

Jesus and the Agnostics

Jesus' Last Days (Mark): Part 6

Mark 11:27-33 (Mt.21:23-27, Lk.20:1-8) 10/10/2020

Summary: Jesus's authority was his most striking characteristic. They ask a question to discredit Jesus, but with a single counterquestion he defends himself, exposes their motives, and discredits them as leaders. Their deliberation shows their fear of man and lack of fear of God or concern for the truth. When past revelation is rejected, further revelation is not given.

Jesus has awesome authority, and it's beautiful to us because it protects us from ourselves and others, it grants us all the freedoms we enjoy, and it authorizes us to act on his behalf without fear.

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Mark 11:27 They arrived again in Jerusalem, and while Jesus was walking in the temple courts, the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders came to him. ²⁸ "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you authority to do this?" ²⁹ Jesus replied, "I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. ³⁰ John's baptism--was it from heaven, or from men? Tell me!" ³¹ They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?' ³² But if we say, 'From men'...." (They feared the people, for everyone held that John really was a prophet.) ³³ So they answered Jesus, "We don't know." Jesus said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things."

Introduction

Mark's Emphasis on Jesus' Authority

I enjoyed watching the first season of The Chosen, about the life of Christ. If you were producing a program like that, how would you depict Jesus? What truth about Jesus would you want to stand out the most? Or to put it another way, if you could watch actual video footage of Jesus' ministry, what do you think would stand out to you as the most noticeable, striking truth about Jesus? His love? His power? His wisdom? If we look at the reactions of the people who really did see Jesus firsthand, we'd have to say the thing about him that really blew people away the most was his authority. That's what they commented on more than anything else.

Mark 1:22 The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.

The teachers of the law (scribes) were the most authoritative teachers there were. Jesus preached with far greater authority. Then Jesus drove out a demon.

Mark 1:27 The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching--and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him."

Of all the things they could have commented on, that's what amazed them most.

Mark devotes the opening chapters of his gospel to establishing Jesus' authority. He begins with John the Baptist pointing to him as the Messiah, the God the Father affirming him as his Son, then he calls men to follow him and they leave their careers and families and follow. Then he preaches his first sermon and drives out a demon and the people respond in those verses I just read, amazed with his authority. All of that is in ch.1: Messianic authority, divine authority, authoritative preaching, authority over demons, and authority over men. Then in ch.2 it's his authority to forgive sins. In ch.2 Jesus proves his authority to forgive sins.

Mark 2:10 But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...." He said to the paralytic, ¹¹ "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home."

That's really extreme authority because as the Pharisees correctly observed, only God has the authority to forgive sins.

Mark 4:41 They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

So the first quarter of the book of Mark is devoted mainly to establishing Jesus' awesome authority.

Matthew 28:18 ... "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

In Ephesians 1:21 says Jesus has been exalted **far above all rule and authority**. One thing you never see Jesus doing is asking permission from anyone to do anything. He needs a colt, he takes one. He rides into Jerusalem as a king, goes into the Temple and tears the place up. No one had that kind of authority. No matter how high up you were in the Israeli government—even if you were the high priest—you didn't have the right to do that. Jesus doesn't apply for a permit, he doesn't consult the authorities, he doesn't have a conference with the Twelve. He had absolute freedom to do and say whatever he decided to do and say. And he acted like it.

And that raised some eyebrows, to put it mildly. Will pick up right where we left off—the very next day after Jesus ransacked the Temple. He returns to the scene—right back to the Temple. You watch the sellers all backing away from him, still smarting from the welts on their backs from yesterday. And now here come the authorities.

Their Question

Mark 11:27 They arrived again in Jerusalem, and while Jesus was walking in the temple courts, the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders came to him.

These are representatives of the Sanhedrin—the ruling body of the nation of Israel. And they question Jesus.

28 "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you authority to do this?"

Everyone else always starts out, “Rabbi ...” or “Teacher,” but these guys just walk up and blurt out their questions without any respectful address. So you get the feeling it’s a hostile mood right from the start.

And you can imagine the people gathering and pressing in to see this confrontation. The most famous man in Israel, the miracle-worker, vs. the most powerful men in Israel.

How Sincere Is This Question?

Jesus forced the issue by tossing their temple and calling them a den of robbers. So they come, but instead of rebuking him, they ask this question. And we have to ask—is it a bad question? Is there anything wrong with asking Jesus about his authority? Isn’t it a perfectly natural question to ask someone who just ransacked the Temple?

