

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Why do you do the things you are doing? That's essentially the question Jesus was asked in our Gospel, but the chief priest and elders weren't just inquisitive. They were challenging Jesus because of what He did. So there's a bit of an edge to their question: "*By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?*"

What's the problem here? Those Jewish leaders knew what Jesus had been doing, especially up in the region of the Sea of Galilee, that's why they asked Jesus "*to show them a sign from heaven*" (Matt. 16:1). After all, "*great crowds [had been coming] to [Jesus], bringing with them the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others, and they put them at his feet, and he healed them ... And [the crowds] glorified the God of Israel*" (Matt. 15:30-31). And Jesus fed the multitudes again, this time with seven loaves and several small fish, and this time seven baskets full of leftovers were gathered up (Matt. 15:32-39).

But then the crowd glorified Him as He entered into Jerusalem. "*Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest*" (Matt. 21:9). Yes, it's holy week, and Jesus is in Jerusalem in our Gospel. And the chief priests and scribes were "*indignant*" with Jesus (Matt. 21:15); they didn't like Him receiving all that praise. He should have prevented them, they argued. "*Teacher, rebuke your disciples,*" they told Him. "*He answered [them], 'I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out'*" (Luke 19:39-40).

More than His royal entrance into Jerusalem, shortly after it, Jesus made His way to the temple. There He found the Father's holy "*house of prayer*" turned into "*a den of robbers*" (Matt. 21:13). And so He cleansed the temple, driving out the vendors and turning over the tables and chairs of the money-changers.

Why do you do the things you are doing? Surely Jesus could have answered them as He would later do before the High Priest. I am "*the Christ, the Son of God ... from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven*" (Matt. 26:63-64). He could have answered: "because the way of the Lord is just; turn away from wickedness and live." Such answers, however, could have spoiled Jesus' carefully mapped out plans.

So, instead of answering their question, Jesus asked them one of His own. Answering it correctly would have answered their own question, but they couldn't bring themselves to admit it. They balked.

Jesus asked them, "*The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?*" The scribes didn't know how to answer — it seemed to them that either way, they lost the parry with Jesus. The question disarmed them. They knew

that if they answered “*from heaven,*” Jesus would respond “*then why didn’t you believe [John]*” — “John prepared the way for me; John pointed to me”: “*Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*” (John 1:29). Behold, the One mightier than I, who baptizes with the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11). On the other hand, if they answered “*from man,*” they feared how the crowd, who held John to be a prophet, would react.

Questions do that — it disarms people. I was listening the other day to an Issues, Etc. podcast. Todd Wilken had on Greg Koukl, from Stand to Reason. He advocates using questions to disarm people who may be antagonistic toward Christians and their message. Questions like: “What makes you say that?” “What do you mean by that?” “How do you come to that conclusion?” It makes them think about beliefs that they hold but have never really explored.

Jesus’ question shut His antagonists’ mouths — “*We don’t know,*” but Jesus wasn’t done. He told a little parable so He could ask another one.

“*A man had two sons.*” He told both of them to go out and “*work in the vineyard.*” One said, “*I will not,*” but did. The other said, “*I will,*” but never did. Jesus asked, “*Which one did the will of his father?*”

The Jews answered Jesus: “*The first.*” They were right. The first son wasn’t guiltless. He defied his father with his words: “*I will not,*” he said, but he “*changed his mind,*” or really, he changed his will ... his heart. He repented and did go. The second son said he would go, but didn’t. Did he really intend to do it? Jesus doesn’t say; certainly he didn’t do it.

Jesus’ parable and question were pointed at these Jewish leaders. He had turned the tables on them. He was now challenging them, asking them, “Why do you do the things you are doing?” They rejected the word of John who came “*to turn hearts*” and “*to make ready for the Lord a people prepared*” (Luke 1:17) — “*you did not believe him.*” The chief priests and scribes rejected the Lord Jesus Himself and were seeking a way to destroy Him. They would not repent; they did not!

The tax collectors and prostitutes, on the other hand, enter into the kingdom of God ... because of their sin? Because of what they did? No! But because having heard the word of God spoken through His prophet, “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*” (Matt. 3:2), they believed him. They repented; they did.

Jesus came preaching the same message, “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,*” (Matt. 4:17), calling upon us to do the same. It wasn’t a new message. John had preached it. The prophets preached it. “*Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a*

*new spirit! ... For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord GOD; so turn, and live.*”

Dear saints of God, we can look forward to the fullness of God’s kingdom not because we have always done right, but because, having heard the word of God, we believe. In this life our will still too often resists God’s call to work in the vineyard; we often say, “I will not.” God grant us repentance, that we may go and do.

God commands us to labor in the vineyard, and what that labor looks like differs for each person. As we’ll hear, some, like brother Matt, labor to learn how to serve God’s people with the Gospel. There will be times when he’ll say, “I will not.” God grant him repentance to do. As we’ll hear, others being installed today labor to see to it that things in the church are done in an orderly way. They, too, will struggle against their fallen wills, which will resist God’s call. God grant them repentance to do. You are called also to labor in the vineyard in other ways. Why do you do it? Because God commands it? Yes. Because your neighbors need it? Yes. But especially because you are disciples of Jesus! Because you hope in Him and want to glorify Him.

Living lives of repentance, God grant that you may *“let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven”* (Matt. 5:16).

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.