

Jesus Has the Highest Authority. How Do You Respond to That?

Luke 19:45-20:8 (text)

15 September 2019, Reformed Church of Wainuiomata 10:30 am

(Put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)

Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

What does it do to a person as soon as he/she finally grasps that Jesus Christ really came and acted by the *highest authority* – the *authority of God Almighty*?

Well, does it not drive you on your knees in awe of Him!?

Did Christ's disciples grasp that? Did they know, that all His life on earth, their Lord did all that He did *by the highest authority* – the authority of the Almighty and Sovereign God?

Well, they *confessed* it! You see, Simon Peter once spoke on their behalf when he said, "***You are the Messiah/Christ, the Son of the Living God!***"¹

And, of course, shortly before Christ ascended into heaven, He plainly told them: "***All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me...***"²

So, with their *minds* they grasped it, and with their *mouths* they professed it!

But do you know when they really *lived* it?

Well, was it not on & after Pentecost Day when our Lord Jesus, *again in/by the highest Authority*, poured out, as He had promised, the Holy Spirit! And Peter, *convinced of Christ's highest authority*, started preaching boldly in the very city where their Lord had preached – and in the face of the very same Jewish leaders from whom the scared-stiff disciples ran away only five weeks earlier!

Indeed, especially after our Lord's resurrection, ascension and outpouring of His Spirit, His disciples' actions showed that they had no doubt *by which authority* He had performed His whole earthly ministry! And, as a result, they *served* Him and *obeyed* His command to spread the Gospel!

And was it not the same with the Apostle Paul who, at first, was an enemy of Christ until...; yes, until he saw the risen Lord, fell to the ground, and started serving Christ with every fibre in his being?

See what it does to you when you grasp who Jesus really is – and that He has the highest authority?

That's what our passage is all about, i.e. **that Jesus Christ holds the highest authority. But here's the question: How do you respond to that?**

Well, our sermon has three points

- Highest Authority *in Action*
- Highest Authority *Questioned*
- Highest Authority *Upheld*

Highest Authority in Action

It's about the year 30 AD, and it's four days before the Jewish Passover – also four days before Christ's crucifixion! Yes, our Lord Jesus was going to be crucified on the Friday,

¹ Cf. Mt 16:16 *Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*

² [*The Holy Bible: New International Version*](#). (1984). (Mt 28:18). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan (Emphasis mine).

but now, at the time of Lk 19:45-48, it's still Monday!³ And Jesus has just arrived at the temple to teach!

But what does He see?

Well, anything but a worship atmosphere! Indeed, it was more like the deafening noise at an auction or business hub – and *that* at the temple of all places; yes, in the temple's outer court, the court where foreigners & eunuchs were allowed to worship God.

Why was it so busy?

Well, because it's nearly Passover!

Many Jews have come from all over the known world – from Rome, from Greece, from Galatia, from Babylonia, from Persia, from Egypt & Arabia!

They have come to celebrate Passover at the temple in Jerusalem and to offer animal sacrifices to God.

And what is more convenient/practical – to bring your own sacrificial lamb with you all the way from Persia and then to see it rejected by the priest who finds some defect in it, or to come with enough cash in your pocket and come buy an already approved lamb (calf or dove) at the temple?

Of course, it's the latter!

So, there at the temple you could buy animals, wine, oil, salt and doves – all you might need for your sacrifices!

What's more, you were not allowed to pay the required temple fees with your *Roman* currency/money. No, if you came with Roman money, you had to come change that there at the temple into Hebrew shekels!⁴ And of *this* you can be sure: you will need to pay whatever fee the money changers charge you! And, no doubt, much of the profits went into the coffer of the high priest!⁵

So, what do we see?

Well, that instead of keeping the outer court free as a place of reverent worship for the foreigner and the eunuch, the priests and their officials had a booming business going there!

It was anything but a quiet worship atmosphere!

There was a deafening noise made by the animals, doves, and buyers & sellers! On top of that, the stench of animals filled the air!

And our Lord Jesus?

Well, He bursts out in holy anger!

