

Scripture: Mark 11:27-33

### By What Authority?

Beloved in Christ, by what authority do you believe what you believe? By what authority? That's the question. Why should you believe what you believe? Who says, anyway?

Everyone has an authority. Everyone has a starting point that they assume as their ultimate authority. It may be science, or Darwin, or their own religion, or themselves. Every person has an ultimate authority by which they seek to answer these three questions: what is real or what is truth? How do I know what I know? And how do I live my life? That is, what is right and what is wrong?

God's authority and His Word was challenged in the garden of Eden. The sneaky snake, the serpent, said, 'Did God really say?' He planted the seeds of doubt in man. And finally, he contradicted God's Word, "You will not surely die!" Eve gave in. She ate and gave to Adam and he ate, disobeying God and rejecting God's authority. Blindness, darkness and rebellion and death came into our world.

God in His mercy promised to reestablish His authority in our hearts and lives by sending His Son, Jesus. He would dethrone Satan as authority, and bring sight, light, life and the joy of obedience to all who believe on Him.

Here we meet Jesus in the pages of the Gospel of Mark. He is in constant conflict with the seed of Satan, particularly with the religious leaders who question His authority. This happened when Jesus was in Galilee in chapters 2-3 and now again in the temple in Jerusalem. Jesus enters the temple and clears it- driving out those who bought and sold and overturning the tables of the money changers. The conflict between Jesus and the religious authorities begins and will intensify.

We have as our text the words of Christ's antagonists/opponents, "*By what authority are You doing these things*" (v.28)? We see

1. The question of Jesus' authority
2. The source of Jesus' authority
3. The response to Jesus' authority

#### 1. The question of Jesus' authority (vv.27-28)

Jesus and the disciples go again into Jerusalem, again into the temple. It's Tuesday. Jesus was walking in the temple and according to Matthew's gospel, Jesus was teaching (21:23).

While Jesus was teaching, His opponents approach Him: the chief priests, the scribes and the elders. Who are they? The chief priests had custody of the temple, the scribes were men who studied, interpreted and taught the law and the elders were the older laymen from various cities or towns. They formed a 71-person council called the Sanhedrin. They were the temple authorities, a powerful establishment; also wielding strong political influence.

They send an official delegation to the temple. Did they wait until Jesus was done teaching? Not sure. But they were terribly upset by Jesus' actions in the temple the day before. Was He right in doing it? Yes, He had full authority. The temple pointed to Him, but they failed to see Him!

See verse 18. *"Is it not written"*, He said *"that My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations? But you have made it a den of thieves"*. Now they were thinking *"how they might destroy Him"* (v.18). Yet they were afraid of Him because all the people were astonished at His teaching.

Now, the next day, they approach Jesus, asking, *"By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You the authority to do these things?"* *"These things"* – that is, Jesus clearing out the temple, purging it – a sign of its removal! It was their religion and their life!

Notice, their two questions: by what authority? In other words, who gives You the right? 'Show us your credentials! You are not accredited by us!' They try to embarrass Jesus in front of the people. If He admits He has no credentials then the people may lose respect for Him. And moreover, *"who gave You the authority to do these things?"*

The real issue is that by doing these things Jesus challenges their authority. They want to be the authority over the own lives, over life and religion. So, from where did Jesus get His authority to do these things? This brings us to verses 29-30.

## 2. The source of Jesus' authority (vv.29-30)

Jesus answers their question with one simple question: *"... I also will ask you one question (lit. one word, event); then answer Me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things: the baptism of John – was it from heaven or from men? Answer Me"* (vv.29-30).

In Jesus' answer here, does He evade giving them an answer? Some say, that Jesus' opponents asked Him a question He did not want to answer, so He turns the tables by asking them a question that they did not want to answer. So He insists they give an answer first.

But this is not so. By no means is He evading the question they asked of Him. In actual fact, Jesus gives them a direct answer by bringing up the subject of John's baptism. Well, you say, 'What does John's baptism have to do with Jesus' authority to do these things?'

Much in every way. Jesus had been called and ordained to His ministry through John's baptism. The heavens opened, the Spirit descended upon Him, empowering Him, and a voice came from heaven commending Him, *"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"* (Mark 1:9-11). Yes, He is God, the Son of God! And did not the prophet John proclaim that a Mightier One would come, who would baptize with the Holy Spirit?

