

Alêtheia Christian Fellowship
September 6, 2020
“What Need to Repent?”

Sunday school at 8:30, Service at 9:15, Service at 10:45 with King’s Kids.

NEWS

Be respectful of others by allowing them to deal with COVID 19 in their own way.
 Wednesday Night Activities Start September 16th (Orientation September 9th) at 6:30 PM

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We talked about how the idea of repenting would have been nonsensical to the legalistic, self-righteous Jews. How they would never have agreed that their religiosity was producing vibrant leaves, but absolutely no fruit. (II Peter 2:17, Jude 12).

MATTHEW 21:23 ~

If you preach repentance, you will be persecuted. Back then, no one operated on their own authority.

Now, a lack of authority, allows Christianity to be a smorgasbord. Each one determines their own truth and religion - creating God in their own image.

Jesus was so different than anyone the Jews had ever heard before
 (Matthew 7:29, 13:54, 22:33, Mark 1:22, 6:2, 11:18, Luke 4:32, John 7:46).

Fill out the other side, detach this part of the page, and place it in the offering plate or the prayer/suggestion box in the lobby or with an Elder or Deacon of the church.

God Bless You!

The query had nothing to do with a legitimate search for understanding... It was merely a trap. Which again, by its very nature, showed the heart condition of those involved.

MATTHEW 21:24-27 ~

We have a problem with these national leaders being afraid of the crowds. Their primary fear was disorder... It happened as prophesied 66-74 A.D. (Mark 13:2).

It was a standoff, but because they were the Leaders, it was a loss for them. An embarrassing turn of events, resulting in even harder hearts.

MATTHEW 21:28-32 ~

Jesus had perfectly set the stage by bringing up John in His question...

Jesus' statement points out that what John said and did was righteous. He never advocated anything other than repentance.

It was only offensive to people who thought highly of themselves.

Legalism always results in relative righteousness, which, in-turn results in self-righteousness, which in-turn results in human pride that prevents humble repentance.

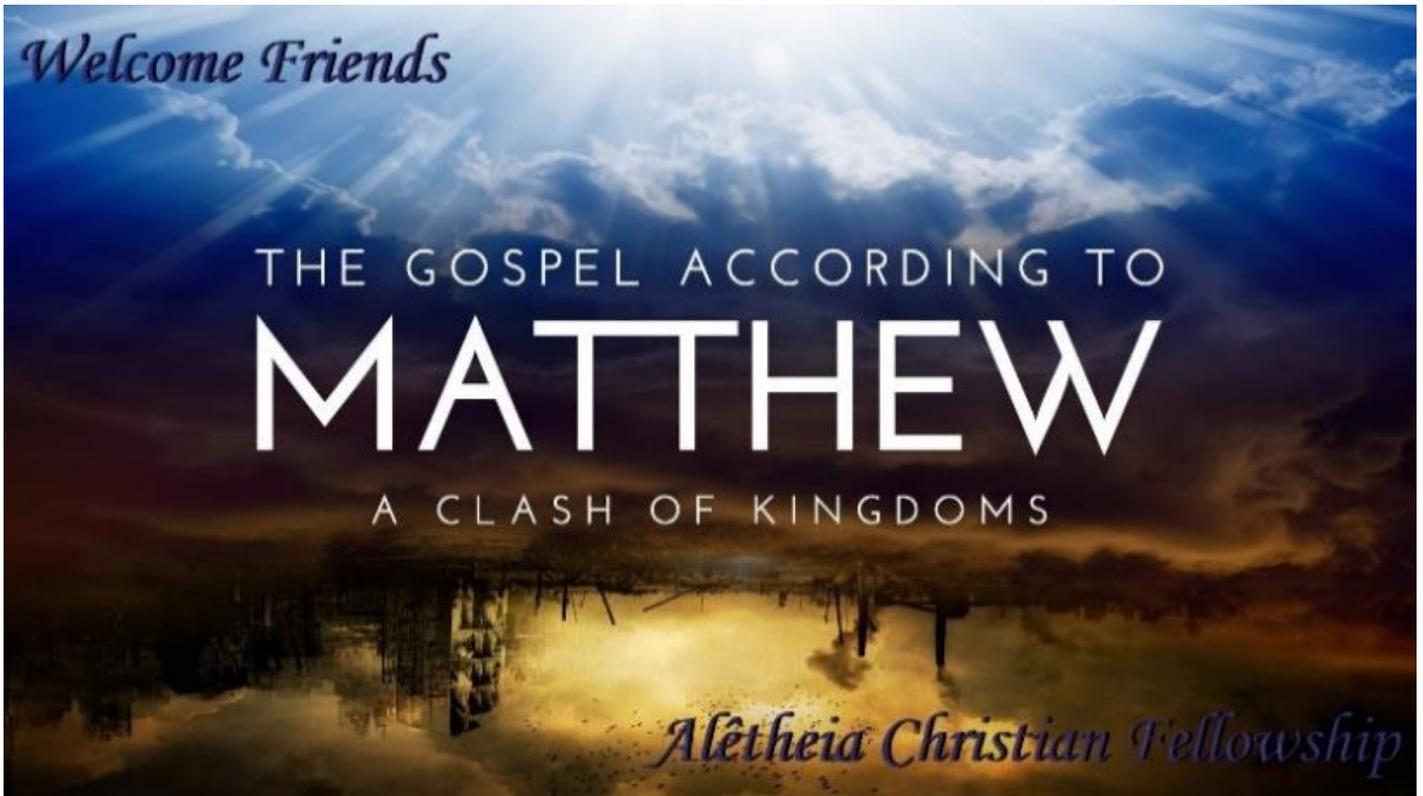
Self-examination is fine, but I suggest Holy Spirit examination... Let Him reveal your heart to you.

