



Christ Reformed Community Church

161 Hampton Point Dr. Suite 2 | St. Augustine, Florida | 32092 | christreformedcc.com

September 4, 2022

Dr. Andrew Smith

“One Authority” Mark 11:27–33

Let’s turn to Mark chapter 11. I’m eager to preach this message this morning to you from Mark 11:27–33. The title of the message: “One Authority, One Authority.” And I want you to stand to your feet in honor of the reading of God’s Holy Word, picking up in verse 27 reading through verse 33:

And they [that is, Jesus and the apostles] came again to Jerusalem. And as he was walking in the temple, the chief priests and the scribes and the elders came to him, and they said to him, “By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?” Jesus said to them, “I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man? Answer me.” And they discussed it with one another, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’ But shall we say, ‘From man?’”—they were afraid of the people, for they all held that John really was a prophet. So they answered Jesus, “We do not know.” And Jesus said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.”

Thus ends the reading of God’s holy and authoritative Word. Please be seated. Let’s ask the Lord’s help as we look at this text together.

Father, we do thank You for Your Word. We thank You for the clarity of Your Word. We thank You for the perspicuity of Your Word, the authority of Your Word, the sufficiency of Your Word. Your Word is our final authority. You are our final authority. Help us to see that this day through this text for Your glory, for our good, we pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

In our world today, authority is a dirty word. Everyone seems to be an authority unto themselves. From political pundits and sports commentators, from blog posters to podcast platforms, people in our world seem to view themselves as specialized experts and authorities on any number of issues. But I want you to understand this morning that the Bible teaches there is but one authority, and it is true that politicians and civil magistrates have a type of authority. Romans 13:1 says, “*Let every person be subject to the governing authorities.*” But then it says, “*For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.*” Politicians don’t have the final authority. Pastors and elders do not have the final authority. God’s Word is clear again in Hebrews 13:17: “*Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls.*” But it says they keep watch over your souls “*as those who will have to give an account,*” those who will have to give an account to God. Proverbs 30 tells us “*Do not add to [God’s] words, lest [God] rebuke you and you be found a liar.*” That is a warning that applies to every preacher and every

teacher. Politicians are not the final authority. Pastors and elders are not the final authority, and people in general are not the final authority. You are not the final authority unto yourself. Jesus said in Matthew 28, “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me,*” and that is why the apostles in Acts 5:29 answered the authorities “*We must obey God rather than men.*” Christ is the final authority.

Several years ago, probably about a decade ago, I picked up a little book written by Martyn Lloyd-Jones simply entitled *Authority*, and the whole book is about authority; the authority of God and how authority has been lost in our culture. This was written in the middle part of the twentieth century. And Martyn Lloyd-Jones makes many statements in this book. I want to read part of it to you because I think it’s critical to our discussion this morning. Lloyd-Jones says:

If I understand the modern religious situation at all this whole question of authority is one of the most important problems confronting us. As such it demands our careful study. There is no doubt that things are as they are in the Christian Church throughout the world today because we have lost our authority. We are faced by the fact that the masses of the people are outside the church. They are there, I suggest, because the church has in one way or another lost its authority. As a result, the people have ceased to listen or to pay attention to its message.

Further this whole question of the nature of authority is being raised. The question is being asked everywhere, “Is there any final authority? Is there any objective source for this authority?” A similar question is, “Can truth be known? Can truth be defined? Can it be stated at a number of propositions?”

Now, it seems to me [Lloyd-Jones says] lying behind these questions is the suggestion that truth is so great and so marvelous that it cannot be defined and, therefore, that you cannot say definitely that this view is right and that is wrong. The result is that the average man feels that there is no such thing as “objective authority.”

In the end, dismissing all suggestion that you can state or define truth in creeds and confessions of faith, is a situation akin to something Lloyd-Jones heard some other man say. He said:

There was a man who spoke about a man who climbed to the top of a certain mountain to obtain a magnificent view. There stretching before him will be a wonderful and marvelous panorama. Very well, the man is anxious to see this. He begins to climb. He goes on and on. The sun sheds its clear rays upon him. He goes on in the blazing heat, and in spite of the blazing heat. Eventually the ascent becomes so steep that he has to get down on his hands and knees. As he scales certain crags, he has to hold onto little tufts of grass. But it is worth it. On he struggles, with hands and knees bleeding, but the quest keeps him going. And, at last, he arrives at the summit, and there, behold, is the grand panorama. What does he do about it? Does he now try now to reduce that view, as it were, to propositions and to state it in theorems? “Impossible!” [says this man that Lloyd-Jones quotes]

The thing is too grand and too magnificent. He just stands with his eyes and his mouth wide open, lost in stupendous wonder and amazement. He cannot go down again and write all he has seen and felt. He certainly can’t define it. That’s impossible. Just as you cannot analyze the aroma of a rose, so you cannot reduce this great and glorious truth to a number of statements and propositions. In other words, it is only something which can only be experienced, something you can feel. You might dance to it. You might sing to it. But you can’t state it in propositions. You cannot define it. You cannot reduce it to the form of a Creed.

