



Speaker:
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The Authority of Christ

Series: The Gospel of Mark • 40 of 40

3/14/2021 (SUN) | Bible: **Mark 11:27-33**

And they came again to Jerusalem. And as he was walking in the temple, there came to him the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders, and said unto him, “By what authority doest thou these things? And who gave thee this authority to do these things?” And Jesus answered and said unto them, “I will also ask of you one question, and answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John: was it from heaven, or of men?

Answer me.” And they reasoned with themselves, saying, *If we shall say, “From heaven”, he will say, “Why then did ye not believe him?” But if we shall say, “Of men”...they feared the people, for all men counted John that he was a prophet indeed. And they answered and said unto Jesus, “We cannot tell.” And Jesus answering saith unto them, “Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things.”*

We’re picking up the story today as Jesus and the disciples return to the temple. This is just after the episode with the fig tree we looked at last week.

The trouble Jesus caused the last time he was in the temple is probably why this group of religious leaders confronts him now. It tells us in verse 27 it was the chief priests, scribes, and elders that are challenging him. Together they form the Sanhedrin, an assembly that rules in all matters legal and ecclesiastical—to the extent Rome allowed, that is.

I’ve no doubt the activity in the temple was going on as normal. Had Jesus tried to disrupt the proceedings of the entire temple last time, he’d have been arrested. But what he did was hugely symbolic, even if these religious leaders saw it as nothing but an outrageous and ungodly attack on God’s house.

They demand he answers their question. They want to know what gives him the right to do and say these things against them and their religion. I don’t expect they were looking for an answer. They hated Jesus, so it’s likely they were hoping he’d admit he had no authority.

Jesus tells them he’s quite happy to answer the question. There’s just one condition: they must answer his question first. And this shouldn’t have been much of a problem for a group of men who were the elite within that society. The rich and influential chief priests, the highly educated scribes, and the well-respected elders should together have had no problem answering a question from this uneducated, poor, trouble-causer from that irrelevant little town up north.

Jesus's proposal is simple but wise (and also quite funny!) He'll reveal his character and mission to the people in his own time, and he's not going to be intimidated into doing so prematurely by this gang or anyone else.

We might describe this as Jesus asking a question he knows they can't answer. Maybe so. But we could also see it as Jesus giving them space to repent—he's giving them the opportunity to think back to what John's baptism was all about. They could have a rethink about John. They could realise he was a true prophet of God and therefore believe his testimony that Jesus is the Messiah.

We see in verse 31 how they huddle together for a quick meeting. It's clear they didn't believe John was a prophet come from God. But instead of being sincere and saying so, they fear becoming unpopular with the people and so decide to lie and say they're not sure! And since they haven't met Jesus's condition, he refuses to answer their question.

We who know Jesus personally understand and freely confess that Jesus is the Lord from heaven. He has the full authority of God behind him. It's my privilege today to answer the question of the religious leaders. They won't hear it, but it will serve not just as a reminder to the Lord's people, but also an answer to anyone in this world who asks questions like, *Why should we listen to Jesus? Who does he think he is?* We'll look at where he derived his authority from, how it was displayed, and how he retains it even after his death and resurrection.

HIS AUTHORITY COMES FROM THE FATHER

The origin of Jesus's authority can be seen even in this passage today if we look closely enough. It may not appear obvious, but Jesus is hinting that his authority comes from the same place John the Baptist's did. When it says in verse 32 all people counted John as being a true prophet, it's to be understood almost literally. There was widespread belief among the common people that the baptism of John—which stands for his whole ministry of repentance and faith—was from heaven; that is, from God.

This poor answer given by the religious crowd was, as I've said, a lie. So there's a question mark over their integrity. But had it not been a lie, and they genuinely couldn't decide if John's ministry was from God, that would undermine their authority. After all, anyone with spiritual light would see John was the real deal.

It's also not obvious to us, not being part of that religious culture, that when Jesus answered their question with another question, he was taking control of the meeting. The perceptive observer would see in this something of the authority that the Sanhedrin doubted Jesus had.

There had been no prophets in Judea for hundreds of years. Then all of a sudden two intriguing characters appear on the scene and, by their words and actions, show themselves to be sent by God. I'm guessing the religious establishment just didn't know how to respond. First John arrives and turns the place upside down, then he announces the second one was far greater than him! John declares the authority of Jesus Christ, and if John is

genuine then Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God. Just have a listen again to what John says of Jesus:

He must increase, but I must decrease. He that cometh from above is above all. He that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth. He that cometh from heaven is above all. And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth, and no man receiveth his testimony. He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true. For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God, for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him. The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand.

John 3:30-35

And by the way, it's interesting John conducted his ministry outside the city. He was introducing the people to a new religious experience, and it had nothing to do with the temple. And this of course ties in with Jesus's veiled warnings that the temple age would soon to come to an end.

