

*I've noticed that in the last few weeks, the Australian media have been churning out Editorials with a big dose of self-pity and expressed outrage. Why? Because the homes and offices of some Journalists, have been raided by the Federal Police...*

*You see, they feel that the notion of "freedom of the press" should mean that:*

- *when it comes to information;*
- *how journalists gather it; and*
- *what they publish,*

*shouldn't matter. They believe that their profession of Journalism should give them immunity from search, seizure or prosecution...*

*The alleged offence, is that, contrary to the official secrets act, a government employee gave top secret information to journalists, surrounding issues of National security<sup>1</sup>. And the police are looking for evidence, so they can prosecute the offenders..*

*And of course, the media are using their very strong public voice, to argue, that the police shouldn't have the authority to do this.*

*Let's talk about authority...*

....

*Last weekend:*

- *a car rapidly caught up with me (from behind), with flashing lights, red and blue...*
- *I stopped and waited*
- *even though it was a cold day, I even wound my window down...*

- *And a polite gentleman (in a dark blue uniform) with a gun on his hip and numerous other little pouches of paraphernalia (& a microphone on his epaulette), approached me.*
- *He held out a little electronic device with a white tube on the top, and he asked me to blow into the little white tube. I did*
- *He asked if he could see my licence... I gave it to him.*
- *He asked me what was in the boxes in the back of my ute... I told him...*
- *He told me I had to wait while his mate rang someone to check up on me... I waited...*

By what authority did he do these things??? I mean, no ordinary person is allowed to do what he was doing...

But a police officer (by **authority** of their office), have every right, and every authority to do this – And I'm glad they do... And as a member of the public, it is **right**, that I submit to this authority... And even journalists are not above the law... It is right, for a journalist to submit to the appropriate authorities...

But it's only the **appropriate** authorities, who have the right to do this... You see:

- **I'm** not allowed to set up my own private police force.
- **I'm** not allowed to put blue and red flashing lights on my own car. And
- I'm **certainly** not allowed to pull you over and demand a breath test; and
- **Absolutely** not allow to issue you with an on-the-spot fine (although it could be quite a lucrative business)...

## It's a matter of authority...

Now, one day, Jesus went into the temple, and

- He drove out the traders
- Overturned the tables of the money-changers;
- Knocked over the seats of those who sold pigeons;
- He wouldn't allow anyone to carry anything through the temple;
- He took-it-on-himself to teach at the temple;
- And some of His teaching was very pointed and filled with condemnation....

And so the next day, when Jesus turns up at the temple again, the religious leaders have obviously been stewing about this (Who does this young up-start think he is? He's just some country hick from Galilee, and he turns up here and acts as if he owns the place...), and they quite rightly wanted to know, "By what authority are you doing this?"

Now, that's a very important question (and it's a valid question).

What right did Jesus have, to do what He did? I mean, even what He said about being "a den of thieves" was very pointed – more pointed than what we realise... We talked about this a couple of weeks ago... The "den of thieves" accusation, points back to Jeremiah, and so it becomes an accusation that "everything that's happening at the temple, is **empty** and **fruitless**, and that the religious leaders themselves, are largely **godless**; and **corrupt**; and **unjust**..." Therefore, God's going to destroy the temple...

By what authority could Jesus throw accusations like that around – accusations that were **squarely** pointed at those who were **the recognised** religious authorities??? What gave **Him** the authority?

I mean, even in many churches today, not just anyone can teach... I wouldn't be allowed to teach in many churches... I don't have the right credentials – I don't have the right training – I don't have the right ordination – I didn't go to the right sort of theological college – I don't wear the right clothes...

And of course, the more letters and degrees one has after their name, the more their authority is recognised...

And you know what??? It wasn't so different in 1<sup>st</sup> Century Jerusalem...

They were probably wanting to know: “Alright Jesus, you're acting like a Rabbi” (Not just anybody can be a Rabbi) “Who did you train under?”... “What's your authority?” “What's your credentials?”...

And Jesus' answer – I always thought it was a ‘smarty-pants’ ‘non-answer’, but it's not. It was much deeper than that... It might **seem** like Jesus was avoiding their question, but He wasn't. He said: **“I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. <sup>30</sup> Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man? Answer me.”**

Now, Jesus' response, did 2 things...