Lloyd-Jones says:

Now, I suggest, that as Evangelicals, that is the major position which we have to meet at this present time. There was a time when we were confronted by absolute denials. The position today is not that. Instead we are told that the truth is so marvelous that you can't define it. One man may say this and another may say that. We are asked to believe that they both are probably right. Everybody is right. There are many ways of getting to this summit. We must therefore welcome all approaches and we must not say that a man has not the truth because he has not come to it our way. Such a school of thought claims that these are matters which, because of the very nature of truth itself, cannot be defined. Therefore we cannot confidently speak of right and wrong.

And Lloyd-Jones then takes us to the subject of revival, and he says:

Any study of church history, and particularly any study of the great periods of revival or reawakening, demonstrates above everything else this one fact: that the Christian Church during all such periods has spoken with authority. The great characteristic of all revivals has been the authority of the preacher. There seemed to be something new, extra, and irresistible in what he declared on behalf of God.

And Lloyd-Jones concludes by saying:

The final reason I suggest to you, is that this subject of authority is indeed the great theme of the Bible itself. The Bible presents itself to us as an authoritative book.

In other words, there is a such thing as right and wrong. There is a such thing as correct theology and false theology. There is one God, and this one God has competently, adequately, and sufficiently revealed Himself in the pages of Holy Scripture. And I say all of that to tell you this morning that in our present passage, authority is the issue. Jesus walks into the vast temple complex and He is confronted by a delegation of the most authoritative people in all of Israel, the Sanhedrin; this board of seventy-one members, sending a delegation to Christ to ask Him the question, in the text as I read it, “*By what authority are you doing these things?*” This is simply another attempt to trap Jesus. Jesus had symbolically rejected the authority of the Sanhedrin when He cleansed the temple. That was a way of Him making a public statement that He was confronting the apostate leadership of Israel. The temple represented Israel. The temple represented the Sanhedrin, and it represented all the corruption that was through and through Israel beginning with the leadership. And the fig tree. Well, the fig tree also was a fitting symbol, withered as it was in an act of prophetic judgment by Jesus because Israel, the spiritual family tree of Abraham, bore no spiritual fruit.

As we come into this next section of Mark's Gospel, at this point Mark begins to present to us several conflicts that Jesus has with the religious leaders. This begins here in chapter 11, but it goes through chapter 12. For example, in chapter 12, verses 1 through 12, Jesus gives a parable about the false leaders, a parable about a vineyard whose hired tenants killed the owner's son. That is targeting the religious leaders. Then in chapter 12, verses 13 through 17, Jesus targets the Pharisees. They try to trap Jesus with a question about taxes. And then in chapter 12, verses 18 through 27, Jesus targets the Sadducees. They ask Jesus a ridiculous question about marriage and the resurrection; A ridiculous scenario about seven brothers who die and then who is that widow going to be married to in eternity, trying to trap Jesus. Jesus rebukes them. Then chapter 12, verses 28 through 40, He targets the scribes. They question Jesus, quizzing Him on what the most important commandment was. But in our present passage, the turf war begins on the turf of the

temple, the grounds of the religious leaders. This is like home field advantage. Jesus is in the most authoritative place, the temple, and He is confronted by the most authoritative people, the Sanhedrin, and He is challenged. But what we see in this passage is that Jesus outshines them, He out shows the Sanhedrin, proving He is the one final authority. He is the one and only true King. Jesus goes toe-to-toe in battle with the Sanhedrin, this apostate leadership of Israel, and He wins for all the crowd to see.

And I hope this morning you see above everything else the centrality and the finality of Jesus’ authority. He is your Lord whether you recognize it or not. He is the Lord of those outside of this church whether they recognize it or not. And you will not win against King Jesus. He has already won. The only option for sinners is to bow to His authority, to submit to His authority, to worship Him for His authority and for His glory, and that is what this passage is all about. I cannot think of a better passage to exalt the glory and the authority of King Jesus before taking the Lord’s Supper than this very passage, and God in His mighty providence has ordained for you to hear this message today to be reminded of the authority of Jesus in this world and in your own life. The authority of Jesus is spoken about throughout the Scriptures, but in this passage, verses 27 through 33, His authority is on full display, and we see it in three tense moments in Jesus’ conflict, His Spiritual battle with the religious leaders. First of all, we see authority confronted in verses 27 and 28; second, authority countered in verses 29 and 30; and third, authority confirmed in verse 31 through 33.

Let’s begin in verses 27 and 28 where we see authority confronted. We pick up in verse 27. It says, “*And they,*” referring to Jesus and the apostles; it says, “*They came again to Jerusalem.*” Now, let me remind you of the timeline. On Sunday of this week was the triumphal entry. On Monday was the cleansing of the temple. On Tuesday morning, they’re going back into Jerusalem and they see the withered fig tree. It’s after that incident that they’re now coming into Jerusalem, on Tuesday, I believe, and it says in verse 27, “*He was walking in the temple.*” Now, the temple was very, very large, and most commentators believe that Jesus would have been walking in the most likely place that people would walk when they were in the temple, and that would have been under Solomon’s Porch. This was the eastern side of the Court of Gentiles, under the shade of the wood carved ornate roof in which many people would sit, and fellowship, and teaching would take place there. It was on that side of the temple that there was a beautiful view because the Kidron Valley lay below some 450 feet, and one could look across under the shade of the roof, look across in the sun to the Mount of Olives across the other side, a beautiful view, a place of shade. It is here that the confrontation ensues.

