

Matthew 21-11-07b

And we're ready now to resume our study in Matthew chapter 21. It's such a fascinating thing to see how beautifully the gospel of Matthew presents this information to tell us what it means. Of all of the occasions, this is not the only occasion where Jesus talks about what our faith can do.

You will remember that we saw earlier in this same gospel that there is the opportunity to believe and do things in prayer. Mulberry trees and such can be uprooted, but this specific context is very clearly the role that God's people have in representing divine truth in the face of impending and necessary judgment. God is not going to allow evil to stand once it has manifested itself, once it's been given an opportunity to change mind, to change heart, to go in a different direction.

When that opportunity is rejected after repeated presentations, and this is what the wicked vine dresser parable is going to represent, is one chance after another, after another, culminating in slaying the son, that is going to be it. And Jesus says to his disciples, you are going to represent this. You are going to do what I have done.

Not only what was done to the fig tree, but to the mountain itself. The fig tree is one thing. It's not hard to make the connection from the fig tree to Israel, but when he says this mountain, and they look across there and look up at the mountain that houses Jerusalem and the temple, this mountain, when you are in the right because your faith is strong and there's no doubt in your mind.

I want to share with you something I ran across every once in a while. I just go out and sample what's available to see what people are saying. One of my Roku channels is ABC News, and there's this big battle between conservative media and liberal media, and whenever you think of liberal media, there's a few networks that come to mind, and the conservative media, there's a few networks that come to mind.

But one of them that is kind of number two, but we try harder, or number three or number four down the way is ABC. They don't really get mentioned one way or another, and I've got a little box there on the menu that says ABC News, and I thought, well, I wonder what they're having to say. So I clicked it, and they had a report there that you can watch that said something about white evangelical Protestants are in the process of mutating or changing or whatever.

And it was a very thoughtful report about how being white evangelical Protestant, and I'm using these terms because that's what the report uses. I don't really think our color makes a difference. Why can't they just talk about evangelicals? Why can't they just talk about Protestants? But the way that this block is viewed, particularly by the opposition, they've got to throw the color in.

But there was no real appeal to people of faith as an individual group until around the time of Jimmy Carter. And this is around the time when you begin to have the moral majority and you begin to have politicians recognize evangelicals in general, evangelical Protestants and white evangelical Protestants in particular, as a group that could be recruited to political ends. And it really wasn't that way before.

And I think one of the reasons is Christianity so permeated the culture that you couldn't just single out Christians and appeal to them. But after Roe v. Wade and after a lot of other things, now you begin to have these divisions that split along religious lines as well as others. So anyway, cut to the chase.

In the last few years, young self-identified white evangelical Protestants are becoming progressive and they are no longer hewing to the values and the tenets and the viewpoints and the political persuasions that characterized the earlier days with Falwell and some of the others. So it changes the landscape of how they are viewed and to what extent any given politician will appeal to them. They had clips of Mr. Trump and others addressing people of faith in various ways.

But here's my point. In the course of this, they picked out a few examples. There's a young man, a believer in a church in Dallas.

He's got a family. They showed him with his kids. He's a young guy.

But even though he is dedicated to his faith and believes his Bible, his understanding of the Bible and understanding of what the Bible teaches informs his choices when it comes to voting and supporting various things. So just as one example, he brought up immigration and he said, you know, when you look at the Old Testament over and over again, God tells his people, look out for the stranger and the foreigner in your midst. And they are to be helped and clothed and aided and assisted and given things.

And is this true or not? It's absolutely true. Widows, orphans, stranger in your midst are to be treated with respect, be treated fairly, look out for them, do not oppress them, do not treat them differently than you do your brethren when it comes to certain things. But interestingly, this young man has succumbed to the strategy which has been perpetrated by the, for lack of a better word, the left to conflate and to intermingle and to confuse legal immigration with illegal immigration.

There is very little pushback against legal immigrants. And it is not that they are immigrants that is the problem. It's that it is unregulated, uncontrolled, unchecked, and against our laws.

