

God's Curses, God's Blessing

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Date: 05 February 2017

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[0 : 00] We continue then our progress through this section of Mark's account of the gospel. We had seen last Lord's Day evening about the fig tree that Jesus cursed because coming to it and finding leaves which would indicate a certain fruitfulness or a certain readiness to produce fruit, he found nothing except leaves.

And we mentioned how despite the fact that it says it wasn't the season yet for figs, normally the fig tree would bear two harvests in the course of the year, one of them about the springtime and that would be about this time when the Passover would be due.

But the better fruit, the better harvest would tend to be in the autumn. But if there are leaves, if there is a certain flourishing, a certain fruitfulness, he would expect at the very least to find partially formed or not yet ripe fruit underneath the leaves.

But he found nothing, no indication of any fruitfulness at all. And he pronounced his word upon it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter forever. And his disciples heard it.

And then we had the cleansing of the temple, of the money changers, and so on. And in the morning as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots.

[1 : 14] Now, undoubtedly it would have already begun to weather and die as soon as Jesus had pronounced the curse upon it. Some commentators have speculated that when they passed by that way coming out of the temple, out of Jerusalem on their way to Bethany on the previous evening, that would be on the Monday, if we might call it that, of that last week of Jesus' earthly ministry, it would have been dark.

So they might not readily have seen it. But in the morning as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. Not merely the leaves beginning to weather, not just a partial blight, not just looking a little bit the worse for wear, but as though it were completely blasted, as though it were completely cut off from any nutrient from the ground, withered and completely desiccated, dried up from the roots here.

And Peter, calling to remembrance, said unto Master, Behold, the fig tree which thou cursest is withered away. He has no doubts that the fact that it is Christ's curse that has caused this withering and dying.

Now, remember that God is the one who pronounces both blessing and cursing. He pronounces cursing upon that which is evil, that which seeks to bring evil in itself.

Remember how when he divided the children of Israel in the Old Testament, there was Mount Ebal and Mount Geism, and some stood on the one and pronounced the curses, and others stood on the other side and pronounced the blessing.

[2 : 43] The curses, if you think about it, if you go back to those stages there in the Old Testament there, you see that the blessings are one thing. The curses, they're almost pretty much the reverse, or the antithesis of the blessings.

You know, it's like, Blessed be ye who worships only the Lord, and cursed be ye who worships other gods, and blessed be ye who, you know, keeps himself faithful to his wife, and cursed be ye who commits adultery, or whatever.

You know, it's the opposite, the antithesis of what you have with God's laws. So if we turn ourselves against the Lord, we bring upon ourselves cursing.

If we defraud the Lord, we bring upon ourselves cursing, in that sense. Now, the curses of the Lord, they are powerful, they are frightening, in that sense.

We think of Malachi, for example, where the prophet is thundering against those who, as he says, would rob God. Malachi chapter 3, Will a man rob God?

[3 : 43] Verse 8, Yet ye have robbed me. But you see, then have we robbed thee, in tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse, for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation.

Bring ye all the tithes, into the storehouse, that there may be meat in my house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.

And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes. You know, the plague, the locust, the canker worm, he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground, neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the Lord of hosts.

And all nations shall call you blessed, for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the Lord of hosts.

Now you see what's happening there. There is on the one hand, you are cursed with a curse, but here is the opportunity to be blessed, and to be called a delightsome land, saith the Lord of hosts.

And what has brought this curse down on the people in Malachi? What brings the curse? Upon the fig tree. It is its lack of fruitfulness. When that was its very purpose, it existed in order to bear fruit, just as man exists to glorify God, and enjoy Him forever.

[5 : 01] And those who are meant to be the Lord's people, particularly, exist to glorify His name, to bring forth fruit, and so glorify His name. What's happening in that Malachi passage, is that there are those who are quite content to take the blessings of God on themselves, but want to keep it for themselves, and not give the Lord His due.

They seek to amass wealth for themselves, at God's expense, and to hoard it, as it were, themselves, and not acknowledge that it is the Lord who gives it to them. That brings cursing on themselves.

