

Jason Upchurch - Mark 11:27-33 - The Good News of Jesus's Authority

This morning begins a very rowdy section of Mark's gospel. This is the showdown in Jerusalem. This is the epic all day battle between Jesus and the religious leaders in the Temple courts.

And this whole section revolves around the authority of Jesus. Keep that in mind.

If you remember this is what we often refer to as Passion week. This is the last week of Jesus's life before he dies and rises again.

Jesus entered Jerusalem on Sunday - Palm Sunday. He came into the city to fanfare and praise of the crowd that was with him. And once he entered the city he went into the Temple and just looked around. It was late Sunday when he came into the city so he went to the Temple and just looked around and it seems as though what he saw going on was outrageous.

Why do we say that? Because that night he heads a mile east to Bethany and bright and early Monday morning he comes back into the Temple. Remember he passed a fig tree and cursed it and killed it - that was a parable of God cursing the unbelieving Jews and the condemning absolute joke they had made of the sacrificial system.

So he curses the tree and kills it and walks into the Temple courtyard and absolutely cleans house. He's overturning tables and chairs and money is flying everywhere, goats and sheep are going everywhere. He's driving out cattle and birds and money changers in this 2-3 acre complex. The whole situation is just surreal as he is taking back control of his house and his Father's house. And it takes him all day.

That was Monday. This is Tuesday. And Jesus marches back into the Temple but the religious leaders are waiting for him. They're not going to let him do this again. They are stopping him dead in his tracks.

And so this begins the longest day we have recorded in the Passion week. This is an all day long affair where Jesus is battling it out with the religious leaders. They're going to go back and forth all day long in a match of theology and parables and questioning each other.

And at the end of the day - Tuesday - Jesus is going to take his disciples out of the city, across the Kidron Valley, up the Mount of Olives. And while they're overlooking Jerusalem and the Temple and all the glory of the city that's where Jesus says that in one generation the Temple and Jerusalem will be absolutely leveled to the ground. That's all of Chapter 13. That's a long day.

We're here at the very beginning of the day. Jesus is just walking back into the Temple after having cleared the whole thing out just the day before. And the religious leaders are asking a very obvious question: "Who do you think you are?"

And they use a word that is incredibly important. Sometimes the best way to know what a section of Scripture is all about is if a word is repeated over and over. And there's a word that's repeated 4 times in these few verses and it's the word authority.

Vs. 28: By what authority are you doing these things? Or who gave you this authority?

That's the main issue in this section: Jesus's authority. This has always been and will always be the biggest issue people have with Jesus.

See, believe it or not, a lot of people like Jesus. A lot of unbelievers like Jesus. Or at the very least they tolerate Jesus. Some, believe it or not, we might even say are Jesus-fans at least when it fits their viewpoint. They like the stories of Jesus: turning the water into wine, the walking across the water. The feeding all the people.

Actually that Jesus sounds a like a social justice warrior. Sort of the Robin Hood, man of the people kind of guy. "We're going to bring food and drink to the masses" and take it to those religious leaders.

They like his healing power and they really like the story of when they brought the woman caught in adultery - the very act - because Jesus lets her off the hook. They like being let off the hook for their sins. They like that story because Jesus doesn't condemn her. All the religious guys want to kill her, but Jesus condemns them and lets her go. They don't care about the fact that he commands her to "go and sin no more" - they just want a gentle Jesus who looks the other way when someone does something wrong.

Jesus is all love. Jesus is all accepting. They love that. But you know the one thing about Jesus they reject? His authority.

See, it's one thing to love the stories and the miracles. It's an entirely different thing to acknowledge his authority and to submit to his authority personally in your life.

Because Jesus doesn't just do heartwarming stories, he also gives commands. And if we love him we'll obey those commands.

So if someone doesn't acknowledge and submit to the authority of Jesus then really what they have is a Hallmark card Jesus that doesn't save them. They have good stories, cute verses to write on their instagram page, but no salvation. Jesus is just a bumper sticker, he's not really their Lord.

Now, interestingly, the authority of Jesus has been something of a theme in Mark's gospel from the very beginning.

I want to show you this as we approach this passage and then dive in here. Because if you were to sit down and read Mark's gospel from start to finish you'd notice this theme and how stark the contrast is as he walks into the Temple.

Turn to Mark 1:21-28. Remember this is the very first time Mark records Jesus walking into a synagogue. And what do we see on display? We see Jesus with authority. **Read.**

So check this out. So Jesus walks into this synagogue and teaches like he has authority. He just owns it. He's not mousey or passive aggressive or shy. He has authority and so he teaches as though he has authority.

