

The Heart of True Power Lies Under Heaven's Authority

Luke 20:1-8

Would you agree that we live in a time when people chase what they call “my truth,” when families are breaking apart under unchecked individualism, and society faces wave after wave of moral confusion? This is the state of our world and it’s creating chaos all around us, leaving a trail of despair, lost purpose, and violent acts, like the tragic assassination of Charlie Kirk this past week.

I submit to you that this is the outcome of rejecting God and His authority, treating the Scriptures not as the final, unchanging rule for faith, truth, and practice, but as suggestions to be redefined by personal feelings or cultural trends.

And who feels this fallout most profoundly today? Generation Z has grown up in a digital age, surrounded by endless choices, social media echo chambers, and the “your truth is your truth” mindset. And it’s taken a devastating toll—many feel crushed by anxiety, depression, and a deep sense of emptiness that just won’t go away.

But here’s the good news: By God’s grace, many in Gen Z aren’t just lamenting the void—they’re searching for answers that the world’s “anything goes” mindset can’t give. They’re showing up at church more, diving into the scriptures, searching for the firm foundation of God’s unchanging truth. It’s a divine move and invitation from God amid the chaos. Many are waking up to the emptiness of self-defined reality and hungering for the unchanging authority of God’s Word.

Yet, this hunger for truth comes at a cost in a world drifting from it. As one writer insightfully said, “The further a society drifts from the truth, the more it will hate those who speak it.” How many of you know, those who speak God’s truth today—like Jesus in His day—face hostility, not because they’re wrong, but because truth challenges control.

This search for truth and authentic authority and the resistance it provokes, isn’t new—it’s as old as the human heart’s rebellion against

its Creator. Now that's exactly the tension we encounter in today's passage from Luke 20:1-8, set against the backdrop of Passion Week.

Jesus has triumphantly entered Jerusalem, cleansed the temple of corruption, and is now teaching boldly in its courts, drawing crowds eager for truth while infuriating the religious elite. During this moment, the chief priests, scribes, and elders—guardians of tradition and power—confront Jesus with a loaded question: *“Tell us by what authority you do these things, or who it is that gave you this authority?”* This isn't a polite inquiry; it's a desperate power play to discredit Jesus and cling to their control. But in His divine wisdom, Jesus turns the tables, exposing their hearts and unveiling a timeless principle: True authority flows from heaven through submission, while rejection stems from a rebellious heart that refuses God's light, leading to deeper darkness.

Main Idea: Spiritual power that effects change in the world for God's kingdom flows from hearts submitted to heaven's authority.

As we unfold our text, we will see how Jesus calls us to live under His rule and find the power that changes everything.

1. True Spiritual Authority Derives from Submission to God, Not Human Control or Position

So, the first principle about kingdom authority is this: True Spiritual Authority Derives from Submission to God, Not Human Control or Position

In response to the question: *“Tell us by what authority you do these things, or who it is that gave you this authority?”*, Jesus doesn't flinch at their challenge. In verses 3 and 4, he responds with His own question that cuts to the heart: *“I also will ask you a question. Now tell me, was the baptism of John from heaven or from man?”*

Again, knowing their hearts, Jesus responds with His own probing question. He's not dodging their question; rather he's directing them to the heart of the issue, namely where does authority come from? These leaders are the gatekeepers of the temple, who loved to be

seen draped in their long robes, and to be respected for their lofty titles.

But their question to Jesus isn't born out of a humble quest for truth; it's rooted in jealousy and a burning fear that He might disrupt the status quo they have so carefully maintained. And they're furious about it. Just days ago, in Luke 19:45-48, Jesus cleared the temple of corruption, and the crowds couldn't get enough of his teaching. Why? As Luke 4:32 tells us, "*They were astonished at his teaching, for his word possessed authority.*"

Jesus didn't teach for men's applause or to tell crowd-pleasing stories; rather he delivered the raw, unfiltered truth with a demonstration of heaven's power breaking through, transforming confusion into clarity, fear into faith, and dead religion into vibrant life.

Similarly, when reflecting on his own gospel ministry, the Apostle Paul explained in 1 Corinthians 2:4-5: "*My speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.*" That's what Jesus perfectly demonstrated.

And let me emphasize that He preached with divine power because His authority flowed from perfect submission to the Father. He said in Matthew 28:18, "*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.*" Let me ask you, from whom did Jesus receive all authority? It was given to Him by the Father, because Jesus, God the Son, took on flesh, and in His humanity surrendered fully, even to the point of the cross.

Contrast that with the religious leaders. They were power-hungry, jealous of Jesus' influence, and desperate to stay in charge, all the while rejecting kingdom authority. Adrian Rogers puts it so well: "You'll never be over what God has put under you until you are under what God has put over you." You can have a title, like pastor, parent, or CEO—but without submission to God, and likeness to Jesus, it's empty. It lacks the Spirit's power, the divine witness that makes one a credible representative of God's kingdom, and draws hearts to Him.

