

Do any of us really like other people interfering in our plans, in our lives? We don't. We have things mapped out. We don't like others telling us what to do. It's something that seems to be ingrained in us to resist authority.

This is really a small situation, but a trip to the DMV—talk about authority! If you don't follow their rules and don't like being inconvenienced, you're in a heap of trouble! I just got a jury duty notice, and if I don't follow that authority, I'm in a heap of trouble. And when I think about that, I think of John Mellencamp when he sang, "I fight authority, but authority always wins," we naturally buck authority. The majority opinion in our culture is, "You can believe whatever you want, and you can do whatever you want as long as it doesn't hurt anyone else." You can be captain of your own fate, captain of your own soul. You can find your own truth and live it. That's what it means to be free.

The authority issue has been a theme throughout the Gospel of Mark as we have studied it. These religious leaders had positions of authority in their world, and they were fiercely holding onto them. Anyone that questioned their authority would find themselves in a heap of trouble. And what did Jesus do? He questioned authority; he challenged power; he interfered. Our Lord interfered.

The Gospel of Mark has this irony here that while Jesus is exposing the hypocrisy of those in authority, he is also at the same time claiming ultimate authority in heaven and on Earth. His claim was real then, and it's real today. Jesus still interferes. So this message may feel a little pushy to some of you because the challenge for anyone who has yet come to believe in Jesus and follow Jesus is the challenge to give up authority. And the challenge for those who have confessed their faith in Christ is to ask the question, "What areas of my life are not under his authority? In what areas am I resisting? What am I holding onto?" One of my seminary professors said that after you have personally internalized the passage you are preaching and have personally come under the conviction of the Holy Spirit, your job as a preacher is to be led by God

to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. That's the role of a pastor, a preacher.

Mark 11:27-33 does indeed comfort the afflicted, but it also afflicts the comfortable. All the way back to Chapter 1, and then up through Chapter 11, we see the authority issue raised again and again. In 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.*" In other words, the ones who held positions of authority never taught with authority.

Seventy-five times in the gospels, Jesus says, "Truly, truly I say to you," which means I am proclaiming with authority. None of the teachers that they had up to that point talked that way. Throughout Mark, we see Jesus had authority over doctrinal truth, demons, nature, disease, authority to forgive sins, authority over death, and authority to give up his life and then give it back again. Jesus is actually the only human being who has ever been captain of his life, of his own fate. We add in a little of John's gospel for good measure; in John 1, he tells us that only Jesus has been given the right to call us to become children of God. In John 5, which we could call the authority chapter, John says that the Father has given Jesus the authority to judge all.

Jesus never asked permission from anyone on Earth to do anything. He never consulted the Pharisees, the scribes, or the elders before he did anything. The only authority he had in his life is that he described himself as being under his Father and in unity with the Holy Spirit.

As Kevin showed us last week, on Tuesday of Holy Week, Jesus interfered in the most dramatic way by flipping tables and cursing the temple, confronting the leaders, casting judgment on the temple, and declaring that it was a false front. He said that the temple was completely void of true faith. Instead of their calling to be light to the world and a place to meet God, it became a den of robbers who hid their sin and hid their hypocrisy behind their titles and their temple buildings, and even the special garments that they wore. So he flipped the tables, cursed the temple, and sent a message to all that if you look good

on the outside but bear no fruit of repentance, he's warning you. Jesus always acted as one in authority. He had the ultimate freedom to do and say whatever he wanted, and it was always right. It was always true. It was always perfect.

So let's look at the text. It's now Wednesday, the next day of Holy Week. Jesus is confronted here by the religious leaders, the elites. *"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"* (Mark 11:27). Three categories of leadership—priests, teachers, and elders—made up the ruling body over the nation. They were called the Sanhedrin, and there were 71 men there who governed the nation.

