

The Authority of Jesus

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[0 : 00] Well, we live in a society where there is little respect for authority, whether it's in government, in education, in the home or wherever. And it seems that any form of external authority is to be treated with suspicion or to be questioned or even just flatly rejected.

Because if the goal of life, which is our modern world's goal, if the goal of life is to pursue yourself, be true to yourself, find personal happiness, what sociologists would call expressive individualism. If the goal of life is to be happy, then it's all about you as the individual and you should be able to do what you want when you want to do it. Why care about what other people think or even what other people say? Just you be you. You do your own thing.

Other people have got no right. Institutions have got no right. Governments have got no right to tell you how to live your life. I decide for myself what I will do. Isn't that the motto for today?

The air that we breathe in the Western world, where it's the responsibility of every individual to determine what is best for me. But does this rejection of all forms of external authority really make us happier as individuals?

[1 : 19] Well, the statistics would say no. And so what is the answer? Well, it isn't to reject or to challenge or to question all forms of external authority, but it is to recognize and submit to the right kind of authority.

And that's really what we see in this passage from the Gospel of Mark this afternoon. And we see it come in a clash between the religious leaders and Jesus.

And the religious leaders question the authority of Jesus. But then when challenged, Jesus displays his authority. And he shows through this parable, the parable of the tenants, who has the ultimate authority for our lives.

It isn't you or me, but it is the God who made us. That is the right authority to recognize and submit to. And so three things to see this afternoon.

First of all, the challenge of Jesus' authority. Second, the rejection of Jesus' authority. And then third, the vindication of Jesus' authority. So first, the challenge of Jesus' authority.

[2 : 27] So Jesus, if you've been with us, is back in Jerusalem. He's heading towards the cross. And so verse 27 says, They arrived again in Jerusalem.

And while Jesus was walking in the temple courts, the chief priests and the teachers of the law and the elders came to him. Now, if you were here last week, Jesus had caused a scene by clearing the temple the day before.

And so Jesus is a problem for the whole Jewish religious establishment. Jesus had challenged their authority. And so now they want to challenge the authority of Jesus.

And so verse 28 says, And this is the religious leaders talking, By what authority are you doing these things? They asked. And who gave you authority to do this?

Now, they're talking about Jesus clearing the temple courts. How dare Jesus behave in such a way in our temple? Who does he think he is? And so this is an attempt to trap Jesus, to catch him out.

[3 : 28] And yet it was a huge mistake, as they would soon discover. Because just see what Jesus does here. What he does is he turns the tables right back on the religious leaders. And so we see this.

Jesus replied, Now, there are only two possible answers to that question.

Was John's baptism from heaven? In other words, was it from God? Or was it of human origin?

Was it God? Or was it man? And if the religious teachers say John's authority was of human origin, It wouldn't go down well, Because the people saw John as a prophet.

And the leaders feared the people. They would turn against him if they didn't side with John. And so they couldn't say that. And yet on the other hand, If they answered that John's authority came from

heaven, It was a shocking admission that they didn't believe John.

And so what Jesus does is he connects John the Baptist's ministry with his own ministry. And the logic of Jesus' question is, Well, if the baptism of John was from heaven, from God, Then the authority of Jesus is from God.

[4 : 49] And if John came from God to prepare the way for Jesus, And if John baptized Jesus and recognized Jesus as the Messiah, Then to acknowledge that John's baptism was from God, Was to admit that Jesus was the Messiah.

And that's why the correct answer to Jesus' question Gives the religious leaders the correct answer to their question. But it wasn't the answer they wanted. Because their answer actually reveals what they think about Jesus.

And so there's no way that they would acknowledge Jesus' authority over them. No way that they would submit to it. And so what they do is they dodge the challenge altogether with their evasive answer.

Verse 33, So they answered Jesus, We don't know. Jesus said, Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things. Jesus had forced them into a corner.

All they could say was, We don't know. And it's a pathetic answer to avoid the fundamental issue. Because they couldn't bring themselves to give Jesus a straight answer.

[5 : 59] Because in reality, They did know. They just didn't want to accept the authority of Jesus. And many are in the same boat today. People challenged by the authority of Jesus.

But it's not really that they don't know. It's more that they don't want to accept the authority of Jesus over their lives. Many will not want to accept that Jesus is from God.

And therefore must be listened to. Because it will have consequences. Listen to what the atheist philosopher Thomas Nagel said. He said, I speak from experience.

Being strongly subject to this fear myself. I want atheism to be true. And I'm made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers.

It isn't just that I don't believe in God. I naturally hope that I'm right in my belief. It's that I hope there is no God. I don't want there to be a God.