We resist the flow of millions of people across our Southern border, not because we're against people from other countries coming to this country. Very many of us are just one or two generations off the boat. That is not the issue.

And to have wisdom to discern spiritual issues and the spiritual issue is not God told his Old Testament, people look out for foreigners. Therefore we should embrace and encourage people to flow across our border. Did God ever tell the Israelites, welcome the Ammonites and the Moabites and the Philistines and the surrounding peoples? What about that part of the Old Testament? Well, once they get in your midst, that changes everything.

If it's an Ammonite and a Moabite in your midst, well, all bets are off. Israel was a distinct people descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob through his 12 sons. And there is a need to have wisdom in not proof texting and taking out of context passages.

And that's what we're seeing in our Matthew passage. But they went to two or three different examples of what they consider to be the new white evangelical Protestant. And in each case where they are breaking from the traditional biblical understanding of social and political issues, they are citing scripture and misusing it by not paying attention to context and by emphasizing the positive aspect.

Well, shouldn't we embrace all foreigners because God told his people this in the Old Testament, shouldn't we be welcoming and non-condemnatory for people who are confused about their gender or confused about their interactions with people of their own gender? What should we do with children and their education and so on? And let me pivot from that observation. And if you happen to have one of these Roku things, it's like ABC News Live or something. You can find this report and watch it.

It's a wonderful test for perception and application, I think. What is wrong with what these people are saying? I think it's a very fair report. I think it puts its finger on something that is definitely happening in our culture.

But my point in bringing it up is it is too easy to cherry pick how we can be kind, be loving, be accepting, be nonjudgmental, and fail to pay attention to passages like the one we are looking at this morning that say God's people are here to make an issue out of the difference between light and darkness. It's not. We're going to blend them all together and come up with a wonderful shade of gray.

Things are right and they are wrong. They are acceptable or they are unacceptable. They are good or they are evil.

And if we cannot stand as people of God for what is right, choose what is good, eschew what is evil, speak truth, and be unafraid in doing so with faith, nothing doubting, we're of no use. God did not put us here to be a palliative, to be a balm, to be comforting and encouraging only. We are here to represent coming judgment on rejection of God, rejection of His Son, rejection of His Word.

Turn with me to our passage, Matthew chapter 21, and let's continue. Whatever things

you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive. This sounds, if you just pull it out of context, like, hey, just believe hard enough and anything you ask for, you will receive.

We know anybody with two neurons to rub together knows that you can't just ask for anything. Well, I'd like a yacht down here in the pond. I'd like three more rooms added onto my house.

I'd like a Porsche in the driveway. I'd like my bank account to swell to disproportionate amounts. Well, if I just believe it, I will receive it.

We know instinctively that there are conditions on such promises. Whatever things you ask in prayer, believing. Notice that the operative portion of this, what brings into effect the withering of a fig tree or the moving of a mountain, is prayer.

We know a lot about prayer. We know that prayer should reflect what we know from the Word of God, that we try to pray in the will of God and we cite God's will and God's Word. You look at the prayer of Moses for the people in the golden calf time.

You look at the prayer of Daniel for his people in Daniel 9. You look throughout Scripture when effective prayer is offered. It reflects God's will. It reads back to God, His grace, His power, His standards.

Turn with me back to Genesis chapter 18. We're looking at this theme of God's people standing up in a time of impending judgment. Well, you know that there was a great impending judgment in Genesis chapter 18 and chapter 19 with regard to Sodom, Gomorrah, the five cities of the plain, Lot, Abraham.

So we're talking about Abraham and he gets the promise of a son in the latter part of Genesis 17. Sarah, your wife will bear you a son in verse 19. You shall call his name Yitzchak.

I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant and with his descendants after him. As for Ishmael, I have heard you. Now notice you can go here without referencing context.

I will establish my covenant, God says, with Isaac for an everlasting covenant and with his descendants after him. Establish my covenant. My covenant is going to be established.

