

Message #42

Mark 11:27-33

We come now to a context in which Jesus will go head-to-head against the phony religious leaders, who want to kill Him. They are getting desperate. They need to come up with something to try and stop Him and now that He is in Jerusalem and in the Temple, they want to take advantage of this opportunity. Their goal is to get something on Him so they can execute Him. All the religious leaders are in on this plot.

Jesus was not intimidated by any of these guys. He was back again in Jerusalem and right back in the Temple. The last time He was in the Temple, He created quite a stir. In fact, He chased those buying and selling things right out of the Temple and he overturned tables and put a stop to their merchandising marketing (11:15-16).

Jesus was not afraid to go back to this very spot because He is God and He cannot be touched until the moment He permits it. He was not concerned about what He had publicly done and He did not apologize for His actions. He had everything right out in the open and He was again walking in the Temple.

As soon as He was in the Temple, the big three phony groups of religious leaders, chief priests, scribes and elders, came to Him to challenge Him. **Their first challenge concerns His authority.** These three phony religious groups are the very same three groups that Jesus specifically told His disciples would kill Him (Mark 8:31).

What we see here is this:

THE TEACHING AND THE ACTIONS OF JESUS CHRIST CAUSED THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS TO QUESTION HIM CONCERNING HIS AUTHORITY SO THEY COULD TRAP HIM AND KILL HIM.

These religious leaders are not asking Christ questions so they can learn. They are questioning Him in order to get Him to say something so they can get rid of Him.

Make no mistake about this; these religious leaders knew that Jesus had authority. As **verse 27** points out “the chief priests” knew it, “the scribes” knew it and so did “the elders.”

- 1) The Chief Priests were the temple rulers. Being chief priests, these are the highest.
- 2) The Scribes were the Biblical scholars. They studied, interpreted and taught (traditions/law).
- 3) The Elders were the religious and civil leaders.

Combined, these three groups made up the Sanhedrin. These were the elite religious rulers. These groups commanded great influence over the people. They dominated religious life. They controlled the Temple, they told people what they should believe, they oversaw political, legal and financial matters. These were very powerful men. They came to Jesus and questioned Him concerning His authority.

Now Jesus had been catapulted into the limelight in a big time way. He had been in this Temple three times in the last three days:

- 1) He had a triumphal entry into Jerusalem the night before last and came to the temple (11:11).
- 2) The next day, He went back to the Temple and purged it and ran people out (11:15).
- 3) Now on this third day He is back walking around the Temple again (11:27).

For these religious leaders Jesus was a thorn in their side because He would not go away and He would not back down from them.

We may recall that early in His public ministry some of these very Scribes alleged that He was doing things by the power of Satan (3:22). They claimed He was casting out demons by satanic power. They cannot deny His power, but they do not want to admit the truth about His power that it is Divine and they sure don't want the people believing this. So again they challenge His authority.

Now this time they are questioning His authority to "do these things" (v. 28). The things to which they are referring is what He did in the Temple. This time He was not casting out demons; He was casting out people.

He had gone into the Temple and overturned the tables of the money changers; He overturned their seats; He would not permit anyone to carry any merchandise through the Temple and then He told everyone that this Temple, which was supposed to be a place of prayer had become a den of thieves (Mark 11:15-17).

So they want to know where He got His power and authority to do these things. According to **verse 28** the religious leaders asked Jesus two questions and in **verses 29-30**, Jesus asks them one, which ends the discussion:

LEADERSHIP TRAP QUESTION #1 – By what authority are you doing these things? **11:28a**

The leadership is challenging Jesus Christ here. They are, as H. A. Ironside said, "cunning legalists" (*Mark*, p. 176). They want to know about His credentials. Jesus had been doing and saying some amazing things and they want to know about His credentials.

This is nothing more than an attempt to discredit and embarrass Christ. If He says I don't have any credentials by your standards, then the leaders can discredit Him before all the people. If, on the other hand, He claims He had authority from God, they could accuse Him of blasphemous behavior.

LEADERSHIP TRAP QUESTION #2 – Who gave you this authority to do these things?
11:28b

What gave you the right and the authority to come into this Temple and start doing what you did? Who gave you this authorization? These leaders certainly had not given Him the authority.

In fact, these guys claimed He was doing these things by the power of Satan (Mark 3:22). That is the rumor they have been spreading.

Now I am sure the people loved what Jesus was doing. His problem was not with the people, it was with the leadership.

Reminds me of what we have witnessed in the Presidential Primaries. You have a candidate who is very popular with the people, but much of the leadership absolutely hates him. His numbers are record-setting, but many of the leadership want to shut him down.

That is precisely what was happening to Jesus Christ. The masses of people loved Him, but the political and religious leaders were out to shut Him down. They were out to stop Him.

Now these questions are questions designed to get Him to admit that He is claiming that He is the Messiah and that He is God. We know that all of this business related to the Temple and His Messianic claim will be the very charges and accusations they will bring against Him to kill Him (Mark 14:58, 61; 15:29, 32).