[7 : 04] I don't want the universe to be like that. My guess is that this cosmic authority problem is not a rare condition. So can you hear what he's saying?

He's saying not just that he doesn't want to believe in God. But he doesn't want God to exist at all. He doesn't want God to be there.

He hopes that he doesn't exist. He doesn't want there to be a God. Because if there is a God, then if you follow the logic, then he will have to accept that God and live under his authority.

So he'd rather he wasn't there at all. And that's what he fears. Because if God doesn't exist, then you can live your life any way you want, can't you?

But if God is there and God sent Jesus, then we've got to accept his authority over our lives. And submitting to Jesus will be a radical upheaval of life.

[8 : 06] And perhaps you're here this afternoon and you're exploring Christianity. You wouldn't call yourself a Christian. And what puts you off is the idea that becoming a Christian is not just an intellectual exercise for you.

But becoming a Christian means there will be a moral change in your life. Some things will have to start. Other things will have to stop. And you don't want that authority bearing down upon your life. And so it can be far easier for some just to avoid the authority of Jesus. It's not just a question of does Jesus have authority.

Because if he is who he says he is, then of course he does. But it's a question of, well, will we bow to his authority? Will we submit ourselves to him?

Because what Jesus does here with the religious leaders is he forces them to respond to him. It can be easier to duck the challenge of Jesus.

[9 : 03] But Jesus won't allow us to slip away from the hard question about whether he is king and lord. And so for the religious teachers, they had to choose.

Would they crown him as king or would they kill him? They chose to kill him. And that's why Jesus tells this parable, which we'll look at next. So first of all, we see the challenge of Jesus' authority.

Secondly, the rejection of Jesus' authority. So the religious leaders had rejected Jesus. And so what Jesus does is he specifically addresses them with this parable.

Now they're in it. And they knew they were in it. So just jump down to chapter 12, verse 12. Then the chief priests and the teachers of the law and the elders looked for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken the parable against them.

Now this wasn't paranoia on the part of the religious leaders. So how does this parable then describe the rejection of Jesus? Well, like all of Jesus' parables, it's set in real life.

[10:10] He takes a situation that the listeners are familiar with. And he uses it to apply a deeper truth. Because disputes with landowners and tenants were common in that society.

And yet Jesus goes deeper because his parable really tells the story of Israel and in fact the story of our world, of world history. And so in the Old Testament, the vineyard was a common metaphor for Israel.

So the imagery for Jesus' parable actually comes out of Isaiah chapter 5. So just listen to these words from Isaiah chapter 5 and see the parallels here in Mark 12.

Isaiah 5 says, That's a beautiful description in Isaiah of God loving his people and providing the very best for them.

But then later on in Isaiah chapter 5, we read this, The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the nation of Israel. So Israel and Isaiah is rebuked for their failure to produce fruit for God.

[11:37] Because God then announces his judgment for their rebellion against him. And so none of this would have been lost on these religious leaders. They were aware that the vineyard was talking about Israel.

And so verse 1, chapter 12, Jesus then began to speak to them in parables. A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the wine press, and built a watchtower.

And he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. Words that echo Isaiah chapter 5. So the vineyard is Israel. And who's the owner of the vineyard?

Well, the owner of the vineyard is God. And we see this, verse 2, At harvest time, he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. But they seized him, beat him, sent him away empty-handed.

Then he sent another servant to them, and they struck this man on the head, and so on, and so on, and so on. So Israel's leaders, those that Jesus was speaking to, are the tenants in Jesus' parable.

[12:42] So what's the point of the parable? Well, in the immediate context, the parable tells how Israel's leaders had rejected God in the past. And now, Jesus is going to say that they are rejecting him in the present.

And so the parable is a sad and a shocking tale. Because Jesus pictures God as the owner of the vineyard. He is generous, and he is good, and he gives the tenants freedom.

And so what he expects is that the tenants will give him his share of the fruit. And yet they refuse, despite all the servants that he sends. And so God, in the Old Testament, sent prophet after prophet after prophet to his people.

And yet the prophets were rejected again, and again, and again. And yet, God faithfully loved his people. God didn't give up.

Infinitely patient. And yet his people continued to refuse God, refused to worship him, and to give him the obedience that God was due.

[13:51] And yet God didn't give up on his people. And that's when Jesus introduces himself as a character in his own parable. In verse 6, He had one left to send, a son whom he loved.

He sent him, last of all, saying, They will respect my son. Now this phrase, a son whom he loved, has already been said in the Gospel of Mark.

So twice, God has declared that Jesus is the son he loves. So way back in Mark chapter 1, the baptism of Jesus, a voice came from heaven saying, You are my son whom I love.