To illustrate this principle of kingdom authority, consider a mighty river that's wild and untamed. Left alone during a torrential rain, its banks can overflow and cause flooding that destroys homes. But channel it under a dam—submit it to structure—and it can light up an entire city with hydroelectric power. That's what happens when we live under God's authority. His power flows through us for His purposes giving us boldness in our witness, grace to heal broken relationships, and strength to be used of God to turn trials into testimonies of His faithfulness.

So, let me ask you, are there areas in your life where you're outside of God's authority and rule? Maybe because of worldly ambition your chasing a career over God's call, or in your relationships your choosing deceitful desires over God's design. Like the world rejecting God's truth, we too can resist His authority by living divided lives.

I counseled someone some time ago struggling with sexual temptation in a dating relationship while he was also seeking a ministry opportunity. I said, "You're putting the cart before the horse. Surrender your dating choices to God's standards first. You can't expect His blessing on your relationships or ministry if you're given in to sexual sin."

How many of you know, too many professing Christians compartmentalize faith, living one way publicly but another way privately. True power comes when your profession matches your practice. Get under His lordship, and watch His power flow through you. Jesus commissions us: "Go therefore"—under His authority—and make a real difference.

2. Rejection of God's Authority Is a Heart Problem Rooted in Sin as Independence, Not a Lack of Evidence

Now, the second principle concerning kingdom authority is this: Rejection of God's authority is a heart problem rooted in sin as an act of independence not a lack of evidence. After Jesus turns the tables on those challenging His authority with His own probing question about the authority of John, the leaders begin to squirm. In verses 5

through 7 we read: *“And they discussed it with one another, saying, ‘If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say, ‘Why did you not believe him?’ 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”*(Luke 20:5-7) or as the NIV translates: *“So they answered, “We don’t know where it was from.”*

This is almost comical—they’re trapped by their own hypocrisy. They know the baptism of John was from heaven. They saw firsthand that his ministry shook Israel as he preached repentance, baptized crowds, and pointed to Jesus as the Lamb of God. The evidence was undeniable—John’s devoted life, Old Testament prophecies coming true, and lives completely transformed demonstrated that his authority was from above.

But they were too proud and too power-hungry to admit it. That would mean repenting and yielding control. So, they dodge the question: *“We don’t know.”* It’s a lie, and Jesus sees right through it. And how many of you know, many today are doing the same thing? Rather than facing the truth, repenting, and remaining accountable, they run away and deceive themselves in the process?

Brothers and sister, this passage prophetically exposes our own hearts today: This rejection of God’s authority isn’t some intellectual puzzle that can’t be solved—it’s a heart rebellion rooted in sin itself. At its core, sin isn’t just a list of rules we’ve broken; it’s an act of treasonous independence from God, a defiant “No” to God’s loving lordship.

Think back to the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3, where Adam and Eve walked in perfect harmony with their Creator, who provided everything they needed. But the serpent whispered, “You’ll be like God, knowing good and evil.” In that moment, they chose self-rule over surrender, grasping for autonomy instead of trusting their Designer. And can I tell you, that same choice today fuels every human heart’s rebellion—every argument, every grudge, every time we justify our way over His.

Jesus’ piercing question in verse 4 gets to the heart of the matter: Is John’s authority *“From heaven or from man?”* If authority comes from

heaven, there's an objective standard, a divine blueprint for truth that stands above our opinions. But reject God's authority, and everything crumbles into re-la-tivism—truth becomes whatever feels good, and morality becomes a sliding scale dictated by selfish desires.

“The Apostle Paul warns in Romans 1: When we suppress the truth about God, plain in creation and conscience, our hearts darken, spiraling into depravity, exchanging God's design for things, like sexuality and identity, for our own sinful passions. The Pharisees knew this principle—they pored over the scrolls—but their hearts were blinded by jealousy, choosing power over conviction.

We see it today, don't we? People reject God's authority to follow feelings—redefining identity, marriage, even truth itself. Take transgenderism, for example: Many call it living their truth, seeing affirmation as compassionate and non-affirmation as hate. But at its core, it elevates personal identity based on misguided desires over God's clear design for humanity as male and female, created with purpose in His image.

But let's not point fingers—this is a universal problem. Every time we reject God's Word because it inconveniences our plans, we're saying, “My way, not Yours.” That's the leaders in Jesus's day: “*We don't know*” they claimed. They had the evidence like Jesus' miracles, and John's witness but their hearts said, “We want to be in charge.”

So, let me ask you, are you—like those leaders in Jesus' day—pushing back against truth to hold onto control? Look around—God's reality and authority shine everywhere. The resurrection of Jesus, for example, is backed by eyewitnesses who gave their lives for what they saw. In addition, creation reveals a purposeful design—just look at the precise distance between sun and earth to the intricate code in your DNA. What's more, the gospel shows it: Through the centuries, it's transformed countless lives—breaking addictions, healing marriages, and sparking hope where despair once ruled.