Write a brief note – detach and place in the offering, or the prayer box, or give it to a Deacon/Elder

Name _____ Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Alêtheia ~ Matthew 21d ~ 090620
“What Need to Repent?”



Last week we talked about how Jesus cursing a tree was a symbol for the judgment coming to unrepentant Israel.

We talked about how the idea of repenting would have been nonsensical to the legalistic, self-righteous Jews. How they would never have agreed that their religiosity was producing vibrant leaves, but absolutely no fruit.



They were “Springs without water” (II Peter 2:17), “Hidden reefs... clouds without rain... autumn trees without fruit... doubly dead” (Jude 12). Yet, as I said, they would have viciously defended themselves as the ones most approved of by God. The self-righteous are deceived to believe that they are simply righteous.



We talked about how the church is the same today - how even the humblest of Christians can fall victim to self-righteousness if we're not diligent in praying that God would show us our pride and independence.

We talked about how certain things are completely logical and yet not widely understood, It makes perfect sense that the only way a group of people can be free is for each one of them to voluntarily restrict their own freedom so as not to harm anyone else... Liberty requires each citizen to be self-controlled. Church unity requires the same as the end result of Christian maturity - the fruit of God's Spirit in us. To take that a step further... Please recognize this reality... If you meet an idiot, a lunatic, or a nasty person; then you've

met an idiot, a lunatic or a nasty person. If you find that you're frequently running into such people... You are the idiot, the lunatic, or the nasty person.

My point is if you have a problem with someone in the Body of Christ, you've probably met a difficult person and you'll need grace to deal with that, but if you find it difficult to get along with several people, say in this very church... You are the difficult person.



REPENT.

This world is not for your personal comfort and pleasure... That's the price of rebirth. You gave up your

claim on your life. You have been purchased by God at an incalculable price... You are His to use for His purposes as He sees fit.

What use is it to gain everything in the entire world and forfeit your eternal soul... Get what's most important right. LOVE WELL... No matter what, through His power, love well. Please, for the sake of the God Who provided you with life and a choice, for the sake the Body of Jesus, Who paid it all, for eternity's sake, love well.



Matthew 21:23 ~ 23 When He entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to Him

while He was teaching, and said, “By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?”

