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# By Whose Authority?

Mark 11:27-12:12<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

Ever had your authority challenged? Was it asked as a “I want to understand...” or “How dare you do that...”?

Listen to Mark 11:27-28...

<sup>27</sup> And they came again to Jerusalem. And as he was walking in the temple, the chief priests and the scribes and the elders came to him, <sup>28</sup> and they said to him, “By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?”

Think backward to what Jesus has done in Jerusalem the day before. He entered the city with great fanfare and praise. He went into the court of the Gentiles and confronted the evil that was going on there. He declared that God’s house was to be a place for all the Gentiles. He has essentially attacked the Jewish leadership for their greed and vice.

Now, Jesus stands in Solomon’s porch amid a forest of Corinthian columns, looking out over the Kidron Valley. He surrounded by the religious leaders of Israel. He is there to engage them and confront them. Oh, they think they are going to surround Him and take Him on. In this and the texts that follow the confrontation takes place. Each of the groups within the religious leaders has their shot at Jesus.

## The Challenge (v. 27-33)

The battle lines are drawn. They are going to challenge Jesus’ authority. But Jesus is going to challenge their rebellion.

<sup>27</sup> And they came again to Jerusalem. And as he was walking in the temple, the chief priests and the scribes and the elders came to him, <sup>28</sup> and they said to him, “By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?” <sup>29</sup> Jesus said to them, “I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. <sup>30</sup> Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man? Answer me.” <sup>31</sup> And they discussed it with one another, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’ <sup>32</sup> But shall we say, ‘From man?’”—they were afraid of the people, for they all held that John really was a prophet. <sup>33</sup> So they answered Jesus, “We do not

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know.” And Jesus said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.”

### ***The Confronting Demand (v. 27-28)***

Three groups within the religious leadership of the Jews circle around Jesus lack a pack of wolves. They were called the Sanhedrin. They are not happy. They have authorized what Jesus attacked and symbolically put a stop to.

So they have want to know how dare He do that? What is His authority? Who gave Him that authority? He rode in as the one who was the fulfillment of the Messianic promise. Then He promptly moved to halt a practice authorized by the religious leadership. So, who gave Him the right to do that?

### ***The Confounding Question (v. 29-30)***

Faced with unbelieving hatred, Jesus offers a deal. “Answer my question and I will answer yours.” His question is not a random one. It is one that is meant to remind them of the ministry of John the Baptist, whom they rejected as well. In essence, Jesus asks them, “By whose authority did John baptize? Was he authorized by God in heaven or the Jewish leadership on earth?”

### ***The Cowardly Response (v. 31-33)***

The heart of the Pharisees is exposed. They are afraid of the people. This is why they challenge Jesus’ authority. He has exposed their hypocrisy. Their answer is not about what is true or what they really think. It is a political calculus. If John had heaven’s authority, then why didn’t they believe? But if they say John merely had man’s authority, they run up against popular opinion which said that John was a prophet. In either case, they have to acknowledge that John was the prophet with heaven’s authority. And to do so, means that John’s preaching about Jesus must be received and accepted.

Well they can’t have that so they answer with what is essentially a lie, “We don’t know”. Jesus says that he won’t tell them by what authority He has done what He does.

## **The Story (12:1-9)**

But Jesus is about to tell a story. This judgment parable reminds all, those to whom it was spoken, those to whom the book was written and now to us what happened to Israel.

**12:** <sup>1</sup> And he began to speak to them in parables. “A man planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a pit for the winepress and built a tower, and leased it to tenants and went into another country. <sup>2</sup> When the season came, he sent a servant to the tenants to get from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. <sup>3</sup> And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. <sup>4</sup> Again he sent to them another servant, and they struck him on the head and treated him shamefully. <sup>5</sup> And he sent another, and him they killed. And so with many others:

some they beat, and some they killed. <sup>6</sup> He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent *him* to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' <sup>7</sup> But those tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' <sup>8</sup> And they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard. <sup>9</sup> What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others.

### ***An Entrusted Stewardship (v. 1)***

This story is primarily about Israel. But it also invokes the larger story of the first garden and fall. God prepared, planted and protected the vineyard. And then He leased it to people who were to take care of it and to give its fruit to the owner. They were not the owners. They were stewards. The Lord gave Israel to be His people, the light of the world, the recipients of the Law of God, the place where God would manifest Himself and where all who would, could come and worship.

The stories and parables of the Bible tell us things about people, history and the world. But mostly they tell us about God. God is shown to be great and gracious. He has given His people a national identity, a land of fruitfulness and a place of worship.

### ***An Escalating Rejection (v. 2-5)***

But something dreadful happens. The story that follows would have been a familiar part of Middle Eastern life. The legal records of the day reflect some of the most harrowing troubles between tenant farmers and landlords. In the parable, the owner starts sending servants to bring in the fruit from his vineyard. In an escalating rejection, the farmers beat the first servant and sent him back with nothing. The owner sends more servants. Some they beat. Some they treat shamefully by doing vile things to them and exposing them. Finally, some they kill.

