

Rev. Dr. Dustin Daniels | River Bible Church
Matthew 21:23-27 | Authority, Power, and Rights
Sunday August 10, 2025

WELCOME:

- Bibles in the back—our gift to you.
- My sermon notes are in the foyer—please take them home with you.

REVIEW:

We have been expositing Matthew's Gospel verse by verse for the past three and a half years.

In doing so, we have learned that Matthew is primarily writing to the Jewish Believers.

His theme in writing is that of the *Kingdom of God*—because Jesus Christ is King and Messiah.

We have studied:

1. The genealogy of Jesus' Kingship, *Stalline / Davidic Covenant*
2. How Jesus teaches with the authority that the other rabbis do not have,
3. How and why Jesus performed miracles, signs, and wonders.
4. Jesus has the authority over both the natural and supernatural—Jesus walks on water, calms the storms, and has the authority to command demons.
5. Jesus even has the authority to forgive sin.

However, the leaders of Israel—Pharisees, Sadducees, and the Scribes—all these people who have positions of authority—have run in after run in with Jesus.

We came to chapter 21 several weeks ago, and saw Jesus taking authority over the entire city of Jerusalem, riding through the city gates on a colt as their King.

We then watch Jesus take authority over the Temple.

Jesus cleanses/purifies the Temple of worldly people doing worldly things so that true worship can take place—because Jesus is not only the King of Israel but the High Priest.

Last week, we watched Jesus take authority over the nation by symbolically cursing/judging a fig tree—because a fig tree represents the nation.

By doing so, Jesus presents himself as a prophet.

So in the last week of Jesus' life, this Passover week, Jesus reveals His authority as King, High Priest, and Prophet.

INTRODUCTION:

Today, Matthew presses into that subject of authority.

The religious leaders want to know who Jesus thinks He is—where does He get His authority to do the things that He's done? Who gave Jesus this authority?

Jesus answers those questions with a question of His own.

Then Jesus continues to answer their question in three parables.

And we'll look at those parables over the next three weeks.

But for today, the Lord has much to teach us about authority.

Who's in charge? ~~Who doesn't?~~ Who has power? Where does it come from?

What does that mean for us today as a church? Personally?

Let's find out together!

Please stand for the reading and honoring of God's Word.

SCRIPTURE:

Matthew 21:23—When he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching and said, "By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you this authority?"

Matthew 21:24—Jesus answered them, "I will also ask you one question, and if you answer it for me, then I will tell you by what authority I do these things."

Matthew 21:25—Did John's baptism come from heaven, or was it of human origin?" They discussed it among themselves, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Then why didn't you believe him?'"

Matthew 21:26—But if we say, 'Of human origin,' we're afraid of the crowd, because everyone considers John to be a prophet."

Matthew 21:27—So they answered Jesus, "We don't know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

These are the holy words from the authoritative, inerrant, inspired, infallible, sufficient, and efficacious Word of Almighty God.

PRAY:

Our Lord is great, vast in power; his understanding is infinite. (Psalm 147:5)

EXEGESIS:

Matthew 21:23—When ^{Jesus} he entered the temple,

After Jesus cursed the fig tree from last week, He went to the Temple to celebrate Passover.

To give you a timeline, this is Wednesday morning of Passover week.

Matthew 21:23— ...the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him...

These men are the VIPs/ ^{of Israel} “grand poobahs.”

The elders include a wide variety of religious leaders— Pharisees, Scribes, Sadducees, Herodians, and even some Zealots and Essenes. — Book Worms
 ↘ Politics ↙ Monks

Think of these men representing different denominations—Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Lutherans—everyone from the conservatives to the charismatics are represented in this special delegation.

Yet at this moment, they all have one thing in common—they all found common ground in opposing Jesus. Why?

Jesus had the audacity to cleanse and purify the Temple for worship the day before.

He took control of the Temple with divine authority—not one of these men dared to stop Jesus.

Matthew 21:23— ... came to (Jesus) as he was teaching...

It appears that the money changers and the vendors selling animals didn't return to the Temple the next day.

So the Temple is a much quieter and calmer place to be.

People can actually pray, worship, and learn God's Word.

Jesus is doing what He's always done—teaching.

Matthew doesn't tell us what Jesus was teaching on.