Again, those leaders in Jesus' day didn't lack evidence—they chose control over God's truth, just like the world's hostility to the truth we see today. Are you doing the same, pushing against God's authority to

cling to your own way? If that's where you are today, turn from your self-rule and bow to Jesus. It's not a cage; it's freedom from sin's tyranny, a chance to know Him and His transforming power.

As Leonard Ravenhill observed: "The greatest sin in the world is not adultery or drunkenness, the greatest sin in the world is to say: 'I run my life' — and not let GOD have it." Again, true freedom isn't self-rule; it's yielding to the One who designed us, because only then does life find its purpose and power.

3. Resisting God's Revealed Light Leads to Increased Darkness, While Responding Brings More Revelation

Now this brings us to our final kingdom principle: Resisting God's Revealed Light Leads to Increased Darkness, While Responding Brings More Revelation. In verse 8 the verdict is given: "*And Jesus said to them, 'Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.'*"

This is where the conversation with the religious leaders ends. Why? Because they rejected the light God already gave them. John the Baptist was a blazing torch, calling Israel to repentance, preparing the way for the Messiah. Moreover, his baptism was a divine signpost, pointing straight to Jesus. Respond to that light, and God opens more—deeper understanding, and the experience of greater power. But refuse the light, and the darkness deepens.

Again, Adrian Rogers captures this so well: "Light refused increases darkness." We must instead, "get in the flow of God's will," where submission to Jesus unlocks deeper revelation and victory over spiritual forces.

But what does that mean? Turning from self-rule to Jesus is not just about keeping rules, but about experiencing a love relationship. It's about real intimacy with Jesus—knowing Him so closely that our hearts beat with His. "True power comes when we swap independence for intimacy with Christ." The more we know Jesus—through prayer, through His Word, through obedience—the more we

trust Him. And the more we trust Him, the easier it is to say, “Your way, not mine.”

Open your Bible, let God speak to you and pray as His revelation demands. Response leads to revelation, which fuels obedience, which unlocks even greater power.

Let me share a story to help us grasp this kingdom principle. In 1989, in Beijing’s Tiananmen Square, a lone man stood in front of a column of tanks. The day before, a violent crackdown had crushed pro-democracy protests. Yet this man, carrying nothing but shopping bags, stepped into the street and raised his arms. The tanks which were roaring with raw power—stopped in front of him. Why? Not because he was stronger. One man can’t stop a tank with muscle. But his stand carried authority—a moral courage, a conviction that something higher than brute force was at stake. That’s the difference between power and authority. The tanks had power; the man, standing on principle, had authority.

Brothers and sisters, Jesus’ authority is like that—rooted in heaven, not human strength, and it stops the enemy in his tracks when we stand under it (James 4:7). But remember the warning: Refuse God’s light, like the leaders in Jesus’ day, and you will stay in darkness. They heard the prophetic voice of John crying in the wilderness, and saw his impact. But they said, “*We don’t know*,” and Jesus left them in the darkness to which they clung.

Again, rejecting light doesn’t just hinder you—it darkens your path further. Yet respond, and God pours out more: more insight, more power, more victory.

So, I plead with you, don’t ignore His prompting today. Maybe it’s a verse that convicted you, or a prayer stirring your heart, or a call to obey in some small way. Respond. Get in the flow of revelation and power—spend time with Jesus, know Him, trust Him. More light awaits: more clarity for decisions, more strength for battles, more joy in His presence.

And as we think about this call to respond and submit, Theodore Cuyler, a 19th-century pastor, offers a profound encouragement: “The mightiest lesson to be learned in this world is to let God have His way. Your brain is not big enough to comprehend the mysteries of Divine Providence; but your heart may trust Him enough to say ‘I will submit!’” Cuyler isn’t dismissing our intellect—he’s elevating the reasonableness of trusting an infinite God, who we can know intimately, above our limited understanding.

Again, the religious leaders’ refusal to answer Jesus’ question stemmed from hearts too proud to yield, while Jesus invites us to a submission that unlocks heaven’s mysteries. It’s a powerful reminder: We don’t have to figure it all out; we just need to say yes to His way, and in that trust, greater spiritual understanding and power follow. What if today, you chose submission over resistance? The flow of God’s spiritual authority on your life awaits.

Conclusion

Beloved, Luke 20:1-8 lays it out: True authority flows from submitting to heaven’s rule. Rejecting it reveals a heart chasing independence, not evidence. And light refused deepens darkness—but light embraced brings spiritual power and victory.

Oh Jesus, with all authority, surrendered to the Father’s will, even to death on a cross for rebels like us. He rose, victorious, offering you His life-giving power through faith. If you’re resisting His rule, surrender now. Pray, “Lord, I bow to You. Forgive my independence. I believe you died for my sin and I trust you as Savior and Lord.

Believers, stay in the flow of spiritual enlightenment and power—draw near to Jesus daily, live under His authority, and watch His power carry you through.