

# *A Spiritual Spring for the Week*

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Sermon Text: Mark 11:27-33  
Sermon Title: "The Authority to Do These Things"

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The Food Network broadcasts a number of interesting shows: *Chopped*, *Cupcake Wars*, *Iron Chef America*, *Giada at Home*. One of these interesting and crazy shows is *Restaurant Stakeout*. Willie Degel, who owns a number of successful restaurants in New York City, will go to your restaurant, set up a million security cameras, and spy your employees to see how productive they are on the job. There was one employee of a certain New Jersey restaurant who was hiding under the front counter to text his friends, break dancing and wrestling on the floor while people were eating, and chatting up a group of female customers that he hoped to take out the following weekend. When the owners observed these antics, naturally they were shocked and upset. They asked the employee to explain himself, to which the employee answered with a bunch of excuses. He didn't think it was a big deal – he was just having a little fun. His "fun" was one of the big reasons for why the business was failing, but he didn't care. He showed no respect to his employers, those people who offered him a job

and a weekly salary, and so he had to be fired. But before he left, he had to fire a few shots at the owners. One of the owners had called this young man a clown, but he wanted to be addressed by his proper name. He argued against his former employers, demanding that they should show him proper respect by saying his name, not by calling him a clown, whereas he himself didn't care to offer proper respect in return. The owners told him to leave immediately, and the young man stormed out in a huff.

The issue of that *Restaurant Stakeout* episode centered on authority. Who is in charge? Who has the right to be in command, and to run a tight ship? Who should respect that authority? The religious leaders in Mark 11, like that former restaurant employee, approach Jesus, and they ask, "By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you this authority to do them?"

Realize that the question in Mark 11:28 goes all the way back to Mark 11:15 and the verses that follow. Jesus enters the temple to see not a lot of worshipping going on. Jesus might as well have walked into a WalMart or Target. All he sees is the dishonest selling of goods. People are getting rich off the ignorance of others. Who is in charge here? Who is running the

ship? The high priests should be maintaining spiritual order, but they don't care how the temple of God is used. They themselves are getting rich off the dishonest selling, too. They have no respect for God to keep the worship of God pure. So Jesus cleans house. In a flurry he overturns tables, and money and animals go flying in every direction. The Pharisees and scribes and chief priests watch what Jesus does, and they are upset. They want to do something to Jesus, but they cannot since they fear the people who support him. They wait until the next day to get into Jesus' face and question his authority.

It is as though the religious leaders are waiting at the door for Jesus to enter the next morning. They are right there to confront Jesus, and they hit him with two questions, What is your authority to do what you did yesterday, and who gave you that authority. In other words, the religious leaders are asking, "Just who the heck do you think you are?" That is a direct attack on Jesus' person. The Pharisees, scribes, and chief priests don't care how many people he has healed, how many people he has taught; they don't care how many followers he has. "Who do you think you are," they stick their fingers in Jesus' face and demand him to respond.

The religious leaders think they are in charge.

They have no respect for anybody who doesn't agree with them. They have no respect for God, and for what the Lord God might be doing through his only begotten Son. They think they are in charge, when they are the employees of the restaurant, so to speak. They don't own the temple, God does. They do not know the Bible forwards and backwards, unless God has given the intelligence to understand Holy Scripture. None of the chief priests has a right to facilitate worship, unless God has given them that chance. The religious leaders have it all wrong: They are the servants and God is the Master. Servants do not dictate to Masters about what they ought to do.

Next Sunday is Christ the King Sunday, and on that day we consider how Christ is Lord over all things. Christ has complete authority, complete influence, and complete right over the hearts of every living thing in all creation.

The idea of Christ being the authority over us might sound unsettling to some. We believe we should be responsible for ourselves. We think we don't need anybody to watch over us. We want to do what we want to do, and we don't need people getting their noses in our business. Teenagers reach a point, in which they wish their parents would just leave them

alone. They roll their eyes and tilt their heads and say impatiently, “Yes, yes, I know, I know.” Adults may still act the same way, when it comes to dealing with bosses or spouses or friends. The idea of somebody having authority over us may be unsettling.

Because when we think of this word *authority*, we think we don’t get to do what we want to do. We think it all has to do with somebody completely controlling every component of our lives. They tell us what to do, how to think, what to say. Drill sergeants do that. Micromanaging bosses do that. Maybe we deal with certain people who are always giving us pieces of advice and always looking over our shoulders to make sure something gets done. We may become easily frustrated by people always directing our moves. So the word *authority* might not settle well with us.

Let’s go back to the confrontation between the religious leaders (The Pharisees, the scribes, and the chief priests) and Jesus. The leaders ask, “Who the heck do you think you are? What authority do you have to clean out the temple of God?” They take an aggressive stance against Jesus. They puff out their chests, spread out their arms, and challenge Jesus to answer their questions.