Well, the self-righteous legalists were waiting for Jesus. If you preach repentance, you will be persecuted. People do not react well to hearing that they are messing up. As a person pointing out the Truth you should be thanked, but it rarely, if ever, does it work out that way. As the old proverb goes, “If you’re going to tell the Truth, you better have one foot in the stirrup.” To paraphrase my good friend Plato... “If ever a just and good man were to appear, he would tell the truth, and the people would crucify him for it.”

The Highest echelon of Jewish leaders are now actively involved in the Jesus problem. They have already decided to “Destroy Him.” They are concerned about the vast crowds supporting Him and they don’t want to do anything so rash as to start a riot.



Rome is watching, at Passover the garrison overlooking the Temple Courts was fully staffed with seasoned soldiers. The Roman Governor was in town.

The leaders must act carefully, shrewdly. They concoct a series of questions and traps to get Jesus to publicly condemn Himself.



First up is a seemingly straightforward question about authority. We don't get that nearly as well as they did back then. We all think that we are our own authority. Some American is spouting off their idiotic bilge on a street corner through a loudspeaker, or some other dipstick is plastering their insane, practically incomprehensible ideas on social media and you ask them. "By what authority are you doing this?" They would look at you like you were from the Klingon home world. It is nonsensical to us... "What authority?" "By my own authority, of course!"

It was not so in those days. In fact, no one had their own authority... Not even the Emperor of Rome. His authority was in his lineage and the decree of the gods.

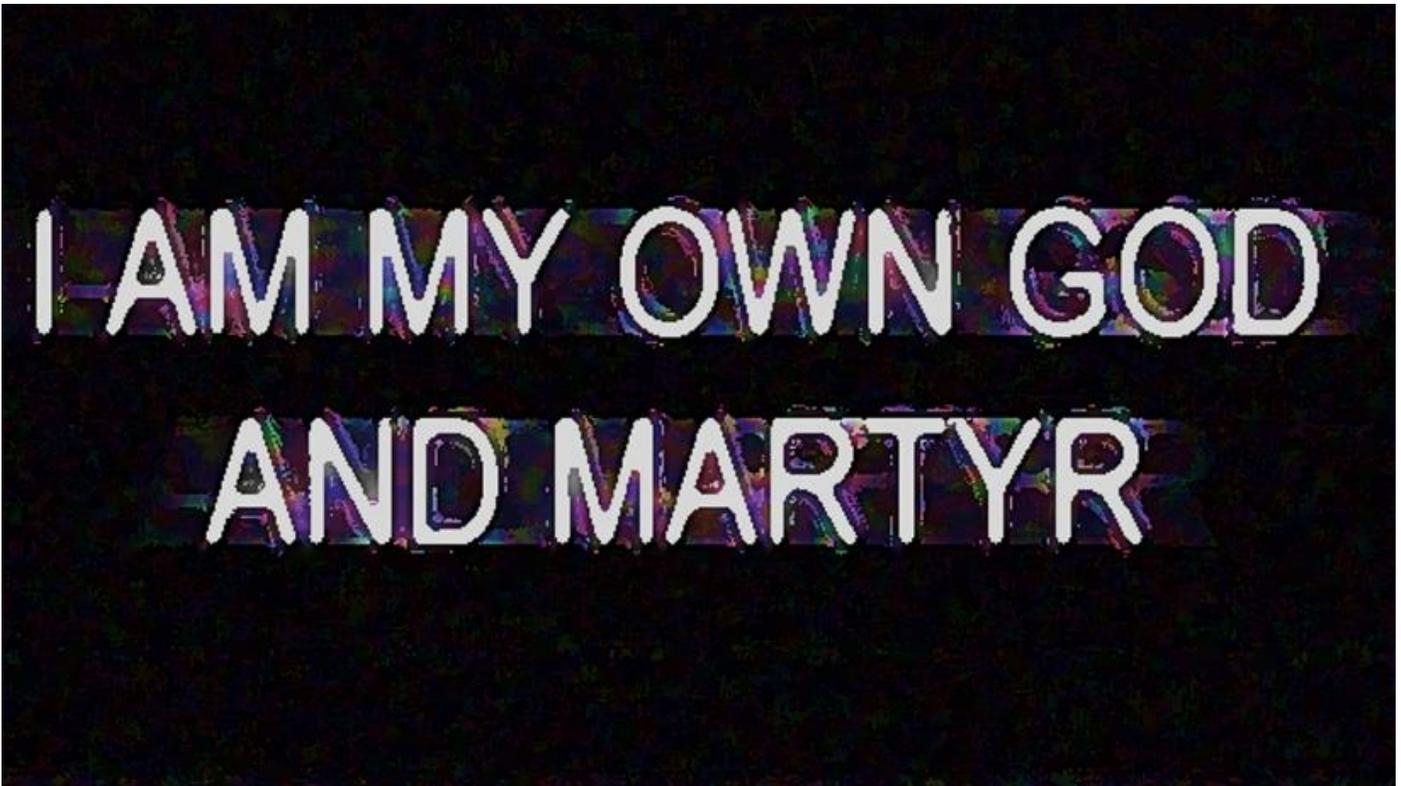
No one operated on their own authority. The Governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate Himself, operated on the Emperor's authority, not his own.

