

Jesus Reveals His Perfect Authority

Matthew 22:15-46

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How do you respond to authority over your life? In our society, the police are given the authority to enforce the law. We all know that. But sometimes we choose to act contrary to the law until we see a police vehicle. It's amazing how everyone's driving improves when you see a police car in your rear view mirror.

It can be similar in the classroom. We may follow the class rules and do our work while the teacher is present. But I remember times in school where the moment a teacher left, the students transformed into crazy time. Spit balls began flying – talking increased – people starting walking around because the authority figure was gone.

What about at work? When the boss or manager is around, people work. . . But when the manager or boss is away, some fool around or waste time. Kids – what happens when your parents are out for the evening? Sometimes, the house rules become house optional considerations because the parents aren't there to enforce them.

Some authorities misuse their power. When injustice occurs, it must be called to account. Some of you come from countries where most authorities functioned on corruption. It is very difficult to live under such authority. But some authority is justified. If there were no police or principals or courts or managers, we would experience chaos because of man's rebellious spirit.

I share this because I want you to think about your experiences with authority in the past and how that impacts your view of authority today. We can project our authority attitude into our relationship with God. We could see Christ as just another human authority figure. He is absolutely unique. When it comes to His authority over us, we need to see Him in a completely different category than other authoritative figures in our lives.

Today, we have another opportunity to see Jesus in action. He will dialogue with people in positions of authority. But whose authority will reign supreme? As we go through these encounters, we will see Jesus' authority revealed. Then we will be faced with the question – how have we responded to Jesus' authority over our lives?

But for some of you here today, you might need to see how Jesus' authority can be a great comfort. There might be something going on in your life that overwhelms you or is much bigger than you. You need a reminder that Christ is bigger than all of this. So I pray this message may in some way comfort you.

Matthew 22:15-46 (ESV) Page 697

¹⁵Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle him in his words. ¹⁶And they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone's opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances. ¹⁷Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?” ¹⁸But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, “Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? ¹⁹Show me the coin for the tax.” And they brought him a denarius. ²⁰And Jesus said to them, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?” ²¹They said, “Caesar's.” Then he said to them, “Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.” ²²When they heard it, they marveled. And they left him and went away.

²³The same day Sadducees came to him, who say that there is no resurrection, and they asked him a question, ²⁴saying, “Teacher, Moses said, ‘If a man dies having no children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother.’ ²⁵Now there were seven brothers among us. The first married and died, and having no offspring left his wife to his brother. ²⁶So too the second and third, down to the seventh. ²⁷After them all, the woman died. ²⁸In the resurrection, therefore, of the seven, whose wife will she be? For they all had her.”

²⁹But Jesus answered them, “You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. ³⁰For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. ³¹And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: ³²‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not God of the dead, but of the living.” ³³And when the crowd heard it, they were astonished at his teaching.

³⁴But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. ³⁵And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” ³⁷And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

⁴¹Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, ⁴²saying, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?” They said to him, “The son of David.” ⁴³He said to them, “How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying,

⁴⁴“‘The Lord said to my Lord,
“Sit at my right hand,
until I put your enemies under your feet”’?”

⁴⁵If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?” ⁴⁶And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

It is Tuesday of Holy Week. The religious leaders directly challenged Jesus back in Matthew 21:23. They asked Him “by what authority are you doing these things and who gave you this authority?” But Jesus exposes these leaders as lacking morality. They wouldn’t publicly admit that they didn’t believe John the Baptist’s message. So they failed to trap Jesus through direct challenge.

Now they will try a different tactic. They want to trap Him through clever questions. Matthew reveals this strategy in verse 15 with his statement “the Pharisees plotted to entangle him with their words.” But their plot not only involves a clever question. They send different people in an attempt to disguise their plot. Instead of the Pharisees themselves, they send their disciples. These were apprentices or junior Pharisees. Maybe they reason Jesus will be less on guard if these junior members ask a question. They are accompanied by a group called the Herodians who sought to advance the political and economic influence of the Herodian family. They were well connected to Rome and sought Rome’s favor to stay in power. So they were likely Jewish but had little concern for Jewish religion. So you’ve got ultra-orthodox religious Jews and secular political Jews coming together. This shows how much of a threat Jesus had become. Two parties that were normally at odds come together in an attempt to trap Jesus.