And the Lord says, if you just give me my portion, just acknowledge that it's me, just basically say thank you, and recognize that it is I who give you life, and blessing, and goodness, and hope, then see how blessed you would be.

See how rich would be the blessings I would give you. Be called a delight so bad. Now, what do you suppose is happening when the fig tree is withered up from the roots?

Is the Lord calling down a lightning bolt to zap it and burn it up? We don't read that at all. Now, as He put His hand in it and smite it, and so it all falls to the ground, and all the branches disintegrate into tiny little dust?

[6 : 14] No, we don't read that either. What happens is that any possible nutrient from the ground, any possible nourishing of that fig tree that causes its leaves to flourish and look so fruitful, any moisture, any goodness, any feeding of that tree is cut off.

I think, yeah, but that wouldn't do it overnight. Well, if it is done to the degree that the Lord is completely strangling off any good, any blessing to it, that is what happens.

Let me just, you know, think yourselves. Supposing you know that there is a storm coming in, and what do you find? You go up the storm away, what do you find? Nothing left on the shelves.

Why do you find nothing left on the shelves? Because people are panicking, buying all the bread, all the milk, all the everything. Why are they doing that? Because they think if there's a storm coming in, the ferries won't sell, and if the ferries won't sell, the shops won't be replenished, and if the shops aren't replenished, they might run out of food, or they might run out of bread, or they might run out of milk, or whatever.

So everybody buys in quickly. It's not that they think it's going to stop forever. It's not that they think suddenly a bird loan is going to break in and empty their larder.

[7 : 30] It's just what they fear is, the inability to replenish their own supplies, that they cannot continue to feed the larder.

They cannot continue to replenish their stores, because the supply has not been taken away. It's just been cut off. That is all you see that God needs to do for us to perish, for us to be cursed.

He doesn't need to zap us with bolts of lightning. He doesn't need to send meteors from outer space to explode the world. He just needs to turn off a little bit of his blessing.

Think of what, you know, in the days of Elijah. What was it? You know, we are introduced to Elijah in chapter 17 of 1 Kings. And this is what we read. Elijah the Tishvot, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, that's the first week of it, said unto Ahab, as the Lord God of Israel liveth before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word, unless I say it.

Now, we know that Elijah is not acting simply on his own authority. He's acting upon the Lord's word because in chapter 18 of 1 Kings, we read, it came to pass after many days the word of the Lord

came to Elijah in the third year and said, go show thyself unto Ahab, and I will send rain upon the earth.

[8 : 52] He doesn't come to Elijah and say, oh, please, Elijah, let's send some rain out. It's okay with you. No, God is the one giving the orders. God is the one who says to Elijah, tell Ahab, there's not going to be any rain unless my prophet says so.

James illustrates it for us perfectly. He says, you know, there was nothing special in Elijah, he says in chapter 5, he says, Elias, Elijah, was a man subject to like passions as we are.

He had the same weaknesses, he had the same frailties, he wasn't a superman, but he prayed earnestly that it might not rain, and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.

And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth our food. Who turns off or on the rain? God. It's he who controls all these things.

Now, of course, in our climate, we might think, oh, a wee while without rain, how nice that would be. A wee bit of sunshine, a wee bit of dryness. But, you know, it wouldn't take long when our burns begin to dry up and the level of the lock begins to go down or whatever, and then we realise, hey, this isn't as great as we thought.

[9 : 55] We have grown used to, accustomed to, a ready supply of rain keeping the burns gushing and overflowing, and the lock's tall at a good level, plenty of water, plenty of supply, never have to worry about it.

In a dry and dusty land where the rain simply stops and where the Lord simply doesn't send the former and the latter rain, he doesn't have to zap them with thunderbolts, he doesn't have to send fiery meteors, he just turns off.

