

JESUS OF NAZARETH IS PASSING BY

Is He from God or from Men

Mark 11:15-18, 27-33

TEXT: *On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple area and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the benches of those selling doves, and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: "'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'" The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching. ... They arrived again in Jerusalem, and while Jesus was walking in the temple courts, the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders came to him. "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you authority to do this?" Jesus replied, "I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John's baptism-was it from heaven, or from men? Tell me!" They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?' But if we say, 'From men' . . ." (They feared the people, for everyone held that John really was a prophet.) So they answered Jesus, "We don't know." Jesus said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things."*

In Jesus' name, my fellow redeemed:

What do you think of our worship services? Too long; too short? Stogy and stiff? Too German?

The Christian question is: What does the Lord think of our worship services? Jesus of Nazareth Is Passing By! We cannot see Him but He has so promised that where two or three gather together in His name, there He is with us! What does He think of this gathering? That depends on a question set before those ancient worship leaders who questioned His authority to disrupt their temple business: ***John's baptism-was it from heaven, or from men? Tell me!*** It was John who baptized Jesus and the voice of the Heavenly Father declared him to be the Christ. Our answer to this same question will make a difference in our worship even today. Jesus: Is He from God or from Men? The answer explains why some worship. The answer explains why you worship God.

The Pharisees summed it up beautifully after Lazarus' resurrection: ***Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. "What are we accomplishing?" they asked. "Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, "You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish."*** Jn 11 They were afraid of losing their worldly advantages. They had their religion, their religious ceremonies and festivals and they were able to co-exist with the hated Roman authorities. The one thing Rome would not tolerate was

insurrection. Jesus' ministry could be so misconstrued. Better that *one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.*" Jn 11

What is amazing is these thoughts come immediately after one of the more amazing miracles recorded in Scripture! Are humans so blind? So spiritually dead? So hostile to God as to deny Jesus? Yes. Scripture reveals something that is not accepted by reason, that while man can make choices in earthly matters, they cannot make spiritual decisions BECAUSE THEY ARE DEAD!

We must know what we are up against in this when it comes to our worship. While we are not spiritually dead, we have an Old Adam is still totally corrupt. It is this totally depraved nature in all of us that comes with us even when we gather for worship. As Jesus of Nazareth "passes by" through this place of worship, my New Man of faith comes to meet with God, to hear His Word and to respond with my heart of thanksgiving and praise, while my Old Adam comes here only for his own self gratification.

Someone who once told me that when he worshipped here at St. John's he didn't feel good about himself. He wanted to leave church feeling good about himself. There are many church bodies that consciously focus on making the worship experience a "feel good" thing. It's a wonderful thing to feel good before, during and after worship, but something is wrong if and when it's a matter of feeling good ABOUT MYSELF. If Jesus is from God and we are here to worship Him, the good feeling is that He has called me, a sinner, to stand before Him redeemed, restored and forgiven. I will feel good about Jesus my God who has graciously called me, a lost and condemned creation, to the knowledge of my salvation! Won't we therefore "feel good" about God and His grace toward us?

This is not insignificant since while there are some who worship with a self-centered focus, and then there is you who worship God.

It was with righteous, sinless, anger that Jesus disrupted what had been acceptable practice in the Temple courts. After all, they were provided a service for worshippers. Scripture says: *On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple area and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the benches of those selling doves, and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: "'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'* Unbelievers who were misleading the people had overrun God's place of worship and prayer. The Bible says: *The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching.* It was not about Jesus' teaching since they did not believe Him to be of God. They boldly asked him: *By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you authority to do this?"* Jesus responded with a question that trapped them and exposed their unbelief: *I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John's baptism-was it from heaven, or from men? Tell me!" They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?' But if we say, 'From men' . . ."* (They feared the people, for everyone held that John really was a prophet.) *So they answered Jesus, "We don't know." Jesus said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things."*

If Jesus were to attend our worship service today, would he come with a whip or with a promise? Would he come to "pat us on the head" and say: "You're OK. You're

trying the best you can. You've got it rough and I understand. I still love you just the way you are!" If He did this, He would not be God because God's Word says: ***Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart...*** Ps 24 If we want to worship Jesus feeling good about ourselves, not one of us could come through the door of this sanctuary. Because we know and believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

And yet we come just as we are because God has come to us in Christ with His gracious promises. The Apostle Paul assured the Corinthians: ***All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.*** 2 Co 5 Any good feelings an honest person can have is that God has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus by Jesus' death and resurrection!

What does this mean to us who believe in this message of reconciliation? Paul continues: ***And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*** 2 Co 5 It means that what is given us is the only thing that we can give to others: the message, the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. This is what draws us to God and what will draw others to Him as well. We are ambassadors of Christ and He has given us the power and authority to proclaim the message of reconciliation to the world.

If that doesn't make worshippers feel good, then they don't know Jesus. Amen.