

# The Authority of Jesus

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[ 0 : 00 ] That's Mark chapter 11. We're going to read from verse 11 to the end of the chapter. Let's hear God's word together. Jesus entered Jerusalem and went to the temple.

He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve. The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. Seeing in the distance a fig tree and leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit.

When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. Then he said to the tree, may no one ever eat fruit from you again.

And his disciples heard him say it. On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple area and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves.

I would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. And as he taught them, he said, is it not written, my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations, but you have made it a den of robbers.

[ 1 : 07 ] The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching.

When evening came, they went out of the city. In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. Peter remembered and said to Jesus, Rabbi, look, the fig tree you cursed has withered.

Have faith in God, Jesus answered. I tell you the truth.

They arrived again in Jerusalem. And while Jesus was walking in the temple courts, the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders came to him.

By what authority are you doing these things, they asked. And who gave you authority to do this?

Jesus replied, I will ask you one question. Answer me and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

[ 2 : 31 ] John's baptism. Was it from heaven or from men? Tell me. They discussed it among themselves and said, if we say from heaven, he will ask, then why didn't you believe him?

But if we say from men? They feared the people. For everyone held that John really was a prophet. So they answered Jesus, we don't know.

Jesus said, neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things. We are continuing to follow Jesus' journey to the cross.

Here is Jesus, the king. The king who comes with authority. And we're going to see that he uses his authority both to confront some and to comfort others.

Just as we begin, we probably recognize that questions of identity and authority sometimes go together. Maybe you remember using words like these, who are you, to tell me what to do.

[ 3 : 38 ] Perhaps you've heard them spoken to you by somebody else. Well, back in 2017, those very same words were uttered in a court down in England in Canterbury.

An angry defendant was in the court and he was scuffling with some security guards. And he was in the middle of an angry tirade. And the judge asked him to be quiet and show order in court.

And the man responded, who are you to tell me what to do? The judge's response was this, I'm the judge and I am tasked with maintaining the dignity in court. And he ended up in jail for two weeks.

Recognizing the authority of a person can be very important. What we see in the Pharisees and the religious leaders is that they often use this kind of, who are you, language.

Who do you think you are, Jesus? Jesus, verse 28, by what authority are you doing these things?

One of the reasons Mark writes his gospel, one of the themes that keeps coming through in the words of Jesus, is that he is the one who is from heaven.

[ 4 : 47 ] Mark begins, this is the gospel about the Son of God. And therefore, he has absolute authority. And so we're going to see how Jesus uses this authority, first of all, in confronting the false worship in the temple.

And then to bring some words of comfort. So first thing, Jesus can use his authority to confront us. Look at verse 11. Here we see Jesus entering Jerusalem and journeying to the temple.

Now, lots of people at this time of the year were journeying as pilgrims. It was time for the Passover feast. Jesus isn't like all the other pilgrims. He's coming as the Lord of the temple, coming to inspect it.

And what Jesus is going to do is he is going to use his authority to confront those in charge in the temple for robbing God.

And we're going to hear him confront us about robbing God. So he arrives in the temple. It's late. He goes back out to Beth. And then he comes back in the next day. And as he's on his way, verses 12 to 14, we see Jesus and this encounter with the fig tree.

[ 6 : 04 ] And we get a parable of the fig tree. What's going on here? As Jesus sees this fig tree with leaves, but there's no fruit, and he curses it. He's trying to make a point about the temple in Jerusalem.

Here is a fig tree that flatters to deceive. Here is a fig tree that looks good, but fails to deliver. And so Jesus curses it.

Verse 14, may no one ever eat fruit from you again, in order to make a powerful point about the temple that he's about to revisit. Some things look good, but they flattered to deceive.

This week in the news, there was the story of the new Samsung folding phone. I don't know if you saw the reports. This really expensive, £1,800 for a phone that has a folding screen.

Well, a number of reviewers were given it, and a number of those reviewers smashed said folding phone. So poor Samsung are left with something that looks great, but is fundamentally flawed.

[ 7 : 02 ] And they're back to the drawing board. Well, something much more serious is happening here as Jesus enters the temple. Jesus entered the temple, verse 15, and began driving out those who were buying and selling.

He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. This temple that looked glorious on the outside, on the inside, had become little more than a marketplace.

Trading in items for sacrifice. Here is a people who are going through the motions of worship, but their hearts were far from God.

An accusation that Jesus had leveled against them previously. Jesus, in verse 16, actually describes the people that he meets as those who have turned the temple, verse 17, into a den of robbers.

And he borrows that language from Jeremiah chapter 7. In Jeremiah's day, there were people in Israel who were murdering, who were oppressing the poor, who were worshipping false idols.

