

Three Common Reasons Why People Are Not Willing To Follow Jesus

Mark 11:27-33

Introduction: 1) In Matthew 23:37-39 (cf. Luke 13:34-35) we find some of the saddest words found in all of the Bible, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! See, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’” The phrase “you would not” has the feel of a clock when it strikes midnight. The day is over. Time has run out.

2) Jesus has just cleansed and cursed the temple in Jerusalem for its corruptions and abuse (11:12-25). Within a generation it would be reduced to rubble and completely destroyed (A.D. 70). In response the religious leaders “were seeking a way to destroy him” (11:18). You would think Jesus would have gone into hiding. At the least He would avoid the public eye. Not hardly! The very next day He returns to Jerusalem and the temple with courage looking for a fight. No, He is not looking for a physical confrontation but one that is spiritual and one that will place His claims and identity front and center.

3) Mark 11:27-12:44 records 5 temple controversies in Jerusalem that parallel 5 earlier controversies in Galilee (2:1-3:6). In both cases his opponents are the religious leaders. Now that He is in Jerusalem the stakes are much higher and the intensity of the conflict much stronger. Things are moving to an inevitable climax. Things are moving to the cross and His bloody death.

4) In this first of 5 temple controversies we will see some common reasons people are not willing to come and follow Jesus as one of His disciples. We will quickly discover that not much has

changed in 2000 years. What kept people from putting their faith and trust in Him then are the same kinds of reasons that cause them to refuse Him today.

I) They do not want to submit to His authority. 11:27-28

- Jesus “came again to Jerusalem.” It was Tuesday and His third day in Jerusalem. Mark tells us “he was walking in the temple.” (v. 27). Luke tells us He “was teaching the people ... and preaching the gospel” (Luke 20:1).
- At some point the religious authorities show up. Mark is very precise: “the chief priests and the scribes and the elders came to him.” This is the Sanhedrin, the Jewish high court, who exercised both political and religious authority in Israel. It consisted of 71 men lead by the acting high priest. Their power was enormous and they functioned as a “go-between” with the Romans and the people of Israel. They were super sensitive to anything that could threaten their authority and Jesus was clearly a threat.
- Coming to Him (v. 27) they question him (v. 28) with respect to the issue of His authority which clearly they reject, “By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them? Note that the word “authority” appears 4 times in this passage.
- I think we rightly suspect that the immediate context of their interrogation is His actions the previous day in the temple. “Who gave you the right to rage havoc in our temple?”
- However, this is not the first time the issue of authority has come up. A quick survey of Mark is most instructive.

Mark 1:22

And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.

Mark 1:27

And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, “What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.”

Mark 2:10-11

But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” — he said to the paralytic—“I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home.”

- This man teaches with authority, cast out demons with authority and heals with authority. He does only what God can do! But they are not satisfied. They request his ordination papers. Show us your credentials! These are not honest questions. They want to destroy Him. They are not motivated by a willingness to know who He is and they have no interest in bringing their lives under His authority. Their goal is to ensnare Him, embarrass Him, and discredit Him. And they think they have found a way. If He admits He has no religious credentials, that He did not go to seminary or even Bible College, and that He is acting on His own authority, He will probably lose the respect and following of the people. His popularity ratings will tank and they can be finished with this troublemaker. On the other hand if He makes a claim to divine authority then they could charge Him with blasphemy, arrest Him and start the process for His destruction. Either way this country “hick from the sticks” would be finished.
- The question of authority is an important one. The fact is we all have a source of authority in our lives, someone or something that guides us and drives us, something that rules. For most of us, like the Sanhedrin, it is ourselves. We rule! And, we are not really interested, as long as we have a choice, in surrendering that rule to anyone else.

