

"Jesus the Temple' Authority"
(2012 Lenten Series #3)

03/11/12

Mark 2:13-25

- I. IN THE FIRST THREE GOSPELS JESUS CLEANSSES THE TEMPLE PRECINCTS IN JERUSALEM AT THE END OF HIS 3-YEAR MINISTRY, WHICH IS ALSO RIGHT BEFORE HE IS ARRESTED. BUT IN JOHN'S GOSPEL, THE AUTHOR HAS JESUS CLEANING OUT THE TEMPLE AT THE VERY BEGINNING.
- A. **Why the discrepancy? Why does John place this controversial event at the start of Jesus' public ministry?**
1. John records several journeys to the Holy City. In the Synoptic Gospels, or first three Gospels, there is one journey by Jesus to Jerusalem.
 2. I think John is telling us that Jesus' most dangerous opponents come from the religious authorities: certain Pharisees, rabbis and priests, and other professional temple clergy.
 - a. Throughout the Gospels we read that the religious authorities hated him and wanted to seize Jesus, but they did nothing for fear of the crowds.
 - b. At one point they hired some people to spy on Jesus, to get the goods on him so they might arrest him privately, but that did not work either until Judas came along.
 3. From the first chapter we discover what Jesus is up against: the whole Temple system, its corrupt hierarchy, its meaningless worship, and their strict interpretation and misuse of the Law of Moses.
 - a. In Jesus' day the position of high priest could be bought from the Romans.
 4. Jesus is out to replace the Temple quite literally!
 - a. At his trial in Mark 14:58, one of the accusers heard Jesus say, "*I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands.*"
 - b. But that remark says Jesuit scholar Raymond Brown in the Anchor Bible, was recalled with difficulty as if it happened earlier in time.
 5. It is interesting, I think, that though his angry rampage at the temple is never mentioned by any of the witnesses against him, or the religious authorities, only that he threatens to destroy the temple.
 - a. So this man could never be a true prophet or a rabbi. A true rabbi would not use such language to imply the opposite of God's Word.
- II. AS THEY FOLLOWED JESUS AND WATCHED HIM CLOSELY, THE RELIGIOUS ADMINISTRATORS ASKED JESUS TWO QUESTIONS. THESE ARE THE SAME TWO QUESTIONS THEY ASKED HIM BEFORE HE ENTERED THE TEMPLE GROUNDS TO DRIVE OUT THE MONEY CHANGERS AND THOSE SELLING ANIMALS FOR SACRIFICE.
- A. **"What are your credentials?" And second, "By what authority are you doing this?"**
1. Certainly both questions are appropriate. We would ask the same questions if we saw a stranger who comes into our sanctuary and started messing up or re-arranging the place.
 - a. The first question demands, "Hey, fellow, who are you?"
 - b. The second question wants to know, "Why are you doing this?"
- B. **First, do you have any credentials?**
1. A "rabbi" in the first century, according to one source, is "a person sufficiently educated in 'halakhah,' or Jewish law and tradition to (be able) to instruct the community and answer questions and resolved disputes."
 - a. Jesus had little formal education, but he may have studied on his

- own to pass for a rabbi. He certainly impresses people with his knowledge. But he does not carry enough clout to stand up against priests and scribes.
- b. When it comes to a specific legal case, the Talmud, or a written record of legal arguments, declare that such questions must be argued in rabbinic courts or study halls, ultimately the highest body or Sanhedrin.
 - c. It seems also that at least 3 rabbis are required for acting with authority in a court.
 - d. So, no, Jesus does not have the right credentials as a rabbi.
2. Second, does he meet the criteria for being accepted as a prophet?
 - a. Some followers acclaim Jesus as a prophet rivaling the great Elijah.
 - b. For the most part he cannot qualify as a prophet of Judaism.
 - (1) First no one believes a prophet could come from a small, unnoticed town like Nazareth.
 - (2) Second, a prophet's voice comes right from God. But Jesus claims more than that: he says he is equal with God, he is God! That is surely blasphemy!
 - (3) Third, a prophet's testimony is required to be consistent with past revelation and holy teaching in the Torah.
 - (a) Jesus teaches a different Law, which he claims not only fulfills, but goes higher than the Torah. And it is sometimes contrary to what the scribes and priests teach from the Torah.
 - (b) Jesus says, "*You have heard it was said.... but I say to you...*"
 - (c) And Jesus' law more demanding ethically and morally.
- C. **One commentator observes that "Jesus operate(s) in grey territory," from the perspective of his own human authority. Such authority astonishes the people.**
1. Second, then, "*By what authority are you doing these things?*"
 2. Jesus does not answer the question but turns it back on them: "*I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man?*"
 - a. The priests are afraid to answer him. Either way Jesus has them trapped. But they did not answer mainly out of fear of the mob of common people who see John as a real prophet.
 - b. So neither does Jesus tell them by whose or what authority he marches!
 3. Ultimately, his authority, we know, comes from heaven, and that is why Jesus in public always refers to "*my Father who is in heaven.*"
- D. **In our church today, as a new pastor or elder, maybe even as a new church officer, we see things we believe are wrong and need to be changed. Or, we have a new idea to help the church grow.**
1. But the run of the mill member and old-time church authority does not like change, is fearful of any change. The first question you or I will be asked is, "What are your credentials?"
 - a. Just who do you think you are trying to do this?
 - b. They may do it that way down in Texas; but this isn't Texas."
 2. And you may be sure the question which follows is, "By whose authority are you doing this?"

- a. Are you a member of this committee? You have only been here a year or two, or ten. "Who gave you permission to try this? We have never done it that way before....!"
- 3. These are valid arguments, and you or I better have a pretty good answer.
- 4. All too often, it may be a stranger who acts a little differently who comes into our midst and says, God has spoken to her directly. So she now is acting on her own authority from God. And we look at that person like we want to show her the door real fast. But maybe, just maybe, one out of 100 times she may be right on the money!
- 5. Ultimately Jesus claims, "all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me!"
 - a. He wants to share that with you and me. He wants you to claim it. But I can tell you the institutional church is never ready for that.

III. JESUS IS ACCUSED OF PLANNING TO DESTROY THE TEMPLE AND REPLACE IT. THAT IS A TRUE INDICTMENT!

A. *As bad as it looks, the cleaning out of the temple grounds is small potatoes compared to the greater charge and corruption on the inside!*

- 1. What does he do at the temple courts?
 - a. He makes a whip,
 - b. Jesus drives all of the money changers, the sheep and the cattle and those doing the selling off of the temple property.
 - c. He turns over the tables of the money changers.
 - d. And he screams at the merchants who have doves for sale, "Stop making my Father's house a weekend market place!" [PAUSE]
- 2. Do you know there are precedents for cleansing the temple or some of its rooms when they are used for un-holy and commercial purposes?
 - a. Nehemiah 13.4-9 records Nehemiah's anger at the priest Eliashib, who stored his own household gear in temple rooms for which he had charge. Nehemiah threw Eliashib out and had the rooms purified.
- 3. Here what Jesus does falls in "the gray area" also.
 - a. Roman coins were forbidden in worship, so money changers have to exchange those coins for Jewish or temple coins. But they are charging a large interest, and so are the animal merchants.
 - b. Most likely the rules for the sacrifice of only perfect animals are not strictly adhered to.
- 4. But the radical statement Jesus wants to make is to restore this holy of holies building to a prayerful use. Now it has the atmosphere of a market place!
 - a. Do you ever think that about our own church?
 - b. like say at the Rummage Sale?
 - c. Some churches have rules that only through tithing and free will offerings should any organization raise money in God's church, not through selling anything or special fund-raisers.
 - d. I have always been uncomfortable with Scouts or school children selling candy, calendars, magazine subscriptions on Sunday mornings at the coffee hour. For me that falls in the gray area.
- 5. The question to ask is, How does this advance the mission of the Church?
 - a. Does it proclaim the glory of God?
 - b. Jesus quotes a line from the Psalms, "Zeal for your house shall consume me." So how is our activity showing ZEAL for God's house.
 - c. It has to do with what we consider holy or sacred ground, and how shall we use it as God's consecrated people? (page 3)

- d. Maybe there is no difference between holy and common ground any more. What do you think?

B. Jesus' passion is directed at right worship, another way as describing zeal for God's house.

1. People miss the point entirely here. Jesus is talking about replacing the corrupt system of sacrifice and giving alms to God/bribes to the officials with a true worship that comes from the heart, of honesty and repentance.
 - a. Here is the real reason the authorities have to get rid of Jesus. Because the authorities' hearts are wrong. They lie, they are dishonest. They mock God's Law themselves.
 - b. As an interim, whenever someone who has quoted Presbytery rules or the Book of Order to me, and I catch them in an infraction, you can predict their reaction will be excessive and immediate!
2. The new center for worship says Jesus is no longer to come from Jerusalem but from Christ himself and his Resurrection.
 - a. And that is truly radical, the biggest threat to Temple worship and sacrifice.
3. Someone has observed, "There was no precedent for Jesus because He WAS (or IS) the precedent- He writes/wrote the rules of the game."
5. Right worship goes right back to the question of Jesus' authority.

B. Jesus tells the Samaritan woman at the well, "Truly, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem ...when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him."

1. The woman cannot see it.
2. She still is waiting for the Messiah to come and give her salvation. When Jesus says, "I am He," she is hard-pressed to believe it.
3. Paul puts it in a differently context, and he makes it very personal:
 - a. "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own" in 1 Corinthians 6.19 (also 3.16).
 - b. This too is part and parcel of our worship and our glorifying God.
4. Had people realized how truly radical and unique this commandment is, I wonder how many would follow him? Very few, I believe. [PAUSE]

Now may the people of God respond by saying, "Amen!"

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