Luke 19:47— Every day he was teaching in the temple. The chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people were looking for a way to kill him,

Luke 19:48—but they could not find a way to do it, because all the people were captivated by what they heard.

Regardless of what Jesus is teaching the people, the people are gripped by God's grace—but the delegation interrupts.

Matthew 21:23— "By what authority are you doing these things?"

If we want to be fair and objective, we have to confess that their question is not inappropriate.

Let's face it, Jesus did walk into the Temple and rearrange the furniture without their approval.

Now He is teaching in the Temple again! And He won't go away!

This nobody from Nazareth—not a scribe, not a Pharisee, not a Sadducee, not a priest, not an elder, not an ordained rabbi—is teaching in the Temple. *After*

Making Such A scene the day before - what nerve!

We would ask the same question if someone came in here and started teaching.

We would ask, “*Who are you and what are you doing?!*”

Illustration: Local pastor.

Matthew 21:23— “By what authority are you doing these things?”

The question itself makes it clear that they are the ones in charge of the Temple.

They had not authorized Jesus to teach—they didn’t approve His sermons.

Authority is a strong/controversial word.

Authority conveys power, influence, and privilege.

Someone in authority has the power or right to enforce something.

They have the right to make a final decision.

Illustration: President Harry Truman *office* had a plaque on his desk that said, “The buck stops here.”

It was a response to other politicians who were “*passing the buck*,” —shifting responsibility to someone else.

the reality Society can’t operate without having people in positions of authority.

If there are no positions of authority, there is anarchy and chaos.

If you need a Biblical illustration of anarchy and chaos—read the most disturbing book in the OT—Judges.

The book of Judges follows Joshua.

After Josh dies, the nation crumbles because there are no leaders in the Promised Land.

The last verse in Judges is a summary verse...

Judges 21:25—In those days there was no king (authority) in Israel; everyone did whatever seemed right to him.
Since there was no king, God raised up local leaders to govern. → Sinner, C. Lee
Everyone did what was right in their own eyes.

Everyone was their own sovereign.

Everyone had autonomy.

Nobody could tell anyone else what to do.

If you need a modern-day example, turn on the news and watch the stories of people rioting.

Talk about a body of people with no head! —no brain, no sense,

There must be a structure of authority for society.

In the family, parents have authority over their children.

What happens when children run the house? 😊

system
In school, teachers and administrators have authority over the students.

What happens when the students have more rights than the teachers? And the parents have more rights than the principal?

In the workplace, the CEO has authority over his employees.

What happens when employees stop doing their jobs because they believe they know more than the CEO? Is that a healthy work environment? Will it be a profitable business?

In government—the mayor, city council, police, and firemen all have different spheres of authority.

KEYPOINT 1:

All authority is delegated.

The question becomes, “*Delegated from whom?*”

The first four words in the Bible reveal who has all authority...

Genesis 1:1—In the beginning, God...

The only one who possesses inherent authority is God.

2 Chronicles 20:6—LORD, God of our ancestors, are you not the God who is in heaven, and do you not rule over all the kingdoms of the nations? Power and might are in your hand, and no one can stand against you.

Power and might is a form of Hebrew parallelism—restating the same thing with different terms to emphasize the point.

God’s authority is revealed by who God is.

Authority is baked into God’s character, revealed in God’s attributes.

God did not inherit His authority—there was no one to transfer it to Him.

God is the one who transfers.

God did not receive His authority—there was no one to bestow it on Him.

God is the one who does the bestowing/distributes/entrusts/lavishes!

God's authority did not come by way of an election—there was no one to vote for Him! God doesn't run for God!

God did not seize His authority—there was no one to steal it from. God is not like a human dictator.

God did not earn his authority—it was already His.

We see this transfer/bestowing/lavishing of God's authority to Adam and Eve...

Genesis 1:28— God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that crawls on the earth."

Genesis 1:29— God also said, "Look, I have given you every seed-bearing plant on the surface of the entire earth and every tree whose fruit contains seed. This will be food for you,

Genesis 1:30— for all the wildlife of the earth, for every bird of the sky, and for every creature that crawls on the earth—everything having the breath of life in it—I have given every green plant for food." And it was so.

Even Satan confesses that his demonic authority comes from God—tempting Jesus in the wilderness...