First, they attempt to flatter Jesus with comments about Him being true and not caring about people’s opinions or positions. Then they ask what seems to be a fool proof question to bring Jesus’ down. “Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?” If Jesus answers yes, He will immediately alienate the crowds. The people hated paying this tax to the Romans. In fact, an armed rebellion arose about 25 years previous when this tax was introduced. The Jews hated the occupation of a foreign power and they hated the coins they had to use to pay the tax. Because God had commanded them not to have any idols or images before Him, they refused to acknowledge the divinity of the Emperor. Yet the denarius, the required coin to pay the tax had a profile of Tiberius Caesar on it with the inscription “Tiberias Caesar, son of the divine Augustus.” On the other side was a picture of a Roman goddess with the inscription “High Priest.” So the people hated the tax and the coin because it claimed that the Emperor was divine.

If Jesus says yes it is lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, He loses popular support thereby making it easier to arrest him. But if he said no to pay Roman taxes, He could be arrested for inciting revolution. Who better to report such an answer than the Herodians with their close connection to the Romans?

But Jesus gives an answer none of them anticipate. He first asks to see the coin for the tax. Then he asks them whose image is on the coin. They reply, “Caesar.” So he answers “render, or pay, to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s.” What has Jesus done that reveals His authority?

22:15-22 - Jesus redefines the nature of loyalty to God with respect to secular government. The rebellion against Rome in the year 6 was partially based on loyalty to God. Jewish zealots claimed that Roman taxes offended to

their worship of God because of the image on the coins. Therefore, to be truly loyal to God, you must rebel against the Romans. But Jesus presents an entirely different perspective. He says you can be loyal to God and live under a government that does not recognize God. There is a place for civil authority that may not be Jewish.

This is something very different than Israel's historic form of government. They had been raised and taught in the ways of Theocracy. We live under Democracy – government by the people. They lived under Theocracy where God was recognized as the supreme ruler. The king and high priest were supposed to rule under God. So if someone ruled over Israel that was not God, then the natural Israelite response would be rebellion. Resist such rule and try to overthrow it so that they could return to theocracy. But Jesus declares it is possible to remain loyal to God while paying taxes to a civil government. So Jesus lays the foundation for an acceptance of life under different governments. With this pronouncement, Jesus instructs followers all over the world how to be loyal to God regardless of the government under which you live. This theme is developed by later New Testament writers. Pay to them what is due them. Yet give to God your whole life.

Yet there are times when we have to choose between the two. If a government demands that we renounce God or go against our Christian conscience or against His Word, we must speak up for justice. Our greatest loyalty is to God.

But it's possible to remain loyal to God while under a non-religious government. This answer so impresses the questioners that even they marvel at His reply.

So another group gives it a go. This time, the Sadducees come in verses 23-33. The Sadducees were more the governors of institutional Judaism. They had great power. From one of their families, came the high priest. They ruled over the temple and it's functioning. They based their rule only on the first 5 books of the Old Testament. They didn't read or recognize Joshua to the end of Chronicles, nor the wisdom literature like Psalms or the prophets. These later parts of the Old Testament talked about bodily resurrection. But the Sadducees did not recognize these texts. Matthew tells us that they did not believe in the resurrection.

Yet they ask Jesus about a difficult scenario that might occur in the resurrection. They recite what is now called the Levirate law. Levir is Latin for brother in law. The surviving brother of a deceased married childless man was supposed to marry his brother's wife to provide for her needs and carry on the brother's line. So the Sadducees draw up a scenario where a brother dies leaving his wife without children. He has 6 other brothers. So each one in turn marries

this woman. But none provides her with children. Each one dies before she can conceive. Wouldn't you think brother #6 or 7 would get that this is a bad idea? But eventually, they all die. She dies. So they pose the question. "In the resurrection, (which the Sadducees didn't even believe was possible) whose wife will she be since they all had her?" What were they trying to do with this question? Maybe they presented such a situation in an attempt to show Jesus' teaching as ridiculous. Or maybe the silliness of the situation might allow them to argue that Jesus and His beliefs were not serious.

