



“Authority”
Luke 20:1-26

Idea: Jesus possesses all authority in heaven and on earth.

Intro: Who is in control? This is one of the most significant questions we can ask in any aspect of life. It is especially true in the home.

I heard about a ten-year-old boy named Robert who ruled his passive mother and everyone else in his life. This boy was a dreaded nightmare for the teachers at his school, the staff at his pediatrician’s office, and even the employees at the local grocery store. During a doctor’s visit, a couple severe cavities were found, so his mom took him to a new dentist that was suggested by the pediatrician.

The day of the appointment, Robert arrived at the dentist, prepared for battle. The dental assistant brought the boy back to a room where the dentist was waiting. As he walked in, the doctor said, “Welcome young man. Can you hop up in the chair for me?” “No chance!” replied Robert. The battle had begun. The doctor said, “Son, I told you to hop onto the chair, and that is what I intend for you do.” Robert stared down his new opponent for a moment, and then replied, “If you make me, then I will take off all my clothes.”

This dentist was an older gentleman who had been in practice for a long time, but having a patient threaten with getting naked was a new experience even for him. He never flinched though. The doctor calmly said, “Son, take them off.” So, the boy removed everything but his underwear. “Well, hop up in the chair,” said the doc. “No, I guess you did not hear me. I will take off all my clothes if you make me,” rebutted Robert. “Go ahead and strip down.” You see, no one had ever called the boy’s bluff before, but to save face, Robert stripped down and hopped up in the chair.

He sat cooperatively and complied with the doctor’s instructions through the entire procedure. When finished, Robert asked for his clothes, but the doctor refused to return them. He said, “Tell your mom that we are going to keep them tonight. She can pick them up in the morning.” Obviously, Robert was shocked. How was he going to walk out of the office with no clothes? Clearly, he was going to have to walk out in his birthday suit, which he did. When he opened the door into the waiting room, it was filled with patients. He and his mom walked out of the office, down a public elevator, and into the parking lot while ignoring the snickers and stares.

The next day, when Robert’s mom returned to retrieve the clothes, she thanked the dentist. She said to him, “Robert has been blackmailing me about his clothes for years. Anytime we are in a public place, he makes unreasonable demands of me unless I do what he says. You are the first person who has called his bluff, and the impact on Robert has been incredible.” This ten-year-old boy needed to learn who was in control. He needed someone to take authority over him, and he needed to submit under that authority.

Recognizing and submitting to authority is crucial. Men, women, boys, and girls all struggle with submitting to it. Yet, authority is essential for the success of any social, political, or religious organization. It is vital for healthy family dynamics. Likewise, it is paramount for how people relate to God. Without authority, there is only confusion and chaos. As the result of sin, most people want authority, but few people want to be under it. Sometimes that rejection is due to suspicion. Someone has abused authority. In other situations, the rejection is simply out of a desire to usurp another's authority. No matter our attitude toward authority, the world remains filled with it.

Inquiry: Throughout the Gospel of Luke, the Lord Jesus is presented as the King who has a Kingdom. Therefore, it stands to reason that King Jesus also possesses the authority of the Kingdom. Throughout our study of this Gospel, we have been watching Jesus move toward the cross. In the previous passage, He entered the city of Jerusalem. Jesus' arrival in the Holy City was grounded upon two significant displays of authority: first, His triumphal entry when He rode into Jerusalem on the colt of a donkey amid the joyous adulation of the crowds, and second, the cleansing of the Temple when He drove out the money changers. The King of Peace, authoritatively, entered the city of peace on a beast of peace to secure peace through the cross. The biblical reality of that moment, which remains still today, is that the true temple had come to the Temple. Jesus' sacrificial death upon the cross signaled both the coming destruction of Herod's temple and Jesus' sovereign role as the temple of His people (Reve 21:22). As the King, Jesus possesses all authority in heaven and on earth.

This authority has always been present with Jesus. It was His in heaven with the Father (Col 1:15-20). It was declared by Gabriel as he told Mary that she would birth Jesus into the world (Luke 1:32-33). It was evident as Jesus sat with the teachers in the Temple as a boy and later taught the people (Luke 2:46-47; Matt 7:28-29). It was on display as He silenced and drove out demons, healed the blind and sick, and raised the dead from the grave. Now, as the King spends this final week in Jerusalem, He exhibits authority.

Read Luke 20:1-26.

