

# Matthew 21:23-27

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 6/3/2012

## How should we respond to those hardened in unbelief?

### Prayer

Father, thank You so much for Your grace and Your mercy, that You through Your Son Jesus are instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live righteously and upright and sensibly in this present age. That You are training us, Lord God. We are such sinners, and yet You are taking us and turning us and making us like Christ. Father, I pray You would do that today – You would take Your Word and You would make us like Christ, that You would help us to see our sin and to see Christ rightly. That we would respond, that we would be changed, Lord God. I pray You would use Your Word today greatly in our lives, that Christ would be magnified. And so I am so thankful for this opportunity for Your Word to go out, and I pray that You would use it for Your great glory and will. In Jesus' name, amen.

### Sermon

Well, in these days we have actually quite a few people in the Christian church, or evangelical church, that talk about apologetics. And we get our word “apologetics” from Scripture. *Apologia* from 1 Peter chapter 3. And if you were to look at this term “apologetics,” you would see it speaks about those who defend the faith against critics. And there is one website, kind of easy to remember, and I do not recommend you go there, but [apologetics.com](http://apologetics.com). And it says their mission statement is this, they exist “to remove intellectual impediments to Christian faith, thereby enhancing believers’ confidence in, and weakening skeptics’ objections to, the gospel message.” Now, on the surface, that sounds really great! We certainly want to weaken skeptics’ resistance to the Gospel message. But I think we are going to see that maybe this is not the way the Lord Jesus dealt with those who were skeptics, with those who had hardened hearts. And I believe we are going to see today that the Lord God deals with those who have hardened hearts, that He comes upon them and He does not deal with their issues and questions. But actually, He does not answer their question because of their hardened hearts. And we are going to see, I believe, very clearly today how we should respond to those who are hardened in heart towards the Gospel. Those who are against the Gospel, those who argue against the Gospel. Those who are hardened in heart – how should we respond? Should we try to talk them into the kingdom? Should we lower their intellectual barriers so that they can receive the Gospel? How should we respond to our relatives who are antagonistic towards the Gospel? How should we respond to those at work who are antagonistic to the Gospel?

Now I am not talking about those who desire to know the truth about Christ. That is different. Those whose heart God is piercing. I am talking about those who are against and want to argue about evolution or Creation or whatever it might be. How should we respond as the body of Christ? By and large the body of Christ, here the evangelical church, has kind of a sense in which we should try to evangelize through apologetics those who are critical of the faith. And I think we are going to see today

# Matthew 21:23-27

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 6/3/2012

that that is not the real way that the Lord would use this term “apologetics,” and I hope we will be able to see very clearly from Scripture how we should respond.

Would you turn with me in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 21? Now I am not against apologetics. I am just against using it the wrong way! And actually if we understand the definition of how to defend the faith and who the Lord God would have us defend it with, then I think we will see rightly how we should respond to those who are hardened to the Gospel. Turn with me to Matthew chapter 21, and we are looking at verses 23-27 today. But we are going to read through verse 32. This all goes together. And actually, it goes farther than that. We are going to see today the Lord Jesus shares a situation, or has a situation with the chief priests and elders, and from that we have these parables that come about afterwards in which He condemns them for their wickedness. And we will go through those parables in the next few weeks.

We have seen in our study of the book of Matthew that Jesus Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords. That He is King of kings and Lord of lords. We have seen very clearly that He has come to His people, that He has taken on human flesh, that God has come not to be served but to serve and give His life a ransom for many. We have seen that Jesus Christ after three years, having clearly revealed Himself through His truth, He has manifest His character, He has manifest His personhood, He has affirmed that with the miraculous – that after three years He has come to the last portion of His life on earth before He would be crucified and raised from the dead. And we have seen that the people have not responded, that they have been tantalized with the miracles that Jesus is doing. The multitudes have followed Him for the stuff they could get from Him. But we saw the Lord Jesus condemn that evil and adulterous generation because they had not repented. And we saw very clearly the Pharisees and Sadducees, we saw these religious leaders, who were hardened towards Christ. The ones we will see today, those who are desiring to destroy the Lord Jesus Christ. And we have seen the Lord Jesus pull away from the people and speak in parables for the benefit of His disciples, that they would hear the interpretation, understand and grow. But the people whose hearts are hardened would not be able to see and would not be able to hear.

The Lord Jesus has come to His last week of life on earth before He would die and be raised from the dead. He would be crucified and rise from the dead. And we have come to a series of discourses which happen in the temple, in which Jesus is teaching the people. And reproving the religious leaders. And I believe we are going to see today very clearly from our Lord’s example, the perfect example, how we should respond to those who have guile in their hearts. Those who are trying to trip up true believers. Those who would attempt to pull Christ down with their questions that sound like they want to know information but yet in their hearts hate Christ.

