

Mark 11:27-12:11 The Authority of the Son

Today's subject is about authority. In a small way, I think of my thesis defense. Working up to that day, as I spoke with some of you, I wasn't nervous or intimidated about your wealth of knowledge on my topic. But, when I entered that small room and sat with three experienced and knowledgeable professors with a copy of my thesis lying before them, I was nervous to say the least. After all, they were the experts; and they were the ones with authority to judge and rule over my degree. However, this is not quite the picture we have of our Lord and the confrontations that will follow. The religious leaders in Jerusalem had great authority. But, as they stood before this simple son of a carpenter from an unknown village, He stood as their creator, the Lord of the Universe, the Son of God with authority. And so He stands today.

Today, Jesus has all rights as the Son of God over the lives of the Sanhedrin, the disciples, the people of Israel, and the nations of the world. He has all authority over us and demands our attention, our obedience, our worship. The words of Peter are as true today as they were from all eternity. **“Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ”** (Acts. 2:36). This morning I would like to explore this subject of the authority of the Son of God. I will do this by working through these two texts. In the first part we see the authority of the Son challenged. In the second part with the parable we see the authority of the Son illustrated. I will go through these texts with some explanation. Then I will end with some applications.

1. The Authority of the Son Challenged. Let's 11:27-33. Today's passage takes place on Tuesday of Passover week. It begins a series of encounters with the Sanhedrin, the religious elite of the nation of Israel. Verse 27 says that the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came to Jesus. These men were from the Sanhedrin, a group of seventy-one leaders who dominated Jewish religious life, and to a great degree political life. They included the Scribes, the Pharisees, and the Sadducees. This is the only instance in Mark in which the Sanhedrin approaches Jesus (apart from his trial in 14:55). Earlier in his Galilean ministry, Jesus confronted various religious leaders in small towns and synagogues. Now, the setting is the center of Israel's religious life, the Temple. And, those confronting Jesus aren't simply representatives of the religious leaders; they are the highest doctors of religion, the philosophers of wisdom, the experts in the law, and the most visible pious of society. The time has come.

They had seen, or at least heard how Jesus entered Jerusalem, as many of the pilgrims for Passover Week worshipped Him. For sure, they had heard of him in the previous three years. Now, they confront him in the temple and ask him, **“By what authority are you doing these things?”** and **“Who gave you this authority to do them.”** (v. 28) I must ask what they mean by “these things.” The question is clearly in the context of overturning the tax tables and the scattering of livestock. However, this episode was only one in a string of many provocations. In Mark cp. 2 alone, Jesus presumes to forgive sins. He accepts sinners. He calls tax collectors into fellowship. He redefines the Sabbath. In cp. 7 he lays an ax to the root of the oral tradition. Now, he pronounces judgment on the temple, and soon he will give judgment on the Sanhedrin itself.

So, they ask him two questions. The first question is about Jesus' “right” to do the things he was doing. Jewish teaching (Mishnah) said that false authority in religious matters was grounds for

capital punishment. The second question asks “who” gave you this authority. Their questions are really one. *What is the source of your authority?* I am sure they were thinking and saying to themselves sarcastically, “*We are the authority here. Did you give him authority? Did you give him authority? Did someone from the Sanhedrin give him authority?*” They were saying, “*Show us your credentials.*” It was really an attempt to embarrass him. The confrontation is quite clever. If he showed to have no credentials (which in their mind, he had none), the crowds would lose respect and stop listening to him. On the other hand, if he considered himself authorized to do the things he were doing, he would place himself in the place of God Himself, for only God had the right to do such things. Then, they could accuse him of blasphemy. If he answers either question they have him.

Notice how Jesus answers. First he says, “**I will tell you by what authority I do these things**” (v. 29). I am sure they are not ready for what comes next. He then asks THEM a question (a common tactic for rabbis). He says, “**The Baptism of John, was it from heaven or from men? Answer me.**” At first thought you might ask, “*What does John’s baptism have to do with Jesus’ authority?*” And, “*Does Jesus really answer their question?*” As I have read this passage through the years, I have immediately thought, “*Jesus is appealing to the authority of John to preach and to baptize. Did he have the authority from God to do what he did?*” In general, the people thought he was a prophet and he did have authority from God. The Sanhedrin, on the other hand, certainly didn’t give him such authority, but they reserved judgment because of what the people thought. They did not believe he was from God. But, this isn’t precisely what Jesus is appealing to. Jesus was appealing to something much deeper, namely, his own baptism and what happened in that event.