Notice verse 27, it says, “*The chief priests and the scribes and the elders came to him.*” Now, Mark doesn’t tell us, but Luke does tell us what exactly Jesus was doing in the temple. Mark tells us that Jesus was simply walking in the temple, but we need all of the accounts in order to piece this together. So, in Luke 20:1, it simply says this: “*One day, as Jesus was teaching the people in the temple and preaching the gospel, the chief priests and the scribes with the elders came up*” to Him and asked him the question, “*by what authority you do these things.*” Matthew 21:23, a parallel account, tells us “*And when he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him [while] he was teaching,*” to confirm what Luke says. So, understand this very clearly. This was not merely a stroll in the temple; this was a sermon in the temple. And when the Sanhedrin confronted Him, they were interrupting the sermon that He was preaching to the

hungry sheep, the makeshift congregation of pilgrims that were hanging on every word of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a sacred moment. The temple had become His sanctuary. The steps of the porch had become His platform. The temple where the shekinah glory of God dwelled now had the very voice of God filling the temple, coming from a flesh-and-blood preacher sent from heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ. And as Luke says, He was teaching and He was preaching the gospel. We don't have to guess what the theme was. It was the gospel.

Jesus, therefore, could not mention the gospel without mentioning several important things. This would have been a message filled with hope, filled with the hope of heaven, but also the fury of hell. There's nothing great about heaven unless you understand the danger of hell. There were warnings of judgment, while also promises of forgiveness. There was speaking about the power of the new birth, as well as the impotency of trying to work one's way into the kingdom. There was forgiveness promised to the penitent, those even penitent who were prostitutes and lowlives, and the lame, and the tax collectors. Jesus no doubt spoke about the cost of discipleship. You can't talk about the gospel without talking about the cost of discipleship, the promise of persecution, the reward for sacrificing for God on this earth, honor to the humble and the penitent, disgrace for the hypocritical and the legalistic. I believe also Jesus was condemning the scribes and the Pharisees for their legalism and how they practiced Sabbath observance. That was a favorite topic that Jesus would preach on, and my guess is when He saw them coming, He began preaching on the very topic that would enrage them. Jesus would have preached against their public prayers that they prayed for attention. Jesus would have taught against the danger of seeking material wealth while remaining in spiritual poverty. So understand, get the picture. They came to confront him. Wisdom would have said wait until He's done. They are enraged at what He is preaching. They can't listen any longer, and so they confront Him in the middle of His teaching.

Verse 28 says, notice your Bibles, *“And they said to him, ‘By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?’”* Wow. They believed they were the only ones who had the God-given right to have authority. Who was Jesus? These chief priests, these scribes, these elders approach our Lord. Now, this is not the entire seventy-one-member board of the Sanhedrin. This is a delegation. This is a small committee made up of chief priests and scribes and elders. Who were the chief priests? Well, they were the group of the leadership of Israel that represented all of the high priests. It would have been a combination of the current high priest or high priests, in this case, and also former high priests. These were the custodians of the temple grounds. These men were largely Sadducees, but then you had the scribes that are described there in verse 28. These were mostly Pharisees. They were the ones mostly offended by Jesus' authority because the Pharisees were the theological and practical interpreters of the Law of God. They were the famous teachers of the day, and when Jesus went into the temple to teach or Jesus went into a synagogue to teach, Jesus was stepping on their turf. They were the special speakers in the temple and the synagogue, and Jesus had more authority than they had.

If you remember all the way back in chapter 1, it tells us that the people were astonished at Jesus' teaching because He taught them as one who had authority—not as the scribes. So, there's something about Jesus' teaching and preaching that had a wow factor. When the scribes got up there, it was bland and it was dry and it was a recitation of man's opinions. And then you had the elders, not only the chief priests and the scribes but also the elders. These were located in every single town, every village, every hamlet. These were akin to ruling elders in the church today.

They didn't quite have the status of scribes because the scribes were the professional theologians, but the elders acted as if they were the professionals. They were the most prominent citizens of a particular city, and the most prominent elders of all the cities collectively made up a group of the Sanhedrin. And so, these chief priests (Sadducees), these scribes (Pharisees), these elders, who were also Pharisees many of them, a little committee made up of them—I don't know how many—came to approach Jesus. Notice the question again that they asked in verse 28: *“By what authority are you doing these things?”* They're confronting Him.