Down through the ages, God sent prophets to Israel. The national and religious leaders to whom God had entrusted the people of God, did unspeakable things to many of the prophets. Some were beaten and some were hounded. Some were stoned and one was sawn in two. Yet God, in His patience, meekness and grace, kept sending servants to God's people.

### ***An Expected Murder (v. 6-8)***

So finally the owner decides to send his son. Now this is not just any son. IT is his beloved son. This son is loved by his father and will inherit the vineyard. The full expectation is that the farmers will respect the son. Vilely, the very logic that should have caused them to accept and respect the son, is turned into murderous intent. Kill the heir and all this will be ours. And so these wicked people took the son and killed him. Then in act of gross disrespect, they threw his dead body outside the vineyard.

Loving His people. God purposed and planned to send His Son so that they would believe and receive Him. But instead, they had the Romans execute Him. But their wicked hands were doing the plan and will of God He devised from eternity past. We know, because we have read the rest of the story that Jesus was raised from the dead.

### ***An Exposing Question (v. 9)***

So what do they think? What is going to happen next? Do they think that the absence of the landlord means the apathy of the landlord? Is the mercy, grace and longsuffering of the Lord mean He doesn't care? No, judgement is coming. He will destroy the leaders that were entrusted with the vineyard. He will hand the garden, the vineyard to others.

Now the people of God are not just one people group and one nation. The vineyard has been taken away from them and given to all. This judgment upon Israel has now brought salvation to the Gentiles. What a glorious God.

This is a global story about God, His people and those to whom God has given authority. And it is a local story about these Jewish religious and national leaders who are about to have the Son from heaven, executed.

### **The Explanation (v. 10-11)**

But the story has a Scriptural twist.

<sup>10</sup> Have you not read this Scripture: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; <sup>11</sup> this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?"

### ***The Scriptures Foretold***

What is going on at this moment in this text is the fulfillment of what the Scriptures foretold. This text is quoted from Psalm 118:22-23. That was a part of the Hallel Psalms that would have been quoted in Passover week. This text is quoted by Jesus and later by the Apostle Peter and directly applied to Jesus.

Jesus is the cornerstone. A cornerstone in olden days was cut as square as possible and was used to align the walls. But it also was inscribed with facts of the building; its date, its purpose and its owner. But the perfect stone was rejected by those who were to build according to God's plan. They cast it aside. But God has taken and has made Him the chief cornerstone. All that God will build will be aligned to and publicly declared to be owned by Jesus Christ our Lord.

### ***The Scriptures Authorize***

So, this is not an accident of history. This not some myth or morality play. This is the deep truth. This is what the Lord designed, declared and has done. The Scriptures have authorized the Person and work of Jesus.

But will it be marvelous to them? Will it be marvelous to us?

One commentator has eloquently written, "As Jesus' final words echoed through Solomon's Porch and then died away, the Sanhedrin had heard an outline of sacred history past and present. They had heard an eloquent description of the *hope* of God, the *kindness* of God, the *severity* of God, and the *triumph* of God. They had heard all this from the most authentic voice that ever spoke." (Hughes, p. 98)

## The Response (v. 12)

Does the Lord's words bring repentance? Do they say, "You know, you are right. We are sorry..."

<sup>12</sup> And they were seeking to arrest him but feared the people, for they perceived that he had told the parable against them. So they left him and went away.

### *Their Goal*

What was all this about? They were looking for a reason that they could arrest Jesus. In Mark's account the religious leaders have now begun to seek a way to get Jesus off the streets and if necessary, put him to death.

### *Their Fear*

But they are afraid of the people. Those standing around heard the parable. Both the religious leaders and the crowd understood that the parable was aimed as a warning to them and against them. Jesus has threatened them with God, the Father, coming to destroy them and to take away their place. But they, are more afraid of the people. Fear of man rules their hearts rather than fear of God.

### *Their Exit*

You can see it can't you? They look at one another. They frown. They whirls around with a big gesture of sweeping cloaks. They went away.

## Reflect and Respond

Praise the Lord for His love and mercy and grace to us Gentiles. We have also been included in the people of God, redeemed by the Lord Jesus. How this ought to fill our hearts with wonder.

By whose authority did Jesus act and do we preach? By the authority of Word of God. All that is said here resonates from "Have you not read what the Scriptures says?"

The Jews truly thought they were God's people just because they were Jews. The religious leaders of Jesus' day thought they were authentic and authorized. They were conservative, defenders of the Law and protectors of the Deity of God. But they rejected the Lord Jesus. Their religion blinded them from the truth. As a result they came under the judgment of God. Has religion blinded you to the truth about Jesus? Have you believed and bowed to Him?

Are you willing to accept the authority of Jesus over your life? Is He truly Lord? Or do you want the redemption and the rewards He promises with His right to rule over you? Now His rule is gracious, kind and generous and easy to bear. But He will tell you how to live. He will insist that you believe what He says. He will be King.