

## Unauthorized Mark 11:27-12:12

**Hook Idea:** Last weekend I was in NE Oregon @ funeral of a good family friend, back when our girls were growing up. This lady taught our girls to sew, and her husband was my OR hunting buddy.

All you have to do is hang around in an airport for 5 minutes to clearly understand the concept of **authorization**. You have to have a ticket to be authorized to go through airport security. You can't board a plane without the authorization of the TSA. And there are entire regions of the airport and aircraft where access is restricted to those who have proper authorization. That permission, in an airport, comes in the form of credentials, a uniform, or both.

In our passage today from Mark's gospel, we will see the religious leaders of the day (RL's) questioning Jesus authorization and credentials. Who gave Him permission to speak as He did, and do the great works He did? And where were His credentials? The answer Jesus gives surprised them and may surprise us.

In this account, Jesus' authority is brought into question by the religious leaders (RL's) of His day. Even when they had clear evidence as to Jesus' identity, they refused to listen and respond in obedience to Him.

### PRAY

**Context:** At the start of this chapter, Jesus had formally presented Himself to Israel as their Messiah. Superficially, He was acknowledged as such. Today's encounter happens on the Tuesday before Good Friday, during the final week of Jesus' life on earth, often called Holy or Passion Week. On Sunday Jesus had entered Jerusalem; on Monday, He had driven out those who turned the Temple into a flea market. He and the RLs are on an exponential curve of confrontation, and they of hate, that will culminate in Jesus' arrest, false condemnation, torture, and execution just 3 days from this event.

The scrutiny to which Jesus was subjected during this time corresponds to the inspection given the Passover lamb before it was slaughtered. At the same moment as these events occur, hundreds of lambs around Jerusalem were being examined, just as Moses had instructed. They were the Passover lambs, whose blood would be shed and bodies eaten in remembrance of the great deliverance from slavery that God had accomplished for Israel. When God saw the blood of the lamb on the doorpost of those houses in Egypt, He passed over those homes and spared their firstborn from death.

But the Lamb had to be a perfect substitute: also a firstborn, and without blemish. Jewish families in Jesus' day confirmed the suitability of their Passover lambs by observing them for 4 days prior to its sacrifice. In the same way, Jesus was now being scrutinized by friends and enemies for four days prior to His offering of Himself as our perfect Substitute. He emerges from this exam being proven to be sinless and innocent... but not without many challenges.

### READ MARK 11:27-33

#### :27-28 Jesus' authority challenged

This confrontation took place in the Temple. Another gospel writer said Jesus was teaching. You can imagine the stir created as the crowd of religious leaders—the chief priests, scribes, and elders—all approached Jesus in the Temple. Certainly they thought they would send Jesus slinking away in shame. They had no idea what was about to happen.

They asked two questions: by what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you that authority? Both formed a cleverly-devised trap. The RLs were certain Jesus would be condemned no matter what answer He offered. If He said His authority came from God, He could be accused of blasphemy. If He said He was authorized by men (say, His disciples), He could easily be accused of subversion or treason. Confident of their own cleverness and Jesus' inevitable downfall, they were unprepared for what happened!

RL's assumption: Jesus had no legitimate authority; He was a self-appointed prophet. They hadn't authorized Him, that's for sure.

And yet Jesus spoke and acted **with authority**... everyone recognized that! After His teaching, people were left astonished: He taught with authority, and not as the scribes. Jealousy was certainly one factor here. "**These things**" included not only His entry, His upsetting of the Temple marketplace, but His entire ministry. (The fact that Jesus' deeds spoke for themselves—that the healings, casting out of demons, raising of the dead, all credentialed Jesus as the Messiah—was overlooked by them.)

Many times Jesus had identified the source of His authority, especially to the RLs. In John 5:17-19 Jesus stated clearly that He does only what the Father instructs Him to do (and that He is equal with God).

John 5:30 **I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.**

The purpose of the RLs wasn't to check Jesus' credentials, but to shame and condemn Him. Jesus was about to answer their question in a way they did not expect.

### **:29-30 Jesus' answer**

A common rabbinic debate technique: respond to a question with a question, making your answer dependent on theirs. One commentator writes, "**The Lord's question was not a trap; it was yet another opportunity for them to realize and confess their blindness, and ask for sight.**"

Jesus questioned them about the baptism of John the Baptist: what was the authority behind that? John's message: the Messiah is here! Prepare the way for Him; repent and believe the good news. He was to be used by God to prepare people's hearts for Jesus, so they might believe in Him and have eternal life. John's authority came not from the RLs, but from God... just like Jesus!

As people hear John's message, they repent and are baptized... but not the RLs.

**"And when all the people heard Him, even the tax collectors justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him. (Luke 7:29-30)**

The RL's rejection of John was actually a rejection of God's will for them... to repent and believe in Jesus as the Messiah of Israel. John, in his characteristic fiery way, called the leaders out of their smugness to repentance:

**"But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance" Matthew 3:7-8** It was God's will for them to repent and believe; they were reminded again and again to do so.

### **:31-33 Motives revealed; debate halted**

:31 This question took them all by surprise. With no one willing to speak for the group, they formed an impromptu huddle and held quite a discussion (**διαλογίζομαι** to consider various reasons in order to resolve a matter). God's irony: these men thought they had Jesus in a dilemma, yet now their own unbelief put them in a dilemma themselves!

If baptism was of heaven (from God) their rejection of both John and Jesus is glaring and inexcusable.

If from men, then they are really saying John was a phony. Even though they didn't believe John, the people did, and the RL's feared the people: they needed their approval to remain in power.

