

The Leaders Question Yeshua's Authority

JRO Notes for 12/23/17

Mark 11:27-33

²⁷The arrived again in Jerusalem, and while Yeshua was walking in the temple courts, the chief priest, the teachers of the law and the elders came to him. ²⁸"By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you authority to do this?"

²⁹Yeshua replied, "I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. ³⁰Jon's baptism – was it from heaven or from men? Tell me!"

³¹The discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?'" ³²But if we say, 'From men'..." (They feared the people, for everyone held that John really was a prophet.)

³³So they answered Yeshua, "We don't know."

Yeshua said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things."

A. Overview

1. We get the sense that Yeshua isn't going to tiptoe around anymore. He sees his time is near.

- Presented as King (Steve taught on this)
- Clearing the temple (Brad taught on this)
- Cursing the fig tree to show the emptiness of religion. (Brad taught on this)

We see this in all the gospels: He holds back less and teaches his disciples more intensely, leaving them with important final instructions.

2. From this point in the narrative there's a straight line to the cross. (Wright) This event in Mark 11 is the key to the unfolding drama of Yeshua being arrested, questioned by the Sanhedrin, sent to Pilate and crucified.

3. Review of Religious Leadership in Yeshua's Day

Before we start: We'll be reading about the religious leadership again. Remember to try not to externalize their issues. No, we're not actual Pharisees or Sadducees but they represent the religious authority of the time. Who would the religious be in our day? Us. So we need to take care to not have the same insecurities and fears that the rulers and priests had.

Chief Priests: The priests who served from a rotation prescribed by Torah, although in Jesus' day they were appointed by Herod.¹ One of these would be the high priest who went into the Holy place on Yom Kippur.

Teachers of the Law: Also known as Scribes or Lawyers, these were experts of the law. They, along with the priests and elders made up the Sanhedrin. (Edwards) While they were usually poor, they were respected.^{1,2}

Elders: The tribal leaders, also part of the Sanhedrin. These would hear out cases from Israelites.^{1,2}

Sadducee: One from a particular party or school of thought who rejected the oral traditions. They were the party of the aristocracy and happened to be the ruling party majority.^{1,2}

Pharisee: One from a particular party or school of thought who held that the oral traditions were close in importance to the Torah. They set up "hedges" around the actual Torah to make it harder to break the commandments. They believed in angels and the resurrection of the dead.¹ They were later responsible for keeping Judaism alive after the 70AD destruction of the temple by bringing religion into the homes and everyday life.² These held less power than the Sadducees.

B. In & Out of Jerusalem:

1. David Pawson writes that the gospel of Mark reads like a fast train slowing down. It starts with broad brush- strokes of long periods of time. An earlier chapter might describe several days or weeks whereas later chapters narrate a few hours. Mark 11 is approaching this high-resolution time line.

2. Yeshua made more entries and exits to Jerusalem in Mark 11 than usual.

- Verse 11 The Kingly Entry.
- Verse 12 Leaves and goes to Bethany.
- Verse 15 Enters the temple – clears temple in anger.
- Verse 19 They went out of the city.
- Verse 27 Back in the temple, authority questioned.

He did this throughout his ministry but all the more here. I wonder if he was periodically going out to different places and then varying visits to Jerusalem in-between so as not to wear out his welcome, so to speak. He would do something in Jerusalem to blow their minds then go out to the Galilee to let them stew on it. This practice may have lengthened his ministry (they didn't want to crucify him too soon) and maybe allowed for a few elders/leaders to be persuaded.

He does this with individuals too, especially the lost. He allows breathing room between visits; between gospel messages. We should follow that example when we're sharing the gospel progressively with our neighbors, friends and family.

C. Yeshua's Authority

The question of Yeshua's authority has come full circle. It is what captivated people in early Mark.

Mark 1:22 "The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law." (See also Matt 7:29)

Mark 1:27 "The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, 'What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him.'"

Mark 2:5 Yeshua demonstrates authority to forgive sins. Teachers call it blasphemy.

Mark 2:10 "But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins."

But now it was personal.

D. John the Baptist

1. Turning attention to John the Baptists can seem to readers like a diversionary tactic. It seems either irrelevant or evasive. But John's baptism has everything to do with Yeshua's authority. It was widely known that John spoke of Yeshua as coming from God. It was when John baptized Yeshua that the Holy Spirit spoke audibly regarding His Son. A decision about John is a decision about Jesus. (Edwards)

2. John the Baptist was a big deal. Everyone had an opinion of him, but the elders had stayed cool and neutral regarding John. Yeshua was urging them to finally take a stance. Was John from God or did he just decide to be a preacher?

E. Get in the Mind of the Elders/Priests

1. Territory: Now Yeshua had done something very big and public exercising his spiritual authority over the temple. But the leaders considered this to be their territory. They asked what authority he had to "do these things" by which they meant the clearing of the temple. This was an official act without their permission. (Pawson) Yeshua was infringing on their official territory.

2: Financial Benefit: Those who came to Yeshua in this passage (elders, priests, teachers) were people who benefited financially by the lucrative business going on in the Temple. The people whose pockets had been affected by him wrecking it now came to confront him.⁴ Now it was personal. He was on their territory and it was affecting them personally.