Now, *“these things”* obviously speaks about *the* thing that He had done the day before. What was that? The cleansing of the temple. He was making a public scene, rebuking the leadership of Israel by stepping on their turf and rebuking the moneychangers and chasing them out. He was confronting the leadership by cleansing the temple on their materialism, on their extortion, on their lack of overall reverence for God's house. Zeal had rightly consumed Jesus, but it says here that they asked Him, *“By what authority are you doing these things?”* So, they're not just speaking about the cleansing of the temple. That was simply the capstone event. That was simply the most recent event that occurred the day before, but this is three years of this thing building, of Jesus doing all sorts of things, beginning with the fact that He taught with authority and the people recognized that. And the scribes and Pharisees were jealous of the fact that the people liked His teaching more than theirs. Not only that, these things would have included the royal entry and cheers of hosanna on Sunday into the city. This would have included the children who were crying “Hosanna!” in the temple that frustrated the religious leaders. This would have included Jesus' claim like back in chapter 2 and verse 9 when He told the paralytic son, *“Your sins are forgiven.”* As a matter of fact, Luke's parallel account of that account tells us that the scribes and Pharisees began questioning Him after He forgave sins, saying, *“Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone? [So] by what authority are you doing these things?”* “You come into Jerusalem as if you're the King. You allow people to cry ‘Hosanna!’ You're telling people they're forgiven of their sins. Not only that, but You on the Sabbath cast demons out? On the Sabbath, You allow Your disciples to pick heads of grain. Not only that, but You're healing the lame. You're touching unclean lepers and making them whole. And when we confront You about what You do on the Sabbath, You turn it around on us and say we're wrong, that we're legalistic, that we're not the ones following God's law. Who do You think you are? Who do You think You are by doing all of these things?”

You remember back in chapter 7, Jesus had laid the axe at the root of the tree of their tradition. Mark 7:6, Jesus said to them, *“Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’”* Jesus says, *“‘You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.’ And he said to them, ‘You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your [own] tradition! For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother.’”*” And what are you doing? You're trying to get away with not honoring your father and mother, but making it look like that your hands are tied and you can't do that, as we looked at that passage several weeks ago. And so, understand this; their confronting of Jesus' authority was a confrontation that had been building. *“By what authority are you doing these things?”* That's a lot of things that Jesus did in His ministry.

But notice the end of verse 28 because there’s a follow-up question in which it says comma, “*or who gave you this authority to do them?*” Now, that’s altogether a different question. The first question confronted Him in the things He did. The second question confronts Him on His credentials. “*Who gave you this authority?*” It’s one thing your doing it, but, by the way, who said you could do it? What right do you have? Who sanctioned this? Where did you get your orders? When were you commissioned by the Sanhedrin? We want to know. Now, this is not sincere questioning, and I trust that you’re smart enough to understand that when they asked Jesus these questions, they had already made their mind up in their judgment of Jesus. They had already determined as early as chapter 3 that He operated with an unclean spirit in the power of Beelzebub; that is, in the power of the devil. And on that occasion, Jesus had told them, “Listen, I’ve already bound the strongman. I’ve already bound Satan. I’m not working in the power of Satan.” But they asked this question because they want Jesus to answer that it was God who gave Him authority because if Jesus would answer that way in this context, they thought that they could bring Him up on charges of blasphemy, which by the way they eventually did in chapter 14. That’s why the high priest rent his garments at the arrest of Jesus. It’s interesting because the *Mishnah*, which is a written document compiled a century and a half after Jesus about all the oral traditions and how you’re supposed to follow them, the *Mishnah* that was not written at this point, but in the *Mishnah* capital punishment was what assigned to those who committed blasphemy. And even though the *Mishnah* was not a written document at this point, many of its prescriptions were principles operative in Jesus’ day, and so I believe they want Him to admit before the crowds in order to discredit Him in some way, that if He admits God gave Him authority they could say, “You have committed blasphemy.”

I read earlier in Luke 20:1 that as Jesus was teaching in the temple, He was confronted. He was confronted. Literally the word means “attacked.” He was attacked because they had already made up their mind about what they wanted to do. Luke tells us he was teaching daily in the temple, and the chief priests and the scribes and the principal men of the people were seeking to destroy Him, but they couldn’t find anything to destroy Him for, for the people were hanging on His words, trying to find something to discredit Him, in the peoples’ eyes, blasphemy, trying to indict Him. By the way, the only blasphemers were the religious leaders and the people that arrested Jesus. We read in Luke 22, they mocked Him, they struck Him, and the Bible says they said many other things against Him, blaspheming Him. The very one they said was a blasphemer was the very one they blasphemed against. Jesus had not committed blasphemy. Here’s the point; they asked the question about authority, hoping that He would answer with His own mouth to condemn Him. And as we’re going to see, Jesus doesn’t answer them, at least not directly.