With that in mind, again let’s turn to Matthew 21:23-27. And we are going to see I believe how we should respond to those who are hardened in unbelief. Let’s look at our passage. Verse 23,

***23 And when He had come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to Him as He was teaching, and said, "By what authority are You doing***

# Matthew 21:23-27

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 6/3/2012

**these things, and who gave You this authority?" <sup>24</sup> And Jesus answered and said to them, "I will ask you one thing too, which if you tell Me, I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. <sup>25</sup> "The baptism of John was from what source, from heaven or from men?" And they began reasoning among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say to us, 'Then why did you not believe him?' <sup>26</sup> "But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the multitude; for they all hold John to be a prophet." <sup>27</sup> And answering Jesus, they said, "We do not know." He also said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things." [Matthew 21:23-27]**

That's what we will look at today, but this is integrally tied to what we will see Lord-willing in a portion next week. So let's keep reading. Verse 28,

**<sup>28</sup> "But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go work today in the vineyard.' <sup>29</sup> "And he answered and said, 'I will, sir'; and he did not go. <sup>30</sup> "And he came to the second and said the same thing. But he answered and said, 'I will not'; yet he afterward regretted it (the word literally means "repented") and went. <sup>31</sup> "Which of the two did the will of his father?" They (that is the religious leaders in this situation) said, "The latter." Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you that the tax-gatherers and harlots will get into the kingdom of God before you. <sup>32</sup> "For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him; but the tax-gatherers and harlots did believe him (they were repentant by the way); and you, seeing this, did not even feel remorse (or the word is literally "repent" again – "...seeing this, you did not repent") afterward so as to believe him. [Matthew 21:28-32]**

Have you ever been in a situation where someone has heard the Gospel multiple times and has rejected it? They are hardened in unbelief, and they are challenging the Word of God. They are challenging the Scripture. Again, maybe it is a family member. Maybe it's someone at work or someone at school, or a professor. Maybe it is a classmate, or maybe it is a friend. How are we to respond to someone who is hardened in heart to the Gospel?

I think first of all we need to recognize that the hardened religious hypocrites, or those who are hardened to the Gospel concerning Christ, form traps to try to discredit Christ. That is their motive. They are asking the questions not in genuine sincerity as we will see today. They are asking them to trip you up and bring you down, and we need to understand that. And that is what we see here in our passage. Verse 23, <sup>23</sup> "And when He had come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to Him as He was teaching, and said, 'By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?'" Now, I need to give a brief summary of what has happened, these events that bring us to this point of where we are at today. Remember on Sunday, not this Sunday, but Sunday back then, Palm Sunday – the Lord Jesus had come down from the Mount of Olives. He had gotten on a donkey, He came in humble. And as He was coming down, we saw in Luke 19, He was weeping over Jerusalem. And He shared those words that because they had missed the day of visitation that they were going to be judged very clearly. That not one stone would be left upon another. And He

# *Matthew 21:23-27*

*Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 6/3/2012*

was weeping, and all of the people were yelling, “Hosanna in the highest!” This same crowd would eventually be yelling “Crucify!” But we saw the reality that even though they would yell out “Crucify Him!” later on, they were speaking truth of Him and Jesus did not refuse that truth. “Hosanna! Save now I pray, Son of David!”

And we saw although it was not a triumphal entry like a general who had conquered, but a humble entry of a King mourning over those who would reject Him. We saw the King in Mark chapter 11 come to the temple, and He looked around and then went back to Bethany and lodged for the night. So with that in mind, we saw very clearly on Monday morning, we know that Jesus came to the temple. On His way to the temple, we know that we see the account of Him cursing the fig tree. So with that in mind, we know that on Monday morning, this is the day after the triumphal entry. We have the account of Him coming and cursing the fig tree. Remember we saw this last week. He saw this fig tree, a beautiful tree, totally in leaf. A tree that should have been a tree that had fruit on it. And it had no fruit on it, and He cursed the tree. And we saw very clearly that that exemplified the reality of those who had not trusted Jesus, those who had not believed in Him. It exemplified Israel, a nation that looked really good religiously on the outside, like they trusted the living God of Scripture. But yet there was zero fruit in their lives. We saw that symbolic reality.

