

# By What Authority?

Mark 11:27-33

*Halifax: 5 July 2020*

## **Introduction:**

Today we will continue our sermon series in Mark's Gospel.

Since His arrival at Jerusalem, Jesus has been much more open about His identity.

- Prior to this, whenever people recognised that He was the Messiah, He had told them to keep quiet about it—and with good reason.
  - The people of Jesus' day, including His own disciples, did not understand that as the Messiah, Jesus must go to the cross to bear His people's sins.
  - They envisioned that He would raise up an army to free them from the dominion of the Romans and establish a worldly kingdom.
- But even just before arriving in Jerusalem, Jesus had allowed blind Bartimaeus (whom He healed) to openly call Him the Son of David, a title that was used to refer to the Messiah,
- And upon arriving in Jerusalem, He had taken two actions by which He intentionally testified that He was the Christ:
  - First, He had ridden into Jerusalem on a donkey while allowing the crowds to praise and honour Him, which was prophesied as something the Messiah would do in Zechariah 9:9.
  - Second, He had driven out from the temple those who were selling animals for sacrifices and who were exchanging money in the very courts of God's house that were meant to be used for prayer and instruction.

To be sure, this had gotten the attention of the leaders of the Jewish church.

- We are told in Mark 11:18 that they began to discuss among themselves how they might destroy Him.
  - Mark 11:18 says: **And the scribes and chief priests heard it and sought how they might destroy Him; for they feared Him, because all the people were astonished at His teaching.**
    - This was the dynamic—they are looking for ways to get rid of Him, but they are afraid of what the people might think if they do.
- They waste no time. On the following day (Tuesday), when Jesus returns to the temple precincts and is teaching there—something that was often done in the portico that surrounded the massive courtyard of the Gentiles (the size of 36 football fields)—
  - it is obvious that the Jewish priests and doctors and elders had been busy scheming the night before because they come in various groups with prepared questions to throw at Him.
    - I always refer to this as “Stump Jesus Day.”
    - Their goal is to entrap Him, but as we will see, they miserably fail.

Today, we will look at their first effort, which is found in Mark 11:27-33.

- With this first line of questioning, they challenge Jesus about the source of His authority to do the things He has been doing—riding into Jerusalem the way He did and driving out the merchants and the moneychangers.

Listen as I read this account to you from Mark 11:27-33. The Word of God.

**Mark 11:27-33: Then they came again to Jerusalem. And as He was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came to Him. <sup>28</sup> And they said to Him, “By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority to do these things?” <sup>29</sup> But Jesus answered and said to them, “I also will ask you one question; then answer Me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things: <sup>30</sup> The baptism of John—was it from heaven or from men? Answer Me.” <sup>31</sup> And they reasoned among themselves, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ He will say, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’ <sup>32</sup> But if we say, ‘From men’ ” —they feared the people, for all counted John to have been a prophet indeed. <sup>33</sup> 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.”**

May the Lord add His blessing to the reading and preaching of His holy Word.

- Understand that this was the very next day as Jesus went up early in the morning to teach. Truly, these Jewish leaders wasted no time in launching their attack.
- Let’s begin by looking at their principal inquiry here:

### **I. “By what authority?”**

A. This is actually a very important question.

1. The language they use here suggests *by what sort of authority*—what is the nature of the authority by which you are acting?
  - The second question flows from this—“Who gave you this authority?”
  - They wanted to discredit Him as one who was not duly ordained—one who had taken authority that God had not given Him.
    - The Bible is clear that those who teach must be sent by God and that no one is to take this honour to himself.
    - We have seen how God has given qualifications that elders and pastors must meet, and appointed that they be selected by the people and ordained by those who are already duly appointed elders and ministers.
  - They knew that Jesus had not been ordained by the Jewish church.
    - And He was claiming greater authority than any scribe or elder.
    - He had astonished the people with the authority by which He spoke—and now He had come into Jerusalem and cleansed the temple.
    - What kind of authority was He claiming for Himself?
2. Jesus considered this “by what authority” question an important enough question that He takes it up, makes it more pointed, and turns it back on them about John the Baptistiser...