We need to get our brains wrapped around this temple. The temple grounds were huge, thirty-five acres to be exact. There were various colonnades, porches, and courtyards designated for Gentiles and for Jews. There were these massive, beautiful marble columns. Jesus could walk the temple grounds all day and still not cover the same ground twice; that's how large it was. Remember, it's Passover, so the crowds are big, maybe like walking through Hillsdale Mall the day before Christmas. Tens of thousands of lambs were being sacrificed. Hundreds of thousands of doves were being bought and sacrificed as they offered their sacrifices to God.

Matthew's account is virtually the same as Mark's. Matthew says that Jesus, as he was walking through the temple, was teaching. He was teaching the people in the most corrupt place. Jesus was teaching about true authority, holiness, and shalom from God. He was no doubt pointing to Passover and saying what they were doing and practicing every year had lost its meaning. It was not penetrating the heart. He likely pointed to other religious traditions which were observed with no heart or substance. He no doubt taught the gospel, about sin, hypocrisy, judgment, faith and not works, humility, God's love for sinners, eternal life, sincere prayers, honesty, the cost of discipleship, heaven, glory, and the narrow way to God versus the broad way of the temple. I imagine people clinging to every word, captivated by his teaching. Then at some time during the day, the representatives of the Sanhedrin came to him.

"By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you authority to do this?" (Mark 11:28). Now remember the Sanhedrin was the assumed authority. They had the schooling, breeding,

and appointments to positions of power. And when they're asking this about whose authority, they're saying that Jesus didn't come to them. Everyone who teaches with authority must get permission from them. They are saying, "Who in the world gave you permission to do what you're doing? Only we can grant authority to teach. Who are you? You have no formal schooling and no family influence. You're just this small-town rabbi from Galilee."

But remember, this wasn't the first time that they encountered Jesus. They had asked him several times or sent their surrogates to ask him as they followed him or tracked him around Judea and Galilee in his ministry. They're plotting at this point. They want him condemned and dead. Jesus was a threat. His claims made him a threat, and they were paranoid. They were afraid of the opinions of the crowds and losing what they had. They envied everything about Jesus. These men had spent their whole lives teaching and studying the Ten Commandments, and now they were conspiring to kill.

Why was that? Because, at the most fundamental level, they were rebellious. They were rebelling against anyone who questioned their authority, who questioned their ways. They hated Jesus. They hated his truth. So then Jesus counters them with his own questions. Like any good teacher, good rabbi, he answered a question with a question of his own.

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

So Jesus agreed to answer their question as long as they answered his first. Let's review a little bit about John. John was the prophet. He was called by God to prepare the nation of Israel for the coming Messiah. So did John have authority from heaven, authority from God, to baptize, or was it authority from men? Then Jesus, in a strong tone, says, "Tell me!"

John, in his ministry to Israel for Jesus's arrival, what did he do? He called the people to repentance. He called out their sin and for people to be baptized with water as a symbol for washing away the sins of the repentant that Christ would do in full on the cross. Thousands made the trek out to the Jordan River to repent and be baptized.

Here's the problem for the Sanhedrin. Jesus puts them between a rock and a hard place. The people loved John. They saw him as a real prophet, and if

the Sanhedrin thought that they were unpopular now, imagine how unpopular their polling numbers would be if they tried to discredit John by declaring him to be a false prophet, not sent by God. But if they affirmed John was indeed a prophet from God, then they would have to affirm Jesus because John said, "Jesus is the one I'm prophesying about." John's ministry was to introduce Jesus to the world. John saw Jesus coming to the Jordan River as he was out there baptizing people, and John said to Jesus, "I shouldn't be baptizing you; you should be baptizing me."

John introduced Jesus to the crowd by the river, "*The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'*" (John 1:29). He proclaimed Jesus' authority over himself when he said that Jesus must become greater and he must become less. And then he said that he wasn't even fit to untie the strap of Jesus' sandals. In other words, if the Sanhedrin answered that John's authority came from heaven, they should be the first in line to bow down and worship Jesus as their king. So faced with this conundrum, what did the religious leaders do? They called a timeout; they took a break. They needed to have a chat.

