

The Authority of Christ

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[0 : 00] Now just as a way of introduction, if I had to say the word authority or authoritative, what would spring to mind? Would you start, would you think immediately, oh that's good, that's a, can't wait to hear about that. What's the first reaction that you think or feel?

I hear authoritative. Normally we go, well I'm not sure I want someone authoritative. My mind goes back to my school days when I was the only English person in a very Afrikanan school.

If you remember cadets and, Engelsman, komiso. Oh, you get that authoritative voice. Sine die blaar, Engelsman. Ja, korporal. Ganal die blaar. Ja, korporal.

And this guy's like my age. Ja, korporal. And if you don't, it's painful. And so I've got a certain accent that comes when I hear the word authoritative, but that's long ago.

So normally we might have negative connotations with authority and someone who is authoritative.

If I said to you that Nick was authoritative, I'd be like, oh shame, poor Dylan.

[1 : 11] But actually, the dictionary definition of someone who's authoritative is positive.

It took me by surprise as well. Here's a, I just googled it. The first definition was someone who is able to be trusted as being accurate or true. In other words, reliable.

So for example, someone who gives clear, authoritative information and advice. And there's certain times in life when you need that, don't you? Some of us might have had a bad medical spell recently.

And you don't want a friend to summon anyone. Maybe your next neighbor, they're good enough.

But you want someone who's got a bit of medical training. In other words, who's been trained and who's in authority, who's authoritative, who can give clear information and advice.

Good stuff, right? You with me on that? The Oxford Dictionary says, authoritative is something or someone that you can trust and respect as true and correct.

[2 : 19] For example, the most authoritative book on the subject. Or, he is an authority on a given topic. And so some synonyms actually for authoritative is someone who's accurate, someone who's reliable, someone who's dependable, and someone who's trustworthy.

So actually, in reality, in certain circumstances, you want someone who's authoritative. Now normally we don't like to think of ourselves as needing to live under authority. We all want to be free. But when you're stuck with a certain issue, I mentioned a medical thing, maybe you're fixing your car, you don't know what's going on underneath the hood.

Maybe you're lost in the mountains. You, at those points, you want someone with authoritative knowledge, a map, maybe, in the mountains, or a mechanic to come and help you out.

And so today, we're looking at how having Jesus as our authority is a good thing, not a bad thing, and why rejecting that authority, and living your own way, will lead to disaster.

So first we're going to look at what happens when we reject the authority of Christ. What happens when we reject the authority of Christ. Now, if you were an outsider, looking in at the period of history where Mark is writing, okay, mid-30s A.D., and you were told about this person, Jesus, who was walking around Galilee, and you were told the things about what he was doing.

[3 : 43] Do you remember what we've come across in the Gospel of Mark? I think there would be one word that you would use to describe that kind of person, and that word is authority or authoritative.

When you come across Mark, you see someone with authority. Just look at all the things that Jesus does in the Gospel of Mark. He speaks a word, and storms stop in their tracks.

Dead people rise from the dead. Demons run for their lives. By the time Jesus rides into Jerusalem, just a few chapters earlier in Mark, same chapter actually, chapter 11, by the time Jesus rides into Jerusalem, the truth about him is undeniable.

Remember, all the crowds went up with him. Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! The truth about this man is undeniable. Jesus has the authority, the right, to claim the throne of his father David, and to begin the long-awaited rule of the kingdom of God over his people. He is Jesus, the Messiah.

[4 : 55] And yet, here in our story today, Jesus gets a visit from the official religious body of Israel. He gets a delegation from the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council, and they do the one thing that's going to guarantee, or that's guaranteed, to seal their fate.

They question the authority of Jesus as the Messiah. They question his right to be their ruler, when he's given more than enough evidence to show who he is. Have a look at this, verse 27 and 28 in chapter 11.

They arrived again in Jerusalem, while Jesus was walking in the temple courts. The chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders came to him. Now that's not by accident.

They're not just hanging around together. Those three groups, the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders, make up what's called the Sanhedrin, the ruling council. That's the parliament, the religious parliament, if you want to put it that way.