- asking them if the baptism of John was from heaven or from men.
  - That gets right to the heart of the matter.
    - Had God sent John, or did his commission come from men?
      - If from God, his ministry must be recognised and received.
      - If from men, it could be disregarded because no mere human authority can institute ordinances from God pertaining to His worship.
        - Men often attempt to do so, but it is not their place.
    - That is the reason we do not go along with the traditional holy days that have grown up in various branches of the church.
      - In the New Testament, we find warrant for the observance of the Lord's Day as the Christian Sabbath, but we do not find that God has instituted the observance of any other days.
    - But even more importantly, John's primary message was that the kingdom of God was at hand because the Messiah was here.
      - And he had pointed to Jesus as the coming One
      - Was that a message from men or was it from God?
- B. "By what authority?" is a question that should often be considered.
1. Ultimately, everything you do should have God's authorisation.
    - Some things require a direct warrant from God in His word—such as how we worship or with whom we may have sex.
    - In other matters, we are authorised to decide what we want to do—such as what we will have for supper or what kind of career we will enter—
      - all under the bounds that God has set of course—He has not authorised you to take a career in organised crime or pornography, but you can decide if you want to be butcher or a baker—you have His authorisation to choose.
  2. You also must determine when God has given others authority over you—if they have authority from God.
    - a. Has God authorised your parents to tell you at what hour they want you to come home?
      - Yes, unless you are out of their home or there is some very important reason for you to disobey—for example, if it is just that they don't want you to go to church because they are opposed to the Lord.
    - b. Has God given your parents or the elders of your church (or both) the authority to forbid you to marry an unbeliever or an ungodly person?
      - The answer is that you are not authorised to marry an unbeliever, but only to marry in the Lord—and your parents and the elders have authority to prohibit such a marriage.
      - Can either tell you who you must marry?

- No, marriage should always be by mutual consent of both parties who are entering into the marriage.
- c. Does a husband, as head of his home, have the authority to ask his wife to violate her conscience about something like engaging in a certain activity on the Lord's Day that she is not comfortable with?
  - If it is a doubtful matter, no, he does not have that authority.
  - But what if it is going to church? Then yes, she ought to submit to him.
  - But what if it is going to a corrupt church? Then it is more tricky. How corrupt is the church? And why does he want her to go there?
- d. We have been challenged to think about authority with the civil magistrate calling for lockdowns during the coronavirus.
  - As those authorised to look after public safety, they have some authority to direct us, but where does that authority begin and end?
    - Do they have authority to limit our church services during a pandemic, or is this a matter in which the Lord has given the elders the final say?
  - The Bible calls us to obey the civil magistrate in matters about which they are authorised to speak (such as paying taxes),
    - but we must consider into what they are authorised to speak.
  - They can never command us to do something that is sinful, and neither can church leaders, but staying away from worship when you might infect others is not sinful in itself.
    - For this reason, the session of this church took the position that our default position during the pandemic was obedience to the civil magistrate, but we began to appeal to them when they seemed to be giving worship less priority than we thought they ought.
    - If they were to decide that what we preach is bad for society or dangerous, they would have no authority from God to say that (unless we were preaching heresy) and we would be obliged to continue our worship despite persecution—the way our brothers and sisters in many places do.

TRANS> But the most important question is indeed about the authority of Jesus... the question these Jewish leaders asked.

### C. By what authority did Jesus of Nazareth do the things that He did?

1. He had done these things at Jerusalem that only the Messiah would be authorised to do.
  - Riding in to Jerusalem on a donkey in fulfilment of Zachariah 9:9 to cries of "Hosanna! O save us," and "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord," and "Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that comes in the name of the LORD."
  - And coming into the temple to drive out the moneychangers and those selling animals for sacrifice and declaring that His Father's house was to be a house of prayer for all nations.

