

BY WHAT AUTHORITY?

Mark 11:27-33

Intro: The account that we come to today in our study of Mark’s Gospel, is found also in Matthew and Luke. In Matthew you will find it in chapter 21, verses 23-27. In Luke, chapter 20, verses 1-8. In all three Gospel records, the discussion that the Lord had about authority is followed by a parable the Lord told about a man who planted a vineyard, and then rented it out to certain vine growers, along with the trouble land owner had when he sent for some of the fruit that they had grown. Evidently it was a part of the agreement that the owner of the land had with the vine growers, that he would receive a certain percentage of the fruit. We will get to this parable next Sunday, the Lord willing.

The connection between our Lord’s discussion about authority which He had with the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders of the Jews, is obscured in the Gospel of Mark by the chapter division. But when you get down to verse 12 of Mark 12, it becomes clear that the first part of chapter 12 actually belongs with the last seven verses of chapter 11 – which is our text for today. The priests, scribes, and elders knew that the Lord “had spoken the parable against them” (Mark 12:12).

The subject is authority. The word that used four times in our text for today, twice in verse 28, once in verse 29, and once in verse 33, is the Greek word ἐξουσία. It is found over a hundred times in the NT, so it is obviously a very important word. W. E. Vine in his *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, says that there are three other words in Greek that are translated authority, but they all mean basically the same thing. But ἐξουσία is by far the main word that it is. There are two words that are translated authority in the OT. One of them is used only three times; the other word really means to increase, or multiply, and so it really does not enter into a discussion of the meaning of authority except by the fact that those who are the more numerous are the ones who have the most power. The verse is Proverbs 29:2 where in the KJV we read,

When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn.

A more literal translation would be, “When the righteous increase,” that is, when a government is led by righteous people, “the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn.” We as Christians understand that in our own government.

However, there are plenty of illustrations in the OT of authority. At creation man was given authority over all creation. The husband was given authority over his wife, and the two of them were given authority over their children. Kings had authority over nations. Potiphar had authority over Joseph, and when he saw that Joseph was a man who could be trusted, he gave Joseph authority over all of his affairs. The jailor had authority over Joseph, but he also gave Joseph authority over all of the prisoners. The same thing happened to Joseph when he was exalted by Pharaoh to be second only to Pharaoh in all of Egypt. The Israelites were under the authority of Moses, then of Joshua, then of the judges, and then of the kings. Armies have their generals. Businesses have their owners or their CEO's. Schools have their Presidents and Boards of Trustees. From grade schools through high schools there are superintendents and principals. Cities have their Mayors. Police have their chiefs. States have their governors. Nations have their presidents, their legislative bodies, their judges. Churches have their elders and deacons. Life would be impossible if it were not for God-given authorities. We all live under the authority of laws and rules and regulations. All men are under the authority of God, whether they know it or not, and whether they like it or not.

The Apostle Paul stated the case for authorities when he wrote to the church at Rome using these words:

1 Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.

2 Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation (Rom. 13:1-2).

So in the light of this don't be so foolish as to put a bumper sticker on your car that says, "Question authority." Authorities are not always right, but they are authorities under which we are to live. If they are wrong, God will judge them. But we are to respect and obey those who have authority over us.

I. THE BACKGROUND OF OUR TEXT.

Our text this morning is about authority. Let me give you that background of this incident which brought the chief priests, scribes, and elders into conflict with the Lord Jesus Christ.

A couple of days before the incident we are considering today, the Lord

Jesus had come back into Jerusalem and into the temple after He had seen the day before what was going on in the Temple. There were people in the temple, selling animals and birds for sacrifices, and doing it with the full approval of the Jewish religious leaders. The Lord through Moses had made it acceptable for Jews who lived too far from Jerusalem to sell an animal before they left home, come to Jerusalem with that money in their pockets or pouches, buy an animal in Jerusalem to offer as a sacrifice to the Lord, *but He did not intend for the Jewish leaders to make a business out of this which would be profitable for them.* And so we read that the Lord Jesus drove these moneychangers out of the temple, overturned their tables, and that He refused to let anyone carry any vessel through the temple that was in violation of the law of God. At the same time our Lord quoted a prophecy from Isaiah 56:7 which predicted that God's house was to be a house of prayer; but they had made it a den of thieves. They were charging the people more than the animals were worth, and those who had come from any distance could not do anything but submit to the dishonesty of their leaders. So the Lord drove them all out.