The wee supply, the replenishment of that which man takes for granted and thinks, I can keep on getting what God gives, he sends the rain to cause the sun to rise and the evil and the good, sends the rain on the just and the unjust, my crops will grow, my bonds will be bigger, I'll still be able to accumulate my wealth, I don't have to think about God, although it is God who gives it, it is God who gives the supply, it is God who gives the means, all God has to do is turn the noble, you bit, as it were, turn off the supply of a little thing like rain, suddenly the ground dries up, no pasture for the cattle, beasts begin to die, men begin to starve and people become reduced to starvation and desperation because of one little thing that God chooses to turn off the supply of his blessing, turn off the things that we so readily take for granted, that's all that has happened here, the fig tree has been dried up and withered from the roots, perhaps the process may have been accelerated by the curse of Jesus, but that is all that has happened, no more nutrients, no more supply and so all that happens is that what you've got gets used up, nobody's taking away what you've got, you know, it's like there's going to be a big storm and the boats don't sail and the Tesco or co-op doesn't get replenished and the shells go empty, it's not that people think suddenly we're going to go home and our larders will be bare, it's that it's not able to be replenished, we take the replenishment for granted, how did the Israelites manage to cross the river Jordan to Jericho into the promised land, not because God divided the Jordan like he did the Red Sea of old, all he did was he cut off the supply and the river stood up and piled up just beyond the city,

Admar, whatever it was and so it piled up there and the supply was cut off and so it became dry and they went across on the dry ground and then when they went across, the river flowed again, cut off the supply, day by day, hour by hour, God continues to supply our need and we don't give a thought.

When Jesus curses this fig tree, the supply of goodness is cut off. In the morning as they passed by they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots and Peter calling to remember and said, and the master, behold, the fig tree which thou curses is withered away.

[13 : 02] You do not want to be on the receiving end of the curse of God yet there is justice, goodness, righteousness in God's cursing because all that he visits upon us is what we desire for ourselves.

His curses are simply the antithesis of his blessing and so if we seek not and acknowledge not the goodness of the Lord, it's just that goodness is cut off.

Master, behold the fig tree which thou curses is withered away. Have faith in God. What then is the lesson Jesus is using us to teach? He's saying, look, you're impressed for what's happened here. Listen, you're going to do far greater things than this. Now, of course, we could recognize that there is also an element here whereby the fig tree is understood by many commentators to be a sort of

emblem of the children of Israel, an emblem of the chosen people which because they brought forth not the fruitfulness for which God was entitled to look, therefore, they were cursed and the supply of blessing was cut off.

Now, Paul says, when he talks about it, when he writes the Romans, he says, you know, if the casting away of them, the cursing of them as it were, the casting away of them be, you know, to the blessing of the Gentiles, that's what spread the gospel around the Gentiles, how much more when they are again gathered in, that will be life from the dead, that will be blessing to the whole world and that's something for us all to look forward to when the Lord restores again the people of Israel. [14:33] But for now, their rejection of the Messiah meant that they were cut off, they were cursed, as it were, as a people. Now, we can preach a whole set of sermons and that, we don't want to get too much into that just now, but we do need to see also that the priesthood is our high priest.

Remember how back in the book of Numbers, I think it's chapter 17 or thereabouts, when the readers of Israel are all given staffs, rods, and Moses lays them up before the Lord to see who is the chosen priest of the Lord.

And in the morning, Aaron's rod has budded. It has brought forth blossoms and flowers and it has brought forth almonds and fruitfulness all in the night.

Miraculously, the Lord has taken a dry stick and made it fruitful in one night. And here we see the opposite end of the spectrum. That which appeared outwardly to be fruitful, although it was in fact only least, is turned overnight into a dry and withered piece of wood that is good for nothing but firewood.

And Jesus says, have faith in God. And he could be saying, you know, make sure that you too, you are fruitful and don't bring this curse to me. But more likely, he is saying to Peter, look, don't be impressed by this.

[15:52] This is almost, as it were, as nothing. He says in Matthew 21, in a parallel account of this incident, he says, verily I say unto you, if ye have faith and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, be thou removed and cast into the sea, it shall be done.

And all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer and be leaving, ye shall receive. Now when he says, this mountain, remember where they are, they're coming over the hill from Bethany, across the shoulder of the Mount of Olives down into Jerusalem.

When he says this mountain, he means the Mount of Olives. He says, it would be possible for you to say to the Mount of Olives, be uprooted and be cast into the sea if you had faith enough to do it. But I would suggest to you that when he says this, verse 23, you know, he's saying, that's what you could do to physical things. You know, it's not a case of, oh, you've got enough faith, look at what you can do, ooh, you can curse fig trees.

