

23When He entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to Him while He was teaching, and said, "By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?" 24Jesus said to them, "I will also ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. 25"The baptism of John was from what source, from heaven or from men?" And they began reasoning among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say to us, 'Then why did you not believe him?'" 26"But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the people; for they all regard John as a prophet." 27And answering Jesus, they said, "We do not know." He also said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

28"But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go work today in the vineyard.' 29"And he answered, 'I will not'; but afterward he regretted it and went. 30"The man came to the second and said the same thing; and he answered, 'I will, sir'; but he did not go. 31"Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you that the tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the kingdom of God before you. 32"For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him; but the tax collectors and prostitutes did believe him; and you, seeing this, did not even feel remorse afterward so as to believe him.

Somewhere along the way, Mom taught us kids that we would always find ourselves somewhere in the middle. Someone will have authority over you, and you will likely have authority over someone else.

We taught our kids the same thing. Respect authority. The policeman has a gun for a reason. He's authorized to use it. Obey those who have authority over you, and be kind to anyone you find yourself in authority over.

Authority and submission is a huge topic these days. That's because we have systematically as a society challenged and rejected every authority. All authority.

On the news shows, we look across the sea at anarchy. Complete anarchy.

And we can't get there fast enough. Overthrow everything. Somehow it'll be better.

In our fallen natures, we have built within us, a seed of rebellion. We don't want any one or any thing telling us what to do. Including our maker. We hate authority.

What we're looking at in this passage this morning is a battle over authority.

The Sanhedrin, the 70 elders in Israel, the High priest, and right down the line up of Pharisees and scribes who have authority over the people of Israel have had that authority challenged.

This Jesus who can do miracles and who has surrounded Himself with common people has walked smack into the middle of everything, declared He owns the house, and thrown everybody else who had any rightful authority, out.

The Jews had an ordination ceremony not unlike what we have today. Like a college of cardinals who choose the next Pope. The Jews had similar structures in place.

Men who were called into the priesthood or who had ambitions to rule would sit under certain famous rabbis and they would become Pharisees and work their way up through the ranks. There was ordination involved. That's how their authority structure had worked for centuries.

Now some hill billy walks in, throws everyone out, says His Father owns the house, and proceeds to hold court with the watching crowds. Add in miracles and power that only God has, and you have a real coup in progress.

This man has no ordination. No letters. He's nobody from nowhere. But He seems to wield power. No one argues when the tables and the money is flying and He drives them out of there like cattle.

This is Wednesday morning, and the authorities have had time to re-group a

bit.

Luke's gospel says the people were hanging on every word. Listening to the teacher who speaks with authority as if He were the source. The author. The people were mesmerized.

So if you're the guy who had all of the authority last week until Jesus showed up, and all the people are swooning over His authoritative teaching, that's a huge threatening challenge. Last week you were the ruling party. This week you've been overthrown by a coup of One.

So they come to Him with this question; *23When He entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to Him while He was teaching, and said, "By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?"*

Root cause analysis. What we have here is two opposing armies. Satan's army consists of organized religion, and these are his emissaries. They've come to challenge an intruder into their realm of authority. Jesus, the Son of God.

We've often said from this pulpit that authority goes far deeper than what we see on our human level.

In the old testament we see this clearly. God will be addressing the king of persia and suddenly the dialogue goes beyond the king we see.

Let me show you just one such passage in Daniel 10. Daniel is distressed and prays for help . . . and we read this; This is the angel who was dispatched to help Daniel but he didn't get there immediately.

...12Then he said to me, "Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart on understanding this and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words. 13"But the prince of the kingdom of Persia was withstanding me for twenty-one days; then behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left there with the kings of Persia. 14"Now I have come to give you an understanding of what will happen to your

people in the latter days, for the vision pertains to the days yet future."...

This is just a tiny glimpse. The Kings of Persia have princes, angelic beings that are in combat with other angelic beings. The struggles of good and evil go far deeper than the figure heads at the top positions in human government.

If only we could have been there this day and seen with spiritual eyes the spiritual armies lined up against each other.

Jesus is the final authority in the universe. He spoke it into existence.

I often think of the Lord's prayer. Some of the simplest words but most profound truth. *Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth . . .* how does it end? Say it with me; *as it is in heaven.*

This tiny rock in the midst of all the vast heavens and universes is the only place, the ONLY place where God's will is not done. Earth is in rebellion with it's creator. And here we have a stand-off. And when we frame the question that way, it seems laughable.

"By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?"

Jesus is in utter control. Complete control.

I get kind of sad when I think of liberal christianity that thinks Jesus was just an ordinary guy with big ambitions and He got himself in over His head.

He got smart with these rulers and things didn't work out the way He thought they would. He got himself killed. He took on Jerusalem and it was bigger than Him. He made some bad choices and made the wrong people angry and it cost Him his life.