Yeshua's Challenge: It was common practice for rabbis to answer a question with a question. But Yeshua often did it to reach the person individually. David Pawson puts it this way: "Never Challenge Yeshua because he has a way of putting it all back on you with a disturbing question."

The elders find themselves wrong-footed. Why had they not repented if John was from God? But John was a wild man following his own crazy ideas – this must have been their true answer. This is what they would have replied had they not been afraid of a stoning. (Wright) Their interest was not in knowing the actual truth but in discovering an answer which would save their political face. (Wright)

If we answer....
"John's baptism was from God"
We protect our spiritual dignity. But..
We appear unspiritual.
Why didn't we repent with the other?
Why didn't we believe?

If we answer....
"John's baptism was from himself"
We protect our status quo power/authority but...
We risk being stoned
We risk this thing escalating out of control.

What a fix they're in! So they bail. They punt the ball. "We don't know." How lame.

F. Former and Latter Revelations

Authority is about submitting. Before He answers about this latter authority, (by which he cleared the temple) He asks if they submitted to the former. He's not going to reveal more about himself to the group who rejected the very first simple call that John gave: repent!

Could this be true of prophetic instructions for us too?
Shall we ask God for new revelation, new guidance or instructions if we haven't acted on the previous ones He's given? Shall we ask God for new revelation if we haven't implemented the previous revelation?
Should we request new instructions if we haven't obeyed the instructions already given?
Shall we request new guidance if we haven't submitted to the former guidance He gave?

They hadn't obeyed the former authority because they were proud, (what could they possibly have to repent of? They were the holy people.) fearful, power-hungry, hard-of-heart, double minded and stubborn.

And their mindset hasn't changed. It is exactly the same now at the end of Yeshua's ministry. They are torn with guilt and fear. They are literally damned if they do and damned if they don't.

Their refusal to answer represented a suspension of their judgment of Yeshua. They were too afraid to accuse him and that bought him a bit more time.

They were too bound-up to make a decision. This can happen to us when:

1. We enter into Group-Think or "Collective Wisdom." Sometimes peer pressure can be a good thing, but following the crowd is often to our demise. We miss the truth because we're following along instead of thinking for ourselves. I wonder how many elders in that little mob were thinking to themselves, "I think John's baptism was from heaven," but were too fearful to speak out. To him, Yeshua might say, "If you are ashamed of me, I will be ashamed of you." (Luke 9:26)
2. We think we have too much to lose. The leaders had a good thing going. They were aristocracy, respected, in charge. They had the wealth, authority, respect, education and power. They felt they were above the others. When we feel we have it all or we have it all together we forget to repent. We forget how humble our circumstances (compared to the holiness of God!) really are. What about you? What about me? Do I sometimes feel comfortable enough that I miss God's call?

3. We care more about our position and image than about the *truth*. Notice the elders don't ask for the truth. They could have asked Yeshua what *he* thought of John. Really, they knew: Yeshua and John were of one mind. They both had commended each other publically multiple times. But they didn't care about truth, only how it affected their position.

Yeshua is willing to dialog with the honest, the humble, the obedient, the single-minded. Not the proud.

G. From the Outskirts to the Inner Court

Yeshua spent much of his ministry outside the temple. In the Galilee, Bethany, Cana, even Samaria. As His ministry progressed, he spent increasing time in the Temple. But this led to increasing conflict with the priests who saw the Temple as their domain. "Do what you want out in the villages, but be careful how you tread here in our house." But it was His Father's House! Finally Yeshua has enough. He is no longer is content to minister only in the outer areas. He want to cleanse and eventually reign in His rightful place – the temple built for God's presence.

What about us? Is Yeshua free to reign in the outer regions of our lives? Do we let him rule and reign as king in our inner temple? Is there a little priest inside of us keeping Him out of the inner temple? Perhaps we submit to him in the areas of lifestyle like what movies we watch and how often we cuss. But do we submit to him in how we spend our vacation time and what we do when no one is watching?

H. Yeshua's Authority comes from the Father

Yeshua does finally answer the question. His last words to the disciples:

Matthew 28:18 "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

If we take the New Testament seriously, it appears that those who follow Yeshua, who are equipped with His Spirit, are themselves given similar authority. We are to act in His name here on the earth. We are of course under His direction and it is all for His glory. But we bear His name and His delegated authority. Have we even begun to consider what this might mean?

I. Summary: Closing Questions

1. Have I obeyed or implemented God's former revelations so that I can receive new ones?
2. Do I need to break free of going along with the crowd?
3. Do I think I have too much to lose (comfort, control, finances...) to fully obey Yeshua's authority?
4. Do I need to relinquish control of the inner most part of my soul (temple) to Yeshua's authority? In other words, is there an area He is asking me to trust in Him in a greater or new way than ever before?
5. Since Yeshua delegates aspects of His authority from Heaven to us, is there an area of life that He is asking us to take authority in?

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David Pawson "The Gospel of Mark" © 2013 by Anchor Recordings, UK

William Lane, "The Gospel of Mark" © 1974 New International Commentary Series

James R. Edwards, "The Gospel According to Mark"

1. <http://www.jesuswalk.com/lessons/religious-leaders.htm>
2. <http://www.uscatholic.org/glad-you-asked/2009/08/who-were-pharisees-saducees-scribes-chief-preists-and-elders>