With you I am well pleased. And then again, later on in Mark's Gospel, the transfiguration, chapter 9, Again, a voice declared, This is my son whom I love.

Listen to him. And so whether we're the religious leaders listening to Jesus' parable, or whether we're the readers of Mark's Gospel then or today, we're left in no doubt that Jesus is the son.

[14:59] He is the owner's son in the parable. So God the Father sent God the Son to be the Messiah. That's what this parable is saying. And yet Jesus goes further than just simply reveal his identity here because he's telling his listeners that they're going to kill him.

So verse 7 and 8, But the tenants said to one another, This is the heir. Come, let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours. So they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard.

So if the religious leaders thought they could get away with rejecting Jesus, then the parable shows just how pathetic their thinking really was.

How could they kill the son and expect to claim the inheritance when the owner of the vineyard was still around? And that's why Jesus concludes by asking the obvious question and then giving the obvious answer.

Verse 9, What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others. So the tenants are killed. They don't get away with their shocking rebellion against the owner and against his son by rejecting him.

[16:13] And it's a perfectly logical end to the story, isn't it? Who could argue about this conclusion to this story? Doesn't the owner do the right thing? Of course he does. The owner had been patient.

The owner had sent numerous servants expecting to get what he was due. And yet the tenants refused to give him his due. And so he sent his son.

They killed his son. And so he killed them. That's the end of the parable. And so Jesus was announcing judgment on these religious leaders because they had rebelled against God by failing to give God his due.

And they had rejected Jesus and they were about to kill him. But the implications of this parable go much further because what this parable does is actually reveals humanity's attitude towards God. How we all treat God. How we all insult God in such a shocking manner. Essentially describes what we're all like.

[17:17] Because God is the owner and everything belongs to him. And yet we don't want to be accountable to God. And so we resist his rightful rule over our lives.

And of course we want the inheritance. It's good, the inheritance. But we like to think of ourselves as the owner. We don't want to be just tenants.

We want to be in charge ourselves. And this comes straight out of the Garden of Eden. Right at the beginning of the Bible in Genesis. Where our first parents, Adam and Eve, chose to reject God's rightful rule and rightful authority over them.

And that has been the story of the human race ever since. And so our 21st century culture in the West just typifies this. Where it's all about me.

My life, my desires, my identity, my rights, my choice, my way. I am the master of my fate. I am the captain of my soul.

[18:22] You do you. That is our motto, isn't it? According to our culture. It's all about self-actualization, self-realization, self-fulfillment.

I have the authority to do what I like. And I have the authority to be who I want to be. And yet the parable that Jesus tells here warns how stupid it is to think and to live in this way.

Jesus is saying, wait. Hang on a second. Don't you realize that you are only a tenant? You are only here on this earth, in this world, because God allows you to be here.

And you are what you are, not because you have done anything, but because that is what God has made you. And you have what you have, not because you've achieved it all in your own strength, but because God in his goodness has given all of this to you.

You are not the owner. You don't have the right or the authority to behave like you are the owner. And yet, we can so often view God's rightful authority over our lives as a threat to us.

[19:43] That's why we want to seize control of our lives and simply push God away. And this parable tells us, well, yeah, that might work for a while, resisting God, like the tenants in the parable did.

But it won't work forever, will it? Pushing God out of our lives doesn't mean that we do actually take charge of our lives. Or that we even take charge of our destiny.

We just can't. And so God's patience should never be mistaken as indifference, should it? God is patient with us. He is not forcing his authority on us.

But if we continue to refuse his authority, then we turn ourselves into his enemies. It's shocking. As well as being utterly foolish, as the parable tells us.

Let me try to illustrate. Before I came to Glasgow, I lived in a lesser city called Edinburgh, through in the east. And before I became a minister, I used to work by going into schools and teaching children and young people, primary school and secondary school, about Christianity.

[20:53] And one of my favorite lessons for younger children to help them understand the story of the Bible was this lesson. So what I'd do is I would give each child in the class a piece of plasticine

or some Play-Doh.

And what they had to do was they had to make a little world all of their own. So they were the creator. They could design this world however they wanted to design it. And so they'd enjoy making animals, trees, people, weird creatures, whatever it was.

And then I'd say to them, okay, this is your world. You're the creator. These are your people. Why don't you make up some rules for how life in this world will work best? And so what they would basically do was end up making up a list of commandments.

It's funny how, isn't it, that when you tell people what's the best way to live, they end up having something that resembles God's ten commandments. So anyway, they'd make up their rules and then I'd say to them, that's great.

That's great. If everybody keeps these rules, the world will be a brilliant place. Everybody will love it. But what if the people you have made don't want to listen to you?