- Aldous Huxley (1894-1963) was an atheist and the grandson of Charles Darwin's "bulldog", Thomas Huxley. He noted that part of what drove him to atheism was a desire for emotional liberation in the area of his sex life, "We objected to the morality [imposed by God] because it interfered with our sexual freedom." Interestingly he died on the same day as John F. Kennedy and C. S. Lewis. The latter's perspective was somewhat different than his obituary companion. In *Mere Christianity* he would write, "The more we get what we now call "ourselves" out of the way and let Him [Christ] take us over, the more truly ourselves we become ... In that sense our real selves are all waiting for us in Him. It is no good trying to "be myself" without Him. The more I resist Him and try to live on my own, the more I become dominated by my own heredity and upbringing and surroundings and natural desires... What I call "My wishes" become merely the desires thrown up by my physical organism or pumped into me by other men's thoughts or even suggested to me by devils... I am not, in my natural state, nearly so much of a person as I like to believe: most of what I call "me" can be very easily explained. It is when I turn to Christ, when I give myself up to His Personality, that I first begin to have a real personality of my own... Until you have given up your self to Him you will not have a real self. Sameness is to be found most among the most "natural" men, not among those who surrender to Christ. How monotonously alike all the great tyrants and conquerors have been: how gloriously different are the saints. But there must be a real giving up of the self. You must throw it away "blindly" so to speak. Christ will indeed give you a real personality: but you must not go to Him for the sake of that. As long as your own personality is what you are bothering about you are not going to Him at all. The very first step is to try to forget about the self altogether.

Your real new self (which is Christ's and also yours, and yours just because it is His) will not come as long as you are looking for it. It will come when you are looking for Him ... Give up yourself, and you will find your real self. Lose your life and you will save it. Submit to death, death of your ambitions and favorite wishes every day and death of your whole body in the end: submit with every fiber of your being, and you will find eternal life. Keep back nothing. Nothing that you have not given away will ever be really yours. Nothing in you that has not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for yourself, and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin, and decay. But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in." (pages 190-191).

Transition: Here is an authority worth submitting to. What a tragedy that so many say no.

II. They refuse to examine the evidence.

11:29-32

- This question asking for "board certification" on one level is understandable and even wise. After all we are seldom helped in spiritual matters by religious "nut cases" running around and stirring up trouble. However, when there is insurmountable evidence that would indicate they are the "real deal," we reject the evidence at our own spiritual peril.
- Jesus would have been a masterful chess player without a doubt. He brilliantly makes a counter move in verses 29-30 by asking the representative delegation from the Sanhedrin a question, "Jesus said to them, "I will ask you one question [lit. "one word"]; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man? Answer me." Jesus' counter-question was a common debating technique among rabbis in that day. And, it exposed their heart and motives.

- Jesus says let's look at the evidence of the one who paved the way for my coming and with whom I closely aligned myself: the ministry of John the Baptist. Interestingly, those who come to Jesus with hostile intentions never receive a direct or straight answer. Oh, they get a response, but it is one that forces them to think and reason. This is reinforced in our text as Jesus twice commands them, "answer me" (v. 29, 30). This "sharp demand" for an answer is found only in Mark. The implication is they lack the courage to give an honest answer.
- Like Jesus, John came preaching a message of repentance. And, like Jesus, he bypassed the temple and the official religious authorities. If Jesus was a country hick from the sticks I don't know how to describe John. A "wilderness wacko" might have been the popular opinion within the temple mafia. Not so, however, among the people and hence the dilemma of the religious leaders. Verses 31-32 explain clearly their problem, "And they discussed it with one another, saying, 'If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?' But shall we say, 'From man'? –they were afraid of the people, for they all held that John really was a prophet."
- I think it is crucial that they do not deny the evidence as they huddle up to draft their responses. They struggle with how to explain it away and set it aside. John was popular with the people and his ministry universally believed to have been given to him by God. So what if he had no human credentials, he had God's! And yet in spite of the evidence, the religious leaders rejected him and did not lift a finger or say a word when he was brutally and unjustly murdered by Herod (6:14-29).
- Jesus' question is pure genius. He is not being evasive in any way. His argument is basically this: my claim to authority is based on the possibility of a divine authoritative

ministry without human authorization given directly by God. You want proof? See John the Baptist! Here is a perfect example universally affirmed by the people. If you have any doubts, then let's ask them. Now, if you are unwilling to grant my premise and accept the evidence I have put before you, then we are at an impasse and I can't help you any further. If you are so determined not to admit what is plain for all to see, then we have nothing further to talk about. If you cannot judge the ministry of John based upon the evidence, then you are not qualified to judge me either! Your willful blindness condemns you.