**1.** Firstly, it exposed the political nature of the religious leaders. And when I use that word “political” (here), I don’t mean it as in “relating to government” – I’m using it in the derogatory sense. Do you know why so many Australians dislike politicians? It’s because of the few politicians, who are ‘political’ in the derogatory sense: Do you know what I mean???

- Run with the foxes & hunt with the hounds;
- They’ll never give you a straight answer;
- you never really know what they truly believe;
- Rather than stand by the truth, they’ll tell you what they think the public **wants** to hear;
- Their own position will change with the wind of public opinion – what they promise today to make them popular, will be canned tomorrow...

As the Macquarie dictionary puts it, a politician (in a derogatory sense), is:

*“one who seeks power or advancement with an organisation by unscrupulous or dishonest means”<sup>ii</sup>*

And Jesus was asking them for a straight answer: <sup>30</sup> **Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man?** That was just a way of asking:

- “Was John sent from God?
- Was John the Baptist doing God’s will
- Did John have the authority of **God** behind him????
- Or was John the Baptist a fraud?

- When John called a nation to a baptism of repentance, to prepare them for the coming kingdom of God, was he speaking with **Godly** authority
- or was he acting on his own authority????

And this is where the religious leaders played the political game... They wouldn't answer Him...

*It's like at the moment, the leader of the Greens party (Richard Di Natale) has refused to comment on (the hero of the greens party) Bob Brown's crusade to have a big wind turbine project canned...*

*In the Australian Newspaper, it says:*

*In the past, federal Greens leader Richard Di Natale has likened investigating complaints about wind farms and noise to taking seriously, alien abductions.<sup>iii</sup>*

And yet, this is some of the reasons put forward by Bob Brown, to stop the wind farm...

You see, they're just being political...

And the religious leaders were playing the political game with Jesus and His question.

You see, most people (the ordinary plebs), firmly believed that John the Baptist **was** a prophet of God. That's why they went out to the wilderness, to hear him preach, and to repent, and to be baptised... (They believed that they were being a part of something that God was doing... They were preparing for the coming kingdom of God)...

But the religious leaders, whether they knew John was a prophet of God or not – they largely rejected John’s message...

And so, they were in a bit of a bind... How do we answer that???

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“If we say that John the Baptist was ‘from heaven’, then Jesus will want to know “Why didn’t you believe him? Why didn’t **you** repent?” “But we can’t tell Him that he was just a human fraud – that’d make us really unpopular, because most people believe he **was** a prophet...”

And so they played the political game... “We don’t know.”

And so Jesus exposed them as the corrupt; self-interested; political game-playing frauds that they were...

2. But I think more important than this, is the second thing that Jesus' response did...

**Far** from being a ‘smarty-pants’ **non**-answer, Jesus was clearly saying something about Himself. Jesus was aligning **Himself** with John the Baptist, and the source of his authority...

Jesus asked the question, “<sup>30</sup> **Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man?**”

And that’s forcing the religious leaders, and it forces us, to ask this same question of Jesus...

When the religious leaders asked Jesus, “By what authority are you doing these things”, it’s pretty clear they were looking for a **human** authority – “What’s your credentials?”... But Jesus makes the point, that there is an authority that is greater than any human authority...

It becomes a matter of:

- human authority or Godly authority;
- was it a fleshly authority, or a spiritual authority
- Did Jesus' authority come from **this** world or did it come from heaven itself???

And the answer to this question, is the most significant truth, that any of us can discover...

By what authority, did Jesus do what He did? If it was merely a human authority, well that means He was either delusional or dishonest. If Jesus was delusional or dishonest – if He was either crazy or a conman, well just disregard Him, disregard everything He said, because it’s irrelevant...

But if Jesus **is** who He said He was – if Jesus did what He did by the authority of God, and if Jesus said what He said by the authority of God,,,,, then how could anyone, in their right mind, ignore this???