If someone goes against the authorities, you need to know if they have the authority to do that—especially if they want you to join them. If someone wants you to join his movement and he’s on his way to go break all the windows in the White House, and he tells you, “Oh, don’t worry. I have full authorization to do it,” you might ask a few questions before you grab a brick and join him. And that’s not far from what Jesus just did here. When Jesus does things like cancel the whole kosher system, or change Sabbath observance because he’s the Lord of the Sabbath, reject the traditions of the elders; it’s a very natural question—does this guy really have the authority to do all that?

So their question is a perfectly natural question. There’s nothing wrong with asking about Jesus’ authority ... if the person asking it actually wants to know the answer. Jesus doesn’t rebuke them for asking the question, but he doesn’t answer it right away either. Why? Because the answer he gives depends on whether it’s an honest question. Are they really curious to discover the source of Jesus’ authority? Or could it be that they don’t really want to know the answer; they’re just trying to discredit Jesus? They know Jesus has no credentials. Could it be they just wanted to force Jesus to admit that publicly? Or do they want to make him sound like a kook when he claims to have special authority from God?

Either way—honest question or hostile trap—either way it’s a very big deal. The stakes are extremely high, because in Jewish law at the time, a false claim to religious authority carried the death penalty.¹ And these men happened to be the ones who decide whether someone’s claim to authority is genuine or false.

And I’m sure Jesus knew exactly why they were asking the question because unlike us, he knew what was in people’s hearts. One thing we always see about Jesus is he responds to people’s hearts, not strictly to their words. So he’s going to respond to their intentions, not just to the wording of their question. But it’s not enough for Jesus to know—he wants everyone to know.

And that’s not all. There’s something else Jesus wants to accomplish here. These men think Jesus is on trial to prove whether or not he has authority from God for what he’s doing. But whenever someone puts Jesus on trial, those people end up being the ones on trial, and it’s no different here. Jesus wants to put these men on trial and raise the question of whether they have authority from God or not. He wants to

¹ Edwards, 351.

expose whether or not they are worthy to be followed. Yesterday he called them a den of robbers—now he needs to justify that accusation. This is a showdown. Jesus isn't just trying to survive their trap. He's not playing defense. In an honor shame culture like this, where nothing is more important than honor in the eyes of the community, Jesus is going to make this a battle to the death. It's Jesus vs. the Sanhedrin, and one of them is going to walk away utterly discredited.

But at this point, it really does seem like they've got Jesus on the ropes. If they are trying to discredit Jesus, you have to hand it to them—this is a masterful away to do it. If they just walked up to him and said, "You don't have the authority to do this," that wouldn't have the impact of Jesus himself admitting to something that made him lose face. By asking this question, now they've put Jesus in a spot where no matter what he says, they'll be able to use his own words against him. But if he just refuses to answer, that would speak volumes too.

So Jesus needs to carefully respond to their question, he needs to defend his words and actions, he needs to expose their motives, and he needs to put them on trial and build a case against them before all the people. How is Jesus going to accomplish all that?

How would you do it? I know how I would do it. I would preach one sermon on who Jesus is, another sermon on Jesus' authority, then another sermon or two on their various sins and bad doctrines. As for their motives, I don't know what I would do there. I could try a line of questioning to see if I could tease it out somehow, but really, if someone is determined to hide his true motives, there really isn't much you can do.

Jesus' Question

So how does Jesus respond?

29 Jesus replied, "I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things."

What is that? Is Jesus dodging the question? No. Look what he says: "...**I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things.**" Jesus has no problem publicly answering this question. He commits to answer it as soon as they answer one question from him.

I love it that Jesus does this. They ask him about his authority, and his first response is to assert his authority. Now he's the teacher questioning them. The highest authorities in the nation are suddenly on trial before the uncredentialed, non-ordained Galilean carpenter.

He's interrogating them, but he lets them know up front exactly how many questions he's going to ask.

29 ... "I will ask you one question."

Just one? You're going to accomplish everything you need to accomplish in just one question? Yep. Normally, if you're dealing with someone who has bad motives that they want to keep secret, it takes an extensive line of skilled questioning to expose that. So Jesus, are you sure you don't want to leave the option open for a couple follow-up questions just in case? "No, just one question is all I'll need." "But what if they don't respond the right way?" Doesn't matter. One, single question will do the job no matter how they respond to it.