And then we saw Him come into the temple and cleanse the temple. He came into the court of the Gentiles, a place which should have been a place of prayer for the nations, a place where the nations could have come into the exterior court and hear the truth of the living God and pray to the living God in the context of a right relationship. And we saw the Lord Jesus come in and cleanse the temple of all who were buying and selling. It didn't matter for what reason – if they were using this temple to pervert what God had shared. He put them out. Every single one. You see, the Pharisees had made it into a house of merchandise. They were selling these animals for the sacrifices and making exorbitant money. They had money changers. And Jesus kicked out every single one of those who were extorting the people. Those who were hiding behind religion to fulfill their greed and wickedness. They had turned His temple into a den of robbers. And then we saw very clearly He cast them out, also kept people from flippantly walking through the temple.

And then in stark contrast, we see Jesus healing the blind in the temple, and the lame too. We saw very clearly He was healing those who were considered outcasts, who the Pharisees would never let come into that area because they believed if you had a physical ailment you had sin in your life. But Christ was healing those who were coming to Him. And lastly, we saw Jesus would not stop the worship of those boys, those teenage boys, crying out in the temple court, “Hosanna, Son of David!” And then on Monday night, Jesus went back to Bethany to lodge. And the next day, which would be Tuesday, He came back to Jerusalem. And that is where we have the second half of this portion with the fig tree, where He talks to Peter when he queries Him. And He reveals to Peter very clearly why.

And then at this point, we come to our passage today, where He comes back to the temple on Tuesday. And we find Him entering again, and we find Him teaching. And here is our passage again. Let's look at it. Verse 23, <sup>23</sup> And when He had come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people

# Matthew 21:23-27

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 6/3/2012

came to Him as He was teaching, and said, ‘By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?’” [Matthew 21:23] So first of all we have the chief priests, and we have the elders of the people. Now this is somewhat of an official delegation. We have Mark and Luke speak of the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders coming to Him – Mark 11:27. And this term “chief priests” used to speak of the religious leadership of Israel. It spoke of the high priest, it spoke of the ex-high priests. It spoke of possibly the captain of the temple. It spoke of other priests. These were the top religious guys. They were not your ordinary priests. They were really the people who ruled Israel. And then we see the term “elders of the people.” This term used to describe the leaders of the people. And it likely included the seventy or the Sanhedrin. And in this group there were the scribes also; they were Israel’s theologians. They were those who knew the Word of God. And so I believe this phrase, “the chief priests and the elders of the people” really describes the religious leadership of Israel at this time, which would be the leadership of the country of Israel and it would be the leadership of this temple obviously – the center of their theocracy.

Now we need to realize as we get into this passage that the chief priests and elders were the ones who ruled over the temple. They had authority over the temple. And on a side note, the Lord Jesus had rooted out sin, and these people come to Him. But I want you to look at something. If you look at Luke chapter 20, and this is another portion of our passage. Luke 20 - turn with me. Luke chapter 20, verse 1. **<sup>1</sup> And it came about on one of the days while He was teaching the people in the temple and preaching the gospel, that the chief priests and the scribes with the elders confronted Him, [Luke 20:1]** We see very clearly He was teaching the people in the temple. And He was preaching the Gospel. This is the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, teaching and preaching the Gospel. And we see here after He had rooted out sin in the temple, we have Him teaching and preaching. And it is at this point while He is in His house, the temple, we see very clearly after having dealt with sin that the people were hanging on every word. If you look back just a verse in chapter 19, verse 47 of the Gospel of Luke. It says,

**<sup>47</sup> And He was teaching daily in the temple; but the chief priests and the scribes and the leading men among the people were trying to destroy Him, <sup>48</sup> and they could not find anything that they might do, (and look at this) for all the people were hanging upon His words. [Luke 19:47-48]**

You see the Lord Jesus had rooted out the sin, and yet the leadership was still there, the sinful leadership which He would root out eventually. And then they would crucify Him ultimately. He would root them out; He would confront them. And the people are hanging on very word. So we have this official delegation coming to Him in the midst of Him teaching in His temple. Now it is important to realize before we get to the rest of our passage that I do not believe at all that these people were genuine in their requests. That they were coming very clearly to trip Him up. They were coming to destroy Him. They were hardened in heart, and we need to see that. We need to understand when someone is hardened in heart and they come against Christ how we should respond. We see very clearly, if you look down in Matthew, back in Matthew 21, that these parables that Jesus shares of condemnation of leadership – they understood were about them. Matthew 21:42,

# Matthew 21:23-27

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 6/3/2012

**<sup>42</sup> Jesus said to them, "Did you never read in the Scriptures, 'The stone which the builders rejected, This became the chief corner stone; This came about from the Lord, And it is marvelous in our eyes ' ? <sup>43</sup> "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and be given to a nation (or a people) producing the fruit of it. <sup>44</sup> "And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust." <sup>45</sup> And when the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables, (notice this) they understood that He was speaking about them. <sup>46</sup> And when they sought to seize Him, they feared the multitudes, because they held Him to be a prophet. [Matthew 21:42-46]**