The word "authority" is exousia and it means that someone has control over something. They have the right to command and control. It's as though this is his synagogue and he's the elder in the synagogue.

And not only does he have it but the people acknowledge it. **Read 22**

The people see. And not only does he have authority over people he has authority over the spiritual world. **Read 27**

He acts like he has power over demons and the demons acknowledge it.

This is why Jesus's fame spread: because of his authority.

He has authority over people.
People acknowledge that authority.
He has authority over demons.
Demons acknowledge it.

Everybody sees it, everybody acknowledges it.

Look at 2:9-12. Remember this is the situation where the paralytic is dropped down in the middle of Jesus's own house. His friends lower him down so he'll be healed. And Jesus doesn't heal him right away. He forgives him, which causes quite the stir. Jesus doesn't have the authority to do that. Who can forgive sins but God alone. Only God has that authority. **Read 9-12**

It's easier to simply say "Your sins are forgiven" because you can't see that. That's a spiritual transaction. It's actually harder to say "rise and walk" because you can see whether or not someone can actually do that. So what Jesus does is show his authority to do the more important thing of forgiving sins by doing the visibly harder thing of making the man walk.

So Jesus has authority not only over physical issues,, but over spiritual conditions as well.

Look at 3:13-16. Here we see that Jesus not only has this authority, but he passes this authority on to his disciples. He can delegate spiritual authority. **Read**

So what Jesus does is pass on this authority to his disciples. Think about this: It's one thing to have authority. But it's a whole different level of authority to pass that along to other people.

A police officer has authority. But a police officer can't make more police officers. He doesn't have that authority all on his own. You have to go higher up the chain of command to pass along your authority.

Jesus can pass on his authority to others. And not just in word - he actually can do it because his disciples have these abilities. He's not a low-level prophet. He's God in the flesh who has all authority and can give that authority to whoever he wants.

He does this again in **Chap 6:6-13** when he sends the 12 out again. they proclaim the gospel, just like he did in the synagogues. They tell people to repent. They cast out demons and anointed people with oil and healed the sick. And it worked.

Jesus had given the disciples actual authority, they knew it, the people knew and even the demons knew it.

So when we get back to **Chap 11:27** - to this chapter and especially when Jesus confronts the religious leaders - it comes down to authority. Jesus acts and teaches as though he has it. But these guys refuse to acknowledge it. In Mark's gospel this is like the record scratch. Everyone sees and knows Jesus's authority except the religious leaders: the very people who should acknowledge it freely.

Why is that? Why do they refuse to acknowledge Jesus's authority? Well, obviously there's a spiritual component here. If God doesn't open their eyes to see and believe the gospel they can't. God has to do a work in them. So that's a big one.

But as I was thinking about this passage I came up with 6 reasons they reject Jesus's authority. And these reasons are all because Jesus is a threat to these guys. And I think these are also reasons why people reject Jesus's authority even today.

1) Jesus's authority is a threat to their money. **Read 27-28**

So Jesus enters into the Temple and is immediately met by these guys. Why are they mad? Well, because the day before he shut down the biggest money making scam in Israel which was happening in the Temple.

I won't go over everything that we did a few weeks ago. But look at **Vs. 17.** **Read**

What is Jesus calling them? He's calling them robbers. They are thieves, people who would overwhelm people by force and steal. And maybe that doesn't seem to be much of an insult to us, but in Jesus's time robbers were the lowest of the low.

If you remember as Jesus was dying on the cross there were two people next to him. What was their crime? Robbery. What Jesus is saying is that these religious leaders are no better than the lowest robber who deserves to be executed on a cross. This is a deep insult to these religious leaders.

What Jesus did was to expel all the money changers who were charging ridiculous exchange rates and expel all the merchants who were selling animals at ridiculous prices. Just all on it's own that's a pretty amazing feat - to be able to clear out an area that packed and that big.

That's what they're saying: "You're acting like you have the authority to do that, where did you get that authority?" That's what prompts this whole conversation.

And if you remember, this was an absolute cash cow. The religious leaders in Jesus's day were crazy rich. You've heard of the show Crazy Rich Asians? Well, it doesn't have quite the same ring but these were crazy rich Jewish leaders. And buying and selling in the Temple was part of the scam.

And what's true for them is true for everyone: Jesus's authority is a threat to peoples' money. Because when someone acknowledges and proclaims that Jesus is Lord what they're saying is that he has authority over all their life including their money.

