

“BY WHAT AUTHORITY DO YOU DO THESE THINGS?”

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Mark 11:27-33

Introduction.

On Monday Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey to the triumphant cheers of a great crowd. On Tuesday Jesus came into the massive Court of the Gentiles at the Temple and threw over tables and chased out those who had turned the House of Prayer into a den of robbers.

Today is Wednesday and Jesus returns to the same Court of the Gentiles and as the other Gospel writers tell us Jesus walked through the Temple area teaching and preaching the Gospel, the Gospel of repentance of sin and the righteousness and judgment of God (John 16:8-11).

The Temple and all the religious life of the Jewish people were under the authority of the Great Sanhedrin, the Jewish supreme court, the most powerful ruling body in Israel, made up of the chiefs, scribes and elders.

These men were revered. They had been ordained and set apart from the rest of the people. They could trace their lineage all the way back to Aaron, the first priest. The Sanhedrin's roots went back to the 70 elders that Moses put in place to help him rule the people of God.

In the most authoritative place, the Temple, and before the most authoritative body in Israel, the Sanhedrin, Jesus was challenged concerning His own authority.

Mark 11:27-30, Questions.

“By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?”

Those in authority have a right to question others who push themselves forward as an authority. No one should be allowed to just announce they were a priest or a prophet. There were plenty of false shepherds in the day and lots of false prophets, so it was a fair question.

And even more clearly, no one should be allowed to just claim to be a Messiah. There were false Messiahs and Jesus even warned that there would be pretenders.

Matthew 24:23-25 If anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. 24 For false Christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. 25 See, I have told you beforehand.

No one can just claim to be a priest or a prophet without a clear calling from God. And certainly no one can be a Messiah without the voice of God declaring it.

So this was a serious question with serious consequences. To be found out to be a false teacher or a false prophet was grounds for capital punishment.

“By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?”

“Who do you think you are coming into the Temple yesterday and doing what you did? What right do you have doing that? Who gave you permission?”

How can they possibly not know the answer to that question?

The truth of the matter was Jesus had already made the case. Jesus had proved again and again and again that clearly He was a true prophet, priest and king; He was the Messiah of God. He had clearly exercised His authority over disease and deformity, He had shown His power and authority over evil spirits and demons, even over nature itself. He had raised the dead. And when the people heard His teaching “they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes” (Mark 1:22).

How do you look at blind and lame people who were healed and ask this question? How do you look at dead people walking around and ask this question. How to you hear reports from hundreds and thousands of people fed miraculously and ask this question? How do you see demons cast out of people in your own synagogues and ask this question?

Jesus had answered the question. Jesus had shown His credentials, He had a lengthy resume. The divine power and authority of Jesus Christ was without question.

How could they act like they have no clue? What could be more foolish in the face of such overwhelming evidence? They had seen the hand of the living God and they refuse to acknowledge it.

Atheists aren't atheists because they don't have enough evidence. Atheists are atheists because they refuse to believe the evidence. Their sin is the sin of hardheartedness.

Their question was not a sincere question, it was an evil, malicious, perverse questioning of one who has authority.

Their goal was not to learn the truth, their goal was to shame and embarrass Jesus, to expose Him as a fraud. They wanted Jesus to say He got His authority from God so they could accuse Him of blasphemy.

You know what the problem was? The problem was Jesus wasn't one of them, they hadn't laid hands on Him, they hadn't voted for Him. They were the authorities around here and they were the one who decided who would be in authority. This was a matter of honor, power and pride.

Jesus answers their two questions with one question.

“I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man? Answer me.”

Remember who John the Baptist was.

Luke 1:76 And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,

John was the last of the OT prophets, the prophet of God sent in the spirit of Elijah to announce the coming of the Messiah. John was the very first piece of evidence concerning Jesus' authority. He didn't point to himself, but pointed to Jesus.

John's authority and Jesus' authority have the same source. Answer one question and you answer the other question. If they said John's authority was from heaven, then they would have to believe what John said,

John 1:29, 34 "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! ... 34 I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."

Jesus' ministry and power and authority are all linked to the baptism of John. It was there that the heavens parted and the Spirit descended and the voice of God thundered, "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased."

His baptism was His ordination for ministry, His anointing with power and authority. That was the very place where Jesus received His authority to do all the things He did.

Jesus challenged them to say out loud who John was and by what authority John spoke. Was John a true prophet sent from God or was John an imposter, a false prophet?

Mark 11:31-33, Answers.

And they discussed it with one another, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?' 32 But shall we say, 'From man?'"—they were afraid of the people, for they all held that John really was a prophet. 33 So they answered Jesus, "We do not know."

The word for "discussed" here is used seven times in Mark's gospel and every time it is used in a context of people trying to skirt around or avoid the truth.

