

It is Dangerous to Deny the Authority of Christ

The Gospel of Mark: Mighty and Mild / Mark 11:27-12:12 / April 28, 2024

Introduction:

What is the ultimate authority in your life? The question of authority is one of the most important questions for us to consider, and most of what we see happening around us today is connected to it. Many of us may say God is our ultimate authority, but when we comb the depths of our hearts, is He really? Our passage today focuses on the authority of Jesus, through a confrontation with Sanhedrin, the Jewish high court and religious authority in Israel, and parable that Jesus gives to point out their folly of placing themselves as the final authority and rejecting God's authority over their lives. This confrontation and parable challenge our hearts to ask if Jesus Christ is really the ultimate authority in our lives. Or whether we, like the Sanhedrin, have placed ourselves as that authority instead. The authority of Jesus is all over this gospel. We have seen it shown through His claims, how He teaches, His power over the demonic world, how creation obeys His voice, and even the Father's declarations of who Jesus truly is. It has been what most often astonishes the crowds and infuriates His opponents. Mark 11:27-12:12 brings that authority to the forefront as the beginning of five controversies Jesus has in Jerusalem with the religious leaders to show God's judgement for their rejection of His rule. Through this confrontation and parable that follows, Mark shows us three things about the authority of Jesus. First, in chapter 11, verses 27-33, how,

The Baptism of John Confirms the Authority of Jesus

Before we look at our text, let's remember what we saw last week, because the confrontation relates to it. When Jesus entered Jerusalem, He surveyed the temple and came back overturning tables and driving out everyone out taking part in buying and selling sacrificial animals judging Israel for making God's house a den of robbers and keeping the nations from worshipping God. Look at how Mark continues in verses 27-28, "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, and they said to him, 'By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?'" Word got out and the chief priests, scribes, and elders, who made up the Sanhedrin, the full religious authority of Israel, approached Jesus for the first time all together to question Him. What gave Jesus the right to do these things, or more specifically who gave Him authority to do it? When we consider their position in Israel, we see they are really saying, "we didn't give you this authority and who are you to claim it." See, they forgot where their authority came from, and foolishly assumed they were the highest authority. Notice Jesus' response in verses 29-30, "Jesus said to them, 'I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man? Answer me.'" Consistent with rabbinic debating practices, Jesus counters their question with one of His own, designed to expose their folly. Was it God who commissioned John to proclaim the baptism of repentance in preparation for the Lord's coming? Or man? What's interesting is the right answer to this question would have answered their question of Jesus. Do you remember how Mark's gospel opened? It opened with the prophetic words of Malachi and Isaiah about one coming to prepare the way of the Lord. After this, John appears proclaiming a baptism of repentance and how one mightier than he was coming. Then Jesus is baptized, and we hear the Father's declaration of Jesus as His beloved Son. In this counter question, Jesus is saying, "look back at the baptism of John and you will see that John's authority came from God and he pointed to me, showing my authority comes from God."

Church, in one way, everything we need to know about Jesus can come from the baptism of John. John confirms Jesus is the Lord to come, showing Jesus' authority is God's authority. If they would accept where the baptism of John came from, they would know who Jesus was and where His authority came from. Yet, look at what happens in verses 31-33, "And they discussed it with one another, saying, '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. So, they answered Jesus, 'We do not know.'

And Jesus said to them, ‘Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.’” The Sanhedrin realized they are now trapped. If they deny the baptism of John as coming from God, they will lose the trust of the people and their authority over them, because they all believed John was a prophet. But if they accept that John was a prophet from God, they will have to accept what he said about Jesus. So they cowardly say “We do not know,” and Jesus refuses to answer them. Note how they can’t deny the evidence they had seen, or what John confirmed about the authority of Jesus, but are desperately trying to avoid it. Family, the problem with coming under the authority of Jesus isn’t in the evidence, it’s in the heart. It is the sin in our hearts that denies the evidence to keep ourselves as the authority in our lives. If we aren’t coming under the authority of Jesus, like the Sanhedrin, we don’t need more clarity, we need more humility. As James 4:7–8 says, “Submit yourselves therefore to God... Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.” We need to take ourselves off of the throne of our hearts and place Jesus Christ where He belongs. We need to trust that His ways are truly better than our ways. As we draw near to God in submission, He draws near to us. The second thing we see about the authority of Jesus is found in verses 1-8 of the parable that follows in chapter 12, showing us how,