- Who had commissioned Him to do these things? What kind of authority was He exercising—for He had not been ordained by the church.
2. Prophets were not ordained by the church.
- They were called directly by God, but they were given signs and prophecies by which they were confirmed as having been sent by God.
    - Think of Moses—he announced the ten plagues that all fell upon Egypt.
    - They came when he said they would and were removed when he said.
    - He stretched his staff over the Red Sea and it opened so that Israel crossed on dry ground.
      - God always made it clear that His prophets were sent by Him.
  - And so it had been with Jesus.
    - Throughout His ministry He had done all kinds of signs to show that He had been sent by God—healing the sick, cleansing lepers, casting out demons, causing the deaf to hear.
    - Just recently He had given sight to a blind man who had called Him the Son of David, and since coming to Jerusalem, He had raised Lazarus from the dead even though he had been dead long enough that his body was starting to decay.
    - And His manner of doing these things had been with authority, as had His teaching—instead of saying “The Lord says,” He said, “I say,” and in commanding demons or healing the sick, He acted in His own name, not in the name of the Lord.
      - He called God His Father and testified that He had been sent by Him.
3. Either He was committing terrible blasphemy or He was the Lord and the Messiah.
- No one had ever spoken as He spoke—so that everyone marvelled at His authority... no prophet had spoken as He spoke.
    - Rather than speaking in the Lord’s name as they did, He spoke as if He Himself was the LORD.
    - If He is who He says He is—if His authority is divine—then He must be obeyed and trusted.
    - If not, He must be rejected as a wicked imposter.
  - The question about His authority was one that the Jewish leaders should have been asking.
    - It was their duty as the shepherds of God’s people to lead the people to follow Him and receive Him if He was the Messiah,
      - and it was their duty to reject Him if He was not.
    - To be wrong about Him either way is to be ruined—utterly ruined.

## II. Jesus exposes the hypocrisy of these men who come to ask Him about the source of His authority.

- A. They were not asking an honest question. They did not really want to know.
1. This was obvious from the very fact that they were asking this question now.
    - By now, it should have been clear to anyone who wanted to know—and especially to these leaders—that Jesus was the Messiah.
    - As one of these Jewish leaders had said to Jesus in secret, “No one can do things you do unless he has been sent by God.”
  2. What’s more, we have already seen that when Jesus drove out the ones making the temple into a house of merchandise, these leaders began to look for a way to destroy Him.
    - They were not asking about His authority to be enlightened, they were asking in an effort to entrap Him—to find an occasion against Him that they might destroy Him because they rejected God’s authority.
- B. Jesus exposes them by asking them about John who had been sent by God as a prophet to prepare the way of Jesus—to announce His coming.
1. Jesus responds to their question with a question, the way good teachers in His day often responded:
    - **Mark 11:29-30: But Jesus answered and said to them, “I also will ask you one question; then answer Me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things: <sup>30</sup> The baptism of John—was it from heaven or from men? Answer Me.”**
    - a. He is not avoiding their question at all. He is exposing their insincerity.
      - They had sent a delegation to investigate John, yet they had never announced a verdict concerning him, nor had they submitted to his baptism as the one who was sent to prepare the way of the LORD Messiah.
        - John was the prophet that God had sent first to begin the preaching of the gospel; and to reject this earlier revelation from God would set the course for rejecting the revealing of Christ.
      - With their response to John, they had made it clear that they were not open to hearing the voice of God—they had begun to suppress His call.
        - God is not interested in giving anyone greater revelation if they have not accepted the revelation He has already given them.
        - Everyone has ample evidence of His creation, for God’s handwriting is on everything that He has made.
          - If you reject that, you will certainly not accept what God’s prophets have said.
          - How can you believe in prophets that speak for God if you don’t even acknowledge God as your creator and judge?
        - For Jesus to declare His own authority when they had not even yet accepted John’s authority would be to deny that John had been sent by

God... as if to say, “Oh, well, if you did not accept what God told you through John, maybe you will accept what I am revealing.”

