

Authority Politics

Mark 11:27-33 May 13, 2026

"Everyone has a plan until they get hit." That is probably Mike Tyson's most famous quote in a long catalog of memorable maxims. Over the years, people have embellished the line to make it more hard-hitting. Usually you hear it repeated as, "Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the face." But Iron Mike confirmed the simpler version when asked about it back in 2012.¹

The quote has taken on a life of its own, but Tyson first said it back in 1987 before fighting Tyrell Biggs for the undisputed heavyweight championship. It was billed as "*The Clash For The Crown*." When they entered the ring, Biggs was undefeated. He was also 12 pounds heavier than Tyson.² People had been asking Mike what he was going to do. "[Biggs] is going to move, he's going to dance. He's going to do this, do that," "He's going to give you a lot of lateral movement."

But Iron Mike wasn't worried. He said, "Most talkers, they can't handle it."³ And he was right. Biggs threw a lot of sharp jabs, but after seven rounds, "Tyson hit Biggs with a left hook that sent Biggs to canvas and almost out of the ring." He was on his feet before the 10 count, but it was clear who was going to win this fight.

On the Tuesday and Wednesday before His crucifixion,⁴ Jesus contended in a multi-round fight with some *heavy* hitters who wanted the crown for themselves. From Mark 11:27 to 12:37, there are five conflict episodes stacked together. And Jesus' opponents weren't just out for a belt or bragging rights. They wanted to knock Jesus out. They wanted Him discredited and destroyed. They had quite a strategy to take Him down...or at least they *thought* they did. We'll find that every time they try to land a blow on Jesus, every time they throw a jab, Jesus delivers a spiritual left hook sending them out of the ring to regroup, re-conspire, and try again round after round.

Mark 11:27-28 - ²⁷ They came again to Jerusalem. As he was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came ²⁸ and asked him, "By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you this authority to do these things?"

The chief priests, the scribes, and the elders are the three groups that made up the Sanhedrin.⁵ This probably wouldn't have been the whole 72 of them, but a delegation that represented the whole. They came to challenge the Lord and try to put Him in His place.

His place, in their minds, was to be under their authority. That's what they cared about. Notice, when they came to ask Him about why He stopped the commerce in the Temple and flipped all the tables, they don't bother arguing about right and wrong, lawful or unlawful. They didn't really *care*

¹ <https://rowansimpson.com/quotes/punch/>

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mike_Tyson_vs._Tyrell_Biggs

³ <https://www.sun-sentinel.com/2012/11/09/mike-tyson-explains-on>

⁴ John Walvoord and Roy Zuck *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*

⁵ Archibald Robertson *Word Pictures In The New Testament*

about that. They didn't care about the prophecies of Isaiah or Jeremiah or the Father's intention to bring Gentiles into the family of God. They cared about *authority*. They're not concerned with theological integrity, but with power and control.

Power can be a terribly addictive narcotic. It can cloud the mind and warp a person's attitude and interactions with others. These guys were obsessed with power and convinced that they were the most important, most consequential people in the nation. The irony is their nation was occupied and oppressed by a much *more* powerful nation - Rome. But these religious leaders were constantly on a power trip.

Christians, sometimes we get some measure of power. Maybe at work. Maybe in our community. We need to remember all that Jesus has been teaching His disciples in Mark about *Kingdom* power and Kingdom greatness. We do well to remember that we are called to humility, to deference, and to not thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought. As Paul bluntly puts it in Galatians 6: "You are not that important."

Now, if Jesus was merely a man, this would've been an incredibly intimidating situation. The Sanhedrin is the nation's executive, legislative, and judicial government rolled into one.⁶ These are heavy hitters, determined to focus *all* their attention and ability on silencing this Teacher from Nazareth. But Jesus was *not* just a man. He's the GodMan. He is not intimidated. In fact, He saw them coming and met them head on.

This situation is a direct fulfillment of what Jesus predicted back in Mark 8:31. He said that the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes would reject Him. And here is Jesus, coming again into the ring to fight so we could be redeemed. We'll watch Him do it round after round, going the distance till the work was done.

Here's what's interesting: They want to know what authority Jesus had to do and say the things He was doing and saying. In other words, "What are Your credentials? What gives You the right, the status, to *dare* to disagree with us?"

It's true, Jesus had no "formal" training. He had no pedigree, humanly speaking. But here's the stark truth: *Everyone* knew Jesus had more authority than the scribes, the pharisees, the elders, the chief priests. What did Mark say all the way back in chapter 1? The people "were astonished because Jesus was teaching them as one who *had* authority, and *not* like the scribes."⁷ Even as they debate here, it's clear that Jesus holds all the *true* power.

Mark 11:29 - ²⁹ Jesus said to them, "I will ask you one question; then answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things.

⁶ James Brooks *The New American Commentary, Volume 23: Mark*

⁷ Mark 1:22

Jesus demonstrates total authority, right here. See, they came and said, "We want to point out that we never gave you any authority." But Jesus doesn't need it, so their complaint makes no impact. The punch doesn't land. I'm guessing some people listening in the crowd rolled their eyes.

Now, the question is: Why not just say "Because I'm the Messiah?" Why not just have heaven open, angels descend, and silence these craven scoundrels once and for all?

It's because Jesus *always* wants *faith*. That we choose to believe Him based on revelation. Based off His word. *Not* based off some sort of sign or manifestation to prove it. And Jesus knew their hearts. They didn't *want* to know, they *wanted* Him gone. They had *seen* the signs. They had *heard* the teachings. It was undeniable, yet they denied it. And when hearts are hard like that - when hearts are *closed* to truth - God does not smash His way in. He says, "Fine. Stay in your ignorance and rebellion. I'm not going to force you to accept the truth."

