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By What Authority Do You Live?

Mark 11:27-33

Hopefully through most of our lives our days have been relatively calm, without much excitement, just normal routine days. Then there are days that we have to deal with problems or issues. We are generally able to handle them and move on. Then there are other days that seem to never end. It seems that from the moment we first wake up something happens and things continue to happen all day long, one right after another. Sometimes on those days several major things happen all at the same time. Life on those days can feel overwhelming and you are looking forward to the end of the day, hoping that **tomorrow will be different**. For Jesus, this is one of those busy days. It is Tuesday of Holy Week. Remember, on Monday he cleansed the temple and disrupted lots of lives. Things started early on Tuesday morning when the disciples, on their 3 mile walk to Jerusalem, questioned Jesus about the fig tree He cursed. He taught them about the importance of bearing fruit and the forgiveness of sins. That was all before Jesus and His disciples reached the city of Jerusalem.

Mark 11:27-28 *“Then they came again to Jerusalem. And as He was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came to Him. And they said to Him, ‘By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority to do these things?’”* After Jesus and His disciples entered the city of Jerusalem, they went to the temple. As soon as Jesus walked into the temple the questions started. These questions continue through 2 more chapters in Mark’s gospel. The chief priests, scribes and elders were in the temple waiting for Jesus. They wanted to know where He got His authority to cleanse the temple the way He did. It was really the responsibility of the chief priests, scribes and elders to monitor the temple grounds. None of them gave Jesus authority to do what He did. Jesus had a great opportunity to put these religious leaders in their place. He could have questioned their authority as to why they let such corruption into the temple. They were given authority as the shepherds of the flock of Israel. But they became corrupt themselves (Ezekiel 34:1-16). Instead of confronting them directly about their own corruption and Jesus’ legitimate authority to cleanse the temple as God in human flesh, Jesus used their own hypocritical behavior to point out their sinfulness towards God.

Verse 29 *“But Jesus answered and said to them, ‘I also will ask you one question; then answer Me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things:’”* By asking this question, Jesus wanted them to see how they have abused the authority that God had given the priesthood of Israel. The priests were to know God. They were to know His word. They were to help and encourage people to walk in the ways of the Lord

and fulfill His will. They were to bring hope and healing to the people. They were supposed to seek the lost and bring them back. The priests were doing none of these (Ezekiel 34:1-16). Who was doing these things? Jesus! He was doing everything the priests were supposed to do and were not. Jesus wanted them to discover for themselves and admit how corrupt they had become. Jesus wanted them to repent and return to the Living God. So, He asked the question.

Verse 30 *“The baptism of John—was it from heaven or from men? Answer Me.”* Where did John get his authority to baptize? (Luke 3:2-6). Where did John get his authority to call people to repentance? Where did John get the authority to tell people to *“bear fruits worthy of repentance?”* (3:8). Did God give him all this authority or did he give himself this authority. Was John doing this just to make a name for himself or was he obeying God?

Verse 31-32 *“And they reasoned among themselves, saying, ‘If we say, ‘From heaven,’ He will say, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’ But if we say, ‘From men’—they feared the people, for all counted John to have been a prophet indeed.”* They reasoned among themselves. Fortunately, these priests, scribes and elders considered their only two real options. They knew they were responsible to question every prophet and teacher in Israel, especially in the temple. They went out and listened to John preach (Matthew 3:7). And **they did nothing**. John even called them a *“Brood of vipers!”* John called them to repent and be baptized. **They did not respond to God’s call**. Now, Jesus is confronting them on their response to John’s preaching. They knew what their options were. If they admitted that John’s authority came from God, then they should have believed him, repented of their sins and been baptized. That was the correct response for everyone to make. **They did not make it**. If they said that John was saying these things of his own free will, then Jesus would ask them why they did not stop him. These priests were responsible to stop all false teaching. They did not stop John from preaching. These priests did not want to do something like this because they were afraid of the people. The people had the right conviction. John’s authority came from God. Their actions showed it. The people repented. They were baptized. They changed their lives. The priests, scribes and elders would not admit their big mistake. **They refused to change**. They remained corrupt and gave the weakest most embarrassing answer.

