



The Scrolls

Helping **CENTRAL BIBLE CHURCH** Families Belong, Become and Go Beyond

V23 N15

April 11, 2021

KING JESUS

“The Horns of a Dilemma”

Mark 11:27-33

THIS WEEK'S CORE COMPETENCY

Authority of the Bible

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

2 Timothy 3:16-17



From whence
is Jesus
authority?

According to some, religion doesn't matter. According to others, it matters, but since all religions are more or less the same, it doesn't matter which one you choose. For example, all religions distinguish between right and wrong, thereby charting a path to morality for their adherents. And to some degree or another, they all unify the culture, or at least a subculture, by giving it a shared worldview, shared values, a shared understanding of basic truths (curiously, secularism, while not technically a religion, does essentially the same)—and unfortunately perhaps, religion provides a shared description of the infidel, which in the eyes of some results in religion doing as much harm as good.

Not surprisingly, what can be said about religion can also be said about belief in God, even though the two are not exactly the same. Nowadays, however, it seems those who believe that religion matters, and that people ought to believe in God, and those who don't have decided to live and let live. *Inclusivity* embodied in *religious pluralism* seems to have won the day.

One Christian author writes: “In today's culture, claims of exclusivity are met with the resistance of a tired toddler pushing back a plate of broccoli. This is especially true of religious claims. Religious pluralism is more palatable for Western society and this worldview rules the day.

“Pluralism posits that there is more than one valid religion and that no single religion has a monopoly on truth. It asserts that there are many paths up the same mountain. Ultimately, so the claim goes, we'll all meet at the top in our respective spiritual journeys.

“When it comes to religion, the word *exclusive* is synonymous with *bigot*. Even worse, Christians who communicate the exclusivity of their faith are castigated and dismissed.

“When a religion claims to have the market cornered on divine inspiration, it's disconcerting. Our culture is more comfortable with the blind men and the elephant analogy—where each reli-

gion represents a blind man touching a different part of an elephant, never having the whole picture. This analogy positions those who take the pluralist position as having the full view of the 'elephant.' Ironically, this position leads to its own truth claims. In fact, the pluralism perspective finds itself steeped in the same intolerance and exclusivity that it despises and rejects. We know the truth . . . and it is found in a little bit of every religion. Embrace it. Live it” (John C. Richards, “One-Path Evangelism: The Scandalizing Exclusivity of Jesus,” *Leadership*, 12 May 2017, christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2017/may/one-path-evangelism-scandalizing-exclusivity-of-jesus.html).

So who are we to say that Jesus is the only way? What gives us the right to say this? Jesus himself was asked similar questions after clearing the temple: “By what authority are you doing these things?” the temple authorities asked. “And who gave you authority to do this?” (Mk 11:28). In a nutshell, Jesus answered, the same one who gave John the Baptist his authority, namely God.

Our authority to preach that salvation is found through faith in Christ alone is found in the word of God, which “has the right to command our belief and action.” In it we find these words of Jesus: “No one comes to the Father except through me” (Jn 14:6). The author above writes: “Jesus makes a no-doubt statement about His position and role in God's redemptive story. ‘I'm the only shot you've got,’ he is essentially saying. *We like choices, but when it comes to our redemption, Jesus doesn't give us any.* The gospel is an exclusive message in an inclusive world. And we're called to share that exclusive Jesus with others. Truth and exclusivity are not mutually exclusive. As Walter Martin notes in his seminal work *The Kingdom of the Cults*, ‘Truth by definition is exclusive. If truth were all-inclusive, nothing would be false.’”

Jesus has been given all authority in heaven and on earth, and he has authorized us to make disciples everywhere (Mt 28:18-20).

27 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. 28 "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you authority to do this?"

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

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

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

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

READ in another translation

27 They arrived once again in Jerusalem. As Jesus was walking in the Temple, the chief priests, the teachers of the Law, and the elders came to him 28 and asked him, "What right do you have to do these things? Who gave you such right?"

29 Jesus answered them, "I will ask you just one question, and if you give me an answer, I will tell you what right I have to do these things. 30 Tell me, where did John's right to baptize come from: was it from God or from human beings?"