[ 8 : 13 ] But they'd still turn up at the temple on the Sabbath day, and they'd still bring their offerings, and they'd presume that they were right with God. And God sent Jeremiah to expose the folly of their hearts then, and Jesus is exposing the folly of religiosity now.

Like the fig tree, there was no fruit of righteousness. In the temple, the worship was dead. Inside, though outside, the building looked great.

So bad is it that they're even preventing other nations from worshipping. For the sake of money and profit, they've turned the part of the temple that was, so that non-Jewish people could come and worship God.

That had now become the prime marketplace, denying people access to the worship of God. So how does Jesus respond? Well, Jesus confronted this abuse of the temple.

Jesus comes as the Lord of the temple to clear it out, to drive out those who are robbing God of his glory. To deliver the same curse that came on the fig tree.

[ 9 : 30 ] If you don't change, if there's no repentance, then the same will happen to this temple as happened to the fig tree, which happened just 30 or so years later. The people were robbing God of honour, and Jesus comes as one who has great zeal for the honour of God.

And so he uses his authority as God's king to confront this abuse. This isn't just a historic issue. Jesus' authority, Jesus' words, confront us too. Some of the guys in this church are doing a thing called the spiritual decathlon, which doesn't involve any physical exercise.

It's about spiritual exercises. And one of the things that that's trying to hammer home in the early days is that spiritually, it's so very easy for us to be short-sighted.

It's so very easy for us to find our joy in lesser things, to be satisfied when we have a career that we enjoy, a family that we enjoy, sufficient wealth or education to make life comfortable.

[ 10 : 44 ] We can easily lose sight and be blinded to the greater glory of Jesus, that our hearts can be content, so long as we have money in our wallet and a smartphone in our pocket and a few friends to spend time with.

We can be guilty of robbing God of his honor and his glory when our hearts run to other things rather than to the living God.

How do we fix that kind of blaming? I think it's as we look, meditate on what God has done for us in Jesus.

Remember, this is Jesus on his journey to the cross. It's as we remember the love and the sacrifice of Jesus, that's what melts our hearts, that's what causes us to have true joy when we understand that God has done all this for us so that we might know him and have eternal life with him.

So just as it was for the people then, we need to be careful that we are not robbing God. There's another way that Jesus uses his authority to confront the people then and to confront us.

[ 11 : 55 ] That's in verse 27 to 33. There's the danger about rejecting Jesus himself. So Jesus has just cleared out the temple.

He just cleansed the temple out of concern for God's glory. But the chief priests and the teachers of the law came to him. Verse 28, By what authority are you doing these things?

Who gave you the authority to do them? So to clear the temple required God's authority. This was a well-established pattern that came from the religious leaders that you could buy and sell and you could trade in the temple courts.

And they're wondering, well, who are you, Jesus? To break up what's been a long-established pattern. Ultimately, the religious leaders don't see Jesus as the Son of God.

They don't see Jesus as God's Christ. And so they don't recognize that his word should have any weight over theirs. And that way, they're very like a man ignoring the honor and position of a judge in his own court.

[ 12 : 55 ] It's the height of pride and folly that we see from these men. So they challenged Jesus' authority and Jesus uses a question of his own to challenge them.

In verse 29, I will ask you one question. The question, John's baptism, was it from heaven or was it from men? What's Jesus doing here?

Jesus is tying his own authority and his own mission to that of John the Baptist. What did John the Baptist come to do? John came to announce, here is the time to repent. Here is the time to get ready for God's promised king.

He is coming. The kingdom of God is near. And then as Jesus arrived on the scene, John the Baptist announced him as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. John who said, I must become less so that he must become great.

The religious leaders are left in a difficult position. They don't want to deny that John came from heaven because the people won't put up with it. They don't want to say from men.

[ 13 : 58 ] The people will get really upset if he's from heaven. Why didn't the people listen to John the Baptist? So they're left in a quandary and they're unable to do anything. They value their position over truth.

So they won't answer. They don't answer. But the result for them is that they are unwilling to accept John and they were unwilling to accept Jesus.

And so like that fig tree, they stand under the curse of God unless they are willing to repent. Jesus is too important a figure to ignore.

There is this tension in Jesus' journey to Jerusalem and the cross about his identity. Who is Jesus? Will the people trust in him? Will they see that he is the one who is sent from heaven in order to save them?

How does Jesus' authority confront us on that issue? Well, it's the same, isn't it? We still all have to reckon with the identity of Jesus. Who do we say Jesus is?

