

**ST PAUL'S (RONDEBOSCH)
SUNDAY 27 SEPTEMBER 2020
SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (YEAR A)**

**READINGS: EXODUS 17:1-7//PSALM 78:1-4, 11-15//
PHILLIPIANS 2:1-13 MATTHEW 21:23-32**

.....

*God of wisdom and love,
source of all good,
send your Spirit to teach us your truth
and guide our actions
in your way of peace.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ,*

In Matthew 21v 23 we read *“When he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, ‘By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?’”*

The issue of “authority” is a theme that runs throughout the Gospel of Matthew. Authority and obedience have been tied together since Jesus began his ministry. In Matthew 3 v 17 at Jesus’ baptism we read *“A voice came from heaven this is my son in whom I am well pleased”* and Jesus will connect them again after his resurrection, when he gives his disciples the Great Commission, telling *All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...* (28:18-19).

In Matthew 7:28-29 we read *when Jesus finished saying these things the crowd was amazed at the way he taught. He wasn’t like the teachers of the law, instead he taught with authority.*

And in Matthew 9:4-8 we read *“When the crowds saw it, they were filled with awe, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to human beings.”*

Jesus was clearly a threat to the religious and social leaders of the day. He displayed enormous and miraculous powers, the crowds were absolutely captured by him, his courage and boldness in confronting the institutions of power was impressive. So of course they would want to question his authority

The Chief Priests were in a spiritual family (an-ces-stry) that went all the way back to Moses. The Scribes were the most learned theologians in Jewish society. The Elders had years of experience and had the unquestioning respect of the people. For them, authority came with a title, with respect in society, with wealth

and prestige, with the ability to make decisions that the people would obey and with the weight of history on their side.

When the Chief priest and the elders asked Jesus ***“By what authority do you do these things?”*** they wanted him to feel small and unwelcome. They were trying to intimidate and incriminate Jesus by questioning his legitimacy, his right to be there.

However Jesus decided not to engage in some debate with them about the nature of his authority. Rather Jesus said to them, ***‘I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?’***

The religious leaders had to make a choice: risk the rejections of the people or risk confirming/admitting John’s the Baptist authority, which in effect would admitting Jesus’ authority (ministry). They didn’t want to do either so they simply told Jesus **WE DON’T KNOW**

Why didn’t they give an answer?

1. They didn’t give an answer because they didn’t want to lose what they had. They did not want to look bad in front of the people. They wanted to please the crowd and uphold their honour.

This is a lesson for all of us: our political leaders, religious leaders, for all those in authority, but it is also for each one of us as Christians. All of us in political and spiritual leadership and all Christians are called to moments of decision ---that will have profound impact on our future. Are we prepared to stand up for what is true and right in the eyes of God and to live out our ministries by the standards of the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Or will we seek to deny the truth in order to protect our power and position and status in the eyes our families, amongst our friends, in our workplace in the Church, in society and in our country?

We hear about Gender Based Violence? We hear about corruption/ we hear and know of how people abuse their authority. What do we do about it?

2. They did not give an answer because they did not want to admit that Jesus’ authority, comes from God – They did not want to stand under Jesus’ authority and be obedient to him --- how can they be obedient to a carpenter’s Son?

In Paul's letter to the Philippians Paul describes Christ's authority perfectly: *"Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death — even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."* (Philippians 2:5-11)

Christ received his authority directly from God, and in obedience he humbled himself. Christ's authority also comes from those who call him Lord, who seek to do his will.

Are you and I like the Religious leaders and the Elders —who do not want to admit God's authority on our lives and seek his will in our lives and be obedient to him--- Are we more concerned about our own titles, credentials and prestige that gives us authority over others? – And prevent us from humbling ourselves and be a servant to others?

Then Jesus tell them the parable of the two sons, who are each given the same command to go work in their father's vineyard. One says he will go, and doesn't, while the other refuses, but then changes his mind, and does what he was told to do.

You see my friends, the chief priest and the elders *were the son who said he would go into his father's vineyard and yet did not.* They had been quoting the Law, chapter by chapter and verse by verse, quick to condemn those who did not follow the rules as they interpreted them. They followed the ancient rites, repeated the sacred prayers, did all they were supposed to do. They were happy that they were not like the others. But they were deceiving themselves to think that they were obedient to God. However, Jesus said that they were arrogant and proud and even blind to see themselves and what they have become! When the time comes for them to obey God's voice, to repent and to humble themselves, to go into the vineyard and reach out and welcome and show love and compassion to the needy, the sick and the outcast, they simply did not.--- They are the ones who did not want to accept Jesus' authority and be obedient to him.

And the one who changed his mind and made his way out to the fields? He represented the tax collectors and prostitutes, the ones who had heard John and Jesus, they repented and changed their minds to follow God in a new way. They are the one who accepted Jesus' authority and are obedient to him

CONCLUSION

My dear friends God's authority is a different kind of authority:

The authority of Jesus is: not in some sort of power game that brought with it prestige and wealth and the respect of the people.

The authority of Jesus was worked out in his welcoming of sinners and prostitutes. The authority of Jesus was worked out in his welcoming of little children, and the welcoming of the outcasts and those on the margins. The authority of Jesus was worked out in a life of service, not ruling. It is a life hallmarked by betrayal and personal sacrifice, for standing up for what is right and experience rejection. (Like many of our political and religious leaders – Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela have experienced in the past)

If we stands under God's authority and obedience we will as Paul says in Philippians 2v 3 “ not do anything out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility we will consider others better than ourselves and we will not only look at our own interest but also the interest of others.

When this son said 'No' to his father, all he really cared about was his own comfort, his own way of living. But later, he changed what he cared about and chose instead to care for the honour of his father and then went out into the vineyard to work for his father (to reach out and care for the marginalized and the outcast// to stand up for the truth and justice) --that is what it means to stand under God's authority.

WITH WHICH SON DO YOU IDENTIFY?