This is a terrible scene. If these men were true leaders, this conversation would never have happened. I can guarantee you, you never want to hear your leaders, whether in government or in your church, having a conversation that goes like this. This is a disaster, a train wreck.

They never dreamed that Jesus would take their question challenging His authority and honor and turn it back on them so that it ended up exposing their lack of authority and honor.

They had no interest in the truth. There was no searching of their hearts here, no examining of their own conscience. This was a travesty of leadership and a disgrace. There was no fear of God in these men, just a fear of man.

Their answer was a calculated dishonesty. They lied to cover up the truth. Jesus made a direct appeal to their conscience and they ducked. They loved their power and authority and the ways of the world too much to be honest.

"We do not know."

What a bitter pill to have to swallow. The spiritual teachers and authorities on their own turf having to say we don't know. The shame and dishonor and embarrassment they sought to put on Jesus fell on them.

Jesus had a rule of thumb He followed when answering questions.

Matthew 7:6 "Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you.

His question to the Jewish leaders was meant to find out if they were dogs or pigs. He got His answer, so He didn't waste an answer on them. They would only trample on any truth He gave them.

Application and conclusion.

Concerning authority.

Can you imagine an elders meeting where the elders are discussing an issue and say, "Well if we vote this way the older members will be upset and if we vote that way the younger members will be upset so let's try to find some compromise." Or, "well, if we do this that family will leave our church and they give lots of money, so we better not do that."

Can you imagine our elders making a decision not based on what is true or right but on what is pragmatic, or will make the most people happy, or will serve their greedy interests or pride? Can you image them compromising the truth, doing what's expedient or politically correct?

We just voted for new spiritual leaders. Brothers and sisters, they are fallen, fallible men with sinful hearts. Pray for them that they not cave into the pressures of leadership and do what they think you want or you will like. Pray for them that they will fear God and follow God regardless of the cost. Pray for them, godly leadership is hard, harder these days than ever.

One of the lessons of this story is that spiritual authorities are fallible, no church leader is infallible. We are all flesh and blood and we can be in error. I know I have done and said things out of a fear of man rather than a fear of God, and it's not to my credit, but to my shame. We must be tested by the Word of God, if we are found in error, we are to be corrected. And if we are found to be right, we are to be followed. As far as we follow Scripture, you are to follow.

The only absolute, completely unquestioning obedience we are to give is to God. All other authority is under God and subordinate to God's Word. Any authority that tells us to do something contrary to what God says is to be respectfully resisted.

I fear the day may come when I am told I cannot preach against the sin of abortion or homosexuality. I will continue to preach the whole council of God's Word and if they come to arrest me, I will submit to those consequences. Paul never resisted arrest, and God helping me, I will not.

Scripture teaches us to respect and obey those in authority over us. The fifth commandment is the basis and foundation for this. We are to honor our fathers and our mothers and it is a commandment with a promise. If we will respect and honor and obey those in authority over us it will go well with us all the days of our lives. It begins at home and it begins early. Fathers

must teach children to respect and obey their mothers. If we get it right with the first authorities in our lives we will get it right with the rest.

Concerning Christ.

On what grounds can anyone truly say Jesus is not the Son of the living God, the Messiah of God come from heaven to earth to destroy sin and Satan and save us from our sin? What lies do people tell themselves, what excuses do people make?

Some say the gospel doesn't make any sense; some hid their souls behind questions about evil or natives in Africa; some say they tried Christianity but it's too hard or too demanding or too costly; some say maybe someday, but right now they are too busy or have too many other things to consider.

The Jewish leaders said, "We do not know." The truth was, "We don't want to say." Those who say they cannot are most likely really saying they will not.

They love the darkness more than the light (John 3:19), they love questions more than answers, they love doubt more than they love truth.

People who play games with God and play fast and loose with the truth will find themselves treated like pigs and dogs.

John 7:17 If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority.

An unwillingness to make a clear judgment about God will end you up under His judgment. If you aren't willing to believe the first witness, the first evidence, don't count on His giving you anymore.

Skepticism, unbelief and cowardice will not be rewarded with truth. But faith as small as a mustard seed will bring great reward. In the face of the smallest faith, Jesus will answer. But in the face of calculated dishonesty and unbelief, Jesus will answer, "Neither will I tell you."

Friends, that is one thing you never want to hear Jesus say to you, "Neither will I tell you." You never want The Word of God who became flesh to be silent to you.

Seek Him, listen to Him, and submit to Him and obey Him, that it may go well with your soul all the days of your life and in the life to come.

Prayer: Holy Father, thank you that you still speak with absolute authority to us through your Word read and preached. And thank you for giving us your Word and your Spirit with your authority to take the good news and share it with others. Helps us not to shrink from the opportunity to be your ambassadors. And grants us your grace to submit to those in authority whom you have placed there for our good. Thank you for the spiritual leaders you have given this church, may we follow them, and together may we glorify you in this place.