

TEXARKANA REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH**SERIES: MARK 11:27-33 | SERMON: THE SOURCE OF JESUS' AUTHORITY****DAVE WAGNER**

We have come in Mark's Gospel to the last week of Jesus' life. Starting with the present text, Jesus will now begin a series of encounters with the Jewish authorities, which will culminate in his arrest and execution. In this first encounter, the Jewish authorities confront Jesus about his actions on the previous day, when he protested in the temple. Their challenge is a question about what authority he has to give command concerning what happens in the temple.

Jesus counters with a question of his own, and at first it may seem unconnected to the present scene. Jesus demands of them where the baptism of John the baptist was from, whether heaven or men.

What Jesus is asking here is whether John's ministry was authorized by God or whether John took his own initiative, apart from God's will and direction, to start baptizing people. The point of this question is simply this: Was John a genuine, God-sent prophet or was he something less, perhaps even a fake?

Instead of answering plainly with what they believed, like good politicians, the Jewish leaders confer together about how they should answer, realizing Jesus has just put them between a rock and a hard place. Here's the problem:

The Jewish leaders reject John's ministry as authentic, probably not least because he openly denounced them as religious hypocrites on their way to hell. It seems obvious that what they really think is that John was a fake, or at least that would be their convenient position on the matter; convenient because it removes the possibility that they themselves are in need of repentance.

However, it is impossible for them to say openly what they think about John in front of the crowd. Why? Because the crowds are persuaded John was from God. At worst, such a statement on the part of the leaders could lead to a stoning; at best it would severely damage their reputation with the people.

On the other hand, if they grant that John was from God to make the people happy, they will fall into Jesus' trap and answer their own question about Jesus' authority in just the way they don't

want it answered. This is because John testified that Jesus is the greater One who comes and baptizes with the Spirit, certainly a strong reference to some divinely-sent eschatological figure whose words should be believed and followed. For the Jewish leaders to grant that John's baptism ministry was authorized by God would be for them to grant that God, or heaven, is the source of Jesus' authority. This they certainly cannot do. So they take the politician's way out: They claim not to know and thus refuse to answer the question.

And Jesus responds in kind: They won't answer his question, so he won't answer theirs. But here's the cleverness of Christ in action: Without directly answering their question, Jesus has rather put them into a difficult public position, at least partly damaged their reputation, given their unwillingness to affirm John, and after all he has given them an answer to their question in a round-about way: It is obvious Jesus is claiming his authority to determine how the temple is managed comes from God.

Main Point: Jesus' Authority comes from God

So what is the main issue in this text? The main issue here is a Christological one, that is, the concern of this text is to tell us something about Jesus; namely, that his impressive, seemingly limitless authority comes from heaven itself, or more plainly, from God.

Now Mark has done a great deal to exhibit the authority of Jesus thus far, and he's not done yet; taken as a whole, this Gospel has some amazing displays of the authority of Jesus. One commentator provides the following list of elements of Jesus' authority in Mark's gospel:

In chapter 3 Jesus has the unique authority to bind Satan; Jesus has authority to forgive sins in chapter 2; in 2 and 3 Jesus displays his authority over Sabbath and the Torah (the Old Testament) itself; his speech about God is unique among rabbis, in his common preface of statements with the phrase "truly I say to you"; his speech to God is unique in calling God "abba," something which exhibits a closeness with God unparalleled in Judaism; surpassing all is Jesus' use of the phrase *ego eimi*, in 14.62, which repeats God's self-disclosure to Moses. To this could be added Jesus' authority over nature in stories such as the feeding of the five thousand or the walking on water.

Jesus' authority is his power and prerogative over everything and everyone we've seen him encounter so far, save the Father. To witness the scope and wonder of Jesus' authority is to know without any further proof where his authority must come from; who could forgive sins, command demons and walk on water unless his authority came from the highest source, heaven

itself? By the time we reach this point in the gospel and hear the question about the source of Jesus' authority, we have seen more than enough to answer the question ourselves. Jesus' authority could not come from any lesser source than God.