Let’s take a quick look at Mark 1. Notice Mark’s emphasis on John’s purpose. In verses 2-3 he quotes Isaiah and says, “**Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way,** ³ **the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.**” In verses 7-8 he says, “**After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.** ⁸ **I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.**” Then, in verses 10-11, Mark says “**And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.** ¹¹ **And a voice came from heaven, You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.**” John came to announce the coming of the Son of God. And at his baptism, the voice of God spoke, announcing his authority as the Son. With this in mind, I believe this is how the religious leaders understood Jesus question. And, yes, he did answer their question, not with a mere, “*yes, I am from God,*” but with the very event that inaugurated his authority. In other words, a decision about John is a decision about Jesus.

At this point they don’t know what to say. Look at verses 31-32. “**If we say, from heaven, he will say, why then did you not believe him? But shall we say, From man?—they were afraid of the people, for they all held that John really was a prophet.**” Now, the tables are turned. Instead of Jesus being trapped, they find themselves trapped. If they say, “from God,” they indict themselves and must put a stamp of approval on all Jesus has done. If they say, “from man,” the crowds may even stone them. Then, Jesus says to them in v. 33, “**Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.**”

2. The authority of the Son illustrated. Immediately following this confrontation Mark tells us of a parable that Jesus spoke (vv. 1-12). Let's read it together. Immediately we know this parable was spoken with direct reference to those who came to him in the temple. Verse 12 says, "**They perceived that he had told the parable against them.**" By the way, this is the only major parable outside of chapter 4 in the Gospel of Mark. The placement of this parable is very significant. It is clearly a story of Israel's relationship to the Son of God. And, it is clearly a parable of judgment.

As Jesus spoke these words, whether they liked them or not, everyone would have understood. Israel was full of vineyards. From the temple court you could have seen many of them on the hillsides. Israel was known as God's vineyard. Verses abound, but listen to the words of Isaiah in 5:1-2, "**Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. ² He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes.**" Not only did they have the Scriptures and the vineyards all around Jerusalem to understand the parable, they were also standing in the temple. And in the temple there was a huge door which led into the Holy Place. Across this door was a gold grapevine. The leaves were made of the finest gold and most costly jewels.

They would have also understood that the owner of the vineyard was God himself. As the owner of the vineyard planted a fence, dug a pit, and built a tower, so had God tended to his vineyard Israel in a special way, always doing what was necessary to preserve his people. From Abraham to Moses to Joshua, to David and even the establishment of the Temple under the rule of Solomon, God kept his vineyard. And, he expected great things from his vineyard. Then, Jesus says that the owner of the vineyard leased it to tenants. This was a very common thing to do in Palestine during the time of Jesus. And, its meaning was clear. As the owner leased the vineyard to take care of it, so God had entrusted leaders to care for his people. Again, this is evident from v. 12 we read a moment ago.

Then, as time for harvest came, God sent servants to collect the fruit. And what happened to these servants? Jesus said many of them came. Some were beaten. Some were killed. In every instance, the tenants trampled the ownership and authority of the owner of the vineyard. If the vineyard is Israel and its history then the servants are God's prophets and good priests. For example, Elijah was driven into the wilderness by the monarchy (1 Kings 19:1-5). The words of Isaiah were never obeyed by the nation of Israel and tradition says that he was killed by sawing him into two pieces. Zechariah was stoned to death near the altar (2 Chr. 24:21). John the Baptist was beheaded. On the faithful remnant of God, the writer of Hebrews says, "**They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated-- ³⁸ of whom the world was not worthy-- wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth**" (Heb. 11:37-38).

At the end of this time, the owner of the vineyard says, "*I will send my Son. Certainly, they will respect him.*" But when the tenants saw the son of the owner, they said, "*This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.*" Then, they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard.

At this point Jesus asks, “What will the owner of the vineyard do?” The answer is no surprise. **“He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others.”** Without going into much detail, this is exactly what we will see in the coming days. With the Apostles as “new tenants,” we will see them take the Gospel to the ends of the earth. We will see the Gentiles come into the Kingdom in mass. In 70 A.D. the temple will be destroyed.

After the parable, Jesus again appeals to their knowledge of the Scriptures. He says, **“Have you not read this Scripture: The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?”** I believe the religious leaders and the disciples would have understood these words clearly. It is so obvious. Jesus was saying, “I am the Son. God has sent me. I am the one who has authority. I am God’s representative. And, God is pleased.”