The religious leaders understood the truth. They knew what Christ had said. They did not believe what Christ had said. And in this context they were trying to trap Him. Matthew 22:15, **<sup>15</sup> Then the Pharisees went out and counseled together how they might trap Him.** And we saw in Luke 19, before this occasion, verse 47, that they could find nothing to do against Him, but they were trying to destroy Him. These leaders were not coming with an innocent question. They were coming to trap the Lord Jesus Christ. And folks, we need to remember that these leaders had seen the truth concerning Christ. They had witnessed it. Turn with me to John chapter 9, where we see the reality of how blinded they are, how blinded these religious leaders are. A voluntary blindness based on their unbelief. In John chapter 9, I won't read the whole chapter, but we have the true story of a man who is born blind that the Lord Jesus Christ heals and opens his eyes. John chapter 9, and the Pharisees, these religious leaders, are calling him and they are trying to have him recant about what happened. John 9:24,

**<sup>24</sup> So a second time they called the man who had been blind, and said to him, "Give glory to God; we know that this man is a sinner." <sup>25</sup> He therefore answered, "Whether He is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I do know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see." (I love that) <sup>26</sup> They said therefore to him, "What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?" (You see there, they know! They are hardened! It's amazing.) <sup>27</sup> He answered them, "I told you already, and you did not listen; why do you want to hear it again? You do not want to become His disciples too, do you?" <sup>28</sup> And they reviled him, and said, "You are His disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. <sup>29</sup> "We know that God has spoken to Moses; but as for this man, we do not know where He is from." <sup>30</sup> The man answered and said to them, "Well, here is an amazing thing, that you do not know where He is from, and yet He opened my eyes." [John 9:24-30]**

They were so hardened in their sin. And there are people like that who have seen the truth of the Gospel, they had seen changed lives, they are hardened to the truth. They have heard the truth, and they are antagonistic to the truth. They are not those who do not know the truth. They know it and they have rejected the truth. And these Pharisees, Sadducees and all the religious leadership had rejected the truth. And I believe even though it seems like an innocent question – “Who has given You authority to do these things? Because we have authority.” – that's kind of what it seems like on the surface. I believe there is more to it than that. I believe they are laying a trap for Him.

# Matthew 21:23-27

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 6/3/2012

So we have back to our passage, Matthew 21:23. We have two questions that they give Him. "By what authority are You doing these things?" First question. And what was that? What were the things He was doing? Everything He had done, He had cast out those buying and selling, He had overturned the tables of the money-changers and cast them out. We see very clearly He had stopped people from going through the temple flippantly. And we saw that He was healing those who were blind and lame. And He was receiving worship. And He was teaching daily in the temple. And they are saying, "By what authority do You have to do these things? And who gave You this authority?" Now to understand how this is a trap we need to understand the religious culture at this time.

You see, these religious leaders based their authority on the Scriptures and their former religious tradition. Scripture clearly reveals that God gave the High Priest and those priests authority in the temple. We see that in the Old Testament. And therefore from their view, they knew Jesus was not a priest and that they could challenge Him on that level. He was not a priest. He had no authority in that sense. But there was another way that they functioned, through a system of tradition. They would never authoritatively teach. They would go under a rabbi and they would grow underneath that rabbi, and they would always name drop the person above them in a sense. They would say something like, "Rabbi Gamiel said this," and they would share that to the people. That is why it was so amazing that Jesus did not say those things. If you go back to Matthew chapter 5, Matthew chapter 5:21. Jesus did not refer to anybody! He did not say, "Rabbi so-and-so said this" or "So-and-so said that." Matthew 21, Jesus says,<sup>21</sup> **"You have heard that the ancients (or that's the men of old) were told, 'You shall not commit murder' (See they would teach it that way : "So-and-so says, 'You shall not commit murder.'") and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.'**<sup>22</sup> **"But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court;" [Matthew 5:21-22a]** If you skip up the end of this sermon on the mount, the teaching on the mount, verse 28 of chapter 7, notice the result. <sup>28</sup> **The result was that when Jesus had finished these words, the multitudes were amazed at His teaching;** (Now look why they were amazed. They did not believe and they did not respond, but look why they were amazed.) <sup>29</sup> **for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes. [Matthew 7:28]** They had a system that they were under someone and they referred to them, and that is how they had their authority. And they knew that Jesus was never formally trained under any specific, approved guy, and so they are saying, "By what authority are you doing these things?" They are saying, "We know He does not have any authority. He was not a priest, He was never under a rabbi." And basically they are saying, "By what authority..." to discredit Him in front of the people. I believe that is the trap that they are laying.