But understand this, Jesus had been abundantly clear that He received authority from God. For example, in John 3 he stated, “*The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand.*” Or Matthew 28: “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me,*” Jesus says. Or Matthew 11:27: “*All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.*” Confirmed later by the Holy Spirit-inspired writers of Scripture, 1 Corinthians 15:27, Jesus must reign until all enemies are put under his feet. Hebrews 1:2: “*In these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things.*” 1 Peter 3:22, “[Jesus] has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.” There’s no doubt that the Scriptures generally, and Jesus

specifically and in particular, declared His authority without apology, an authority that Paul says in Ephesians is *“far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet.”* But even before the ascension, Jesus had declared His authority. He had also demonstrated His authority through His teaching, already mentioned. Mark chapter 1: *“He taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.”* He declared His authority over Satan, binding the strongman in Mark 3:27. He declared His authority—listen to this—in giving salvation, in John 1:12: *“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.”* John 6:37: *“All that the Father gives me [Jesus says] will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.”*

These are declaration of authority to give salvation to whom the Father had given Him. He declared His authority to judge in John 5: *“For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son. And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man.”* I mean, Jesus even declared authority over His own life. He said, *“No one takes it [my life] from me.”* I lay it down on my own authority and on my own accord. *“I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again.”* Authority, authority, authority. He had been crystal clear. He did not need to answer their question. He was not in submission to them. He had declared His authority over and over and over again; and by the way, always in concert and in submission to His Father. This was what we could call a humble authority. Jesus said for example in John 5, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.”* Humble authority. *“I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.”* Humble authority. John 6:38: *“For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.”* Humble authority. John 8:28: *“When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me.”* Again, humble authority, submitting Himself to the Father.

John 12:49: *“For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak.”* I listen to Him. I follow the Father’s will. Humble authority. *“Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me [speaks].”* Humble authority. The very fact that He made these authoritative claims and submitted to the Father instead of the Sanhedrin enraged them. They wanted submission on the spot to their authority, and Jesus refused to do that. He had made Himself explicitly clear during His three years of ministry, and so here we see this confrontation over authority. Trying to trap Jesus, aren’t they? But Jesus isn’t trapped.

We move from the authority confronted, verses 27 and 28; number two, to the authority countered, verse 29 and 30. And here we see Jesus counters their authoritative attack with a counterattack question. Notice verse 29: *“Jesus said to them, ‘I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things.’”* Verse 30: *“Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man? Answer me.”* Now, I love this. This is a counterattack. This is what happens in sports when you get a turnover, and you get the defense on their heels, and you score and slam dunk over their heads. This is what happens in the military when people come invading you and you

counterattack and obliterate them. That is what Jesus is doing. And please note, Jesus knew their question wasn't sincere. Jesus knows that they're trying to trap Him. Jesus understands that. So, Jesus' counterquestion about John the Baptist doesn't merely sidestep their haphazard attempt to trap Him, but it's a question that actually traps them. It effectively silences them. Their attempt at trapping Jesus backfires. He embarrasses them. He ends up humiliating them like dogs with their tails between their legs. And I want to be clear about this as well. Jesus is not evading the question out of fear on the one hand. On the other hand, He is not being unnecessarily rude. They are asking for what they get. They are asking for what they get, and in fact if you read clearly enough and think clearly enough, He was answering their question implied in His own question, the right answer of which would answer their question to Him. In other words, the right answer to Jesus' question by them would provide the right answer to the religious leaders' question to Jesus. They could answer their own question by answering His question. Jesus was shrewd, and Jesus wanted them to read between the lines, and so this committee sets them up for failure. Now what Jesus does here is both courageous and wise. I don't want you to miss this. Most people when they are falsely accused, resort to arguing and pettiness and defending oneself, hurling insults and attacks. But here is a wiser course of action demonstrated by Jesus, not with a counterargument but with a counterquestion, and Jesus was a master of this. Most of the rabbis were good at this. They had a method of answering a question by means of a counterquestion because it laid things on neutral ground. It equaled things up as a common way of rabbinical argument. The difference is Jesus was a master at this. He beats the Sanhedrin at their own game. He crushes His attackers with a counterquestion of His own.

Now, before we look at this counterattack question, I want you to go back with me to Mark chapter 2. We'll go through this quickly, but this is par for the course. Jesus constantly did this. You just may have forgotten. In chapter 2 and verse 7, they ask, *“Why does this man speak like this? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”* They're asking that in their own hearts. That's a question. Jesus hears it in their hearts, and in verse 8, *“And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that”* they were questioning Him. And so, He asks His own question: *“Why do you question these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the paralytic—“I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home.”* Counterquestion. Or chapter 2 and verse 18: John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. And people came and said to Him, *“Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?”* Verse 19, counterquestion: Jesus said, *“Let me ask you a question.” “Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them?”* Again, leading to a neutralization of the situation.