- No. By rejecting John’s testimony they showed that they were opposed to God’s testimony.
  - People who deny God as creator but then claim that if God gave them miracles and signs, they would believe, are liars.
2. See how the hypocrisy of these men is clearly exposed by Jesus’ question about John.
- a. You can tell by how they respond that they are not interested in the truth.
    - Look at verse 31-32: **And they reasoned among themselves, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ He will say, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’<sup>32</sup> But if we say, ‘From men’ ” —they feared the people, for all counted John to have been a prophet indeed.**
    - Their concern is not whether John was sent by God—if that is true or false—but whether it would be safe or unsafe to say what they believed.
      - If they admit that he was from God, Jesus will ask why they didn’t believe him; and that would make them look bad because they certainly don’t want to act on what John taught...
      - But if they deny the truth, they will look bad in front of the people because God had made it clear that John was a prophet...
        - They show that they have no concern about the authority of God and about right and wrong here!
  - b. So they answer in verse 33 that “We do not know.”
    - It mortified them to say this because they knew that they ought to know, but it was better than either denying or affirming it.
      - They could play the agnostic—that we don’t have enough information—this is what so many people do and it is so harmful.
      - There is plenty of information for anyone who wants to know the truth.
        - It is not a lack of evidence, but a lack of willingness to embrace the truth.
  - c. So Jesus responds appropriately.
    - **v. 33: “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.”**
    - These words contain in them the assertion that it is not that they do not know, but that they are unwilling to say—for He says, “Neither will I tell you,” not “Neither do I know where My authority is from, but as you are unwilling to tell Me about the source of John’s authority, I am unwilling to tell you about My authority.”
      - Beware—this is how our Lord works.
      - If you are unwilling to accept what has already been shown to you, don’t expect God to show you anything more.

TRANS> How masterfully Jesus exposes their hypocrisy!

C. How gracious it was of Him to expose them.

1. Yes, it was gracious for their own sake.
  - They needed to see that they were on a terrible trajectory—that they were rejecting God’s counsel against themselves.
  - This could only lead to their own destruction.
    - What a gracious thing it is when our Lord exposes us so that we might see what we are doing, the wickedness of suppressing His truth.
    - He does this so that we might repent and change our ways.
  - But oh how much worse it will be if they refuse to repent even now!
    - To refuse now means that they will have to harden themselves twice as much if they do not receive God’s testimony now!
2. Jesus exposure of these men was also a gracious act for the sake of His disciples.
  - These men were their esteemed leaders—appointed by God to govern His church.
    - Our default position should be to follow such men—until it is clear that they are not following the LORD.
    - Our Lord makes it clear—and it is wrong of us to keep on following leaders once it is clear that they are not speaking the truth.
      - To follow them in their rejection of Jesus would be to follow them in rebellion against God all the way to eternal destruction in hell.
  - Once you find out that a minister rejects Jesus as the only way of salvation, or that he rejects the Bible as the word of God, or that he rejects the virgin birth and the bodily resurrection of Jesus (as many ministers do),
    - then he is no longer a leader to follow unless you want to go to ruin with him.
    - The same is true if you learn that he rejects what God says about right and wrong—about sexual immorality or about the murder of unborn children... who is he following then? God or man?
  - Jesus shows us here that if we respect God’s authority, we must not blindly follow those who claim to be His ministers but reject His authority.
    - Anyone that did that in Jesus day ended up rejecting Jesus.
    - It is the same today. Religious authorities are only right when they submit to God’s authority.

TRANS> But I tell you what you ought to do:

**III. Behold the LORD as Lord—as Lord of all—as the one who has all authority—as your authority!**

A. You have every reason to be confident of His authority!

1. Based on His testimony from Mark so far—



- Where we have seen how the people were astonished at His authority to cast out demons, to preach in His own name, to heal the sick, to raise the dead, to feed the five thousand, to show that He is the Messiah.
  - By all this, He has testified that He has authority over all things.
2. But we have even more reason to be confident that His authority is the authority of God...
- For now we know that He went to the cross with our sins and that for our sins He died but then rose again for our acceptance and justification.
    - Truly, He has authority to forgive sin and to raise up all who come to Him for salvation.
    - Not only did He rise from the dead, but we now know that He also ascended into heaven to sit at the Father's right hand until He makes all of His enemies His footstool.
      - And we know that He poured out His Holy Spirit on the church to empower her to be His witness to all nations so that as a sign she spoke in tongues of the nations.
    - And now there is an even greater witness in that the church has gone out to the nations people from all different lands and languages and cultures have believed and been transformed by His salvation.
      - Truly He is Lord of all.
    - And that is still not all that we have been given to make us confident that He is truly the LORD from heaven.
      - He also testified before He died, that the temple at Jerusalem would be destroyed so that there would not be one stone upon another, and in less than forty years, it was fulfilled—in 70 AD.
      - By this He testified that His authority is not to be trifled with.
        - The fig tree that withered up from the roots was a picture of this coming destruction.
        - He is the LORD. He has all authority in heaven and earth and He will judge the world at the last day.
3. If you do not confess Him as LORD in the face of all of this... if you claim that you do not know about Him...
- you are as insincere as these men were who said that they could not know about if John's baptism was from God or man.
  - Don't kid yourself. God has spoken.
    - What confidence you ought to have in His word.

B. And I say, what boldness it ought to give you when you see His authority!

1. Boldness in the world to testify with confidence about Jesus and all that we are told in God's word...
  - The world has no authority to say that what God calls an abomination is good.

- It is not for you to embrace feminism or oppression, but federal headship of a man who is responsible to lead his wife and children in the Lord.
  - You don't need to be ashamed—Jesus has authority.
2. And you should have boldness in your witness about the gospel...
    - That faith in Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation and that until one believes, the wrath of God remains on them.
    - There is no call for doubt or equivocation about that.
  3. And you should have boldness in your prayers.
    - Jesus has authority to answer them. As we saw last week, He can remove mountains that stand in the way of His kingdom—He will move them when He hears the prayer of faith.
  4. And you should have boldness in your ministry to others.
    - Not the angry kind of boldness that speaks more about insecurity, but the kind of the boldness that stands firm on the truth of God... that ministers patiently and gently, yet with unshakable confidence because Jesus rules and reigns!
    - Don't be afraid to minister to each other in His name.
- C. And I say, what consolation it ought to give you when you see His authority!
1. The consolation that comes from knowing that Jesus has authority to forgive sin.
    - Nothing is more disconcerting than to have looming over you the day of judgment—to know that you will stand before God but not know how you will stand.
    - What a dreadful thing—the prospect that you might be rejected in that day.
    - But with a Saviour like Jesus who is the Son of God who was crucified and who solemnly testifies that He will receive all who come to Him for forgiveness and eternal life...
      - You have every reason to be comforted.
      - Not at all in thinking that He'd never punish anyone or that you must be better than others—but in knowing that no matter how wretched you are as a sinner before God, the Son of God who bled for sinners will make His promise good to receive all who come to Him for mercy.
  - There is that consolation...
  2. And there is also the consolation that Jesus, having all authority, will judge the nations in righteousness.
    - That He will conquer Satan and the world and even our own flesh and that He will conquer death itself for all His people.
      - He has full authority to do this.
    - You see all the corruption and all the sin in the world, but remember that Jesus sees it too and that He hates it a lot more than you do.
      - Be comforted... He will deal with it once and for all.
      - Be of good cheer, He has overcome the world. He will cast Satan into the pit. He will restore righteousness.

3. And there is also consolation for you that Jesus, with all His authority, will build His church and establish her in holiness forever.
  - We see the church's sin, we see her weakness, we see her capitulation.
  - We wonder how we will be able to stand and how we can ever be what God has called to us to be.
  - I will tell you—it is because of the authority of Jesus and His power to save.
    - His kingdom will come. He will gather in all His elect and then He will perfect all that concerns us.
    - He can do it because He has all authority.

**Conclusion:**

What kind of authority does He have? Divine authority. The authority of God.

Who gave Him this authority? God the Father sent Him and gave Him this authority as mediator when He pleased Him and finished the work of our redemption.

That is authority that cannot fail. Embrace it. Embrace it in your weakness.

- It is enough even if in your weakness you embrace it weakly...
  - because your welfare is not based in how well you hold to Him but in who He is that you hold to—and in the authority that He has.