

The City and the King: Divine Authority

Mark 11:27-33

We are said to live in the information age and there's a very good reason for that. The volume of information that we create through the internet each and every day is simply mind blowing. Let me give you some numbers. There are over 5 billion searches done on the internet every day, with 77% of those searches being done through google. Every minute of every day there are over 4 million videos watched on Youtube, over 450,000 tweets sent on twitter, and over 46,000 pictures posted on Instagram. Every minute of every day we as human beings send 16 million text messages, 156 million e-mails, and, are you ready for this, every minute of every day there are over 103 million spam e-mails sent.

The point is that information is coming at you like a 100-foot Tsunami and our brains can often feel like a tiny origami boat just trying to stay afloat. Perhaps the biggest challenge in this wave of information is to know what information to treat as authoritative. When you read a news story online, or in the newspaper, or when you watch your favorite talking head bloviate on TV, what information do you treat as credible and thus with the authority to shape your actions and attitudes?

Today we're going to look at a passage where the idea of authority is front and center. The religious leaders in Jerusalem have the authority over the temple and Jesus has come on the scene and disrupted that sense of authority. Now they come to confront him and demand that he explain the origins of his authority.

So, open your Bible to Mark 11:27-33 and let me give you a one sentence summary of this short little story. Here's the summary: **Jesus reveals his divine authority that shapes how we respond to Him.** If you look at this sentence we are basically going to break it up into two parts. First, we will uncover Jesus' authority from this story, then we will look at our response to that authority. Let's begin in verse 27.

Of course, you will remember that we are in the passion week of the life of Jesus. It's Passover week for Israel and Jesus and his disciples are staying each night in Bethany and entering the city in the morning. Here we are on Tuesday of passion

week most likely and we find Jesus heading right back to the main target of his ministry this week, the temple. Look at the rest of verse 27.

If you remember from last time we talked about how the temple complex was huge and this outer court often had many activities going on in it during the day. No doubt Jesus would head to this outer court, find a spot to sort of set up shop with his disciples and begin teaching. This time, a delegation of religious leaders come and find him. These three groups would have been the ones who made up the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was the ruling body in Israel at this time as it relate to religious matters and even some minor political matters. Jesus has already predicted that he would suffer at their hands in 8:31, so this confrontation certainly had an uneasy feel to it.

Look what they ask him in verse 28. You can see that the issue of authority is the main issue in their questions and they want to know about certain activities that Jesus has engaged in. Which ones? Well, keep in mind the previous day Jesus had entered this very temple complex and caused quite the uproar when he disrupted commerce and made some strong accusations against the religious leaders. You couldn't just enter the temple and do whatever you wanted to.

They ask two questions and the second one is a clarification of the first. They are essentially saying, "We are the authority in the temple. We know that WE didn't give you permission to disrupt the temple in this way and say these things, so what makes you think you have the right to do this?" In other words they are telling Jesus that he has no official status in Jerusalem so he needs to stand down.

But Jesus does something interesting here. Look at verses 29-30. While it would have been accepted Rabbinic practice to respond with a question, the question Jesus asks is not accidental. It might appear that he is trying to evade their question, but his question puts the issue of his authority right on the 50 yard line.

By asking about the baptism of John Jesus is asking about John's entire ministry since this was the most important part of what he did. Jesus specifically asks if the ministry of John was from heaven, which was a way of asking if John was a prophet of God, or if John was just another guy speaking on his own authority.

Why does Jesus ask about John's ministry? Well, keep in mind these words from Mark 1:4-9. Jesus was baptized of John and John's entire ministry was to prepare

Israel for one who was coming who would be much more important than him. Go back up to 1:2-3. John was a forerunner of the Messiah, sent by God. Jesus asks the religious leaders this question because their assessment of John will ultimately determine what they think of the authority of Jesus.

If John's baptism was from men, then Jesus has no authority at all. But, if John's baptism was from heaven, instituted by God to announce the arrival of a promised king, then that certainly puts the actions of Jesus in a whole new light. If John is prophet, Jesus is someone greater than a prophet. So, how do the religious leaders respond?

Look at verses 31-33. Let's be honest here, the religious leaders are not unsure of what they think about John the Baptist. If they are honest they would answer this question "from men." But, they are scared of the people and unwilling to give Jesus any authority in their minds. Notice that they don't even finish their discussion on if they say from men. Mark has to explain why they don't answer that way in verse 32.

Jesus responds by telling them that if they won't give him an answer then he won't give them one either. This isn't just petty gamesmanship. Jesus knows that if they aren't able to answer clearly on John the Baptist they certainly won't believe him if he tells them his authority comes from God.

What's amazing about this whole scene is that you have a conflict between two claims to authority and the ones who run the religious show in Israel, who are exposed as being unable to have the discernment to know whether John's ministry was a fake or truly from heaven.

Now, as we've seen so much in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus doesn't make a direct claim to heavenly authority here. You can miss his claim to divine authority if you aren't reading this carefully. But make no mistake, this passage is showing us what we have already seen throughout Mark regarding the authority of Jesus. Listen to these passages:

1:22 - Authority in Teaching

1:27 - Authority over unclean spirits (they obey)

2:10 - Authority to forgive sins

3:15 - Authority to cast out demons

6:7 - He's even able to give his authority to others.

Let's recap our summary sentence: **Jesus reveals his divine authority that shapes how we respond to Him.**

This story has clearly made known his authority. Now we need to ponder what this means for us and how we ought to respond. To evaluate our response, I want to ask 3 questions.