It's not about the physical world. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal. Jesus is talking about a far bigger battle. About far different kind of mountains that will be in our way.

[17:03] To the eyes of men, mountains are that which is from the beginning of pine. Mountains are that which is immovable. But the ultimate obstacle to getting where we want to be.

You can't, you know, you can't go round the mountain, you can't go under it, you're going to climb it and it's an awful slog. The mountains are that which cannot be moved. Now, when it comes to spiritual warfare, sometimes what seems to be in our way seems like mountains that cannot be moved.

And what does the Lord say even back in the Old Testament about mountains? Well, we look to Zechariah, for example, in chapter 4 where we read, Who art thou, O great mountain?

Before Zechariah, you're babble, thou shalt become a plain, a flat land. And he shall bring forth a headstone, a cheap cornerstone thereof, with shoutings, crying, grace, grace, unto it.

And remember the very, the very previous verse to that when he's talking about removing this mountain that will not stand before Zechariah of Abel. It will become a plain. Zechariah of Abel being the chosen vessel of the Lord to lead his people at that time.

[18:12] In the preceding verse, verse 6 of Zechariah 4, he says, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.

Lord of hosts, the Lord of the armies of heaven. Now it means that there is nothing that God cannot do. And it's not by the force of men, not by strength of muscles or number of armies.

God is the Lord of hosts. Jesus says, remember in Gethsemane, Don't you think I could call for twelve legions of angels just now if I wanted to? A legion at full strength was reckoned to be six thousand men.

And there were twelve of them, eleven disciples, and Jesus, twelve legions, a legion each, six thousand men each. Seven, seventy-two thousand. We could have had men to support us, he could have said, instead if that's what we wanted.

But no, this is a spiritual warfare. He says to his enemies, This is your hour and the power of darkness, but it's not going to last forever. Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.

[19 : 14] Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubabel thou shalt become a plain. Now, what is the position of Zerubabel? He is one of those Old Testament characters pointing us to Christ.

Just like David is. Just like some of the other kings of Israel were. You look in Matthew chapter 1, you see in verses 12 and 13, in the genealogy of Jesus, Zerubabel is a direct ancestor of Jesus. There he is in a direct line that leads ultimately to Jesus Christ. And in that sense, here he is at his stage in salvation history, being the used of the Lord, the chosen of the Lord, to demonstrate mountains will not stand in the way of the Lord.

Mountains of unbelief, mountains of opposition will not stand. It's not just in that place that we read this. What do we read in Isaiah 40? The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be exalted that is lifted up, filled in. Every mountain and hill shall be made low, brought flattened down. And the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places play.

[20 : 23] The Lord will smooth the way. If there's a mountain, he'll flatten it. If there's a valley, he'll fill it in. What's the context of that? Prepare ye the way of the Lord. Jesus is talking about a spiritual warfare, the spiritual progress of his kingdom.

He's saying to Peter, look, don't worry about this faith tree. Don't worry. I see the power I can use in that. That's nothing. When you are given the power from me, the power from on high, have faith in a God who is my father and your father, nothing will stand in the way of the gospel you have to proclaim.

Nothing is going to be able to oppose you. A mountain of opposition will be picked up, removed, and chucked out of the way. You can do that if you have the power of God with you.

Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit. What is the mountain that would stand before Zerubay? What is the mountain that would stand before Peter, or James, or John, or Thomas, or the apostles, when they are going with the message of salvation, with the message of Christ?

This is what he is saying. Whosoever shall say to this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea, and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saved shall come to pass.

[21 : 38] He shall have whatsoever he saved. Therefore I say unto you, what things whoever ye desire when ye pray. Believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. You're going to believe in the Lord.

Believe in his name, and in his truth. Trust that he is willing and ready to do what you ask him to do. It is by his spirit, by his power, that these things happen.

There is, as Zerubaybabel is being used of the Lord, so the spirit and the power of the Lord is that which sweeps away all such opposition.

In Psalm 103, remember again, we read in verse 15, As for man, his days and his grass is a flower of the field, so he flourisheth.

