “just who do you think you are?”

Here’s what I would like us to consider today.

An accusatory reaction

An authoritative response

An absolute rejection

I. AN ACCUSATORY REACTION – v. 1-2

Some scholars believe that this is Tuesday of Passion Week, while others believe that it is Wednesday. Luke only records that it was on one of those days during the week. It followed the triumphal entry into Jerusalem and the cleansing of the temple of those who were turning it into a Kmart blue light special.

Last week I made this statement challenging us to consider what we do with the Word of God. I said “*when the Word of God is neglected, it is easy for the Temple of God to be neglected.*” I wasn’t referring to the physical building, although that also happened in Josiah’s day when the Temple needed some serious repairs and in the process of cleaning out the Temple they found the book of the Law that had been hidden – and might I add neglected. People were living in blatant idolatry. It was widespread in the land and practiced in the Temple. In response to what Josiah heard from the Law he repented and instituted significant reforms throughout the land beginning with a reading of the Law to the people so that they would get right with God and get rid of their idols.

I then went on to illustrate from Scripture that when we trust Christ as our Savior, we become the Temple of God and when we neglect His Word it is easy for this Temple to become filled with idols and to allow the old sin nature to continue. Things become more important to us than God, and this Temple then needs some cleaning out. The challenge for us then becomes to be in the Word, regularly, habitually. Scripture reminds us that when we devote ourselves to its study and practice through the empowering work of the Holy Spirit, the Temple will be a fit place for the worship of God who resides there.

Neglect the Word and this Temple, His Temple will be neglected. D.L. Moody put it this way: "This book will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from this book."

So which is it in your life?

The fact of the matter is that while we have the truth contained in the Word of God, we can choose whether or not to accept it. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us and throughout Jesus' ministry people either accepted that truth or rejected it. The latter group was predominantly made up of the religious leaders. We meet them here in our passage. They are the ones who confront Jesus in the Temple while He was teaching.

A. His Instruction

Throughout His ministry of three and a half years Jesus taught in a variety of settings to a variety of groups.

He taught the rich and the poor.

He taught the well and the sick.

He taught the unsuspecting and the willing.

He taught the seekers and the sinners.

He taught in homes.

He taught in synagogues.

He taught in fishing boats.

He taught along the roads of Palestine.

He taught thousands on a hillside.

He taught a Samaritan woman sitting by a well.

He taught the 12.

He taught a man in a tree.

He used any and every opportunity to teach using a variety of teaching styles from parables to paradoxes to penetrating questions.

Where ever He was and with whomever He spoke, His was a singular focus and we see it noted here in our passage. With the city swelling in preparation for the Passover many gathered in the Temple where He preached to them the Gospel.

D. L. Moody writes about a time he invited another preacher to come to his church in Chicago to preach. Every night he preached a gospel message and all the while Moody wondered why, but at the end Moody came away convinced that the gospel message must be woven in every message.

It is a reminder to the saved of our only hope resting in the finished work of Christ on the cross and then His resurrection three days later. It is a reminder that when we come to Christ we come with empty hands, we have nothing to give in exchange for His free gift of salvation, that salvation is by grace through faith alone.

It is a reminder to the unsaved that there is only one way to be saved, and that way is Christ.

In the conference I attended last year one of the speakers shared a letter he had received that brought him to tears. According to the letter, The author indicated that she had attended a recent service and said he had preached a fine message, one that was not offensive in any way to her. She was Jewish and had been invited by a friend. She thanked the Pastor for not preaching a salvation message about Jesus. The pastor was broken hearted because he had failed to present the gospel, even though it is offensive to some, even though the cross is to them who perish foolishness and to this Jew, a stumbling

block. It convinced him of the need to weave the gospel each week into his message.

We may preach on a lot of topics from the Bible like prayer, godly living, finances, loving a neighbor and any other host of messages from Scripture, but there must be interwoven into those messages the truth of the gospel – that salvation is through Christ alone. We can follow the principles of the Bible and live a good, moral life, but if we do not hear the gospel and get saved, it's pointless.

Jesus spent His remaining days with the weight of the cross and our sin bearing down heavily on Him to preach the gospel. It was not a distraction to take His mind off the inevitable pain and rejection He was to encounter. It was the reason He came – to seek and save the lost, to point them past religious behavior to a right relationship with God through His shed blood as their sacrificial Passover Lamb.

We must take our cue from Jesus who preached the gospel so that people can hear that without Christ they are destined to an eternity of separation in hell. They must hear that everyone is a sinner in need of a Savior and that Jesus is that Savior. They must hear that there is a place called heaven and there are not many ways but only one way to enter it. So shame on me if I do not invite you once again to be confronted the gospel message either to give praise for the salvation you have accepted freely from God or to ponder the life altering message of your sin and need of salvation.