Jesus Christ, superstar, do you think you're who they say you are?
Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice depict Jesus as a helpless puppet who got carried away in the crowds enthusiasm and then died helplessly.

They forget one thing. He rose from the dead. The same thing liberal christianity forgot.

Nothing is out of control in this scene. These leaders of Israel are in fact the puppets. They have no clue of the spiritual warfare taking place as they ask Jesus *“By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?”*

Jesus, this Jesus who they confront, has the authority to lay His life down, and take it up again. Everything is running on schedule. Nothing is out of place. Sovereign God is in control of every breath these puppets of Satan take.

But Jesus will answer their question; Sort of. His question to them contains the answer.

24 Jesus said to them, “I will also ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. 25 “The baptism of John was from what source, from heaven or from men?”

The baptism of John. The one where the heavens opened and a voice said, *This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.* The one where John said, Behold, the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world. That baptism? yes, that one. Was it real, or phony?

This isn't the first time the jews have been at this crossroad. The baptism of John is huge. Because Malachi promised a John - like prophet who would announce the Messiah when He arrived. And Isaiah 40 promised likewise;

Isa. 40:2 "Speak kindly to Jerusalem; And call out to her, that her warfare has ended, That her iniquity has been removed, That she has received of the LORD'S hand Double for all her sins." 3A voice is calling, "Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God. 4"Let every valley be lifted up, And every mountain and hill be made low; And let the rough ground become a plain, And the rugged terrain a broad valley;...

We're familiar with those lines because of Handel's messiah, but the jews were familiar with those lines because they promised a messiah.

Was John that prophet?? They need to know, and they have investigated previously. They asked John himself.

John 1:19 - 23 This is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" 20And he confessed and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." 21They asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" And he said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." 22Then they said to him, "Who are you, so that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?" 23He said, "I am A VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD,' as Isaiah the prophet said."

24Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. 25They asked him, and said to him, "Why then are you baptizing, if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" 26John answered them saying, "I baptize in water, but among you stands One whom you do not know. 27"It is He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." 28These things took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

29The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! 30"This is He on behalf of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.' 31"I did not recognize Him, but so that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water." 32John testified saying, "I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. 33"I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.' 34"I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God."

That was the testimony of John, to the jews. That's the information they have already in place when they have made up their minds in unbelief that

John was not a prophet and Jesus is not the messiah.

That's a LOT of information. It clearly was from God. The people of Israel streamed out to the wilderness to repent and be baptized by John. It was a revival that only God could accomplish.

There was no prophet in Israel for 400 years, and now there is one in the wilderness that weilds the same spiritual power as Elijah!

In order to remain in disbelief, these jews must surmount the miracles and the spectacle of a national revival by a man wearing the clothes of Elijah in a remote place unto whom thousands streamed and repented of their sins in the waters of the Jordan.

But wait, there's more. In order to dis-believe they must discount a familiar miracle from 30 years ago. Not less than the angel Gabriel had come to one of their own homeboys, Zachariah, and told him he would have a son with his barren wife, in his old age, whom he would name John, and this son would go forth in the spirit and power of Elijah to prepare the hearts of the people for their messiah. He would go before Him as forerunner as Isaiah had prophesied.

When Zachariah had questioned Gabriel in disbelief, he was struck dumb for the remainder of the pregnancy until John was born.

These were facts that these jews knew. Add these miracles to the mountain of others they must climb over in order to remain in disbelief. An angelic visit to an old childless man married to a barren wife will produce a child and that child will be the forerunner Isaiah prophesied of. And a further miracle, Zachariahs inability to speak until the miracle took place.

OK, hopefully this review of John will make Jesus question to these rulers more pregnant with meaning. *24Jesus said to them, "I will also ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. 25"The baptism of John was from what source, from heaven or from men?"*

Now, in the next verses, I want you to see the attitude of these rulers,

because we're seeing it today in our rulers.

And they began reasoning among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say to us, 'Then why did you not believe him?' 26 "But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the people; for they all regard John as a prophet."

Do you see the undercurrent there? It's blatant in John 7.

45The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, and they said to them, "Why did you not bring Him?" 46The officers answered, "Never has a man spoken the way this man speaks." 47The Pharisees then answered them, "You have not also been led astray, have you? 48 "No one of the rulers or Pharisees has believed in Him, has he? 49 "But this crowd which does not know the Law is accursed."

Do you see the double tier? The elite's who are in the know, and the ignorant who can't think for themselves.

These common people are accursed. It doesn't matter what they think.

We're seeing that every day in our land. To such an extent that the elite class, the ones who think they are in a position of knowledge not possible for common folks with common intelligence, are seeking ways to change the laws to silence folks like us.

I'm too common. Too stupid to think for myself. Therefore the political elites are going to create laws to regulate what I can and cannot say in my ignorance.

Our colleges have "safe zones" where someone like me who might teach what the word of God commands of men, can no longer safely speak.