Rabbis then, and throughout time, to this very day, refuse to take a position on any topic, as their own opinion on the matter. They all associate themselves with a particular school of thought, or follow a respected leader from the past. They would never say, I teach this, or that; they would say, well the ancient Rabbi so and so taught this, or that. The Jewish leaders were constantly arguing over the details of the Law and citing different, long-dead Rabbis as their authority. 2,000 years ago, most of the Pharisees either followed Hillel, or Shammai. They would endlessly argue among themselves and then with the Zealots and the Essenes and the Sadducees and with a whole host of other smaller groups.

In Seminary, it's all about writing scholarly papers to defend, or disprove, theological positions. One of the difficult things was you can never use your own opinion... You have to quote well respected scholars whom you happen to agree with.

It's so much like that today for Christians. We have so many different Christian groups, all claiming the Truth, and yet all arguing with one another over the details. It leads to so many people, so confused about what God really wants from them, which then results in individuated Christianity. Every person has their own individual version as they quite literally pick and choose their doctrinal positions, thus adhering to a Christianity of their own making.

Christianity is a potluck smorgasbord. Everyone bellies up to the trough and selects the items they desire, while dismissing the others. Each one creating the meal they crave... All the while justifying each particular item on their plate as legitimate, because some group somewhere extols that item.



It not only becomes a mishmash of conflicting ideas it actually puts the individual in the driver's seat of their own religion. They are their own Lawgiver, their own God and as such, anytime a particular idea ceases to be relevant to them, they jettison it without concern.

There is, for them, a sense of following Christ, but it is an illusion of their own making... Can you see what I'm saying?

Who needs, or even wants a Biblical Christianity? Why saddle yourself with the bits that are cumbersome, when you can find someone, somewhere, to confirm anything you would rather believe?

You are attracted to a person enough to sleep with them, but not enough to marry them... Sex outside of marriage is a sin. Well, not in every denomination it isn't. I'll adopt someone else's doctrine in this area, until I settle down with a spouse and then I'll readopt the more Biblical position... You see? Once it doesn't affect me, I'll take the hard line.



Jesus was so completely different than anyone the Jews had ever heard teach. The Bible tells us repeatedly (Matthew 7:29, 13:54, 22:33, Mark 1:22, 6:2, 11:18, Luke 4:32, John 7:46) that the people were "Astonished," and that they were "Amazed," at Jesus' teaching because, "He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes" (Matthew

7:29). John tells us that some of the Jewish “Officers” who were sent to arrest Jesus were so amazed at His teaching that they left Him alone and returned empty-handed (John 44-46).

You might remember that when we were examining the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount, that Jesus repeatedly said, and I paraphrase here... You have heard Almighty God declare in His Holy Scripture, blank, “But I say.” That is personal authority and in the ancient world, such authority belonged to God alone.

Jesus never wavered, never compromised, never said, “I don’t know,” except in the case of His return, which He deferred to the Father’s Will.