31 They started to argue among themselves: "What shall we say? If we answer, 'From God,' he will say, 'Why, then, did you not believe John?'" 32 But if we say, 'From human beings . . .'" (They were afraid of the people, because everyone was convinced that John had been a prophet.) 33 So their answer to Jesus was, "We don't know."

Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you, then, by what right I do these things." (GNT)

After reading the text, practice your Observation skills by noting the following:

- Circle "again" in v. 27.
- Circle "temple courts" in v. 27.
- Underline "chief priests," "teachers of the law," and "elders" in v. 27.
- Circle "authority" in vv. 28, 29, 33.
- Circle "heaven" in v. 30.
- Box "or" indicating *contrast* in v. 30.
- Box "but" indicating *contrast* in v. 32.
- Box "So" indicting *result* in v. 33.

What one word would you use to describe the TONE of this passage? (i.e., stern, joyful, cautious, etc.)

What word or idea stands out to you in this passage?

What one thing do you not understand in this passage?

Try to summarize the THEME of this passage in one word. If you were going to describe these verses, you might say, "This text is about _____."



DIG DEEPER

Answer the questions to help you apply the passage and prepare for discussion

1. This is apparently Jesus' third visit to the temple courts in Jerusalem. Review what happened on the earlier two.
2. Who are the "chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders" to question Jesus' *authority*?
3. They question him about his authority to do "these things." What things?
4. Jesus does not give a direct answer to their question. Why not?
5. Jesus takes control and turns the table on his interrogators by doing what?
6. Regarding John's baptism, Jesus asks, "was it from *heaven*?" Explain what he means by "from *heaven*" (noting the use of *contrast*).
7. Jesus' question left his interrogators on the horns of a dilemma. Explain "horn" number one.
8. Explain "horn" number two.
9. Comment on the close relationship of John's and Jesus' ministries.
10. **Discussion:** What do you infer about the temple authorities from their answer to Jesus' question – "We don't know"? Talk about it.

Commentary On The Text

One commentator introduces the controversy between Jesus and his Jewish opponents recorded in Mark 11:27-33 with these words: "This is the first of six controversies between Jesus and the temple authorities (11:27-12:37). After Jesus has demonstrated his authority in the Outer Court of the temple and prophesied both the era of messianic fulfillment when the nations would worship Israel's God and God's judgment of the temple, the Jerusalem authorities question Jesus about the source of his authority, evidently in an effort to further their plans to have him executed (11:18). Queries by other groups that oppose Jesus are reported in 12:13, 18, 28. In these controversies Jesus holds his own, not only in the discussion about the source of his authority but also in the subsequent dialogues in which he develops the messianic claims implied in the manner of his approach to Jerusalem and in his actions in the temple" (Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Mark*, TNTC, 278).

The plot thickens in a two-fold back-and-forth, a two-question-followed-by-two-answer encounter (vv. 28-29, 31-32), between Jesus and temple authorities, introduced in verse 27. The setting for the encounter is the temple courts on Wednesday morning of Passion Week—a day after Jesus disrupts business as usual there and two or perhaps three days after he enters the city to messianic accolades (see note v. 37 **again**). Clearly, the religious authorities are following his every move with continuing evil intent (cf. 3:6, 22; 8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34; 11:18).

Question and counter-question round one: When the authorities spot Jesus walking in the temple courts with his disciples, they demand he tell them what or who gives him the authority to do "these things" (v. 28), no doubt referring to the day before when "He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts" (vv. 15b-16). Since they have full authority over all that goes on in the temple, and they did not authorize him to do so, they want to know who did. One commentator reveals the sinister motive behind their question. "Since the ruling priests had exclusive jurisdiction over the temple, their question, which had no acceptable answer, was more a move to incriminate Jesus than an attempt to gain information from him (cf. Schmithals, 2:507). Either Jesus admitted his conduct was unauthorized, which would have made him publicly vulnerable, or he claimed a right superseding that of the ruling priests, a claim that would have made him politically vulnerable (cf. 14:61-64). In either case, his conduct would then have provided a basis for a more formal proceeding against him, without fear of the crowd

(cf. v 32; 12:12)" (Craig A. Evans, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 34B, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 200). Of course, Mark's readers know that Jesus' authority is of divine rather than human origin, and he certainly expects them to answer the questions "By what authority?" and "Who?" with "By God's authority" and "God."