We started in Mark's gospel around a year ago. If you can remember going over the very first chapter, we see even there a small revelation of Jesus's authority. Jesus had been in the local synagogue, teaching:

And they were astonished at his doctrine, for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes.

Mark 1:22

One of the characteristics of Mark's gospel is it shows how Jesus was very guarded about revealing things about himself too early. We've seen, haven't we, a gradual unveiling by Jesus about his identity and purpose.

Yet there are hints even in our passage today of Jesus's authority. We've seen that John declared it too. And we've seen that many of his hearers recognised it simply from the things he taught and the way he taught them.

But let's not forget the two declarations we've come across in this gospel which show more than anything else where Jesus's authority came from. At Jesus's baptism, we saw this:

And there came a voice from heaven saying, "Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased".

Mark 1:11

And you may remember Jesus taking three of his disciples up a mountain to witness his transfiguration:

And there was a cloud that overshadowed them. And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my beloved Son. Hear him".

Mark 9:7

There we have it. The answers to the Sanhedrin's questions. By what authority did Jesus do and say these things? **By the authority of God.** Who gave Jesus this authority? The very same God of heaven, the one who these hypocrites claimed to worship and serve.

HIS AUTHORITY WAS SEEN WHILE ON EARTH

Since Jesus's authority was attested by the people, a prophet, Jesus himself, and the God of heaven, we're not surprised to see this authority displayed in the things he did and spoke.

We'll have a look at a few examples of this.

He showed his authority over nature

Think about last week, where we saw a tree turn from having green leaves to being dead and shrivelled up, all in the space of 24 hours. Jesus made a pronouncement about the tree, and then walked away. In his absence the tree, by no natural process, started to die. He exercised his power over the tree from a distance.

If we go back further in our gospel, will see an even more startling example of Jesus's authority over the created world. Remember when he and the disciples were caught in a storm at sea? In their panic, the disciples roused Jesus from his sleep to help them. He addressed the storm, as if it were a creature needing to be tamed. And in a way that we'll never understand, he manipulated each one of the innumerable molecules of water and air in such a way as to bring instant calm.

The one of whom it's said he created the world was of course able to do the lesser thing of making changes to what he'd created.

He showed his authority over sickness

If you think back, you'll recall that Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law. It could've been some kind of coronavirus she'd caught, or an infection. Whatever it was, it'd caused a fever. She couldn't have been a young woman, so it was potentially very serious. Yet standing there in her presence was the one who'd invented viruses and bacteria, and by the same divine power he miraculously made the woman's illness vanish.

He showed his authority over evil

I mentioned a minute ago about Jesus being in the synagogue early on in Mark's gospel. I referred to it then because of the reaction of the people to Jesus's teachings. But let's not forget the incident there that caused the most shock and amazement. There was a man there, wasn't there, who was demon possessed. Now although devils can influence the thinking and behaviour of anyone, this type of case involved people who were affected to a far greater degree than is normal in this world.

The man spoke to Jesus, but he was speaking the mind of the demon rather than his own mind. And he knew he was in trouble. There before him stood the Son of God, with all the power of God at his disposal should he choose to use it. And Jesus used his power to force the demon to fly away, leaving the man at peace and well again.

He showed his authority over sin

The example I'm going to use here was to do with Jesus healing someone of his disability, so you might be wondering what that has to do with sin. But it was the episode where the lame man was lowered down through the roof of the house by his friends. Do you remember?

This wasn't to be just a bodily healing. Jesus meant to show something even more important. The first thing he said to the disabled man was, "Your sins are forgiven." And he had the full authority of the Godhead to forgive sins in this way.

The leadership of the synagogue was outraged of course, but as they muttered their complaints, they got one thing right. They said, "No one can forgive sins except God." Give them a round of applause! They got something right! Only God has the authority to forgive sins in this way, and they should have rightly concluded Jesus was God manifest in the flesh.

He showed his authority over death

Can it be true? That Jesus had authority even over death itself? We turn to the story of Lazarus, brother to Martha and Mary, and a personal friend of Jesus. His appointed time came. Lazarus died. And this wasn't a special kind of death. He died the same way you and I will. We pick the story up where Jesus is speaking to Martha:

Jesus saith unto her, "Thy brother shall rise again." Martha saith unto him, "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me."

And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth." And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes. And his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, "Loose him, and let him go."

John 11

And this power of Jesus's wasn't limited to the lives of others only. Incredibly, he told his followers not only was he going to die, but that he had the power to raise himself from the dead. And this takes us to our final heading.