And with that trap in mind, we see very clearly that these hardened religious leaders felt they had Him, as they did many times. We will see later on when they have different people coming at different times – "Well should we pay tax to Caesar?" – all these different little tests. "Well what about someone who dies and has seven you know, brothers and they have wives..." and all this stuff. They are all these little tests trying to trip Him up. And this is the first of them. And so what does Jesus do? How does He answer them? He does not answer their question. Notice this. Verse 24, <sup>24</sup> And Jesus answered and

# Matthew 21:23-27

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 6/3/2012

said to them, 'I will ask you one thing too, which if you tell Me, I will also tell you by what authority I do these things.'" [Matthew 21:24]

The reality is the question if they would answer it, would answer the question about Jesus' authority. And it would cause them to realize their spiritual state. If they were willing to see their spiritual state of wickedness, Jesus would answer them. And we should reckon that too as we will see. When we come to people hardened to the Gospel, we should not be trying to convince them to Christ unless their hearts are being softened by Christ, and they are willing to see their sin as we will see. And He says in verse 25, "The baptism of John was from what *source*, from heaven or from men?" Jesus answers their question with a perfect question, forcing them to deal with their guile, hypocrisy and unbelief. I marvel at the perfect wisdom of God. And you know what, brothers and sisters? We have the living God in us. If we trust Christ in those situations, if we are abiding in Him, His Word richly in us, He will give us the wisdom when to speak and when not to speak. Only Christ has the perfect wisdom how to respond, we don't. And so often we intellectually try to work people into the kingdom with our own wisdom and knowledge rather than the truth of God, as we will see. So these Pharisees come to Him and they ask Him, "By what authority are you doing this, and who gave You this authority? Who is Your Rabbi? Who gave You this authority to do this?" And Jesus says, "I am not going to answer you unless you answer Me. The baptism of John was from what source, from heaven or from men?"

Now why would He bring up the baptism of John? I have already shared it already. John has been beheaded, he is dead already, Herod has killed him. He has been martyred for Christ. And it is interesting that He brings up John the Baptist here. Well what do we know about John the Baptist? Let's review him just quickly and then we will finish up with our passage. Turn with me to Luke chapter 1. Luke chapter 1. And let's look at verse 5. Here we are going to see the proclamation to Zacharias by the angel concerning the fact that his wife Elizabeth advanced in age and barren would bear a son. And this announcement to Zacharias that this son John would be special from the beginning. Luke chapter 1, verse 5.

***<sup>5</sup> In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah; and he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. <sup>6</sup> And they were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord. (What a testimony, huh? And we see here,)<sup>7</sup> And they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both advanced in years. <sup>8</sup> Now it came about, while he was performing his priestly service before God in the appointed order of his division, <sup>9</sup> according to the custom of the priestly office, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. <sup>10</sup> And the whole multitude of the people were in prayer outside at the hour of the incense offering. <sup>11</sup> And an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. <sup>12</sup> And Zacharias was troubled when he saw him, and fear gripped him. <sup>13</sup> But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son,*** (Now, that took a little while for that petition to be answered, didn't it? He was advanced in age, "But

## Matthew 21:23-27

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 6/3/2012

your petition has been heard." And we see here very clearly,) **and you will give him the name John.** <sup>14</sup> **"And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth.** <sup>15</sup> **"For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and he will drink no wine or liquor; and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, while yet in his mother's womb.** <sup>16</sup> **"And he will turn back many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God.** <sup>17</sup> **"And it is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous; so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." [Luke 1:5-17]**

Then if you go down to verse 67. You will remember that Mary had visited Elizabeth and John the Baptist leaped in Elizabeth's womb. And then we have Zacharias now prophesying concerning John in verse 67.