And they're not coming to greet him and throw their cloaks on the ground and acknowledge him as their lord. No, no, they're going to undermine him. Hey, by what authority are you doing these things?

[6 : 03] Who gave you the authority to do this? In essence, they're asking, who told you, you could rule over us? Who put you in charge of us?

Now, that's an ancient question, 2,000 years ago. Modern man, we could still be asking that question ourselves. We're not different to the people back in Jesus' day.

We still presume to know better than God and better than his appointed ruler, Jesus. The modern world, our world, finds it so difficult to accept the authority of Jesus because, I guess, absolutely everything in our culture is geared towards the overthrow of authority in any way, shape, or form.

We all want to be our own leader, our own ruler. We might have been taught by our own parents.

We certainly would have been taught at school and we certainly would have been taught by the movies we watch, by imbibing our culture, by imbibing electronic media.

No one has the right to tell you what to do or how to live your life. You must be the boss of your own life. We all need to live under authority.

[7 : 06] We think we make ourselves authority at that point, but in truth, we're constantly living under someone else's authority. Social media, for example, is constantly telling us what to do, how to live, what clothes to wear, what to think.

Those aren't original thoughts. They're given to us by someone else. Sadly, Christians are not immune to this kind of thinking about me wanting to live my own life.

Jesus, of course, hasn't he set me free to live my life my way? Isn't he my friend and my savior? Far too few Christians understand that to be called a Christian necessarily means living under the authority of Jesus as the Christ.

And by this stage, although it's Mark, you should know by now that he's our king and we've got to live underneath that and do what he says. Now, I once had a discussion with a Christian who didn't like the idea of authority at all.

This person just wanted me to know that having a relationship with God is all about being open to hearing from him, to listening to him. I didn't like this idea of obedience and marching around like a soldier.

[8 : 09] I try to point out that literally the same Greek word used for listen is used of obey. It's the same word. I guess parents use it often. Have you listened to me? You're not listening. It means you're not obeying.

In Greek, it's the same word. Listen and obey is the same word. Anyway, we didn't get far in that conversation because I didn't like the idea of authority.

In our passage today, Jesus has had his authority questioned for the very last time. Remember that this questioning of his authority has been happening all the way through Mark. The very first time he stood up and spoke about the Torah and said, oh no, hang on, what's going on over here?

Remember when he threw out the demon, he healed his son. And he said, oh, you're driving out demons by the power of Satan. Well, he had his authority questioned for the last time.

He tells this parable in chapter 12 to lay out in non-certain terms exactly what is going to happen to people who question his authority and rule. But this is nothing new.

[9 : 10] It's not the first time this has happened in the Bible. Jesus is actually, this parable is drawing on long-attested Old Testament imagery and events that warn the people God's people that they've been in this situation before.

In our passage from Isaiah that we read, God shows how he provided everything his people needed. But instead of responding to him, to his kindness with their own kindness, he finds that they only yield bad fruit, which is described as injustice and bloodshed, oppression and unrighteousness, resulting in distress and cries for help.

It doesn't sound like the kind of people that God originally wanted his people to be. Now when something is this bad, God is duty-bound to deal with it. It's like when you plant a vineyard. We've all been, oh, okay, we haven't all planted a vineyard. Strangely, I have planted a vineyard. And it only produced, it was a huge field on the farm in Somerset West. We managed to get two crates of grapes.

After years, we ordered a big truck to come fetch all the grapes. We took a little bucky load down. Anyway, that was the end of the vineyard. But it's kind of the same with God.

[10 : 19] He simply cannot let bad things continue to infest his world and hurt others. Otherwise, what kind of a God would he be if he just let that happen? But, okay, we mustn't make the mistake of thinking God is ready to jump in and chomping at the bit to punish and discipline his people.

He's not that kind of authority. God is a being of total authority, but he's not a bloodthirsty tyrant. So we mustn't make the mistake. It's good to have God in authority.

It's good to have Christ as our authority. But that doesn't mean that we have that bad connotation when we talk about them being in authority. I mean, notice how many times in the parable he sends his servants, the prophets, to speak to his people, to warn them about the consequences of not living under his rule.

