

From Heaven or From Man?

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[0 : 00] When I first came to St. John's many years ago, I was this young fellow and there was this legendary preacher, this legendary teacher, this legendary evangelist who I'd heard about, this guy Harry Robinson.

And I was like, this guy, he came to St. John's like decades ago and there was a dead church and he came and he preached the gospel and it came to life in faith. And I was like, oh, I can't wait to hear this guy preach.

And so one day he was up to preach. He was retired, but he was coming to preach. And I was like, yes, this is great. So I sat in the pew and I waited. And there he got up there and he was jingling his keys in his pocket as he did.

And he was leaning over the pulpit. He was a big man. He was a big man. And he was here, this gruff voice. And I was like, oh, this guy's cool. And then he started preaching. He was saying these great things. And I was like, yes, yes, yes.

And I was like, but how did they fit together? And I was like, this guy's good, but I don't know. Maybe he's losing it in his retirement. Maybe he's not so great. Maybe he's not the legend that I thought he was.

[1 : 05] Maybe he's not as legendary as Aaron Roberts or something. And then, see at the end, and this was his trait, he took all these facts and all these things that he was preaching about Jesus.

And he brought them all together. And just a couple of sentences at the end. And I was like, oh, that's where it is. And I got to see Jesus more clearly. And I was like, oh, that is fantastic.

Now, I think that's what we need with our passage tonight. It seems to be a jumble of things. We need this kind of hairy moment where you can take all these things and put them together and go, I see Jesus more clearly.

Well, we've got, what have we got in this crazy passage that Noah just read to us? We've got, you know, some, Jesus gets angry at a fig tree. We've got like this fight in the temple.

We've got something on prayer and mountains getting tossed about. And then we've got something about the authority of Jesus. And these, you know, these chief priests are coming and questioning him.

[2 : 06] And then, how do we put all this together? How do we put all this together? How can we see Jesus more clearly? Well, what's helpful, I think, is if we kind of go back, we can see, oh, wait a second.

This is the second passage. This passage is the second entry into Jerusalem. Okay. And particularly, Jesus coming into the temple, right? Okay, this is good. And there's this confrontation. It's a big deal confrontation with all these buyers and sellers in the temple. But what we seem to see is like a bookend. This fig tree bookend. You've got fig tree, this fruitless fig tree.

And you've got this withered fig tree. And it's kind of like bookending this confrontation in the temple. And then there's this kind of next confrontation of the chief priest coming to Jesus and questioning him.

And saying, you know, where does your authority come from? And these guys are the ones who will later bring him to crucify him. Wow, this is a pretty big deal passage.

[3 : 06] We kind of look at it. There's kind of four little sections, it seems. If you look at your Bible, it seems to be split up in these four sections. You've got Jesus, and he's kind of confronting this fruitless fig tree, right? Jesus is confronting this activity in the temple.

And the fig tree, again, but with this beautiful prayer. And then we have this confrontation with the chief priest questioning Jesus' authority. Well, how might we see Christ more clearly in this?

Well, the beautiful thing is, I think it's great, kind of like what Harry did. Let's go to the end. Let's go to the end and see what Jesus tells us. Let's look what Jesus tells us. Look with me at verse 29. Now, Jesus is giving us the lens by which we can see these events. Jesus, the chief priest in this little clan comes to him and it's like, what authority are you doing these things? What are these events you've just done? What are these things you've just done? You tell us about those. Here's what Jesus says. He said to them, verse 29. I will ask you one question. Answer me. [4 : 06] And I will tell you by what authority I do these things. Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man? Answer me. I kind of like that he asked this with authority. You know, just kind of noticed that.

Okay, Jesus' authority. And it's kind of this question. And he's saying, you know what you need to look at? Heaven or from man? Is it from heaven or from man? That's the lens which we can go back and look at these events and ask, from heaven or from man?

Let's let Jesus correct us. Let's let Jesus help us to see these events as truly the events from a heavenly authority. That's kind of cool.

Okay, so that's how we're going to look at it. Do you remember back to last week and Aaron was preaching and we had Jesus coming into Jerusalem riding on a donkey?

You have all these Hosanna people. They're throwing the clothes around and some leaves and stuff. And it's really exciting. Now, on the outside, you probably agree with me, that looks a little weird. Just looks a little strange, you know.

[5 : 07] Doesn't look like a normal kind of thing. But if we look at it from a heavenly perspective, if we look in the Bible, as Aaron reminded us, look at Zechariah in chapter 9.

We see the king riding into Jerusalem, riding on a donkey. And it's a picture of the king coming into his city with peace. It's a pretty great picture.

And when we see it with a heavenly perspective, when we see the authority from heaven, we see Jesus as king. Now, in the same sort of way, we're going to kind of take a look at our passage for today.