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, 'Of human origin' ..." (They feared the people, for everyone held that John really was a prophet.) John 11:31-32

They were trying to work themselves out of this jam that they were put in, and they needed to figure out a way to frame Jesus and, at the same time, save their face in public. Once again, they couldn't see that standing right before them was the Righteous One of God who was there even to this day, even to this moment, offering them forgiveness, grace, a new identity as God's children, peace, and they couldn't see it. They didn't want to see it, the authority issue. "*So they answered Jesus, 'We don't know.'*" (v. 33a). They don't know? With all their schooling, all their intellectual pride. They're the ones who were supposed to know. They have a duty to study and search and observe. And here's the thing, they knew the answer. They had asked these authority questions before, and Jesus had answered. So they went silent.

Can't you just picture Jesus at this point, angry, disgusted at their hypocrisy, but also sad and compassionate, at the same time knowing that they were choosing judgment and death instead of repentance, instead of life? "*Jesus said, 'Neither will I tell you by*

what authority I am doing these things'" (v. 33). He's done with them. He is saying that he is not going to tell them again. He has cast my pearls before swine for the last time. The temple light had gone out. They had rejected the one who has absolute authority.

I think it's a sad scene. Prior to that, Jesus paused on the top of the Mount of Olives looking down on Jerusalem before his triumphal entry, and he lamented the unbelief in the city of Jerusalem.

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. Matthew 23:37-38

The ultimate authority issue of Mark 11 is the same issue that's been repeated throughout history. Ultimately all of us have a problem with authority, which is a personal problem. We have a cultural problem; we have a national problem, and we have a global world problem. We don't like other people demanding our obedience, especially when it comes to our moral choices and our spiritual values. We don't want to be told that we're in error, that we're going against God's plan. And it's been that way since the beginning of history. So it's just as relevant today that Jesus still comes and crashes in and interferes.

It's hard to understand our culture right now. It's hard to understand the increasing and accepted attacks on the Christian faith in the public square and in our institutions. It's hard to understand the madness in the name-calling that erupts when Christians publicly affirm their biblical views. In the latest: news about our identity, about sex, about marriage. It's hard to understand the rage against the biblical worldview that God created us male and female, two sexes, two genders, and that God's intent is that man, a male, unites with his wife, a female, and they become one flesh. It's hard to understand why young kids are being taught in some schools around the country teachings that clash with Christian biblical worldviews. Teaching on these most sacred topics, such as their own sex, their own gender, and their identity, and wanting and thinking it's okay to do that without parents having authority or even a place at the table in the curriculum that kids are given.

As we know, God has given authority to parents to teach their own kids, especially in these precious areas that we're talking about—identity, sexual morality—it's an authority issue. We must understand that there

are other forces that are demanding authority continually over your life and over the lives of your family that are only reserved for God.

To get an understanding of our times, we need to understand that our world hates God because God interferes with their authority. The philosopher Frederick Nietzsche, who thought this about authority and unfortunately has helped shape our modern world, described the perfect world as being one where there is no ultimate authority and we should reject Christian values and accept that the strong and the powerful survive, the elite survive, and the weak die and that's okay. When the most vulnerable are marginalized, when truth becomes relative, when people live by what is right in their own eyes, when personal opinions matter more than actual facts, and when people live like sheep that have gone astray, we can certainly understand the decline as a culture.

So there's this global understanding that we need to grasp our minds around of Jesus's authority. I want to dig a little deeper into this authority issue and let the Bible inform us of what's going on in current events, what's going on in and around us. And you may wonder, why do people hate God? It always was this way, and it always will be that they hate God, and that will continue to be until the day of judgment, until the return of our king. I want to give you some words that David wrote.

Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed, saying, "Let us break their chains and throw off their shackles." The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. He rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, "I have installed my king on Zion, my holy mountain." Psalm 2:1-6

Why do the nations conspire or literally rage against God? Peter the Apostle quoted this verse in his sermon before the Sanhedrin in Acts 4. Why do they rage against Jesus, and the people plot in vain? Because they hated God. It's the spirit of rebellion. They hated the idea of obedience to God. They hated the idea of transcendent absolute truth. They thought that freedom would be found in the absence of God's authority, and really freedom is about being under God's authority.

