

The title for today's message is: **And who do you think you are?**

The chief priests and the elders asked Jesus: ***"By what authority are you doing these things?" "And who gave you this authority?"***

Grace and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen

It was Tuesday of Holy Week, and it was a long day for Jesus, preaching, and teaching to all who would listen.

Something by the way, the Chief priests, and the elders of the people, certainly didn't miss noticing. In fact, they were watching everything Jesus was doing.

They noticed this man by the name of Jesus from Nazareth, doing things that only a man with authority, should, or could do.

Here we have the Chief priests, and the Elders, who are very upset with Jesus.

And as far as they were concerned, the Chief priests and the Elders were the only ones who could give such authority, other than God.

Now, there were many things that they were upset about, but the one thing that upset them the most, was Jesus cleansing the temple.

It was this act that prompted them to ask, no, demand, Jesus to tell them by what authority He did these things.

The truth is, they knew very well who Jesus was, at least, who He claimed to be.

They just wanted Jesus to publicly say who He claimed to be, thinking it would give them the opportunity to finally put a stop to Him.

But, Jesus had a great sense of timing. You see, everything Jesus did in His short life here on earth, was done to teach a great truth.

And at the time all this took place, there were many pilgrims, who came to Jerusalem, to celebrate the Passover.

Now, the Passover celebration was a busy time, as well as a very profitable week, for the money changers, and the merchants alike.

But it was also a profitable time for the Chief priests and the Elder's as well.

So any interruption to the flow of money through the temple courts, would cause problems for the religious, and government leaders.

This cleansing of the temple, which actually happened the day before, or there a-bout's, was devastating to them. It was something like shutting down a shopping mall.

I know, that doesn't sound too devastating, but add in the fact, the mall is shutdown at the beginning of the third week of December.

Now that's devastating, or at least it could be. I mean can you imagine shutting down the only mall in town, the week before Christmas.

There would certainly be chaos, and the people of the town wouldn't stand for it, not for one second.

Therefore, because of all this the Chief priests and the Elder's confronted Jesus. They couldn't believe anyone would do such things.

So they asked Jesus by what authority He was doing these things. Now what's interesting here is the question itself. Why.

Well, earlier, these same leaders had asked the same question, regarding authority, of John the Baptist.

The apostle John wrote in chapter 1: ***Now this was John's testimony (meaning John the Baptist) when the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Christ."***

Hearing this they asked John, are you a prophet then? but John said no, I'm not a prophet.

So as far as they were concerned, they had proven their point. John had no authority to do the things he was doing.

They believed they could say this because again, they regarded themselves, as the only authority, apart from God.

So as you can see, the reason for asking this question of John the Baptist, was the same reason for asking Jesus.

They were saying neither one of them had any authority to do the things they were doing.

So they thought they could discredit Jesus, His Word's and His actions, by claiming He was lacking the authority.

But, to their surprise, Jesus asks them a question, it was as if Jesus knew that in their minds they were comparing Him to John the Baptist.

And so they were. Jesus asked them: ***John's baptism--where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?"***

Here Jesus puts these leaders in a dilemma. There just wasn't anything they could say, that wouldn't cause them great heartburn.

Talk about turning the tables on someone, Jesus did a masterful job of it here, to think the leaders were left speechless.

Look, the question here, "was John's Baptism from God, or was it merely from men", another words, was it symbolic only.

Meaning, where those who went out to be Baptized in the Jordan river responding to merely a human impulse, and not God's call.

Or were they in fact answering a divine challenge? Now the dilemma for these leaders was this.

If they were to say John's baptism was of God, then they had no alternative but to admit, that Jesus is in fact, the Messiah. Why?

Because John had borne definite, and unmistakable witness, to that fact. On the other hand, if they denied that John's baptism came from God.

Then they would have to bear the anger of the people, who were convinced by the way, that John was a messenger of God.

Therefore, because any answer would be a loose, loose situation for them, they were silent at first. Then they gave the lamest of all answers.

They said to Jesus: "***We don't know.***" Now, I must say, If ever anyone stood self-condemned, these men did.

They knew it was part of the Sanhedrin's job, of which they were members, to distinguish between true, and false prophets.

So in a since, they were saying that they were unable to make that distinction, therefore driving themselves into a shameful self-humiliation.

Now, be careful, there is a grim warning here. There is such a thing as the deliberately assumed ignorance of cowardice.

If we consult expediency, rather than principle. Our first question will be not, “What is the truth? but, “What is safe to say?”

And just like these leaders, the worship of expediency will drive us to a cowardly silence as well. There’s only one right answer, that is the truth.

We too, will lamely say: “I don’t know”, even though we know perfectly well what the answer is, its just were afraid to give it.

So I submit, the question would not be, “What is safe to say? but “What is right to say?

Now, Jesus is not just engaging in a “power play” here, just in order to ward off His enemies.

No! Jesus was engaging the leaders mind. Jesus said: ***If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things.***

If only they would just think about what Jesus was saying here, and answer His question truthfully, they would have had their answer.

The answer being, He is the one, who came after John the Baptist, the one who would Baptize with the Holy Spirit. Yes, The Son of God.

And the authority that He was doing these things came from His Father in heaven, God Himself.

I guess you could say, Jesus was in a way, showing just a little bit, of His divine nature.

But, it wasn't Jesus' time yet. Jesus wasn't prepared to give them the direct answer, that He is the Son of God.

You see, to do so, would have been to precipitate the end of His ministry. But, there were actions still to be done, and teaching still to be given.

You know, It sometimes takes more courage to bide one's time, and to await the necessary moment.

Than it does to throw oneself on the enemy, and invite the end. Look, for Jesus, everything had to be done in God's time.

But, what was Jesus saying here, not only to the Chief priests and Elders of the people, but to you and me here today.

Well, the question Jesus asked was really a call to repentance. To speak the truth, and stop denying who Jesus really is.

You see, to answer the question truthfully, we, they, would have to repent of our sinful ways.

We, they, would have to admit that Jesus is in fact the true Son of God, the savior of the whole world.

So, I ask you; who are you? Are you one of those leaders who really had no authority of their own.

Or are you a child of God, who has been given authority to speak the Word of God, and to bring others to believe in Him.

And to Baptize others with water, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Yes, we have been given the authority by God Himself, to do all things of God, in our thought, words, and in our actions.

If your ever asked, by what authority do you do these things, you can with out a doubt, say; by the authority of God Himself.

Amen.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all. Amen.