We're going to take a look at Mark chapter 11, verses 12 and following. Now, I want you to look with me at this, starting kind of around verse 12.

And you've got this fig tree scene. I said that you've got this bookend thing. And something strange is happening here. And what we've got here is Jesus. And this is really cool. Jesus is living out in a dramatic form.

[6 : 05] He's living out in a dramatic form the truth of God. He's kind of dramatizing for us so we may see with truth what's going on underneath it all. This bookend of the fig tree is going to really help us.

And what Jesus is doing is living out this parable. He's living, he's like a living parable. And this happens all over the Bible. You just think of the whole book of Hosea. Hosea has a, his God has called Hosea to have a very unfaithful wife, right?

And she's constantly in need of being rescued. But he's called to love her. And that's the picture of God loving us in our unfaithfulness and our constant need of being rescued.

Jesus is doing something very similar to this. He's living out this parable so we can see the truth of God in a kind of dramatic format. Now, let's take a look at his, his intentions and authority through when he confronts this fruitless fig tree.

Take a look. Verse 12. On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. And seeing in the distance a fig tree and leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on it.

[7 : 12] When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves for it was not the season for figs. And he said to it, may no one ever eat fruit from you again. And his disciples heard it. And then later in verse 20, it's kind of the bookend to it.

And they passed by in the morning and they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. And Peter remembered and said to him, Rabbi, look, the fig tree you cursed has withered.

Now, if we're asking the question, is Jesus' authority from heaven or from earth or from man, is this Jesus just, he's like hungry and unaware of the season? And the tree looks like it should have fruit because he just finds a bunch of leaves.

Does Jesus have a bit of a tree rage moment or something like that? No. It's kind of like me taking, going to Safeway, buying a package of Fig Newtons, opening it up and finding nothing in it and saying, darn you Fig Newtons, you shall never be figgy again.

Okay. Sounds absolutely ridiculous, doesn't it? It kind of puts Jesus in a place like, that's not how Jesus thinks. That's not how Jesus acts. And Mark is telling us very clearly, not the season for figs. That's not what it's about.

[8 : 23] What we have to see is the heavenly perspective. Let's see Jesus' authority from heaven and see that Jesus has come with supernatural authority.

He has a supernatural authority of judgment. It's hard to see right away. But Jesus, as he's living out this parable, this portion of the gospel, his supernatural authority and judgment brings this only destructive miracle of Jesus.

When Jesus pronounces judgment on this fig tree, notice it's withered away to its roots. It's done. It is by his supernatural authority and word that it is judged. It is fruitless. It is judged. And this is a harsh fact, but often in the scriptures, the picture of the tree and the fruit tree is a picture of God's people.

Under judgment. And you can find that in Jeremiah 8 and other places. Now when we come to this passage where Jesus confronts activity in the temple, that makes it really helpful for us to see that Jesus is coming with judgment.

[9 : 36] These bookends are really helpful for us to understand that. And Jesus comes here in verses 15 and following with arresting authority. Notice he stops everything in its tracks in the temple.

This heavenly perspective is helpful in this second confrontation. Let's look at verse 15 and following. And you know this. You know this. This is a very famous passage, right? And they came to Jerusalem and he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple and overturned the tables and the money changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons.

And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple, right? And he was teaching. Now, it's going to sound ridiculous. Is this Jesus having a temper tantrum? You know, is this Jesus walking in the temple, saying, hey, and then being surprised at what he sees and just losing control?

Is this Jesus being mad at all these money changers, maybe ripping people off? Is this Jesus, maybe, intentionally making himself look heroic, right? Look at me coming in to save the day, revolutionary and causing a scene, making those temple leaders look foolish and lose face for the people?

No. Now, what Aaron did last week was really good. Let's go back to verse 11. It's our hint that Jesus, this is absolutely no surprise to Jesus. Go back with me to verse 11. So it says, here's Jesus entering Jerusalem.

[10 : 55] And he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple. And when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with a 12. This is not a surprise or a reaction.

This is just like the last passage. Very deliberate. Jesus is doing everything here very much on purpose. Now, Jesus is coming with this arresting authority, this judgment.

And notice he's stopping all the activity in the temple, all this bustling about. And I love this. One great theologian said something very much like this. Here is the great high priest walking into the house of God.

Here is the great high priest, Jesus himself, walking into the house of God. And this is what he sees. And this is what he does with authority. Which makes it rather ironic what the chief priests are saying.

What authority do you have? Here he is, the great high priest coming with this authority. And he stops all this activity. And he comes bearing the word, the authority of God.

[12 : 05] Notice he's preaching from Isaiah. Isaiah. He's preaching from Isaiah. And I'm just going to read a few verses around this. And Isaiah read this to us.