But Jesus takes their question seriously and responds seriously. Here He demonstrates authority. **22:23-33** - **Jesus reveals the nature of resurrection life.** How many people do you know who can tell you what life will be like in the resurrection? Do you know anyone who has experienced that? Do you know someone who was part of the board that planned the resurrection life project? Jesus doesn't get this detail from another Scripture. He reveals it. Who could know what resurrection life will be like if it hasn't yet happened; only the one who designed it; the one who planned it; the one who looks into the future to describe it. The only person who could do that would be God.

Jesus does not enter into playful debate. He simply states truth. "You are wrong, because you don't know the Scriptures or the power of God." They were wrong about the fact of the resurrection. They were wrong about the nature of resurrection. In resurrection life, there will be no marriage. Instead, we will be like angels in that there will be no marriage and no more having sex and babies. So the scenario proposed will not be a problem.

This woman and the 7 brothers will experience relationship that have no jealousy or competition or possession. They will simply relate to one another as resurrected believers. Now those of us who are married and deeply love our spouses may find this troubling. We look forward to spending eternity with our spouses in heaven without all the trials and sufferings of life, absence of marriage in the resurrection seems like a disappointment. But that's because we are only projecting what we know onto resurrection life. Jesus' answer reveals unexpected realities in resurrection life. And we can expect that God's designs are infinitely better and greater than what we can imagine. We will know one another and be able to fellowship with our spouses along with others we know. But instead of focusing on who we were bound to on Earth, we will focus on whose children we are. So Jesus resolves the problem the Sadducees present in their scenario.

But then He goes on to address the bigger issue – their disbelief in the resurrection. He uses their own Scriptures to disprove their belief. In Exodus 3:6, Moses encounters God through a burning bush. God spoke to Him out of it saying “I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” God doesn’t say, “I was the God of those guys but their now dead and no longer exist.” He says “I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” as if they are still alive and he is still in relationship with them. Jesus makes this clear. “He is not the God of the dead but of the living.” Therefore people go on living after death and will one day be resurrected to life in the new heaven and earth. This time the crowd marvels at his answer because He corrects representatives of the most powerful religious group in Israel. The Sadducees fail.

Normally, this would be good news because for the Pharisees because they competed with the Sadducees. But they are joined together by the common enemy. So the Pharisees try again. This time, they don’t send their disciples but a lawyer – an expert in the law. “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?” This was a hot topic in that day. Different schools of thought debated which commands from God were the greatest. Maybe if Jesus declared just one commandment as the greatest, He would alienate the majority of the population.

But again, Jesus shows wisdom far beyond their expectations. He answers “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind.” This was from Deuteronomy 6 and a critical text for Jews. They recited it twice daily to remind themselves of God’s call on their lives. Jesus singles this one out as summarizing the law. But then he adds a second – Love your neighbor as yourself. “All the law and the prophets depend on these 2 commandments.” So here is a simple summary of God’s law. Love God with all you have and love your neighbor as yourself.

How does this emphasize Jesus’ authority? **22:34-40 - Jesus judges the entire law.** Jesus looked at the law and in an instant picked out the command which summarized it. An expert in the law asks the questions. Jesus reveals that He’s the supreme expert on the law.

Then He again goes on the offensive. He asks the Pharisees a question. “What do you think about the Christ – the anointed one – the Messiah – the deliverer promised by the Old Testament? “Whose son is he?” Well that was easy for the Pharisees. They knew the Messiah had to come from the line of David. “The son of David,” they answer.

But then Jesus takes them back to Psalm 110. “How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying “The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under my feet. If David calls him Lord, how is he his

son?” King David was Israel’s greatest king. The Messiah had to come out of his descendants. But a descendant does not become lord over an ancestor even if that descendent does great things. The only way this would happen is if the descendant was in some way divine or greater than King David. The Pharisees have not considered this. So they do not answer.