³ That is, going by Mk 11:11-17, which describes that, on Palm Sunday, *Jesus entered Jerusalem and went to the temple. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.*

¹² *The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. ¹³ Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. ¹⁴ Then he said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard him say it.*

¹⁵ *On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple area and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, ¹⁶ and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. ¹⁷ And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written:*

"My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'?"

But you have made it 'a den of robbers'" (Emphasis mine).

⁴ Cf. Bock, D. L. (1996). *Luke* (pp. 499–505). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

Also cf., Hendriksen, W. 2004. Exposition of the Gospel according to Luke (In: Hendriksen, W. ed. New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI : Baker Book House. p.879-880).

⁵ Cf. Bock (ibid) and Hendriksen (ibid:880)

According to Mark's Gospel, He *began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons.* ¹⁶ *And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple*⁶ – thus, a thorough cleansing!

Then our Lord says, *“It is written, ‘My house shall be a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a den of robbers.”*⁷

So, what do we see?

Well, that Jesus is exactly saying what also the prophets Isaiah & Jeremiah once told God's people!⁸

Yes, Jeremiah once warned: “You who have changed God's holy temple into a den of robbers, do you think God will forever tolerate you and this place. Do you want to see what God can do to this place of worship? Then go look at Shiloh – that former place of worship! Go see how it now lies in ruins and how thorns & thistles are growing where God's place of worship once stood! So, look, God is able to do the same with this place!”

And God did!

Not long after Jeremiah's warnings, God, through the Babylonians, destroyed that most glorious temple once built by Solomon – a temple that had become a place of insincere worship! And God also destroyed the sinful priests and worshipers!

So, back to our text: What prophetic warning does *Jesus' temple-cleansing* now give?

Well, a warning re the new temple – a glorious one, built by Herod the Great – beautiful & big; a warning that would be fulfilled only about forty years later, in 70 AD, when God would bring the Romans to destroy city and temple, and slaughter 1.1 million Jews!⁹

But Jesus' temple-cleansing did not just serve as a *prophecy* – no, it also served as a *Messianic sign* – as a *look-who-has-come-to-His-temple sign*!!

Why do I say that?

Well, look, is the authority by which Christ cleanses this temple – is that not a fulfilment of the words our Lord once spoke in Mt 12:6, *“I tell you, something greater than the temple is here”*? And is this not also a fulfilment of Mal 3:1 *“... ‘Then suddenly the Lord*

⁶ ESV

⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Lk 19:46). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

⁸ Cf. Is 56:6-7 (especially v.7) *And foreigners who bind themselves to the Lord to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant—⁷ these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations”* (Emphasis mine).

Jer 7:11-16 (especially v.11) *Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching! declares the Lord.*

¹² *“Go now to the place in Shiloh where I first made a dwelling for my Name, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of my people Israel. ¹³ While you were doing all these things, declares the Lord, I spoke to you again and again, but you did not listen; I called you, but you did not answer. ¹⁴ Therefore, what I did to Shiloh I will now do to the house that bears my Name, the temple you trust in, the place I gave to you and your ancestors. ¹⁵ I will thrust you from my presence, just as I did all your fellow Israelites, the people of Ephraim.”*

¹⁶ *“So do not pray for this people nor offer any plea or petition for them; do not plead with me, for I will not listen to you”* (Emphasis mine).

⁹ Cf. e.g. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siege_of_Jerusalem_\(70_CE\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siege_of_Jerusalem_(70_CE))

you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,' says the Lord Almighty"?¹⁰

But the Jewish leaders did not even “click” that!

All they would perhaps accept was that, when the *prophets of old* preached, *they* preached by the highest authority – the authority of God! But who is this unlearned Jesus from Nazareth who has not even studied theology at any training school!?

Well, as for the rest of that Monday, the Jewish leaders were afraid to do anything against Jesus, because they feared the people, for the people loved Jesus and His teaching and healings!

But look at our Lord’s calm and authoritative composure: Now that He has cleansed the outer court for proper worship, He goes and, unafraid of the priests, and as v.47 says (and also the parallel in Matthew),¹¹ just continues in that same court to teach the people there, and to heal the blind and lame. And they were hanging on His words!! And the children kept on shouting, “*Hosanna to the Son of David!*”¹²

So, when our Lord had done what He, *in highest authority*, had planned for that Monday – yes, when He had restored the temple’s outer court for proper worship, and had calmly finished His teaching and healing ministry for that Monday, then, as Matthew & Mark tell us, He left the temple, and went out of Jerusalem to nearby Bethany where He spent the night¹³ – which brings us to point 2...