Verse 33 *“So they answered and said to Jesus, ‘We do not know.’ And Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.’”* If anyone should have known, these knowledgeable, wise, dedicated men should have known. They said, *“We do not know.”* Maybe they did know but were too afraid or embarrassed to admit what they believed. At this point, Jesus was not going to admit

to them where He got His authority. They would find out soon enough. So, **by what authority do you live?** Why do you believe the things you do? Why do you do the things you do? Are you under anyone's authority? Or, do you operate your life managing your own authority? What authority should a pastor have in a church?

The more I think about these things the more I understand that **everyone lives under the authority of God**. Jesus said, "*For without Me you can do nothing*" (John 15:5). Jesus literally means this! Without Jesus, without God creating this world the way He did and life as He designed it, we cannot move a muscle. Jesus followed this statement by describing what happens to **people who refuse to abide in Him** and **people who truly abide in Him**. "*If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, **and** My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you*" (John 15:6-7).

God allows us to choose to live under His authority or not. You can **choose to refuse God's authority** in your life. **God made us self-determining**. We can determine for ourselves how we want to live. We can choose to live having God's authority in our lives or we can choose our own way, being our own authority. But if you choose to live being your own authority, you will not be able to determine your ultimate, eternal existence. In the end, God's authority reigns! **Everyone falls under God's final authority**. He has let us know what happens to those who refuse to submit to God and His authority. They are gathered together and thrown into the fire. And there is nothing they can do to change that. They fall under God's authority. **For those who abide in Jesus**, who abide in God, we incorporate God's words and His life into our lives. These are true Christians. There are those who say they abide in Jesus but they do not incorporate God's words into their lives. They believe and do what they want. They do not submit to God, no matter what they say. **True Christians** want God to live in their lives. They want to know Him. They want to learn and practice His truths. They want to glorify God. Then we can ask whatever we want and God will do it for us. Do you know what I want? God's forgiveness. I never want to take His grace for granted. I do not think the apostle Paul did. He wrote late in his ministry, "*This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief*" (1 Timothy 1:15). Paul did not say he **was** the chief sinner. He said, **I am** the chief sinner.

Paul wanted to be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness, but he wanted to be found having the righteousness which is from God by faith (Philippians 3:9). He wrote, "*that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may*

attain to the resurrections from the dead” (3:10-11). Paul sought daily to die to his sinful nature and live daily under the authority of Christ. Paul believed and taught that salvation came by the grace of God alone through faith in Jesus alone. And he worked daily to abide in Christ and have His teaching abide in him. When a person is under God’s authority, that person is obedient to God. **We work at believing** the way God wants us to believe (John 6:28-29). **We work at living** the way God wants us to live (Luke 9:23-24). **We work at doing** what God wants us to do (John 14:23-24). When a person is under their own authority they believe and do what they want to. They follow their own will not the will of God.

When it comes to authority, what authority should a pastor have in a church? Part of the answer is, I should have none. Paul put it this way. *“Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then **neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase**”* (1 Corinthians 3:5-7). Concerning authority, ministers are nothing. Paul said he and Apollos were nothing. It is God who should have the authority in your life. In Corinth, church members were following a man when they should have been following Jesus and His teachings. When you give a person authority over your life you may end up being controlled by them, like Jim Jones and his followers who drank the cool aide.

A person should only allow God and His word to have authority in their life. As your pastor, I am responsible to teach you to be under God’s authority, not mine. I am to teach you the word of God so that you follow Him, not me. Pastors, preachers and people like John the Baptist were given authority to teach God’s truths. It is God and His truths that are to be followed, not the person (John 3:30). John the Baptist could preach, repent and be baptized. I can preach the same thing, repent and be baptized. Because God’s word tells us to repent and be baptized (Acts 2:38). Listen to and follow God’s word, not because I say so, but because God says so. We are also taught, *“do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God”* (Romans 12:2). This takes time and dedication. The religious leaders abused the authority God gave them as do many people today. They ruined lives. Determine to live under God’s authority. Repent, believe. Seek to live and do God’s will.

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