What has Jesus’ done? **22:41-46 - Jesus has just shown that He is Lord over King David.** This is no mere question of academic theology. This is a real question about the person standing in front them. This is the same person who rode into the city on a donkey’s colt just as the Old Testament Scriptures’ prophesied. He disrupted the entire trading system of the temple and called it His house; He welcomed the blind and lame into the temple where they were sometimes excluded. He exposes the religious authorities for their lack of morality; he prophesies that they will lose the kingdom of heaven and it will be given to a fruitful people in the parables. Now He demonstrates His authority by announcing a new paradigm for loyalty to God under a secular government; by revealing the reality of the resurrection life; by pronouncing the greatest commandment out of God’s law by declaring Himself Lord over King David.

This is the end of the discussion. There is no more gray area. They see clearly what He claims and determine to get rid of Him. He sees clearly what He claims and will follow through to take the claim in the remaining days of Holy Week. Then God would give Him the name that is above every name - Jesus Christ, the Lord over all.

So back to our question of the day. We asked “How do you respond to authority over your life? Now the question is “How do we respond to Jesus’ authority over your life?”

I completely reject Jesus’ authority over my life.

I accept Jesus as my Savior but not as my Lord. So we want the gifts Jesus provides – forgiveness; eternal life; help and encouragement through tough times. But the rest of the time, we want to do whatever we want to do without interference from Jesus.

I accept Jesus’ authority over *some* areas of my life. I will obey what makes sense to me but resist what I don’t agree with. Jesus can have authority over 2 hours on Sunday morning which includes travel time to and from church. But the rest of the week is my time.

Jesus has authority over my eternal state – but not my day to day life; not my driving; not my negative attitude; not the jokes I tell or the language I speak.

Jesus can have some authority over our finances because we give a bit to him. But not over my spending.

Jesus can have some authority over my work time or regular school time. But when I'm in leisure time or on vacation, that's my time. I should be able to do whatever I want with my time.

I listened to a podcast from Ask Pastor John recently about recharging our bodies without neglecting our souls.¹ The question was asked "how do we honor God in our down time or leisure time?"

Pastor John replies – I am fairly suspicious of how self-justifying I can be in the defense of my tendency to compromise my mind and my conscience and what I do with my so called down time. In weariness, we can justify just almost anything. Subtle self-justifications or worldliness during downtimes are the beginning of many downfalls. Worldly downtimes lead to wicked downfalls.

So how do we combat this?

1) Pray daily that God would keep us from ministry-ruining, marriage-ruining, soul-ruining sin in our leisure. "Lead us not into temptation."

2) Do your Bible reading, prayer and soul-feeding when you are at your best. Take your best times with your best energy and feed your soul. For many of us, that means first thing in the morning. For others it might be early in the evening. If we work so hard that we don't have energy or time left for soul feeding, we have our days backwards.

3) It is no sin to leave your Bible on the table if you leave it for the sake of soul refreshing activity. The Bible commends enjoying God's creation; using our gifts to glorify God; finding time to enjoy our spouse and our families and serve others. But we must not neglect our Bibles and time with the Lord for immersion in pop culture with all its God-ignoring, sin-enjoying, pride-exalting assumptions and think that somehow that time will be good for us. So if you resist Jesus' authority over your leisure time, have you really given Him authority over your whole life?

I accept Jesus' authority over my life because I have to. Yes, I'll obey. But I don't like it very much. All my friends having a great old time while I'll be stuck at church or at home. Keller – It does not glorify God if we only ever obey Him simply out of duty. We must give him not only our will but our heart, as we adore and enjoy him, as we find him infinitely attractive."

I accept Jesus' authority over my life because I want to. It is a daily struggle to reach this state. But it is where we need to be. Jesus has ultimate authority. He is a good and perfect Lord. He wants the best for us. He has wisdom and

¹ <http://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/i-m-exhausted-how-do-i-recharge-my-body-without-neglecting-my-soul>

knowledge way beyond the smartest people on earth today. We can entrust our lives to His wisdom and authority without fear and with great hope. Will you respond to Him as your loving authoritative Lord as we come to His table? If you have resisted Jesus' authority over your life for a long time, will you stop doing that? He comes calling for you to receive Him as your Savior and Lord.

One final word to those of you hurting or struggling with something major; Jesus is bigger than whatever you face. Jesus is smarter & wiser. He has His eyes on you and constantly intercedes on your behalf. He is at the Right Hand of the Father reigning over the universe and this authoritative, powerful Lord cares for you. Will you come to Him now with whatever is going on and be with Him.