

The Bible draws a distinction between power and authority, and Christians must understand the difference. Power has to do with the might to carry out an action. However, authority has to do with who has the right to carry out such actions. Might and right are two different things, and, no, might doesn't make right.

You could have power, but not authority. For example, a gun is a very powerful weapon, but only in very few situations does a gun owner have the authority to take the life of another. Simply owning a gun does not authorize you to shoot whoever gets on your nerves.

On the other hand, you could have authority, but not power. A police officer has the authority to arrest criminals, but he better think long and hard about going unarmed into a bank filled with robbers armed with assault rifles. His authority is not going to be enough to stop criminals with firearms.

And so today, in our Gospel lesson, we have a question of authority and power. **“And when [Jesus] entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, and said, “By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?”**” Powerful people were approaching Jesus to try to trap him. Jesus must have felt the walls closing in on Him.

After all, the 1. (oops!) The powers of evil disregarded John the Baptist's authority. It's no surprise that Jesus answers their question with a question about John the Baptist. Jesus asks, **“The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?”** This question would of course bring to mind John the Baptist.

John the Baptist was the forerunner of Jesus. His mission was to prepare the way for Jesus by calling the people to turn from their sins. The Heavenly Father had authorized John the Baptist to teach, to preach, and to baptize in this way.

But John the Baptist meddled with the wrong people. He called the powerful to repentance and the powerful didn't like that. When John the Baptist told King Herod that it was wrong for him to marry his brother's wife, Herod threw him in prison. Eventually, John the Baptist was beheaded. Although he had the authority to preach repentance, he did not have the power to free himself from prison.

It would appear those in power wanted to do the same to Jesus. 2. (ugh!) The powers of evil disregarded Jesus' authority. In order to appreciate the pickle that Jesus was in, we need to take a few steps back. A lot of things have happened since last week's reading from Matthew 20. Jesus really kicked a hornet's nest since then.

He entered Jerusalem on a donkey and caused a commotion. **“And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, “Who is this?”**” Indeed, that word “stirred up” is used elsewhere to describe earthquakes. And not

only that the temple mount must have quaked as Jesus then proceeded to go into the temple and overturn the moneychangers' tables. He then proceeded to heal the blind and the lame in the temple. All of this was done in the sight of the chief priests who must have been so angry they were spitting tacks.

If somebody were to get a bee in his bonnet and go on a warpath against school bake sale fundraisers, saying that we shouldn't have to pay extra for what the city should already be providing and so on, and he goes to the school on a bake sale day and flips over tables with homemade cookies and pies, guess what? No superintendent is going to let that man in the building ever again, let alone into a classroom to teach as a guest the next week.

Yet that's exactly what we see Jesus doing in this text. The next day after he flips the tables, He's there in the temple again teaching. I don't think we can understate how angry the chief priests and elders were, and I don't think we can understate how much danger Jesus faced. John the Baptist was killed, and the powerful people of Jerusalem wanted to make Jesus next on the chopping block.

Does Jesus have power over everything? Yes, of course, He could have called a legion of angels to zap his enemies into smithereens. Does Jesus have the authority to teach in the temple and to rebuke those in power? He is God who created the heavens and the earth, of course He has that authority.

The chief priests and the elders ask Jesus, **“By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?”** After everything Jesus did in Jerusalem in those days, you might as well hear that question as, “What are you doing here, Jesus? You don't belong here!”

Many of us identify as good churchgoing Christians, and that makes us more like the chief priests and elders than we care to admit. We set our alarm clocks to get to church on a Sunday, even those of you who are livestreaming the service in the pandemic, I bet many of you still dress up in church clothes.

All authority in heaven and earth has been given to Jesus, but we only authorize Him access to our lives certain times of the week: an hour on Sunday, five minutes for a morning devotion, or maybe even an hour for Bible study with other Christians.

Do you get surprised then when He shows up uninvited? “What are you doing here, Jesus?” Just after you were impatient with one of your coworkers. “What are you doing here, Jesus?” Just after you yelled at your spouse. “What are you doing here, Jesus?” When the anxiety and stresses of this pandemic have caused you to engage in destructive behaviors: doomscrolling on your phone with a news feed that only fuels your fear, opening that next bottle, or hitting play next after having already binged an entire season.

**“By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?”** Don't tell me what to do, Jesus. I don't need you telling me how to

live my life. I don't need you here right now. You're welcome from the hours of 9 a.m. until noon on a Sunday morning, but the rest of the week is "me" time.

Yet 3. (aha!) Jesus' authority shines brightest in weakness. Paul tells us in Philippians that although Jesus is true God, He emptied Himself of that power becoming nothing, becoming a servant, and humiliating Himself to the point of death on a cross. Going to Jerusalem was always plan A. Going toe to toe with the religious elites was always plan A. Going the way of John the Baptist with death at the hands of the powerful was always plan A.

Jesus' rightful place as the king of Heaven and Earth was made clear at His coronation, not with a crown of gold, but with a crown of thorns. His authority was made clear as He was high and lifted up, not high and lifted up on a throne, but high and lifted up on a cross. His authority was made clear in the weakness of the cross, as He died not only was Jerusalem astir, but the earth was astir as the temple curtain was torn in two, the rocks split, and witnesses cried out, "**Truly this was the Son of God!**"

His authority was made clear in His third day resurrection, and the Father acknowledged that those evil men had no right to torture and kill His Son. His authority was made clear as He stood there resurrected on the mountain proclaiming, "**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore...**" Therefore what? Go take vengeance on those chief priests? No. Therefore overthrow the Romans? No. "**Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.**"

**JESUS' AUTHORITY OVERCOMES THE POWERS OF EVIL TO FORGIVE & RESTORE THE LOST.**

4. (whee!) Jesus' authority is for the purpose of saving his enemies. Why does John the Baptist call kings to repentance? Why does Jesus confront the powerful even risking His own life? Because they also need a savior. The religious elites of Jerusalem need a savior and they don't even know it.

In every confrontation that Jesus has with those religious leaders, His desired result is that they turn and live. As we continue reading through the Gospel text in Matthew, Jesus' language may sound harsher and more alarming towards the chief priests, elders, and other religious leaders, but it's an urgency born of love. You yell at your son when He's about to touch a stove.

It's almost as though Jesus were saying to them, "You don't have to do this. You may have the power to do this, but you don't have the authority. It's not too late to slam on the brakes and reverse the gears you've set in motion. I want you too, to be my disciples."

And 5. (yeah!) Jesus' authority is for saving you. So you too, when you find Jesus in a place that you don't expect, don't shoo Him away. You might feel guilt when you did something you know is wrong but know that Jesus is not there to kill you, but to forgive you.

He has the authority to forgive sins, and He is on a mission to redeem you. He has authority to access all parts of your life, and He uses this authority to save you, to air out those deep dark secrets in your life not so that He can enact revenge, but so that He can heal you and make you whole. He's there in your fears and anxieties so that you know in whom you can entrust your burdens.

**“By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?”** When you find Jesus in a place in your life where you don't think He should have access, remember that all authority in Heaven and on Earth has been given by the Father to Him to forgive, to redeem, and to create new life where there once was none. There's not a sin in your life that Jesus hasn't forgiven, so He comes not to condemn, but to tell you, “You don't have to do this. You may have the power to do this, but you don't have the authority. It's not too late to slam on the brakes and reverse the gears you've set in motion. I want you too, to be my disciple.”

It's never too late to repent, to flip over the moneychangers' tables in your heart. Today is the day to turn from your sins. Today is the day to trust Jesus. Amen!