

"By Whose Authority?" - Mark 11:27-12:12

We are all rebels in our natural state. When the Bible tells us that we've all sinned and fallen short of God's glory, all means all. (Romans 3:23) We are all guilty of this cosmic rebellion, and the penalty for our rebellion is eternal death, a forever future in the pit of hell, suffering horribly for every transgression we commit in this earthly life.

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)

God is so incredibly gracious that He has made a way for us to be saved from the judgment we so richly deserve. One is saved by confessing Jesus Christ is Lord and believing God raised Him from the dead. (Romans 10:9) But declaring Jesus as your Lord is far more than just saying those words; you need to be willing to submit to His Lordship. You need to seek out His will for your life and follow His leading. Otherwise, He's not really your Lord. As Jesus asks:

"But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say? (Luke 6:46)

Is Jesus your Lord? Do you recognize the authority He has over your life? Or are you still trying to be the boss? Are you still trying to press your own agenda? Are you still trying to get Jesus to submit to your will?

I want you to know that Jesus is Lord whether or not you accept the fact. A day will come when every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of Almighty God. Trust me when I say, you want to accept the fact now, while it is the day of salvation.

This morning, we're continuing with Mark's account of the passion week. Jesus has already ridden triumphantly into Jerusalem. He has cleansed the temple of merchants who were raking in the dough at the expense of religious pilgrims. He continues to call out the religious leaders for their hypocrisy.

Those religious leaders want Him out of the way. They have already decided that they need to kill Him, but they are concerned about the crowds who welcomed Him as the promised Messiah. So, we are now going to see a series of challenges to Jesus' authority. The movers and shakers want to discredit Him before the masses. Well, if you try to discredit Jesus, good luck with that. It is not going to go well for you because Jesus will never be discredited. He is the Word of God. Jesus is the ultimate authority.

Then they came again to Jerusalem. And as He was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came to Him. And they said to Him, "By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority to do these things?" (Mark 11:27-28)

I believe it was Tuesday of Passion week when they "came again to Jerusalem." As I explained last week, there are some scholars who believe that the Triumphal Entry actually occurred on Monday rather than Sunday. Those guys would say it was Wednesday when these events occurred. It is certainly possible, but I'm sticking with Tuesday.

In any case, as Jesus came to the Temple, He was confronted by His enemies. "By what authority are You doing these things?" What things were they talking about? Cleansing the Temple, for one. But also preaching to the people about the Kingdom of God and the hypocrisy of the religious establishment.

There is a serious challenge here. You see, they were the gatekeepers. They were the religious authorities, or so they thought. But this Galilean carpenter was calling them out. “What gives you the right, Jesus? Who gave you this authority to do these things?”

You understand, don’t you, that they weren’t really interested in an answer. This was an accusation, pure and simple. They were saying, in essence, “You have no right! You have no authority here!” But then, Jesus so easily turns the tables.

But Jesus answered and said to them, "I also will ask you one question; then answer Me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things: The baptism of John—was it from heaven or from men? Answer Me." (Mark 11:29-30)

John the Baptist was the greatest prophet of the Old Covenant. He testified clearly that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah.

John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29)

Jesus’ question put the religious leaders in a tough spot, and they realized it.

And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?'" But if we say, 'From men' "—they feared the people, for all counted John to have been a prophet indeed. (Mark 11:31-32)

You see, if they admitted that John’s ministry was God-ordained, then they would have to admit that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, because that’s what John taught. And John was highly regarded by the people. Disrespecting John was not politically expedient.

These guys were all about politics. It was all about power and influence. They weren’t interested in truth; they were only interested in maintaining their status. And so, they were stumped. Since they didn’t know what to do, they plead ignorance.

So they answered and said to Jesus, "We do not know." And Jesus answered and said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things." (Mark 11:33)

Jesus made two statements here. By refusing to answer their question, He was saying, “You want to talk about authority, but you have no authority over me.” And, by implication, Jesus was asserting the fact that He has authority in and of Himself. He is God the Son. He is the Agent of creation. He is Lord of all!

Christ’s opponents failed to see the truth because they hardened themselves against it. They didn’t want to see the truth. There are so many people who know nothing about the joy of living a Christian life simply because they refuse to submit to the Lord’s will. And a lot of those folks claim to be Christians.

If you don’t want to know the truth, Jesus isn’t going to force it on you. What would be the point? In fact, the Bible tells us that ...

*The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, **because they did not receive the love of the truth**, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12)*

I hope you genuinely want to know the truth about what Jesus wants for you. He wants only the best. He wants to give you good gifts.

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28)

But you need to get out from behind the wheel of your life and let Jesus drive! Your prayer should ever be, "Teach me to do Your will, Lord, because You are my God!"

Jesus' opponents were certainly not interested in submitting to His will. It was tragic, because they were the religious leaders of God's chosen people. It is always tragic when a spiritual leader refuses to submit to the Lord's will. Way too many pastors crash and burn because they try to run things their way. We all need to be people of the Book, because this Bible will teach us what Jesus wants for us.