For the wind passeth over, and it is gone, and the place that all shall know it no more. Now when it talks about the wind, the word, the Hebrew word for wind and the Hebrew word for spirit are the same word.

[22 : 43] And elsewhere in the prophets of God, it says, you know, the wind of the Lord, it means, or the spirit of the Lord, it's sometimes translated as the spirit of the wind of Jehovah. And as the wind of the Lord, the spirit passes over man, there you go.

The place that all shall know it no more, but the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him and his righteousness unto children's children. You see, that which the Lord gives in his spirit, that lasts.

More than the mountains, more than the things of this world. When you pray, what things soever you desire, when you pray, believe that you receive them. But remember, Jesus is talking about spiritual objectives here.

He's talking about furthering God's kingdom. He's talking about building up the kingdom and the people of the Lord. He's not saying, oh, well, Lord, I'd really like a new car. If you could make that Peter in the garage for me, that would be really nice.

Lord, I could do it with a few more zeros in my bank account. If you would just add that, that would be great. Thanks very much. Why do you want these things? If we're simply saying, well, I just want to be rich, that would be nice.

[23 : 50] But if you were saying, Lord, we've got a hospital, a building in Nepal, or we've got, you know, a leprosy mission that needs bandages and we haven't got the money, Lord, if you could really supply the resources for that, please help us to do your will, then you can believe that the Lord is going to supply that meat.

If what you want is not a new variety in your garage, but maybe a truck that can bring supplies to those in need on an outlying mission somewhere, you can be certain that you bring that to the Lord and you pray about it, he will supply the meat.

When it is for him, when it is for this kingdom, when it is in God's name, in the name of Christ that we are praying, whatsoever things you desire when you pray, believe that you receive them and you shall have that.

And when you stand praying, forgive if you have ought against any, that your Father also, which is in heaven, may forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father, which is in heaven, forgive you your trespasses.

You see, this is part of love, which is the requirement of following the Lord. God is love. If we seek blessing for ourselves, we seek God to answer our prayers, we don't want obstacles and instructions in the way of our prayers, then we've got to be prepared to let go of some of the things that maybe we have cherished by way of revenge or desire or wrongs done to us.

[25 : 13] You've got to let them go. This is a race we cannot run with lead boots on. And sometimes the grudges that we bear or the hurts that we have sustained, and, you know, they might be legitimate hurts.

You know, nobody's saying, ah, just get over it because it wasn't really that much that you endured. Maybe it was a genuine hurt, a genuine wrong that was done to you.

And nobody's saying, God is not saying, ah, for goodness sake, grow up, get over it. It doesn't matter. Nobody's negating the pain of what you may have endured. Nobody is diminishing the wrong that you may have suffered.

But what God is saying is, yes, it does matter. Yes, it was a biggie. You really took a hit there. And the person that did that to you was wrong. They were in the wrong.

They were at fault. And you never hit back of them. You never required it of them. You just bore that and it's been simmering away there. And I haven't zapped them with a thunderbolt.

[26 : 11] I haven't made the earth open and swallowed them up. And you might be wondering why I haven't avenged you. And I haven't so far. And it's just simmering away. That resentment of the wrong done to you, which is a legitimate concern.

Yes, you're not wrong to feel that hurt, but you've got to let it go. You've got to take off the leg boots so that you can run the race that is set before you.

You've got to be able to follow the Lord. And this ball and chain is dragging you back. You've got to unshackle it. You've got to let go. That which you may consider to be your legitimate demand for justice, you've got to leave that with me, says the Lord.

You've got to forgive. You've got to allow them the opportunity of grace because, hey, that's what you're asking me for. You're asking me for forgiveness. You're asking me for grace.

You're asking me for help, but you're not prepared to give it to somebody else. This is exactly what Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount when he teaches about prayer. Matthew chapter 6, verses 14 and 15.

[27 : 18] We have to be prepared to do as we ask God to do for us. There is none of us who deserves grace. None of us who deserves the free gift of God's mercy.

But if we are asking it, we have to be prepared to give it as well. If we want to receive it, we have to be prepared to give it out. Now, I don't know what has happened individually in your lives.