It's going to be fulfilled. All of these wonderful. And this is why they say the Abrahamic covenant is unconditional.

Well, we've got to keep reading. I will bless Ishmael. So Abraham takes Ishmael and circumcises him.

And that very same day, Abraham was circumcised. His son, Ishmael, all the men of his

house born in the house or bought with money from a foreigner were circumcised with him. Notice that God did not tell Abraham, by the way, all these people you have bought for money, what a heinous person you are making merchandise of human beings.

I can't fulfill my covenant with you until you free your slaves, etc. Now look at chapter 18. I'm not saying slavery is great.

I'm just saying notice what God makes an issue of. Then the Lord appeared to him by the terebinth trees of Mamre as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day. He lifted his eyes and looked and behold, three men were standing by him.

When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them. If I found favor in your sight, do not pass by. Let a little water be brought, wash your feet, rest yourselves under the tree.

I'll bring a morsel of bread that you may refresh your hearts. After that, you may pass by in as much as you have come to your servant. They said, do as you have said.

They said, do as you have said. Abraham hurries to the tent, took a tender and good calf, gave it to a young man, hastened to prepare it. Notice how long it takes to slay, butcher, hand the meat to somebody, drain the blood out.

He knows Genesis 9. Get the thing cooked. This is a process of hours, right? Where is Sarah? The laughing incident. Then in verse 16, the men rose from there and look towards Sodom and Abraham was with them to send them on the way.

The Lord said, shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him. Pay attention. Verse 19, Genesis 18, 19.

For I have known him in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord to do righteousness and justice in order that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has spoken to him. Do you see the condition? I was told through my 10 years of seminary, actually 12 years of seminary total. Every time this came up, the Abrahamic covenant is an unconditional covenant.

God promised Abraham, what do you do with this verse? I have known Abraham in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord to do righteousness and justice so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has spoken to him. They've got to be commanded. They've got to heed, hear, follow, pursue, stand up for righteousness and justice.

If these covenant promises are going to be fulfilled, the Lord said, because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great. And because their sin is very grave, I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that

has come to me. And if not, I will know this is God himself speaking in the first person through three angels.

This first mightiest, most authoritative angel is speaking in the first person for God himself. He is an angel. He is identified as a man here.

Yet we are also told that it is God. You go back to verse one, the Lord appeared to him by the terrament trees of Mamre. That's, that's the title.

That's, that's the introduction to this section. And then these men come and these men represent the Lord. And he speaks in the first person, verse 13, the Lord said to Abraham, why did Sarah laugh? The Lord said, verse 20, because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great.

I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to me. And if not, I will know where he's got located in heaven, the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah, where Lot and his family lives. Lot lives, his family lives.

The report, the outcry has come up, but God says, before I perpetrate judgment, I am going to see for myself. And in the person of this man slash angel slash appearance of the Lord, he says, I will see for myself. Now, what is this about? This all bears on our passage and on our application of it.

In Job 25, verse five, behold, even to the moon and it shines not. Yes, the stars are not pure in his sight. The stars representing the angels.

We know this from a couple of different passages in Job. The stars are not pure in his sight. Even more pointedly, you go to Job chapter four, verse 18, and on the lips of Eliphaz, the demonite, can a mortal be more righteous than God or a man more pure than his maker? This is Job four, 17 and 18.

If God puts no trust in his servants and he charges his angels with error, God puts no trust in his servants. These are his angelic servants. He charges his angels with error.

This tells me that Eliphaz was acquainted with the story of Abraham and Genesis because God says the report has come to me. But before I judge and destroy these cities, I'm going to see for myself. I'm going to make an issue of personally verifying whether this is so.

If not, I will know it, God says. If not, I will know it. He puts no trust in his servants and he charges his angels with error.

I will go and see for myself. Very fascinating. There's all kinds of theological knots to try to untie here.

Cutting the Gordian knot. God makes an issue of his own personal firsthand knowledge before judgment is executed. The Lord Jesus has been in Israel now for 33 years in Matthew 21, and he personally goes to Jerusalem.

