

MARK — Questioning Jesus' Authority

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Every so often, or perhaps, more often, we find ourselves reading the Bible and a passage just crosses us the wrong way, and we hate it. And we question Jesus' authority. And the question we ask is, Jesus, do you really have authority to say that? And the deeper question is do you trust him?

Our hope is that by seeing Jesus is that you'd walk out of this community group, you'd at least be 1% more trusting of Jesus in your life.

Context Setup

Earlier in the passage, Jesus marched into the temple, grabs a whip, and starts flipping tables and scaring the animals. From his perspective, he's walking through the temple with authority and cleaning the temple.

He quotes prophetic judgment over the temple and claims that the temple is blocking the way for foreigners to hear the teaching of the LORD. So now the leaders see him in the temple again and question Jesus:

They arrived again in Jerusalem, and while Jesus was walking in the temple courts, the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders came to him. "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you authority to do this?"

The New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Mk 11:27–28.

Essentially, “Who do you think you are?!”

However, Jesus has been demonstrating authority for the first 11 chapters of Mark through healing sick people and a paraplegic, casting out demons, claiming authority to forgive sins, raising a girl from the dead, feeds the 5 - 20,000, calms a storm & walks on the water, and so much more. Jesus has been exercising authority over all of life.

But it is only now that the Pharisees are questioning his authority because he’s critiquing the religious temple system.

In true rabbinic fashion, he answers a question with a question because he wants to hear the heart of someone before he replies to them.

Jesus replied, “I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John’s baptism—was it from heaven, or of human origin? Tell me!”

The New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Mk 11:29–30.

Jesus is now testing the Pharisees. He cites John The Baptist’s ministry, which was very well known and wants to see what they’ll say about John’s ministry.

Because whatever their conclusion about John’s ministry is will be the same conclusion for Jesus’ ministry. We’re shown how important John’s ministry is at the beginning of the Gospel, and now the Pharisees reveal their hearts:

They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask, ‘Then why didn’t you believe him?’ But if we say, ‘Of human origin’ ...” (They feared the people, for everyone held that John really was a prophet.)

So they answered Jesus, “We don’t know.”

Jesus said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.”

The New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Mk 11:31–33.

Privately, they knew what they thought, but they were more afraid of the people, losing their leadership and their credibility, so they try to play it safe and not be honest with Jesus.

But they show that their internal beliefs do not correspond with their external words: hypocrisy.

If they believed in John’s ministry, they would have joined and supported John.

Their choice was clear. And it revealed their worst fear: The Fear of Man.

Fear of man will prove to be a snare,
but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe.

The New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Pr 29:25.

The fear of man can follow us through all stages of our life and show up often at every opportunity it can in order to intimidate us into silence.



And sometimes the threat of being associated with Jesus, the most common cause of the fear of man, is real. It can cost us jobs, academic positions, promotions, and social status. It can go further and cost us health, our bodies, or our life.

But the Pharisees, they're living a double life. So when they try to play it safe, playing right into the fear of man, Jesus essentially tells them, "well I guess you'll never find out."

Identifying with Jesus' Authority

What about for you? What happens for you when the opportunity arises to represent or defend King Jesus? Is the fear of man at work in your life?

Where may the fear of man be at work?



Because if Jesus' authority is actually from heaven, and not just human, does that not imply that our full allegiance and trust should be with King Jesus?

What has Jesus' authority done all throughout this gospel? It heals people, brings life where there was death, and restores people!

It brings peace where there was chaos.

If his authority is welcomed into an area, it brings restorative life. Do you want that in your life?

And if you welcome that into your life, the more you become a conduit of Heaven's restorative life through you into the places that you go.

You become like the one you submit to.



Jesus taught us to pray, “thy kingdom come,” where? Here on earth. God wants to invade the places where there are sickness and darkness and death. What he needs are a people who are willing to welcome Jesus’ authority in their lives and become partners with him to restore creation.

What’s At Stake?

What’s at stake if we don’t own our Christianity in those spaces?

When the Pharisees remained neutral, they revealed that the authority they submitted to is their own. If we ignore Jesus’ authority, we supplant him with ourselves as our ultimate authority.

Rejecting Jesus wasn’t new for the religious leaders. It happened to Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the prophets:

Jesus then began to speak to them in parables: “A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the winepress and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. But they seized him, beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Then he sent another servant to them; they struck this man on the head and treated him shamefully. He sent

still another, and that one they killed. He sent many others; some of them they beat, others they killed.

“He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’

“But the tenants said to one another, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’ So they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard.

“What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others. Haven’t you read this passage of Scripture:

“*‘The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes’?*”

Then the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders looked for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken the parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd; so they left him and went away.

The New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Mk 12:1–12.

This story came straight out of Isaiah chapter 5, where Isaiah was critiquing the temple-keepers and the kings of his generation, calling them out:

“God will judge you because you’re disobedient, ignoring the Lord, leading the people into murder and rebellion, raping, stealing, and injustice.”

Jesus steps into Isaiah's shoes and calls them out for doing the exact same thing Isaiah's generation did: rejecting God and turning a blind eye to injustice.

Jesus is essentially claiming, "Look, if you reject me, you reject life and salvation, and instead embrace death. You are telling me that you don't want to be a part of my new Heaven and Earth."

If we fail to see who Jesus is and reject the author of life, we'll get what you want.

We need to be sobered up by the text. Jesus is claiming to be the authority on creating life as life's author. If we reject the author of life, we embrace death.

And when we see the author of life for who he is, when we accept his authority, it will motivate us to look past the fear of man and not care so much about those things that don't matter so much and invite people into that new heaven and earth.

Jesus wants to rescue people, and that's why he keeps sending us. And if we sober up from the fear of man, we have an amazing opportunity of joining him to appeal to others to reject the authority of death and embrace the authority of life.