

**\*READ Mark 6:1-6\***

This account of Jesus's rejection at His hometown of Nazareth is not the first or the last time we see Him enduring such rejection. However, what makes this rejection sting more than others might be the fact that these were the people who should have been able to recognize Jesus as being someone truly special. These were those who watched Him grow up. These were the people who knew Him best. They knew His occupation, His mom, His brothers, and His sisters. Yet, they still refused to accept His authoritative teachings. In fact, they were offended by Him to the point that He was unwilling to show His unmatched power within His hometown.

As I mentioned, this isn't the first time we have seen those who should have been the first to recognize Jesus's incredible nature unable to do such. Back in **3:20-35**, we find Jesus's own family rejecting His authenticity by trying to claim that He was out of His mind. The Scribes also sought to ridicule and discredit Him by stating that He was being empowered by evil forces. Of all the people who should have been first in line to crown Jesus for who He truly was...these were the very people!

Again as I mentioned, these aren't the only two instances of Jesus being rejected by those who should have known better. Our text this morning of **Mark 11:27-12:12** falls on the Tuesday of Jesus's final week prior to His death, burial, and resurrection. This day could be summed up with the word "argument" because Mark's Gospel details for us a series of back and forths with those belonging to the Jewish religious leadership.

**Jesus's Final Week**

**Sunday: Acclaim** (11:1-11)

**Thursday: Anticipation** (14:12-72)

**Monday: Authority** (11:12-19)

**Friday: Atonement** (15:1-47)

**Tuesday: Argument** (11:20-13:37)

**Saturday: Absence**

**Wednesday: Appraisal** (14:1-11)

**Sunday: Awakening** (16)

They are going to present Jesus with four difficult questions, and Jesus's answers or lack thereof are only going to leave them more frustrated with Him than they were before. This section will culminate in Jesus speaking of the impending judgment of destruction that will not only bring down Jerusalem but everything she stands for.

Of course, such language is only going to greatly upset those who stand to lose the most from what He says, so it shouldn't surprise us that Jesus is going to be greatly challenged as to who He thinks He is and who has given His such authority to say what He is saying. As God's Servant stands against His authority being challenged, we would do well to evaluate the attitude and mindset of those who are challenging Jesus to see if we might be guilty of some of the same failures they are putting on display.

**Mark 11:27-12:12**

**A. The Jewish religious leaders question the authority of Jesus. (11:27-33)**

**1. "By what authority...who gave you this authority to do these things?"**

- a) Let's remember that it seems to have only the day before that Jesus had completely shut down the den of thieves that had been operating within the Temple's courtyard. As He did so, He spoke strong words that surely would have resonated within those who heard Him as words of strong rebuke and even judgement. Let's remember that Jesus quotes from a text of **Jeremiah. 7:1-15** which is a warning against Jerusalem that her behavior was going to bring the fate of Shiloh down upon herself. The people were unfaithful and judgment was right around the corner. Jesus's words no doubt forced people to think that the current behavior and state of the temple at this moment might bring the same sort of judgement.

- b) Therefore, we really shouldn't be surprised that Jesus's quick return visit was met by those who were in essence the target of His rebukes from the previous day. It is important to recognize that all three groups that comprised the Sanhedrin, the highest legal body in Judaism (English, Message of Mark, 191), are present in this scene. The chief priest, scribes, and elders all confront Jesus, and ask a question that, if we're being fair, was very much appropriate for them to ask, ***"By what authority are You doing these things? Who gave You this authority to do these things?"*** In other words, they are asking, "Who do You think You are that You think You can come up in our house, rebuke us, and lay down judgement language that would leave us in shambles?"
- c) Let's be honest, on the surface...I don't blame them at all for asking such a question. I would be asking the same question if some random person showed up saying such things right here and right now. However, therein lies the rub, right? This wasn't just some random guy! This was an incredible Man who had been doing incredible things for the last three years as He went about teaching with authority and performing miraculous deeds. This wasn't just a nobody...this was the somebody! They should have recognized by what He said and did that He was matching what had been prophesied of long ago. Yet, they were unwilling to honestly evaluate the evidence to come to the proper conclusion. They wanted to do anything they could in order to discredit Jesus to the point of being able to permanently remove Him as a thorn in their side by killing Him. However, Jesus is about to call them on their insincere motives by showing that their minds were actually closed and the truth was not actually what they sought.