Jesus turns the table on his opponents by asking a question of his own to which he requires an answer—a question they find has no acceptable answer. "John's baptism—was it from heaven," that is, done with God's authority, "or of human origin?" that is, an activity devised by John without divine sanction. "Tell me" (v. 30). Their answer to his question implies his answer to theirs.

Answer and counter-answer round two: The temple authorities immediately find themselves on the horns of a dilemma. So they deliberate—not because they are unsure of their answer, but because they are unsure of the consequences of their answer. If they say, "from heaven" (i.e., from God), that is, of divine origin, they must explain why they did not believe the forerunner's message about Jesus, and by implication accept that Jesus' authority is from God, too (v. 31). If they say, "from man" (ESV), that is, "of human origin" (NIV), they will surely face a backlash from the crowd "for everyone held that John really was a prophet" (v. 32). They could answer truthfully, but their willful unbelief would not permit it, so they offer what one commentator calls "a cowardly answer." He writes: "It is a cowardly answer that seeks to save face. But instead of saving face and embarrassing Jesus with their questions in 11:28, they have embarrassed themselves by their hypocrisy and refusal to answer Jesus's question. If they were unable to conclude whether John the Baptist was a true or false prophet, they had forfeited the right to be the religious leaders of the nation" (Robert H. Stein, *Mark*, BECNT, 527).

Jesus is willing to answer their question if they are willing to answer his, but since they will not, he will not. "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things," he tells them (v. 33b). Jesus refuses to answer their question because he has answered it in his words and works. His authority is explicitly revealed throughout Mark's Gospel: he forgives sins, commands the wind and the waves, and raises the dead—like God, who has affirmed Jesus' divinity and authority twice (1:11; 9:7). In the parable of the tenants that follows, Jesus portrays himself as the Son sent by the Father, with the Father's authority, which leads to opposition, rejection and murder. The rejection of his authority by the Jewish leaders ultimately leads to his death two days later on Friday.

Word Studies/Notes

v. 27 *again*

This is apparently Jesus' third visit to the temple courts (cf., vv. 1, 15, 20, 27). Commentators are divided as to whether this visit occurred on Tuesday (John D. Grassmick, "Mark," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, 159) or Wednesday (Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Mark*, TNTC, 279; Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, 91) of Passion Week.

v. 27 *temple courts*

"The Greek term *hieron* refers to a temple including temple courts and surrounding colonnaded halls. The modern label 'Court of the Gentiles' is misleading; this court was not specifically constructed as a place for Gentiles to worship, nor was it reserved for Gentiles—most of the people one would encounter in the outer Court were Jews, but the area was accessible to Gentiles as well since it was not sacred, in contrast to the area inside the Inner Enclosure which Gentiles could not access. Herod I had rebuilt the Second Temple, built at the site of Solomon's First Temple under the leadership of Zerubbabel after the return from the exile. Herod extended the temple area in the north and in the south beyond the sacred area of the Second Temple, building immense retaining walls and bridges that gave access from the city to the Temple Mount. The eastern and the western walls of the Temple Mount were 1,542 and 1,591 feet (470 and 485 m) long, and the northern and southern walls were 1,033 and 918 feet (315 and 280 m) long. The platform, enclosed on all four side by colonnaded halls, including the triple-colonnaded Royal Portico (see on 13:1), was exceptionally large, capable of accommodating over 70,000 people. The Court within the Outer Court, and area of 820 by 820 feet (250 by 250 m), was surrounded by a stone balustrade 5 feet (1.5 m) high; this seems to have been the area of the original temple precinct before Herod's extension; it was regarded as sacred and thus forbidden for Gentiles. Signs warned Gentiles of being punished by death if they violated the restriction: 'No foreigner is to enter within the balustrade and forecourt around the sacred precinct. Whoever is caught will himself be responsible for (his) consequent death' (CIIP I/1 2). Inside the Court within the Outer Court was the Inner Enclosure, between 10 and 13 feet (3-4 m) higher than the Outer Court and surrounded by a wall about 65 feet (20 m) high. The Inner Enclosure contained the temple proper (*naos*), its entrance facing east, with the vestibule, the Inner Sanctuary and the Holy of Holies; the Court of Priests with the altar and the slaughtering place in front of the temple; and the Court of Israel accessible to Jewish males. The court of Women, which served as the main access to the temple for the men, was attached to the eastern side of the Inner Enclosure" (Schnabel, 268-69).