Reading this event, perhaps you wondered why the Lord was not taken into custody then and there, and prosecuted, perhaps even put to death, for what He had done. Those of us who understand that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God Who had come to earth as a Man, and it was absolutely impossible for anyone to lay a hand upon Him until His time had come. Furthermore, we believe that, being the eternal Son of the living God, it was impossible for Him to do anything wrong. The disciples would have gotten into trouble if they had done what the Lord did, but not so with the Lord. We have here in this story *a conflict of authorities.* The Lord Jesus Christ is the highest of all authorities. He is the Lord of heaven and of earth. He is above all men on earth. As I read yesterday in Revelation 1, He is Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, the first and the last, the One Who lives and was dead, and behold, He is alive forevermore. What He was, He still is, and ever shall be, the Prince of the kings of the earth.

I. OUR LORD CONFRONTED BY THE JEWS (Mark 11:27-28).

But He was confronted and challenged by the top brass, so to speak, of the Jewish leaders of the day, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. They had recovered in part from what had happened a couple of days before, and now they were going to hold Him accountable for what He

had done.

And they brought their chilling charge against Him in these words: “By what authority doest thou these things? And who gave thee this authority to do these things?” They wanted Him to know that He was responsible to them, and He had dared to drive out of the temple those who were doing what they had been told by the Jewish authorities not only what they could do, but what they must do. And they wanted Him to know that what He had done was an attack upon their authority.

III. OUR LORD’S RESPONSE TO THE JEWS (Mark 11:29-30).

I marvel at the patience of the Lord Jesus. He could have responded to them by saying, “Who gave you the authority to tell those moneychangers that they could use the temple as a place to take advantage of the people who had come to Jerusalem to worship the Lord?” In our Bible reading for this week we have read the wonderful story of Hezekiah who came to the throne of Judah, and the first thing that he did was to call the Levites together, tell them to sanctify themselves, and to prepare to “carry forth the filthiness out of the holy place” (2 Chron. 29:5). They got busy right away to do what King Hezekiah told them to do, and it took them eight days to clean up the mess and to purify the articles in the temple which were for holy worship, the altar, the table, and the vessels that were used to worship the Lord.

And so those chief priests, scribes, and elders who were there to put our Lord on trial, showed that they had forgotten their own nation’s history, if they had ever even learned it at all. As powerful as these chief priests, scribes, and elders were, their authority had been designated to them by God Himself, and they stood in violation of the very offices which they occupied. Their authority, as great as it was, did not give them the liberty to violate the Word of God. The Lord had the authority to strike them dead for what they had allowed. He also had the right to ask them where they got the authority to do what they had done in the temple of that day. But He did neither. He was too wise for that.

Now remember that these men were very powerful men. The Jewish people really feared them. They had the power to put people out of their synagogues, and certainly out of the temple. And to a people who really did not know the truth of God, to be put out of the synagogue amounted to the eternal loss of their souls. Even men like Nicodemus and Joseph of

Arimathaea were silent about what was going on in their hearts because they feared the Jews, *i.e.*, the Jewish leaders. We read in John 9:22 that the parents of the young man who had been blind from birth, and to whom the Lord had given sight, were afraid to say anything favorable about the Lord because the Jews had already let it be known that anyone who said that Jesus was the Christ, would be put out of the synagogue. And they did put their son out because he had dared to say that the One Who had given him his sight has to be “of God,” or He could not have done what He did.

So what did the Lord say to these Jews who really felt that at last they had Jesus trapped?

