

Mark 11:27-33
February 17, 2019

Margaret Thatcher, the late British Prime Minister once memorably said,

"Being powerful is like being a lady. If you have to tell people you are, you aren't."

The same thing is true with authority. If you have to go around telling people you have authority—you don't. Mark has shown us that Jesus most definitely has authority, not so much by his words but his actions. Jesus shows he has authority more than he tells that he has authority.

Jesus goes about his business and people notice his authority on their own. Remember what the crowds said way back in chapter 1?

"And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching. [22] And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes." Mark 1:21–22

He taught with authority and people noticed on their own. And from there Jesus constantly broadcasts a

settled, unshaken authority that comes through in all he says and does.

His authority infuses everything he does: from casting out demons, forgiving sin, calming storms, redefining the Sabbath and feeding thousands. All he did and said was drenched with authority.

He had authority without talking about his authority.

Throughout Mark we see people respond differently to his authority. Some are astonished. Some repent. Some follow him. Some stare. Some are offended. Some oppose him. Some plan to kill him.

Everyone has to respond in some way to the authority of Christ. How are you responding to Jesus?

Are you astonished?

Do you repent?

Do you follow him?

Do you just stare?

Are you offended?

Do you oppose him?

The question is not: Does Christ have authority, but how do you, how are you responding to that authority?

This question on the authority of Jesus is not something you can remain 'neutral' or 'undecided' about. All of us are and will respond to his authority in some way—Everyone responds.

Some respond

- By pretending Jesus doesn't have any authority.
- By running from Jesus and his authority.
- By obeying Jesus and his authority.
- By opposing him and his authority.
- By following him and his authority.

How are you responding to Jesus?

How will you respond to Jesus?

PROP: Because Jesus has all authority—we must respond by follow him.

Let's join Mark again as we go with Jesus for the third time in three weeks with Jesus at the Jewish temple. There we meet a delegation that sees the authority of Jesus and does NOT respond well. They try and hide their disgust behind the mask of a question.

Let's see how that goes,

"And they came again to Jerusalem. And as he was walking in the temple, the chief priests and the scribes

and the elders came to him, ²⁸ and they said to him, "By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?" ²⁹ Jesus said to them, "I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. ³⁰ Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man? Answer me." ³¹ 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." And Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things." Mark 11:27-33

PRAY

Questions of Jesus

AND

Question from Jesus

1. Question(s) of Jesus: Mark 11:27

As the calendar turns from Monday to Tuesday we again join Jesus at the center of Jewish worship—at

the temple. You'll remember the day before that Jesus came in and cleaned house.

Today, he upon entering the temple he is confronted by an official delegation,

Vs. 27,

"And they came again to Jerusalem. And as he was walking in the temple, the chief priests and the scribes and the elders came to him,..."

Let's meet each group,

The chief priests were the upper echelon of the thousands of temple priests. They were each former high priests from previous years.

The scribes were the legal experts in Jewish law. They were the teachers of the people.

The elders were the Jewish aristocratic class who were community leaders.

This was a formidable delegation facing off against an uneducated peasant from Galilee. All of the people who mattered in Jerusalem were arrayed in front of Jesus.

Think of the temple like a massive corporation. What is happening here is that Jesus is walking into their building and being faced by all the Corporate Executives—CEO, CFO, COO, the governing board and the whole legal department all at once.

This delegation was sent by the Jewish ruling class. And there sent to ask a very specific question of Jesus.

Vs. 28,

²⁸ and they said to him, "By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?"

Notice the two questions:

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

Or in other words, Where do you get off coming to our temple, disrupting our lives and doing all these things? They are probably talking most specifically about the day before when he cleared the Court of the Gentiles of those buying and selling and he taught that the temple was cursed with horrendous leadership.

That's why this delegation is before Jesus.

The chief priests and the scribes and the elders saw themselves as the temple's highest authority. Nothing happened in the temple without going through them first. And then Jesus comes disrupting everything.

They knew that Jesus didn't get his authority to clear the temple and teach in the temple from them. This question is more civil than it appears because there is a watching crowd. Not only are the Jewish elite standing before Jesus but also the crowds press in to hear the interchange.

We know it is not an honest question because Mark tells us that after Jesus cleared the temple they were already colluding together on how they could, "destroy him."

They ask the question to trap him.

