

THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS (Mk. 11:27-33)

Mk. 11:27 And they come again to Jerusalem: and as he was walking in the temple, there come to him the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders, ²⁸ And say unto him, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority to do these things? ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men? answer me. ³¹ And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say, Why then did ye not believe him? ³² But if we shall say, Of men; they feared the people: for all men counted John, that he was a prophet indeed. ³³ 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.

I wondered at something which was said in Mk. 11:18, *And the scribes and chief priests heard it. It is referring to what happened on the Wednesday morning,* ¹⁵ *And they [Jesus and the disciples] come to Jerusalem: and Jesus went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves;* ¹⁶ *And would not suffer that any man should carry any vessel through the temple.* ¹⁷ *And he taught, saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves. ... It is the way Mark recorded it,* ¹⁸ *And the scribes and chief priests heard it ... It implies they weren't there ... and if the scribes and chief priests and elders weren't there, - where they ought to have been, - where were they?!*

Surely, in this most important of weeks, - the days immediately leading up to Passover, - they *should* have been there! It was their responsibility to be there! ... People came from all over the ancient world ... but the scribes and chief priests and elders weren't plain to be seen! ... How seriously their religious duties?! ... Perhaps that explains the emphasis on the word Jesus brought to the fore in these verses, ²⁸ *And say unto him, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority to do these things?* ²⁹ *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. ...* ³³ *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.*

The word for 'authority' (ἐξουσία) relates to the idea of rights and rule. The Hebrew word behind it is *s'mikhah*, meaning 'authorization'. The Jewish leaders were asking Jesus, "What *s'mikhah* (official 'authorization') do You have authorizing You to teach and preach in this temple area?" ... Where did You study? What great rabbi did You sit under? ... Where and when were hands laid on You to become a rabbi?... So, they demanded of Jesus, "Tell us, what *right*, - on whose authority, - do You teach and to preach here?!"

The answer, of course, is found in **Lk. 4:14** And he [*Jesus*] came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. **17** And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, **18** The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because *he hath anointed me* ... That is the meaning behind this word *s'mikhah*. ... The Spirit of the Lord, - the Holy Spirit, - had commissioned Him and 'anointed' Him ('laid hands on Him') ... and He, - Jesus, - was in that temple area on the authority of His Father.

Therefore, He did not need the permission of these religious leaders who felt threatened by His authority. ... They were livid that He thought He could come into 'their' temple and behave as if the place was His ... with such *authority*?! ... It is also an interesting word used in the Latin Bible, the Vulgate. There, it is the word *potestate*, from which we get 'potential' and 'potency', - *power* ... and it is also at the root of the word Paul used to refer to Jesus in I Tim. 6:15, the blessed and only *Potentate*, the King of kings, and Lord of lords. ... That was the *authority* Jesus exercised in the temple. ...

Obviously, they were within their rights to examine anyone teaching in that area. Sadly, though, they were in no spiritual condition to judge others for they had allowed the corrupt moneychangers and the rest of the crooked dealers to 'ply their wares' in the temple ... They had 'double standards'!

Jesus was totally different though ... and He knew where His power was coming from, **Mt. 28:18** And Jesus came and spake unto them [*i.e. His disciples*], saying, All power [*ἐξουσία, omnis potestas*] is given unto me in heaven and in earth. ... The religious men did not like Him, but they could not deny His authority! ... Jesus was teaching without their approval, and it was harming their ratings in front of the people, as Matthew relates how the young children were shouting out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David" ... The chief priests were sore displeased (Mt. 21:15), so they asked Jesus what He was going to do about getting them to keep quiet, **16** Hearest thou what these say? And Jesus saith unto them, Yea; have ye never read, - He quoted from Ps. 8:2, - Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise? ... There is true God-glorifying praise coming out of their hearts ... with the implication to the religious leaders, "but what is coming out of yours"?! The reply from Jesus made the matter worse!

As far as they were concerned, Jesus was treating them, - the religious elite ... hierarchy, - as without true authority. If He had anything to say, He should have checked it out with them first! They were offended and outraged ... and they were not going to let the matter rest. They pursued Him for He was not keeping within their rules. ... Basically, they were enemies of Christ, enemies of God, enemies of His truth, and enemies of the Gospel! ...

... And notice Jesus did not sit down with them and work out an amicable agreement which suited both sides. No, it would not have worked, **II Cor. 6:14** *for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?* ... The state the temple was in was their fault for they had consciously made it into 'a den of thieves' ... They were robbing God of His authority and His position in the nation. They were the reason the people were so far away from the God of their fathers. It is like how John Wesley said, "What one generation tolerates, the next generation will embrace." ... The people were in such a state of religious confusion, they would have accepted anything their leaders said!