He personally goes to the temple and looks around. He personally goes there and teaches and measures the response. He is going to personally confront the chief priests and the elders of the people on this day that we are looking at this Tuesday in Matthew 21 before judgment is finalized.

Represented by the withering of the fig tree, represented by the removal of the mountain that is coming. Well, it's very fascinating, but note that the presence of God is not just for benefit, not just for preservation, protection, blessing. It is also judgmental.

These young people, these progressive white evangelical Protestants that were interviewed do not understand, appreciate or factor into their thinking the judgmental side, the representative nature of our presence. We are the temple of the Holy Spirit. We are representative until we are taken out of the way.

The man of sin is not going to be revealed. Why? Because the presence of the Holy Spirit, he doesn't just blow in the wind like Jesus was telling Nicodemus in our age, he resides in us. If he is going to convict of sin, righteousness, and judgment, and we refuse to talk about sin or righteousness or judgment, we're useless.

Why are we here? Shall I hide from Abraham what I'm about to do? He has got to know and teach his children about righteousness and justice for the covenant promises to be fulfilled. He has to be a representative of righteousness. His children have to represent and live out before the world righteousness so that the nations can be blessed through him.

That is our role. Being the temple of the Holy Spirit isn't for our benefit only. We serve a representative function in the same way that the body of Christ when he was here in his first advent was a source of blessing and of judgment.

We fulfill the very same role and we have got to be willing in faith, nothing doubting, to stand up for divine truth. Now how this works itself out in terms of social and political action or inaction or speaking or not speaking or acting or not acting, this is what prayer is for. That's why Jesus goes on to say, communication with God is important.

God comes down and communicates with Abraham. Shall I hide from Abraham what I'm about to do? I'm about to judge Sodom and Gomorrah and God's messenger angels are going to go and let Lot know about this and Lot is going to make an issue out of that coming judgment with the people. He's going to request that his sons-in-law or fiances, they're actually fiances I think, the men that are associated with his daughters, but they won't come.

Nobody will come except Lot, his wife, and his two daughters. But the issue has been made clear the night before when all of these people are circulating around the house, they make their dedication to evil clear. They make their rejection of messengers of light and messengers of deliverance clear.

They want to harm and have their way with these messengers. In Genesis chapter 19, you know that story well. Well come back to Matthew chapter 21, whatever things you ask in prayer, believing you will receive.

Do you need guidance? Do you need wisdom? Do you understand the representative role of the Lord Jesus Christ that we are here to fulfill? That's the reason, one of many reasons why we have the Holy Spirit is to represent God, God's truth, God's righteousness, and God's justice, and God's coming judgment on unrighteousness to the world. You can't just pick the parts of the mission that you like and fail to do the others. It's an all or nothing thing.

Jesus could have said, you know, I like this healing and blessing and raising the dead. I'm just going to do that part. I'm not going to do the hard part of going to the cross.

I'm not going to stand on the hill and condemn Jerusalem. I'm not going to speak to the chief priest and create this ruckus and and, you know, cause consternation and opposition and murder plots against myself. I'll just do the happy stuff.

We represent Jesus Christ. We carry the Holy Spirit. And the mission is not only to bless, not only to comfort and encourage, but also to represent judgment.

The reason you've got white evangelical Protestant progressives is they do not understand this truth. You see this, whatever things you ask in prayer, believing you will receive in Matthew 21, 22, flip over to James chapter one, James chapter one, James, a bond servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ to the 12 tribes scattered abroad. The same audience to whom Peter writes, these Jews scattered in the diaspora.

Greetings, my brothers counted all joy. When you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience, look at the positive. When you are tried, when you are put under pressure, when there is a test, you accounted an occasion for joy.

This is a thinking process. You're not just getting giddy and hilarious and perpetrating your sense of humor. When hard times come, this is an accounting.

This is a reckoning. You think your way through the trial and say, I ought to be happy. God is giving me an occasion to demonstrate my faith.