<sup>67</sup> **And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying:** <sup>68</sup> **"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people,** (You know, it's interesting, as I read that I think of when Jesus was weeping, He said to them, to Israel, that they had not recognized the day of visitation. But here we have it, "Blessed that He has visited His people.") <sup>69</sup> **And has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of David His servant--** <sup>70</sup> **As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old--** <sup>71</sup> **Salvation from our enemies, And from the hand of all who hate us;** <sup>72</sup> **To show mercy toward our fathers, And to remember His holy covenant,** <sup>73</sup> **The oath which He swore to Abraham our father,** <sup>74</sup> **To grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, Might serve Him without fear,** <sup>75</sup> **In holiness and righteousness before Him all our days.** <sup>76</sup> **"And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; For you will go on before the Lord to prepare His ways;** <sup>77</sup> **To give to His people the knowledge of salvation By the forgiveness of their sins,** <sup>78</sup> **Because of the tender mercy of our God, With which the Sunrise from on high shall visit us,** <sup>79</sup> **To shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, To guide our feet into the way of peace."** <sup>80</sup> **And the child continued to grow, and to become strong in spirit, and he lived in the deserts until the day of his public appearance to Israel. [Luke 1:67-80]**

John was special, from a miraculous conception, being filled with the Spirit in the womb, he was destined to prepare the way for the Lord Jesus Christ, to share as we will see repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as Bob read. We see very clearly that in the book of Malachi and also in Matthew chapter 3. And we see very clearly that John introduced Jesus as the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. It was very clear, if you responded to John's message truly from the heart, you would respond to the message of Christ. And very clearly John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. The Apostle Paul in Acts 13:23, if you want to turn there just really briefly, shares about this. He is preaching and he is sharing concerning David at this point. And he brings up John. And it's important to realize because these Pharisees had heard this. They understand who John was. They had heard the truth. They were not those who did not know the truth. Acts 13:23,

# Matthew 21:23-27

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 6/3/2012

<sup>23</sup> **"From the offspring of this man** (He is speaking of David), **according to promise, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus,** <sup>24</sup> **after John had proclaimed before His coming a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel.** <sup>25</sup> **"And while John was completing his course, he kept saying, 'What do you suppose that I am? I am not He. But behold, one is coming after me the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.'** <sup>26</sup> **"Brethren, sons of Abraham's family, and those among you who fear God, to us the word of this salvation is sent out."** [Acts 13:23-26]

When Paul deals with those in Ephesus in chapter 19 who had only heard of John's baptism, we see him say, <sup>4</sup> **And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus."** [Acts 19:4] And that is what Paul shared. You see, the ministry of John the Baptist was to prepare the way for Christ by preaching repentance, to make straight the paths. And all the people of Israel had heard this. They knew it. These leaders understood the message of John. And as Bob read, they came out to be baptized, and John called them on their hypocrisy, "Who has warned you of the judgment to come? The axe is at the root of the tree."

And so with that in mind, we have this scene here. And so He is saying, "The baptism of John was from what source? From heaven or from man?" And again we need to be really careful. We need to allow the Lord to give us wisdom how we should respond to those attempting to tear down Christ. It is really easy in our flesh to get into an argument with people. It is really easy to intellectualize and discuss things and go down those roads where we are debating people who are totally against Christ. The Lord Jesus did not do that. He said, "I am not going to answer you. But if you answer Me..." And the answer would have been the right answer, revealing their sin. "What was the source of the baptism of John, was it from heaven or from man?"

You know, a couple passages that came to mind as I was thinking about this. Proverbs 23:9, <sup>9</sup> **Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, For he will despise the wisdom of your words.** Proverbs 25:4-5, <sup>4</sup> **Do not answer a fool according to his folly, Lest you also be like him.** <sup>5</sup> **Answer a fool as his folly deserves, Lest he be wise in his own eyes.** Matthew 7:6, <sup>6</sup> **"Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces."** God's Word calls for us to have discernment with those who are hardened against the truth. And Jesus had perfect discernment. And His answer was one that if they would answer would only reveal their sin, and that's it.

So now take a look at how they reason. Back to Matthew 21:25,

<sup>25</sup> **"The baptism of John was from what source, from heaven or from men?"** (And listen to this) **And they began reasoning among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say to us, 'Then why did you not believe him?'"** <sup>26</sup> **"But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the multitude; for they all hold John to be a prophet."** <sup>27</sup> **And answering Jesus, they said, "We do not know."** [Matthew 23:25-27a]

## Matthew 21:23-27

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 6/3/2012

That is a cowardly lie. They are cowards, just like those who will not enter the kingdom as we see in Revelation, the cowardly and liars. Notice it says, "And they began reasoning among themselves." They were continually reasoning. And they say, "If we say from heaven, He will say, 'Then why did you not believe?'" They have hard hearts! They understood what John the Baptist preached, but they did not believe. And they understood if they acknowledged it was from heaven, that he would respond, "Why didn't you believe if it was from heaven? Why didn't you believe that you needed to repent to prepare the way for Christ? Why didn't you believe that He was the 'One who would come after me, the Messiah.' Why didn't you believe that?" They understood. They understood. And then notice they are also concerned for their own lives. "But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the multitude; for they all hold John to be a prophet."

