

CLOSE-UPS OF JESUS THROUGH THE LENS OF MARK - Part twenty-two

Wednesday, November 18th, 2020 - 7:00 p.m.

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1) JESUS' TEACHING ON PRAYER - MARK 11:20-25

"As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. [21] And Peter remembered and said to him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered." [22] And Jesus answered them, "Have faith in God. [23] Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, '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. [24] Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. [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."

A) IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO EXAGGERATE THE POTENTIAL AND POWER OF BELIEVING PRAYER - EVEN IN SEEMINGLY IMPOSSIBLE SITUATIONS

True enough, prayer must be made according to the will of God rather than the demands of human selfishness, but Jesus knows we also need the complementary reminder that prayer need not be limited to the things we think are in the realm of normal possibility.

B) UNFORGIVENESS SUCKS THE LIFE OUT OF PRAYER

Strong prayer takes more than just trying to have positive thoughts about God. Faith has as moral aspect to it. It is nourished by clean hands and a pure heart as I deal with my brother.

2) THE QUESTION OF JESUS' AUTHORITY - MARK 11:27 - 33

"And they came again to Jerusalem. And as he was walking in the temple, the chief priests and the scribes and the elders came to him, [28] and they said to him, "By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?" [29] Jesus said to them, "I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. [30] Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man? Answer me." [31] And they discussed it with one another, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?' [32] But shall we say, 'From man'?"— they were afraid of the people, for they all held that John really was a prophet. [33] So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

Mark's mention that Jesus was approached by the "**chief priests, and the scribes and the elders**" (27) shows that this encounter was probably a carefully planned one. These three groups make up the membership of the Jewish Sanhedrin - this was the official body with all of the religious clout in Jerusalem. Their question was to be expected. Given that Jesus had just wiped out a great profit making enterprise in the middle of their temple courts, it's understandable that they would ask "**Where did you get the authority to do these things? Who gave you the right?**" After all, Jesus was not an officially recognized priest, scribe, elder, or even Rabbi.

Their question was designed to put Jesus out of business - While the actual question is recorded in 11:28, the ***motive*** behind the question is stated in 12:12 - "**And they were seeking to arrest him but feared the people, for they perceived that he had told the parable against them. So they left him and went away.**" They wanted to trap Jesus. But they were afraid of the people. What they really wanted was to ***set up a situation where Jesus was forced to ruin His own ministry without them having to be the ones to dethrone Him.*** They felt their question would do the trick.

If Jesus answered that His authority came from **God**, He would be perceived as being guilty of blasphemy and insurrection against the Roman Emperor. They would have the legal grounds for having Him put away. ***Eventually this is what happened*** - Matthew 26:62-66 - "**And the high priest stood up and**

said, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?" [63] But Jesus remained silent. And the high priest said to him, "I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." [64] Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven." [65] Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy. [66] What is your judgment?" They answered, "He deserves death."

If Jesus answered that His authority came from *men*, He would soon forfeit the approval of the crowd. There were oodles of self-proclaimed teachers around. Jesus would just be written off as another part of the religious machinery. The true Messiah, everyone knew, would be sent by God.

A) JESUS' ANSWER WAS MORE THAN JUST A STALL TACTIC - MARK 11:29-30

"Jesus said to them, "I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. [30] Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man? Answer me."

It's not that Jesus felt confused or rattled and was trying to buy some time to come up with something cute and clever. *In answering His question properly they would find the correct answer to their question.*

Then why did Jesus answer a question with a question? In short, His tactic was exactly the same as theirs. They were trying to *force Jesus to confess His own doom with His answer*. Jesus was trying to *force them to justify their rejection of His ministry and seal their fate from their own lips*.

B) JESUS INTENTIONALLY QUESTIONED THEM ABOUT JOHN THE BAPTIST – MARK 11:30-32

"Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man? Answer me." [31] And they discussed it with one another, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?' [32] But shall we say, 'From man?'"— they were afraid of the people, for they all held that John really was a prophet."

If John's baptism (*meaning his whole ministry - the things he taught - 25*) was of God, then of all people, the spiritual leaders should have listened to him. *And John clearly pointed to and validated the Person and ministry of Jesus as the Messiah - Matthew 11:7-10 - "As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? [8] What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. [9] What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. [10] This is he of whom it is written, 'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.'"(see also John 1:19, 26-27, 3:25-30).* But if they claimed that John's baptism was merely of men, they too will lose all credibility with the masses. The people clearly took John to be a prophet of God, a forerunner to the Messiah. Luke 20:6 highlights how deep their fear of the crowd went - "But if we say, 'From man,' all the people will stone us to death, for they are convinced that John was a prophet."

Far from avoiding their question Jesus *actually forced them to deal with it in a way that would make them acknowledge who He is*, or, negatively, would *cause them to become tripped up in their own fear of man*. Either way, in grace of judgment, Jesus showed them that they weren't just dealing with an *intellectual issue* when they came to Him with their question. They were dealing with the greatest *moral choice* of their religious careers.

C) HOW PEOPLE BECOME INCAPABLE OF RECOGNIZING JESUS – MARK 11:33

"So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things." These experts told Jesus they simply didn't know how to answer His question. In a sense, they were telling the truth. They *knew* what the correct answer was. But they were *unable* to give it. In fact, this *hardness of heart* is a subject that Jesus had already talked a great deal

about. We looked at this back in **Mark 4:24-25** - **"And he said to them, "Pay attention to what you hear: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you. [25] For to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away."**In pointing out a connection between Himself and John the Baptist, Jesus was saying that their rejection of Him was the product of their rejection of the Scriptures and the previous testimony of John the baptist.

Their rejection of ***revelation already given made their request for more light a bad joke***. They were hard hearted. They would never open their lives to Jesus. They never could, given their treatment of past grace.