- If they give any answer at all, it will be safe for him to answer their question, so he commits to that right up front.
- So what question is Jesus going to ask that is guaranteed, no matter how they respond, to expose their motives,
- build a case against them, and
- answer the question of whether or not they have spiritual authority,
- prove that Jesus does have authority?

John the Baptist

Here it is:

30 John's baptism--was it from heaven, or from men? Tell me!

If Jesus had a mic, he could drop it right here because he just accomplished every one of his objectives. Right at the moment they thought they sprung their trap on Jesus, he says, “Can you just take a few steps to your left? See that big X on the ground—the one with the net over it? Yeah, stand right there.” And they have no choice—there’s no where else for them to go.

Their Response

And if it’s not immediately obvious to you how mentioning John the Baptist puts them in such a bind, it’s obvious enough to them. They feel the pinch immediately.

“Thumbs up or thumbs down on John the Baptist?”

“Um, can you give us a second?”

31 They discussed it among themselves

Their Weasely Reasoning

Why? Why do they have to talk it over? They sent a delegation to check John out back when he was alive,² and they made their assessment back then. So for a long time they have had a definite position on John. Nothing’s changed since John died. They know exactly what their opinion of John is, why do they need to have a conference about it? Well, let’s listen in.

31 ... "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?' ³² But if we say, 'From men'...." (They feared the people, for everyone held that John really was a prophet.)

I don’t know if this conference irritates you as much as it irritates me, but these two verses just set my teeth on edge. I have zero patience for weasely answers. Look at what they’re saying. “If we say yes, this will be the result, but if we say no, then this ...” How about you just tell the truth? It’s not a complicated question. All Jesus did was ask your opinion. Do you think he was from God or not?

This is what people hate about politicians. You ask their opinion on something and they can’t answer until they do a focus group. When I hear a politician doing that it’s like fingernails on a chalkboard. On those rare occasions when you get someone running for office who just says what he thinks, and you can tell he’s not even thinking about how it will effect his popularity, that’s such a breath of fresh air it makes you want to vote for him even if you disagree with his opinion. If We Say “From Heaven” But John’s baptism was the third rail of Jewish politics back then. They don’t want to touch it. We’ve seen before that John’s baptism is shorthand for the whole message John preached. So Jesus is asking whether John’s message that he preached was from God, or if it was merely human in origin. Did it carry only human authority like everyone else’s opinions, or did it carry divine authority? They consider the first option in v.31.

31 ... "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?'

What didn’t they believe specially? His testimony about Jesus.

² John 1:19ff.

John's Testimony

When they ask Jesus about his authority and Jesus brings up John the Baptist, he's not changing the subject. He brings up John the Baptist because the question they're asking has already been answered by John.

Mark 1:7 And this was his message: "After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. 8 I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

They wish they could say, "Yes, John's message was from God!" They want to say that for political reasons. But they can't.

31 ... "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?'"

So they turn their attention to the other option.

If We Say "From Men"

32 But if we say, 'From men'"

They don't even finish the sentence. They bring up that option and just say, "Let's not even go there." That's a nonstarter. Why?

Worthless Watchdogs

32 ... (They feared the people, for everyone held that John really was a prophet.)

Think about that. They know that everyone believes John was a prophet from God. Were the people wrong? If so, why haven't these spiritual leaders spent the last couple years warning the people of Israel, "John was a false prophet! Don't believe his teaching." Did they believe John was leading the entire nation astray, but they refused to tell anyone? How much more worthless could they be? They're like the false prophets of Isaiah's time.

Isaiah 56:10 Israel's watchmen ... are all mute dogs, they cannot bark.

This would be like if you saw your kids about to drink poison, but you didn't say anything because you didn't want to lose popularity with them.

Their Weasely Answer

So these guys have their weasely conference and try to come up with the best possible answer. These are the smartest minds in the nation—the best and the brightest, the scholars. And they put their heads together, combine all their knowledge and intelligence, they consider the ramifications of saying yes, and the implications of saying no, they take all relevant factors under consideration, and the finally come up with an answer.

33 So they answered Jesus, "We don't know."

That is the most intelligent answer they can come up with. Can you imagine how hard it was for these proud, arrogant men to utter those words? My guess is this was the first time they ever gave an answer like that about *any* religious question.