Have a look at chapter 12 from verse 2. At harvest time, the owner of the vineyard sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard.

But they seized him, the servant. They beat him and sent him away empty-handed. All right. What right has the owner got at that point? Well, he can call the police, get involved himself.

[11 : 31] No, no, this one says, okay, I'm going to give you another chance. And he sent another servant to them. They struck this man on the head and treated him shamefully. He sent still another.

And that one they killed. He sent many others. Some they beat and others they killed. Again and again and again and again in history, God sends prophets, preachers, leaders to his people who say, guys, please be careful.

Don't live like this. It's dangerous. You're going to hurt yourself and you're hurting others. I want you to stop. Do the right thing. If you trace this out in the Old Testament, you're talking about a period of over one and a half thousand years from the time of Moses till the time of the prophets are writing. It's about one thousand, well, to the time of the New Testament. It's about one thousand five hundred years. And this speaks to the incredible patience of God in dealing with his people. There's simply no other being that has this kind of patience and long-suffering.

But, this parable serves as a warning that God's patience has a limit. God's patience has a limit. And that limit centers on how people relate to his son, how they relate to Jesus. Just a bit further on in verse six.

[12 : 46] They've treated all his servants, all his prophets, they've treated them shamefully. He says, okay, I've got one more card up my sleeve. Verse six, He had one left to send.

The final one, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, they will respect my son. The reason they're going to respect him is because he's the heir.

It's not just any old servant over here. And if they deal with him badly, then they place themselves totally outside the care of the owner. What do the tenants do? They said to one another, this is the heir.

Come, let's kill him. That's almost, by the way, a direct quote from a story of Jacob in the Old Testament, where the brothers took Joseph and threw him in the pit.

Come, they said, let's kill him. Here, doing the same thing two thousand years later. This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and the inheritance will be ours. They took him and killed him and threw him out

of the vineyard.

[13:51] What will the owner of the vineyard do? I imagine Jesus must have paused there for a minute. Remember, he's got the Sanhedrin standing in front of him. Ooh, I wonder how they felt at that point. I don't know what he's going to say.

He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others. Ooh, boy, their heart must have just sank to their feet. Jesus is warning the Jewish leaders that the consequence for knowingly and repeatedly and ongoingly rejecting his authority is that God is going to become the implacable enemy.

He's going to hunt them down and he's going to kill them. Because to reject the son at this point is to be in open rebellion and in effect to declare open warfare against God. is to usurp the role that he's given Jesus.

Now, of course, we can take one big lesson from this today and I'm sure we've learned this lesson but it needs to be said. We mustn't play around with God. Don't take him for a fool.

Don't mistake his patience for apathy or indifference. So many people lull themselves into a false sense of security. I will make right with the big guy upstairs when I need to. Don't be like that guy.

[15:06] You don't know that you're going to get that chance. You kind of think that you do. People think about they're going to retire one day and they'll write a letter, a dear God letter. Hey, listen. Hey, buddy.

Can we sort this out? And they think it's going to be like a little easy thing. And I think they kind of bypass Jesus. They just don't even realize what they need him for anyway. But this kind of way to think about God, hey, I'll make right with the big guy upstairs, is to maintain the top position in the relationship.

Who's in control here? Not the big guy, the small guy. Because I'll deal with you when I'm ready.

You just hang on. You just say, hey, I'll put you on hold. Now imagine you did that to your boss.

There's certain things he wants you to do, and you say, I'll let you know when I'm good and ready to get it done. I'll get there when I'm ready. This kind of attitude is not going to work in the workplace.

You think it's going to work with the God of the universe who knows you and knows why you're doing that.

And we mustn't think to ourselves as Christians, I'm a Christian, I'm immune to this kind of thinking.

Now there are times in our life when we can be all too complacent with sin in not bringing our thoughts, our thought life, the words that we say, the actions that we do or don't do under the authority of Christ.

