

“Because I Said So!”
The Gospel According to Mark 11:25-33
September 9th, 2018

A man was taking a drive in the country when his car suddenly stopped running. He coasted to the side of the road and lifted the hood... when an old horse came trotting by.

The horse never slowed down. He just looked and said, “You better check if you have any gas.” The man was shocked! He ran to the nearest farmhouse and knocked on the door frantically. When an old farmer opened the door, the man told the farmer what had happened.

The farmer asked, “Was this a horse with a floppy right ear?” “Yes, yes!” the man exclaimed.

“Don’t believe everything he says,” the farmer pointed out. “He doesn’t know a thing about cars!”

Throughout my childhood, I received many commands from my parents... “Make your bed,” “Pick up your clothes,” “Clean your room,” and “Go weed the garden” were among the marching orders they gave me. Sometimes, if not regularly, I asked why I would have to do such things. Invariably, their response was something like this... “Because I Said So!”

My parents were in charge in the family, especially Dad. If corporal punishment (whippings) was needed, and it often was, he was the one who administered it. I learned - eventually - I’m a slow learner - I should submit, willingly, to their authority if I desired a happier life!

As I regularly challenged my parents’ authority (and I’m venturing to guess you did, too) so the Jewish religious elite regularly challenged Jesus’ authority. We see that in the passage before us this morning, **the Gospel According to Mark, Chapter 11, verses 25-33**. There are two concepts central in these verses – forgiveness and authority.

The Gospel According to Mark 11:25-33:

²⁵ “And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. ²⁶ “But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.”

²⁷ Then they came again to Jerusalem. And as He was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came to Him. ²⁸ And they said to Him, “By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority to do these things?”

²⁹ But Jesus answered and said to them, “I also will ask you one question; then answer Me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things: ³⁰ The baptism of John—was it from heaven or from men? Answer Me.”

³¹ And they reasoned among themselves, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ He will say, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’ ³² But if we say, ‘From men’ ”—they feared the people, for all counted John to have been a prophet indeed. ³³ So they answered and said to Jesus, “We do not know.”

And Jesus answered and said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.”

Jesus’ teaching on forgiveness is found in the first two verses. He refers to praying in verse 25, because that’s what He explained in the two verses immediately preceding today’s passage, verses 23 & 24, “For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says. ²⁴ Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that

you receive *them*, and you will have *them*.” Such teaching “assumes that a believer (in Christ) will ask things which are not sinful, and which are in accordance with the will of God.” (Ryle, 237)

As verse 25 continues, Jesus says, “...if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.” *Why might we have something against someone else?* It could be that the other person has sinned against us. Further, their words or actions may have hurt or offended us. If we’re not careful, such hurt can grow into bitterness!

To forgive someone else who has hurt us is absolute proof of real faith. Yes, it is risky; in forgiving another, we give up our right to retaliate against them for hurting us. In forgiving, we choose not to hold another’s sin against them any longer. There’s nothing that exists any longer for which there must be forgiveness! To forgive is to be like Jesus; look to the cross and to what lengths He went to bring about forgiveness!

In this merging of prayer and forgiveness, we should catch the drift that forgiving others requires God’s help; we seek God’s help in prayer, and God honors prayers that seek to accomplish His will on earth. We can only truly hope to forgive those who’ve offended or hurt us by God answering our prayers to that end. And He delights to answer such prayers. JC Ryle observes, rightly, “(Our prayers) must come from a forgiving heart. We have no right to look for mercy, if we are not ready to extend mercy to our brethren. We cannot really feel the sinfulness of the sins we ask to have pardoned if we cherish malice towards our fellow men.” (Ryle, 239-240)

The Romanian pastor and his wife had hidden Soviet soldiers during the World War II Nazi occupation of their country. Now it was Nazi soldiers who needed refuge.

Three German officers hid in the little building behind their house. The pastor’s wife sneaked them food and emptied their waste buckets at night. As a Jew, she felt hatred for their actions – they had murdered her entire family. But as a Christian, she felt compelled to aid the refugees and offer them physical and spiritual support.

The show of favor intrigued the captain; “I wonder why a Jewess should risk her life for a German soldier? I do not like Jews, and I do not fear God. I must tell you that when the German army recaptures Bucharest, and it surely will, I will never return the favor to you.”

The pastor’s wife was undaunted by his cold heart. She continued ministering to him, “Even the worst crimes are forgiven by faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus has authority to forgive you, if you repent.”

The officer replied, “I won’t say I understand you. But perhaps if more people had this gift of returning good for evil, then there would be less killing.” The officers soon escaped to Germany, still unrepentant. But the pastor and his wife had done their part in showing them the true meaning of Christianity.”

In verse 26, Jesus teaches that if we don’t forgive others who’ve hurt us, then we can expect that God will not forgive us. We can only forgive others to the extent that we ourselves have been forgiven. The critical heart, shriveled and crusty, points to the reality that one has not received a new heart from the Lord!