Can you imagine all the people standing around hearing this—in that honor/shame culture? "You don't know? The most important religious question of our age—whether John the Baptist was from God or not, and you have no idea?"

32 ... everyone held that John really was a prophet.

So this is a religious question that every Tom, Dick, and Harry knew the answer to. The spiritual leaders of Israel are the only ones in the whole nation who don't know the answer?

When they say they don't know, they publicly disqualify themselves from leadership. And yet they are still willing to publicly admit their ignorance because Jesus had put them into such a tight corner that any other answer they gave would be even worse.

Agnosticism

The best they can do is try to hide behind agnosticism—a tactic that has endured to this day. In fact, in many circles, agnosticism about Jesus is considered academically respectable, which is amazing when you consider what the word means. *Agnostic* is a compound word: *gnosis* (knowledge) and *a* (a particle of negation). So it means “no knowledge.” Or to use the Latin term, *ignoramus*. An agnostic is a self-proclaimed *ignoramus*. And so when someone claims to be agnostic I don't argue with that. No doubt there are some agnostics who really are genuinely ignorant. But most agnostics are probably like the agnostics Jesus was talking to in this passage. They weren't really ignorant. They just claimed to be agnostic. And they did it, not for lack of information, but for lack of courage. They just simply didn't have the backbone to accept the ramifications of what they knew to be true. Agnosticism is the oldest trick in the book for hiding a bias against the truth.

And in our day, so many people have used that tactic that it has become a respectable position. They actually take intellectual pride in their ignorance. They say, “Nobody really knows if there's a God. You can't know. We're the only ones smart enough to realize that it's impossible to know.” And if you're not agnostic, it's only because you are a backward, primitive Neanderthal who believes in superstition. They are the proud *ignoramuses*.

Fear of Man

So back to the men in Mark 11. Were they true *ignoramuses* or were they lying when they said they didn't know? We can't say for sure. Odds are, it wasn't so much a matter of not knowing but rather not caring.

They didn't care if John was from God or not. What did they care about? Popular opinion. They had no fear of God; they only feared men.³

11:18 The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching.

11:32 (They feared the people, for everyone held that John really was a prophet.)

12:12 Then they looked for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken the parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd; so they left him and went away.

Fear of man and living for popularity will blind you to the truth. It will keep you from making judgments on unpopular truths. People like that claim to be keeping an open mind, but in reality they are just shuffling between skepticism, unbelief, and cowardice and the result is spiritual blindness.

³ As weasely as that is, there is an upside. When you have leaders with no integrity who operate completely based on fear of man, God actually uses that to protect his people. These men would have killed Jesus on the spot, but they couldn't because of their fear. And even now, there are politicians who hate Christians and would do who knows what to us if it weren't for their fear of popular opinion and the favor we have in the eyes of millions of people.

Asked and Answered

So Jesus was right—all it took was this one question, and they are completely stymied. And what's really ingenious about this is the fact that all Jesus is doing with his question is forcing them to answer their own question. He's saying, "Everybody knows, I'm with John. So give your verdict on him, and that will be your verdict on me."

And that shows us something about how God reveals truth. Once a fact has been established, it doesn't have to be revisited or re-established. God will respond to genuine doubts (like Thomas), he'll give as much evidence as we need, but God does not cater to unbelief. If you reject what God already said, don't expect him to say anything else to you.

So often we think we would have more faith if God would just give different evidence than the evidence he has given. If he would just answer this prayer, if he would just do this thing, perform that miracle, give me something more aligned with my tastes—then I'd really pay attention. But over and over in Scripture we learn there is no better evidence than the testimony of a prophet of God. That's more reliable than scientific evidence, it's more reliable than philosophical evidence, logical evidence, historical evidence—it's more reliable than your own senses. Your eyes and ears frequently lie to you. God's Word never does. People claim they would believe if they just had better evidence than Scripture. But there is no such thing.

Luke 16:31 "He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

God provides evidence, and if you don't have the courage to make a judgment based on that evidence, he'll let you go blind.

Jesus' Response

So Jesus wanted to put these men on trial and expose their lack of authority—to show them unfit for spiritual leadership. Mission accomplished there. He asks the most important theological question of the day, a question that any average Joe on the street could easily answer, and they put their heads together and come up with the answer, "We have no idea."