- When Mark began his gospel he cited Mal. 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3 linking the ministries of John and Jesus to prophetic promise as well as to one another. The evidence is there, but the hearts of these men will not embrace it. They may attempt to put forth a rational argument against Jesus, but in the end it is an emotional reaction rooted in a fear of losing control, losing their position, losing their friends, losing their way of life.
- Ultimately, for so many, the real problem is not the evidence. The problem is them, it is us and our sin. The idols of the heart lurking beneath the surface is the real issue. If I accept that Jesus is the Son of God who died for my sins and was raised from the dead then my life will never be the same. But I like my life, my set up. With eyes shut and ears plugged, I do not want to talk about this anymore. As Abraham says to the rich man in hell in Luke 16:31, “ ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’ ”

III. They fear men more than they fear God.

11:32-22

- Few things in life are more paralyzing than fear. According to a recent Gallup Poll, more American adults -51 percent- fear snakes than any other common possibility suggested,

including heights, flying, storms, the dark, or going to the doctor. Women, in particular, are terrified by the slimy slitherers. Sixty-two percent of women report a fear of snakes, compared with 38 percent of men. And what else are Americans afraid of?

- Public speaking (40 percent)
- Heights (36 percent)
- Being enclosed in a small space (34 percent)
- Spiders and insects (27 percent)
- Needles or shots (21 percent)
- Mice (20 percent)
- Flying (18 percent)
- Thunder and lightning (11 percent)
- Crowds (11 percent)
- Going to the doctor (9 percent)
- The dark (5 percent)

Adapted from “Snakes top list of American’s fears...,” by Geoffrey Brewer, on the Gallup Website

- Another survey gave similar but slightly different results:

Activities that Americans dread:

- Going to the dentist (68 percent)
- Preparing taxes (66 percent)
- Public speaking (60 percent)
- Cleaning house (58 percent)
- Job interview (57 percent)

(US News and World Report, 4-16-01, p. 11).

- God’s Word addresses another fear that we see in this text: the fear of man. Proverbs 29:25 says, “The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe.”
- Verse 32 lays bare what is at the very core of these men’s being, “they were afraid of the people, for they all held that John really was a prophet.” Luke 20:6 is even more graphic: “if we say, from man, all the people will stone us to death, for they are convinced that John was a prophet.”
- And so they beg off, they punt! “We do not know.” (v. 33). They see clearly the two horns of their dilemma and choose to wimp out. Jesus calls their hand and shuts them down, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things,” though the parable of the wicked tenant farmers that follows would give them a big hint they will not miss (12:1-12, esp. v. 12).
- Sad isn’t it? What was expedient and safe was more important to them than what was true and right. “We do not know” was a lie motivated by fear. They would rather keep their position and live a lie than submit to Christ and walk in the truth. Their problem was not dullness of mind but stubbornness of will. They had neither sincere motives or an open mind. Cowardice instead of courage had become their barometer.

Conclusion: So a question for all of us to consider, especially if you have never trusted in Christ and submitted your life to His authority: “what is holding you back? Is it your desire to be the lord of your own life (His authority)? Is it your refusal to honestly consider His claims (the evidence)? Is it that you fear men more than you fear God? What is keeping you from following Christ as His disciple? It is really that you have not been given good answers to your questions? It is really that Jesus is not sufficiently good and glorious and true and kind and loving? Or is it

that you are paralyzed from moving forward for the same reason the religious leaders and elders in the first century were?

Note that something is stated twice in this section of Mark: first in 11:32 and then again in 12:12. They were afraid of the people. The fear of man hindered their movement toward Jesus. Their fear of what others would think paralyzed them. Their fear of what others might do. Their fear of losing face. Their fear of losing power and position and prestige. Be honest with yourself today. How much of your hesitation and alleged doubts and unanswered questions is really a mask to hide your fear of what faith in Christ might cost you socially, culturally, relationally, financially?

Look once more into the face of this Jesus. Listen once more to the words he speaks. Watch once again at how he loves the unlovely. Ponder once more his claim to be God. Be willing to come to Jesus. The end result will not disappoint you.