[21 : 58] What if they reject these rules that really are best for everybody? What are you going to do then? And without exception, whatever the age of the children, they'd always say that this wasn't right.

This was wrong. This was unacceptable behavior. And then one day, a little cute girl, I remember it well, blonde hair, blue eyes. What she did was she said, well, if that happened in my world, and she picked up all her people, put them in her hand.

She said, with anger in her face, I would squish them. And who could argue with her? Who could argue?

She felt the rejection of being dissed by all of these little Play-Doh plaster scene people in her world. It was bang out of order for a six-year-old.

And so as readers of Jesus' parable, we are meant to feel the shock of the way that this generous owner is treated by the tenants whom he has allowed to exist in his vineyard.

[23 : 05] And it is scandalous, isn't it, that God should be treated in this way by the people he owns and loves. It is the ultimate insult.

And that's why God must punish all of those who continue to reject him and to insist upon their own independence. That's why Jesus' story ends like that.

And yet there's a twist in the tale at the end. And that's our third point, the vindication of Jesus' authority. So this was a hard message for Israel's leaders to hear.

They had no doubt Jesus is addressing this parable to them. And so we can't afford to miss the warning here. But there's more than just the warning. We've heard the warning. There is also a tremendous opportunity.

Because the parable doesn't really end with the killing of the tenants. Did you notice that? The vineyard wasn't destroyed. It was given to others. So what does that mean?

[24 : 04] Well, it means that God's vineyard would grow and it would produce fruit. But not through the Jewish religious leaders. It was given to others, the parable says.

Namely, it was given to the apostles. Because the rest of the New Testament tells how God's people expanded and have grown. So much so that we are sitting here today as the church.

We are the fruit of the vineyard, if you like. Because the parable points towards the salvation that Jesus gives. And that's why Jesus asks another challenging question of the religious leaders in verse 10 and 11.

Haven't you read? Somewhat sarcastically, I think, he says. Haven't you read this passage of scripture? Like, you're the boffins who should know theology. The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

The Lord has done this and it is marvelous in our eyes. So Jesus is quoting Psalm 118. That's why David led us in that in our call to worship and why we sang it earlier in our service.

[25 : 07] Because it's a psalm that declares God's salvation. And it's a psalm that is fulfilled in Jesus. And so the picture here that comes from the psalm in Mark 12 is of a stone and it's on a building site.

And the stone there is just thought to be a useless stone of no purpose, no good for anything. And so the builders reject this stone and yet this stone that's rejected actually becomes the most important stone in the building.

It was the cornerstone. The thing that kept and held everything together. And so Jesus is talking about himself. He is the rejected stone.

The leaders rejected him. People still reject him today. He is the rejected stone. And yet he is the most important one. And so while he was rejected by the religious leaders and would be killed on a cross through his resurrection from the dead, he would be the cornerstone of the new temple, as it were.

So God's people would be built around Jesus. He'd be the one who would hold everything together. And so just listen to how Peter describes this in 1 Peter 2.

[26 : 23] He says, It's telling us this is what God is doing in Jesus.

He's building a people for himself. And that's why it says here that this is marvelous. It's marvelous because it was God's plan to use the rejection and the death of his own son as the way of bringing salvation to the world.

And the way of building a people for himself called the church. And so here's the thing. Jesus came to die for all the ways that you and I reject God's authority over our lives.

And on the cross, he took the punishment that you and I deserve so that we can be forgiven. And it really is marvelous. And so the owner described in this parable, God, he doesn't force his authority over us.

Instead, what has he done? He has come to win our hearts by revealing his great love for us and sending his own son to die despite our rejection of him.

[27 : 48] And so the issue is, have we accepted the authority of God over our lives? Because Jesus' parable warns us that while God is patient, he won't be patient forever.

And so it is completely foolish to think that we can live in God's world and enjoy God's good gifts and yet live our lives independently of him.

We will face God's judgment for rejecting his son, Jesus. Because God, as our loving creator, is due our worship.

He is due our obedience. And so we ought to give him his due. That's how we respond to his marvelous work for us in Jesus.

By making Jesus Christ the cornerstone of our lives. Making sure that Jesus is the most important to us. Because everything must revolve around him.

[28 : 50] And do you know why? Because one day in the future, everything will revolve around Jesus. Every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

He is the ultimate authority we must submit to. He must be Lord of all. Or else, for us, he isn't Lord at all. How will we follow him?

Or else? For us? To notice, every village will promise. Which will leave us with our ley As an applause to our light and light on him. Let's give you an opportunity between Jesus and all the people from the person of the party.

Thank you sir. Thank you.