After cleansing the Temple of those who were desecrating it, Jesus taught the gospel in the courtyard. We should do no less.

So let me pause and have you consider once again your need of Christ. Is He your Savior? Some are okay with the gospel message being repeated, others will have a different response. The religious leaders fall into the latter camp. What Jesus was teaching infuriated them. Those who should have been

preaching the same message were instead the ones who were opposing it. That's where we see His interruption.

B. His Interruption

Enter the religious leaders. They are identified as the chief priests, the teachers of the Law (Scribes), and the elders. Most likely it was a delegation from their group elected to be the representatives who were chosen to confront Jesus.

The chief priests would include Caiaphas who was the reigning high priest and Annas, the former high priest. Annas still held considerable influence. Included in the high priests would be the captain of the temple who was the assistant to the high priest along with some other high ranking officials.

The Scribes were the theologians tasked with the responsibility of interpreting and teaching the law and the rabbinical traditions.

Elders would include other high ranking officials either within the religious community or the city itself.

The NIV says they “came up to Him” while the KJV says they “came upon Him”. The word in the original means that they confronted Him and further implies that it was with suddenness, hostility and with evil intent.

We see the word used in Luke 21:34 where it speaks of sudden coming of judgment.

It is also used in Acts 17:5 describing how the Jews in Thessalonica attacked the house of Jason.

Take that meaning here in Luke. These religious leaders were bent on one thing and that was to disrupt the teaching of Jesus and to publicly discredit His reputation.

“Tells us by what authority You are doing these things? Who gave You this authority?”

“Just who do you think You are?”

Their question is not a lack of knowledge or even of understanding. Jesus had been very clear on that throughout His ministry. On occasion when they would challenge Him in regard to His forgiving sin, He would demonstrate His authority by performing a miracle. Every miracle was not done to showcase His divine power, but to authenticate that He was who He said He was and to validate the message of the gospel He proclaimed.

Jesus didn't need a birth certificate or a driver's license or a passport to prove His identity. Several times after Jesus spoke to crowds, the gospel writers would add that they were amazed because He spoke with authority and not like the religious leaders.

They didn't ask Him about His authority because they didn't know. It is not a question couched in a lack of knowledge. It was a question couched in willful rejection.

Their question had to do with the most recent action of clearing out the Temple. The first question dealt with the kind of authority he was using. Was He a prophet, priest or king? Is that where His authority came from? Did He have a legitimate right to exhibit such authority?

The second question dealt with who gave Him that authority. It would be akin to when Saul sought authority to go from town to town rooting out all the Christians to take them bound back to Jerusalem to be sentenced. Was Jesus acting on behalf of Himself or had He gotten authority from a group? They were looking for His credentials. They wanted to see His resume', His degrees, His certificates, His ordination papers.

It is comforting to go into a doctor's office to see hanging on the wall certificates from the institutions where degrees were given. I want to know that the person is a legitimate medical professional and not some crack pot pretending to practice medicine.

Jesus didn't need to do that. His miracles were proof enough and they had rejected Him. John records that He came to His own people and they rejected Him.

The rejection by the religious leaders was not because of a lack of knowledge but an unwillingness to accept the truth.

I want to say that again. Their rejection was not because of a lack of knowledge where if they were more sufficiently taught they would believe but rather their rejection was an unwillingness to accept the truth that He was God in the flesh, the Messiah.

A person who goes into a store and commits retail fraud by shoplifting can't plead ignorance because they didn't know there would be consequences. There are plenty of warning signs around indicating that shoplifters will be prosecuted.

A person who gets pulled over by the police for speeding in a construction zone can't be surprised when the sentence includes the fine being doubled and time spent in jail. There are plenty of warning signs.

They were unwilling to accept the truth of the warnings that were given. Jesus clearly said who He was and where He had come from and so should not be surprised at the consequences for refusing to believe Him. They would not accept the truth and consequently will be judged.

We can't say we weren't warned. When someone rejects Christ it is because of an unwillingness to accept the truth. Some may argue about those who never hear the gospel but Romans 1:19-20 is clear: "What may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them...He has been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse."

Here's a thought: to not accept Christ is to reject Him. We can be a church going, Bible thumping, hymn singing, pragmatic prayer, but still have not accepted Christ. There will be those who will hear Jesus say depart in spite of all their religious activity.

The religious leaders confronted Jesus in an accusatory manner and wanted to know where His authority came from. They wanted to publicly defame Him and snap His popularity with the people. They expected Him to claim that His authority came from God in which case they could try Him for blasphemy.

Jesus turned the tables on them. He answered their question with a question. In the next two verses we see an authoritative response.

II. AN AUTHORITATIVE RESPONSE – v. 3-4

One author said this about what was taking place. “They were trying to push the Lord into a dilemma so that no matter how He answered, He would be in trouble. If He said that He had no authority then He was in trouble for acting like a prophet and doing the things He had done in the Temple. If He said that His authority came from God, then He would be in trouble with the Romans, who were always looking out for trouble, especially during religious holidays when thousands of pilgrims were gathered.”