Jesus entered Jerusalem on Sunday, and He spent the next few days teaching and preaching in the Temple courts. On one of those days, the religious leaders questioned Him about His teaching (vs. 1). Luke casually records it was just "*one day.*" It is almost as if this day began like any other day. There is no doubt that Jesus made it His practice to preach and teach the gospel.

The religious leaders wanted to know by what authority Jesus had entered Jerusalem, cleansed the Temple, and taught. As R. Kent Hughes points out, "derived authority was a major pillar in their system." The act of teaching was typically a tedious chain of authority citations. Rabbis would reference other rabbinical teachings. When lecturing, they would say something similar to "Rabbi Meir says...but Rabbi Judah says this...however Rabbi Simeon also permits..." Jesus, however, never referenced what rabbis had to say on matters. He spoke out of His own authority. As such, He broke all the teaching ministry protocols. In addition, the religious leaders also correctly assumed that no leader of Israel had been consulted or given approval of Jesus' actions and teachings.

The religious leadership of Israel questioned Jesus to stop His ministry. They rejected His authority, but Jesus demonstrated that He possessed all authority. We see this in three ways. We see that His...

1. Authority as the Prophet is unquestionable.

Jesus was teaching and preaching the gospel (vs. 1). In doing so, He was carrying out the duties of a prophet. By definition, prophets declared the Word of God they received through the direct prompting of the Holy Spirit. Thus, they became the human instrument of divine revelation. On this day, the leaders came and questioned Jesus about His authority (vs. 2). Rather than answering, "I speak on

behalf of God the Father,” He asked them a question about John’s baptism (vs. 3-4). Was it *“from heaven or from man?”*

The leaders quickly deliberated between themselves in front of the people (vs. 5). If they admitted John’s baptism was from heaven, then they were guilty of rejecting it. If they stated it was from man, then they feared the people would revolt against them (vs. 6). So, they chose the passive aggressive approach of a good politician, stating they did not know (vs. 7). These men were stuck between conviction and cowardice, so they attempted to control the spin. As a result, Jesus refused to answer their interrogation (vs. 8).

What is amazing is that with one question, the Lord exposed the spiritual emptiness of Israel’s religious authorities. You see, if you do not know where authority is derived, then you cannot possess authority yourself. His question and their inability to answer demonstrated that the religious leaders were unqualified to question His authority. If they could not tell the difference between a prophet and a mere man, then how could they discern the Son of God when He came?

The truth is John’s baptism was from heaven. He was the last of the Old Testament kind of prophets. Jesus even described him as the greatest of the prophets (7:28). The message he preached and the baptism he performed were to be received because they rested on the authority of Holy Spirit.

Jesus, as God the Son, possesses this same authority. When we meet Jesus, we meet a Person with unquestionable authority. As such, He is even greater than John the Baptist. John received divine revelation, but Jesus is divine revelation (John 1:1, 14). John preached the Word of God, but Jesus is the Word of God. Therefore, He is the ultimate prophet, and His authority is unquestionable.

What gave Jesus the authority to welcome the praise of the people as He entered Jerusalem? How did Jesus possess the authority to rebuke the money changers and cleanse the Temple? Who authorized Jesus to teach the people? He was able to do these because He possessed authority as the Prophet of God. There is a second way this authority is demonstrated. We see that His...

2. Authority as the Son is irrefutable.

If the Lord’s authority cannot be questioned, then His rule also cannot be refuted. In verses 9-18, Jesus told a parable to the people observing this debate. It was a parable about rejected authority, using the image of a vineyard. In many ways, Israel viewed themselves as the vineyard of God, and many passages in the Bible make this connection (Ps 80:8-16; Is 5:1-7; 27:2-5; Jer 2:21; Ezek 19:10-14; Hos 10:1). This image was such a significant part of their national identity that the Temple where Jesus was teaching displayed a richly carved grapevine that was sculpted around the door leading from the porch to the Holy Place. The branches, vines, and leaves were made of the finest gold. The clusters of grapes were comprised of costly jewels. King Herod had placed the vine there when he expanded the Temple. It was sacred in the eyes of the Jews.

As the people and religious leaders listened to Jesus’ parable about a vineyard, they quickly made the connection. The song in Isaiah 5 lamented the failure of the vineyard, but Jesus’ parable addressed the failure of the tenants of the vineyard. This allegory is easy to follow. The man is God the Father. The vineyard is Israel. The tenants are the religious leaders. The servants are the prophets. And the son is Jesus.