Soloman said, there's nothing new under the sun. What we're seeing today, the storm clouds building on the horizon, is what these jewish leaders had in place when Jesus walked. These ignorant folk are accursed. They know nothing.

That, then, is their approach to Jesus question.

We're in a tough spot boys. We're surrounded by ignorant farmers who are missing teeth who believe in this guy. We're outnumbered. We can't win this. There's too many accursed ignorant people to discount John. And if we don't discount John, we get Jesus in the bargain, and that's un-tenable.

There's only one answer possible to get us out of this mess. It's the "*I was baking cookies with my daughter*" answer.

25 "The baptism of John was from what source, from heaven or from men?" And they began reasoning among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say to us, 'Then why did you not believe him?' 26 "But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the people; for they all regard John as a prophet." 27 And answering Jesus, they said, "We do not know."

There it is. We don't know.

The answer to their question was in Jesus question to them. All of the evidence surrounding John is impossible to explain or discount. God was in it from start to finish. John had completed his Isaiah 40 mission with the evidence of spiritual power that only God can supply.

It's sort of like DNA and evolution. DNA has made an insurmountable argument against Darwin's theory, but the other conclusion is untenable. We can't have a God who reigns over men who has standards, so we're going to go with the impossible thing.

The argument against John is insurmountable, but the conclusion is Jesus, and we've made up our mind about Him, so John is out too.

Jesus gives them His answer then, based on His question. When people have made up their minds to ignore evidence because they love their sin more than God, God then gives them over. He lets them have their choice. Sin. Disbelief. Darkness.

He also said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

Then He immediately launches into an illustration and a second multiple choice question.

28“But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, ‘Son, go work today in the vineyard.’ 29“And he answered, ‘I will not’; but afterward he regretted it and went. 30“The man came to the second and said the same thing; and he answered, ‘I will, sir’; but he did not go. 31“Which of the two did the will of his father?”

This is simple stuff, right. No way to get this wrong. They are forced to answer Him. I mean, people with no teeth are looking on. Ignorant folk are watching the literati. You can't answer this one, "we don't know".

They said, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Truly I say to you that the tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the kingdom of God before you.

Bingo! Right answer. The problem is, the picture is of you. You're the son who said he would, and then did not. You're the fig tree that promised fruit, but just had leaves.

In a sense, perhaps we could push this parable and make one son the whole nation of Israel, and the other son, the gentiles.

Israel, as a nation, said, We will, and did not.

The nations said, No way, but then thought better and repented and did God's will.

Ultimately, the picture is of every son of Adam. What you do is what counts. Not what you say. The world is full of religions of people saying they'll be righteous, but are not. They cannot.

But then there are a few repenters. They're sorry they caused their Father sorrow. They go into His field and do His will.

32“For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him; but the tax collectors and prostitutes did believe him; and you, seeing this, did not even feel remorse afterward so as to believe him.

We come full circle back to John, who announced the Man who is speaking to them.

There's history here. These same men went out to see John for themselves. Listen to a few lines from a sermon preached by that same John to these men.

Matt. 3:4 - 12 Now John himself had a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. 5Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea and all the district around the Jordan; 6and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins.

7But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8"Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance; 9and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. 10"The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

11"As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 12"His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

John called these same men, the ones who have come to ask Jesus about His authority, these men, to repentance.

But . . . they had nothing to repent of. They were already perfect. Legends in their own minds to borrow the current vernacular.

John was having none of it. You brood of vipers!

This story of Jesus about sons who say, yes to their father and do not, is a curse on them. And John was in full agreement.

Our time is up. It's a holiday weekend. We've got watermelon and corn on the cob and short ribs on our minds.

Let's quickly bring this home to us this morning. What does Jesus teaching, Jesus story about sons who say yes, and do not, and sons who say no, and then repent, and do, have to do with us.

Evangelicalism in America is overflowing in 2016 with mega churches full of people who have said YES! to Jesus. But where is the fruit? Why is our nation and the entire world in trouble? Where is the influence of the church today.

With so much salt, why is the meat rotten?

I'm a reformation man. Reformed theology is my meat. But one of my hero's, Martin Luther, didn't much like the book of James. He called it a "right strawy" book. It's well that he didn't get a vote about whether James book was included in the canon of scripture. Luther thought perhaps they had made a mistake.

But James addresses this issue. In fact it's the very thing that made Luther so uncomfortable with James. Here's the passage that troubled Martin Luther.

*Jas. 2:14 - 20 What use is it, my brethren, if someone **says** says says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? 15If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 16and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? 17Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.*

18But someone may well say, "You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works." 19You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. 20But are you willing to recognize, you foolish

fellow, that faith without works is useless?

I would close with these questions for you to consider.

How is James argument here, any different from the story about 2 sons that Jesus told the pharisees? A son that says YES, and then does nothing, and a son that said NO, but repented and did the work his Father asked.

Which son are you?

Eternity hangs on the answer.