It's no longer our money but his money. We go from being owners to being stewards. We just manage God's money.

How we make money changes: we're honest, hard working, looking to build stuff and help others as well. We're even told to help others build money and wealth. Very different than the world.

How we spend money changes: we're more concerned about generosity and thrift. We're more concerned about how to train our kids and grandkids to manage money wiser. The world says give me all I want right now.

How we give changes: because we're joyfully taking part in the building the Kingdom of God.

Jesus's authority is a threat - and has always been a threat - to money.

2) Jesus's authority is a threat to their religion. Read 27

It's not just money that Jesus threatens, it's really the whole of the Jewish religious system. Because what had happened by this time was that the religious leaders had so corrupted what God had intended in the sacrificial system that it really had just become a shell of what it was supposed to be.

The sacrificial system was designed by God to show his holiness and our sinfulness and our reliance on his mercy.

The idea - in short - was that wretched sinners could come to the Temple and be made right with God. When they sinned unintentionally, they would take one of their own animals to the Temple and the priest would help them in their sacrifice. The sinner would lay their hand on the head of the animal visually imputing their sin to this perfect animal. And then they would slaughter the animal.

And the idea was that this animal - a bull or goat or sheep or dove - was dying in their place. The animal was a sacrifice - a substitute - on their behalf.

And the job of the priest was to help the repentant sinner come near to God. To be made right with God. They were to facilitate reconciliation between God and man. And the system had become so corrupt, so filled with man-made rules and what can only be called superstition that the very people who were charged with leading the people are now literally confronting God for what he has done.

There are 3 groups here and we've seen them throughout Mark's gospel. Jesus has indicated over the last several chapters that it would be these exact 3 groups that would condemn him and turn him over to be crucified. And right on time, here they are ready to stop him.

There are the chief priests - the guys in charge of the Temple. The priests were Levites who were in charge of the sacrificial system. In the gospels they are found primarily in and around Jerusalem because that's where the sacrificial system was located. And ironically not only are they keeping the Jewish people from coming close to God, but their keeping God from coming close to his own house. This is how blinded they are.

The scribes, some of your Bibles say "lawyers." They weren't lawyers quite in the sense we know them. They were basically scribes who would make professional copies of the Scriptures. And since they spent so much

time copying the Bible they knew it really well. So the people looked to them as having some amount of authority. And you'd think guys who spent a ton for time in God's Word copying it would know what it says. But they didn't.

The elders were also part of the ruling class. These three groups made up what was called the Sanhedrin which was a ruling council of religious leaders in Jerusalem. There were 70 members of the Sanhedrin. And these will eventually be the guys who condemn Jesus and hand him over to Pilate for execution.

Jesus is threatening their religious monopoly in Jerusalem. And this is what Jesus often does. Jesus is often a threat to religious systems. Jesus is a threat to all kinds of religious systems because he claims to be the only way, the only truth, the only life and no one comes to the Father except through him.

All other religions are rendered useless. Their systems and beliefs and motions are all a sham. Believing and following Jesus in Spirit and in truth is the only way of salvation.

But Jesus is also a threat to religions that claim to follow Jesus. A lot of people claim to follow Jesus but then add to his Word or take away from his word.

I think most of us have at least heard of churches that forbid alcohol or dancing. Or required using the King James Version or made up all kinds of rules to follow Jesus that oddly enough aren't in the Bible at all. There's a lot of legalism out there.

By the way, when we talk about legalism we have to be careful. There are 2 types of legalism. The first type is adding works to faith in order to be saved. Faith + plus something = salvation is legalism. Faith + circumcision/ baptism/anything is legalism.

The second kind of legalism is saying that once you are saved you have to follow some man-made rules that aren't in the Bible but have a religious feel to them. If someone can't show you in Scripture where a command or prohibition is found, or they can't show you the good and necessary consequence it's legalism.

By the way, simply obeying commands is not legalism. It could be if you're using it as the **reason** that you think you're saved. But just calling people to obey Jesus is not legalism. It's actually love.

Jesus is a threat to legalism. He's a threat to all false religious systems. So much so that even as Jesus was standing in his own Temple, within one generation he would send armies in to tear the Temple to pieces. The Old Covenant would be obsolete and pass away because the religious establishment had corrupted it so bad. Jesus doesn't do man-made religion. He's a threat to it even if it looks like something from him.

Jesus wants people who joyfully submit to his authority in their lives not just people who are going through religious motions.

