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Dear Students,

"How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work." (John 14:9-10)

What is **authority**?

You might think of answers like "power", or "expertise", or "who gets to decide". In English, the meaning comes from the word "author". Finding an authority meant looking something up in a book that an expert had written, to prove you were right.

These days it seems like everyone is an expert or can find an expert to back up their ideas. People argue about what we should do about everything, whether it's health or politics or education - and everyone on both sides has "experts" to back them up. On the internet, everyone says, "Do your own research" but how? How do we decide which experts to listen to or what authorities to trust?

Here's something that was written before the internet, before science as we know it, before any universities or even most people being able to read. Can this help us now?

Mark 11:27-28

27 Jesus and his disciples arrived again in Jerusalem. He was walking in the temple courtyard. Then the chief priests came to him. The teachers of the law and the elders came too. **28** "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "Who gave you authority to do this?"

What has Jesus just been doing and talking about? What are "these things" that the people who are "in charge" are asking Jesus why he thinks he can do them?

Jesus has been healing sick people and teaching about God's kingdom. He made a huge uproar in the Temple, knocking over tables and chasing out animals and yelling at the "authorities" there for disrespecting God's house. He also cursed a fig tree, told everyone we have to forgive other people if we want to be forgiven, and particularly, that

we can ask God for mountains to be moved. Who gets to decide whether the mountains get moved? What kind of authority would that require?

In many ways it's perfectly reasonable for these spiritual leaders to ask Jesus this question. It's part of their job to check on people who are claiming to give God's message. Jesus is in the temple courts here. If someone started teaching right on our church property, like on our patio right after the service, shouldn't the pastor know what they are teaching and be checking if it's in line with the Bible? But Jesus doesn't answer this question right away. Instead he asks another question first:

Mark 11:29-33

29 Jesus replied, "I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. **30** Was John's baptism from heaven? Or did it come from human authority? Tell me!"

31 They talked to each other about it. They said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?' **32** But what if we say, 'From human authority'?" They were afraid of the people. Everyone believed that John really was a prophet.

33 So they answered Jesus, "We don't know." Jesus said, "Then I won't tell you by what authority I am doing these things either."

So what does Jesus find out by asking this question? Actually he probably already knows, but the listeners can now find out, and we can find out...

- Why don't they want to say that John's authority came from God?
- Why don't they want to say John's authority came from a person?
- What is missing here?

What we find out here is that they don't even try to find out the answer! They don't even ask themselves, well where did John's authority really come from? They only care about what will happen if they say Answer A or Answer B. They end up giving a true answer almost by accident: "We don't know!"

And why don't they know? Because they don't want to know! They don't want to pay the cost they will have to pay if they actually come to a conclusion. And let's be honest about how big a price that is. It's not just that they will have to admit to themselves that they were wrong, and maybe change their behavior, though that is hard enough.

What might happen if they say John was sent by God? They might have to give away their stuff. They might lose their jobs. They might get into serious political trouble, which means risking jail and death. It turns out that the high priest right then, Caiaphas, was the only one who had kept that job for more than a few months. The Romans kept removing the high priests for being politically dangerous. The high priest had ***too much*** authority - and not enough!

What might happen if they say John was just some guy saying stuff on his own? Mark says they were afraid of the crowd, so they actually thought people might riot and attack them. And incidentally, this might also lead to the Romans doing more bad stuff...So we have to have a little sympathy for them actually. They were afraid to find out the truth, because either way it would be costly for them.

So, how does this apply to us now?

If you want to know what to think about some controversial thing, what do you have to do first? You have to ask yourself if you honestly want to know the answer. If you "did your research" did you read things or listen to things from both sides? Or did you only look at answers from people you think will agree with you? Did you honestly read or hear what someone was saying and try to understand it, or did you just hunt through what they said to find bits that support what you wanted to think already?

It's really hard to be honest with ourselves, because of what we will have to do differently if we really find out the answer to difficult or painful questions. It's tempting to do like the Temple leaders and just decide "not to know".

Jesus' question reminds us that even reading the Bible and praying won't give you answers from God if you don't actually want to know!

Thought Questions:

- Is there anything you really want to know, about God or the Bible or yourself, that you're afraid to ask?
- Who can you go to for advice, when you aren't sure what the Bible is really telling you?
- Are you willing to spend time reading the Bible and praying, on your own, so that you can be closer to God and ready to hear His answers?

Challenge: The next time someone forwards you a short quote from someone, to prove a point, try to find the larger thing the person wrote or said and see if that's a fair representation of what they think. Ideally do this with something you like or agree with and again with something you disagree with or think is mean. Even if the quote is a

Bible verse--look up the whole section and chapter and ask yourself if that's what the Bible is really saying here.

Video Lesson: [“Jesus the Royal Priest”](#) This Bible Project video goes really well with today's lesson, explaining more of the background of where Jesus' authority really comes from. There are links below it to more good videos in the same series.

Close in Prayer: *“Dear Jesus, please give me the wisdom to ask questions and push for answers, the courage to listen to what you are really saying, and the peace to rest and trust in you when I know the truth. Amen.”*