Listen to this. Verse 7 of Isaiah 56. These I will bring to my holy mountain and make them joyful in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar.

For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all people. The Lord who gathers the outcasts of Israel declares, I will gather yet others to him besides those already gathered.

That's a beautiful picture, isn't it? And Jesus says, this is a den of robbers. This is a place of deceit. It is fruitless. We find Jesus preaching with the authority of the word of God.

And he's preaching that the temple is to be a place. Listen to this. Of prayer. Of worship. Of teaching. And right fellowship.

[13:07] A place of prayer. And of worship. Of teaching. And of right fellowship. It is a place of fellowship for all people. It is a place transformed by the word of God.

And what he is doing here, this is amazing, is displaying his righteous anger. Now, Alistair preached a number of weeks ago in Psalm 103.

You remember that? Do you remember the character of God? That he is slow to anger. Abounding in steadfast love. And that's beautiful. That he is slow to anger. But he is a God who gets angry. He gets angry at sin. And he gets angry at this fruitlessness. This is God's righteous anger. And what he's saying here, friends. This is hard to hear.

He's saying to the temple, you're done. You're fruitless. You're done. It's done and finished. The old way is done. It's done. That's what he's saying. Ouch.

[14:06] It's pretty harsh. But that's what Jesus is doing. Now, when we come to the fig tree again with this prayer, it will make more sense. Just an interlude, of course.

As Peter comes to Jesus, he's like, do you notice every time Peter opens his mouth and says the word rabbi, something stupid comes out? It's like, hey, Jesus, let's build a tent.

And maybe for Elijah and for Moses. And maybe we can get a Coleman stove and build a fire. You know, he just, it's that tendency, as we know, when you don't have anything to say, say something stupid.

That's, and I do this too. I do this too. You just get overwhelmed and you say something really daft because you want to say something. I love Peter. But Jesus redirects Peter.

He redirects us. He redirects us. He says, I don't want you to concentrate on the fig tree. That was the picture of judgment. But here's what I want you to concentrate on. Faith.

[15:05] On hope. And on love. What Jesus is doing in this little prayer passage is quite astonishing and quite beautiful. Get this.

It's great. Jesus is showing us that he has the authority to replace the temple. And he is bringing the replacement into the new community of God's people.

Into the new kingdom people. This is how he replaces. And notice as we move, we're moving towards the cross. Here we're coming into this Easter season.

Towards Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Here's this picture of Jesus taking all our sin upon him. His perfect sacrifice.

And dying on the cross with the wrath of God on him. The temple curtain torn in two from top to bottom. Temple is done.

[16:04] Jesus is the one. He is coming. Replacing the old covenant. He's coming. Replacing the old temple. He's bringing the new community of God through himself.

And his people. It's a beautiful picture. So when we come to this passage, we can see faith, hope, and love. Faith first.

And Jesus answered them. Have faith in God. Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain.

This is verse 23. Be taken up and thrown into the sea and does not doubt in his heart.

But believes that what he says will come to pass. It will be done for him. Now what this passage is not saying. It's been taken the wrong way many times. It's not a prosperity passage.

That you pray for whatever you want. And you'll get it. Healing. Money. Alligator boots. Whatever it is that you're wanting. And for some of you who are hearing the mountain thing.

[17:01] You're like, man. If I just prayed that Cyprus and Seymour crushed into grouse. We'd have a huge kind of like whistler-like mountain. No, that's not what it's saying. What it is saying is Jesus giving a picture of the new community of faith.

This new temple. This new kingdom. Community replacing the old one. And it's a kingdom. A community. That is a faith. That is supernatural. It's a faith that's so strong because it's based on Christ.

And his life and his death and his resurrection. And it's a picture of Jesus being able to give without measure. It's a boundless kind of picture. This mountain being thrown into the sea in faith.

It's a beautiful saying. And this is the picture of the new community. And it's so strong in Christ. That doubt is cast off.

Because it's Jesus' life and death and resurrection that it's based on. And it's a picture, friends, of faith from the heart. It's not this outside kind of thing.

[18:07] Where there's temple hustling and bustling and all this activity. It's a relationship from the heart. And, friends, it's a picture of faith with great hope.

Verse 24. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it. And it will be yours. It's this God giving and receiving. It's this hope in God yesterday, today, and forever. It's the trust in God that we have as a community. Trusting that Jesus did die on the cross for you. And our prayers will be answered. A hope in Jesus.

That he is faithful and trustworthy. It's a hope that leans towards heaven. And it's a community, friends, of amazing love and forgiveness.

Verse 25. And whenever you stand praying, forgive if you have anything against anyone so that your Father, also who is in heaven, may forgive you your trespasses. And this is a community beyond our imagination of love and understanding and forgiveness of Jesus, forgiveness on the cross.

