

Emmanuel Sept 27 2020

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Matthew 21:23-32

When Jesus 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?" 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?" And they argued with one another, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' But if we say, 'Of human origin,' we are afraid of the crowd; for all regard John as a prophet." So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

"What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' He answered, 'I will not'; but later he changed his mind and went. The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, 'I go, sir'; but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him.

"By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" It is the chief priests and elders on one side, and the tax collectors and prostitutes on the other. The tax collectors and prostitutes believed John, the chief priests and elders did not. The tax collectors and prostitutes opened their minds and their souls, and believed. The chief priests and elders believed the way things had always been, the ways that had made them prosperous, that had given them authority over others. Who would not embrace change, or the unknown.

Our first authority figures may be our parents, a grandparent, maybe our day care provider. So how do we decide someone is an authority figure? Is it because they have been elected, or they have letters after their name, our best friend told us they were a good person, or there was a Letter to the Editor? Here in Staunton, we may know their sister,

uncle, or be members of the same club. As we go thru life, there are a variety of people we trust, respect, and perhaps look at as an authority. And I'm not talking about someone who can look at an antique and tell you what its history is, and how much it's worth. I mean someone who touches your heart, someone you respect, who you believe in with every ounce of your being.

And I thought of the process of meeting Barbara Bryant. We have trusted her with our babies and children for 25 years. At the beginning, a resume would have meant nothing when we were looking for someone to watch the kids an hour and a half each Sunday. And we have been blessed with someone who is much more than just someone they see on Sunday morning. Barbara has loved hundreds of our children thru the years, they have been her children. And you can't buy loyalty, kindness, caring, and dedication. Barbara has earned the respect and love from both children and adults. And we have watched her grandsons grow up, and they have been part of our church family.

Sometimes who we recognize as having authority, is someone with similar beliefs to ours. A "good" supervisor may be the one who has the same philosophy, not always the one who has the business' best interest at heart.

As we go thru our lives there are many people who may have some element of authority over us. Our parents, whoever is driving the car, various teachers, the Coach who taught driver's ed, a platoon sergeant, Mrs Forbes, my 10th grade English teacher, if you had finished your assignment, she would tell you to read the dictionary, a boss or supervisor, a Boy Scout or Girl Scout leader, a football coach, the Army recruiter, the Supreme Court, government officials. Any one of them has some element of authority, but it is not permanent. Just as many laws or policies reflect the time they were written. When the average household had one car, there wasn't a need for 24 hour gas stations. You didn't need to get out of your car, because the gas station attendants would fill up the gas tank and clean the windshields. You pulled up your car to the front of the grocery store, and the teenage bag boy would load the groceries into your car, so you didn't need to leave your car. And if you needed a prescription, the Pill Wagon would deliver it to your house. Right now, the authority of local school boards means that for some families, one adult is staying home with the kids, not "working" outside the home. Years pass, and the ones we see as authority figures come and go.

How many times have we each said, there is no way I will ever do that. I would never ever visit people in the hospital, and yet I do. Doug would never, ever question the authority of the government to send soldiers into war, and yet, now he does. In elementary school, the girls wore dresses or skirts to school, that was a rule. Years pass, our beliefs change, just as our perception of authority changes.

If my evaluation at work was based on the times I said I would do a project and didn't, I wouldn't do very well. Just as one son said he would not go into the field, and then he does. He accomplished more than his brother, who said he would go into the field, and then does not.

To each of you I ask, if your mother came and asked you to do the dishes, would you say yes, or would you say, I don't think so.

A harder question, a bigger question, is how did each of us put ourselves in God's hands, knowing God and Jesus had full authority over us. There is no easy answer. We can see Barbara, we can watch her with our children. We can talk with her we can see her. The tax collectors and prostitutes saw John and believed. And yet, the chief priests and elders saw, and did not believe. Sometimes we can look at someone and know they hold God in their heart. They don't need to wear a cross, for they live it and show it thru their actions. That process of coming to know Christ may come all at once, or may have taken years. For each of us it is different. When Doug's sister died, his niece asked Doug when Julia joined the church, they wanted to put the date she joined the church in her obituary. What they meant, was when she answered an altar call. Some of us would not be able to state a date when we saw Christ as our Savior. My faith grew within me as I grew up. There was no sudden revelation, just a constant belief.

And now, let's look at the flip side. For anyone who is a teacher, a supervisor, a doctor, an elected official, a minister. How do you use your authority? Are you conscious that others may look at you as an authority? Most of us have had someone look up to us, do we use that power carefully? Authority. Who has it, who wants it, and who is our ultimate authority. Amen.