This faith is visible to others. It is a light shining in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation among whom you shine as lights in the world. Count it all joy, knowing that this trial of your faith produces patience.

It strengthens us pushing against weight. You can always tell when you're out of shape, the older you get, the harder it is to stay in shape. I was under a piano a couple of days ago, putting in a damp chaser.

You lie on your back when you're doing this as a piano guy, putting in a damp chaser, and you have to reach up lying on your back to the underside of this grand piano and fasten things and route chords and test and one thing and another. I was under there probably 20, 25 minutes with my head raised, with my arms over me. And toward the end of the day after that, and certainly the second day after that, my neck was sore and my arms were sore.

And I thought, what kind of weakness is there in me that I can't raise my head off the floor for 20 minutes without my muscles being sore? I need to work out. I need to regularly exercise and put stress on my muscles to strengthen them so that when the time comes to use them, I am not having trouble keeping my head up where I can see what I'm doing. I'm not getting fatigue in my neck or in my arms when I need to do a necessary task.

I need pressure. I need weight. I need to work out and keep myself in shape so that when a time of need comes, I'm prepared.

I need strength in my feet and my ankles and my legs. I need to walk so that my muscle tone is such that if I step on a rock, I don't roll my ankle and suffer for three minutes. I need to keep myself in good enough shape that when an unexpected test came, my muscle tone failed, and now I've got something torn in my joint.

The testing of your faith produces patience. Verse four, but let patience have its work of maturing. Let patience have its maturing, completing, perfecting work so that you may be mature, complete, perfected.

These tests strengthen us so that we are strong. They give us patience so that we are patient. They give us durability so that we are durable.

We hold our edge. When God picks us up to chisel something into granite, we don't fail. We don't roll.

We don't split. We don't come apart. Watch that forged in fire program sometime and watch guys making knives and swords and things.

It's fascinating the torture to which metal is put to forge it into a worthy blade that will survive testing, that will survive impact, that will survive being thrown at a wall or hacked through a block of ice. It is examined afterward. Did the edge roll? Did the laminations split? Did it bend? Did it warp? Did it break? It is forged in fire so that when the testing comes, it holds its edge.

It holds its point. It holds its shape. And it is a worthy blade.

If any of you lacks wisdom, verse five, let him ask of God. Lacking is mentioned at the end of verse four, to be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks, for example, wisdom, not sure what is the better part of valor here? Is this a time for me to stand? Is this a time to try to be a blessing? Or is this a time to represent the standards that define sin, that define righteousness, that predict judgment? How do I know? Should I, is this a non-essential or an essential? Do I flex? Do I roll with the punch or do I stand firm in the face of opposition? Is this a time to flee youthful lusts or is this a time to stand and having done all to stand with the full armor of God? Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

Flee youthful lusts. Is it a time to stand or a time to flee? Is it a time to stand up and be counted? Is it a time to, as Jesus does in John chapter seven, which we're about to look at, which thing do we do? And it may change depending on circumstance. It may change depending on who we are talking to and what we are talking about.

Let him ask of God. Jesus says, whatever you ask in prayer, it will be given to you. What are you praying for? What are you praying about here? If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God who gives to all liberally and without reproach.

Notice maybe we ought to know what to do and for whatever reason we don't. Maybe we're not sure enough to pray. Nothing doubting to operate in faith.

Nothing doubting when we go to God and ask for wisdom. Notice there is no reproach. God doesn't rebuke and say, you know, weren't you listening in Bible class, you know, three weeks ago, two weeks ago, yesterday, today, weren't you listening? There is no reproach.

This is such a beautiful expression of God's grace, God's love, God's patience, and the fulfillment of God's will in our lives. If we lack wisdom, the key is recognizing that we lack wisdom and going to God. He is not going to reproach us for coming.

Maybe we should have known, maybe we could have known, maybe we could, you know, review or talk or whatever. Go to God. He gives liberally.

You won't just get a little wisdom if you say, Lord, I'm not real sure to do in this situation. You don't just get a little bit of insight. You don't just get one clue.