[ 14 : 59 ] We need to make a decision on his identity because when we read the Gospels for any length of time, we discover that he is just too important. His claims are too big that we can simply put him to one side as someone of marginal importance.

Either he's telling the truth, in which case we need to listen as he talks about being the son of God and the only savior, the only way to know God, or we can call him a liar, but we cannot remain apathetic.

Last week was Easter Sunday. Easter Sunday, we were remembering that Jesus is the one who claimed that he would die and then claimed that he would be raised to life. And then we thought about the empty tomb.

We thought about the fact that there was no dead body. The fact that there were numerous eyewitnesses to the risen Lord Jesus. We saw the transformed life of his followers, all pointing to Jesus' ultimate authority.

So if we have questions today about the identity of Jesus, you're not sure who this man is, please read the Gospels.

[16:10] Discover for yourself his compassion, his mercy, and his love. Hear his words of truth that are unlike any other. See his sacrifice and hear the promise of forgiveness forgiveness and eternal life that comes from him.

Because what we see in the story of the religious leaders is that to reject Jesus is to be on the outside of the kingdom. It doesn't matter how religious they were because they wanted nothing to do with Jesus.

They were outside of God's kingdom. And so we don't want to be in that place. Rather, we want to lovingly hear, hear this loving invitation of Jesus, who welcomes us in to God's kingdom, to God's family, through trusting in him.

So Jesus used his authority to confront, but he also uses his authority to comfort us. The first way he does this is in verse 17, where he gives us this reminder that he provides our way to know and enjoy God.

As Jesus is clearing the temple, driving out the money changers, he says, is it not written, my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.

[17:31] What's happened in the temple is it's now a million miles away from God's original intention, from the temple, and for the people of Israel.

From the very beginning, as God decided to establish a people for his own glory, and he called Abraham, he told Abraham that one of your seed will be a blessing to the nations.

Abraham's family was to be a blessing to the nations. The nation of Israel in the Old Testament was to function as a light to the nations. Light as opposed to darkness, revealing the truth about God, again, to be a blessing to the surrounding nations.

That Isaiah 56 that Jesus is quoting from here of verse 17. It is a gospel message of hope for those who would be considered outsiders to God's kingdom, including foreign nations.

So Jesus is reminding the people that God's original intention for his redeeming purposes is that he would use Israel to draw people in.

[18:39] Jesus comes as the true Israel to draw all nations to himself. So as Jesus is confronting some about abuse in the temple, he's also comforting others.

How? Because the goal of temple clearing is so that the Gentiles will be able to worship God at Passover. Previously, there's no access because there's no room because there's all these animals and things getting sold.

But now there's space, so now non-Jewish people can come and can worship God. Jesus creates the way for us to know God. And remember, this is all happening at the time of Passover.

Passover, when the people had been slaves in Egypt and God had announced that he was going to deliver them and give them freedom so that they might become his people.

And God's people, Israel, were told, in order to escape the judgment of God that would fall on Egypt, they had to sacrifice the Passover lamb. God's judgment passed over their houses and their families.

[19:47] And what does Jesus come to do? Jesus comes to die at Passover, to be the true Passover lamb, the one who dies in our place so that the judgment of God against our sin might pass over us and fall on him.

And now this is open, not just to Jewish people, now this is open to all of the nations because of Jesus. Jesus who comes into the world not just to be the true Passover lamb, also to be the true temple.

What was the temple? The temple was the place where people could come to meet with God, to worship God. And Jesus announces that he is now the way to know and to meet with God.

God. I was out at the start of the week having a walk with a friend and he was asking me, why doesn't your church do confession like the Catholic church does?

And it gave me a chance to talk about the fact that Jesus gives us something special. Jesus gives us direct access to God. The fact that we don't need a priest because Jesus has come to be the great high priest.

[ 20 : 53 ] We don't need intermediaries because now we have access to God in heaven. So Jesus has opened up this way for anybody to know and enjoy God.

So how can we respond to this truth? Well, since Jesus has come as the true temple, announcing judgment on a corrupted temple, let's seek to lay aside our idols, those things that keep us from worshipping and valuing God above all else.

Let's repent of that and seek to give our hearts and our worship over to him. And let's enjoy the access that we have to the one true God. Sometimes we take that for granted or we forget the privilege that we have.

We've got an incredible right of access through Jesus. And since Jesus is our sacrifice, since he has dealt once for all with our sins of our faith is in him, then we can be honest with him about the fact that we are unclean and impure, that we do sin, that we do fail, and we trust that Jesus gives cleansing and so we accept that washing.