Another objective was to defend his own words and actions. Mission accomplished there as well. He just points to the testimony of the greatest prophet of all time who said Jesus was even greater.

What about his objective of exposing their motives? When they say they don't know, Jesus says, "**Neither will I tell you ...**" Notice the word **neither**. When you say, "Neither will I," you're saying, "That thing you just said you won't do—I won't do it either." So when Jesus says, "I won't tell you either," he's pointing out what was already obvious, namely, that when they said, "We don't know," what they really meant us, "We refuse to tell." They knew full well what their opinion of John was, but they refused to tell because they were a bunch of political weasels. And Jesus exposes that when he says, "I you won't talk, neither will I." Basically what he's saying is, "If we can't have an honest conversation, then we're not going to have any conversation." What would be the point? It is a waste of time. You can have a profitable conversation with someone who disagrees with you. But talking to someone who won't say what they really think, that's a total waste of time, waste of breath, and always does more harm than good. So because of their dishonesty, they lose the opportunity of a lifetime—to have a conversation with God in human flesh.

Jesus Did Answer

Jesus refuses to give them a direct answer. Although—to anyone with ears to hear, Jesus does give a clear answer by pointing to John. What kind of authority does he have? Messianic authority. Who gave it to him? God. All through his ministry, Jesus' favorite title for himself was *son of man*—from Daniel 7. What kind of authority do I have? I'm the one who receives authority, glory and sovereign power, and all

peoples, nations and men of every language will worshiped me. My dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and my kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. (Daniel 7:14)

Conclusion

So, what's the point of this passage? For one thing it shows that Jesus was way smarter than the smartest men around, which is fun to watch. But the main point of the passage is very simple: Jesus has awesome authority—complete authorization to do whatever he chooses to do. But the leaders of Israel at the time refused to accept that, so Jesus stopped talking to them. What are the implications for us? Bow the knee to Jesus' authority and accept what God has already said, otherwise he'll stop talking to you as well.

That's the basic summary, but when we're dealing with attributes of Christ, we need more than just a summary. We need to see what's glorious and marvelous and soul-satisfying about that attribute. Our chief goal in life is to increase our love for God. And loving God means loving what he's like—his attributes. And one of his attributes is his authority. So it's crucial that we learn to love Christ's authority. So let's take a moment just to gaze at this facet of his glory and see if we can increase our delight in it a notch.

It's natural, in our fallen state, to rebel against authority. No one has to teach you to do that—it's starts way before you learn how to walk or talk. And people don't grow out of it either. When I was a kid, it was fashionable for everyone to drive around with "Question Authority" bumper stickers. If you say something about wives submitting to their husbands in our secular culture today you'll be taken as a knuckle-dragging Neanderthal.

Why is there so much resistance to the concept of authority? If you asked, my guess is most people would say it's because they value freedom. We don't want to be told what we can and can't do.

And as Christians, we're no different. We like our freedom too, right? We want what we want, and we're not crazy about restrictions that get in the way. We know we have to *submit* to Christ's authority, but how can we learn to *love* Christ's authority? There are three angles that you can look at this attribute from that show it's glory. First, we love his authority because it protects us.

Protective Authority

Jesus' Authority Protects us from Ourselves

If someone tells me they don't want Jesus restricting their freedom, my first response is, "Yes you do. You should because without it you would destroy yourself." The only freedoms Jesus restricts are freedoms that would harm you. When Jesus says, 'no' to something you want, it's always because that thing wouldn't be good. Like when a parent tells a 3-year-old, 'No, you can't jump off the roof with an umbrella to see if you'll float down like Mary Poppins.'" All God's laws are like that. Every single thing the Lord tells us no to, we'll thank him for it once we see the full story. We love Jesus' authority because it saves us from ourselves. It protects us from the abject misery we would drive ourselves to if we did whatever we wanted.

Jesus' Authority Protects Us from Others

His authority protects us from our own dumb decisions, and it also protects us from others. This world is filled with people who will hurt you if some strong authority doesn't restrict their freedom to do that, then there's nothing to stop them.

This has become clear in the whole discussion about replacing police with social workers. To some people that sounds like a great idea on paper, but when you're the victim of a violent crime, suddenly you're in favor of full funding of the police. If someone breaks into my house and they're stealing all my stuff, and they are threatening my life and assaulting my family, don't send a counselor. I want someone

with a badge and a gun. The higher the authority the better. Ideally, the secret service would show up and say, “We need to secure this area for the President.” Bring a few Navy seals while you’re at it. We need people with enough authority to protect us.