## 2. ***"Was John's baptism from heaven or of human origin?"***

- a) In order to reveal these actual motives, Jesus responds to their question by asking a question of His own. Now, some might say that this is Jesus sidestepping the question and not being willing to answer the hard questions present to Him. However, I would suggest that this is not what Jesus is doing at all. Instead, Jesus is trying to show that this isn't an honest investigation. If truth was really what was being sought then the answer to His question would only further support the answer to the questions they had asked. Therefore, Jesus asks, ***"Was John's baptism from heaven or of human origin?"***
- b) This was such a clever for Jesus to ask not because it was meant to keep Him from answering, but because it was going to highlight the hypocrisy of the religious leaders in regard to their question to Him. John and Jesus were inseparable when it came to the work they had both accomplished. If we go back to the first chapter of Mark, we are reminded that John's message point directly towards Jesus! He came in the form of Elijah as a man of simple means but with an invaluable message. ***"One who is more powerful than I am is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop down and until the strap of His sandals. I baptize you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."*** (Mark 1:7,8) It is in the very next verses that Jesus is baptized by John and the Spirit descends upon Him while the voice comes from heaven validating Him. Yet, these men refused to believe the message of John, and Jesus puts them in a real pickle with this specific question.

## 3. ***"If we say...He will say..."***

- a) We immediately see the cleverness in this question from Jesus by the response of the religious leaders as given by Mark. ***"They discussed it among themselves: 'If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say, 'Then why didn't you believe him?' But if we say, 'Of human origin' — they were afraid of the crowd because everyone thought that John was truly a prophet."*** Now of course, this was exactly the conundrum Jesus was hoping to put them in.

Jesus wants them to see their own dishonesty, and Mark wants to show the reader what it looks like when dishonest hearts approach Jesus.

- b) What's most sad about this situation is the fact that they knew exactly the position they were in. They knew they couldn't say that John's authority was from heaven since John himself endorsed Jesus. This would lead them to having to answer that Jesus's own authority was from heaven if John's was. On the other hand, they couldn't say that John's authority was man-made because everyone recognized that John was clearly the second coming of Elijah. There was no denying that, and there would be no good result from the standpoint of the people if they denied John's legitimacy. These leaders were truly stuck between a rock and a hard place which is exactly where Jesus want them to be in order to highlight their hypocrisy with their approach to Jesus.

#### 4. *"We don't know...Neither will I tell you..."*

- a) Therefore, they come up with an answer that would not get them crushed on either side... *"We don't know."* This is the cop-out answer of all cop-out answers, and it was a dishonest answer to the core. They knew that John was from God, and they knew that admitting such would only leave them floundering as to why they didn't believe the message he had presented, and they knew that such an answer would only further validate Jesus and what He was doing. They couldn't flat out lie in the negative because then they would lose their influence with those over whom they desired to have power.
- b) This leaves them with no choice other than the cop-out answer, but that also allowed for Jesus to take the fifth in not answering their questions. Again, let's emphasize that Jesus isn't scared to answer this question. He was in no way scared to acknowledged His unmatched place among men, and we can know this by the way He allowed Himself to enter into Jerusalem in such a royal and majestic manner. Jesus responded to their questions with His own question to simply show that they weren't there to have a serious conversation. They were only their to continue to figure out some way to get Him in trouble to the point they could kill Him. Jesus is making the point that their dishonest hearts don't leave room for truth to be expressed, considered, and accepted. Truth was not their goal, they only wanted to play games with Jesus, and that will continue throughout the rest of this day.

These games and questions lead Jesus to begin to speak to these men through a parable that, again, exposes their dishonesty and hypocrisy. This unfortunate chapter break might cause us some trouble, but let's recognize that this is the same conversation that continues to play out.

#### **B. Jesus exposes their error through the teaching of a parable. (12:1-12)**

##### 1. **The parable:** Tenants reject the vineyard's owner.

- a) The parable that Jesus shares concerns a man who planted a vineyard and did everything necessary in order for it to run efficiently and thrive. He then leases this vineyard out to tenant farmers who would work and live off the vineyard in the owner's absence. After some period of time, when it was time to harvest, the owner sent a servant to the farmers to collect some of the produce of the vineyard, but they horribly mistreated the servant. They refused to give up any of the fruit that had been produced in this vineyard. The owner continued to send servants as his representatives to collect the fruits that was rightfully his, but the wicked farmers continued to reject them by beating them and even killing some.
- b) Finally, the farmer decides that he is going to send someone to the farmers that they surely couldn't reject, his own beloved son. Yet, this only allowed for the evil farmers to act more treacherously because they saw this as an opportunity to really get any obstacles out of the

way for them to take full possession of the vineyard. They took the son, killed him, and threw him out of the garden. Jesus then asked what the owner would do at this point? He says that he would surely come, kill the evil farmers, & give the vineyard to someone else.

2. **Its meaning:** Israel has rejected God's authority & those sent to represent it.