One more thing about their questions. Before we move on, we need to realize these guys are not stupid and they did not formulate the question on the spot. They surely gathered together, debated the best question that would expose Jesus as the charlatan they believed him to be, and they came up with—

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

These questions were an opening shot to try and destroy the reputation and following of Jesus with all the people.

They thought they had him trapped. They thought that Jesus could have responded in one of only two ways:

#1: if he says, "I'll tell you by what authority I am doing these things—God above has given me the authority to do these things."

At that, the chief priests, scribes and elders of temple could shout blasphemy and try to get the crowd to riot and stone him.

#2: if he says, "I am doing this by my own authority."

At that, the chief priests, scribes and elders of the temple can tell the people to ignore this man because he is not sent from God.

They thought they had him trapped.

But they underestimated Jesus. The proud and the self-righteous are constantly underestimating because they think no one could see things as clearly as them.

But little did they know, Jesus had them exactly where he wanted them. We've heard their question of Jesus now let's turn our ears to the question from Jesus.

2. Question from Jesus: Mark 11:29-33

Vs. 29,

"Jesus said to them, "I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. ³⁰ Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man? Answer me."

Snap. And that is the sound of these guys falling into their own trap.

I love how Jesus tells them twice, "Answer me."

It is as if Jesus is saying, "You think you have questions—I've got better ones." Boom. Talk to me about the ministry of John the Baptizer.

It might seem strange or a deflection for Jesus to ask about John, but remember Mark forcefully presents John and Jesus as linked. They were linked not just in the fact that John baptized Jesus but also because Isaiah promised centuries before that John would prepare the way for Jesus—

Mark sounds this note right from the beginning of our journey with Jesus,

“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

[2] As it is written in Isaiah the prophet,

“Behold, I send my messenger before your face,
who will prepare your way,

[3] the voice of one crying in the wilderness:

‘Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight,’”

[4] John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” Mark 1:1–4

If John was commissioned by God, so was Jesus. If John was working on his own, so was Jesus.

This delegation did NOT like or endorse the ministry of John. He preached that all a person needed was a willing heart of repentance. It was the first time that the center of worship was not at the temple.

The chief priests, scribes and elders did not like getting pushed to the margins when John showed up.

John preached a repentance without a priest—they could not have that!!

And now Jesus brings John back up.

Jesus didn't confer with his disciples when they asked him a question—they have to huddle up. Mark takes to the middle of their huddle on the mound, and we hear the deliberations.

³¹ 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.

The chief priests, scribes and elders were not stupid—they saw what Jesus had done. They had two choices. Neither of them good from their perspective.

They can't say—John was a prophet sent from God. If they do that, they would be admitting that they opposed a man sent from God.

But....

If they says that John was not sent by God but was just a man doing all he did on his own—the crowds might just riot.

Nearly all of the people that choked the Court of the Gentiles that day and strained to hear what was going on had gone out to John, confessed their sin and got plunged in the waters.

To speak against John would be to speak against everyone there.

So, they took the cowards way out—they didn't take a stand. But we all know that when you don't take a stand you are still taking a stand.

Look at verse 33,

³³ So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

Do you hear what they just admitted?

The temple authorities—the chief priests, the scribes and the elders just admitted before everyone that they could not tell the difference between the work of God and the work of men.

The reputed leaders of Israel who were supposed to lead and shepherd and protect the flock could not even tell the difference between a prophet and a fake.

They had authority in the temple but they just admitted that they didn't even know what they were doing.

Of course they had an opinion, they thought John was a fake, not from God. But they lacked the guts to say it in front of others for fear of how the crowd would take it.

What kind of leaders are these?

They can't even be relied on to give an honest answer. It calls to mind the oracle against Israel's wicked leaders. These standing before Jesus—

[9] All you beasts of the field, come to devour—
all you beasts in the forest.

[10] His watchmen are blind;
they are all without knowledge;
they are all silent dogs;
they cannot bark,
dreaming, lying down,
loving to slumber.

[11] The dogs have a mighty appetite;
they never have enough.

But they are shepherds who have no understanding;

they have all turned to their own way,
each to his own gain, one and all.
[12] "Come," they say, "let me get wine;
let us fill ourselves with strong drink;
and tomorrow will be like this day,
great beyond measure." Isaiah 56:9–12

These leaders devoured the people for their own personal gain. When these guys were in charge the people lost. They sacrificed the people's well-being for their own gain.