And there's also a responsibility, I think, for us as a church in light of this to be open and welcoming, to recognize that just as God's desire is that the nations would be brought in to worship, so as a church, as a community of God's people, we ought to be open and welcoming to those who want to hear the truth for themselves, to be careful not to put barriers in the way, that we want to both invite people in but we also want to go out with the good news of Jesus, to be sending and supporting people both in local mission and in global mission.

[ 22 : 42 ] There's a second way that Jesus uses his authority to comfort us, not just in giving us access, wonderful access to know and enjoy God, but also he gives us the gift of prayer, verse 22 to 25, and not just any prayer.

By faith, we have this gift of mountain-moving prayer. Have faith in God, Jesus answered. I tell you the truth. If anyone says to this mountain, go throw yourself into the sea and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him.

Jesus is calling us to confidence confident, faith-filled prayer, confident in the faithfulness of God, confident in the goodness of God, confident in the power of God.

Now we see some examples of this all the way through the Bible. We can maybe think of when Peter was in prison in the book of Acts and the church gathered to pray earnestly to God for Peter's release.

What happened? At midnight, an angel came, the chains were loosed, the door was opened and Peter walked free. Or we can think about Jairus asking Jesus to come and heal and save his daughter so she might live.

[ 24 : 01 ] It was a prayer of faith, no other hope other than hoping in Jesus. Over Easter weekend, we were thinking about the thief on the cross.

His was a prayer, a cry of faith. Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom and Jesus promised today you'll be with me in paradise. Maybe you like to read Christian biographies, the likes of George Mueller who set up Barnardo's, the orphanages, and how so often in the story of that movement he had to pray for food for the next day or funds were empty, people needed to be paid, buildings needed to be looked at, and they would pray for funds and God always provided.

There are lots of examples of faith-fueled prayer. And we have a promise from Jesus that this kind of prayer and this kind of access to God's power is ours.

One of the reasons why the Lord's prayer begins with a focus on God, you know, begins, our Father in heaven, your kingdom come, your will be done, is it reminds us who we are speaking to.

And as we remember who we are speaking with, the Lord of the universe, the creator and sustainer of all things, and that increases our faith in the one we are making our appeal to, it strengthens our asking.

[ 25 : 27 ] And so we're called to have faith, Jesus said, have faith in God, get to know God and his character, and that will strengthen our resolve to pray.

So Jesus gives us this gift of prayer that we have access to God as Father, and he says there are two things that this effective prayer needs. It needs, first of all, faith, but also in verse 25, it needs forgiveness.

When you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins. We need faith, but we also need to be willing to forgive others. Why is that important? Last week, I was watering the garden, lovely sunny week, last week. So I was watering the garden, but we haven't used the hose for a while. You may have discovered this, that sometimes there's kinks that you find in your hose, or perhaps there's knots if people have been playing with it a little bit too much.

What happens when there's kinks or there's knots in your hose? There's no water supply. You turn the tap on all you want, but there's a blockage. And Jesus is reminding us that bitterness, a lack of forgiveness, an unwillingness to be reconciled to someone, it is like that knot.

[ 26 : 42 ] It's like that kink. It's a barrier to effective prayer. And so Jesus is saying we need to act fast to untangle those knots. We need to seek to be reconciled so that our praying might be effective.

Now, how might this teaching on prayer change our lives? Well, doesn't it give us a really positive incentive to pray when we remember the access to God that we have and the power that God has and his willingness to answer?

It helps us to recognize prayer isn't just a duty, it's also the great blessing that we have as God's people. It was Martin Luther, the great reformer, who used to get up super early to pray and he said, I'm too busy not to pray.

It reminds us to be dependent on God, it reminds us to have faith in God's provision, in God's purposes. Jesus' teaching reminds us to invite God in, into our situation, the big things and the little things, to invite God in, not to be self-reliant, but to remember the gift of prayer, to take opportunities to pray as a church, in your home, all through your day, as families, as friends.

A few weeks ago, we looked at the prayer of the man whose boy was possessed by an evil spirit and he prayed, I do believe, Jesus, that you can help, help my unbelief.

[ 28 : 06 ] It's a prayer that can be really important for us as we seek to have the kind of effective prayer life that enjoys relationship with God and sees prayers answered like Jesus is talking about here.

So here is Jesus on his journey to the cross and we're reminded once again that he is the king with absolute authority. How did he use that authority? Not like so many other leaders.

He didn't use that authority to get rich. He didn't use it to exploit the weak. He didn't use it to make sure that he could show up power for himself. Rather, we find him again deliberately going on his journey to the cross so that people like us, people who rob God of his glory, people who worship the wrong thing, people who have said to him, who are you to tell me what to do, might be welcomed, might be honoured, might be forgiven by God when we place our trust in Jesus, God's true king.