Sadly, their aggressive posture did not solve the

problem of the temple being used as a giant flea market. Their spread-out arms has done nothing to move the people from the worship of money to the worship of God. They do not understand the entire situation before them. Why does Jesus enter the temple with “barrels blazing” (so to speak)? Why is he so upset with what he sees that he tears the place apart? It's because he knows what is right. He knows how that space in the temple ought to be used. Jesus respects the temple of God and the worship of the one true God. Jesus the Son respects God the Father, since both of them are the one true God along with the Holy Spirit. He is like an owner of a restaurant, walking into his establishment, and seeing employees texting and goofing around and not serving the customers as they ought to be served. As the owner, he will do something about it. He will make God's temple productive again. People will come not to feel cheated but to enter the presence of their Lord and God and be filled with life.

“By what authority do you do these things?” is the question. Jesus is God, the religious leaders should have understood that from the start. We understand this. This is why we come to this place and spend an hour or so singing and praying and standing and

sitting. This is why we have dedicated our lives to the Lord's serve inside and outside this church. Jesus is our God, our Savior, our Lord, our Commander. Without him we are nothing. Our lives mean nothing.

So we want Jesus as the only authority over us. We want him to control as much of us as he can, because it is better than trying to take charge of ourselves. We mess it up all the time, if we try to take charge of ourselves. Jesus never messes it up. He has never messed it up for us, so we are thankful for when he takes control.

The word *authority* is not a negative word, when it comes to Jesus Christ. We need Christ as the authority, the power, the influence over us.

First of all, we need parameters. We need boundary lines to show us what we can and cannot do. Boundaries or parameter define who we are. If we don't have them, we lose the sense of who we are and what we ought to be doing. With them, we have better understanding of the kinds of people we can be. When Christ defines the parameters/boundaries for us, we discover that we are not unloved people who are left to fend for ourselves. We are not aimless, hopeless people wandering around clueless.

Psalm 16 says that the Lord is our portion and our

cup, and he maintained our lot (our very existence). “The lines for me have fallen in pleasant places, and I have a good inheritance.”<sup>1</sup> Christ sets up the territory for us to travel in, and within that space we have learning, we have understanding, we have direction. We have a God with the authority to love and save us.

We also need Christ as our authority, because sometimes we need Somebody to whip us into shape. We need somebody to yell in our ears and wake us up. Sometimes the Lord will do this, because we are too lazy or senseless to understand. Take the case of the dishonest trade being conducted in the temple when Christ arrived. Asking everyone kindly to close up shop and take their business somewhere else would not have stopped anything. Christ had to break through the haggling, the money exchanging hands, the loud shouting and busy activity. Turning over tables and cages got everyone’s attention. It certainly got the attention of the Pharisees, scribes, and chief priests.

I can tell you that there are times in which Christ simply said to me, “Do this thing I want you to do.” He didn’t approach me like a proper gentleman and say, “Excuse me, John, but would you mind dropping what

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Psalm 16:5-6.



you are doing now and please follow me?” No, at times he appeared in an instant and said, “Stop, now! Do, now!” I don’t know if you’ve experienced that before, but it is a startling moment. A lightning flash strikes your skull. All the lights in your brain flash on at once. You see something you have not seen before. There is no mistaking the Lord’s voice, since it is very clear, very distinct. “Stop and do!” A person who has a weak relationship with Christ might ignore his loud voice. He or she might pass it off as a suggestion, not a command. But those who continue to grow in a stronger relationship with Christ, those who desire to understand him a little bit more each day, those folks hear the Lord’s voice and they stop. They hear the command, and they recognize that it is right for them. When our Lord is correcting our behavior, or when he is calling us to a ministry we never dreamed of doing, we respect the authority, the influence, that he has over us. We carry out exactly what he wants us to carry out because, whatever it is, will bring the greatest bounty of fruit possible for somebody else.

We desire Christ’s authority over us, because we need help. We need support. We need somebody to take control of what we have no control. We need somebody with the answers we cannot find. We need

our Lord to solve the problems we cannot solve. When we are done with all the praying and the wishing, when we have come to the end of the rope and can do nothing else, we need the Lord to take over. No amount of praying, no amount of wishing, no amount of arguing, no amount of planning, no amount of heartfelt words can save us ultimately. Only Christ can. Christ puts the pieces together, find us the bridges to cross, and show us the way through the fire.

Jesus asks a question of the religious leaders that they cannot answer. “The baptism of John: Was it from heaven or from earth? Answer me.”

We could have given the answer to Jesus without hesitation. John’s baptism was from heaven, originated by God during the time of Isaiah the prophet.<sup>2</sup> That answer would have come to us easily because, unlike the religious leaders, we have respect for Christ as our Savior. We honor him as our Lord. He has the authority, the power, to make the impossible possible.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Isaiah 40:3-5 and Matthew 3:1-3.