The Romans did not take kindly to one who claimed to be some leader and under the O.T. law, anyone who claimed to be a false prophet could be executed (Deut. 13:1-5; 18:20). So this is more than just a fact-finding couple of questions. They are plotting as to how they may get rid of Jesus Christ.

So they think that these questions will help them succeed.

JESUS' RESPONSE QUESTION – By what authority did John minister? **11:29-30a**

Now Jesus answers their questions with a counter question. He says I will give you one question and you answer it and then I will answer you. In other words, you answer one question for Me and I will answer two questions for you.

Jesus often used a counter question approach as a method of shutting the mouths of those questioning or criticizing Him. In each case, He left them speechless: 2:7/8-9; 2:18/19-22; 2:24/25-28; 3:22/3:23-30; 8:11/8:12-13; 10:2/3-12; 11:27-28/29-33; 12:8-23/24-27.

It is not the brightest move to try and trap Jesus Christ by using some question attack. It won't work. He is God. He knows all the questions and He has all the answers. In fact, He had been in this very Temple when He was twelve and He could question and answer things that astounded these very religious leaders (Luke 2:42, 46-47).

Jesus' question to the religious leaders was a simple question: **“Was the baptism of John from heaven or from men?” 11:30a**

Actually what Jesus is doing here is answering their question, He is not evading it. Even though the people won't pick up on this, these leaders will. If they answered this question honestly and accurately, they would have their answer.

Now John had been intimately connected to Jesus and these leaders knew that. John came on the scene and proclaimed the superiority of Jesus Christ.

For hundreds of years there had been no prophet in Israel's history and then all of a sudden here comes John on the scene, claiming that he is the forerunner of the Messiah, whose shoes he is unworthy to touch. He was baptizing hundreds of Jews in the Jordan with the goal of introducing them to Jesus Christ (Mark 1:1-8). Shortly after John surfaced and started preaching these things, Jesus surfaced and when John saw Him, he said there is "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

These leaders knew that and these religious leaders had not responded to John or Jesus. They hated them both and rejected them both. So when Jesus asks them a question about John, this puts them in a bad way.

Now the baptism of John, to which Jesus is referring, was a preaching baptism (Mark 1:4).

It was a baptism in which John preached that Israel needed to repent of sin as a preparatory means for the coming of Jesus Christ. Israel needed to change her thinking to realize that she did not have the righteousness necessary to get into the Kingdom, any more than we have the righteousness to get into heaven. John demanded that Israel be baptized to acknowledge they were sinners and they needed One to come who could forgive their sin and give them a righteousness to enter the Kingdom. That is what John's baptism was (Mark 1:5-8).

Jesus had been very closely linked to this baptism because John came proclaiming that his baptism was that which would point people to Jesus Christ. The people who were baptized by John admitted that they were sinners and needed One to come who had a righteousness that could get them into the kingdom.

In Mark 1:7-8, we learn that John's baptism was all about pointing a sinful nation to the One who could and would save them from sin. He was so righteous that John was not even worthy to touch His sandals.

So when Jesus asks these leaders to answer the question about John's baptism, He is presenting them with a real personal and theological conundrum.

John was regarded as a true prophet of God by the people. So Jesus says tell me whether or not John's baptism was from heaven or from men?

When you go to some religious meeting, this is what it comes down to; either you are hearing something from heaven or something from men. If it is an accurate presentation of God's written Word, you are hearing from heaven. If it is not, you are hearing from men.

Carefully observe that two times Jesus says, you “answer Me” (v. 29, 30). Christ is putting public pressure on these guys and says, “answer me,” “answer me.”

So what we have here is Jesus has been challenged by the religious elite and He is demanding they answer Him.

Well His question for them was a real stumper.

So according to **verse 31**, they began reasoning among themselves. They were plotting and pooling their ignorance and their arrogance. They knew that Jesus had just painted them into a corner.

They came to two conclusions:

Conclusion #1 - If they answer Him and admit that John got his authority from heaven, then He will ask them why they didn’t believe Him. **11:31**

In other words, they will condemn themselves by admitting they don’t believe the truth of God presented by a man of God. Since John was saying they needed to believe in Jesus Christ, whose shoes he was not worthy to untie, they would be forced to admit they did not believe in the heavenly truth pertaining to Christ’s identity.

Conclusion #2 - If they answer Him and say that John got his authority from men, then they will lose the favor of the people because they all believed John was a real prophet of God. **11:32**

Luke adds an interesting comment here. He says that they were afraid if they said John was just a man that they would be stoned by the people (Luke 20:6).

Religious leaders are gutless politicians who want the applause of the people. They are not after truth.

Now having reasoned like this they decided to say to Jesus “we do not know.” That is a lie. They do know. If they don’t know, they shouldn’t be a leader. If they do know but aren’t telling the truth, they should not be a leader.

So Jesus says in **verse 33**, if you won’t answer Me, then I won’t answer you.

Now the thing that these leaders were not about to do was to admit they were sinners who needed a Savior. They were not about to admit that Jesus Christ was the only One who could save them from their sins and give them the righteousness they needed to get into the Kingdom. Don’t you make the same mistake?