... But the only fault *their leaders* could see was in Jesus, - He was the threat to everything they were and had, and He had to be silenced! ... They had no interest in what He was teaching, - they simply condemned Him. Evidence and proper scrutiny was not necessary, - they just did not like Him! They had no desire to sit down with Him, and listen and learn from Him ... as previous leaders and rabbis had done nearly twenty years earlier when Jesus was a young boy of twelve years of age. On that occasion, - in this same temple, - Jewish holy men, **Lk. 2:47** *And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.* ... This time, though, they weren't interested!

... It cannot be stressed enough that these Jewish leaders had absolutely no time for Jesus ... and *He* knew exactly what they thought of Him! They had no time for Him whatsoever. They were determined to *get* Him!

This is now approaching the culmination of *all* those previous confrontations they had with Jesus, since He began His ministry about three-and-a-half years earlier. ... It was all now 'coming to a head'! The city was full of them, and these temple leaders realised this was the perfect opportunity to deal with Jesus once and for all.

On the other hand, though ... They had the Saviour of their nation in their midst ... Isn't it sad when people have the opportunity to know Jesus, but they waste and refuse it? ... They only want to ridicule and mock.

So, it is the Wednesday when the religious leaders catch up with Jesus. He was walking in the temple area ... with its vast courtyard. Mark says He was "walking in the temple" (v.27), - that is the Jewish description of what the rabbis did as they mingled with the people ... as Luke also explains, Jesus **Lk. 20:1** taught the people in the temple, and preached the gospel. ...

His every move was being watched, ²⁷ and as he was walking in the temple, there come to him the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders, - the 'main men' from out of the three groups within the Sanhedrin, - the delegation of the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders. This was orchestrated planning, - they had Him 'in their sights'! They were a sneaky lot, but Jesus knew all about them! They 'slithered' up to Him, and they confronted Him, ²⁸ By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority to do these things?

And they would have been *hoping* He would have given them the opportunity there and then to lambast Him. It would have played into their hands perfectly if, - for example, - He would have said what He had said previously, **Jn. 8:58** Before Abraham was, I am. ... If Jesus would have said *that*, they would certainly have *had Him!* Previously, He had told them He was God, and that is where His authority came from! ... Now, if He had repeated those same words, - within the environs of the temple, - He would have been immediately stoned for blasphemy. ... And that is what they were hoping for! ... But Jesus knew what those contemptible men were up to so He answered their question with one of His own, **Mk. 11:30** The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men? answer me. ... *What a question!* ... It threw them into disarray!

They did not know how to answer Him, and the way He responded to the question they asked, - that is, by asking another question, - was perfectly valid for it was how the rabbis carried out their discussions. ... Jesus was using their methods, and they could not argue with Him! ... He 'had them over a barrel', as we say! ... He told them, I'll answer your question if you answer mine. ... And it was very clever because He asked them a question which took them outside of their immediate circumstances. ... What did the subject of John's baptism have to do with the authority with which Jesus taught? ... They had to answer though, or the conversation was over ... and their opportunity lost!

The baptism of John was a phrase which described John the Baptist's ministry, - his Gospel preaching and his teaching concerning the Messiah, **Mk. 1:7** And [John] preached, saying, There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. ⁸ I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost. ... **Jn. 1:29** John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. ... The link was that John the Baptist had taught Jesus was the Messiah ... so, Jesus asked these Jewish leaders, - with the crowds gathered around them listening ... was John the Baptist right or wrong?! **Mk. 11:30** The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men? answer me. ... They were in a quandary!

Their problem was that if they said John was a prophet sent from God, then they had to admit to the message he was preaching ... that Jesus is the Messiah. John was popular, and he had been well-received among the Jews (**Mk. 1:5** And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sin) ... So, to keep in with the people, the leaders would have been better replying to Jesus that John *was* sent from God. However, if they admitted to Jesus that John was sent from God, then they would have had to endorse John's message about Jesus ... and that would have gone against their grain! ... They would have had to agree with Jesus! ... Either way, they were in a conundrum! ... Jesus had made it impossible for them to take the matter any further, at that moment.

Really, it wasn't going their way. On the Monday, the crowds had received Jesus triumphantly into Jerusalem, - the religious leaders didn't like that. On the Tuesday, the crowds had been impressed with Him in the temple, - they would not have liked that either. It's Wednesday, and He continues to hold the interest and fascination of the ordinary people ... It really wasn't going the way of these malicious Jewish clergymen! ... And Jesus hammered home His question, ³⁰ The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men? answer me.