Highest Authority Questioned

The next morning,¹⁴ i.e. on the Tuesday, despite how He had upset the Jewish leaders the previous day, our Lord returned unafraid and *with great authority* back to the same temple to teach and heal God’s people.

¹⁰ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Mal 3:1). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

¹¹ Cf. Mt 21:12-14 (especially v.14), ***And 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.***

¹³ ***He said to them, “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you make it a den of robbers.”***

¹⁴ ***And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them*** (Emphasis mine).

¹² For a more complete description of what went on at that occasion, cf. Mt 21:12-17, ***Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves.*** ¹³ ***“It is written,” he said to them, ““My house will be called a house of prayer,”^e but you are making it “a den of robbers.”***

¹⁴ ***The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them.*** ¹⁵ ***But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” they were indignant.***

¹⁶ ***“Do you hear what these children are saying?” they asked him.***

“Yes,” replied Jesus, “have you never read,

“From the lips of children and infants

you, Lord, have called forth your praise’?”

¹⁷ ***And he left them and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night.***

¹³ Cf. Mt 21:17 ***And leaving them, he went out of the city to Bethany and lodged there.***

And Mk 11:19 ***And when evening came, they went out of the city.***

¹⁴ Cf. the parallel texts from Matthew and Mark: Mt 21:18 & 23, ***In the morning, as he was returning to the city, he became hungry....***

²³ ***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?”***

And as He was busy healing & teaching them, the Jewish leaders who were still angry about what He did on the previous day (yes, the same leaders who would, only three days later, hand Him over to the Romans), came to Him and asked Him by what authority He did these things.

So, they asked Him as much as, “Jesus, show us Your credentials!” “Yes, show us Your certificate of study – Your qualifications, so that we can see from which theological training school You are, and who has given You the authority to do what You have been doing!” “Yes, who do You think You are?” “Who gave You the authority to do what You did yesterday by hampering our temple business and then even quoting words from the respected prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah at us!?” “By what authority did You do all these things?”

My brother & sister, how would you & I have wanted Jesus to answer them?

Do you (do I) think Christ would have done better if He had answered them this way...?¹⁵

“Dear Jewish leaders, do you remember what happened thirty-three years ago, when wise men came from far away from the east? Surely, some of you who lived then are still alive today! Do you remember how God led them by a special star? Do you remember their question to Herod: ‘Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?’”¹⁶

“And do you remember some twenty-one years ago when I was twelve years old and sitting among you and asking you questions, and you were amazed at My understanding and My answers?”¹⁷

And do you remember three years ago, when John the Baptist preached and baptised at the Jordan? Do you remember that John baptised even Me? And do you remember what happened as I came out of the water – yes, how the Holy Spirit descended upon Me like a dove and empowered Me; and My Father’s voice from heaven!? Surely some of you were there, for you sent a delegation!¹⁸ You must have heard that voice from heaven saying, ***‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.’***¹⁹

Then, when I healed the paralytic in Capernaum and, when I forgave him his sins, some of your law-teachers were there. Did they then not tell you what I did & said at the time? Here it is: ***“But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—I said to the paralytic—¹¹ “I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home.”***²⁰

Mk 11:20 & 27-28, ***As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots....***

²⁷ And they came again to Jerusalem. And as he was walking in the temple, the chief priests and the scribes and the elders came to him, ²⁸ and they said to him, “By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?” (Emphasis mine).

¹⁵ The idea about these incidents from our Lord’s life which I now describe – this idea I have gladly borrowed from the audio sermon of RC Sproul on Luke 20:1-19, for which cf.