[16:23] That's why we pray those confessional prayers because God knows what we're like and he knows we've got to come to him continually and say, hey, I broke that, I messed that up, please help me. But the warning in the New Testament, like God's warnings in the Old Testament, are made to his people and not to outsiders.

So that's why we've got to take these things seriously. We mustn't think we're immune. Paul, writing in Galatians 5, says this, do not be deceived. He doesn't want the church to fool themselves.

God cannot be mocked. We can't play with him. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh from the flesh will reap destruction. Whoever sows to please, but whoever sows to please the Spirit, the things of God, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

And deep down we know where we stand with God. But if this is you and you're the one that says, yeah, I'll make right with God with the big guy upstairs when I'm ready, I just, I need to urge you not to wait and not to have that kind of thinking in your mind.

You need to be reconciled with God, but it's got to be done with humility, knowing who he is and what you've done. We prayed it in our collect. We justly deserve his wrath. So please don't be angry with us.

[17:40] Now you can do this on your own. You can pray to God and get right with him on your own. But, knowing how humans are good at deceiving themselves, it's probably better if you go and speak to someone about that because then you can be certain and know because a good Christian will be able to guide you through this.

Speak to the truth to you in love. Speak to me or speak to Nick or any of the Christians here that knows what they're talking about and you can get into a right relationship with God. Don't reject the authority of God.

Don't reject the authority of Jesus. It ends in disaster for everyone. Okay, well, what about, so don't reject the authority of Christ.

What about accepting the authority of Christ? How do we do that? What does that look like? Well, the major thrust of this passage is to warn people not to end up like the Jewish leaders.

Mark doesn't just leave us with a cosmic watch out or else. He's not just here to wag our finger.

There's in fact plenty of good reasons why you want to accept the authority of Jesus. Having Jesus as your king is the best thing you can do.

[18:45] Firstly, it saves your life from having God as your enemy and that's no small thing. But then also you get to have Jesus as your cornerstone and your capstone. See what Jesus says at the end of the parable.

Haven't you read the scripture? He says, verse 10. Haven't you read this scripture? The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone. The Lord has done this and it is marvelous in our eyes. The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone. something that everyone else thought was useless has become the most important thing and that's Christ. Now R.C. Sproul does a good job of explaining this.

R.C. Sproul is a well-known Christian preacher in the States. He says this, the term translated cornerstone refers to a capstone placed at the top of a corner where two walls come together. We don't see it often in our days but that's how they used to build in those days. It's a piece of the building essential to its integrity that holds the entire structure together. And Jesus is saying that though the Jewish leaders reject him that does not mean the end of the vineyard.

[19:58] Do you notice though in verse 9 he's going to kill the tenants and give the vineyard to others. So it's not the end of the vineyard. Instead it's the occasion for faithful tenants to take the place of the faithless tenant farmers.

A new structure is coming into place that has continuity with the old one. Remember last week we heard about the removal of the temple or the rejection of the temple but that that wasn't the end of the temple rather it's fulfilled in us the church.

The same with the people of God. The vineyard remains and it still has tenants and it is protected by walls but it's also different in important ways. Its leaders will include Gentiles that's us and Christ himself will be known by all as its guardian and sustainer.

It's ending the quote. So having Jesus as your cornerstone gives you this almost rock solid foundation in life. We put the cornerstone at the bottom of our buildings now. You know if you go outside you'll see it's in Mark's the foundation stone they often put at the bottom that first one. You can have a rock solid foundation in life. Jesus is the measuring line that is straight and true. It means we can trust him. There's no trickery of falsehood with Jesus.

[21:12] He says what he means and he does what he says so you can trust him. And that means because he gives us these lines that are straight and true to follow we don't we tend not to throw little wobblies and then have our whole life crumble.

That's not to say we don't face difficult times we actually do throw little wobblies but not to the point where we crash and burn because we've got this as long as we stay strong in Jesus if you're building the building's going to stand strong.

And we need that because there's strong things in life that want to undo us. This is why we need to live under him as our capstone his authority protects and fortifies us.

Just going back to thinking about living under authority again. We don't like to think like this but obeying those in authority if they're truly good and if they're truly trying to help it's vital if you want to thrive and flourish.