HIS AUTHORITY REMAINED AFTER HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION

We haven't come to this bit yet in Mark's story, but we all know the main character dies. This was the Grand Mission of the Ages. God would come into this world as a man, and in the prime of his life he would throw himself onto God's altar to pay the penalty for the sins of others.

If you're listening to this and you don't know if this has anything to do with you, perhaps we can help you with that. Firstly, who God saves is God's business, not mine or yours. Secondly, the very reason you're thinking about these things—and tuning in today—may very well be because God the Holy Spirit has started a work in your heart and means to bring you to Christ. The one who's sincerely looking to get right with God will go to God in

prayer. They'll begin to ask him for mercy. And it's then they find themselves convinced Jesus died for them.

So friends, we won't venture to say Jesus died for you or didn't. We won't guess whether God loves you or hates you. But we do have the warrant of God to tell you, if you want to be saved for all eternity, you must stop what you're doing, go somewhere private, and pour your heart out to God in prayer. Be honest about your sin and ask for his forgiveness. What a life awaits you if you find Jesus!

Jesus died, then. But as we know, he was gloriously raised from the dead after only a few days in the grave. And in his journey to the land of Hades, his authority was not diminished. He rose from the dead with all the authority he had before his death. And listen to what he said after his resurrection:

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth."

Matt. 28:18

This word "power" is the same word that's elsewhere translated *authority*. And look at the extent of his authority. It extends to every part of the material and spiritual realms.

And we know Jesus, after some days of showing his resurrected self to people, returned to heaven. This is how Peter described it in one of his letters:

Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him.

1 Peter 3:22

And even in heaven he continues to serve his people. It's said he argues our cause with his heavenly Father. He's our intercessor.

But he does far more even than that. He continues in the work of salvation. For although the sacrifice of himself has been completed, he still has people out there who haven't been saved by his grace yet. Yes friends, there are people in the world today, maybe even people within our own circle of friends and family, who belong to God but who haven't yet been saved.

This is why we share the gospel with people. It's our words, faithfully transmitting the truths of the Bible, that God chooses to use to reach his people wherever they are. And he reaches them with the gospel. And they believe it. He draws them into that place of prayer where they realise the glorious truth they've been born all over again but in a spiritual way.

As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.

John 17:2

We can rest in this comforting truth that **every one** on that list the Father planted in the heart of Jesus Christ will eventually come to the saviour and receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

But there are of course multitudes of people in this world who refuse to take notice of the gospel we preach. And one of Jesus's other roles as he sits at the right hand of God is to deal with those people. They'll encounter Jesus Christ whether they like it or not. But they'll only get to see him in the robes of a judge in the Supreme Court of God.

This will take place when Jesus returns to this earth. But when will that be? I want to draw your attention to a specific time within the next week. It's this Tuesday, 16 March 2021. And at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, people in the UK will be going about their business. People will be in supermarkets or filling their cars up with fuel. Parents will be picking their children up from school, and employees will be looking forward to going home. In other parts of the world, people will be retiring for the night. Others will hear their alarms getting them up for work or college.

What, brother, are you saying Jesus is going to return to judge the world in just two days time? Of course I'm not! We have no idea when he's coming back. Some people tell me Jesus is coming any day now. They pick out verses from the Bible they assume refer to Jesus's second coming, and on that basis believe Jesus will be back very shortly. I think that's a huge mistake.

So why did I mention Tuesday at 3.00pm? *Because it's that type of ordinary day when Jesus will come.* This Tuesday's special because *it's just as likely that Jesus could return then as any other time!* It could be in a thousand years, but it could also be Tuesday! Are you ready for that, friends? What about you who don't belong to God? Are you ready? Have you said all you want to say? Have you done all you wanted to do? Because your eternal imprisonment could begin on Tuesday—never mind that: **it could be tonight.**

The will of the Godhead was that Jesus, the Son of Man, should be given the authority to judge this world.

Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

Acts 17:31

You see that there is a day appointed. And it's because we don't know when that will be we need to have this feeling of expectation. For the unbeliever, we urge them to understand Jesus could come at any time. We also remind them how fragile life is. They have no idea when they're going to die any more than we do. We tell them to repent while they can.

But see how much more beautiful an expectation this is for the believer. For us, it's not something we want to be postponed for as long as possible. We want Jesus to come as SOON as possible! We say, don't we, from time to time, *Come quickly, Lord Jesus.* The apostle Paul, in his letter to his friend and brother Titus, says the following:

...teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Titus 2:12–13

Blessed hope! A happy and excited expectation that Jesus is coming. By his authority, he'll consign the hordes of unbelievers to their eternal prison, and by the same authority grant his people access into the great Garden of God, a place where they'll enjoy the company of other believers and even Jesus himself in a state of joy that will never end.

I pray you believers would experience this hope in a very powerful way during your days in God's service.

Amen.