They had to retreat and hold a meeting, - their evilness was no match for God's holiness, - where sin abounded, grace was proving to much more abound. There in the temple yard, they huddled in a bunch to figure out how they would rescue themselves from this embarrassment, ³¹ And they reasoned with themselves. ... What are we going to do?! We can't say anything for anything we say will incriminate us! ³¹ ... If we shall say, From heaven; he will say, Why then did ye not believe him? ³² But if we shall say, Of men; they feared the

people: for all men counted John, that he was a prophet indeed. ... They were between the proverbial ‘rock and the hard place’! ... Indeed, Luke explains the *extra* seriousness of the situation, **Lk. 20:6** *But and if we say, Of men; all the people will stone us: for they be persuaded that John was a prophet. ... Potentially, they could have ended up getting what they intended Jesus to have gotten!*

So they decided ... whatever you say, say nothing! If we say the wrong thing, we shall ‘lose face’ ... so say nothing ... and that is exactly what they said ... *nothing!* ... All these clever men were made out to be like fools in front of Jesus, ³³ *And they answered and said unto Jesus, We cannot tell.*

Humiliated, by the rabbi from Nazareth, - whose validity they had mocked and ridiculed ... the carpenter’s Son, the Man of Galilee, the travelling preacher. What a disgrace! They with all their education were no match for Jesus! ... He ‘wiped the floor’ with them!

Can you see the expressions on their faces? These proud, vain, arrogant, self-righteous, obnoxious men ... their hatred for Jesus *oozing* out of them! ... But there was not a thing they could say. They had to ‘give in’, and say nothing other than, *We cannot tell.* ... Oh, the shame! ... Clever men in religious matters, and they had to confess they did not know the answer to the question from the Man of Galilee! And Jesus made it worse when He said to them, *Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things.* ... They had nothing to say to Jesus, and He had no more to say to them! ... What a predicament they were in! ... They thought they were so smart, but they were as nothing, compared to the Saviour!

“When I see Jesus, I’ll tell Him what I think of Him ... I’ll ask Him why He allowed all those poor, hungry, starving people in the world, and why He allowed wars and disasters ... When I see Him, I’ll tell Him!” ... Whenever you see Jesus, - as we all must stand before Him some day, - if you don’t know Him as your Saviour and Lord, you will not tell Him anything ... for you will be like these ungodly men ... and you will have nothing to say!

They thought they could castigate and condemn the Saviour, but when you examine what happened, we are being shown the complete ineptitude and the absolute futility of their efforts. ... They *failed* to do anything against Jesus! Of their own plans and schemes, it was one disaster after another. *They hadn’t a clue how to silence Jesus!*

Had it not been for the plan of God Jesus would *not* have been crucified! Left to man's devices, it would *never* have happened! Yes, ultimately, He was crucified and slain by wicked hands, but at the source of it all, Jesus, - ... as Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost, - was **Acts 2:23** *delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God* ... If the Father had not handed His Son over, sinful man, - on his own, no matter how wicked and evil and corrupt, - would never have managed to crucify Jesus. No, the only reason it happened was because **Is. 53:10** *it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief ... and made his soul an offering for sin.* ... It was the Lord's will, otherwise the death of the Lord Jesus Christ would never have taken place!

But, here they were ... they had rejected the Saviour, and the Saviour rejected them. ... That was their opportunity gone ... They were, **Rom. 1:20** *...without excuse: 21 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.* ... The light of the Gospel shining upon them had gone out!

God *does* have His limits. They had replaced Him in their temple with their false religion ... a religion based upon crumbling foundations ... They had deceived themselves into thinking they could mock God, and get away with it ... but the corrupt seeds they were sowing they were about to reap. ... They had been granted the opportunity to meet the Saviour, to receive and believe in Him, but they persisted in their unbelief, as so many do today. ... And the 'curtain came down' when Jesus told them, **Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things.** ... The conversation was over. The opportunity for the Gospel had gone. Their temple, - with its vain religion, - would be destroyed in less than forty years. Many of the people would be massacred by the Romans, and many more would be scattered across the world.

We began by highlighting the word 'authority'. Jesus proved Himself to *be* the *only* true authority ... and that is where our authority is built upon for we have nothing but Him to preach and present. Everything that emanates from this fellowship must be about Jesus, as taught in His Word. All our doctrines, all our beliefs, all our teachings ... He must be the focus of them. Our only authority is His Word which presents Him from beginning to end ... No matter what the issue of the day is, we must preach Christ, and Him crucified, the only Saviour of men and women, boys and girls ... *Our only authority is the authority of Jesus!* ... Let's be careful we keep it that way! Amen.