People in authority who are authoritative know things that we don't know. That's why we listen to them. They've made mistakes and know what works and what doesn't work. For example there's an adventure journalist I've been listening to recently online who lost his brother in Table Mountain.

[22:25] He fell and died. And now what he's doing to sort of commemorate his brother's life is amazing actually. He's taken the whole month of February it was last year February this happened. He's taken the whole month of February every day he's talking to experts serious experts in the field and also people who have had similar experiences to highlight things that one should not do and if you're in trouble what you should do.

Not listening to people like this just makes you an arrogant fool. So imagine you're on the mountain and you're stuck and you don't know what to do and an expert in the field says hey listen let me

show you how to get out of this problem.

No no I'll do it myself. The biggest problem there is yeah okay fine you can do it yourself you're going to die you're probably going to die but you're probably going to fall on someone else and hurt someone else and we don't want that.

That's why people want to help you. Now the only time we don't want someone who's in authority telling us what to do is when we think we don't have any problems that we need to overcome.

No no I know what I'm doing I'm fine leave me alone I've got this. But who look at our lives over the course of our life I'm not saying our life at the moment is a mess but who has managed to have always I've got this in our life.

[23 : 39] None of us. We've all had times where we haven't got it and we need help. We all need help in our life. None of us does life well enough on our own terms certainly not in our own thinking and capacity and our own authority to claim to be a shining example for others to follow.

That's why it's important to make sure we're living under the right authority. There's so many rival authorities out there aren't there? With the age of social media everyone with a keyboard is an expert and then you listen to what the experts are saying so for example in all the schools in many of the schools in Cape Town you can identify whether you want to be a him or a her or a they or a she or something else entirely.

One of the images I saw recently there's a person who's a biological female who has become who wants to be a male has a beard looks like a male but they're pregnant and it's got a male partner who made them pregnant who I think if I'm correct used to be a female so they and left her own devices that's where we go.

I mean humans are crazy like that. That's why it's so important to make sure we're living under the right authority. There's only one cornerstone there's only one capstone there's only one king that won't lead you astray and make sure you stay safe and grow to maturity under his loving wisdom and care.

Peter was with Jesus at this time when he heard that parable about Jesus being the rejected stone but ultimately the cornerstone and he wrote about it in his epistle 1 Peter chapter 2 it's a lovely passage so I'm going to end with that so if you've got your Bibles then just thumb through to 1 Peter chapter 2 towards the end of the New Testament after Hebrews and a little bit before Revelation and just listen to all the good things we get or the good reasons we should have for having Jesus as our cornerstone and then just imagine what life is like without that 1 Peter chapter 2 verse 4 as you come to him the living stone rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him you also like living stones are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to

[26 : 24] God through Jesus Christ that spiritual house I love the Lord of the Rings and I remember Elrond's house these beautiful elvish houses that are just beautiful that's what we look like to God only more so for in scripture it says see I lay a stone in Zion a chosen and precious cornerstone and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame the one who trusts in this cornerstone is going to win he's going to succeed it's the opposite of shaming now to you who believe this stone is precious but to those who don't believe the stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone they lost out they lose out on the stone they think it's worthless but meanwhile it's the most important thing in the universe and he ends off with but you are a chosen people you've been chosen to serve this king you're a royal priesthood we're royalty we're a holy nation we're God's special possession the God of the universe thinks we're special if we have

Jesus as our cornerstone the opposite is true if you don't have him as your cornerstone that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light we do this every Sunday we sing his praises once you were not a people but now you're the people of God once you have not received mercy but now you have received mercy having Jesus as your capstone as your king and as your authority means you get to ultimately win at the game of life and who doesn't want that and who doesn't need that we all do let's pray dear Lord Jesus what a lovely reminder of your authority and your power and your prestige although you were rejected by your own people Lord you saw fit to continue your kingdom project and wonder of wonders you've included us into your kingdom what an amazing mystery thank you Jesus for including us help us to live well help us to live properly with you as our king and to accept and honour and obey you as our Lord and Saviour in Jesus name

Amen