He gives liberally and without reproach. I love this promise. I come to passages and I can't figure out what's going on.

I think I'm seminary trained. I know Hebrew and Greek. I've been doing this for a long time.

How can I not know what's going on here? It takes, and it's easy for me, you know, there's people who have great occasion for humility and I'm one of them. It's easy for me to know what I don't know. And I go to God and I say, Lord, give me insight.

Maybe I should know, maybe I should be able to put this together, but I really want to understand this. And I promise you, God gives liberally and without reproach. It is such a wonderful promise.

Hug this to your chest, put it on a card, stick it on your rear view mirror, your refrigerator, your shaving mirror, your makeup mirror. If we lack wisdom, ask of God. He will give it.

God is canvassing the earth, trying to find those of us as believers who have the humility to say, I don't know, Lord, give me wisdom. Liberally and without reproach. And it will be given to him, but let him ask in faith.

Does this sound familiar? Let him ask in faith with no doubting. Is there any doubt in your mind that if you go to God and tell him, I don't know, I'm not sure I've resorted to what I can remember and what I want to try to apply from what I've learned from your word, what I've seen in experience, what the council and the conversation of other believers who speak the truth in love are telling me, but I want to confidently accomplish your will for myself. Your will might be different for somebody else.

Somebody else's decision in similar circumstances might be different than mine. I want to do what you would have me do in my place, in my time. I want to hold my edge.

I want to stand with the full armor and quench the fiery darts of the wicked one in my assignment, my part of the battlefield, which may be different than somebody else's. Lord, give me wisdom. Ask in faith, nothing doubting.

Same thing. Jesus says, James says, is there any doubt in your mind that God is going to answer? If you ask him for wisdom in a situation, there shouldn't be look at this promise. Take this thing to the bank.

Lord, you have said, if I come to you and recognize my insufficiency, when it comes to wisdom, the practical application of knowledge, spiritual truth in my life, that I can come and you will provide. I am claiming your promise. Lord, I believe help thou mine unbelief.

It will be given to him. Let him ask in faith with no doubting. He who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.

If I was writing the book of James from scratch and just sitting down with an empty page, getting my quill, my ink and writing, he who doubts is like one of the last figures that would come to my mind is a wave blown by the wind. Isn't this an interesting simile? You could say, well, he's like a flighty bird or he's like a head of a dandelion blowing in the

wind. He's like a wave of the sea.

He who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. Let not that man suppose he will receive anything from the Lord. When you think about seashore, you think about the Pacific coast, you think about wind driven waves that you've seen in various places.

This is elemental, isn't it? It's forces beyond control. Nobody can go out there and calm wind and waves except the Lord Jesus himself, right? The man who doubts is the sea before Jesus says, peace, be still. What does the wind driven wave need? He needs the presence of the Lord to say, peace, be still.

And immediately there is a supernatural calm, right? Such a beautiful picture here, harking back to the calming of the wind and the waves. What manner of man is this that even the wind and the sea obey him, but you have to appeal to him. Remember, Jesus was going to pass on by the boat.

He was walking past them. He was going to leave them to row and they called out to him. And when he comes into the boat, his presence, his power, his word, calm the raging sea, still the storm.

A man who doubts doesn't get that. Let him ask in faith, nothing doubting. Well, that's what we have over here in Matthew chapter 21.

If you have faith and do not doubt, you can not only be a blessing and a benefit, be a comfort and encouragement and speak the truth in love, but you can stand up in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation and shine as light in the world. We are here for both things, not just one. Whatever things you ask in prayer, believing you will receive because you will be smart enough to pray in the will of God and claim promises that bring joy to God's heart.

And we can account our time of trial and occasion for joy because God is pleased. Now, when he came to the temple, verse 23, the chief priests and elders of the people confronted him as he was teaching and said, by what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you this authority? Doing what things? Cleansing the temple. By what authority are you doing these things? This is fascinating to me because you know what I would be tempted to answer? Who are these people? This is the Sanhedrin, the chief priests and the elders.