And deep down, the evidence is there. All we have to do is open our eyes and see it... But many people today, are just like those religious leaders back then: God reveals Himself,



but they refuse to see... Jesus is alive, but they treat Him as if He's dead... Jesus Christ is the most significant figure in not only history, but in eternity. **And the heavenly authority of Jesus, demands our attention; submission; worship; and loyalty.**

At this point, Jesus told a parable:

He borrows an image from the prophet Isaiah... **"A man planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a pit for the winepress and built a tower**

Alright, this is all coming straight from Isaiah 5. It was an image for how God lovingly cared for His chosen people Israel...

Now, in Isaiah, the vineyard didn't bear any good fruit – just bad... And so He was going to remove His protection from the vineyard, so it would be destroyed...

But Jesus gives **His** story a different twist... Jesus' parable is clearly about the religious leaders and against them... And they didn't miss that point.

And so, the vineyard still represents God's people... The owner of the vineyard went to a great deal of attention, to make sure it had everything it needed... **and leased it to tenants and went into another country.**

Now, part of the lease deal was, that obviously at the time of harvest, He was entitled to a share of the fruit. And so **he**

sent a servant to the tenants to get from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. <sup>3</sup> And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed.

<sup>4</sup> Again he sent to them another servant, and they struck him on the head and treated him shamefully.

<sup>5</sup> And he sent another, and him they killed. And so with many others: some they beat, and some they killed.

Now, to us, this parable might need a bit of explaining, but to a Jew, it was very obvious... The servants were the prophets... God had sent many prophets to Israel, demanding that they become fruitful (produce fruit of righteousness)...

- Some they beat
- Some they laughed at;
- Some they mocked
- Some they shamed;
- Some they imprisoned; and
- Some they killed....

So then He thought, "I'll send my son. They'll have to take notice of Him."... <sup>7</sup> But those tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' <sup>8</sup> And they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard.

Now, there's something to this, that I don't think I ever really 'grasped', until a few days ago... I **used** to think that the

metaphor of this parable was simply an imperfect metaphor... Because in the parable, the evil tenants recognised the son for who he was... And I used to think, that the religious leaders (who the tenants represent) **didn't** recognise Jesus... And I don't know why I'm so thick and it took me so long to get it, but the point of the parable is "They **did** recognise Him"...

I think what Jesus is saying, is deep down, they **did** recognise Him... It was clear for them to see – they were just not **willing** to see it... All of the things that Jesus was doing, were revealing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God... But they refused to see it.

In the Jewish religious world, they had the power; they had the authority; they had the respect; they had the honour of being leaders, and they didn't want to lose that...

The religious leaders themselves, were fruitless – they **weren't** living Godly lives, and they didn't **want** to be living Godly lives... They liked things the way they were... They were quite happy with the status quo...

What this parable is saying, is they were treating God as if He was dead... Let me explain:

They saw the son, and "Let's kill the heir, and it'll all be ours." They must've been assuming that the master was dead,, and that there would be no consequences to their actions... The master is dead; Here's the son, come to claim his inheritance; let's knock Him off,, and then it'll be ours – **we'll** be the owners ....

But they were wrong... They were so, so wrong... The owner of the vineyard wasn't dead... He wasn't weak... He wasn't impotent – He wasn't powerless... **He would take action!!!**

Jesus said:

**9 What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. 10 Have you not read this Scripture:**

**" 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone;**

**11 this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes'?"**

He's talking about judgment isn't He...

The religious leaders, and the old Jewish religious system, was going to be judged, and of course, that happened in 70AD, when the Romans put down an uprising, and the temple was destroyed, and many people were killed...

Jesus was the stone that the builders rejected, but He's become the cornerstone – He's become the capstone – the most important stone in the whole building... And this was God's plan right from the beginning...

Now, for us today, I reckon for the application of this, we need to look at it on 2 different levels...

## 1.

Firstly, I believe it's really important that we remember that what Jesus originally said, was aimed squarely at religious leaders... There is a serious, serious warning here, for leaders in the church...

