

A Battle over Authority

Matthew 21	Mark 11	Luke 20
23 {a} When he had come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, [...]	27 They came again to Jerusalem, and as he was walking in the temple, the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders came to him,	1 On one of those days, as he was teaching the people in the temple and preaching the Good News, the priests and scribes came to him with the elders.
23 {b} [...] and said, “By what authority do you do these things? Who gave you this authority?” ¹	28 and they began saying to him, “By what authority do you do these things? Or who gave you this authority to do these things?”	2 They asked him, “Tell us: by what authority do you do these things? Or who is giving you this authority?”
24 {a} Jesus answered them, “I also will ask you one question,” [...]	29 {a} Jesus said to them, “I will ask you one question.” [...]	3 {a} He answered them, “I also will ask you one question.” [...]
24 {b} [...] “which if you tell me,” [...]	29 {b} [...] “Answer me,” [...]	3 {b} [...] “Tell me:”
24 {c} [...] “I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things.”	29 {c} [...] “and I will tell you by what authority I do these things.”	
25 {a} “The baptism of John, where was it from? From heaven or from men?” [...] ²	30 “The baptism of John—was it from heaven, or from men? Answer me.”	4 “the baptism of John, was it from heaven, or from men?”
25 {b} [...] They reasoned with themselves, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask us, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’” ³	31 They reasoned with themselves, saying, “If we should say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’”	5 They reasoned with themselves, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say, ‘Why didn’t you believe him?’”
26 “But if we say, ‘From men,’ we fear the multitude, for all hold John as a prophet.”	32 “If we should say, ‘From men’”—they feared the people, for all held John to really be a prophet.	6 “But if we say, ‘From men,’ all the people will stone us, for they are persuaded that John was a prophet.”
27 {a} They answered Jesus, and said, “We don’t know.” [...]	33 {a} They answered Jesus, “We don’t know.” [...]	7 They answered that they didn’t know where it was from.
27 {b} [...] He also said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.” ⁴	33 {b} [...] Jesus said to them, “Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things.”	8 Jesus said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.”

¹ Jesus’ teachings, His miracles, and His display of authority by cleansing the Temple quickly caught the attention of the religious authorities. In Mt 21:23b; Mk 11:28; Lk 20:2, they ask Him to explain what gave Him the right to challenge the status quo—which is not unreasonable on its own. The problem is that they were not actually interested in the truth.

² The ministry of John pointed to Jesus as the Messiah; they could not recognize John’s calling without recognizing Jesus’ Messiahship (Mt 21:25a; Mk 11:30; Lk 20:4).

³ Their internal discussions show that they were more interested in the political and practical implications of their answers than in what was true (Mt 21:25b-26; Mk 11:31-32; Lk 20:5-6).

⁴ Jesus was not being evasive in His answer (Mt 21:27b; Mk 11:33b; Lk 20:8), and went on to explain His point through parables. Instead, He was demonstrating the pointlessness of answering those who had already decided the truth did not matter.