God had planted a vineyard; He had called a people to Himself. Then, He left it in the hands of His tenants, priests and kings. Little by little they lost touch with the owner of the vineyard. After a while, God began to send His servants the prophets to them. They were rejected and beaten. Finally, God sent

His Son, but He was rejected and killed. By eliminating the son, the tenants rejected the owner's highest expression of love. For this reason, they would be destroyed (vs. 16).

The people understood exactly what Jesus was conveying, but they could not believe it. They even refused to believe it (vs. 16). At this point, the Lord does not back down. Instead, He leans in and looks them in the eye and quotes Scripture (vs. 17). His words come from Isaiah 28 and Psalm 118, and they are messianic in nature. The stone is rejected, but it becomes the cornerstone. In that day, when a building was constructed, the first thing laid down was the cornerstone. It made sure the foundation was level and square. Jesus was obviously speaking of Himself. God's Kingdom is built upon Him. Those, however, who reject His rule are destroyed. The Jews who refused to believe stumbled over Jesus and broke themselves. Those that stood against Him were crushed (Dan 2:34-35). It is a clear picture of judgment (vs. 18).

The point of Jesus' parable is to describe the futility of building a life without Him. There is no way to enter God's vineyard with Him. You must not stumble or fall on the stone, and you dare not let it fall on you. There is no way for you to survive that. Jesus' authority as the Son is irrefutable. Every single person must decide what to do with Jesus. The only safe way to live is to stand on the stone, build upon it, and make it the foundation of your life.

There is a third way this authority is demonstrated. We see that His...

3. Authority as God is incontestable.

The religious leaders heard and understood what Jesus said through the parable, but they refused to heed it. There was no conviction or contrition in them. They only felt contempt for the Lord, so they sought to once again to lay a trap for Him (vs. 20). Their religious authority had been destroyed in the debate over John, so they now look to use government authority to silence Jesus.

Their plot begins with flattery. *"Teacher, we know that you speak and teach rightly, and show no partiality, but truly teach the way of God"* (vs. 21). It is important to recognize that often the Enemy's agents will make their appeal to our pride. The trap question is found in verse 22. The spies hoped to discredit Jesus by getting Him to validate the Romans, whom the people hated. If that did not work, then they hoped to catch Him on record speaking of insurrection against Rome.

As always, Jesus sees through their plot. He famously answers, *"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's"* (vs. 25). The denarius was a Roman coin that bore Caesar's image and inscription. It was the tax that all adult men and women had to pay into the Roman treasury for the privilege of existing. As such, this tax was an explosive issue in Israel. Rather than getting bogged down in the controversy, Jesus tells them to fulfill their obligations both to Caesar and God.

The Jews were to render to Caesar what was his. The reason for this was because Israel was a conquered nation under Roman rule. Therefore, Rome was the governing force, and Caesar's image was on the coin. Ancient coins were understood to be the property of the person whose picture and inscription was on them. Similarly, the U.S. Treasury Department owns American currency, and it is illegal to deface it. Therefore, Jesus' statement affirmed Caesar's authority and the role of government in society.

The Jews were also to render to God what was His. The reason for this is because each Jew bore the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26). His image is stamped onto each of us; therefore, He has the right to command our lives.

The religious leaders failed in their attempt to trap Jesus. They marveled over His answer to their question, but they were not moved to submit to His authority. As we contemplate these words, there are two questions we ought to ask: 1) Whose image do I bear? 2) Have I given to God what is God's? The answer to the first question is quite clear. You bear the image of God. The second answer may not be as clear. If your first attempt thinks God only wants your money, then you have missed the point. We also should not first think of our time or talents. No, what the Lord wants and rightly deserves is us. Jesus wants you, and He possesses authority as God to demand it. He is incontestable. Therefore, we must give Him our lives.

Conclusion: Who is in control? Who is seated upon the throne of your life? Perhaps there is no greater question to be asked. Little Robert sat confidently on the throne of his life, not understanding how miserable he and everyone else in his life were. Everything changed, however, when he met a dentist who took authority and humbled the boy. Robert's life was changed that day.

Similarly, if you are not living in submission to King Jesus, then you too are miserable whether you see it or not. Your life is full of confusion and chaos. Even more than that, it is under the just judgment of God. You are in danger of being destroyed by the Stone. So, I urge you in faith to stand on the stone, build upon it, and make it the foundation of your life.