+ **Luke 4:6**—The devil said to (Jesus), "I will give you their splendor and all this authority, because it has been given over to me,"

Martin Luther said, "There is a devil, but it's God's devil."

Jesus reminded Pontius Pilate of God's authority while on trial...

+ **John 19:10**—So Pilate said to ^{Jews} him, "Do you refuse to speak to me? Don't you know that I have the authority to release you and the authority to crucify you?"

+ **John 19:11**—"You would have no authority over me at all," Jesus answered him, "if it hadn't been given you from above."

KEYPOINT 2:

While God has delegated all authority—every person in authority has been given their authority by someone else.

+ ^{The religious delegation asks:} **Matthew 21:23**—"By what authority are you doing these things?"

Job asks a similar yet rhetorical question...

+ **Job 34:13**—Who gave (God) authority over the earth? Who put (God) in charge of the entire world?

God's authority becomes unmistakable and unquestionable when we consider two things.

First, God created the cosmos—the heavens, the earth, and all that exists (Genesis 1–2).

Second, God not only owns the earth—but ^{owns} everyone in it.

Psalm 24:1—The earth and everything in it, the world and its inhabitants, belong to the LORD;

Psalm 24:2—for he laid its foundation on the seas and established it on the rivers.

Psalm 24:3—Who may ascend the mountain of the LORD?
Who may stand in his holy place?

But the religious delegation is not asking a rhetorical question like Job— they are demanding answers.

Matthew 21:23— “By what authority are you doing these things?”

Authority is the Greek verb *exousía*. (Ex-you-see-uh).

Exousía is also translated as “power and a right,”

Exousía is translated as “rights.”

John 1:12—But to all who did receive him, (God) gave them the right to be children of God,

1 Corinthians 8:9—But be careful that this right of yours in no way becomes a stumbling block to the weak.

Exousía translates as “power.”

Acts 8:18—When Simon (the magician) saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money,

Acts 8:19—saying, “Give me this power also so that anyone I lay hands on may receive the Holy Spirit.”

Revelation 9:3—Then locusts came out of the smoke on to the earth, and power was given to them like the power that scorpions have on the earth.

Exousia is translated as “authority.”

Matthew 7:28— When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, *why?*

Matthew 7:29—because he was teaching them like one who had authority, and not like their scribes.

Matthew 28:18—Jesus came near and said to them, “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.

Wait! Who gave Jesus His authority? Isn't Jesus God?

We even see an authoritative structure within the Trinity!

The Trinity/The Godhead/the mystery includes God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

We see this transfer of divine power—for our sake

Psalm 2:7—I will declare the LORD's decree. (God the Father) said to (God the Son), “You are my Son; today I have become your Father.

Psalm 2:8—Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance and the ends of the earth your possession.

Paul affirmed Jesus' authority...

Philippians 2:10—*so that* at the name of Jesus every knee will bow—
in heaven and on earth
and under the earth—

Philippians 2:11— and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Jude 25— to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority before all time, now and forever. Amen.

Hebrews 13:8—Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper said, “There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: ‘Mine!’”

KEYPOINT 3:

Jesus’ authority is God’s authority because Jesus is God.

But, because the religious leaders don’t believe that Jesus is God, their question comes down to a specific type of authority—credentials/title.

Matthew 21:23— “By what authority are you doing these things?”

They want to know who ordained Jesus.

It’s been a long-standing practice within Judaism that a person must have a rabbinic ordination to establish his religious authority.

A protégé would need to substantiate his theological doctrines with other scholars.

This requires years of training, discipleship—seminary is not a new concept.

When the student was ready for ordination, Scripture reveals that the laying on of hands symbolized affirmation and a call to duty by his mentors, teachers, and other scholars.

Once ordained, he had official recognition as a credentialed teacher of Israel—he earned the title “rabbi.”

(delegation)
The Sanhedrin had the responsibility for the training, the discipleship, the curriculum, and the ordination.

Here’s the rub, Jesus had no such ordination— and, therefore, had no such recognition.

Jews
~~He~~ completely ignored their system for ordaining rabbis.

Today, most Christian denominations have a credentialing process that someone goes through to become a pastor or minister.

BTW, there are many people today who say this, “I don’t need worldly/ denominational credentials.”

