

September 27, 2020

St. Matthew 21:23-27:

## “Performing Or the Real Thing, Which Will It Be”

- I. Performing.
- II. A Real Confrontation.
- III. Jesus Is No Performer.

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St. Matthew 21:23-27

Dear Friends in Christ,

When I first read the text for this morning I thought about the following item that was written by former Lutheran Professor Donald L. Deffner who is now in eternal life:

"A pastor of the Pacific Northwest tells of the dramatization of Christ's trial and crucifixion by the youth group at his church. The youth director played the role of Christ, the youth the jeering mob. 'Crucify him! Crucify him!' they shouted and then dragged the youth director into the back yard of the church and hung him upon an improvised cross.

The pastor stood to the side of the assembly to see how the drama was going. The youth were hushed as 'Christ' hung there and spoke these words to the youth group: 'Even though you are doing this to me, I still love you.'

"Then the pastor noticed an 8-year-old girl standing in the front of the group, transfixed by the scene. He looked at her and saw real tears streaming down her face. 'And,' the pastor stated later, 'I was envious for her. For us professionals it was a performance. For her, it was the real thing.'"

And so, our theme . . .

## PERFORMING OR THE REAL THING. WHICH WILL IT BE?

### I. Performing.

And when he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" (v. 23)

Jesus entered the temple to teach. We're told that the day before "Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons." (Matt. 21:12) He did that because the temple, which pointed to the Christ, had become a place of business. It drew people in and made money. Success and prosperity. It has a ring to it for the church today.

Not only that, but we're told, "And the blind and lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them." (Matt. 21:14) The most egregious aspect of this was the following: "But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, 'hosanna to the Son of David!' they were indignant..." (v.15) Hosanna, or "save us" combined with "to the Son of David" recognized Jesus as the Christ, the descendent of David as God promised David about one thousand years earlier: "When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name (the church), and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever." (2 Sam. 7:12-13) Imagine that?! God standing in front of your face, cleaning house, working miracles, recognized by children, and the spiritual leaders became indignant because He was dismantling their lust for power and wealth.

The question, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" is filled with ignorance and hatred. But, that's not all. It takes us to these words from Matthew's Gospel:

"Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, and plotted together in order to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him. But they said, 'Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people.'" (Matt 26:1-5)

And that fits the description Jesus gave to all who hate Him and want to rid the world of Him:

"You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character for he is a liar and the father of lies." (Jn. 8:44)

These were not spiritual leaders. They were liars, miss-representing God's Word in order to keep people in alignment with their thinking and driving the people like cattle. And they were murderers plotting to kill the Lord Jesus Christ! Their leadership was a performance. They were children of Satan! Can you imagine asking God, "By what authority are you doing these things?"

## II. A Real Confrontation.

Jesus answered them, "I also will ask you a question, and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?" And they discussed it among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' But if we say, 'From man,' we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet." (vv. 24-26)

The fact is, many were drawn to John's teaching and favored him. Luke's Gospel reports: "...the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ..." (Lk. 3:15) Matthew's Gospel reports: "Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins."

Jesus' question, "'The baptism of John, from where did it come?'" was not asked as a ploy to get them off His back. The fact is, John had clearly testified to who Jesus is: (John said) "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie, He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." (Lk. 3:16-17) This could only be God in the flesh! The prophesied Messiah.

They heard and saw the love of God in Christ; God in the flesh who confronts this world's sin and death and does something about it. It's the way the world sees Him through the witness of the church, if the church is faithful in its witness to Christ. However, most don't want the Lord of Life to interfere with their thinking and ways. It is exactly as we have stated here many, many times; the words of Jesus: "'(the world) hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil.'" (Jn. 7:7)

In our text, Jesus is giving the performers an opportunity for repentance, just as He did for us. Our Confessions define repentance this way:

...true repentance is nothing else than to have contrition and sorrow, or terror, on account of sin, and yet at the same time to believe the Gospel and absolution (namely, that sin has been forgiven and grace obtained through Christ), and this faith will comfort the heart and again set it at rest. Amendment of life and the forsaking of sin should then follow, for these must be the fruit of repentance, as John says, "Bear fruit that befits repentance." (Matt. 3:8) (Augsburg Confessions, Article XII)

## III. Jesus Is No Performer.

As you know, Jesus is no performer. He is God in the flesh, the Living Word! And their response to Him is chilling:

So they answered Jesus, "We do not know (that is, they lied when they said they did not know the origin of John's baptism; from heaven or from man)." And he said to them, "neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things." (v. 27)

Their response and Jesus' answer were locking them out of forgiveness and the hope eternal life! They would exchange eternal peace and joy for a few years of power and control of others on earth followed by an eternity of terror!

Being a child of God through faith in Christ is not a performance! It's to be realistic in our understanding of the sinful nature. It's to joyfully receive the comfort of forgiveness and the Lord's presence in Word and Sacrament. It's the understanding that this world will worsen in its hatred of the Christ. It's getting ready for that glorious moment when we stand before our blessed Savior and He wipes away our tears and fears and anxieties and says to us: "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." (Matt. 25:34)

*PERFORMING OR THE REAL THING. WHICH WILL IT BE?* For those cleansed in the Blood of Christ, the answer is quite simple, isn't it?

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott