

*“By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?”* The chief priests and elders of the people ask this of Jesus. Do you know who did not ask this of Him? Those who came to Jesus with leprosy. Paralytics who were brought to Him. Those who were blind, and those who were deaf. Jairus, whose daughter had died. None of these asked Jesus, *“By what authority are You giving me healing for my body?”* *“Who gave You the authority to restore my sight? To make me walk? To raise my little girl to life?”*

They don't ask because they know. Only God has this authority. Only the One who created the body has the authority to heal it of its brokenness. Only God, who breathed life into man, is able to restore to life the one who has died.

*“By what authority...?”* But even the chief priests and elders know the answer to their own question. The Pharisee, Nicodemus, speaks for them all when he comes to Jesus at night and says: *“We know that You are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.”*

And so, here we have it. The chief priests and elders demand an answer from Jesus not because they honestly want to know the answer, (they already know), but because they want to trap Him with His answer. It's a lose-lose for Jesus. If He answers, *“My authority is from heaven,”* they will accuse Him of blasphemy for which they can put Him to death. If He answers, *“My authority is from man,”* He will be shamed and disgraced before all the people. And if He avoids the question and refuses to answer it, He will show Himself to be a coward.

Yet the ditch which they so masterfully dug for Jesus is the same ditch into which they themselves fall headfirst. For Jesus' answer is contingent upon their answer to His question: *“John's baptism, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?”* And now they are in a lose-lose situation. No matter how they answer they are trapped. And so, they show themselves to be cowards by replying, *“We do not know.”*

Oh, but they do know. John told them when he was alive. John was God's prophet fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy. John did not preach and baptize by his own authority. His authority came from heaven. All the people knew this. So did the chief priests and elders. They simply refused to believe it.

John preached Christ. He pointed to Jesus. The *“Lamb of God,”* he called Him, *“who takes away the sin of the world.”* No wonder the chief priests and elders refused to believe John. If they believed him, they would have to believe Jesus. And therein lies the answer to their question. *“By whose authority? From heaven or from man?”* Jesus' authority is the same as John's authority. If they truthfully answer Jesus' question about John, they have the answer to their question about Jesus. It is one and the same.

Now in this text before us, we see these chief priests and elders coming up to Jesus in the temple while He is teaching. They interrupt Jesus to put their question to Him. It is apparent that we do

not have such chief priests and elders here today. Up to this point, no one has stood up and interrupted this sermon by asking me: "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" Because you know, don't you? The authority to baptize and forgive sins, to preach and administer the Sacrament is not from man but from heaven. "*All authority in heaven and on earth,*" says Jesus, "*has been given to Me.*" And in mercy, for the sake of His dear Christians, He authorizes His Church, and those He calls to serve in His Church, to baptize, forgive sins, preach and teach, and administer the Sacrament.

Could it be that you do not question this authority because you come here to God's house not as the chief priests and elders did, but rather as lepers came to Jesus, as paralytics were brought to Him, as those who were blind, deaf, and dumb, and as those needing to be raised from the death of sin to new life in Christ?

All of these were grateful that Jesus had the authority to grant to them what they needed. Do you not also come here with such grateful hearts, knowing and believing that Jesus still gives to His children what they need?

And thus, you are blessed. Those who despise Jesus' authority and resist it, as did the chief priests and elders, do so to their own detriment. But for lepers, and paralytics, and those needing to be raised from the death of sin, authority is a beautiful word because Jesus' authority is connected to mercy, and forgiveness, and life, and restoration.

You see, there is brokenness in all of us. Our bodies, our lives are broken physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually. This is why Jesus willingly suffered the cross for you and me. He became the broken One to heal us of our brokenness. He had the authority to stop His crucifiers. But He did not. And so, He was given all authority with His death and resurrection, not simply because He is God, but because as your God, He submitted to the authorities who put Him to death.

Through His death and resurrection, Jesus has all authority over you. And in His authority, there is mercy, and forgiveness, and life. And so, He authorized His servant to baptize you into His death and resurrection. He authorizes His servant of the Word to announce to you that your sins are forgiven. Yes, Jesus authorizes and commands this servant to actually and truly forgive your sins no matter how many and how awful they are. They are all forgiven, for He authorizes it. Jesus authorizes this servant to preach His living words into your ears so that the life you are given in your baptism will grow within you and produce abundant fruit. And He authorizes this servant to give, into your very mouth, His body and blood to restore you, and heal you, in both body and soul according to His grace and mercy toward you.

Jesus' authority is a beautiful thing. Those who are like the chief priests and elders to not think so. But those, like you, who receive mercy by His authority, are blessed beyond measure. Amen.