

Sermon Matthew 21 23 32 15th S af Pent

Sermon: 15th Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Matthew 21:23-32

Theme: The authority of Jesus

Goal: To submit ourselves to the authority of Jesus by faith is the way to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: The question of authority and obedience is a hard issue to many people. In our post-modern century, all claim for autonomy and freedom to do whatever they think is right. There is no absolute truth any more and everything is relative, depending on the nature of the circumstances it happens or on the private opinion of someone. This happens on all levels of our society, beginning at home, where parents cannot discipline their children as in the past, and the children are taking over the authority. The authority of the parents is ruled by the society, and not by God's Word anymore. And this happens on all the other levels as well: in the schools, where children have more rights than the teachers; in our job; in the government; and even in the church. If someone claims that he has authority, others contest it immediately. Everything is questioned. - Of course, on the other hand, it frequently happens that someone in authority abuses his position and takes advantage of it. We have several examples in the current history of power in Africa. But that is not the subject of our text today.

I – Jesus' authority questioned.

A - Jesus had cleansed the temple the day before and expelled the money changers and the cattle and doves sellers from it. His reasoning to do this was: “It is written: My house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it a den of robbers” (Matt 21:13). But He was questioned about this and other attitudes He had. Many didn't

accept what He was doing and saying.

“The chief priest and the elders came to Him and asked: By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?”

The chief priests and the elders were the established authority in the church and were recognized by the Romans as well. They had established a lot of new rules and laws and had added them to the Scriptures, even if some of them were against the Scriptures and God's will.

It seems that Jesus was opposing their authority and command. Therefore the question, “By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?” - Jesus could have answered them directly, that His authority came from above, from the Father. But He knew that they wouldn't accept His answer. Therefore “Jesus replied: I will also ask one question: If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John's baptism – where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?”

B - “From heaven or from men?” This is the big question that we need to raise as Christians nowadays to judge rules, guidelines, opinions and behaviors. Ethic decisions that we are challenge to take everyday have to match with God's will. Ethic positions that the society needs to take in face of so many new situations have to match with God's will as well. But it is not so, unfortunately. Let me just mention two of the current opinions and behaviors accepted by our society that come “from men” and not “from heaven”: the liberation of abortion, that officially permits to kill thousands of undeserved unborn children; or the free rights of the homosexuals, even inside the Christian Churches, who are ordaining homosexual priests and are blessing homosexual couples; and even inside the army, which was considered the model of Man (with capital letter!). There are lots of other controversial issues, especially involving sexuality and integrity

of life, where the opinion of the society is more important than the opinion of God and of His Law. The proverb that says, *“The voice of the people is the voice of God”* is not always true. The authority of the Bible is still valid and cannot be despised.

The questions that we have to raise as Christians are: Does it come from heaven or from men? Is the Bible the true Word of God, or can we despise its teaching and follow our own opinion? Can the changes of our post-modern world change God's eternal will? What are the consequences that we are already suffering because of all these changes against God's Word? What are the earthly and eternal consequences that people who do not conform their lives to God's revealed will have to suffer? - See, it is not just a matter of our society and time. It affects the eternity of everyone!

II – Jesus' authority reaffirmed.

The priests and the elders didn't answer Jesus' question, and Jesus didn't answer their question either. But after His death and resurrection, Jesus is very clear about from where His authority comes. He says in the well known passage of Mathew 28:18: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” The Victor over death, sin, and Satan himself can now claim and proclaim all authority He has received from the Father. It is not the poor man of Nazareth who is speaking here; it is not Jesus in His humiliation, as Paul describes Him so well in the Epistle for today (Philippians 2); but it is the exalted Christ, who sits at the right hand of God the Father. His authority and the authority of His words are still valid till our days and to the very end of the world. There we need to look for guidance for our decisions, and not just to the opinion of men. The opinions of men are not trustful at all and they change from time to time.

Psalm 53 describes in a very realistic way the situation of those who despise God and His word: “The fool says in his heart, 'There is no

God.' They are corrupt, and their ways are vile; there is no one who does good. God looks down from heaven on the son of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. Everyone has turned away, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.'"

As God saw that humankind was not able to find the right way by itself, He sent His Son. Jesus came to the earth to help people who were astray following their own thoughts, showing them that there is a way of truth and life. Look up, not down; look to heaven, not to men! In Jesus there is truth and security!

Conclusion: To accept Jesus' authority means to obey Him. Faith and obedience walk together. The Parable of the Two Sons, told by Jesus in this context, shows that deeds are more important than just words and good intentions. The first son represents all the sinners, as Jesus mentioned the tax collectors and the prostitutes. They opposed God's will first and were not willing to work in His vineyard; but after the preaching of John the Baptist they repented, were baptized for the remission of their sins and changed their lives. The second son represents the church leaders, who were (seemingly) always willing to do God's will; but they never did it. They were just holding their position.

In His gracious authority, the resurrected Jesus sent His disciples to preach the Good News to all creation and to go to all nations. The Word of Jesus has authority and reached our country as well. We are the workers of His vineyard nowadays. Let's work according to His rules, believing that He is wise to know what the truth is and what the best is for us as His beloved children. The Bible called us to faith in Jesus and gives guidance to our decisions. Without any doubt, but believing in His promises, we are firm under His authority and secure in His hands. Amen.