And if you look at Luke chapter 20, verse 6 just briefly. We have this account in Luke chapter 20 and Mark chapter 11 and 12 and also in our passage. Luke chapter 20, and actually look in verse 3. <sup>3</sup>**And He answered and said to them, "I shall also ask you a question, and you tell Me:** (And actually in Luke and Mark, it is a little more demanding the way the Lord Jesus says this. He says, "You tell Me. You are asking Me a question? I'll ask you a question and you tell Me." It's very forceful if you look in the book of Mark and we looked in Luke. And He says here,) <sup>4</sup>**"Was the baptism of John from heaven or from men?"**<sup>5</sup>**And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say, 'Why did you not believe him?'"** <sup>6</sup>**"But if we say, 'From men,' (now look at this) all the people will stone us to death, [Luke 20:3-6a]** They are cowards. They are concerned for their lives. They feared the multitude because they knew the multitude, although they did not respond to the message, they did believe that John the Baptist was a prophet and that his message was from God. They did believe that. And these Pharisees are cowards and so they answer and say, "We do not know." They lie. They lie.

And as we look, we see because of their wicked belief, Jesus does not answer their question. Look at verse 27, <sup>27</sup>**And answering Jesus, they said, "We do not know." He also said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things. [Matthew 21:27]** "I am not going to tell you. I am not going to tell you. You are not going to acknowledge your sinfulness; I am not going to tell you." Folks, we can learn so much from the example of Christ here. Again, so often we get into discussions because we have right motives, at least we think so because we love the people; we want them to hear the truth. Or maybe we have wrong motives – we want to win an argument. Sometimes we get into discussions with people with hardened hearts – professors or whatever it might be! I do not think we should be debating atheists. I think that is casting pearls before swine. Now, if an atheist comes and says, "Why do you have hope?" then we share the Gospel with that atheist, don't we?

Someone who is hardened towards Christ, we do not see Christ responding to them. They were attempting to destroy Him and discredit; and that is usually what these debates are about. They are trying to tear down Christ and His Word. Very clearly at times the Lord Jesus did not respond, and also He did not respond when people ask with the wrong motives also. Take a look at Luke chapter 23. Luke 23:8. The Lord Jesus is not a puppet who just answers anybody's questions any time. And we can really learn from it. Luke 23:8-9, and I pray that you, and we, leave our naiveté behind, that we grow in

## Matthew 21:23-27

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 6/3/2012

wisdom and understanding when we are confronted in these situations, that we grow in His wisdom. Luke 23:8,

***<sup>8</sup> Now Herod was very glad when he saw Jesus; for he had wanted to see Him for a long time, because he had been hearing about Him and was hoping to see some sign performed by Him. (Herod's motives were totally wrong) <sup>9</sup> And he questioned Him at some length; (And notice Jesus. Did He discuss these things?) but He answered him nothing. [Luke 23:8-9]***

Nothing. We have examples in Scripture, these descriptive examples of how Jesus responded to those with wrong motives and hardened hearts. He did not answer them. And the cowardly here say, "We do not know." Folks, there are a lot of Christians who would have done a song and dance for Herod - "He wants to know about Jesus" - to open an opportunity to share the Gospel. But as we see in Scripture, Jesus did not do it. Herod's motives were wrong and wicked and He did not respond.

Now on a side note, when the Lord does open the door, we need to share the Gospel. Not set up a system of apologetics to remove impediments. The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation! We need to be discerning and stay quiet when people are hardened towards the Word of God. Turn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 1. We see very clearly that God is wanting to strip down the wisdom of men, not to prop it up through debates and arguments. Only the Gospel can remove impediments to faith. First Corinthians 1. The Corinthians are elevating people that baptized. "So-and-so baptized this guy, and so-and-so baptized this guy." And Paul is saying, "I didn't baptize anybody but maybe I baptized this guy. I'm not sure, I just want to get out of that focus." And then he says in 1 Corinthians 1:17,

***<sup>17</sup> For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, that the cross of Christ should not be made void. <sup>18</sup> For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. <sup>19</sup> For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And the cleverness of the clever I will set aside." <sup>20</sup> Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? <sup>21</sup> For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. [1 Corinthians 1:17-21]***

The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation. And it rips down and tears apart man's prideful wisdom. And when someone is pierced and God is opening their hearts, share the Gospel. But pray to be wise when people are hardened. Learn from what the examples we see from Christ, that we would not throw our pearls, this glorious Gospel, before those who will trample it up, before man. Folks, our apologetics should be Gospel-centered in the context of yielded discernment and trust in Christ. It is the work of God in the life of the believer that has sanctified Christ as Lord of heart that enables him to

# Matthew 21:23-27

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 6/3/2012

respond biblically in trials that might open opportunities, where someone might come and ask why you have hope (1 Peter) and that you would give an *apologia*, a defense for the person that is asking. They want to know why you have hope, they are not arguing with you about the Word of God, about creation/evolution – they are not doing that. They want to know why you have hope. And God uses those situations to open those doors.