Jesus was and is the opposite. He freely gives himself for others. He does not take advantage but gets taken advantage of for the good of people.

Do you see what this delegation is afraid of? Look again at vs. 31,

"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."

They were afraid of the wrong thing.

God the Son is standing before them—the Alpha and Omega; the Ancient of Days; the Mighty One—and they are afraid of the crowds.

They did not fear the God they claimed to represent—but feared the people they took advantage of. Poor leaders fear the wrong things.

How different Jesus is from the chief priests, the scribes and the elders!

- They will do anything to hold onto their authority so they can control the people.
- Jesus will use his authority to lay aside his right to control for the good of the people.
- They were out only for themselves and their own enrichment.
- Jesus was out only for the people and THEIR enrichment.
- They feared losing control over the crowds.
- Jesus feared for the crowds.
- They feared the wrath of the crowds.
- Jesus feared the wrath of God for the crowds.
- They demanded the people serve them.
- Jesus came to seek and save the lost.

These leaders were most concerned with getting rid of Jesus and saving face.

Jesus was most concerned with getting rid of the punishment of sin and saving sinners.

These leaders said to Jesus—Not your will but ours be done.

Jesus as he faced rejection from God said to him—
“Not my will but yours be done.”

He was not concerned with what people thought of him, but of what God thought. Jesus shows himself to be one worth following.

Following Jesus and his overarching authority makes sense because he is the only one who uses his authority for our good. Responding to Jesus’ authority does not mean that he strong arms you into doing all kinds of odious stuff.

It means—as you orient your life around his will for your life—he will incline your heart to obey and birth an increasing desire to follow him more and more.

Jesus might have told the chief priests, scribes and elders,

Vs. 35,

“Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.”

But we know—because we have seen it so very clearly in the book of Mark—we know that Jesus has not just authority FROM God but the authority OF God.

And these leaders did not respond rightly to his authority.

Mark asked us to join him at the temple as he talks to the chief priests, scribes and elders—NOT so we can say—Look how stupid those guys are! We aren't to say—I would never do that. Not true, we are all stupid in our own ways.

No, the point for us is to ask—how am I responding to his authority in my life?

How are you following him?

In our world, many if not most who have authority have it because they are willing to be ruthless with others. They grasp and clutch and grapple just to hold onto what they can get. They walk over others and push anyone down who gets in their way.

But not Jesus.

He uses his authority on behalf of his people. It is his good pleasure for our good out of unmixed love for his people.

Why does that matter?

When you see that Jesus uses his authority not against us, but for us—you find it is pleasant to follow him. It only makes sense.

It is Almost easy to follow Jesus.

Understand what I am saying here. I am NOT saying that the Christian life will be easy—NOT at ALL! I'm saying something all-together different. The reason we can say that it is almost easy to follow Jesus is because he ALWAYS uses his authority for you good.

The way might be hard, but the savior's heart toward you never is.

The way might be confusing, but the savior's love for you is clear.

With Jesus you never have to wonder—

- Does he care about my good?
- Does he know the way is hard?
- Does he really love me?

Nope.

Follow Jesus.

If you are following Jesus—keep following Jesus.

We end with where we began—How are you responding to his authority?

Our passage gives us a few ways—

1. Opposing him

That is what the chief priests, scribes and elders are doing with Jesus. They oppose him and want him to go away. They want to go their own way and do their own thing.

Is that you?

Do you know what Jesus wants you to do but you push back and stick your hands up and say, “NO!”

Some oppose him. Others in this passage—

2. Have just started listening to him

That is the crowd. They stand and watch and listen to this Galilean.

There is a time for standing and listening to Jesus—and maybe you have been listening for a while. That is good.

Is that you?

3. Others who are following him

There is only the briefest mention of them but Mark tells us that Jesus did not come to the temple alone. They—the disciples his followers—came with Jesus to Jerusalem and the temple.

The 12 don't understand all that he is doing but they are following him nonetheless.

Is that you?

For those of us who are following—let us remember that his authority over us is complete.

1. He has authority to forgive all.

2. He has authority to do with you what he wants.

3. He has authority over all parts of your life.

Your hopes.

Your dreams.

Your thoughts.

Your actions.

Your secret/open agendas.