You will see the Lord’s response to them in verses 29 and 30. **(Read.)**

Undoubtedly a crowd must have gathered around the Lord and these Jewish leaders because they always attracted attention wherever they were, and especially when there was such a group of them together. They were representatives of the Sanhedrin, the most powerful, the most authoritative group in Israel at that time. So the Lord was not only putting them on the spot before Himself, but He was putting them on the spot before the people. As the Lord knew, and as He had publicly said before, these leaders were a bunch of hypocrites. They spent all of their time trying to make the people think that they were devoted to God, when they were not. If they had been sincere men, their hearts would have been open and receptive to the Lord.

There was the Lord’s condition: “The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men? Answer Me!”

IV. THE DILEMMA OF THE JEWS AND THEIR RESPONSE (Mark 11:31-33a).

These men were obviously familiar with the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. They knew about His teaching. They had to admit that He had performed many, many miracles. Speaking of authority, do you remember what the people had said from the very beginning of our Lord’s ministry, about His teaching? You will find what the impression of the people was of our Lord’s teaching in comparison with the teaching of the scribes. Listen to what Mark recorded for us in Mark 1:22. In the synagogue in Capernaum where the Lord had been teaching, this was Mark’s

report of the reaction of the people:

22 And they were astonished at His doctrine [teaching]: for He taught them as One that had authority, and not as the scribes.

And then let your eye run down in Mark 1 to verse 27, and you will read these words:

27 And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? what new doctrine [teaching] is this? for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him.

Now the point from these verses is that the people who heard the Lord teach, and who saw the miracles He performed, had the discernment to realize that in Jesus of Nazareth there was One Who demonstrated by His teaching and by His miracles, that He was far greater than their own religious leaders.

Now the Lord, without directing further attention to Himself, asked them about the ministry of John the Baptist. He didn't come into the city; the people went out to the Jordan River in uncounted number to be baptized by John, confessing their sins as they turned to the Lord. And remember that John the Baptist had spoken of the Lord as One Whose shoe latchet he himself was unworthy to untie.

The Lord had these proud, hypocritical, deceitful religious leaders where He wanted them. "The baptism of John, was it from heaven," that is, was he what the Apostle John would write later, "a man sent from God," or was he "of men," just another of the many false prophets who could be heard in Israel in those days? Luke recorded that these Jewish leaders feared that the people would stone them if they denied that John the Baptist was a prophet.

The dilemma that these impostors faced was very clear to them. If they were to respond, "from heaven," then the Lord would say, "Why then did ye not believe him?" He said that Jesus was "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." But if they said that John the Baptist was "of men," that would get them in trouble with the people because they believed that our Lord was "a prophet indeed," *i.e.*, really a prophet from God. To the Jews a prophet was one who spoke from God. Either answer would get them into trouble.

So what did they answer the Lord? "We cannot tell." The Greek is, "We do not know."

V. THE LORD'S REJECTION OF THE JEWS (Mark 11:33b).

These Jewish leaders claimed to be the authority by whom all such cases were to be judged. Their refusal to take a stand on John the Baptist, amounted to an abandonment of their authority, and so the Lord refused to submit His case to them. "Neither do I tell you by what author-ity I do these things."

Concl: There is nothing more despicable than a hypocrite in clerical garb. The men of the Sanhedrin were not concerned about truth; they were concerned about power, about authority. They did not seek the blessing of their people; they sought to enslave them. Earlier the Lord had instructed His disciples with these words:

6 Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you (Matt. 7:6).

And with regard to the scribes and Pharisees, among other things the Lord has this to say:

13 But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in (Matt. 23:13).

But what did the Lord say about His own authority? We have His words in His departing instructions to His disciples just before He ascended back in to heaven. You will find his words in the last three verses of the Gospel according to Matthew:

18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power [ἐξουσία] is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.

Amen (Matt. 28:18-20).

To speak of the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ is just another way of speaking of His sovereignty, His sovereignty over all people, over all events, throughout all time. There is no authority greater than that of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord's will is going to prevail. His purposes shall stand. They cannot fail. Therefore, because He is our living Savior, our exhortation from Paul and to each other must always be, and can always be 1 Corinthians 15:58.