I don't know who the individuals may be who have wronged you or against whom you may be despite all your best efforts and trying to let it go and forgive. The grudge that may be bearing away in there, burning away in your heart.

You know, we're nursing our wrath to keep it warm, as it were. You've got to forgive it. Not for the sake of the person who you may resent, but for your own sake.

You've got to let go. You've got to forgive. Because otherwise, that will be the obstruction to your prayers. That will be the thing that will block the receipt of your request at heaven's throne room.

[28 : 23] That is what will come in the way between you and the Lord. It is the devil's greatest weapon. Your righteous indignation where you're not wrong to say, I have been wrong.

I need to be avenged here. You let it go and you leave it with the Lord. You're not saying it's okay. You're not saying it didn't happen. You're not saying it doesn't matter. You're giving it over to the Lord and you are letting it go.

And you, for your part, are forgiving. And God will require it on behalf of his servants. He will require it on behalf of those who trust in him.

God is the one who says, vengeance is mine. I will repay. Say it to the Lord. It's the only one of two things that's going to happen in the end against a person that you may have a grudge you, you may resent or may have wronged you.

One is, either they will become converted if they're not already. And so, this is a fellow brother and sister. Against whom perhaps you may have this grudge. You need to forgive because they're somebody for whom Christ died.

[29 : 29] They have received grace just as you have. If they're going to be in heaven, it's because their sin is forgiven just as your sin has been forgiven. This is your brother or sister. You can't keep on that grudge against them. Nothing is going to be more offensive to the Lord than that sins that they have committed for which he has died.

You're still getting the grudge of. You can't do that. That's the one scenario that they are themselves a Christian or they become converted. And become a Christian. And so, their sins are covered by the blood of Christ.

Or else, they never convert. They never become a Christian. And if they never convert and they never put their faith in Christ, we know where they'll be going. They'll be going to a lost eternity.

They'll be going to hell.

Now, if somebody's going to be dragged down into the Abyss of hell with all the load and burden and weight of their sin unforgiven, when you know a little perhaps of the fate of such a lost soul and the hopelessness of a soul separated from the Lord for all eternity, can you really throw in your sixpence worth and say, yeah, quite right.

And you know what they did to me as well? This is what they did. Saves you up. You can't do that. That soul is going to be in anguish and torment for all eternity. You do not want to be the cause of it.

[30 : 47] You do not want to be the one who is adding to the burden of what they endure. Enough for all the other sins they will bear. When Jesus prayed from the cross, Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.

It doesn't mean that all the soldiers nailing them to the cross were going to heaven. It doesn't mean that all the Jewish leaders who betrayed him and who stitched him up are going to heaven. It does mean, however, that amongst all the sins for which they might end up in hell if they don't repent, this one would not be made to their charge.

You have all the others still to answer for them, but this one would not be made to their charge. This has to be our position too. If somebody is going to be lost and they have committed all these sins that are not going to be washed away by the blood of Christ, don't let the one or two little sins committed against us be that which adds to the weight of their burden.

Don't let that be laid to their charge. You've got to forgive. You've got to let go because that's what we ask the Lord to do for us. If you do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.

And you see how this is bound up in the same section with this prayers about power and about changing things and moving mountains and all the great spiritual armory that we call upon and the power of God that we seek not to harness in that irreverent sense but to access access that God would move the mountains of opposition, move the mountains of unbelief, that he would break down the barriers and the doors of hatred and darkness and unbelief and that he would make a way in the wilderness of humanity for his gospel to come in.

[32 : 36] What will hinder that? Our own unwillingness to forgive will hinder that, will obstruct the progress of the gospel if we do not ourselves forgive from our heart those who have wronged us.