This is the Sanhedrin. This is the LXX. This is the 70.

They are the Jewish government underneath the Romans, largely religious. That's why they are priests and elders. They are given some authority under the Romans.

So you know what I would answer if they came up to me and said, by what authority are

you doing these things? You know what I would say? I would say, by what authority are you asking me what my authority is? By what authority are you ruling? Who has given you any governmental power here at all? That would be my riposte, right? You know, I could ask you the very same question. By what authority is this in the law of Moses? Is the Sanhedrin in the law of Moses? But what happens if you make that reply? Well, I'm going to argue that my priestly authority comes because I'm a Levite, even though these guys were not Levites. Remember that the chief priest isn't even a legitimate high priest.

You've got Caiaphas and Annas and all these guys that are not legitimate priests. Jesus could have made an issue and turned the tables on them easily, right? Jesus has such wonderful dedication to getting at the heart of the matter, getting at the truth. It is so easy to devolve into argument back and forth about the merits of the case.

And well, you're calling me a hypocrite. You're a hypocrite. You're calling me racist.

You're a racist. You're calling me gender sensitive. You're gender sensitive.

You're calling me this. Look at you, look at you, look at your, and what is it? It's subjective. So easy.

I fully expect if I'm reading this for the first time, by what authority do you do these things? Who's asking? What's their authority? It's illegitimate. These, these people, this is all political. They appoint each other.

They vote each other in, they Cody up to the Romans and the Romans let them do certain things. Jesus skips all of that. Is it a legitimate argument to make? Absolutely.

Could he embarrass them? Of course, but it's not the issue. It's not the issue. Lord, give me wisdom to see the issue.

What is the essential? Jesus cuts right past all of that. His eye is on his father. His eye is on his mission.

He is representative of divine truth, God's plan and God's purpose for his people. And he never loses sight of that. It's such a, an amazing example.

He could easily have gotten into a cat fight and been dragged down into the mud by these people, but he doesn't look at what he says. Jesus answered and said to them, let me ask you something, which if you tell me, I will tell you by what authority I do these things. He doesn't say by what authority do you operate in these precincts? By what authority do you let in the money changers? By what authority do you, uh, let the sellers of, of doves and oxen and, and sheep and such goats enter into these precincts? By what authority do you set aside the law of Moses? What does he say? The baptism of John, where was it from, from heaven or from men? Where did it come from? They reasoned among themselves.

If we say from heaven, he will say to us, why then did you not believe him? If we say from men, we fear the multitude for all count John as a prophet. So they answered Jesus and said, we do not know. And he said, neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

Fear. Remember earlier I said, put an asterisk by the word fear. What controls these people, these elders, these chief priests, why have they not already dealt with Jesus? We fear the multitude.

Turn over to Mark chapter six and verse 20. You should have a note to this effect in your new James. Mark chapter six, verse 20.

This is John the Baptist arrested by Herod because Herodias held it against him that he said, it's not lawful for you to have your brother's wife. Herodias held it against him and wanted to kill him, but she could not for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just and holy man. And he protected him, feared the people over and over again.

You find this, we fear the multitude. Turn back to Matthew chapter 14 and verse five, what controlled Herodias? What kept her in check? What kept Herod in check? John represented something and he was unwilling to attack him. He was unwilling to murder him.

Look at Matthew chapter 14, verse five, Matthew 14, five. We saw this not long ago. John the Baptist, Herod laid hold of John because of condemning him for Herodias, his brother, Philip's wife.

John had said to him, it is not lawful for you to have her. And although he wanted to put him to death, he feared the multitude. Why? They counted him as a prophet.

What does it say in Matthew 21? Why are these authorities unwilling to say that John the Baptist was only from men? They fear the multitude. Now, how do they know what the multitude thinks about John? How does Herod know what the multitude thinks about John and counts him as a prophet? There are enough people in the population who respect John. Now they may not have accepted his message and followed Jesus, although many of them have, but their opinion that divine truth is important and John is a speaker of it, this controls the government.

