

# THE GOSPEL OF MARK: WEEK 9

## Jerusalem: "Entry into Jerusalem & The Temple"

Mark 11:1-13:37

### Commentary: "Hey! What gives you the right?"

Jesus was approached by three groups of religious leaders: the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders – together, these groups made up the Sanhedrin, the highest level of Jewish authority – and they were not very happy. So, they went at Jesus with a question: "By what authority do you do these things?" In other words; "Who gave you the right – the authority – to do or say the things that you're doing and saying?"

If you've ever been asked this question, you know that this is a question that comes from, and is based on, power – and the fear of losing it. Bullies ask it – in anger and trepidation – in loud voices and aggressive gestures, and usually with a crowd of sycophants who bask in their wake. But they only ask it when they're feeling threatened. Power is fickle and fleeting, and those who live by it die by it, but they'll do anything to keep it. And that means taking out the 'up and coming' competition. But there's one thing that I've learned about power – or, more often, authority – is that is you have to ask this question you never really had it.

When I was in 3<sup>rd</sup> year at Knox College, our Class had to attend something called the "Guidance Conference" – a 4-day psychological, sociological, and practical 'assessment' used to 'discern' each "student's fitness for ministry." At the time I chafed against what seemed like an exercise designed to tear down our confidence (several classmates didn't pass this mandatory component of our program and left; their sense of Call shattered). In looking back, I realize now that what it did was challenge our personal, human need, or unhealthy desire, to lead, or assume – and possibly misuse – a position of authority.

A sense of Call to go into pastoral ministry is not easy to discern, but what is clear is that it should not be "entered into carelessly, or for selfish motives; but responsibly and prayerfully" as I say to every couple as they're about to enter into a similar covenant relationship. Time might have been when being a Minister gave you 'power' – through a position, social status, a title and 'uniform' – but true ministry – like the relationship in a marriage – is only strong if it is done through humility, submission, and by an example of sacrifice. I don't have any 'power' – or authority – other than that given to me by God, the Holy Spirit, and by those I serve. And this is how Jesus answers their question.

Theirs was a question that probed into the very nature of Jesus. What was His authority? Who sent Him? Who empowered Him? Who gave Him the right to do as He was doing? Where had He come from? Just who was He? The question was also a trap; power was the temptation. But Jesus didn't bite; He knew who He was, and Who had sent Him – and gave Him the power and glory (another word for 'authority'): He also knew that He didn't have to rise to His bullies' taunts.

According to Philippians 2:4-11, Jesus waived His equality with God – so as not to "exploit" it – and "emptied" – surrendered – Himself, His divinity, in order to become "slave" to our human form, and obediently died for us. But His sacrifice was a form of weakness, it was one of strength and character – it was an act of leadership; it revealed His true power and authority so that His name "is above every name," and "that at the name of Jesus every

knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord." Jesus came to show us that power and authority are not conferred through force or might, it is gifted only to those who lead by example; placing others ahead of themselves, treating others as they would like to be treated.

Jesus "came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life" for those God loves: His 'authority' wasn't about power – it was about love.

### Jesus' Authority Is Questioned

Again they came to Jerusalem. As he was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came to him and said, "By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you this authority to do them?" Jesus said to them, "I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin? Answer me." They argued with one another, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?' But shall we say, 'Of human origin'?" – they were afraid of the crowd, for all regarded John as truly a prophet. So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things." (Mark 11:27-33)