3) Jesus is a threat to dishonesty. Read 29-32

Now this is really a brilliant move on so many levels. First of all, a little apologetics side note: if someone is wanting to talk about Jesus, don't be the one on the hot seat answering all the questions. Especially if it's disingenuous questioning.

And you know what I'm talking about. People who are asking questions to poke holes in the Bible.

"So you really believe that some God created everything 6,000 years ago?"

Well don't answer that because now you're on the ropes. I'd respond with, "You're telling me you believe everything we see and know magically came into being out of nothing billions of years ago and complex creatures evolved from goo?"

In a contest don't be the only one lifting all the weight. Make them answer questions. That's what Jesus does here.

“I’ll answer your question about authority, but you’ve got to answer a question about authority first.” And what he does is bring up John the Baptist. Why J the B? That seems like a very odd person to bring up.

Here’s why. Because everyone acknowledged that there was something special with John. The crowds flocked to him en masse. They knew he was a prophet sent from God.

And if you remember even scribes and chief priests sent people to John to find out if he was the Messiah. They knew something special was going on with John. That’s why Jesus frames the question the way he does. Was this from heaven or from man? When Jesus says “from heaven” what he means was “Was John sent from God?” Was he actually a prophet speaking for God?

And the answer, of course is “yes.” Why does that matter? Because who did John says Jesus was? John said he is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He said Jesus was coming and Jesus was mightier than John. John wasn’t even worthy to stoop down and untie Jesus’s sandal strap. And Jesus was coming with a more authoritative baptism.

And Jesus’s point is basically: If you believed John was from God and a prophet, and John said I am greater than he, why don’t you believe that?

He’s putting them in an impossible situation. They know John was a man of God. They know he was a prophet. But they hate Jesus. And so they can’t even admit what they know is true. **Read 31-32**

They just can’t bring themselves to be honest because that would mean they have to acknowledge that Jesus has authority over them.

This is often the case with many people about Jesus. There is a functional dishonesty with their belief system.

People will refuse to acknowledge truths that are right in front of them because if they were to do that then they’d have to acknowledge they are wrong.

They all know that John’s authority came from heaven. And when Jesus says “heaven” what he means is God. God sent John.

A little fun note here. Look at how Jesus asks the question. **Read 30**

He asks the question, then demands an answer. Who has authority here? Jesus does. And ironically, they play along. They submit to the very authority they deny he has by deliberating the question.

You think if they really rejected his authority they’d just say “We’re not playing your games, arrest him.” But they don’t! They actually functionally acknowledge his authority!

But they are dishonest, and many who reject Jesus are too. A lot of unbelievers sound like they give logically airtight answers until you press them. And one of the easiest ways to do this is to show how 2 points in their religious system are at odds.

“So you don’t believe in God and think we’re just animals?” “Yes.” “Then where do we get morality?” “It just evolved.” “Well, let’s say it evolved further and I just take your wallet.” “No chance.” “Why not?” Lions kill each other all the times, animals kill each other all the time. No one loses any sleep.

See, when we come to Jesus there’s no playing games about truth. Jesus is the truth and that truth is a light that shines into every aspect of life. And because unbelievers love darkness, it’s often very easy to see where dishonesty is.

4) Jesus is a threat to popularity. **Read 32-33**

Why don’t they tell Jesus the answer? They know the answer and they all acknowledge that they know the answer.

The reason they don't answer is fear of man. It's fear of the crowd. They're not even afraid of Jesus - who they actually should be afraid of.

They're afraid of the crowd and what the crowd would do to them if they confess that John had authority and that John said Jesus had more authority.

They're hypocrites. And Jesus isn't going to play their game. He says he won't tell them where he gets his authority. He knows. They know. And they both know what the other knows.

Commentator: "Their hypocrisy is evident in that their deliberations are motivated not by what is true about John, but by the potential backlash from Jesus or the crowds." (Mark Strauss)

Listen when you follow Jesus your popularity is at stake. It's going to take a hit. You're going to lose friends, family. People aren't going to like you.

Why? Because now everything you do and believe is in conflict with the world, the flesh and the devil. You're messing up their system.

You can't fear man and fear God. You can only do one. And you have to choose which it will be. You can't be popular with the world and hear "Well done good and faithful servant." You just can't.

Listen, only Jesus has all authority. And it's a threat to those who don't want it.

But for those of us who do, it's freedom. Because now we don't have to play religious games any longer. We don't have to live lies any longer. We don't have worry about whether what we do or believe will lose us friends.

Because Jesus is our friend, our Lord and our master. To him belongs all authority.

Pray