If we look outside of Mark's gospel we find even more, and perhaps further reaching statements of the authority of Christ. Matthew has Jesus claiming his possession of all authority in heaven and on earth upon his resurrection. It is on this basis that Jesus calls his followers to baptize and teach the nations. Paul speaks of Jesus being exalted to the right hand of God and even now reigning from heaven, after all powers, whether on earth or in heaven have been made subject to him as their supreme ruler. In the Revelation, John speaks of Jesus as the ruler of the kings of the earth; Jesus is Emperor over all lesser rulers.

And there is no area over which Jesus' authority does not extend. For the Christian, the doctrine of Christ's supreme authority has implications for all of life. First, it is a comfort to consider Jesus is ruling all things for the good of his people. Every circumstance must pass through the gate of Jesus' approval, else it cannot come to pass. Second, the Christian is never right in addressing any situation without considering how the will of Christ affects it. Everything done without Christ must perish without him, for only he can sustain anything. Everything done in faith and submission to Christ must please him and will often yield a blessing from Christ's own hand.

One way a Christian can bring the absolute authority of Christ to bear in his daily life is to speak freely and openly of Christ whenever possible. Christ has an interest in all that occurs in his world, and the Christian is his representative. We are appointed to work for the observance of Christ's will wherever we can, and to serve in prayer that Christ would pour out his Spirit and renew more of the world. The world, and every institution in it, is hopelessly and miserably lost without Christ; we do no one any favors by keeping quiet when we have the answer to solve the deepest problems facing the world.

It is to be feared that many Christians have bought into the myth of neutrality, that there are spaces in our culture in which Christ's authority has no say. Public school, government offices, the work place, college, or wherever else; it is claimed by the prophets of Baal that these are "sacred" spaces in which the name of Christ shall not be named. But behold, they prophesieth a lie! And we see it is a lie as soon as, moments after removing the worship of Christ from an institution, they set up an image to Baal in the central courtyard.

Neutrality is something so obviously false, only western Christians are foolish enough to believe it. No worldling believes it; they prove they don't believe it when they fight tooth and nail to

remove Christ from the public square. They aren't aiming for a vacuum; they are aiming to replace the true God with a false one. Nature hates a vacuum; so does the soul of a culture. Remove Christ, the true God from the culture's collective soul, and that soul will furiously suck into itself an idol.

The authority of Christ is the healing balm for the Christian, and for all society, in this case. We must come to believe that Jesus can save not only individual sinners, but whole cities and countries from descending into the abyss. But that salvation can't happen as long as Christians agree to avoid "talking about religion," which actually means promoting any god you feel like, however perverse, so long as we stay a thousand miles away from the true God, Christ.

Applications

First, recognize Christ is sent from heaven and authorized by heaven. See Jesus this way; reject any idea which diminishes his absolute authority.

Second, submit to his authority in everything you do. Nothing is exempted. There is no middle ground.

Third, as you live in the world, seek to bring others under the authority of Christ by speaking openly and plainly about him and his words. Don't be afraid and don't hesitate. Jesus has given you authority over snakes and scorpions, over all the power of the enemy. Be friendly and humble, but do not give any ground. We are ambassadors of the Power Who sits enthroned in heaven. If you tell me you have a job where you have to be careful, I tell you Jesus already gave you a more important job in which you had better be more careful. God forbid you should take any chances in being silent about Jesus' words when it is time to speak. You will say that if you speak you might lose your job. I tell you that if you don't speak you might lose your soul. Which would you prefer to lose?

Conclusion

The early Christians living in the Roman Empire faced temptations and challenges as bad and worse than we do. At times they were required to confess the Roman Emperor as Lord; the problem is that this word referred to more than just political leadership. In certain contexts it could be used to refer to someone who was divine; this reference the Christians refused to allow. Apparently the Christians would get into trouble when they refused to confess Caesar as Lord; instead they insisted that only Jesus the Nazarene, who had come back from the dead, was Lord. They often sealed this testimony with their blood.

So what Caesar are we commanded to call Lord in our day? Egalitarianism, sexual perversion, absolute sexual freedom, unlimited rights of the individual, to name a few. The truth of Christ's heavenly authority smashes all these competing lords to pieces, like a steel rod applied vigorously to a clay pot. Caesar is not lord; Egalitarianism is not lord; only Jesus is Lord.