Let me also point out something that I find very interesting with this parable and its placement in the Gospel of Mark. Do you remember Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem and the words Mark used as he rode on the donkey? He quoted Psalm 118, one of Israel’s Messianic Psalms. Verse 25 says, **“Hosanna (save us), we pray, Oh Lord!”** And verse 26 says, **“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”** Now, at the end of this parable in front of the Sanhedrin, he quotes the same Psalm. Verses 22-23 say, **“The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.”** From cp. 11 and his coming into Jerusalem with the people shouting, **“Hosanna, Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord,”** to Israel’s tenants, the Sanhedrin, as those who have rejected the very foundational corner of Israel’s spiritual foundation, Jesus is the Messiah. He is the Son of God. Now, what are some things we can learn and apply from these verses?

1. The most obvious is this: Do not reject the Son of God. The religious leaders rejected God’s Messiah. In the face of clear evidence of God’s leading throughout their history, the witness of the Scriptures themselves, and the life that Jesus lived for 3 years openly, they rejected the very foundation to their relationship with God. This warning is also for us. Do not neglect the clear evidences of God throughout the history of your life. Do not reject the Son of God. Listen to the words from Heb. 2:1-3: **“Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. ² For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, ³ how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?”**

2. To those unwilling to commit themselves, Jesus refuses to commit himself. When the religious leaders from the Sanhedrin refuse to answer Jesus question, he says in 11:33: **“Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.”** Those who cannot be honest with themselves cannot be honest about Jesus. Unwillingness to make a judgment about God’s first acts eliminates the possibility of knowing the last act in Jesus. *“If there is even faith as small as a mustard seed,”* this is good.”

3. Consider the compassion of God. God is compassionate. In our parable today the landowner sent servant after servant to his tenants. Then, he sent his son. Today, this is a picture of the patience of God. God is long suffering, not desiring any to perish, but all to come to repentance.

What Farmer in his right mind would surrender his son to such tenants? This is what our God does. What a picture! And, he doesn't simply give his Son to the nation of Israel, but for the world. For the non-Christian, I would plead with you to turn to Christ. As the Psalmist says, **"Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him"** (Ps. 2:12).

As a Christian I ask you to rejoice in this kindness. Think back to before you believed on Christ. How many of you turned your back on God's clear speaking into your life by the Word, by friends, by your own conscience, only to find yourself in the grace of God today? And, even as a Christian, how many of you have not sinned over and over and over and over again, only to find a God who has thrown your sins as far as the east is from the west?

4. We see the beautiful providence of God in the face of sin and evil. Even though the leaders of Israel rejected their Messiah, the plan of God still prevailed. As we just read in Ps. 118, **"It (the killing of the Son) was marvelous in his eyes. Is. 53:10 and ff. says, "It pleased the Lord to crush his Son. . . Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. ¹¹ Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities."**

Christ will be supreme and retain the place the Father has appointed for him, no matter how strong the enemy may seem or sin may prevail. In short, the authority of God will prevail. He is sovereign and He will reign through the sending of his Son.

5. As a Christian we have all the means necessary from a loving God to bear fruit. The owner built a fence, a pit, and a tower for the vineyard's protection. He sent servants to gather the fruit. In the end, He sent His Son to gather the fruit. Today he gives us his Son and all the fruits are dependent upon Him. Do you remember John 15 where Jesus said, "Abide in Me and you will bear fruit. Apart from Me you can do nothing. He also gives us His Word. He gives us His Spirit. He gives us the Church. He gives us the ordinances of the church. He gives us each other. We must never stop calling upon Him in our weakness. For apart from him we can do nothing.

6. Do not be perplexed or think it strange when people reject the Son of God in spite of all the means and evidences that are before them.

7. We must learn that God is the owner of all. In respect to leaders, many have been disqualified because they are hanging onto "their ministries" as if the vineyard was their own. In respect to churches, we have seen the same. It is not about us! It is about the owner, God. He is still the owner. He is still sovereign. He still does as He pleases. He still cares for his vineyard. This means He gives the means to care for it. And, his means must not be neglected. This culminates in the giving of His Son.

8. Religion without Christ is empty. Institutional religion, even its pinnacle in the powerful and prestigious Sanhedrin, is empty unless it is centered in the "Stronger One," declared to be God's Son at the baptism of John. Notice that Mark begins and ends his Gospel with this truth. (1:1

says, **“In the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”** In 15:39 concerning the soldier standing at the foot of the cross, he says, **“And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, “Truly this man was the Son of God!”**”