There are hundreds of millions of people in this world who have very little freedom. They are living under restrictions you and I could hardly imagine living with. In some cases they are restrictions imposed by an oppressive government. In other cases it’s criminals or warlords the government won’t or can’t do anything about. For others it might be poverty.

If you were one of those people with hardly any freedom—you couldn’t travel, you couldn’t leave your house without risking your life, you couldn’t buy things you needed—in you were in that situation, wouldn’t you love it if some authority came along who was powerful enough and good enough to say, “I have more power than the gangs, more power than the warlords, more power than the government dictator—I have authority over all that, and I say to you—feel free to go where you want to go, day or night, and nothing’s going to happen to you.”

Someone with a whole lot of authority is great to have around—if that person is your friend. Especially if his authority is so great, he not only has authority over people, but he even has authority over the creation, over sickness and disease, over history. Imagine he even has authority to forgive sins! What could be better than to have someone like that as a friend? Or a brother?

Freeing Authority

So we love the authority of Christ because it protects us from us and because it protects us from others. That’s his protective authority. But that’s not all. We also love what I’ll call his *freeing* authority. Authority doesn’t just restrict freedom. Another function of authority is to grant freedoms.

If you go to someone who says he hates authority and you give him a VIP backstage pass at a concert of his favorite band, if he’s happy about that, that means he likes authority. What is a backstage pass? It’s something that grants you the authority to go backstage. Whoever is in charge of backstage passes says 99% of concert goers can’t come back there, which is good, because if everyone could go back there it wouldn’t be any fun for anyone. That person has enough authority to say no one else can go back there, but you’re free to walk right past security and do whatever people do backstage at a concert. Even people who claim to hate authority like that authority.

All of you came here tonight and just walked in. You can’t do that with any of the other houses on this block—which is good, because not even the anti-authority people want to live in a place where anyone and everyone can just walk into your house, pour a drink, and help themselves to a meal. But at this house, you can do it because the owners have granted that freedom.

There are countless privileges we have in life because some authority has granted them. People who resist authority are under the illusion that if there were no authorities, they would have full freedom. Wrong. We’re not free by default. All freedom is granted by God (or by someone to whom God delegated the ability to grant a freedom). Without someone in authority granting you freedom, you have no freedom.

People who claim they don’t like authority don’t really understand what they’re saying. What they want isn’t to be free from authority. What they really want is to have full authority to carry out their will. It’s not really God’s authority they hate; it’s God’s will.

Being under authority doesn’t diminish freedom. Just the opposite. All freedom that we enjoy derives from authority.

Delegated Authority

We love his protective authority, we love his freeing authority, and one more: delegated authority. When someone in authority delegates authority to you, no lesser authority can question it.

When I’m at work, I can use the emergency turnarounds on the highway because CDOT grants me that privilege. And not even the police have the authority to prevent that, because on the highway, CDOT

has greater authority (since they own the highways). Now, if I higher authority came along, that would be different. If the President's motorcade rolled through, the secret service could tell me exactly where I could and couldn't go and CDOT would have zero say in the matter.

But you and I work for an employer who is far above all rule and authority, the Lord Jesus Christ. And so when he tells us to preach the gospel to all people, or to minister to people with our spiritual gifts, no one has the right to stop us. Nor do we need anyone's permission or approval. If someone tells you to stop proclaiming God's Word, it doesn't matter if it's your elder board at church, the Governor, or the Congress, or an angry mob—no one has the authority to override the authority that has been delegated to you to carry out the work of Christ in the world. They can tell you you're not allowed to do it on their property, but no one—no government, no parent, no supreme court—no authority at any level in any place has the right to restrict you from doing what God commanded you to do. You are literally on a mission from God.

Some people work for the Mayor, some people work for the Governor, some people work for the President—we work for Jesus Christ, who, at the great commission, said, "All authority has been given to me." Think of that claim. This poor Galilean carpenter with no money, no political position, no educational credentials comes along and says "All authority belongs to me." "All authority?" Yeah. "Given to you?" "Yes!

It is a marvelous thing that, as his people, we have the grand privilege of living under his protective, freedom-giving, and authorizing authority that no one can override because there is no higher authority.