

October 1, 2023

St. Matthew 21:23-27:

## **“Do We Truly Understand?”**

- I. Whose Authority?
- II. Evil Works.
- III. Do We Truly Understand?

Pilgrim Lutheran Church  
2155 N. Oakland Avenue  
Decatur Illinois 62526

St. Matthew 21:23-27

Dear Friends in Christ,

You might recall Luther's words, "Whoever sees Christ as a mirror of the Father's heart, actually walks through this world with new eyes." When I look into that mirror of Christ I see two things: 1) God's hatred of our sin in the suffering death and hell Christ endured for us. 2) God's love for us in the suffering, death and hell Christ endured for us. I understand that being a child of God in Christ changes everything. It's what God's Word says: "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body (I Cor.6:19,20)."

Luther was asked: "Are hypocrites members of the church?" He answered, "Yes, in the manner in which perspiration, excrement, boils, rash, smallpox, and other diseases may be said to be part of the human body." Luther didn't mince words, did he? It's amazing how easily the mirror of the Father's heart can become blurred by the thinking and wants of the flesh.

The question is . . .

## **DO WE TRULY UNDERSTAND?**

### I. Whose Authority?

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 (Mt. 21:12)." Now, we must remember that the temple first appeared as the Tabernacle at the time of Moses. The tabernacle and temple foreshadowed the Messiah, the Christ, the ultimate sacrifice for the sin of the world. By the time of Jesus, under the leadership of the chief priests and the elders of the people, the temple became a place of business. It drew people and made money; success and prosperity! It's the odor that permeates most of the church today.

We're also told, "And the blind and lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them (Mt. 21:14)." And here is the most shocking aspect of this: "But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things he did, and the children crying out in the temple, 'Hosanna to the Son of David!' they were indignant...(v.15)." "Hosanna," meaning "save us" connected with "Son of David" recognized Jesus as the Christ, the descendent promised to king David about one thousand years earlier. Here's part of that prophecy: "When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who will 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)." Think about this! God (in the flesh) standing in front of your face, cleaning house, working miracles, recognized by children, and the spiritual leaders became indignant because He was ripping into 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 (Mt. 26:1-5)."

And that fits the description Jesus gave to these leaders and 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 leaders. They were Satan’s spawn, doing whatever it would take to keep people in line with their thinking. But there’s another issue here. It’s the mass people were running after these “leaders” because...well...because that’s the way it often is with people: “it’s the thing to do - it’s expected - it’s popular - it’s appealing - it’s what my friends do.” Sound familiar? And the leaders were murderers plotting to kill Jesus.

And this has to be said: this is what much of the church has been doing: destroying Christ. Avoiding and rejecting Scripture teaching about sin and its earthly and eternal consequences. Avoiding and rejecting Scripture teaching of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. Can you imagine asking God, “By what authority are you doing these things?”

## II. Evil Works.

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 (John), and they were baptized by him...”

Jesus’ question, “the baptism of John, from where did it come?” was not a ploy to get them off His back. They knew the answer. John had clearly testified to who Jesus is. He said, “I baptize 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).” Jesus is God, the prophesied Messiah.

The leaders of the Jews had deluded themselves in their lies. They heard and saw the love of God in Christ that enters our dying and death because of sin and does something about it. But they didn’t want that. They fit what we’ve heard here many times, Jesus’ words: “(the world) hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil (Jn.7:7).”

In our text, Jesus gave these leaders the opportunity for repentance, just as He did for us. Our confessions state: “...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. (Augsburg Confessions, Article XII).” They refused.

## III. Do We Truly Understand?

Once again, the horror of this text are the words of the deluded leaders, “By what authority are you doing these things?” That’s similar to, “If God is love then why does He let bad things happen?” It’s a smack in God’s face. When Jesus responded with, “The baptism of John, from where did it come?”, they answered, “We do not know.” They lied! They knew, and Jesus checkmated 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 of eternal life. It's what God's Word says about those who persistently refuse the truth: "Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness (I Thess.2:11,12)." *Delusion - to believe - what is false.* God makes it so they can't think straight.

We know Jesus and understand the admonition the Lord gave to the Apostle John, "Do not love the world or the things in the world" - that is, do not sacrifice your eternity for what you want and can get out of this world. We always come back to that, don't we?? We are a forgiven people granted citizenship in heaven through Christ. We love Jesus' words, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world (Mt.25:34)."

So, the theme is "Do We Truly Understand?" For those who hold to the love of Christ the answer is quite simple, isn't it?

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott