



ANGRY JESUS CLEANSSES THE TEMPLE

Part 81 of Luke's Gospel: Investigating the Man Who Is God

Pastor Mark Driscoll | Luke 19:45–20:8 | July 10, 2011

LUKE 19:45–20:8

^{19:45} And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold, ⁴⁶ saying to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be a house of prayer,' but you have made it a den of robbers."

⁴⁷ And he was teaching daily in the temple. The chief priests and the scribes and the principal men of the people were seeking to destroy him, ⁴⁸ but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were hanging on his words.

^{20:1} One day, as Jesus was teaching the people in the temple and preaching the gospel, the chief priests and the scribes with the elders came up ² and said to him, "Tell us by what authority you do these things, or who it is that gave you this authority." ³ He answered them, "I also will ask you a question. Now tell me, ⁴ was the baptism of John from heaven or from man?" ⁵ And they discussed it with one another, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say, 'Why did you not believe him?' ⁶ But if we say, 'From man,' all the people will stone us to death, for they are convinced that John was a prophet." ⁷ So they answered that they did not know where it came from. ⁸ And Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

INTRODUCTION

A few years ago when my family and I had the opportunity to visit the nation of Israel and the city of Jerusalem, we were very encouraged and discouraged. Very encouraged to see the places that the Bible speaks of, to be able to understand the topography and the history and to verify the credibility of the Scriptures about peoples and times and places and events was very helpful. And I tend to be a very visual learner, as many men are, and so going to places, seeing them, reading the Bible, being able to, in some regard, put myself back in history in that moment and visualize what was happening around the person and work of Jesus while he was doing his ministry on the earth, was incredibly encouraging.

But the one thing that I and my family and others who were on the tour were discouraged by was the crass commercialism. It was amazing how much business was tied to Jerusalem and to religion. It was just thick with corrupt business. Everywhere you went somebody was hocking something, pushing something, and selling something. And prices were very high. There wasn't a deal to be had anywhere, and it really had become all about the money.

THE CENTER OF OUR FAITH IS NOT A PLACE, IT'S A PERSON

I am one who tends not to refer to Israel in general, and Jerusalem in particular, as "the Holy Lands." I think they're lands, period, and it is Jesus who makes people holy. It is not necessarily a place that makes them holy because, for us, the center of our faith is not a place. It's a person and his name is Jesus.

And we got to go there to learn about Jesus, but the place in and of itself didn't get us any closer to God. And, in fact, I believe that the way that the business was oftentimes conducted was very displeasing to God. It's not a sin to sell something, it's not a sin to make a profit, but when it is an exorbitant profit and it is ripping off people who are coming, in their mind, to meet with God, then it is corrupt business.

Some of you might find that estimation harsh, but some things don't change. And as we go back a few thousand years to Jesus walking into Jerusalem and up to the temple, we see that he is very discouraged, displeased, and disapproving of the business that is happening at the temple. I'll share it with you.

JESUS CLEANSSES THE TEMPLE

Here (we find it in Luke 19:45–20:8) we learn about [when an] angry Jesus cleanses the temple. Let's jump right in and read it for ourselves. First thing we learn is that Jesus got angry. Luke 19:45–46 we read, "And he," that is Jesus, "entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold, saying to them, 'It is written, 'My house shall be a house of prayer,' but you have made it into a den of robbers.'"

Now this is very important because Jesus, since Luke 9:51, has been traveling toward the great city of Jerusalem. He is entering into the city of Jerusalem during the season of the Feast of Passover. We've covered this, but might I remind you that that goes all the way back a few thousand years prior, during the days of the Exodus, when God's people were led by Moses out of bondage and slavery in Egypt into freedom that they might worship

God. That was made possible through something called the Passover, where the wrath of God passed over those who belonged to him, and brought judgment and justice and death to those who did not. And the way that it was shown that one belonged to God is that they would sacrifice a lamb and that blood of the lamb would literally show that they had faith in God, that he would forgive their sins through a substitute sacrifice which ultimately was fulfilled in the coming of Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world—that's what John said when he saw him, Jesus Christ, our Passover lamb who has been slain—that's what Paul tells the Corinthians.

And so this all culminates. City of Jerusalem, here comes Jesus, season of Passover, ascending up this great city to the temple, built on the rock, in the place where Abraham nearly sacrificed Isaac. And it was that place that people would come to meet with God. It housed the Holy of Holies, the very presence of God, the Holy Spirit on the earth.

There were various courts that surrounded it where men and women and Jew, Gentile—those who were non-Jew, like many of us—would come to meet with God. They would bring their sacrifices so that they could show that because of their sin they should die, but that a substitute would be made and that blood would be shed and that the wrath of God would be satisfied so that their sins might be forgiven and their relationship with God reconciled. And so this was a huge holiday. This was a massive event. And people were journeying for days and days and days to get there. Many of them poor peasants, like Jesus, coming from rural areas, like Jesus, venturing on foot, like Jesus.

As a result, it would be very hard for them to bring their sacrifice. Perhaps they didn't have one, so they'd been saving up to buy one, or maybe just the transport of an animal. After all, if you're walking with your family and others and you're helping those who are old and looking after the little kids, bringing along sacrifices for your family, lambs and such, would be very difficult.

So some people, in an effort to obey the commands of Scripture and have a lamb, they would arrive at the temple, they would start at the base of the mountain, and they would undergo ritual washings and cleansings and showing that they needed God to cleanse them from sin. And they would robe themselves in white, showing that in God they can be forgiven. And they would ascend up to the temple, singing oftentimes the Psalms, and there are Psalms of ascent in our Bible. They would be singing those as they literally ascended up Jerusalem, up to the temple. And then when they would arrive at the temple to have their sacrifice, they would purchase one.

So there would be businesses that had their wares out and they'd be selling goods, just like today. Alongside the highway there'll be certain businesses that help those who are traveling to stop and get supplies and what they need and tend to them. It's the exact same kind of thing that was happening, that happens in all tourist destinations, and it would have included sacrificial animals that you could purchase.

All of that is perfectly reasonable, except Jesus got very angry and began to drive them out. There are other occasions where he apparently did the same thing at various times in his ministry. And it says in other places that he would grab a whip. And I mean, he really got very angry. And he drove people away from these businesses, and he condemned these business leaders. And on some occasions, we read in other accounts of the Scriptures, he would throw over their tables and money would go flying and products would go flying. I mean, you can imagine.

Imagine there's a massive event, and vendors have bought booths at a conference or a concert. And Jesus comes in and is flipping over tables. Or it's a day at Disneyland, or some other massive tourist destination, and here comes Jesus and he is furious, he is rebuking people, he is flipping over tables, he is tossing aside merchandise, money is flying. He is angry.

CHRISTIANITY IS NOT JUST ABOUT BEING NICE

Now some of you will be very surprised to hear that Jesus got angry because you wrongly misperceive that Christianity just means that you be nice. Christianity is not that we just be nice. We are to love people, we're also to be truthful. And if you love God, you're going to hate sin. If you love people, you're going to hate injustice. The fact that we do love means we must hate. The fact that we have joy requires that we also will be angry.

Now, some of us have short wicks and foul tempers and we are far too quick to anger. But that doesn't mean that anger is in and of itself a bad thing. Anger's an emotion. It's a response to something that is valid or invalid.

How about you? Do you ever get angry? If some of you say, "I never get angry," then you're probably in sin. You probably don't feel the heart of God because the Bible says that God gets angry. Now, the Bible does say that God is, "slow to anger." He has a long wick, it takes a lot to get him angry, but he will get there. If we continue in sin and harming of people and injustice and evil, it does make God angry.

And here we see Jesus gets angry. Some of you get angry all the time. You get angry for reasons that are not just. And you would wrongly appeal to Jesus, say, "Well, Jesus got angry, I get angry." Yeah, but you don't get angry for the same reasons Jesus did. Jesus got angry here because the glory of God the Father was being damaged and harmed and the people were being taken advantage of. Poor people, common people, simple people, many illiterate people, hardworking people, God's people who had walked for miles, they're getting ripped off. After all, when you get up to the temple, where else are you going to find a lamb without blemish to offer on behalf of your family in obedience to the commands of Scripture, all foreshadowing the coming of Jesus? It's like you're in a concert and there's only one place to get your food or your water, and they have ridiculous prices but you have to pay them because you have no choice.

ACCESS TO THE TEMPLE

We expect that in business, but to see that for people who are worshiping God, it infuriated Jesus. It infuriated Jesus. And there are some clues as to why. He says, "It is written, 'My house shall be a house of prayer.'" There he is quoting Isaiah 56. And way back in the Old Testament God had said that he wanted the temple, this holy, sacred place, to be the place that people would come to pray and talk to him and reconcile with him, so that's the

whole point of the temple. The point of the temple was not a big business venture. It was not a get-rich-quick scheme. It was not to be a con and a sham. It was to be a house of prayer.

And then he goes on to say, “But you have made it a den of robbers.” And that is actually a quote from Jeremiah 7. And what had happened is that the way the temple was constructed is that there would be the Holy of Holies, so this is where the presence of God, the Holy Spirit, dwelt on the earth. This was the sacred ground on the earth where it was really the meeting place between heaven and earth, if you could think of it in that way. This is where God’s presence was on the earth so that people could come near the presence of God. And what happened then is that there would be various levels of access to the proximity of the presence of God. So the high priest and the other priests would have certain access, and then other groups of priests would have a certain level of access. And then those who were men and worshipers of God, Jews, they would have access, women would have certain access, and then sort of the farthest away access.

I’m summarizing all of this quite simply, but it’s kind of like you come to a concert and various people get various access. There’s the band that gets to go on stage, and then there’s the backstage pass, and then there’s the front row seats, and the VIP seats, and then there’s the suites, and then there’s the cheap seats, and then there’s those who are standing-room only. It’s like that for these major holidays. The crowd is enormous and various people have various access.

THE COURT OF GENTILES

Well, the worst seats were the Gentile seats. They called it the Court of the Gentiles. This is where those who were not Jewish would come to participate. Some of them were believers; they had turned from sin and trusted in the God of the Bible. Some of them were unbelievers, they didn’t know the God of the Bible, but they were curious people; they wanted to know about the God of the Bible. They were curious about sin and forgiveness.

So in our nomenclature we’d call them non-Christians. Well, they got the cheap seats; they were over in the Court of the Gentiles. And what had happened was all of the business, the nefarious business dealings, where do you think they put those? Do you think they put those in the Holy of Holies? Do you think they put them near the Holy of Holies? They didn’t. They put the business over in the Court of the Gentiles.

And so in the place where evangelism was supposed to be happening—and evangelism is where Christians invite non-Christians into relationship. We call it hospitality. “Come to our house, come to our church, come out to dinner with me and my friends. We just wanna get to know you, love you, answer any questions you would have about Jesus.” Begin a conversation about who the God of the Bible is. That’s evangelism—helping non-Christians get to know Christ. That’s evangelism.

Well, that was supposed to happen in the Court of the Gentiles. And rather than evangelism happening, business was happening. And while all the non-Christians were watching, the believers—I call them Christians because ultimately their faith was in the coming of Jesus Christ, but they were believers—they were arguing and fighting and bickering and conducting business and there’s price gouging.

It’s all very ungodly, it’s all very greedy. It’s not just selling products. It’s really extorting people. And it’s not even just making a simple profit; it’s making an exorbitant profit on the backs of poor people coming to meet with God. That’s exactly what was happening. And so Jesus was furious. He was absolutely furious.

GIVE GENEROUSLY SO NON-CHRISTIANS CAN MEET JESUS

Friends, this is why as a church we like to encourage God’s people to give generously so that we can give freely to those people who are not yet Christians. It’s why church is free and we don’t sell tickets. It’s why we don’t have VIP seating and the cheap seats for the non-Christians. It’s why, when we have classes, they’re free. Counseling is free. Community Groups are free. Redemption Groups are free. Bibles are free. Sermon downloads are free. All of that is free. And truth be told, none of it’s free, but it’s all been paid for by Christians so that it can be generously shared, given to anyone and everyone, including non-Christians.

If non-Christians want to come to Mars Hill, we love you, we’re glad to have you, we know many of you are here. It’s all paid for. We’re not charging you anything. You want to go to Community Group, meet with people, make some friendships, Redemption Group, deal with some horrible sin that’s been committed against you like sexual assault, you have questions, you want to go to a class, you want a free copy of the Bible, you want to download some sermons? Take whatever you like. We love you. All the way down to the coffee. It’s free, take what you want.

But it’s not free; other people paid for it because they love you. And this is why even at Easter we didn’t want to have a big offering. For those of you who don’t know, we had a great Easter Celebration in Albuquerque at that campus. We also, in Seattle, pulled all of the various Mars Hill churches together for one big event at Qwest Field. At least 19,000 people showed up. There were others who didn’t make it through the turnstile. We don’t know how many, but we know at the very least, over 19,000 people. And we didn’t collect an offering and we didn’t pass the plate and we didn’t ask anyone for money. Why? We wanted people to hear about Jesus. We didn’t want them to be pressured to give money.

Now, you can’t run an event like that for free. You can’t go to the Seahawks and say, “It’s for Jesus, we want a free stadium.” They have to pay their workers and their bills and their insurance and their utilities, so you’ve got to rent it. You can’t get a whole sound, light, and video rig for free. Somebody paid for it and you’ve got to pay them. This is all reasonable; we don’t have a problem paying for things. But I’ll tell you, it was one of the great joys and highlights of my ministry when so many people came out and heard about Jesus. I think 724 people were baptized, if memory serves me correct. Many people became Christians. And we didn’t talk about money. We just talked about Jesus.

We didn't ask for money because we didn't have to. The Christians who call Mars Hill home had already given generously through a series of special offerings so that it was all paid for. Some may wonder why we did that. It's because of situations like we find in Luke. It's a huge event, non-Christians show up, and all they see is a bunch of greedy religious people ripping one another off. That's not what we want people to see.

Friends, this is why, quite frankly, if we get a nice building like our West Seattle campus, yeah we'll renovate it. But the truth is, this is why we're not building huge, ornate buildings. We tend to meet in relatively simple spaces. We're meeting in warehouses and schools and [we're] renovating old churches and community centers. And we're not spending massive money for enormous cathedrals.

We want our money to go toward people meeting the God of the Bible, the Lord Jesus Christ. In the last year we've seen over 1,200 people baptized. That's fourteen percent of Mars Hills Church that was baptized in Mars Hill Church this past year. That means lots of people are meeting Jesus. And so what Jesus here is demonstrating is non-Christians, unbelievers, should always be welcome. We shouldn't be fighting over money and greedy and stingy. We should be generous and pay for things so they can come and learn about God. And all the money shouldn't be spent for very exorbitant, extravagant things. It should, instead, be spent reasonably to help more people meet Jesus, which is the whole impetus for the temple. It was the place for God's people to meet with him and other people to come and meet him. And what it had turned into was an enormous price-gouging, business fiasco.

THE TEMPLE'S TAXES

There's another aspect to this that makes it even worse, and that is you had to pay a temple tax to get in. But some people were using different currency than the temple tax, so they would have to have money exchanged. You ever seen that when you go to another country you've got to have currency exchange? Well, the currency exchange there was also exorbitant so you'd come with your money, you have to pay your temple tax to get in, you buy your ticket. And so you'd go exchange your money. And the exchange rate was exorbitant and ripping people off.

And here's what's even nastier about it all. A percentage of all these proceeds went to, who do you think? The high priest. He was the man who was supposed to serve God and his people. And so he would rent out the booths and the businesses, and he would have his team set up all the business dealings and help set up the currency exchange so that he profited from every transaction and sale. He was in on it. He got a cut of the deal.

This would be like you showed up at Mars Hill today and to get in you got to buy a ticket. But before you buy your ticket, you can only buy your ticket in Mars Hill money. It's like going to Chuck E. Cheese's. You got to get Mars Hill money. Well, Mars Hill money, it's not dollar for dollar. The exchange rate isn't very fair. So we're gonna make money on the currency exchange. Then we give you the Mars Hill money and then you can buy the ticket with your Mars Hill money.

And then when you get in, depending upon on how much money you gave for your ticket, that determines how good your seat is. Oh, and by the way, if you want a Bible, they're really expensive. See, we get them at a discount, but we sell them to you at a high profit. Oh, you want a cup of coffee? Well, those are \$27 a cup. It's Jesus coffee. And you're not allowed to bring coffee in from the outside. You're only allowed to drink our coffee when you're in our building. Those kinds of rules. Oh, and by the way, Pastor Mark gets a cut of everything because he is part owner in the coffee company and he's part owner in the ticket company, he's part owner in the Mars Hill money currency exchange scam.

You see how all this works? Jesus shows up furious. This is not the way it's supposed to be. This is not the way it's supposed to be. And so what Jesus does is he disrupts their whole economic model. It's amazing he didn't get thrown out. I mean, he disrupted business. Money did not change hands that day. And as long as Jesus was around, everybody knew it's not business as normal this year. Jesus is causing real economic difficulty for those who had high profits that they were anticipating. Now Jesus is hurting their income.

This is one of the reasons why people oppose Jesus and want him dead. Some of it was religious, some of it was political, some of it was financial. Nonetheless, Jesus doesn't have fear-of-man issues, he's not a coward, he stays at the temple, and he preaches and teaches. He plants himself right there so that people could meet God and learn about God—the whole reason the temple existed.

JESUS SPENT A LOT OF TIME PREACHING AND TEACHING

So the next thing we see is that Jesus preached and taught. Luke 19:47 through the first half of 20:1, "And he was teaching daily in the temple. The chief priests and the scribes and the principal men of the people were seeking to destroy him, but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were hanging on his words. One day, as Jesus was teaching the people in the temple and preaching the gospel—" and we'll pick it up here in a moment to see what had happened. But there are two big ideas here that I want you to see.

Jesus spent a lot of his time preaching and teaching. Preaching and teaching. This is absolutely core to Christian ministry and Mars Hill Church, preaching and teaching. Preaching and teaching the Word of God. Some of you like to see Jesus as one who helped the poor and fed the hungry and healed the sick and cared for physical needs. All of that is totally true, we're not arguing against that at all. But don't miss that Jesus spent the bulk of his time doing preaching and teaching. Opening the Bible, teaching the Bible, helping people learn about the God of the Bible, turning from sin, and trusting in him.

Jesus was, while on the earth, he's still alive in heaven today, a preacher and a teacher. A preacher and a teacher. And so for us at Mars Hill, because we love Jesus and we believe in Jesus and we want to honor Jesus, we do hold the teaching and the preaching of the Bible incredibly high. As high as we can. We believe that preaching and teaching is essential and central to everything that it means to be Christians and the church. It's why we gather under the Word of God every week and then we scatter into groups to talk about life as it applies to the Word of God. It's why we esteem Bible

preachers and teachers who faithfully open the Word of God and teach us about Jesus. It's why we invite people in from the outside to lecture, to preach, to teach, to do seminars and classes and retreats and conferences. Because we believe that central and essential to everything that it means to be the people of God, is a love for preaching and teaching.

Because none of us truly knows who God really is, we have to be taught. We can't just trust all of our feelings and experiences. Oftentimes we don't even interpret them rightly. What we need is a clear, concise, compelling, convicting Word from the Word of God. And so Jesus spent his time preaching and teaching and he was incredibly popular. It says that the crowds were literally hanging on his every word. They were constantly around him.

And what was wonderful about Jesus, his preaching and teaching was free. Let me say this. I absolutely love preaching and teaching at Mars Hill Church. We have other preachers and teachers as well, I'm not alone, we have a good team of leaders and we have a good team of those who can preach and teach and I'm not saying I'm the only one, but being the most high profile preacher and teacher at Mars Hill, let me say a couple of things; I love preaching and teaching at this church. I love the freedom that I get. I love the fact that I'm allowed to take my time, and I do. If you're new, you'll notice that when we're still going many minutes from now.

In addition, I love the fact that we have the freedom to do things like two-plus years in Luke's Gospel, as well as shorter series and other things as needed. I love the fact that we have a congregation of people who love to learn. That they listen and they pay attention. That large crowds of people come because they want to hear the Word of God.

CHURCH IS FREE

This is the same thing Jesus experienced and enjoyed. And Jesus did so without charging people. It was not uncommon in that day, if you were a rabbi, that it was like running a small school and that people would have to pay a fee to sit under your teaching, kind of like going to a college or a grad program. And Jesus, his preaching and teaching, he made it free.

One of the things I love is we get to make it free. Church is free. Classes are free. Sermon downloads are free, like I've already said. But how wonderful it is. And I simply want to say to those of you who give generously, thank you. Because the truth is, it's not free. You paid for it. And other people have, I hope and pray, been served by it. And on their behalf I want to say thank you.

That's what's happening here with Jesus. He is able to serve others, and many come because they love his preaching and teaching. And I'm in no way saying I'm anywhere near as good as Jesus, but to some degree I get that same joy. Lots of people coming, appreciating preaching and teaching, and I want to thank you for being that kind of people.

JESUS HAS ALL AUTHORITY

What we find then is not only does Jesus preach and teach, he preaches and teaches in a way that I don't. And in a way, quite frankly, that no one else ever has or ever will. Because Jesus has all authority.

In that day it was common for the preachers and teachers to quote this rabbi and to quote this teacher and to quote this tradition and this document or this council. And Jesus had his own authority. He spoke on his own authority because he is the highest authority. We read this in Luke 20, a lengthy section from the second half of verse 1 through 8, "The chief priests and the scribes with the elders came up and said to him, 'Tell us by what authority do you do these things, or who is it that gave you this authority.' He answered them, 'I also will ask you a question,'"—here we go—"Now tell me, was the baptism of John from heaven or from man?"

They call a committee meeting. "And they discussed it with one another, saying, 'If we say, "From heaven," he will say, "Why did you not believe me?" But if we say, "From man," all the people will stone us to death, for they are convinced that John was a prophet.' So they answered that they did not know where it came from. And Jesus said to them, 'Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.'"

The religious leaders come. It tells us who they are: chief priests, scribes, and elders. So these are high-ranking religious leaders. These are people who'd written books and spoken at conferences and they're the experts when something comes up. Larry King, you know, would've called them in that day. CNN would have got a hold of them in that day.

These are people who are highly respected religious leaders and authorities. They had more degrees than Fahrenheit, educated beyond their intelligence, went to the best schools, read all the books. These are nerds who know the footnotes and they're sick of Jesus because people love him, they follow him, they enjoy him, they like him, and as a result their power base is waning. All the money they were making from the corrupt religious business? Well, that money's starting to dry up. And the people who would follow them in fear have now abandoned them and are following Jesus in love. Their lives have been changed. And rather than themselves supporting Jesus and submitting to Jesus and serving Jesus, they instead continually fight with Jesus.

This is how religious people are. They're all about the money. They're all about the control. They're all about the power. And so they meet and kind of get this idea, they all pull aside. You can see a, you know, a dark room, one light, they're all meeting around a table, "We need to get Jesus. We need to publicly humiliate him, we need to shame him, we need to ruin his reputation. He's getting too popular, we need to shoot him." Religious people love to do this. "What can we do?" "Well, let's come up with a theological question that will stump him. Let's come up with this impossible, difficult, hard question. Let's ask it openly, publicly, brazenly in front of everybody. Let's use it to stick it to Jesus."

People still do this, bloggers, haters, trolls, Tweeters, Facebookers, the whole lot of them, critics of every sort and kind, “Let’s stick it to him. Let’s show that we’re better than him and we’re smarter than him and that people should follow us instead of him.” It’s all about the money. It’s all about the control. It’s all about the power. It’s not about the truth.

So they come up with their question. They walk up to Jesus, “Who gave you the authority to do what you’re doing? You didn’t go to college, you didn’t go to grad school, you didn’t pass an ordination council, you didn’t get all of the degrees and support and tradition that would give you the authority that you have. Where do you get your authority?” It’s a question of authority.

And the truth is this: Jesus has all authority. Jesus doesn’t derive his authority from teachers or schools or traditions. He is God. There can be no higher authority than Immanuel (God among us). Jesus said this after he rose from death, he gave something called the Great Commission, the end of Matthew’s Gospel. He says, “All authority has been given to me.” All authority. And so Jesus does not derive his authority from any source because he is the source of his own authority.

Now, what I love about Jesus, everybody’s watching, here come all the religious leaders. Can you feel the tension in the air? I mean, it’s the Passover, huge crowds were in the temple, you know, one of those side rooms or courts, massive crowds, famous teachers, all the preachers, authors. I mean, this is the big event, everybody’s there, and in walks all of Jesus’ enemies and critics, all together. The crowd would have gone silent. “What now?” And the leader of them steps right up, the guy who’s written the most books and is the most famous, “Jesus, I have a question for you.” And he asks his question, “Where do you get your authority?”

I love Jesus. I wonder how he did it. I don’t know. I wonder if he winked at the crowd, I don’t know if he played it up. I don’t know if he did it straight-faced, I don’t know if he was smiling, I don’t know how he did it. He says, “Well, while we’re at it, asking questions, I got a question for you. How about I make you a deal. You answer my question, and then I’ll answer yours. Now, John the Baptizer, his baptism, was it godly or not?”

Now, the situation with John the Baptizer is that he was Jesus’ cousin. He was the prophet that was come to prepare the way for Messiah, for God among us. He preached repentance, people came, he was famous, he was a legend in his day. Early on he was even more famous than Jesus.

The ancient historian, Josephus, a Jewish historian, is not in the Bible—he’s outside of the Bible—but he writes more about John the Baptizer than Jesus because for awhile John was actually more popular than Jesus. And so the people loved John. But you know what? John was kind of like Jesus. Not in that he was God and had all authority, but that he didn’t come from the right institution. It would be like today, he wasn’t part of a denomination, he didn’t pass an ordination council, he didn’t graduate from seminary. He just sort of did it. Just sort of did the work of God by the power of God to the glory of God by the Word of God and he didn’t go through the traditional systems.

Now, let me say this, there’s nothing wrong with going through the traditional systems. You could be someone who goes through a school, goes through a denomination, goes through an ordination, loves and serves the Lord faithfully. We don’t critique that, we don’t negate that, we don’t criticize that. We rejoice in that. But there are other people that God just puts his hand on and they go do amazing things. And the question is, well why do they have the right to do that? Well, ‘cause God put his hand on them and told them to go do it. There are not a lot of people like that, but John the Baptizer was certainly one. He was set apart from his mother’s womb. He was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother’s womb—we learned that earlier in Luke’s Gospel. He was prophesied about in the Old Testament that he would prepare the way for the coming of Jesus, and he did.

And the people loved John ‘cause he was like one of them. He was the poor, rural, humble outsider that spoke as a prophet with authority the powerful Word of God. So they loved him.

THE CHIEF PRIESTS, SCRIBES, AND ELDERS DON’T ANSWER JESUS’ QUESTION

So the religious leaders have got a real dilemma because if they say, “No, John did not work for the Lord,” the crowd would assault them. This would turn into a riot scene. And if they said, “Yes, he worked for the Lord,” then Jesus would say, “John said that I was God. He said to turn from sin and trust in me, so why don’t you obey him?”

Jesus has got them on the horns of a dilemma. They’re either going to get killed or become Christians. He’s really got them in the clench up against the cage. So what do they do? Well, sadly, they do what religious people often do: they walk away. They don’t say, “I’m wrong.” They don’t say, “I’m sorry.” They walk away.

Now, religious people can say they’re wrong and they can say they’re sorry. And sometimes guys in the Bible, like another man named Saul, who’s a good friend of Luke and he became Paul the Apostle and wrote much of the New Testament along with Luke, sometimes it does happen where religious people say, “I’m wrong. I’m sorry.” But they don’t. Instead they walked away.

So Jesus said, “Well, since you won’t answer my question, I’m not gonna answer yours.” I’m assuming the crowd had a good chuckle. Everybody laughed. Everybody thought, “This is hilarious.” The whole committee met, maybe for days, weeks, months they’d been working on their one question, they finally walk in, here it is. Jesus, on the spot, in the moment, in a second stumps them all because he tells the truth. He has all authority.

DO YOU BELIEVE THAT JESUS HAS ALL AUTHORITY?

Now, let me ask this of you. The whole point here is about Jesus’ authority. Do you truly, really believe that Jesus has all authority? Do you live as if Jesus has functional authority? See, I’ve seen some people, they love psychology and they turn Jesus into a really good psychologist. Or they love sociology and they turn Jesus into a really good sociologist. Or they’re into politics and they turn Jesus into kind of a moral politician. Or they’re into

spirituality and they take out all the God stuff but they leave all the “do good works for the poor” stuff and they turn Jesus just into a spiritual person.

I’ve seen people who don’t believe in miracles because they’re more naturalistic and, for them, their ideology and their philosophy is in authority so if the Bible says that Jesus performed miracles they say, “No, he didn’t.” I’ve seen people who hold religious pluralism up as their highest authority, so when Jesus says “I’m God” they say, “Well, that’s probably not true.”

How about you? I’ve seen people even do this with sin in their life. There’s something in their life that’s sinful, that is displeasing to Jesus. And they say, “Well, that was a long time ago. That was a different culture. We’ve evolved. Things have changed. That was primitive.” What they’re saying is something is now in authority over Jesus. Someone is in authority over Jesus. Might be me, my religious commitment, my political cause, my view of the world, my philosophical presumptions and presuppositions, my financial commitment, my political preference, whatever it is, my sexual orientation, my religious affiliation, whatever it might be—what you’re saying is, “Yeah, there’s Jesus, but he’s not the highest authority.” Someone or something is above him.

It was the debate in that day; it’s the debate in our day. As Mars Hill Church, we believe that Jesus is Lord. That’s a simple way of saying he’s the highest authority. There’s no one equal to Jesus, there’s no one above Jesus. He is in highest authority. When he says something, we believe it. When he commands something, by the grace of God, we seek to obey it.

And if someone or something should disagree with him, they are wrong and they need to repent and agree with him and not just walk away, but change their mind and say, “I’m wrong, I’m sorry.” And friends, it’s not that we’re right, it’s that he’s right. Because the truth is, we’re all wrong. None of us begin submitting to Jesus. We all have sin and folly. We all think we’re right when we’re wrong. And we all have to say, “I’m wrong and I’m sorry. Jesus, you’re right.”

TWO REASONS WE DON’T GO TO THE TEMPLE

Now, where does all of this happen? Jesus gets angry, preaches and teaches, and exercises all authority. Where does this happen? It happens at the temple. Some of you may ask, “Why don’t we go to the temple? “If Jesus went to the temple and for years God’s people had been going to the temple, why don’t we go to the temple?”

Well, two reasons. Number one, there’s no temple. The temple was destroyed in 70 AD, so if you go to Israel, as I did, there’s just a pile of rubble. There’s no temple. I’ll tell you why we don’t need it in just a moment.

Number two, we’re not going to the temple for the same reason I’m not going to college. I graduated from college a long time ago, like 1993. I recently had this really terrifying dream. I went to bed a few nights ago and I had this dream where I got a call from my college—I went to college and then later on finished grad school. And I had this bad dream that I got a call from my college saying, “There was a problem with your transcript. We made a mistake. You didn’t finish all your classes.”

So in my dream I actually had this nightmare where Grace and I had to pack up all of our stuff with our five kids and move back and I had to go back to undergraduate college, like twice the age of all the other students, and that I had to go to class and I had to quit pastoring Mars Hill for awhile and quit preaching and teaching ‘cause I had to go back and knock out like a semester or two of credits.

This was actually a horrifying nightmare that I had. And I think, in my nightmare, I think Grace and I were actually living in a dorm with our five kids. This is my version of an absolute, Freddy Krueger, “Nightmare on Elm Street” horror film: me and Grace and our five kids living in a dorm at a college. And this was my nightmare.

And I woke up and I remember for a minute I started thinking, “Was that prophetic? Do I have to go to college? You know, am I gonna be in sociology next to a nineteen-year-old kid who says nasty things on my Facebook page ‘cause he’s one of my haters?” I mean, this is one of my, “Ahh! What am I getting myself into?” And then it kind of hit me, it was like, no, I really did graduate. And because all my graduation requirements are fulfilled, glory to God, I don’t need to go back to college.

Some of you say, “What’s that got to do with anything?” We don’t need to go to the temple because all of those requirements of the law have been fulfilled. It’s not that they were unimportant, it’s that they’re now fulfilled. Just like all my graduation requirements. It’s not that they were unimportant, but they’re fulfilled. Once I fulfilled them, I move on, I’m done, I’m free, I don’t need to go back, I don’t need to play by those rules, I don’t need to live that way.

The Bible is filled with requirements, with laws. They’re all fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Once we have faith in Jesus Christ, we don’t need to live a life that qualifies us because Jesus’ life is the life that qualifies us to graduate, to be free from the law, to go on with the rest of our life filled by the power of the Holy Spirit.

JESUS IS GREATER

So here’s what we’re not gonna do. We’re not gonna go to Jerusalem. We’re not gonna go rebuild the temple. We’re not gonna go get some priests. We’re not gonna go slaughter some animals, which is what they were doing. Why? Because Jesus is greater.

JESUS IS A GREATER TEMPLE

I’ll explain it to you in this way. Jesus is greater. First of all, Jesus is a greater temple. The temple was a foreshadowing of Jesus. It was the place

between heaven and earth, where God and man would connect. Jesus is the greater temple. He is God become a man. So the presence of God is in Jesus. The reconciliation with God is in Jesus. The holy place of meeting and worship between heaven and earth is Jesus.

That's why Paul says there's one mediator between man and God: the man Christ Jesus. We don't go to a place, we go to a person. The place was just requirements that were held until Jesus came and fulfilled the law and now we don't need the temple.

The temple had the Holy of Holies; Jesus is the Holy of Holies.

The temple was the presence of God; Jesus is the presence of God.

The temple was where we would go to meet with God; Jesus is where we go to meet with God.

The temple is what got us close to God; Jesus is who gets us close to God.

The temple is where you'd go to sacrifice and shed blood and have your sin atoned for it; Jesus is where we go now to have our sin atoned for and blood shed and our lives transformed.