They weren't interested in the truth, but only the consequences and Jesus asked them a question to put them on the defense. He didn't directly answer their question because they were not interested in the truth. So He asked them a question. Where did John's baptism come from? This was an indirect answer to their question on His authority.

So where did His authority come from?

Matthew 11:27

Matthew 28:18

John 3:35

John 13:3

John 17:1-2

But Jesus wasn't the only one to make that claim about Him. Other New Testament writers did as well.

I Corinthians 15:27

Ephesians 1:27

Philippians 2:9-11

I Peter 3:22

If His followers weren't aware, He made it abundantly clear just before His ascension when He stated that “all authority had been given to Him.” That authority came from the Father.

There are two words used in the New Testament that translate authority.

The first is *dunamis* and refers to authority in the sense of power or ability.

We see this in the authority or power He had at creation to bring into existence the universe from nothing.

We see it on the Sea of Galilee when He displayed power or authority over the storm.

We see this power or authority when He cast out demons, healed all manner of diseases, and even raised the dead.

We see this power or authority when He emptied the temple of buyers and sellers.

We see this authority at His resurrection when He had power to conquer the grave and death itself.

The second word is *exousia* and refers to authority as a right or privilege. It's the same word used in John 1:12 “But as many as received Him, to them gave He the power (authority, right, privilege) to become the sons God, even to them that believe on His name.”

Jesus possesses this authority in Himself

Matthew 7:28-29

Jesus possesses this authority to forgive sin

Matthew 9:3-6

Jesus possesses this authority over the forces of hell

Luke 4:36

Jesus possesses this authority to give eternal life

John 1:12

Jesus possesses this authority to judge

John 5:22

Jesus possesses this authority over death and life

John 10:18

I John 5:11-13

Revelation 1:18

Where did Jesus get His authority? He got it from the Father. The religious leaders were not willing to accept Him or His authority so He turned the tables on them and took them to John the Baptist and really asked them much the same question they asked Him. Where did John the Baptist get his authority to baptize? The implication in His response was that His authority came from the same place as John's.

Warren Wiersbe writes: "Jesus took them back to John the Baptist for two reasons. First, John had pointed to Jesus and introduced Him to the nation (John 1:15-34), so their rejection of John was actually a rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Second, it is a spiritual principle that if we disobey truth we already know, God cannot reveal new truth to us (John 7:14-17). Why answer their questions when they had refused to submit to John's message?"

What John did came either inspired from God or it was invented by man. How would they answer? The closing verses of this section provide their answer. We see an absolute rejection.

III. AN ABSOLUTE REJECTION – v. 5-8

They gathered in a huddle and began to discuss their limited options. They had disapproved of John's baptism. He had challenged them and their hypocrisy the same as Jesus. He had even gathered

quite a following. People who had once followed the religious leaders were following John instead and they didn't like that. John was a sheep stealer.

As they talked among themselves they were afraid to deny John's authority because on one hand to say it was from God, Jesus would ask why they didn't believe his message and repent. If they said it came from man, they feared retaliation from the people because they believed he was prophet. To deny the latter would prove to be fatal because our passage indicates that if they made such a statement they feared the people would kill them.

J. Vernon McGee adds this note: "If they had believed John, they would have never questioned the authority of the Lord Jesus."

The religious leaders played dumb and didn't answer and in a sense humiliated themselves. To claim that they did not know was a deceptive answer. They simply didn't want to implicate themselves for rejecting John's message and therefore rejecting Christ. They chose to plead ignorance rather than admit they were wrong. That was their absolute rejection. For several years Jesus had openly taught and performed miracles. They had plenty of proof that He was the Messiah. Any additional proof would not have moved them to change their mind and accept His message.

God is patient with man's rejection, but there is a limit to His patience. The same God who is a God of love is also a God of justice and judgment. That judgment awaits those who reject Him.

Genesis 6:3a, 5, 7 "Then the Lord said, 'My Spirit will not contend with man forever...' The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time... So the Lord said, 'I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth...'"

Jeremiah 11:7-8, 11 “From the time I brought your forefathers up from Egypt until today, I warned them again and again, saying, ‘Obey Me.’ But they did not listen or pay attention; instead, they followed the stubbornness of their evil hearts. So I brought on them all the curses of the covenant I had commanded them to follow but they did not keep...Therefore this is what the Lord says: ‘I will bring on them a disaster they cannot escape. Although they cry out to me, I will not listen to them.’”

Those are just a couple of reminders from many throughout both the Old and New Testaments of God’s impending judgment on those who reject Christ.

Jesus has authority over us whether we accept Him or not. What authority does Jesus have in your life? If we accept His message, we must also obey His commands.