

Lesson 45

Chair of Moses

Icebreaker:

Who is in authority over you at your church?
Who do you have authority over at your church?

Introduction:

Jesus left the withered fig tree where He had taught the disciples about faith and entered the city of Jerusalem. From there He proceeded to the temple where He began to teach on the topic of **authority**. He began by saying; *“The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses.”*

When Jesus talked about the chair of Moses, He probably was referring to it, both literally and symbolically. The chair itself was a stone seat on a raised platform. It was placed at the front of the synagogue next to the Ark containing the Torah scrolls, facing the congregation. Usually the most prominent elder or leader would sit on it while he expounded upon the Law and the Prophets. Undoubtedly this is what Jesus was referring to concerning the scribes and Pharisees when He said, *“They love the place of honor at banquets and the **chief seats in the synagogues**, and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men.”*

Symbolically, the chair of Moses represented the place of judgment. From there legally binding decisions were made for the people in regards to the Law. This concept was derived from Exodus 18:13-16. *It came about the next day that Moses **sat to judge the people**, and the people stood about Moses from the morning until the evening. Now when Moses’ father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, “What is this thing that you are doing for the people? Why do you **alone sit as judge** and all the people stand about you from morning until evening?” Moses said to his father-in-law, “Because the **people come to me to inquire of God**. “When they have a dispute, it comes to me, and I judge between a man and his neighbor and make known the statutes of God and His laws.”* According to the Mishna (oral tradition), this right passed from Moses, to Joshua, to the Judges, to the Prophets and finally to the Sanhedrin.

Interestingly, the Catholic Church began to develop the idea of a “chair” or “cathedra” sometime in the 4th century. It was called the Chair of Peter. According to Catholic tradition, Peter was given the keys to the Kingdom of God therefore he had the right to bind or loose (pass legally binding decisions) in regards to the church. Eventually, every Bishop of Rome claimed the right to the Chair of Peter and he later became known by the title of Pope (papa or father).

St John Lateran in Rome was the first basilica built.¹ Later a chair was added to it making it the first cathedral. A cathedral is simply a church with a **chair**. The Pope taking a clue from Moses appointed others to help him pass legally binding decisions. Now, every diocese has a bishop and he in turn has a chair, which when placed in a church building makes it a **cathedral**.

¹ A basilica is a Catholic church given ceremonial privileges. The term is derived from the word “basileus”, which means king. St John Lateran was consecrated in 324 AD.

Reading The Scripture:

Matthew 23:3-12, Mark 12:38-40, and Luke 20:45-47

Beware of the Scribes

Matthew 23:1-2 and Mark 12:39

(Gospels forged together into one seamless story, in collaboration with New American Standard Bible,
authored by Michael Gibson, Founder of Spirit & Truth, dba Key 2 Changes: "Follow Me: A Message from God", a journey with Jesus)

Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, saying, "The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the **chair of Moses**;"

Chair of Moses. This literally means, "serving as the Judge."

Matthew 23:3-12, Mark 12:38-40, and Luke 20:45-47

(Gospels forged together into one seamless story, in collaboration with New American Standard Bible,
authored by Michael Gibson, Founder of Spirit & Truth, dba Key 2 Changes: "Follow Me: A Message from God", a journey with Jesus)

"therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things, and do not do them. And they tie up heavy loads, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger. But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their **phylacteries**, and lengthen the tassels of their garments. And they love the place of honor at banquets, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called by men, Rabbi. But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. And do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ. But the greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted."

Phylacteries. Small leather boxes which contain portions of Scripture (Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 11:13-20, and Exodus 13:1-16). They were worn on the arm and forehead in order to literally fulfill Deuteronomy 6:8.

The Commands:

1. Therefore all that they tell you, do and observe
2. But do not do according to their deeds.
3. Do not be called Rabbi.
4. Do not call *anyone* on earth your father.
5. Do not be called leaders.

The Lesson:

When Jesus began His teaching He said, "*The scribes and the Pharisee have seated themselves in the chair of Moses.*" By this He was saying that they appointed themselves to this high position, it had not been granted to them by God. All the individuals in the line of succession for the chair of Moses from Moses, himself through the last prophet, Malachi all had a **personal relationship** with God and their **authority** was derived from Him because they **heard** and **obeyed** His voice. From that time on men were appointed by other men based on their knowledge and understanding of the Law.

God has always wanted a personal relationship with His people, where they heard His voice and fellowshiped with Him. This was never more evident then when God led the Israelites out of bondage to the Egyptians. Moses took the Israelites from Egypt to Mt Horeb (Sinai) where they could meet with and talk to God. However, a tale of sorrow unfolded. Lets look at what happened.

God told Moses to tell the Israelites, *‘Now then, if you will indeed **obey My voice and keep My covenant**, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me **a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.***² The people replied, *“All that the Lord has spoken we will do.”*³ The covenant was confirmed.