The Jewish leaders fully accepted the notion that no one had the authority to render their own unsupported opinion. To them, Jesus, just like everyone else, had to appeal to an external authority, He had to enlist the opinions of past experts who were considered to be authorities in order to have any legitimacy for His actions and teaching.

By what authority did Jesus enter Jerusalem on a donkey? By what authority did He disrupt the sacrificial

system? By what authority did He teach in the Temple during the busiest and, arguably, the most holy time of the year?

While it seems like a genuine and reasonable question, given what we just talked about, their purpose in asking it had nothing to do with learning something that might change their mind. They had already decided that Jesus was illegitimate. It made no difference to them, at all, to whom Jesus appealed, or claimed as His authority... The point was, once His authority was established, they could create all kinds of controversy over whatever, whomever, that authority was. That's what they did as a daily pastime.

If Jesus said no one... He was arrogant and not to be followed. If He named any Rabbi, or leader of the past, they could refute that authority with other respected Rabbis, or leaders of the past who disagreed.

If Jesus said God Himself was His authority, they could charge Him with blasphemy unless He could clearly prove it... You might think - no problem, just give them the proof and everything will be great.



There's a couple of big problems. 1) First, as we've seen throughout this Gospel, miracles can be rationalized away. Jesus had already provided ample proof. At this point, He'd already raised Lazarus from the dead and the Jewish leaders knew all about it. Instead of causing them to pause, it only caused them more jealousy, more outrage, and so, more plotting Jesus' demise. They simply refused to believe, or if it was too plain and obvious to ignore, they ascribed the miracle to the power of Satan, rather than God. 2) Second, even if Jesus could perform some mighty supernatural deed that would cause all the Jews to bow to Him - it would be a false worship. A coerced tribute. The way God does things is to give just enough

evidence to reveal the heart of a person, then as now. What Jesus actually did, was neither too little, nor too much, to accomplish the Father's Will and show plainly the desire of the people.

Bottom line? The query had nothing to do with a legitimate search for understanding... It was merely a trap. Which again, by its very nature, showed the heart condition of those involved.

So, Jesus responded in a way that revealed their question for what it was... It revealed their motive and agenda.



Matthew 21:24–27 24 Jesus said to them, “I will also ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. 25 “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?’ 26 “But if we say, ‘From men,’ we fear the people; for they all regard John as a prophet.” 27 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.

With the background and context, these verses are self-explanatory.

Notice that the Leaders do not engage Jesus in a give and take discussion... They confer before answering. It's proof that they are trying to manipulate the situation, Jesus, and the people. It is also a great example of what we were talking about earlier. The Jews were forever discussing among themselves the pros and cons of various ideas, but never just proclaiming their own personal belief on any matter.

I think for us, so far removed in time and culture, the thing we have a bit of a problem with is the idea that

these national leaders would fear the crowds. Just to reiterate, their primary fear was disorder... Protests, civil unrest, riots, destruction of property, abuse of law enforcement, the dismantling of public symbols, and the vandalizing of municipal institutions... Oh, well, maybe we do have a clue.



Unlike the liberal mayors of the major American cities currently under siege. Rome had zero tolerance for unrest. Please remember that Rome ruled a massive empire with a very small presence in each hostile and foreign land they had conquered and now occupied. They were only able to maintain control by immediately crushing any hint of instability with an iron fist.

A Roman crackdown would not only be swift and brutal, it would bring more direct Roman control, which meant a drastic reduction in the power, wealth and influence of the Jewish leaders. If the civil unrest was bad enough, the Leaders could easily find themselves dismissed from their positions and their associated power. They might even find themselves imprisoned, or sold into slavery or even executed... Rome did not play. And Rome always held someone responsible.

If we leap forward only 35 years, or so, from these events, we find that the Jewish people did allow a bit of unrest seize them. They started protesting mainly about taxes and a lack of sovereignty. As expected, Rome cracked down. The Jews then began to riot and rebel. The first Jewish War began in 66 A.D. According to Josephus, a Jewish general writing at the time, the end result was 1.1 million dead Jews, about 100,000 others sold into slavery, and the complete destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. An outcome that Jesus prophesied would happen (Mark 13:2).