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/sermons/jesus-authority-parable-tenants/>

¹⁶ Cf. Mt 2:1-2 ***After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.”***

¹⁷ cf. Lk 2:46-47, ***After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷ And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.***

¹⁸ Cf. e.g. Mt 3:7 ***But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?”***

¹⁹ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (Mt 3:17). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

²⁰ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (Mk 2:10–11). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

Then, a few weeks ago, when I was with My disciples alone at Caesarea Philippi, I asked them, ‘But you, who do you say that I am?’ Then, Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God!’”²¹

“Then, on Sunday (yes, only two days ago), you saw me riding that donkey, and you saw the palm branches of victory and you heard the crowd shouting the prophetic words of Ps 118, “Hosanna!” Can’t you see? Are you blind? Can’t you see that I have fulfilled the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9...

***“Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion!
Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem!
See, your king comes to you,
righteous and having salvation,
gentle and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey”?***²²

“So, dear Jewish leaders, can’t you see that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given Me?”

My brother & sister, that’s *not* what our Lord said!

Somehow you/I wish He had said that! But He would not get into a dragged-out discussion trying to defend Himself before men who would not listen to even those words if Christ were to utter them!

No, those leaders were hard of heart!

They had seen/heard enough, but would not listen!

How about you & me?

Do you/I grasp who Jesus was/is – with what authority He came, taught, healed, died, rose, and ascended back to heaven?

Our Lord is not going to answer anyone in a petty human way – in an under-the-sun way, because His ways are not our ways! You see, because of who He is, He rises above human thinking!

So, how would He answer these theologians and leaders who questioned His authority?

Well, that brings us to the last point...

Highest Authority Upheld

In typical Jewish fashion, Jesus did not answer these blind theologians with an answer!

No, as so often when the Jewish leaders asked Him a question,²³ so also now our Lord answered them with a counter-question by which He puts them in a corner!

This time, they have asked by what authority He was doing all these things.

Then we hear our Lord say in v.3 ***“I also will ask you a question. Now tell me, was the baptism of John from heaven or from man?”***

And, of course, our Lord knew exactly how they would discuss among themselves as to how they could answer Him.

He, as Lord of heaven & earth, knew they would not be willing to admit that John the Baptist performed his ministry by the authority of God, for if they were to admit that, then

²¹ Cf. Mt 16:16

²² [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Zec 9:9). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

²³ Cf. e.g. Lk 5:21-24; 5:33-39; 6:2-5; 11:15-22; 20:27-38 (and Mk 12:24); and Lk 20:1-8.

Jesus would say to them, “Then why did you not believe John when he pointed at Me and said, ‘*Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*’³⁰ *This is the one I meant when I said, ‘A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’*?”²⁴

But Christ knew they would not admit that John ministered by the authority of God. And Christ also knew that they would not want to say that John administered by mere human authority, for if they’d dare say that, then they’d be in big trouble with the crowds who were convinced that John was a prophet from God!

My brother & sister, a chess player would have said, “Wow, Jesus has put those Jewish leaders in *check mate!*” He has cornered them! The only way they can get out of their mess is by giving an embarrassing answer like, “*We don’t know!*” “*We don’t know by whose authority John was baptising!*”

And that’s exactly what they did!

So, what does Jesus now say?

Well, this: “*Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.*”

You feel like saying to Jesus, “But, Lord, why didn’t you tell them exactly who You are?” “If you did, You could have saved Your life!” “But as it is now, they think You’re just an ordinary man!” “So, they will now proceed with their schemes to kill You!” “Why did You not tell them straight-out who You are, and saved Your life!?”

Well, my brother & sister, you & I know our Lord was not going to try & escape death! After all, that’s exactly what He came for – to willingly give His life for His loved ones! Besides, even if He had told those Jewish leaders straight-out who He was, they would just do what they had done all along, i.e. discard His testimony as rubbish!

So, what did our Lord do?

He gave them the same answer as He would give to everyone who refuses to submit him/herself to His will – a *final* answer; an answer of closure – an answer that closes the door!

So, dear Wainui member (Dear visitor), allow me to ask: “How do you answer the question regarding Jesus authority?”

Who is Jesus for you?

I know who He is for me: my promised Saviour, Messiah, the Son of the Living God!

If you, too, can say the same, then, look, this is what our Lord will say to you, “Blessed are you, dear Wainui member (visitor). For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.”²⁵

AMEN (2725 words excluding footnotes)

²⁴ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Jn 1:29–30). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

²⁵ Cf. Mt 16:17 *And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.”*