Three days later the entire nation of Israel gathered and heard God speak out loud the Ten Commandments. And when He finished speaking the Scriptures report this. *All the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood at a distance. Then they said to Moses, “**Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, or we will die.**”* No sooner had God spoken to His people than they broke their covenant with Him. They were settling for second best, wanting to listen to Moses’ voice instead of His. God granted their request.

At this point everything changed for the nation of Israel. Since they didn’t want to hear Him speak, God gave Moses a set of laws for the people to follow and he became its first mediator.⁴ This became the Law of Moses and has led these people the past 3,400 years. The Law of Moses was added because of sin⁵, the refusal to hear and obey God.⁶ And its purpose was to lead men to Christ.⁷

God having mercy on His people came to them in the likeness of a man ... Jesus, the Christ. That way, He wouldn’t frighten His people and could show them what He was really like. This is seen in Jesus’ reply to Philip’s inquiry, *“Show us the Father”*. Jesus said, *“Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”* Even though God came in a lowly, humble and gentle way to his people most of them still refused to listen to Him ... preferring their own ways to His.

The scribes and Pharisees had developed skill in and knowledge of the Law of Moses through study, but Jesus constantly accused them of being hypocrites. They didn’t apply the Law to themselves nor did they apply it correctly to the people. The reason for that was that they did not have a personal relationship with God in which they could properly hear and obey Him. Outwardly they appeared righteous to the people but inwardly they were corrupt. Although the scribes and Pharisees professed to know and love God, when He actual came to them in the flesh they hated Him. Listen to what Jesus had to say about them.

“You search the Scriptures because **you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; and **you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life.**”**
(John 5:39-40)

² Exodus 19:5-6

³ Exodus 19:8

⁴ A mediator is one who can reconcile differences between opposing parties. (I.E. God and His people)

⁵ *Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a **mediator**, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made. (Galatians 3:19)*

⁶ This was the original sin that occurred in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve refused to hear and obey God.

⁷ *Therefore the Law has become our tutor **to lead us to Christ**, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:24-26)*

“How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God? Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?” (John 5:44-47)

“But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. **My sheep hear My voice**, and I know them, and **they follow Me**. (John 10:26-27)

Jesus’ disciples were different than the scribes and Pharisees, they could hear the voice of God because they listened to Jesus and obeyed Him. Jesus issued three important instructions to them regarding **authority**. First He told them to do and observe everything the scribes and Pharisees said to do in regards to the Law of Moses. In other words, since the scribes and Pharisees are expounding on the Law, which is holy and good then have respect for the Law and pay attention to them because they are experts in regards to it. This is **submission** to the authority of Scripture.

Secondly, Jesus commanded them not to behave like either the scribes or Pharisees, because they were hypocrites living their lives for the applause of men not God. The disciples were to live their lives in contrast to the scribes and Pharisees. They were to become servants of people and not taking exalted positions of authority.

Finally, Jesus instructed them on proper authority by using three titles that men take upon themselves. His disciples were not to place men in authority over them nor were they to be in authority over others. Instead they were to be constantly pointing people to God. Here is what Jesus said.

His disciples are not to let people call them, Rabbi ... that is teacher. Why? The word Rabbi indicates that he is a master qualified to give instructions for living ... a guide. Jesus said there is only “**One**” who is qualified to be your teacher. When Jesus uses the term “**One**” He is referring to God and more specifically, the Holy Spirit.

*As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have **no need for anyone to teach you**; but as **His anointing teaches you about all things**, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him. (1John 2:27)*

*But when He, the **Spirit of truth**, comes, He will **guide you into all the truth**; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. (John 16:13)*

His disciples are not to call anyone on earth their father.⁸ Why? The word father denotes the one who gives life. Jesus said there is only “**One**” who gives life, that is your Father in heaven, the Creator.

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:26)

I said, ‘You are “gods”; you are all sons of the Most High.’ (Psalm 82:6)

⁸ It is obvious that Jesus is not referring to natural fathers but to spiritual fathers.

His disciples are not to let people call them, leaders. Why? A leader is someone that people follow. Jesus said there is only "One" who is appointed to lead, that is Christ.

"Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified." (Acts 2:36)

Jesus told the disciples, "*Follow Me.*" (Matthew 4:19)

Group Discussion:

1. Do some churches have people like the scribes and Pharisees in them?
2. Why do the pastors of Messianic congregations allow the people to call them Rabbi?
3. Why do the pastors of Catholic churches ask that their people to refer to them as Father or Pope (papa)?
4. Why do some people in the churches want to be referred to as leaders instead of servants?
5. Why do many pastors wear special clothing?
6. Why do some churches have chairs on the elevated platform or stage in front of the congregation?

The Point Of The Lesson:

A believer's true authority comes from God and they are to behave as His servants

Application:

Today, the church has become a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation and a people for God's own possession. How then should we live?