Because of that fear, what we have was a standoff, but because the Leaders were the Leaders, a standoff was a loss for them. It was an embarrassing turn of events... They looked like the indecisive self-serving politicians that they were.

Of course, that only served to harden their hearts against Jesus all the more. It is always the same. We see it clearly with Pharaoh and the 10 Plagues of Egypt. God reveals Himself to a person and in that encounter they will either move closer to Him in faith or move further away in hard-heartedness... No one stays the same after interacting with the Word of God.

Well they should have skulked away with their tails between their legs and cut their losses, but being who they were, their pride forced them to remain... Circling Him like sharks looking for an opening. So, Jesus told them three similar parables... The first...



Matthew 21:28-31a 28“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.’ 29“And he answered, ‘I will not’; but afterward he regretted it and went. 30““The man came to the second and said the same thing; and he answered, ‘I will, sir’; but he did not go. 31a“Which of the two did the will of his father?”

Without reading ahead, what do you think? They got it too and correctly answered, but clearly without grasping the correlation Jesus was driving at... Let's read...



Matthew 21:31b-32 31bThey said, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Truly I say to you that the tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the kingdom of God before you. 32“For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him; but the tax collectors and prostitutes did believe him; and you, seeing this, did not even feel remorse afterward so as to believe him.

This is a great example of how parables work. Jesus has one primary point and He makes it in a way so as to involve His audience. Because they get immersed in the story, they buy in and are eager to answer correctly and as soon as they do - Jesus has them right where He wants them.

Only then does He drop the hammer and reveal the connection... They are the second son. They are all “Yes, yes,” in their outward display, but their heart is in a state of open rebellion to what God desires from them.

There is no grace, no mercy, no love, no kindness, no gentleness, no goodness in them - only the holier-than-thou attitude of religious legalistic performance. The opposite of what a repentant sinner looks like.

Jesus had perfectly set the stage by bringing up John in His question... They had discussed it and through their refusal to answer proved beyond doubt that they did not believe John. They certainly didn't believe him in his life and Jesus proved that nothing had changed.

Jesus' statement points out that what John said and did was righteous... He never advocated anything other

than repentance... Fall on your face, admit your need, cry out for God to save you. John's message was only offensive to people who thought highly enough of themselves that they felt repentance was beneath them.

How many people will go into the Lake of Fire for no other reason than that they were too proud to humble themselves and repent?

The disenfranchised people were easily humble enough to repent. It was easy for them to do that because their sin was so blatantly obvious. For the piously religious, it's much more difficult. The sin is really the same. It's really just as offensive to the Lord. It just doesn't seem like it because it's more subtle.

I said legalism always results in relative righteousness. Relative to "Tax collectors and prostitutes," I'm extremely righteous... Compared to drug dealers, wife beaters, child abusers, bank robbers and callous murderers, I'm a saint! That's how relative righteousness becomes self-righteousness. Self-righteousness always produces enough personal pride that a call to repent from some grasshopper eating character is going to produce nothing but disdain.

That's how it was, and that's how it still is today. While the whole God-hating world is a tough nut to crack, it is nothing compared to the hyper-religious people who already think they have it covered.



Self-examination is fine, but I suggest Holy Spirit examination. Get alone without distractions and genuinely pray that the Holy Spirit would show you your imperfection... That in that you would be humbled. That you would see the need for His righteousness to be applied to your account. That in embracing His perfection as your own, you'd be overwhelmed with gratitude.

What's the proof that you are such a person?

Forgiveness, patience, kindness, and gentleness with others, recognizing that you're no better than they are and that if not for the grace of God that you undeservedly received, you'd be the same, or worse. Perhaps different sin, but sin earning death, nonetheless.



Again, it seems as though there should be an almost infinite number of possibilities as there are an almost infinite number of reactions to Jesus, but it's not that way... It is a Saved, Holy Spirit filled, Follower of the Lord Jesus Christ because of a total dependence upon

Him, or it is a suffering wretch, eternally dying in the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth - that's it... Choose wisely. Choose opening yourself to the work of God's Holy Spirit... Let Him reveal your heart to you.