So they go off and start a cult—people don’t plant churches— churches plant other churches.

If they don’t start a cult, they bypass the whole process of formal training, discipleship, seminary, and get their ordination from a fake church on the Internet.

— very popular today
Or they start a Bible study in their home—maybe a parachurch ministry with no oversight at all.

Isn’t it interesting that “religion” is the only institution where this bypassing/ skipping/ignoring of formal training is accepted?

In other words, don’t you want your dentist, medical doctor, accountant, and plumber formally trained?!

mechanic

So do you see where the Jewish leaders are coming from?

As the custodians of the Temple, they had the right to ask this question.

But we are amazed at their ignorance.

Jesus had given them three years of examples.

Jesus is not some wandering preacher waltzing into the Temple during Passover for the first time.

They all know who Jesus is, what He's done, and the divine authority that He wields.

Matthew 21:23— "By what authority are you doing these things?"

By "these things," they meant everything Jesus had been teaching and doing up to this point.

But, they were primarily focused on Jesus cleaning the Temple the day before.

A second question
Matthew 21:23— Who gave you this authority?"

We now move from a systematic/theological credentialing question to a personnel question.

If Jesus admitted that he had no formal credentials, the people could have lost respect for Him.

On the other hand, if Jesus had responded that his authority and credentials came directly from God, He would have been guilty of blasphemy.

And that's what the delegation wanted!

Because if they can charge Jesus with blasphemy, they would succeed in killing him, because blasphemy is a capital offense.

Matthew 21:24—Jesus answered them, “I will also ask you one question, and if you answer it for me, then I will tell you by what authority I do these things.

Jesus rarely answers a question directly. Why?

Because most of our questions to the Son of God are either selfish or self-righteous.

Jesus’ question is better.

Matthew 21:25—Did John's baptism come from heaven, or was it of human origin?”

At first, it seems unrelated.

What does John's Baptism have to do with anything?

“*The baptism of John*” referred to ^{John's} ~~his~~ entire ministry.

The question makes more sense to us this way—

Where did John's right/authority (exousia) to baptize come from: was it from God or human beings?

^{with pure charity}
Still, what kind of question is that? Is Jesus deflecting?

No, it's a very clever question.

Jesus plays their game.

John's ministry was like his own in three ways.

1. Neither John nor Jesus studied in the rabbinic schools, nor were they ordained.
2. Both had been rejected by the religious authorities
3. Both had been accepted by the people.

In other words, John's ministry prepared the way for Jesus.

Therefore, if the delegation acknowledged that John's authority was from God, then they would be admitting that Jesus' authority was also from God!

How so? John testified that Jesus was the Christ.

John 1:19—This was John's testimony when the Jews from Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him, "Who are you?"

John 1:20—He didn't deny it but confessed, "I am not the Messiah."

John 1:21—"What then?" they asked him. "Are you Elijah?"

"I am not," he said.

"Are you the Prophet?"

"No," he answered.

John 1:22—"Who are you, then?" they asked. "We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What can you tell us about yourself?"

John 1:23—He said, "I am a voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the Lord—just as Isaiah the prophet said."

John 1:29—The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

John 1:34—I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.

That's John's testimony about Jesus.

So the question is before the delegation. What do they do?

Matthew 21:25—They discussed it among themselves, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Then why didn't you believe him?'"

Matthew 21:26—But if we say, 'Of human origin,' we're afraid of the crowd, because everyone considers John to be a prophet."

Notice that they did not ask one another: *Do you think John was sent from God? Are we wrong on this?*

No! There was no debate about the question itself.

They didn't debate the truth because they did not care about the truth.

They were debating an answer based on expediency and discretion.

But, as they began reasoning among themselves, they saw how Jesus put them between a rock and a hard place.

These men are wicked, but it doesn't mean they're dumb.

They firmly believed that John was not a prophet, but they did not dare tell the crowd.

Although it is strange to consider for us today— John at this moment may have been more famous than Jesus.

John was a prophet turned martyr. Martyrs instantly receive fame.

So, if the delegation said that John ordained himself, they would have had a riot in the Temple.

Second, notice how fearful the delegation is in verse 26.

They continue to make decisions based on the latest poll.

Matthew 21:27—So they answered Jesus, "We don't know."