But to you, struggling brother or sister in Christ, take strength and solace from God’s Word in **Hebrews 12:3-6:**

“...consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. ⁴You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. ⁵And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons:

“My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD,
Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;
⁶For whom the LORD loves He chastens,
And scourges every son whom He receives.”

Jesus’ teaching on authority is described in verses 27-33.

It was now the third day since Jesus had entered triumphantly to Jerusalem. The first day, Sunday, He looked around the temple, and, because it was late, He took in the worship elements and departed. The next morning, Monday, Jesus returned to the temple and cleansed it of the money changers and sellers of wares. He also closed off the temple as a short cut people took to get to their destinations. Now, it is Tuesday, and Jesus comes again to the temple, probably to teach the people.

It strikes me that this is further proof that the house of worship was a priority for Jesus, not merely on the Sabbath, but also during the week. He’s in Jerusalem three days at this point, and for each of those days, He spent a portion in the temple. I wonder – *when was the last time you were in the church building 3 different days in a given week?* Sadly, it’s possible some haven’t been in this building for weeks and weeks. Let’s be like Jesus, dear ones. The Church was (and is) the apple of His eye. It is the centerpiece to what He’s accomplishing in kingdom work. Let’s make it similarly important in our lives.

While in the temple, Jesus is confronted by three groups of Jewish leaders represented (and probably dispatched by) the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was a leadership council which consisted of three different groups of people (as listed in verse 27 – “the chief priests, scribes, and elders.” The custody of the temple had been entrusted to the chief priests, who were mostly Sadducees. The scribes, mostly Pharisees, studied, interpreted, and taught the law. The elders were the Sanhedrin’s lay leaders; they were typically the head of a tribe or of a tribal division.

These men confronted Jesus by asking Him two questions (v. 28) – “By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority to do these things?” “These things” probably refers to Jesus’ removing the money changers from the temple and His triumphal arrival in Jerusalem.

In reply to their double question, Jesus says that if they first answer one question He poses, then He’d answer their questions. These men were probably giddy, as that was what they’d been trying to achieve all along; they believed their double question had placed Jesus in a corner. But, in posing His one question to the members of the Sanhedrin, Jesus had put them in a corner.

His question? It’s in verse 30 – “The baptism of John—was it from heaven or from men? Answer Me.” *If their answer was ‘heaven,’ then why had they not placed themselves under his authority?* If their answer was ‘men,’ they would discredit themselves before the people, whom they feared. Actually, that is the key to their lack of submission to Jesus’ teaching; they feared Jesus, but not

in the fear of submitting to Him as Master and Lord. They feared losing their positions of leadership, and their standing among the Jews in the Holy City. They feared being exposed for the spiritual dwarves they really were.

So, they come up with an incredibly, amazingly, astonishingly...stupid answer. They said they didn't know. So, Jesus tells them He won't answer their questions, either.

Dear ones, though He was a Jewish carpenter, the son of Joseph and Mary, born in a lowly manger, walking around Jerusalem in the flesh, Jesus Christ was from eternity past the King of heaven and earth! There is no higher authority than Jesus Christ and His Word. This applies to each and every one of us.

It surely applies to the leadership of the Church. The ruling elders are accountable to the Lord, first and foremost. They are also accountable to each other and to you. As you've heard already in this service, yesterday three elders and I attended the stated meeting of our presbytery up in Forreston.

The leadership to which I submit as a pastor is the presbytery. As your pastor, I am not a member of this congregation. My membership is with our presbytery; in that way, it is my church. When you as a congregation determined to call me to serve as your pastor, the Presbytery had the responsibility to make sure that I was orthodox in my beliefs and what I'd be teaching from this pulpit. I had to undergo the trials of written and oral exams. The elders of the presbytery also checked in with my former presbytery. They did their due diligence to ensure that they could lock arms with me for ministry in the Presbytery of Northern Illinois.

None of us is an authority to him or herself. Husbands and wives must submit to each other; children must submit to their parents; believers in Christ must submit to each other in order to love and serve each other. We will be spending forever together, not just our brief lives here in this present life. Let's learn to forgive each other and support those whom God has appointed over us.

"What is it?" Soviet captain Marco snarled at the young boy. "What do you want?"

The boy, only 12, swallowed his fear as he stood before the Communist officer. "Captain, you are the man who put my parents in prison. Today is my mother's birthday, and I always buy her a flower for her birthday. Since my mother taught me to forgive my enemies and to reward evil with good, I have brought the flower instead for the mother of your children. Please take it home to your wife tonight, and tell her about my love and the love of Christ."

Captain Marco, who had watched unmoved as Christians had been unmercifully beaten and tortured, was stunned at the act of love of this boy. His tears fell as he slowly walked around the desk and grabbed the boy in a fatherly embrace. Marco's heart was changed by the gift of Christ's love. He could no longer arrest and torture Christians, and soon he himself was arrested.

Only months after the boy's visit to his office, Marco slumped in a filthy prison cell surrounded by some of the same Christians he had previously arrested and tortured. He tearfully told his cellmates of the young boy and the simple gift of a flower. He considered it an honor to share a cell with those he had previously hunted and attacked.