

Luke 20:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And spake unto him, saying, Tell us, by what authority doest thou these things? or who is he that gave thee this authority?

Analysis

Tell us, by what authority doest thou these things? or who is he that gave thee this authority? The question ἔξουσία (exousia, authority) appears twice, emphasizing the central issue. Exousia means legitimate power, jurisdiction, or right to act—not mere ability but authorized permission. "These things" (ταῦτα, tauta) refers to teaching in the temple, proclaiming the gospel, and especially cleansing the temple (19:45-46).

The double question creates a false dilemma: identify the source of authority. If Jesus claims divine authority, they'll charge Him with blasphemy. If He claims human authority (like the prophets commissioned by God), they'll demand credentials. Jesus' response (vv. 3-8) masterfully exposes their bad faith—they're not genuinely seeking truth but setting a trap. This question reveals the fundamental conflict between human religious authority and divine authority breaking into the establishment.

Historical Context

Temple authorities controlled who could teach in the courts. Rabbis derived authority from recognized teachers in the chain of tradition. Jesus had no formal rabbinic training (John 7:15) and claimed authority directly from God, bypassing the establishment. The leaders' question was legally proper—they had responsibility to protect the temple from false teachers. However, their earlier

rejection of John the Baptist (whom they also questioned, John 1:19-28) and their opposition to Jesus' miracles revealed hearts closed to divine authentication.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How do religious leaders today sometimes demand credentials while rejecting clear evidence of God's work?
2. What is the difference between genuinely seeking to understand authority versus using authority questions as a trap?
3. Why is the question of Jesus' authority still the central issue every person must answer?

Interlinear Text

καὶ	Εἶπε	πρὸς	αὐτόν	λέγοντες	Εἶπε	ἡμῖν	ἐν	ποίᾳ
And	Tell	unto	him	saying	Tell	us	by	what
G2532	G2036	G4314	G846	G3004	G2036	G2254	G1722	G4169
ἐξουσίαν	ταῦτα	ποιεῖς	ἢ	τίς	ἐστιν	ὁ	δούς	σοι
authority	these things	doest thou	or	who	is he	G3588	that gave	thee
G1849	G5023	G4160	G2228	G5101	G2076		G1325	G4671
τὴν	ἐξουσίαν	ταύτην						
G3588	authority	G3778						
	G1849							

Additional Cross-References

Acts 7:27 (Parallel theme): But he that did his neighbour wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?

Exodus 2:14 (Parallel theme): And he said, Who made thee a prince and a judge over us? intendest thou to kill me, as thou killedst the Egyptian? And Moses feared, and said, Surely this thing is known.

John 2:18 (Parallel theme): Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things?

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