Nevertheless, not my will, but Thine be done!

We're going to blow right past a chapter heading this morning, because the parable that opens Chapter 12 supports the assertion Jesus made at the end of Chapter 11. It seems to me that this parable draws from what is called the "Song of the Vineyard" found in Isaiah, Chapter 5. Let me just quickly read it for you:

Now let me sing to my Well-beloved A song of my Beloved regarding His vineyard: My Well-beloved has a vineyard On a very fruitful hill. He dug it up and cleared out its stones, And planted it with the choicest vine. He built a tower in its midst, And also made a winepress in it; So He expected it to bring forth good grapes, But it brought forth wild grapes. "And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, Judge, please, between Me and My vineyard. What more could have been done to My vineyard That I have not done in it? Why then, when I expected it to bring forth good grapes, Did it bring forth wild grapes? And now, please let Me tell you what I will do to My vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it shall be burned; And break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will lay it waste; It shall not be pruned or dug, But there shall come up briars and thorns. I will also command the clouds That they rain no rain on it." For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, And the men of Judah are His pleasant plant. He looked for justice, but behold, oppression; For righteousness, but behold, a cry for help. (Isaiah 5:1-7)

This is a prophecy of judgment. Israel is represented by this vineyard. Despite the Lord's tender care, it did not produce good fruit, and so, it would be laid waste. Now, with that in mind, let's look at Jesus' parable.

Then He began to speak to them in parables: "A man planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a place for the wine vat and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country. Now at vintage-time he sent a servant to the vinedressers, that he might receive some of the fruit of the vineyard from the vinedressers. And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Again he sent them another servant, and at him they threw stones, wounded him in the head, and sent him away shamefully treated. And again he sent another, and him they killed; and many others, beating some and killing some. (Mark 12:1-5)

Sound familiar? This vineyard, like the one in Isaiah, represents the nation Israel. The servants who were beaten, wounded and killed, represent the prophets of God, just as Jesus had lamented the nation's treatment of the prophets before:

*"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing!
(Luke 13:34)*

Continuing with the parable, now, verse 6:

Therefore still having one son, his beloved, he also sent him to them last, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But those vinedressers said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' So they took him and killed him and cast him out of the vineyard. "Therefore what will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the vinedressers, and give the vineyard to others. (Mark 12:6-9)

It's really not hard to interpret the meaning of this parable. The owner is God the Father. The beloved Son is Jesus. The wicked tenant farmers are the religious leaders confronting the Lord. They had already disregarded all the Old Testament prophets. They would soon kill the beloved Son. God would soon remove them from power, destroy them and turn the vineyard over to others.

For His next trick, Jesus pours salt on the wound by quoting from Psalm 118:22-23.

Have you not even read this Scripture: 'THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED HAS BECOME THE CHIEF CORNERSTONE. THIS WAS THE LORD'S DOING, AND IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES?'" (Mark 12:10-11)

Remember, these are guys who pride themselves on their scriptural scholarship. And Jesus asks them, "Have you not even read this scripture?" Burn! They had read it, but they didn't accept it. Their entire Bible, our Old Testament, pointed forward to the coming of Jesus Christ, but when He arrived, they refused to accept Him. He is the stone the builders rejected. Yet with His resurrection, He is the chief cornerstone of the Church. This rejected stone would be hung on a cross to die, but He would rise again. And as promised, Jesus would build His Church.

... on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:20-22)

The old system of Temple worship was in the process of being replaced. The chief priests, scribes, elders, and those who followed them would be destroyed. And God's vineyard would be given to others: this vast body of people who accept the Lordship of Jesus Christ

Are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. If so, you are the Temple of the Holy Spirit! You are the Temple of God!

Jesus often employed parables to obfuscate the truth from those who refused to love the truth. When His disciples asked why He spoke in parables,

He said to them, "To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables, so that 'SEEING THEY MAY SEE AND NOT PERCEIVE, AND HEARING THEY MAY HEAR AND NOT UNDERSTAND; LEST THEY SHOULD TURN, AND THEIR SINS BE FORGIVEN THEM.' " (Mark 4:11-12)

But in this case, the meaning of the parable was crystal clear, even to His opponents.

*And they sought to lay hands on Him, but feared the multitude, **for they knew He had spoken the parable against them.** So they left Him and went away. (Mark 12:12)*

Jesus' ministry on earth was coming to its climax. The hatred of the religious leaders was being whipped into a sinful frenzy. And this was exactly how God planned it from before there was time.

By whose authority was Jesus doing these things? By His own. He is the ultimate authority. He is Lord!

The question is, "Are you willing to acknowledge Him as Lord?" Are you willing to submit to His will and let Him lead? Are you willing to cry out, "You are my Lord and my God!" Are you willing to humbly say, "Not my will, Lord, but Thine be done."