[19:17] It's beyond our imagination. It's beyond our imagination of God. It's beyond our imagining how great that love is. And it's an absolutely stunning picture, friends, that Jesus is giving. And he's saying it with authority.

The kind of authority to replace the old covenant with the new one on the cross. But you didn't see that coming. Finally, we come to the final section, verses 30 and following.

And this is this confrontation with the chief priests and company questioning Jesus' authority. And we've kind of already looked at most of this. And I just want to focus on one thing.

And this is kind of a strange thing. But I've been wondering this week, why does Jesus focus on the baptism of John? He's answering. He's saying, where does your authority come from?

Look at John. What's he doing there? What's he doing there with that? What's he doing there with that? Well, if we think about it, let's think about John. What is his one purpose that he came to this earth to do?

[20:20] It's to prepare the way of the Lord. To make his path straight. And what is the only baptism of John that we know anything about? Well, hey, it's Jesus' baptism, isn't it?

And in Mark, chapter 1, verses 9 and following, this is what you hear. In those days, Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opening and the spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven. You are my beloved son. With you I am well pleased.

Ah, where is the authority that Jesus is doing what he's doing? It's the authority of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It's a supernatural authority. It's the authority in judgment.

It's this arresting authority to replace the temple. It's the authority of a new community. It's the authority of God, the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. So I hope you see Jesus just a little more clearly.

[21:29] His authority to bring us into this new community, this new covenant community through the cross. And he's doing it through this amazing living parable. He's doing it through this incredible arresting moment in the temple.

He's doing it through this prayer time with his disciples explaining the love and forgiveness of God and bringing them into this new place of deep relationship. Let's look at just a couple of implications as we finish up.

Look at three. And I think this is here where we need to see Christ clearly as we're sent out tonight. The first implication is quite simply this.

For you and I personally, It is in the authority that Jesus came to arrest and stop us where we are in our tracks. And to call us by his word to himself.

It's a beautiful authority that he comes. And it's not about the outside things. It's not just about coming to church and showing up. It's about the inside.

[22:42] It's about our hearts. And if you have not received Jesus, Receive him tonight. Be stopped in your busyness. And your programmed life.

Your distractions and selfishness. And know him as your king. Your great high priest. Your Lord. Who came to be your forgiveness. The first implication.

Jesus wants to stop us in our tracks. And help us to look in. And receive him. The second implication I think is an implication of community.

Friends, here in Evening Church. Are we a community that is fruitful? Are we a community that is fruitful?

What does that mean? Jesus is talking about this community that's so filled with worship and prayer. It's a community that is so filled with God's word.

[23 : 45] And it is filled with this fellowship for all peoples. Are we so busy with our own lives that we're not caring for those around us?

Maybe it's here at church. Maybe it's in our Bible studies in small groups. Maybe it's in youth group. Maybe it's in just getting together as Christians. Maybe it's our family.

Maybe it's in our family. Are we so distracted by our own things that we forget to welcome all peoples into God's house? Called to be a place of faith and hope and love.

Are we bringing the forgiveness and love and welcome of God to all who walk through these doors?

It's a question. I'm not saying we're not doing that. But how can we be more fruitful?

And thirdly, I think this is really important. This is a hard one. It's a hard one. Do we acknowledge that Jesus has the divine authority of judgment?

[24 : 53] That we will all stand before Jesus? And that we'll be thinking about that in chapters to come. Maybe we have come to love Jesus and trust in him.

And when we stand before Jesus, we'll be in awe and wonder. And he'll say, well done, good and faithful servant. And I pray that for each and every one of us. Because Jesus is the one who came not to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.

But how about your friends? Your colleagues? Your fellow students? Your family? Your neighbors? People who walk through these doors who have never heard the gospel?

Do we understand that eternity is at stake? Do we see how powerful this is? And how much our friends and colleagues and all those around us need the gospel?

Do we realize that Jesus has the authority of judgment? And as Jesus sends us out tonight, I hope he stopped us in our tracks a little bit.

[26 : 07] But I hope that you hear that he's calling us to this community of faith and hope and love. That is a living, breathing, amazing, heart-filled relationship with him. And that is what we're to be, a fruitful church, a fruitful people.

And Jesus lived this parable out for us before our eyes. And he's going to speak another parable to us next week, which is also very hard.

But it's very good for us to hear. Let me pray for us. Let me pray for us. Heavenly Father, may we be this new community of faith.

May we be those who so deeply love you and trust you that doubt is cast off. May we be those who love you and trust you that we want others to know and love and trust you as well.

Help us to have a fruitfulness, a life in us, Lord, that's from the inside out. Lord, bless us and keep us mindful of how powerful and glorious you are, our great high priest and our very Lord and Savior.

[27 : 25] In your sweet name, Jesus, we pray. Amen.