You see at the end of the day it's rather like you know if we have somebody who owes us a hundred pounds if you owe me a hundred pounds and I want to say well that's okay I forgive you that debt then it's not a case of oh well it's just all forgotten about and so on and you just walk away you do walk away but if I forgive you that debt it doesn't mean enough well it doesn't matter there's no cost to it now there is a cost there's a cost of a hundred pounds somebody's down a hundred pounds and it's me and what I'm saying is if that were the case I bear the cost I lose the hundred pounds I forgive you the hundred pounds that you might owe me and I say well I'll take that I'll take that burden myself I'll bear the cost of that myself because that's what the Lord has done for me that's what the Lord has done for us my sins are far more than a hundred pounds worth and the Lord himself bears the cost for me that is what Jesus says we must do for us let your prayers be offered and they come again to Jerusalem and as he was walking in the temple there came to him the chief priests and the scribes and the others well it says he's walking in the temple he's not just sort of having a nice wee walk and just entertaining himself taking the air sort of thing this is what rabbis and teachers did they moved they walked and their disciples or those who were living for them would follow them and sort of hang out their words and seek to sort of mentally take notes as they went and one reason we know that

Jesus is not just walking alone that there is a crowd of people with him is that it is this crowd of people that the scribes and the chief priests are afraid of offending when it says they feared the people for all men counted John that he was a prophet if there's nobody except Jesus there they used to say if they say well actually yes he was from heaven but we didn't believe him or no we don't believe John was a prophet so tough there's a crowd gathered around Jesus they're all waiting to see what the chief priests will say they want to know there is a crowd with Jesus as he walks he is teaching he is expounding he is giving his own message of salvation and they are following him as he walks in the temple so as he walks in the temple there come to him the chief priests and the scribes and the elders now these are the temple authorities those who were in a sense you could say charged with ascertaining whether somebody was a true prophet or not a true prophet of God now they're not really in any doubt as to where

Jesus' power comes from but what they're trying to do is pin him down in you don't have authority to work here you don't have authority in the temple you're not a priest you're not ordained by God for this you haven't got any power you know where's your authority what authority doeth these things and who gave thee this authority to do these things you see notice what they're not saying they're not saying how dare you turn over the tables and the money changers you know imagine interfering with trade we're making a nice profit here and you're cutting off our supply of money who do you think you are they're not saying that because purifying the temple of commerce and business and abuse is not something that any leader of God's people can ever complain about if this man is purifying the temple so that it's returned to its pristine religious spiritual purpose if it is cleansed of its commerce cleansed of its abuse and all the money grubbing that's been going on they can't exactly complain oh no we don't like this so they can't complain in that respect they can't question what

Jesus has done so well they say well you know okay fair enough but who gave you the power to say why exactly are you doing this who do you think you are who gave thee this authority to do these things and Jesus answered and said unto them I will also ask of you one question and answer me and I will tell you by what authority I do these things now they probably knew they knew exactly that Jesus was a prophet sent from God but they didn't like the fact that he was interfering with trade he was interfering with the fact that people's devout religious belief was a racket that they were able to milk that they were able to make money from this that as people filled the court of the gentiles with their stalls and their beasts and their birds and all the other things supposedly for sacrifice and all the noise and all the stench and all the all the constant market trading and interfering where are the gentiles going to be able to go to pray where are they going to be able to bring their devotions to the God of Israel instead of a solemn quiet and a reverent hush in the courts of

[37 : 45] God's house as people bow in prayer from all nations under heaven you've got this constant lowing of the beasts and clucking of the birds and all the stench of animal dung and all the clink of money changing hands and the hucksters calling out and all the dust and all the busyness

and that temple that was meant to be a house of prayer has just become a marketplace for cheating people Jesus said I'll ask you one question now before I answer the baptism of John when he says the baptism he doesn't just mean the polymort he means the entire ministry of John what do you think who's it from of heaven or of man now you'll also have a sort of slightly more subtle question here because he will know as John's account of the gospel tells us if we look at chapter 1 verse 19 this is the record of John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him who art thou and he confessed and denied not but confessed

I am not the Christ and they asked him what then art thou Elias he said I am not art thou that prophet he answered no they said who art thou that we may give an answer to them that sent us what sayest thou of thyself he said I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness make straight the way of the Lord as said the prophet Isaiah and they which were sent were of the Pharisees he said the Pharisees the Levites chief priests and they asked him why art thou that Christ thou there that be not that Christ nor Elias neither that prophet John answered them saying I art thou tithes and water but there standeth one among you whom you know not he it is who coming after me is preferred before me whose shoes latchet I am not worthy to unloose and then the next day John seeeth Jesus coming to him and said behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world this is he of whom I said after me cometh a man which is preferred before me for he was before me and what Jesus is saying is John's ministry who did it bear witness to he knew the answer to that will witness to him