So they gave up—they pleaded "*The Fifth*."

They lied. They didn't say, "We don't want to answer that question," which would have been the truth.

Matthew 21:27—And (Jesus) said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

Jesus physically turned over the tables the day before; now He's turning over spiritual tables.

Since the delegation is unwilling to take a stand one way or the other, Jesus doesn't need to answer their question on authority.

Jesus knew that if He gave them a direct answer, they would have used it against Him—no matter what the answer was.

Next week, we'll see Jesus launch into a series of three parables where He indirectly answers their questions for the crowd.

How will the delegation respond? You'll have to come back next Sunday!

APPLICATION:

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

APPLICATION:

As I close, I want to consider the subject of *authority, power, and rights* from two perspectives.

1. Corporately—Your church as the Body of Christ.
2. Personally— *Who do you consider your ultimate authority?*

Corporately/Your Church:

As the pastor, I have zero authority over you. ☺

We are an elder-led church, not elder-ruled.

I am the pastor-teacher, not a CEO/dictator.

You are my Brothers and Sisters in Christ. We are all equal.

Yes, we have different roles and functions, but we are all one and the same.

That's why we are the Body of Christ—we need one another to be healthy and holy.

As the pastor/shepherd, my role is to lead—but you have the choice to follow.

As a Bible teacher, I teach the Bible—but it's your choice to believe.

That's why I'm never telling anyone to do anything—but always inviting and encouraging.

And if you feel uncomfortable at times, I pray that's not me—but rather God working in your heart.

Personally:

Who is your ultimate authority? Who do you *submit* to? *Submission*

Who are you accountable to?

Do something I rarely do - myself as an example

Let me share with you how many people I'm accountable to in some way or another.

Obviously, I'm accountable to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And many people say that—but the question becomes one of means.

In other words, *how* are we as Christians accountable to the Lord?

The answer comes from Scripture.

The Word of God is our ultimate authority.

That's why we read the Word of God by the Spirit of God from cover to cover over and over.

If we want to hear God speak, *listen* we read His Word.

But there is also a practicality to submitting to the Lord through the Bible—and that is through God's people.

God uses His people to do His will.

God uses His people to mold, shape and to grow us up into maturity—as long as His people agree with God's Word.

I'm accountable to:

- Amy, my bride and best friend.
- Dr. Jim Martin, my mentor.
- Dr. Dallas Bivins, another mentor—
 - Both men are allowed to ask very hard and personal questions. — *Before That*
- The other two Elders of the church, Jeff Christensen and Brad Kesler.
- The other eight members of our leadership team that comprise of Deacons and Deaconesses.

Lastly, I'm accountable to the rest of you, 100+.

I don't want to ever let any of you down.

I'm so grateful that God has put so many people in my life to keep me on narrow road walking through narrow gates.

Because all these people in my life are guard rails for me—preventing me from running my life into a ditch—which I did for the first 33 years of my life. Why?

Because I was my *own* authority and submitted to no one.

Enough about me, what about you?

Allow me to make it a bit uncomfortable in here for the next few minutes.

- Are you accountable to the Lord Jesus?
- Is He your ultimate authority?
- How do you know?

The Word of God shows us how to submit and be accountable to Him.

The Apostle Paul had the church and all the people he was accountable to.

Scripture also shows us how Paul poured his life into Timothy.

Let me encourage you to make a list of the people that you're accountable to—and praise God for these people!

The more people you have in your life, the healthier you will be.

What if you don't have any? No worries.

Let me encourage you to ask someone you trust to be a friend and mentor to you.

Someone whom you can open up to a little bit.

Someone you can trust with their advice and counsel.

And meet with this person every other week for an hour or so, and watch what God does with that relationship.

You know what one of the great things about being a part of an older congregation is?

Your wisdom! Your knowledge! Your life experiences.

You may be losing your strength, stamina.

You may walk into another room and not know why you walked in there...

But I'm guessing that many of you have the desire to pour your life into a Timothy.

Dear friends, there is no better way to finish life well, than to pour your life into someone else.

Being a friend, a mentor, or a mentee will change your life.

PRAYER

And that change will make us grateful
for those in Authority — ? We'll be
eager to submit to others.

BENEDICTION

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. (Col. 3:15)

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