

**Prove Yourself**  
**Matthew 21:23**

*“By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?”*

Brothers and sisters in Christ, many of our purchasing decisions are based on trusting the testimony or authority of others. To help your teeth a dentist recommends that you buy a specific toothpaste. When purchasing a vehicle you depend on the reliability of those who have had the same vehicle to see if they have had any problems with theirs.

You trust the dentist because he has been trained to keep teeth healthy and should be familiar with what toothpastes are best for certain issues with your mouth. You trust the friend with the same vehicle, because she has proven trustworthy in the past and you know that she would not exaggerate her experiences.

But we also don't blindly follow authority either. The history of our own country shows that we broke away from Great Britain because the colonists did not trust the authority of the king. If they continued to recognize that authority, we may not be the country we are today.

So what do you do when people seem to act of their own authority without getting permission from someone else? That is the issue at hand in the Gospel. What authority does Jesus have, and where does He get it?

Once again we have to understand the context. As we should be aware, Jesus has an adversarial relationship with the chief priests, elders of the people, Pharisees, and Sadducees. It has become more strained in the last day. The day before Jesus had entered Jerusalem to the adoring cheers of the people – Palm Sunday. Yet the religious leaders are indignant that Jesus would receive such praise, for He is nothing more than a loose cannon.

Right afterward Jesus goes into the temple courts, to the area where money is exchanged and animals for sacrifice can be purchased. In these outer courts the temple isn't about worship,

it is about business, so Jesus turns over the money tables, drives the sellers away, and says that His house has become a den of robbers. That can't sit well with religious leaders who allow it.

Then the blind and lame come to Him looking for healing, and He heals them, to which the people proclaim, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" And again, the religious leaders are frustrated because Jesus is honored more than they are.

Finally the next morning, Jesus returns to Jerusalem with His disciples. He comes to a fig tree, but it has no fruit, so He curses it and it withers. Jesus then compares that fig tree to those who do not have faith.

That is when He encounters the priests and elders from our reading. They have either witnessed what He has done or heard of His actions. So as Jesus teaches the people around Him the priests and elders have a question to subvert Him: "By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?"

It's a trick question. If He answers that His authority is from God they will declare Him a lunatic, for they supposedly have the Word of God. But if He answers that He received permission from a regular person, they will deny that His words and actions have any meaning.

That is why Jesus asks His own question, "The baptism of John, from where did it come?" Either answer – from God or from man – will catch them in their unbelief. So they cop out – "We do not know" – and neither will Jesus answer them.

Jesus did not need to establish His authority with them, for in reality He already had. Near the beginning of His ministry He was in Nazareth and He read from Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Once finished He simply says,

“Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” In other words, I’m the one Isaiah is talking about. I do these things.

I also encourage you to read John 5 regarding Jesus’ authority, for here Jesus says plainly that His authority is from the Father, and He details what that authority is. One key verse is 39, where Jesus says, “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about Me.”

This is important because there is still doubt about Jesus’ authority today. Now you may say, “I’ve been faithful all my life.” But it is still to want Jesus to prove Himself. Mourners of the deceased want proof that their loved one lives. Those concerned about the violence and discord in the world, particularly that directed toward Christians, want proof of Christ’s control. Others want proof that Christ’s word is better than other religions.

You have to be very careful today when it comes to listening to religious talk. Many will claim their own authority, that they are wise so they have the secrets that they want to share with you. They might claim their revelations come from God, but test their words.

If a teacher has his own authority, it will show because he ultimately wants you to do something to please God. If a teacher depends on the authority of God, he will always point others to Jesus Christ.

The greatest proof of Jesus’ authority comes in His death and resurrection. Christ foretold of it in John 10 when He said, “I have authority to lay [My life] down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from My Father.”

What this means is that Jesus did not go to the cross for His own sins. But He who had no sin became sin to be an offering for your sin. He willingly entered into suffering and death in order to free you from your sins and the condemnation from them. He suffered the full wrath of

the Father so you don't have to. As your substitute He took your sins so you could be covered by His righteousness. And now you stand in the forgiveness of your sins. You are not asked to prove yourself good for God. You live as one who has been adopted into His kingdom through Christ's blood-filled offering.

And He takes up His life as proof that all He spoke and did was true. Someone who is dead has no ability to grant anything. He who lives, can. Living, Jesus forgives; He strengthens in faith; He raises from the dead.

Ascended, Christ exercises His authority in heaven. He checks the wicked ways of Satan in ways we may not always see. And as each person dies, He uses His immediate authority, granting believers access to heaven through His blood but denying heaven to the unfaithful.

Following His death and resurrection Jesus states: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations." The proof of Jesus' authority comes through His teaching in the Church. The Word of the Gospel leads sinners to repentance, changing lives sometimes in dramatic ways – wicked people now sharing the faith. Now there is a trust in the righteousness of Christ that covers us rather than our own deeds. Jesus' authority is seen when the dying are comforted with the promise of eternal life.

This is the authority you can depend on, and upon which every faithful minister and ministry is based. It's not from me, or a scientist, or the president, or anyone else. Jesus has authority forgive or bind sins and over life and death. The proof is in His acts. The religious leaders didn't trust Him, but you have the one who died so you have life.