

Mark 11:27-33 – Jesus' authority questioned

Jesus had come to Jerusalem – God's king came to God's city. He had come to claim his kingdom – by dying and rising again. Last week we saw him in the temple, giving his judgment against it. In this passage today we find him in the temple again, teaching (Matthew 21:23). Jesus was never afraid of his enemies; he knew that God was in perfect control. We cannot die until the time that God has chosen for us – until then, we should be courageous in serving him!

1. The Question To Jesus (v27-28)

Jesus was asked about his authority. What authority did he have to teach in the temple, and to throw out those who were trading there (v15-17)? Those asking him were the leaders of Israel – the chief priests, scribes and elders (v27). Jesus had not been given authority by them; they did not approve of him.

Why did they ask this question about Jesus' authority? Surely because they could find nothing wrong with his teaching, or with his life. They instead tried to find some legal problem, to trap him with. Often people ask questions about the Bible's teaching – but really they are trying to hide behind those questions, to find an excuse. Are the questions you ask about the Bible's teaching real questions, or are you just trying to escape what God says?

2. The Question From Jesus (v29-30)

Jesus answered the question by asking another question. The leaders asking him were not sincere. They were not looking for the truth, but for a way to arrest Jesus. So Jesus was very wise, and did not answer directly – but he did answer. He asked them to tell him what authority John the Baptist had in his ministry. (Jesus said, “the baptism of John” - but this means his whole teaching, because John baptised those who accepted his teaching). John was the one who preached about Jesus, and who introduced him to Israel (Mark 1:6-11, John 1:29-36). John was the one that the Old Testament spoke about, saying he would prepare the way for the Saviour (Mark 1:1-4). If John was a true prophet, then what he said about Jesus should have been accepted. So now the leaders were challenged – what did they say? What do you say about Jesus? He has done everything the prophets said – so will you believe in him as the Son of God?

3. The Questions Answered (v31-33)

The leaders of Israel could not answer. If John was a prophet, they should have listened to him and believed in Jesus. But if they said John was a false prophet, they feared for their lives – because all the people recognised John as being true. Notice that they did not ask “What is true?”, but they asked “What will it mean for us if we give this answer?” When you read the Bible, do you search for truth so that you can please God – or are you wanting to just be comfortable? So, they said “we do not know”. They did not want to know! They were Israel's leaders and it was their work to know the truth, but they did not want to. If we choose to reject the truth, then God will judge us by hiding from us, as he did with them.