

In Luke 20, Jesus is confronted by the religious leaders who question the source of His authority. Their inquiry is not born out of genuine curiosity, but rather from a place of threatened pride and a desire to trap Him. Jesus, in His wisdom, responds with a question about John the Baptist's authority, exposing their hypocrisy and forcing them into a corner. The leaders, unwilling to answer truthfully for fear of the crowd and the implications for their own power, simply say, "We don't know." This moment reveals the deep contrast between human credentials and God-given authority.

Throughout history, God has chosen unlikely people—fishermen, zealots, tax collectors, and even those considered outcasts by society—to carry His message. The religious elite, with all their education and status, often missed the very presence of God standing before them. The same spirit that opposed Jesus has persisted through the ages, manifesting in persecution against those who stand for truth, from the early martyrs to the Reformers like Jan Huss and Wycliffe. Their stories remind us that the cost of upholding the gospel can be great, but the call to faithfulness remains.

The heart of the matter is not education or outward credentials, but the presence and anointing of the Holy Spirit. The general public could recognize God's hand on Jesus and John, even when the experts could not. Discernment is a gift for all believers, not just the learned. We are called to examine our own motives and actions: are they from human origin or from heaven? The challenge is to live lives so marked by the Spirit that others can say, "They have been with Jesus." In a world still hostile to the truth, we must be ready to stand firm, relying not on our own wisdom, but on the Spirit who gives us words and courage.

Key Takeaways

1. God's authority often confounds human expectations and credentials.

Jesus and John the Baptist did not come through the established religious channels, yet their authority was undeniable because it was rooted in God's calling, not human approval. This challenges us to value God's anointing above worldly qualifications and to recognize that God delights in using the humble and the willing. [44:16]

2. The motive behind our questions and actions matters deeply to God.

The religious leaders' question was a trap, rooted in pride and self-preservation, while Nicodemus approached Jesus with genuine curiosity and faith. God honors honest seeking and is willing to reveal truth to those whose hearts are open, but He resists the proud and the manipulative. [47:19]

3. The spirit of opposition to God's truth is persistent and often violent, as seen in the persecution of reformers and martyrs throughout history.

This same spirit was present in the religious leaders who plotted against Jesus, and it continues to resist the gospel today. Recognizing this helps us understand the cost of discipleship and the need for courage and perseverance in the face of opposition. [50:39]

4. The Holy Spirit equips believers with wisdom and discernment that surpasses human intellect.

When challenged, Jesus turned the tables on His accusers with Spirit-led wisdom, and the same Spirit is available to us. In moments of trial or questioning, we can trust the Holy Spirit to give us the words and insight we need, making us “unbeatable” in God’s purposes. [55:42]

5. True discernment recognizes God’s anointing, not just outward credentials.

The general public could see God’s hand on Jesus and John, while the religious experts missed it. We are called to be people who can discern the Spirit’s work in others and in ourselves, ensuring that our actions are from heaven, not merely human origin. This requires humility, openness, and a willingness to be led by the Spirit daily. [59:04]

Bible Study Guide

Bible Reading

Luke 20:1-8 (ESV) — 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.”

Observation Questions

What question did the religious leaders ask Jesus, and what was their motive for asking it? ([47:19])

How did Jesus respond to the leaders’ question about His authority, and what effect did His response have on them? ([55:42])

According to the passage and sermon, what was unique about the backgrounds of Jesus’ disciples compared to the religious leaders? ([45:31])

How did the general public respond to John the Baptist and Jesus, compared to the religious experts? ([59:04])

Interpretation Questions

Why do you think Jesus chose to answer the leaders’ question with a question about John the Baptist’s authority? What was He exposing in their hearts? ([44:16])

The sermon mentions that God often chooses “unlikely” people to carry His message. Why might God do this, and what does it say about how He views human credentials? ([45:31])

The religious leaders refused to answer Jesus honestly because of fear and pride. What does this reveal about the dangers of valuing human approval over God’s truth? ([56:51])

The sermon draws a line from the opposition Jesus faced to the persecution of reformers and martyrs in history. What does this suggest about the ongoing cost of following Jesus? ([50:39])

Application Questions

The sermon challenges us to examine the motives behind our questions and actions. Think of a recent time you questioned someone's authority or decision—was your motive honest curiosity, or something else? How can you check your motives in the future? ([47:19])

Jesus' authority was recognized by ordinary people, not just the religious experts. Are there people in your life whose faith or calling you might overlook because they don't have the "right" credentials? How can you be more open to seeing God's anointing in unexpected places? ([59:04])

The pastor shared stories of reformers and martyrs who paid a high price for standing for truth. What is one area where you feel pressure to compromise your faith or values? What would it look like to stand firm, even if it costs you? ([50:39])

The Holy Spirit gives wisdom and courage beyond our own abilities. Can you recall a time when you felt the Spirit give you the right words or boldness in a difficult situation? How can you rely more on the Spirit's help this week? ([55:42])

The sermon asks, "Are your actions from heaven or human origin?" Take a moment to reflect: Is there a specific area of your life where you sense you're acting out of human ambition or pride rather than God's leading? What step could you take to surrender that area to God? ([01:02:58])

The pastor mentioned that discernment is for all believers, not just the educated or experienced. What practical steps can you take to grow in discernment and recognize God's work in your life and others'? ([59:04])

The religious leaders missed God's presence because of their pride and self-interest. Is there a way pride or fear of losing something is keeping you from fully following Jesus? What would it look like to let go of that? ([56:51])