John pointed people to Jesus John's business was to prepare the way of the Lord the way of the Messiah and he pointed people to Christ and there is the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world and the chief priests they had sent people to investigate John they had ascertained is he a real prophet isn't he a real prophet but Jesus said what did you find out what did you think you sent a wee committee to find out whether or not he was a real prophet or not what do you think was it from heaven or from men answer me and they reasoned within themselves saying if we shall say from heaven he will say why then did you not believe him doesn't just mean why didn't you become disciples of John why didn't you get baptized means why didn't you believe where he was pointing John directed people to me John prepared the way of the kingdom John pointed to me as the Messiah how is it you don't see it why didn't you believe him and they know this they know this in their heart it's just that they don't want to admit it because they're not really interested in finding the Messiah they're not really interested in finding the kingdom of God they just want to keep the temple as a money making machine they want to build their treasure house in this world they said if we say of men this is where the crowd is gathered waiting expectantly what are they going to say are they going to say he's from heaven are they going to say he's from men and ready if they dare to say he's not of God Luke's account of the gospel says they'd be ready to stone them so they don't want to lose their reputation with the people but they cannot admit that Jesus is true is this not the situation some of us are sometimes in we don't want to lose face with the world we don't want to lose face with those around us but we cannot bring ourselves to admit that Jesus Christ is the son of God is the lord of our lives is the one to whom all the prophets and scriptures and all of our lives have been pointing we cannot bring ourselves to admit it and we do not want to lose face with the crowd so we say oh we don't know but they do know they do know and we do know and really we do know the truth and you they said they'll simply say why did you not believe them and if we say well if it's a man we fear the people so the answer we don't know we cannot tell what a client what an acknowledgement what an admission oh we don't know yes they do

I don't know yes you do you know the claim that Jesus has heard of it like saying well why do we go to church we don't just go to church to go through the motions we don't just go to the temple for the money changing and the beasts and the birds and the sacrifices we don't just go there to do religion the whole reason the temple exists is that so people may pray and encounter the living God the God of Israel the whole reason a prayer meeting hearts such as this has been built in the first place is so that the people may encounter the living God so they may come into a relationship with Christ that is why people built this place that is why people were to come here to pray and to encounter the living God not just about doing religion not just about outward stuff it's about meeting with the living God with the Christ we cannot tell I cannot tell I don't know yes you do you know the truth that the

[43 : 27] Lord impresses upon your heart he answered and said to Jesus we cannot tell Jesus answered well neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things you want to say to me oh Lord

why don't you do this Lord why don't you answer me when I ask about this Lord I prayed about that and you didn't say yes or you didn't give me what I prayed for Lord why don't you give me what I asked for why don't you show is it real what John says is it real what the Bible says is it real that it's all pointed to me are you prepared to acknowledge that I am really the reason for all these things why didn't you believe that we know the truth of that we don't want to lose face for the boys we don't want to lose face for the world we can't tell Jesus is not going to give us an answer to any of our deepest questions we are not going to see the answers to our prayers that we crave the answers to our solutions the unlocking of our problems it's not going to happen until we like the chief priests are prepared to acknowledge the truth whatever may be the cost whatever may be the losing of face that we think by what authority does Jesus impose upon our lives the authority of God himself he has that authority who gave him that authority the creator of heaven and the earth this is the Christ who asks men as he asks the chief priests who do men say that I am but who do you say that I am what did

John say what did John bear witness to what saith the scripture what does the bible teach what is the church child has been saying what were you always brought up to know who is this Jesus and what is his place in your life tell me the truth Jesus says is it from heaven or from men and we may shrug and walk away like the rich young ruler and we may be like the chief priests here and we may try to fool ourselves but we cannot fool God and we cannot fool the people and we can only buy ourselves such a little portion of time until eventually we come again to our senses and lay hold upon the truth and acknowledge this is the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world