There are many times in the Gospels where someone will come and ask Jesus something but it's not asked in humility or faith or true searching. In those cases, Jesus usually asks them something back. He asks something deeper to reveal the heart behind the question. Not to just win an argument, but to expose truth.

This is why He taught so often in parables. So that only those who *truly* wanted to know, who *truly* wanted to seek God, would follow up and then have those wonderful secrets explained to them.

Mark 11:30 - ³⁰ Was John's baptism from heaven or of human origin? Answer me."

When He says, "John's baptism," Jesus means the totality of John's ministry.⁸ But why bring up John after all this time? If I'm honest, John seems almost superfluous. Did he really do that much? Was he really that necessary?

The answer is, yes! He was the forerunner of the Messiah. He was an essential part of God revealing Who the Christ was. And Jesus' ties His ministry to John's here. It wasn't just that John was doing his thing and then Jesus came and did *His* thing. John was sent from God *as part* of Jesus' work.

If John was sent by God, then Jesus must *also* be sent by God. Because John said that the One Who was coming, the One he was preparing people for, was from heaven. and would baptize people with the Holy Spirit. And John identified Jesus as that Person - the eternal Son of God.⁹

So, if John was a true prophet, Jesus *is* the Messiah they've been waiting for. If John was just making things up - if he was a liar - then they as the leaders of Israel had the duty of *stopping* him from teaching lies and prophesying falsely. At least of warning the people. They were out there, listening to John preach. And *many* people were convinced by his message.

⁸ Walter Wessel *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 8: Matthew, Mark, Luke*

⁹ John 1:30-34

You know, Mike Tyson once discussed his punching strategy. He said, "I'm not trying to punch him in the nose. I'm trying to punch the soft tissue behind his nose."¹⁰

When Jesus asked this question, it wasn't just to deflect and it wasn't just to push His opponents into a corner they couldn't get easily out of. He was punching into a *much* deeper spiritual truth.

John was in the wilderness preaching that a person could repent and be saved *without* offering any sacrifices in the temple. A "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins."¹¹ If John's baptism was from heaven, the temple was obsolete.¹² At least it would be *after* the Lamb of God laid down His life. And of course, that's *exactly* what happened. But with one question the Lord lays out just how powerful He really was.

So, the Sanhedrin is absolutely on the ropes. Let's see their response.

Mark 11:31-32 - ³¹ They discussed it among themselves: "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say, 'Then why didn't you believe him?' ³² But if we say, 'Of human origin' "—they were afraid of the crowd, because everyone thought that John was truly a prophet.

John's spiritual authority was never in question among the people of Israel. Did you know even Josephus, the Jewish historian, says John was a "good man," who commanded the Jews in righteousness and piety toward God. And that John was so beloved and respected that when Herod's army was destroyed it was because of God's displeasure toward Herod for murdering John.¹³

Understand - Josephus was no Christian. *That's* how revered John was by everyone *other* than Herod.

Now, this is a comedic moment in the temple. This official delegation, full of pomp and venom, confront Jesus. They think they're ambushing Him and are going to knock Him out. Jesus asks them one question and they have to say, "Time out! Give us a second." Then they go huddle up and discuss what they're going to say. And they're downright *scared* to answer. Did you see them stop mid-sentence in verse 32? "But if we say, "Of human origin..." The sentence just dies there.

Mike Tyson's famous quote, "Everyone has a plan until they get hit," doesn't end there. No one ever says the rest of the line, but here's what Iron Mike said in full: "Everybody has a plan until they get hit. Then, like a rat, they stop in fear and freeze."

That's *exactly* what happens to the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders here. They are exposed as phonies, as hypocrites. They did not care if John was a prophet. They only cared about holding onto their own power and influence over the crowds, who they did not care about or respect.

¹⁰ <https://rowansimpson.com/quotes/punch/>

¹¹ Mark 1:4

¹² David Garland *The NIV Application Commentary: Mark*

¹³ Flavius Josephus *Antiquities Of The Jews XVIII v.2*

Mark 11:33 - ³³ So they answered Jesus, "We don't know." And Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

We don't know?!? What a joke. *It's their job to know!* They are the ones who are tasked with maintaining the spiritual and doctrinal integrity for the nation! *That's* the job! To know whether John was a prophet from God or a *false* prophet who needed to be stoned! If you don't know, then what are you here for?

Jesus has no interest in playing games with them. They don't want truth, they want status. If they had really been seeking God, like Nicodemus (a member of the Sanhedrin) did, He would've responded to them like we see in John chapter 3. But for those who don't care, the truth is withheld.

They *could've* had an answer to their original question if they really wanted one. R.T. France writes, "For those who will look below the surface there is a clear enough answer."¹⁴ And Jesus *will* give the answer to those listening into this debate in the very next passage. He will teach a *parable* which reveals *exactly* Who He is for those who are interested in really learning.

Mike Tyson beat Tyrell Biggs in a TKO. His victory was clear, but it wasn't a Hollywood knockout. Biggs was powerless, but still standing.¹⁵

The chief priests, the scribes, and the elders limped away from this round only to come back for more. Each time, Jesus showed just how much authority He had. This wasn't just about Jesus being a great debater. It's that His absolute power and authority and right-ness could not be denied.

And yet, many continually deny it. May we live in acceptance, not denial of Christ's authority over heaven, over earth, over *our* lives as we follow Him.

¹⁴ R.T. France *The Gospel Of Mark*

¹⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mike_Tyson_vs._Tyrell_Biggs