- **What does it mean that Jesus has authority?**

The entire book of Mark, including this passage has made the divine authority of Jesus clear. So, what does it mean that Jesus has divine authority in my life and in your life? Let me give you a quick definition:

"A relational word, authority signifies the right to rule. It is expressed in claims and is acknowledged by compliance and conformity." - J.I. Packer

Notice first in the definition that it is a relational word. The authority of Jesus is not an abstract reality. We aren't just saying that he has the authority to create mountains and fashion storms. Jesus' authority is relational. It specifically comes to bear on me and on you. Notice also that He has the right to rule and that is because He is the creator. He made us and so He has the right to order our lives and make claims on how we live them.

To properly order ourselves under his authority we must comply and conform our lives to the claims he makes. When he says that we are to be holy, we comply to that claim. You see how authority works itself out all the time. On a football field the referee is the one who has the authority to claim that a rule was violated. He can make that claim and then in order for the game to continue, every must comply with his claim. The game wouldn't work very well if we allowed any player or fan to claim a rule had been violated.

Unfortunately, we very often allow things to make claims on our lives and we very quickly and readily comply with other authorities. That's our second question:

- **What else do we often look to as authoritative?**

Ideally, we would all listen and respond to the authority of Jesus in every area of life. But we don't. Our lives are lived with a mixture of authorities that replace submission to the rule of Jesus. What are some of those?

The World. This is such a problem that the Apostle John warned believers not to be seduced by the world. 1 John 2:15-17. The world exercises authority over us by making righteousness appear abnormal and unrighteousness appear normal and good. It makes claims on us that we often comply with.

You can see in 1 John that John warns against loving the world. The world gains authority over us by training our loves and affections. Some of you have no doubt served in our military. We had a former student in our ministry in California who went on to be a special forces operative. The training he went through literally changed his physical abilities but also how he processed the world mentally and emotionally. The world trains us, but not through a military like boot camp. The world trains us to love and it becomes our authority so that we willingly comply and conform.

Ask yourself, where have you given the authority over your loves and desires to the world? What do you long for that stands in opposition to Christ's kingdom?

Beside the world we often give authority to our feelings. Feelings are a gift from God and they are not wrong to experience, but they are meant to be understood using your mind. Emotions make a wonderful complement to our thinking but a terrible master over our thinking.

But we get used to living by our feelings and letting them have mastery over us. We allow anxiety and fear to dictate day to day life. We make decisions based on a feeling of peace rather than using wisdom gleaned from Scripture and good counsel. How do we stop bending the knee to the authority of our emotions? Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones was a pastor in England in the middle of the 20th century. He wrote a wonderful book called *Spiritual Depression* where he addresses how it is that believers can become overwhelmed by feelings of sadness and depression. I want to read you a section where he is commenting on Psalm 42.

The main trouble in this whole matter of spiritual depression in a sense is this, that we allow our self to talk to us instead of talking to our self. Am I just trying to be deliberately paradoxical? Far from it. This is the very essence of wisdom in this

matter. Have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself? Take those thoughts that come to you the moment you wake up in the morning. You have not originated them, but they start talking to you, they bring back the problem of yesterday, etc. Somebody is talking. Who is talking to you? Your self is talking to you.

The main art in the matter of spiritual living is to know how to handle yourself. You have to take yourself in hand, you have to address yourself, preach to yourself, question yourself. You must say to your soul: 'Why art thou cast down'—what business have you to be disquieted? You must turn on yourself, upbraid yourself, condemn yourself, exhort yourself, and say to yourself: 'Hope thou in God'—instead of muttering in this depressed, unhappy way. And then you must go on to remind yourself of God, Who God is, and what God is and what God has done, and what God has pledged Himself to do. Then having done that, end on this great note: defy yourself, and defy other people, and defy the devil and the whole world, and say with this man: 'I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance, who is also the health of my countenance and my God'.

Whether it's the world or your feelings or any other number of places, our sole authority in this life is Jesus Christ. But that brings us to one last question. If Jesus, the creator God is our sole authority in this life, how exactly does Jesus exercise authority over us now, when he isn't even here?

- **How does Jesus exercise His divine authority over us now?**

Let's say a sociologist did some research that showed that children shouldn't be taught to read until they were 8 years old. He could not verbally explain his research to every educator out there. So, what does he do? He writes his research down in an article or a book and publishes it for many people to read. That article carries the weight or authority of that sociologist's work.

In a similar way the Bible carries the weight or authority of God, but the obvious difference is that God is the creator of the world and humankind. He has the right to direct how we think, feel, and act. He has the divine right to tell us how to live and we have the obligation to respond to his authority by doing what he says. When you read the Bible, it is as if God was standing in the room speaking directly

to you. No one is obligated to act or feel based on the research done by that sociologist. But when God speaks, we are obligated to respond rightly. Speaking of the weight God's written Word carries, one author said it like this.

"Similarly, when God speaks to rational beings his word conveys meaning. In his word, he expresses his wisdom, knowledge, desires, intentions, love, grace. That meaning is authoritative. When God shares his love with us, we have the obligation to treasure it. When he questions us, we should answer. When he expresses his grace, we are obligated to trust it. When he tells us his desires, we should conform our lives to them. When he shares with us his knowledge and intentions, we ought to believe that they are true." - John Frame

God reveals the way things truly are through His Word. At the most basic level this means telling us about His own character and revealing to us our desperate need to be forgiven of our sins and how the only way for that to happen is through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the gospel. The Bible is authoritative because God spoke it and it's the kind of authority that brings good news.