Herod is unwilling to execute John because of the opinion of the people. He fears the multitude and he fears John himself. And what John might say, that's the reason he's locked up.

John is making him look bad and the people are believing John because they hold him to be a prophet. This is affecting the government. If you want to have an effect on our government today, you can write a letter to your congressman.

Nothing wrong with that. You can write a letter to your senator. Nothing wrong with that.

You can express opinions on the internet. Nothing intrinsically wrong with that. But if you want to genuinely have an effect, if you want to hold evil in check in the government, what's your strongest recourse? Represent the truth of God.

Herod fears the multitude. These chief priests and elders of the people fear the multitude. Why? Because they have recognized divine truth.

What does Jesus go on to say? The harlots and the tax collectors are entering the kingdom before you because they recognize something that you refuse to acknowledge, which is the authority of the message. What they do with the messenger, what they decide about Jesus, that's secondary, but they recognize that there is something exceptional about the source. People may not agree with our beliefs.

They may not come to our savior, but they have to acknowledge that we stand for something special. And that presence is what has kept this nation for 230 or 40 years exceptional. The 10 righteous in Sodom have been enough for God to not bring judgment down on it.

But when there are not enough righteous people who are going to stand up against the presence of sin, the power of evil are not willing to speak the truth. Judgment is coming. There's judgment in Genesis 19.

There is judgment here. We have a role to play and it is not all sweetness and light. They judge John to be a prophet when the Lord Jesus is going to come to Jerusalem.

Turn to John chapter 7 once again. John chapter 7. After these things, Jesus walked in Galilee. He did not want to walk in Judea because the Jews sought to kill him.

Jesus doesn't go because there is a plot to kill him. Where is wisdom? Does he go despite the fact that they want to kill him or does he not go? John 7 is fascinating. I just want to point one thing out.

We'll look at this in more detail next time. The Lord initially tells his brothers he's not going to go. It's the time of the feast.

This is the feast of tabernacles. Jesus says, my time has not yet come. So in verse 25, some of them from Jerusalem said, is not this whom they seek to kill? But look, he speaks boldly and they say nothing to him.

Do the rulers know indeed that this truly is the Christ? We know where this man is from, but when the Christ comes, no one knows where he is from. Jesus cried out as he taught in the temple. This is on the preceding feast of tabernacles.

This is last fall from where we are in Matthew. You both know me and you know where I

am from. I have not come of myself, but he who sent me is true whom you do not know.

But I know him for I am from him and he sent me. Therefore they sought to take him, but no one laid a hand on him because our not yet come. Many of the people believed in him and said, when the Christ comes, will he do more signs than these? Which this one has done on the last great day of the feast, Jesus stands up.

Some want to lay hands on him in verse 44, but no one laid hands on him. The officers that were sent to arrest him come to the chief priests and Pharisees who said to them, why have you not brought him? No man ever spake like this man. We could not lay hold of him because his truth that he represents, that he communicates, that he embodies, that he presents is too powerful.

Nobody spoke like this. We can't oppose him. The Pharisees said, are you also deceived? This crowd that does not know the law is accursed.

Nicodemus says, does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing? Are you also from Galilee? Search. No one has arisen out of Galilee. No prophet has arisen out of Galilee.

The truth that Jesus speaks that he represents is so powerful that it holds the rulers in check until God's time. That's what we need to be. That's what we need to have.

We are here to do this. The fig tree will wither. The mountain will move if we know who we are and why we're here as the Lord Jesus did.

We have much more to say about this. It's so fascinating. We'll look at it in next Sunday, but we'll close here in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for the promise of wisdom when we pray in faith, nothing doubting. We ask that you will impart that wisdom to us as we reflect on the truth from your word, as we look at our circumstances, our opportunities, our obligations, our decisions and actions, that we can truly represent the Lord Jesus as his body in the time that remains to us in this life. We ask it in Jesus name.

Amen.