Our 24-hour news cycle is a testimony to the rebellion against authority and the truth of God and his word.

We can't explain history and current events without the Bible. The Bible says that there is conflict in our world that is directly related to cosmic struggles. The Bible calls this "in heavenly places." This has gone in full force because the triumph of Jesus was proven; his authority through his resurrection changed the world forever. Jesus, the enthroned king, now and forever, interferes from his position of authority and the nation's rage.

Another verse that I think helps us understand this authority issue on this broad global scale is found in Matthew 28. We're going to look deeper at verse 18 because this is just before Jesus ascends to heaven. He spoke of his own authority, that his own authority was over all other positions of authority on Earth, and he delegated that authority to his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations. *"Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me' (Matthew 28:18).* Everything is 100 percent his. Jesus is the CEO of the universe.

Notice, he says, in heaven. When I think of heaven, I'm reminded of what I read about Yuri Gagarin, who was a Soviet cosmonaut. I'm going back a lot of years. In 1961 there was a space race between the Soviet Union and the United States, and the United States lost the first battle. The Soviets were the first to get into space, and Yuri Gagarin was the cosmonaut that sat on top of a missile and was fired up into space. And as you know, the Communist party, their platform is they're atheists. What was striking is that in the middle of this Cold War with the Soviet Union, as the Soviets were beating us into space, Yuri got back and said, "I have reached heaven, and there was no God there."

But the scriptures tell a different story. There is heaven, and God is there, and Jesus has authority. He is the only one who has the authority to open up the door of heaven, the door that none of us can open, not even a Soviet cosmonaut.

I love the words of Revelation 5, when John, in his vision, sees the throne of God, and next to the throne is a scroll of salvation and judgment. John wept because there was no one worthy to open the scroll of the scroll—no angel, elder, or living creature was worthy.

Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals." Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the

throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. In a loud voice they were saying: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" Revelations 5:5-6a, 9, 12

In a loud voice, they were saying, worthy is the lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise. Jesus is the ultimate authority over the universe, so we have nothing to fear. We're in this league, in this connection and this relationship with the King of kings and the Lord of lords, and Jesus has all authority.

His authority has been given, not just in heaven, but let's talk a little bit more about on Earth as well. I love the mind of Paul when I think about this. When the earthly powers of his day were persecuting him, they were telling him to hush up about Jesus, or they were going to kill him. What was Paul's response? "Great! To die is gain." There's where he was in terms of his understanding of authority. The earthly powers said we're going to throw you in prison, and we're going to let you live. And he said, "Great. To live is one more day to serve Christ." Any earthly trouble that any of us have does not compare to the greatness of future life, future glory in heaven.

So throughout history, nations have made it their mission to destroy the church. And throughout history, the church has survived under persecution. It not just survives, but it thrives under persecution from governments because God is in control of governments. When governments have left the church alone throughout history, the church has struggled to maintain its mission to make and mature more followers of Christ. So when worldly powers seek to crush and kill the people of God, they only end up serving the purposes of God. This is the authority of Jesus.

I love this quote by theologian Frederick Bruner.

All spiritual, metaphysical, philosophical, and religious power 'in heaven' but also all social, physical, political and economic power 'on earth' is in his hands. He is in charge, and the world experienced a massive disinvestment here. Frederick Bruner

I wondered what he meant by that. What does Bruner mean by a disinvestment? All earthly powers that

opposed God and all dark spiritual powers were dethroned; no spiritual being, no human being truly has authority. God holds absolute authority. That means that every human being, every angel, every demon is accountable to his authority. And one day every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord (Phil. 2:10-11).

We talked about Jesus globally; now, we should talk a little bit more about it personally. What does Jesus' authority mean to us right here on Father's Day 2023? We are accountable for responding to Jesus' authority with surrender and obedience. Paul makes it clear by describing his own testimony:

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. Galatians 2:20

Christians don't just believe things; we are called because of the authority of Christ to surrender to live by faith. We've died to our former life and the life we live now, we live by faith in Jesus, who loves us and who gave up his life for us. And this is where it gets uncomfortable for me. Show me where partial surrender is any sort of option here. I can't say that I believe Jesus as my Savior because I don't want to go to hell, but in other areas of my life, I pull back and I decide my own ethics. I can't consider Jesus as my Savior and remain Lord over my own life, for example, in sexual ethics.