Even in Paul's most "apologetic" sermon, Acts 17, we see very clearly within a couple seconds he then proclaims that God has fixed a day in which He will judge the world through the man Christ Jesus, "Therefore, repent." He shares the Gospel. I know there are a lot of well-meaning people, and I believe unfortunately a lot of people are trying to talk hardened hearts into the kingdom that God is giving over. If God softens their heart, share the Word of God, pray that God would break it down, and pray for opportunities that He might bring. We need to learn from Christ. "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

Some of you might have realized that you shared the Gospel when the Lord probably did not want you to share it. And I think we have probably all been in that situation, where we have so desired people to be saved, we have gone out and passed what the Lord would do and we have shared the Gospel and gotten into arguments and whatever it might be; and some of you might have done that and you need to say, "Lord, God, I am sorry for that." I have done it! The motive does not make it right. We need to learn and we need to grow together. We need to grow. If someone is hardened, pray for them. Pray God would break that down that they might see the light of Christ in you, that God might open a door, that they might glorify God in the day of visitation.

I was going to share about the authority of Christ, but we see very clearly He has authority over everything. And hopefully He has authority over your life, practically speaking. Hopefully you have yielded yourself to Him. Friend, God has complete authority over you. He has authority over me. And He does as He pleases. And He does what is good. As I shared about apologetics, I hope we learned how Christ responded. He did not try to convince these Pharisees into the kingdom. He did not try to talk Herod into the kingdom. They had hardened hearts. They knew the truth. How are we to deal with those in unbelief? First of all, we need to recognize questions from people in that mode are not genuine and authentic questions. They are attempting to tear down Christ. Their motives are wicked. And secondly, we need to respond as Christ responded.

Turn with me to 1 Peter chapter 3, and I want to close with that. I pray, brother and sister, that we are discerning. That we are discerning, that we do not damage Christ by running around everywhere and forcing the Gospel on people. The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation, and God opens those doors. We need to depend upon Him, trust in Him! First Peter 3:14, <sup>14</sup> ***But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED,*** (Don't respond wrongly when you are suffering for Christ. But instead...) <sup>15</sup> ***but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts,*** (Set Him apart as the Lord. "Lord, whatever Your will is. If I suffer, it's Your will, I trust You. I am not going to fear their intimidation. I trust You.") ***always being ready to make a*** (an *apologia*, that

# Matthew 21:23-27

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 6/3/2012

is where we get our word) **defense to everyone** (and then notice the qualification) **who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; [1 Peter 3:14-15]**

I pray that we are godly in the way we respond to people, that we learn from this and that we confess if we have failed. And we learn and we pray for those who are hardened in heart. We pray that God would open their hearts and open the door, where they are not antagonistic, where they are not trying to trap, and that He would open the door that they would want to know why we have hope. They would see the life of Christ in us rather than some belligerent Christian sharing everywhere and all the time – they would see the life of Christ in us and wonder why we have hope.

## Prayer

Father, thank You for Your Word. I praise You for it, and I thank You for Your instruction. And I thank You for the perfect example of Your Son. Father, I pray that we would not lean on our own understanding, that our desires for people to be saved, which is Your desire Lord God – You are unwilling that any should perish – that our desire should be tempered in the context of Your truth and Your will. Father, I pray that we would instead of debating people, Lord God, that we would allow Christ to be Lord of our hearts. That in the midst of suffering, Lord God, we would allow Him to shine forth. And that you might break down the hearts of those who are antagonistic towards Christ, and You might open doors for us to share Christ with them. I pray for anyone here who does not know Christ, I pray that they would truly understand that He has authority over all, He is Lord of all. That they would turn to Him and they would respond in repentance and faith. And I pray for those of us who are saved. Protect us from ourselves, from our own wisdom, from doing Your will our way. Help us to abide in Christ, that we would produce much fruit, that You would be greatly glorified. I pray this in Your precious Name. Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.vancouverbible.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2013 Vancouver Bible Fellowship

You may reproduce this sermon transcript in its entirety for  
non-commercial purposes in accordance with

Vancouver Bible Fellowship's Copyright Policy (<http://www.vancouverbible.org/copyright.pdf>).