Some church leaders, act as if God is dead. They act as if they are a law unto themselves. They have power and authority, and they exercise that power and authority for their own purposes:

- Some do it for dishonest gain;
- Some do it to feed their egos;
- Some act in greed;
- Some perpetrate appalling abuses on the weak and the vulnerable;

We've all read the unsavoury headlines of people who have held positions of leadership in the church, acting as if God isn't watching – acting as if God is dead, and as if there's no consequence to their actions...

But even for leaders, or should I say, “**Especially** for leaders in the church, the day of judgment is coming...” We cannot go on, acting as if God is dead, and abusing our position as leaders... <sup>iv</sup> **Matthew 24:45-51**

I also believe it's important that leaders in the church don't become like the religious leaders, by becoming 'political' in the derogatory sense of the word...

Many leaders in the church of today (especially some of the most **prominent** leaders) have a policy of avoiding unpopular topics – it might interfere with church growth. Just like how the religious leaders wouldn't answer Jesus' question – they won't say what they really believe, because it's unpopular to say it...

This is why we preach our way through whole books of the Bible – so we don't miss anything out... And you'll hear some really unpopular teaching coming out of Bush Disciples, because we won't shy away from it, just because it's not popular...

*It's been very telling over the last couple of months, in the wake of the whole sacking of Israel Folau, to hear what various church leaders have to say about "Hell", or "homosexuality" or about the sharing of faith...*

And the number of church leaders, who, "Oh no, we just don't talk about Hell – that's not loving." Or they won't answer the question, "Is homosexual behaviour sinful?"

And instead, they go all political; and wishy-washy; and they don't want to say anything to offend anyone... And they pretend that what they're doing, is following in the footsteps of Jesus, but that's not at all true.... The reality is, Jesus offended lots of people...

Alright, so the first lesson for us, is a warning to church leaders.

## 2.

But I reckon the second lesson, is for all of us, and for unbelievers too.

By what authority, did Jesus do what He did, and say what He said??? Jesus acts with the authority of the Lord God almighty, .... And so do we... When the Lord gives us an assignment – and when we share the Good news of Jesus Christ, we are **not** doing this by the authority of men; we are **not** doing this by the authority of ourselves – When we are serving God, we are doing it with the full commission and authority **of** the Lord God almighty... Do we realise that???

Once again, the example of Israel Folau – it didn't only stir up a hornets nest – it has generated a lot of discussion, about the sharing of faith... And for many people, the criticism has been, “What right does he have, to call anyone a sinner – What right does he have, to say that people are going to go to Hell”... In essence, what they're saying, is “By what authority is he doing this? He doesn't have the right.”... But you know what? He does. We do...

I think what Jesus is saying to us, is even people who reject Jesus, deep down, they know who Jesus is... God reveals Himself – we can be sure of that... But a hard heart refuses to see... And it's precisely, because of who Jesus is, that they reject Him... Because Jesus **is** the Christ, the Son of God, Jesus has a legitimate claim on our lives, that many don't want to give-in to...

The authority of Jesus, is a heavenly authority.

## And the heavenly authority of Jesus, demands our attention; submission; worship; and loyalty.

Many people would rather take the place of God themselves, and treat God as if He's dead... He's demanding fruit in our lives – the fruit of faith; and The fruit of righteousness...

But they treat Him as if He's dead, and they reject the Son, and they take the place of God themselves... But Jesus warns us, the day of judgment is coming...

## The heavenly authority of Jesus, demands our attention; submission; worship; and loyalty.

What does the heavenly authority of Jesus mean for you???

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/politics/peter-dutton-rejects-appeal-to-drop-action-against-journos/news-story/eeefd345e109de05d5442d274439e554>

<sup>ii</sup> Delbridge A et. el., The Macquarie Dictionary 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 1991, the Macquarie Library: Macquarie University.

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/politics/greens-exposed-as-bob-brown-baulks-at-turbines-in-his-backyard/news-story/04b617906ce5e77e3a13dd4ddef0ddd0>

<sup>iv</sup> Matthew 24:45-51 (ESV)

<sup>45</sup> "Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? <sup>46</sup> Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. <sup>47</sup> Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. <sup>48</sup> But if that wicked servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed,' <sup>49</sup> and begins to beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards, <sup>50</sup> the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know <sup>51</sup> and will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.