- a) Nothing said by Jesus would have been any surprise in the hearing of those He was speaking to. Not only did the outcome of the story make logical sense, but it would have also set off alarm bells for them because it is so similar to what is found in **Isaiah 5:1-7**. This text speaks of one who himself had a vineyard, and he did everything possible to allow it to be a successful vineyard, but for whatever reason it only yielded worthless grapes. Isaiah goes on to equate the failures of that vineyard to the vineyard of Jerusalem and Judah. They were God's vineyard that was to be producing good fruit for God, but they had failed miserably in doing so. Therefore, God was going to remove all of the benefits from the garden and make it a wasteland. His expectations were not met, so His blessings were removed from a people who refused to produce despite having every opportunity to do so.
- b) This parable is simply Isaiah's own writing being rewritten. God had made Israel into this beautiful and blessed vineyard that was expected to produce fruit of faithfulness before Him. Yet, when God's prophets sent with His authority into Israel to check on the fruit or to prune that which wasn't producing...they were mistreated and even killed. Finally, we now have God sending His own Son, who is the very fullness of deity, to Israel to prepare them for the coming Kingdom, and these men simply will not listen. They refuse to acknowledge His authority. They refuse to approach Him with honest and open hearts. They simply want to make sure they keep what is theirs and give none of it up which is why they were so willing to play right into the words of **Psalms 118:22,23** which Jesus follows up the parable by quoting. They rejected that which God had declared as good and right, but God would have the last say as He would right the wrongs they would commit three days from now.

3. **The leaders' response:** They know, but they refuse to acknowledge the truth.

- a) While they might not have known exactly how things would play out, we can confidently say that the Jewish religious leaders were well on their way to once again fulfilling the words of Isaiah along with these words of Jesus. What's worse is that they knew exactly what was going on in this moment. *"They knew He had spoken a parable against them."* Yet, instead of honestly evaluating what had been said concerning them, they decide to continue to seek out His arrest, but only at a later time since they feared the crowd.
- b) All of this simply goes to show that these men were not stupid or ignorant. They knew exactly what was going on, but their prideful, arrogant, and dishonest hearts prohibited them from being able to accept that what was happening was truly the will of God. They cared more for keeping their own influence and way of life instead of submitting to God's will that was being accomplished through Jesus. Of all of the people who should have been quickest to recognize Jesus as God's Messiah, it was these men, but they sadly decided to dishonestly challenge Jesus's authority. In doing so they only set themselves up to fully endure the judgment which was to come, and which Jesus would speak plainly about in the coming chapters.

## Application Questions

A. Are our motives pure as we approach the teachings of God's Word?

1. Could it be that we find ourselves in a similar position to these men in regard to our attitude and mindset as we approach Scripture? Are we truly searching for truth or are we simply trying to validate what we already want to believe it says. The reality is that we can almost certainly

find some sort of support for just about anything we want to believe by taking something out of context or twisting a text in one way or another. This isn't even a new problem for Peter says such things were even happening within the days of the Apostles (**II Peter 3:14-16**).

2. Therefore, where do our motives truly stand? Are we hungering for what is true? Or are we only seeking that which tickles our ears and validates where we already are? The reality is that we could very well be validated by the truth of Scripture, but that conclusion should only be drawn after care and honest evaluation of the text under consideration. Starting from a faulty premise almost always if not always leads to a faulty conclusion, so what is our premise? What are our motives? Are we seeking truth or are we simply seeking to validate our own desires like the Jewish leaders?

#### **B. Are we willing to respect and submit to the authority of Jesus?**

1. The impure motives of these men led them to flat out reject Jesus regardless of the evidence that stood before them. They refused to acknowledge Jesus's authority, and it led them to the very courtroom where He was condemned to death and to the cross where His life was taken. While we might never see ourselves behaving in such a way towards Jesus, the reality is that we treat Him as nothing more than dead when we refuse to respect and submit to His authority within our own lives.
2. Are we willing to humble ourselves to the point of simply living according to His will in all things? This is not something He has suggested, but it is something that is demanded of those who desire to be His disciples. We cannot forget the teachings of **8:34** where Jesus Himself says, *"If anyone wants to follow after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me."* These are words that demand absolute reverence for what He says and submission to what He commands. Am I willing to approach Jesus in this manner? Or am I simply trying to figure out some way to make Him serve me and my desires?

**Main Point/Conclusion: Only genuinely honest hearts will accept God's hard truths.**

On the surface, these were the men who were seen as the most pious and devoutly religious men within the Jewish community, but their behavior clearly reveals that they were dishonest men only seeking to retain their own power and influence even if it meant rejecting the clear evidence that stood before them. May we put away dishonesty from our hearts and only seek to honestly evaluate Jesus's will for us so that we might be fully conformed to His will and glorify Him as our Savior & God!