And the temple was the center of faith and life and worship and God's people would all come to that place. And today we don't need to go to that place because we go to Jesus. He's the greater temple. The center of our faith is not a place, it's a person. We don't believe in a Holy Land, we believe in a holy man, the God Man, Jesus Christ.

Jesus is greater than the temple, so the temple was destroyed in 70 AD. There's been no temple since. God doesn't even make it possible to go to the temple. And one of the things that grieved me so deeply when I went to the location where the temple had been, number one, there's a wall, the Wailing Wall. It grieved me, broke my heart. People wrapping up prayers into a little pieces of paper, walking up and sticking them in the wall.

When I asked why they said, "Well, that wall is closer to God so if you put the prayers in the wall they get to the Lord." No, that wall doesn't get you closer to the Lord; Jesus gets you close to the Lord. If you want your prayers to go to the Father, don't stick them in the wall, give them to the Son of God. He is our mediator. Told all my kids, "Do not put any prayers in the wall. We're Christians, not pagans." We don't believe that a wall mediates between us and God. If you want your prayers to go to the Father, give them to the Son.

What also grieved me is the closest place to where the Holy of Holies and the center of the temple used to be is underground. So we took an underground tour at night and there's a wall that is closest to where the temple used to be. And you would literally see women pressed up against the wall, weeping and wailing and praying, thinking that by being on that wall, as close as they could physically be now that the temple's been destroyed to where the temple used to be, that they were closer to God. And it's tragic because Jesus is the greater temple. They could have stayed home in their apartment, been filled with the Holy Spirit, worshipping Jesus. And that's as close to the Lord as you could possibly be in this life, because it's about a person, not about a place. Jesus is the greater temple.

JESUS IS THE GREATER HIGH PRIEST

Jesus is the great high priest. What happened at Passover, and what was happening in that day is that the high priest would represent the people and he would mediate between the people and God. And here's Jesus, the great high priest.

So friends, I'm not your priest, and I'm certainly not your high priest. And we don't have priests and we don't have a high priest, other than Jesus. And because of the presence of the Holy Spirit in us, the Bible says we're a kingdom of priests, we all get to do what the priests used to do: pray for people and love people and serve people and intercede between them and God and love them with a love of God and introduce them to Jesus, our great high priest. It's exactly what Hebrews is all about, over and over and over. Jesus is our high priest. He's the one who brings us close to God. He's the one who offers the sacrifice for sin so that sin might be forgiven and atoned for.

JESUS IS THE GREATER SACRIFICE

So friends, we're not going to a temple today, and we're also, furthermore, not offering any sacrifices. We're not slaughtering any animals because Jesus is the greater sacrifice. They would bring a lamb and they would sacrifice the lamb in their place for their sins as their substitute. That lamb's blood would be shed, and there's Jesus the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Jesus, the Passover lamb who's been slain.

As glorious as it was for them to come together for Passover, it's more glorious for us. They have a temple; Jesus is our greater temple. They had a high priest; Jesus is our great high priest. They had to sacrifice; Jesus is the sacrifice given once for all sin and sinners. And when we gather, we gather around him.

It's not about a place, it's about a person. This means individually, the Spirit of God dwells in us. And we get to experience the Holy of Holies in the center of our life. Not that we're sinless and perfect, but that the presence and the power of God would be at work in us. And that corporately, as the church, that God the Holy Spirit would dwell in us. And that together as the people of God gathered around, not a place but a person, the Lord Jesus Christ, we would come to worship and to celebrate and open up the proverbial court of the Gentiles to invite those who are non-Christian to come in, and that we give generously to pay the bills, that they might learn about him. And if you're among us as a non-Christian, we say God bless you, we love you, we want nothing from you. Jesus has something for you: forgiveness of sin, eternal life, and friendship with God.

PRAYER

Father God, we thank you for the Scriptures and an opportunity to study them. And Jesus, I thank you that you got angry. Some of us need to learn to get angry. Some of us get angry too much for the wrong things, and we need to learn how to have a godly, righteous anger.

Jesus, thank you that you were, while on the earth, and still are through your servants, a preacher and a teacher. That Lord Jesus, you don't just call us to figure life out, but you teach us. You've sent the Holy Spirit to teach us. You've given us the Scriptures to teach us. Pray for those of us who have the privilege of preaching and teaching, all the way from moms and dads, all the way up to deacons and elders and Community Group leaders and Redemption Group leaders and worship team leaders, that God, we would excel at preaching and teaching by your grace, for your glory and others' good.

And thank you, Lord Jesus as well, that you really are greater. You're greater than the temple, you're greater than the priest, you're greater than the sacrifices. You're the greatest of all. Jesus, it's remarkable to think that the whole Bible's about you and all of human history is about you.

And Jesus, we now confess individually and corporately that you have all authority. There's no one alongside of you, there's no one above you. It doesn't matter what the experts say, what the professors teach, what the media would communicate, what the philosophers would pontificate, or what the religious people would speculate. Jesus, you are the highest authority. Help us to take you at your word. Amen.