v. 27 *chief priests* . . .

"These three groups made up the leadership of the Sanhedrin, the ruling body of the nation. Presided over by the high priest, the Sanhedrin consisted of seventy-one members made up of the chief priests, scribes, and elders. They had authority over all religious matters and, within the boundaries set by the Romans, over various political issues as well" (Robert H. Stein, *Mark*, BECNT, 525). "The chief priests (former high priests and priests with permanent duties in the temple), the teachers of the law (learned legal experts), and the elders (laymen drawn from the wealthy aristocracy) are the very ones Jesus predicted would conspire to kill him (8:31)" (David E. Garland, *The NIV Application Commentary: Mark*, 443).

v. 28 *authority*

"Because of the major similarities in their two questions (both ask about Jesus's 'authority' [*exousia*] to do 'these things' [*tauta*]) it is best to understand them as essentially synonymous (C. Marshall 1989: 197n2; Evans 2001: 203; contra Hultgren 1979: 69-70). The repetition of the first question alone in 11:29 and 11:33 demonstrates this" (Stein, 525). "They want to know by what authority Jesus is doing these things, quite obviously a reference to Jesus' disruptive actions in the Outer Court the day before (vv. 15-16), and possibly also a reference to the manner of his approach to Jerusalem on a donkey and accepting the pilgrims' shouts of blessing for 'he who comes in the name of the Lord' (vv. 7-10) . . . since *we* did not give you the authority to disrupt the commercial activities in the Outer Court, who did? Jesus has no official authorization that gives him a voice in the affairs of the temple. Jesus' actions in the temple the day before, following his triumphant approach to Jerusalem, implied a claim to authority that the official leaders cannot afford to ignore" (Schnabel, 279-80).

v. 30 *heaven*

"Heaven" is often used as a *circumlocution* for "God," e.g., "kingdom of heaven" and "kingdom of God" are one and the same. "John's baptism—was it from heaven or of human origin?" Note the *contrast*: "from heaven," i.e., of divine origin or "of human origin." "Essentially, Jesus asked these leaders if they believed God was behind John's ministry (was 'from heaven'). John had taught that God was behind Jesus' ministry. If the critics said they believed God was behind John's ministry, they would have had to agree that God was behind Jesus' ministry. Jesus challenged them to respond. 'Answer Me' (v. 30) is unique in Mark, and reflects Jesus' superiority to these men" (Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Mark," 2020 ed., 245, planbiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/mark.pdf).



APPLY THE TEXT

CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THE TEXT

Jesus speaks and acts with divine authority, so you should believe that he is the Messiah, the Son of God, and should follow him as his disciple.

CENTRAL MESSAGE FOR YOUR LIFE

(Rewrite the Central Message above to personally apply to your own life)



3 LIVING QUESTIONS

The “Living Questions” are simple questions we may ask of any text in order to apply the Bible to our life. Answer the questions below as personally as you can.