Rejecting the Authority of Jesus is Rejecting the Authority of God

Back in Mark chapter 4, Jesus says parables are designed to hide the truth from those who don’t believe, but this parable is unique because it exposes the truth to the Sanhedrin. Look at how it begins in verse 1, “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.’” The parable opens with a man who plants a vineyard, secures the vineyard, leases it to tenants, and goes away for a while. When interpreting parables, the goal is to identify how each element in the story relates to what the parable is speaking for or against. The man and the vineyard become clear when we understand the backdrop of the Old Testament. A vine or vineyard is commonly used as an image for Israel as God’s special people throughout the Old Testament. What is most interesting is how Jesus’ language at the beginning of verse 1 mirrors Isaiah 5:1-2. Listen to what Isaiah says, “Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. 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.” Isaiah speaks of Israel as a vineyard God planted, provided for, and protected, in similar language to how Jesus speaks of the man and vineyard in our parable. However, if you continue in Isaiah 5, you will see God’s judgement was against the vineyard, Israel, because of their lack of fruit. Jesus’ parable focuses the tenants God had placed over the vineyard, which we see are the religious leaders of Israel placed to guide Israel to spiritual fruitfulness. The purpose of Jesus’ allusion to Isaiah 5 is to connect to God’s judgment, but instead of speaking of judgment against the vineyard, as Isaiah does, Jesus’ speaks judgement against the tenants and offers hope for the vineyard. Notice what happens in verses 2-5, “When the season came, he sent a servant to the tenants to get from them some of the fruit of the vineyard.’ And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Again, he sent to them another servant, and they struck him on the head and treated him shamefully. And he sent another, and him they killed. And so with many others: some they beat, and some they killed.” The servants represent the prophets sent to Israel over and over again to call God’s people back to Himself. So, Jesus is showing how God sent many prophets to collect the yield of the harvest, but the tenants repeatedly beat and killed them. Jeremiah 20:2 speaks of how Jeremiah was beaten and put in stocks. 2 Chronicles 24:21 shows the prophet Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, being stoned to death in the temple by the king. Tradition suggests Isaiah was sawn in two. And the prophet, in Nehemiah 9:26, says to God, after Israel possessed the land due to God’s grace, “Nevertheless, they were disobedient and rebelled against you and cast your law behind their back and killed your prophets.” Time and time again, God sent His prophets to Israel to look for fruit and call for repentance, but they were consistently disregarded, mistreated, and killed. The parable shows how the leaders God entrusted His people to were responsible for this.

Church, before we move on, take some time to consider the patience of God with His people. He relentlessly pursued them despite their rebellion. He lovingly sent prophet after prophet to call them to return but they would not. Our God is so merciful and patient. Look now at verses 6-8, “He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally, he sent him to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’” Pause there. You almost cry out, “don’t send the son,” don’t you? Yet, God’s mercy goes that far. He sends His son in a final attempt to get their attention. Note how it’s the owners “beloved son.” This reminds us of the Father’s declarations at Jesus’ baptism and transfiguration. The phrase indicates only son, loved and cherished by the father. Oh family, see what our God has done to redeem us. I love how Charles Spurgeon speaks of this, saying, “Let us see for a minute who this Messenger is. He is one greatly beloved of His Father and in Himself He is of surpassing excellence. The Lord Jesus Christ is so inconceivably glorious that I tremble at any attempt to describe His Glory. Assuredly, He is very God of very God, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and yet He stooped to take upon Himself a human form!” (Charles Spurgeon, “The Pleading”). This is the one sent to be mistreated and denied the honor that He deserved because of our sin. The end of verse 7 doesn’t suggest God was taken off guard by this but shows how His Son should have been respected. Continue, then, in verses 7-8, “But those tenants said to one another, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’ And they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard.” Look at the reaction of the tenants. Not only do they not listen to the son, but they assume if they kill him, the yield of the vineyard would be theirs. Note how they recognized he was the son. It was obvious who he was, but their self-centered greed led them to kill him and throw him out of the vineyard. There is no burial, no honor, only death and disregard. Jesus’ parable shows the tenant’s rejection of the servants and son is ultimately a rejection of the owner’s authority. The religious leader’s rejection of Jesus wasn’t just a rejection of a good man, or even a prophet, it was a rejection of the authority of God over their lives, as Israel had done all throughout their history. Any rejection of the authority of Jesus Christ in your life is ultimately a rejection of the authority of God. The final thing Mark shows about the authority of Jesus comes from verses 9-11, showing us how,