Chapter 2 verse 24, on the Sabbath, the disciples are plucking heads of grain. Verse 24: *“And the Pharisees were saying to him, ‘Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?’ And he [Jesus] said to them,”* let me ask you a question, *“Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him?”* Have you not read about the fact that *“he entered the house of God.”* Are you not aware of the fact that I'm not doing anything David himself didn't do? Counterquestion. Silences them. Chapter 3 and verse 22: *“And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, ‘He is possessed by Beelzebul,’ and ‘by the prince of demons he casts out the demons.’ And he called them to him and said to them,”* Let me ask you a question, *“How can Satan cast out Satan?”* If I'm empowered by Satan and I just cast

out demons, how am I not working against myself? How is Satan not working against himself? A house divided cannot stand. Again, another counterquestion. Or just skip with me to chapter 8 quickly and verse 11: “*The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, seeking from him a sign from heaven to test him. And he [Jesus] sighed deeply in his spirit,*” and He asked a question. “*Why does this generation seek a sign?*” Over and over and over again. Chapter 10 verse 2: “*And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, ‘Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?’*” And Jesus asks a counterquestion: Let me ask you “*What did Moses command?*” Jesus wins another argument, and there are more examples.

But look with me very closely at verse 30 of our text because here is the counterquestion Jesus asks. In verse 29 he says, “*I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things.*” What is the question? Here’s His counterquestion, verse 30: “*Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man? Answer me.*” Now, the answer to where Jesus received authority for His ministry—don’t miss this—was summed up in the ministry of John the Baptist, and specifically the baptism of Jesus that he performed. Nobody in their right mind would criticize John the Baptist. That’s why Jesus brings him up. He was the greatest of all prophets. The most beloved of all prophets, the last great prophet. He was the one that Jesus said was the greatest man born of woman. What did his ministry entail? That’s what Jesus is asking. Well, let’s answer it. John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus, the Messiah. John the Baptist preached repentance. John the Baptist conducted baptisms of repentance, and therefore, John’s baptism not only of Jesus but the multitudes, representing all that represented John, all that represented his ministry. It was a summary of what he did. He called the nation to repentance by guess what? Pointing to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Jesus is saying, “Let me ask you a question.” “*Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man?*” Remember, John did not think he was worthy to baptize Jesus at first. Do you remember that, back in chapter 3 of Mark? Actually, not Mark, of Matthew, excuse me. I promise I’m not going crazy. I just wrote it wrong in my notes. Chapter 3 verse 14 says, “*John would have prevented him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?’ But Jesus answered him, ‘Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.’*” And what did John do? He submitted to the authority of Jesus. He baptized scores of people including Jesus. So, in verse 30, Jesus is asking this: “*Was the baptism of John,*” his ministry as a whole, and in particular his baptism of me, was that “*from heaven?*” That is, did it come with heaven’s approval? Did heaven, the highest of all authorities that you would agree with is the highest of all authorities, did heaven sanction that ministry? You see, Jesus is using the word *heaven* as a substitute word for *Yahweh*, for God because in the Jewish culture you didn’t mention the name of God. So, by saying “Did it come from heaven?” Jesus is saying, “Did John’s ministry come from God? Was the baptism of John sanctioned by God?” “*Answer me.*” Or did it come from man? Was it done without God’s approval and authority? Was it done just in the flesh of John? Was he a rouge prophet? Are you ready to admit that before the crowds?”

By asking the question He’s asserting that John’s actions were approved by the authority of heaven, and if John’s actions were approved by the authority of heaven, which everyone affirmed, then Jesus’ own ministry was affirmed by heaven. Why is that? Because when John baptized Jesus, he was commissioning Him into ministry, at His baptism. And it wasn’t John alone. The voice of the Father said, “*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*” At that moment, Jesus became

the prophet of all prophets. He became far greater than John the Baptist, the greatest of prophets. He’s the prophet of all prophets, the very mouthpiece of God, because as Hebrews says in these last days—in former days He spoke by other prophets, *“But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son,”* and that is the final authority. And so, please note, this counterquestion is not merely a diversionary tactic. It is an assertion of Jesus’ divine authority over the Sanhedrin because if they approve of John’s ministry, as everyone did, and John commissioned Him, then they are approving of Jesus’ authority. At His baptism, heaven itself confirmed Jesus’ ministry, right? The heavens were rent. The Spirit of God descended as a dove. The authoritative voice of the Father said, *“This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”*

And what happened at the transfiguration months later? A reenactment of that, Peter, James and John: *“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.”* He is the prophet. Where does that come from? Turn back with me to Deuteronomy 18:15, a prophecy of Moses: *“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers.”* That’s Jesus, Jewish like Moses, preacher of the Law, Sermon on the Mount. *“It is to him you shall”* what? *“listen.”* He’s the authority. You see, the baptism of Jesus was a major event pointing to Jesus’ authority, the prophet of all prophets. Jesus is showing the religious leaders He had authority from God, and—listen to this—thus He had authority over them. They could ask any question they wanted to, but the baptism of John was the very event that inaugurated the *exousia*, that is the authority. *Exousia*, the Greek word for “authority.” That event revealed Jesus’ oneness with the Father. The Spirit descended on Him. *Eis auton*, the Spirit descended in Him, literally. That event exposed His empowerment, His authority to do all these things they were questioning. It unveiled His sovereign authority as King over all. So, if the Sanhedrin really wanted to know by what authority Jesus did these things, then they needed to consider John’s ministry, and they needed to consider what John did and how the crowds viewed John. Were they really prepared to say that the most beloved prophet of all operated in the flesh and was a false prophet? I don’t think so. They didn’t trap Jesus; He trapped them. Jesus is saying, “Listen, a decision about John’s ministry and John’s authority in effect is a decision about My own ministry and authority. You can answer your own question by telling me, did John have a ministry from heaven or from man?” If John’s ministry was from man, then the Sanhedrin had reason to question Jesus’ authority. But if it was from heaven, which they couldn’t deny, then they had to also admit Jesus’ ministry was from heaven as well.