1. What does this passage teach me about God?

2. What does this passage teach me about myself?

3. What does this passage lead me to do?



FAMILY TALK

One of my kids has a very similar personality to me and consequently we tend to butt heads. When he was in mid-elementary my husband pulled me aside and very lovingly told me, "STOP IT!" Stop arguing with him. Stop battling with him to be right. Stop trying to claim authority that was already mine. He reminded me that God made me the parent. I had authority but I was wielding a tool incorrectly. It was as if I was trying to hammer a nail with a screwdriver. Sometimes it kind of worked but it was a hack job at best. I had to learn a new way to parent him, to claim my authority and reach him without squashing his character. He needed lots of freedom to play within the boundaries and I had created a narrow field that was based on my issue with control. With lots of prayer I released control to the One with the ultimate authority. Rather than using my cookie cutter formula to parenting, I stepped back and prayerfully allowed the Lord to lead. He isn't doing things following my formula; he's his own person who dances to a drum I can't hear but I fully trust the Lord has a plan for him. There are definitely times I feel twitchy and want to grasp control of a situation, but I remind myself that control isn't authority. My job is to lovingly guide my children to be fully functioning adults who love God and love others. Thankfully, the Lord is my guide. Do you struggle with authority in parenting? We are praying you can release control and claim authority this week!

What Does The Bible Say?

Read Mark 11:27-33.

1. What question did the religious leaders ask Jesus in the temple courts?
2. How did Jesus answer this question?
3. Why do you think Jesus didn't claim His authority?

What Do You Think?

What's the difference between authority and control?

What Do You Do?

List names of people who have authority over you. Why should you honor and respect them as authority figures?

CORE COMPETENCY: Authority of the Bible

I believe the Bible is God's book that tells me what to believe and do.

MEMORY VERSE: John 3:35

"The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in His hands."

KidPIX COUPON

Earn 1 KidPIX Token by completing the CENTRALKids Bible Study on this page and another token by memorizing and reciting the memory verse for this week.

Questions: kids@wearecentral.org

- _____ I completed my Bible Study
- _____ I memorized this week's verse
- _____ I brought my Bible to church
- _____ I brought a friend



CHILD'S NAME

GRADE PARENT SIGNATURE

OUR CORE COMPETENCIES

CENTRAL BELIEFS

Authority of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Church (Ephesians 4:15-16)
I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Eternity (John 14:1-4)
I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

The Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9)
I believe the Holy Spirit convicts, calls, converts and changes me as a child of God.

Humanity (John 3:16)
I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Identity in Christ (John 1:12)
I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-4)
I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man, died for sinners and rose from the dead.

Life Purpose (Acts 20:24)
I believe I am a steward of God's resources and have been redeemed to participate in His Kingdom purposes for His glory.

Personal God (Psalm 121:1-2)
I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Salvation by Grace (Ephesians 2:8-9)
I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.



CENTRAL VIRTUES

Love (1 John 4:10-12)
I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Joy (John 15:11)
I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace (Philippians 4:6-7)
I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself and others.

Patience (Proverbs 14:29)
I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness (1 Thessalonians 5:15)
I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others

Faithfulness (Proverbs 3:3-4)
I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Gentleness (Philippians 4:5)
I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Self-Control (Titus 2:11-13)
I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Grace (Colossians 3:13)
I demonstrate forgiveness, mercy and generosity to others, even when they have offended me.

Hope (1 Peter 1:3-5)
I have a growing anticipation of God's promises and my secure eternity with Him.

Humility (Philippians 2:3-4)
I choose to esteem others above myself.



CENTRAL PRACTICES

Bible Study (Hebrews 4:12)
I study the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Biblical Community (Acts 2:44-47)
I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Compassion (Psalm 82:3-4)
I seek to serve the last, the least and the lost in my community.

Disciple-Making (2 Timothy 2:2)
I multiply godly beliefs, virtues and practices in others to encourage their spiritual growth in Christ.

Evangelism (Acts 1:8)
I share Jesus with others through personal proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.

Generosity (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)
I gladly give my resources to fulfill God's purposes.

Prayer (Psalm 66:16-20)
I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-Mindedness (Matthew 6:33)
I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts (Romans 12:4-6)
I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Worship (Psalm 95:1-7)
I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

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Stephanie Thomas (B.B.A University of Texas at Arlington). Stephanie is married to James and they have four children: Elijah, Levi, Ella and Simon. Stephanie has attended Central Bible Church for more than 20 years, has been on staff since 2014, and now serves as Children's Minister.

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