*"The baptism of John – was it from heaven or from men? Answer Me."* How they answer will determine whether they recognize Jesus' authority from God or from men. All recognized John as a true prophet of God. If they don't accept John's authority to baptize, they will not recognize Jesus' resulting ministry either

Soon after His baptism by John, John described Jesus *"as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"* (John 1:29). John prepared the way for the coming of Christ. They had heard earlier who Jesus was and what He would give. Many spoke of Jesus' authority: *"they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes"* (Mark 1:22); *"for with authority He commands even unclean spirits, and they obey Him"* (Mark 1:27); and that *"the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins"* (2:10).

By means of Jesus' question, He drives His opponents into a corner: "the baptism of John – was it from heaven or from men? Answer Me." If they answer that the baptism of John is from heaven (from God), they know very well Jesus' answer, 'then why did you not believe him?' On the other hand, if they answer that the baptism of John is from men, they were afraid of all the people. In Luke's account we read that they feared all the people would stone them (Luke 20:6).

So by what authority does Jesus do these things then? It is clear. The baptism of John is from heaven. John is the prophet of God. Jesus is the Son of God. So Jesus puts them into a dilemma, that they can't come out of. How will they answer His question? He calls for a response, "Answer Me!" How will they respond? Will they believe or will they harden their hearts? This brings us to verses 31-33.

### 3. The response to Jesus' authority (vv. 31-33)

They intended to put Jesus to the test, but Jesus now puts them to the test. What will they do with Jesus? Verses 31-33, *"And they reasoned among themselves, saying, 'If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say, 'why then did you not believe him?' But if we say, 'From men' – they feared the people, for all counted John to have been a prophet indeed. So they answered and said to Jesus, 'We do not know.' And Jesus answered and said to them, 'Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.'*

A decision in favor of John will support the case of Jesus. A decision against John will alienate the crowds from them as they regarded him as a prophet!

Their answer 'we don't know', is not an honest answer. They knew the answer. But it was expedient, handy. They didn't want to deal with the trouble. They opt for 'keeping an open mind' as we see today. But they were only playing it safe, as so many people do today. They don't want to commit. So here, they are afraid to take sides: "from heaven, or from men?" Their answer is not of one of trust and faith. Their answer is ultimately a rejection of Jesus and His authority.

Jesus' question to them was not a trap. Jesus was reaching out to them in His love and grace. He was giving them yet another opportunity to come to Him, to repent and confess their blindness and ask for sight. They heard all the marvelous reports: He opens eyes; He opens ears. He gives life to the dead! What will they do with Jesus?

Their words "we don't know" was not neutral. It's saying 'no' to Jesus. That's why He says what He does, *'Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.'* He already had told them by what authority He does those things. They know. If they do no answer regarding John then He need not answer them either.

For many, Jesus' authority is threatening, even dangerous. A call to faith is call to surrendering our life and control to Him.

Recall again those words in verse 18, the setting for these verses today. The scribes and chief priests *"sought how they might destroy Him"* (Jesus). They don't realize how Jesus will fulfill the sign through them. Earlier He said, *"Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up"* (John 2:19). He was speaking of His death and resurrection. He has the power to lay down His life, and He has the power to take it up again (John 10:17-18).

That resurrection power, His authority you see in the new communion of believers, a new life, a new temple!

The world's only hope is Christ. As Spurgeon says, 'Our only hope to be saved is the cross and empty tomb! Our only hope to slay our sin is the cross and empty tomb!' There Christ has defeated the king of terrors: Satan, and also death and hell. In Jesus, we meet God, our Savior and Lord. He so loved His people to death. He forgives sin and gives new life. He has the authority to do so! This is the One you should want to have as authority in your hearts and lives. This is the One you should want to obey.

He gives grace and His Holy Spirit. Submitting to Christ in faith means You confess He has the right to destroy your old way of life and sin and bring you into the new. It's surrendering your life to Him. You are acknowledging He has the authority to do these things in your life. The chief priests, the scribes and the elders wanted to hold on to their old ways and be in control of their own life. Christ offered life in Himself. They rejected Him; they rejected life – remaining in blindness, darkness, rebellion and death.

Through faith in risen Lord Jesus Christ, you have His promises. He dethrones Satan from your heart and life and breaks into your life with His resurrection life, securing forgiveness and new life, giving you love and joy.

Jesus says, *"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty . . . I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and Death"* (Revelation 1:8, 18). To God be the glory. Amen!