By the way, the crowds knew that John’s ministry was from heaven. In fact, again Luke is helpful for us because it tells us they later say that *“If we say, ‘From man,’ all the people will stone us to death.”* It was considered blasphemy to say John was a false prophet. So, get the picture. Jesus’ attackers, these religious leaders had gone toe-to-toe with Jesus, and now He has them on their heels. They’re backpedaling. They’re staring the Lion of the tribe of Judea in the eye. Their backs are against the wall. Jesus is demonstrating, “I not only have authority to do these things, I have authority over you. I hold the scepter. If John’s ministry comes with divine approval, so does Mine.” Jesus’ authority is on full display in this passage.

Three tense moments: authority confronted, verse 27 and 8; authority countered, verses 29 and 30; finally note with me number three, authority confirmed verses 31 through 33. Here Jesus and His authority is confirmed. How is it confirmed? As we’re going to see by the silence of the religious leaders, their appeal to ignorance. Notice verse 31: *“And they discussed it with one another, saying,*

‘If we say, “From heaven,” he will say, “Why then did you not believe him”?’ Now, I believe that when it says there in verse 31, *“They discussed it with one another,”* that means that they’re stepping aside. This is not a holy huddle. This is a hypocritical huddle to strategize, to come with a game plan. “I mean, this guy is pretty shrewd. He’s got us in a conundrum. Now, we can’t go back to the board with no answer, and we certainly can’t be embarrassed. We’re losing this debate.” So, it says, *“They discussed it with one another.”* Literally, that means they reasoned, they considered. *Dialogízomai* is the word. It means they had a dialog. Interestingly enough, Mark uses this same word discussed seven times, and in every single context, it’s used with people who are reasoning away not to face the truth that Jesus has just presented. This is a strategy session, not one of seeking truth, but rather an expedient answer to avoid the truth, right?

So, they reasoned together. They come up with this calculated response, or at least they’re trying to because if they say John’s ministry came from heaven, then they know they essentially are endorsing Jesus’ ministry. They’re saying it comes with authority because John commissioned Him. So, they say that, and they’re going to have to answer the follow-up question in verse 31. What is it? *“If we say it was from heaven,”* if we say John’s ministry came from heaven, then we know He’s going to turn around and say back to us, *“Why then did you not believe [in] him?”* In other words, they know Jesus is going to ask, “Why did you not believe all John said about Me? If his ministry is authoritative, if it’s sanctioned by God as you just admitted, then why didn’t you believe all the things that he said about your need to repent and about your need to look to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world?” I mean, they’re in a tight spot. They can’t say that John’s ministry came from heaven without indicting themselves. They couldn’t do that because don’t you remember they were publicly rebuked by John himself. Listen to this. This was earlier in John’s ministry. It says:

Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, and they were baptized by him in the River Jordan, confessing their sins. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin [presume] to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.”

In other words, “You’re coming to Me to be baptized because you want to remain in influence over the crowds that are being baptized, but there’s no repentance with your baptism so don’t even bother coming. You’re a brood of vipers.” He had condemned them. John, the one whose ministry was sanctioned from heaven, the one who everyone believed had a ministry sanctioned from heaven was the same one that preached against the religious leaders. They are in a real big conundrum here. They cannot affirm John’s ministry because then they’re indicting themselves. They cannot do that, and they can’t condemn his ministry. They can’t condone it. They can’t condemn it. If they say that it came from man, the crowds would want to stone them. The Pharisees and the lawyers, Luke tells us, rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by John. So, when they came with no repentance and John said, “Go away until you repent,” they went away. They were never really part of John’s ministry, but they couldn’t condemn it because everyone else loved John. And they couldn’t say that his ministry came from heaven, because then that’s endorsing Jesus’ ministry. Nor could they say, notice verse 32, *“But*

shall we say,” they are continuing to reason among themselves, ‘From man?’” Why? “They were afraid of the people, for they all held that John really was a prophet.”

It’s what I’ve just been saying, and as Luke says because the people believed that John was really a prophet, they would pick up stones and stone these religious leaders. They would be alienated from the people, lose their influence, lose their authority because nobody in their right mind would criticize John as being a false prophet. So, rather than facing the truth they knew deep down that Jesus was the prophet of all prophets, the Lamb of God who has come to take away the sin of the world. They hardened their hearts. They saved face to their own detriment to avoid further embarrassment. Notice verse 33: “So,” Mark says, “*they answered Jesus, ‘We do not know.’*” “We don’t know. We don’t know. We can’t answer definitively whether John’s ministry was sanctioned fully by heaven or if it’s from man. We, just, we don’t know.” They go back to Jesus in front of the crowds. They plead ignorance not because they didn’t know but because they had hardened hearts. Ignorance is bliss. They’re marked by cowardice, not courage; pride, not humility; expediency, not sincerity.