Rejecting the Authority of Jesus Leads to Judgment and Condemnation

At the end of telling this parable, Jesus asks the Sanhedrin a final question to show God’s judgment of their actions. Look at verses 9-11, “What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. 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?”” Mercy runs out for the wicked tenants and Jesus says God will come and destroy them. This happened. In 70 A.D. God executed this judgment on Jerusalem and the religious system in Israel. The temple was destroyed. The Sanhedrin was removed, along with the priesthood, chief priests, Pharisees, and Sadducees. The whole religious system was judged and destroyed. Church, God is patient and longsuffering, but that patience will run out and those who reject the authority of Jesus, like the Sanhedrin, will suffer eternal consequences. Yet, there is hope in Jesus’ parable. Look at what he says at the end of verse 9, the vineyard is given to others. The tenants are removed, but God will continue to have His vineyard, His people. It will look different but it will not fade away. Then Jesus quotes Psalm 118:22-23 to show God knew His Son would be rejected, but the Son would also raise to life and become the cornerstone. Their rejection was part of God’s plan, and the Son would be placed as the stabilizing foundational stone of God’s people. And family, let verse 11 sing to your heart, “this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.” As Isaiah 53:10-11 says, “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. 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.” This is marvelous in our eyes because the death and resurrection of Jesus made an offering for our guilt, securing our forgiveness, ensuring that we who trust in Him are accounted righteous.

The religious leaders thought they were ridding themselves of the Son, but everything they did to Jesus Christ was predestined to take place according to the plan of God, and death could not contain Him. Their rejection is devastating and the consequences of it is sobering, but don't let it drive you to despair. Instead let it turn your heart away from any rejection of the authority of Christ to a loving embrace that sees His death and resurrection as marvelous. As Peter says in 1 Peter 2:6-8, "For it stands in Scripture: 'Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.' So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.' and 'A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.'" Don't let Christ be a stumbling stone of offense, but your pathway to life and honor. Consider verse 12 with me and how it leads us to respond, "And they [the Sanhedrin] 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." This verse is loaded with travesty. They understood the meaning of Jesus' parable. They understood they were the tenants who were about to try and execute the Son of God. Yet, they continue in their rebellion against the will of God and rejection of the authority of Christ, but it wasn't time for Christ to die yet, so they left him due to fear of the people. Let their reaction lead you to consider your response to our passage.

Will You Reject or Embrace the authority of Jesus Christ?

This parable shows there is no hope for those who reject the authority of Jesus. He has been firmly placed as the cornerstone. You will either build your life upon the stone or stumble over it. There is no in between. As Spurgeon says well, "If you do not hear the well-beloved Son of God, you have refused your last hope. He is God's ultimatum. Nothing remains when Christ is refused. No one else can be sent. Heaven, itself, contains no further messenger. If Christ is rejected, hope is rejected!" (Charles Spurgeon, "The Pleading"). You have heard this morning how the baptism of John confirmed His authority and seen how rejecting His authority is rejecting the authority of God, leading to peril. Will you disregard what you have heard, like the Sanhedrin, because you want to be the authority over your life? Will fear of losing that authority keep you from mercy? Don't reject the authority of Jesus Christ and His offer of mercy but turn embrace His authority over your life. Here in lies one of the greatest beauties of the gospel, the authority of Jesus is our highest and greatest good. His ways are always best. His presence is the greatest joy imaginable. He leads and guides like a perfect shepherd always knowing exactly what our hearts truly need. The Sanhedrin's response shows the peril of clinging to our own rule over our lives. The call of discipleship isn't a call to give Christ partial authority over your life. It is full denial of self and surrender. It is a call to fully embrace His authority as your highest good. We don't get to pick and choose what areas we hand over. What are you clinging to that you need to turn over to Jesus? What are you afraid of losing? What sin is keeping you from fully embracing the authority of Jesus? I know there are many people in this room who can attest to the joy and peace that kind of surrender brings. Fully embrace the authority of Jesus and find joy and peace today.

Conclusion:

As the worship team is coming to lead us in a time of reflection and response, what is this passage calling you to believe, desire, or do? We provide an extended time of reflection following our time in God's Word to give you the opportunity to sit before God and let Him work on your heart. Maybe you need to trust in Christ for salvation or turn over an area of your life to His authority. Maybe you need to rejoice in how good He has been to you since you released that authority to Him. Maybe you need prayer for something you are struggling to let go of. If so, we have a team of people ready to pray with you and for you worshipping on the front rows or the bottom of the stairs in the back. Seek the grace of God today and let His Spirit work in your heart. Would you pray with me as we respond to His Word?