Unconditional surrender to the authority of Jesus is not designed by God to make your life hard. I hope we can get this because I want you to be edified. Unconditional surrender to Jesus is an invitation into the full life with Jesus. Unconditional surrender may feel like he's taking something away from you, but it's actually an invitation to abundance and freedom, which is what we're designed to receive from him.

A question people my age should ask, and maybe younger people as well, is, are you old enough to be tired of your life? It's never too late. You're never too old to change and experience the fullness of life through a full surrender to the one in authority. The thief, the devil, came to steal, destroy, accuse, and deceive, but the one in authority came to give you abundant life.

I think it's safe to say that for a large number of men and women who feel that Christianity doesn't work for them is almost always tied back to a partial surrender to authority instead of this unconditional surrender. Jesus says the truth shall set you free. The

authority issue challenges us to surrender not just to him as Savior but also as Lord over our lives. His grace to us is not a coverup for sin. The church, as a global witness, suffers without this unconditional surrender, and we personally struggle when we don't take the position. Jesus is my Savior, but now I'm going to make him Lord over every area of my life.

I've met with people who are clenching their fists. They're anxious; they don't have peace, and they're even blaming God for their circumstances when in reality, there's an authority issue, failure to surrender. We call it a struggle. It's a struggle, but it's more than that; it's sin.

So what's our main point here? Again, I hope this is encouraging to you. It's through submission to God's authority that we find true freedom and life. I hope you let that sink in, considering that true freedom is found through submission, not just submission to anything, but submission to the one who has authority.

I met with a wonderful guy this week, an older saint in the faith. We ended up talking about the sermon for today and how we both found that there were seasons in our lives when we loved the world more than we loved God. There were times when we chose our own course, when we took control to determine our happiness. We thought we knew what we needed. Then we became weighed down with burdens. We wished that we had gotten this earlier. We became disillusioned because we recognized that the promise of a self-directed life didn't lead to freedom. As he was looking back on his life, he was so thankful for the years after he surrendered and made this a priority and that he was leading a rich and abundant life. We were glad we had lived long enough to prove this true. Young people, don't wait as long as some of us waited.

Ask yourself if God is interfering with the authority structure of your life. If so, count yourselves blessed! This is the path to true freedom in life. May God work in your life, and may this authority issue transform you.

I asked the Lord: Am I just like the Sanhedrin? Do I fear man? Are there hidden areas in my life of hypocrisy? Am I choosing to keep quiet about sins I see that hurt and deceive people, just because talking about them isn't popular? I was reminded this week that every

area of my life needs a surrender audit. Maybe for you, it's asking God for the strength and maturity to speak the truth gently with love and clarity and love all people as Christ loves all people.

Holy Spirit, may you challenge each of us to open our hearts to your work in areas where we need to surrender authority. Jesus, we trust that there are areas in each of our lives where you want to interfere—finances, marriage, parenting, use of time, and loving all people, especially those opposed to God.

For some of us, there's fear, anxiety, and envy, those things the Sanhedrin had—lack of peace, lack of joy. Lord, we invite you to work in our hearts right now. Lord, we invite your Spirit into the dark areas of our hearts to bring light and cleansing. Lord, lead us to examine, confess, renounce, and repent over our lack of surrender. We invite you, Jesus, to fill us. We believe in your promise for freedom and life. You're the only one who can provide that.

Peter exhorts us to live as free people. 1 Peter 2:16 says, "Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a coverup for evil; live as God's slaves." Galatians 5:1 says, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." God, show us the path of surrender. Thank you that submission to you is the pathway, the right way, and the perfect way. We receive now, as you've challenged us, as you've interfered in our hearts, the promise of freedom and abundance that comes with obedience. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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