Jesus had made it clear. He spoke with authority. The Father’s voice from heaven had made it clear that He spoke from authority. The Spirit of God descending in Him made it clear He came with authority. John’s baptism of Him made it clear He came with authority. He taught with authority. No one could deny it. He healed people with authority. No one could deny it. Every theological debate He was ever in, He won and embarrassed the religious leaders, and yet, they still hardened their hearts. Beloved, the only thing that can soften your heart to the gospel is God Himself. If the religious leaders can die and go to hell, you could die and go to hell. It will take a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit to soften your heart, to confess your sin, and to bow to King Jesus. He is the only authority, and because of that He would not submit to the Sanhedrin. He would not give a direct answer. Notice how He responds at the end of verse 33: “*And Jesus said to them,*” okay, you don’t know, “*neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.*” I don’t answer to you. *Oude egō legō eimi*, “Neither will I tell you.” You don’t want to talk about truth? We’re done talking about truth. You don’t want to enter a discourse of seeking truth? You’re going to harden your heart? I’m not going to cast the pearls of the gospel before the swine any longer. “*Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.*” I mean, ignorance was all these so-called theological experts could plead, so Jesus doesn’t give a direct answer. His body of work had spoken for itself.

How do we apply this passage for today? Well, it’s simple. Just as the religious leaders had the light of the gospel, the light of Christ’s authority revealed to them, so too has the light of Christ’s authority been revealed to all mankind in general. And we’ve been going to the Gospel of John many times this morning because John oftentimes gives us the theology behind these events. What does John tell us? Well, for example he says this:

He [Jesus] was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John. [These are the words of Jesus] For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent. You search the Scriptures because

you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.

That was the religious leaders. That is all who reject the authority of the Word of God, the authority of the gospel. It is a rejection of the authority of King Jesus, the only authority. Jesus said on another occasion in John 12, *“The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.”* It’s a warning that still goes out today, right, because as Genesis 6:3 says *“My [God’s] Spirit shall not strive with man forever.”* God told Israel through the Levites in Nehemiah, *“Many years you bore with them and warned them by your Spirit through your prophets. Yet they would not give ear. Therefore you gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands.”* Isaiah the prophet, Isaiah 63: *“But they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit; therefore he turned [away from them] to be [became] their enemy, and himself fought against them.”*

As I said at the beginning, there is no winning against Jesus. He has already won. There is one authority that all must bow to, and as the church, we declare that authority. Paul told Timothy, *“Do the work of an evangelist.”* That was to pastors, but that applies to parishioners as well. We are to urge and command sinners to bow to the authority of Jesus. Acts 17: *“The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”* That’s why Paul told Titus, *“These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you.”* That is specifically preachers because how will they hear without a preacher? But it applies to all Christians who have a responsibility in the Great Commission. *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go into all the world, proclaim the gospel.”* And the Bible says, *“He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations.”* The church has been given delegated authority over the nations. We have been given authority to tell every man, every woman, every boy, every girl, from every tribe, from every language, from every culture, *“You must bow to Jesus. There is one God. There is one authoritative source—the Scriptures. There is one Savior, and if you reject Him, He has already rejected you. Come to the light that your deeds may be exposed, that you may be redeemed.”*

The question is: Is the church faithful at this? Is the church faithful in declaring authority without apology? The church through Christ has the only authority in the world because the gospel is the only thing that can deliver sinners from hell, sinners from misery, so we declare the authority of Jesus. We do not hold back. We do not apologize. We do it with boldness. We do it with courage. We do it with conviction. We don’t apologize for our beliefs. We don’t water the message down. We don’t dilute our message to appeal to the masses. We say, *“Listen, we have the only authoritative message that you must heed.”* And as we proclaim that message, we then live out that message because the worst thing you and I can do is live contrary to the thing that we’re proclaiming. If we claim His authority, we better live in submission to His authority. We better search our hearts and make sure that our lives are fully devoted to King Jesus from the inside to the outside. That will bring lasting change in this society. Nothing else will. To Him be the glory and may He empower us to do that. Let us pray.

Father, again we thank you for Your Word that is so rich. It's so rich because we have before us the Lord Jesus Christ; all of His actions, all of His words. Lord, it's just amazing. Lord, His wisdom. Lord, His ability to confront and convict. Lord, something that happened two thousand years ago, we feel as if we were there. All of us in a sense have the tendency to not want to submit to Your authority, even as born-again Christians, so, Lord, help us to be yielded fully to You. Help us to unapologetically proclaim Your one and only true gospel. Help us to lean upon the only foundation of Your Word. Your Word is truth. And Father, we believe that and now confidently come to the Lord's Table. We know that the Lord's Table is for the Lord's people. It represents the Lord's death, burial and resurrection, His body and His blood. So, as we partake of it in a moment, Father, we pray that we might do so rightly. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.