;33 So these learned men devise a noncommittal, politically correct answer to Jesus' straightforward question: **"We don't know."** They take no stand at all, which conceals the attitude of their hearts.

Even though the RLs were in opposition to Jesus and hardened in unbelief, He still loved them and reached out to them. They had to work at rejecting Jesus.

Since they did not answer Jesus' question, He was under no obligation to answer theirs. Yet He does tell them by Whose authority He does all things... but not in the way these men expect.

When confronted with unbelief, Jesus often spoke in **parables**. He brought a spiritual truth to life through a story. Those in the audience who believed Him would be able to comprehend what Jesus was teaching. Those who were hardened in unbelief heard a story, nothing more. The answer to the RLs question in this parable was so clear that even they were able to understand it.

### Read Mark 12:1-12 The Parable of the Wicked Tenant Farmers

:1 The scene set: a man (landowner) planted and developed a vineyard.

Dug a pit for the winepress [photos]. Grapes stomped by foot, juice drained into lower vats that collected juice. Grapeskins provided the yeast, fermentation began almost immediately. Not long before a wine of sorts was ready to drink or be "bottled" in wineskins or clay pots (with olive oil for a cork).

Built a tower. [photos] A guard tower: needed to protect grapes from animals and wine from thieves: a valuable commodity being produced. [In news this week: gang in Italy steal ¼ M worth of wine and cheese. Still valuable! Video link: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-03-22/italian-police-bust-gang-behind-cheese-thefts/8375444> ]

Leased it and traveled away to a far country. In Leviticus, this process spelled out. The tenant farmer expected to pay rent in the form of shared produce within 5 years.

:2 That's what the servant was coming to collect.

:3 Beat the servant and sent him back to the owner with nothing. A shocking thing to do to the rep of one's landlord and the backer of one's business.

:4 Next servant was pelted with stones, wounded in the head, and treated shamefully. No respect was being shown the landowner based on how his servants were dealt with.

:5 A long line of servants were shamefully treated and even killed by these tenants. (By now the police would have been called and forcibly evicted these guys.)

:6 **"Therefore still having one son, his beloved, he also sent him to them last, saying, 'They will respect my son.'**

The son is the heir: he speaks with the authority of the landowner, who expected the tenants to respect him, listen to him, and obey him. They had been entrusted with the vineyard; they were only being asked for their rent.

:7-8 Instead, the tenants conspired to kill the beloved son of the landowner, thereby stealing the inheritance from the landowner. They carried out their wicked plan: killed the son and tossed his body out of the vineyard!

:9 The evil tenant farmers thought they had won, but they still have the landowner to deal with directly. **"Therefore what will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the vinedressers, and give the vineyard to others."**

The meaning of any Biblical parable doesn't come out of the air: an explanation is either offered within the parable itself, or our Lord explains it; or a reference is made to another Scripture which helps us to understand it. That's what happens in this parable: Jesus told this story especially for the RLs. He references a story written by the prophet Isaiah that opens up this parable for them and us.

**"My Well-beloved has a vineyard on a very fruitful hill. He dug it up and cleared out its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine. He built a tower in its midst, and also made a winepress in it; so He expected it to bring forth good grapes, But it brought forth wild grapes... And now, please let me tell you what I will do to My vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it shall be burned; And break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down... For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are His pleasant plant. " -Isaiah 5:1-7**

The RLs were familiar with this passage; they would have known that the vineyard represented Israel. The tenant farmers were themselves: the leaders to whom the spiritual care and feeding of the nation had been entrusted.

They and their predecessors were the ones to whom God sent prophets over and over; these messengers encountered almost uniform rejection. The last One sent was God's only Son, the One speaking to them. This should have been a goosebump moment of recognition that brought them to their knees: instead, they became angrier as the story unfolded.

Jesus spells out Israel's long history of rejecting messengers from God when He speaks to the Pharisees in Mt. 23: **"Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth... Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation."** -Mt. 23:34-36

So the RLs and their predecessors not only rejected the message of the prophets that God had sent to them over the centuries, but had done these men harm, wounding many, killing some. Jesus concludes the parable with a prophecy meant as a warning to repent: **He will come and destroy the vinedressers, and give the vineyard to others.** Before this generation had passed, judgment would fall on Israel for their rejection of the Messiah: the vineyard, the land of Israel, would be given to others. For 1900 years, after the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, other nations trampled the land of Israel underfoot. This catastrophe brought an end to the RLs abuse of power, and even of the Temple itself. But God is not done with Israel... far from it! A day will come when Israel will acknowledge Jesus as their Messiah.

:10-11 To end this parable, Jesus quotes from Psalm 118, **"Have you not even read this Scripture:**

**'The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone. This was the LORD's doing, And it is marvelous in our eyes?'**

Of course they had read this psalm! As Tony pointed out 2 weeks ago, Jews ascending to Jerusalem for the Passover would sing Psalms 113-118. Jesus urges them to consider the meaning of the psalm they had been singing.

**"The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone"**. They, the builders, the leaders of Israel, had rejected Jesus as if He was flawed building material. Yet unbeknownst to them, He is the Chief Cornerstone of Israel and the Church. The irony of their actions-- by their rejection of Jesus they were actually fulfilling prophecy about Him and them-- completely escapes them.

Jesus is called the Cornerstone by both Isaiah and Zechariah, the most important stone in a wall or building. The church would be built and Israel rebuilt upon Him.

**:12** The truth in what Jesus and the Psalms proclaimed was lost on them. They had a choice: either fall on their face before Jesus or do what they did. **"And they sought to lay hands on Him, but feared the multitude, for they knew He had spoken the parable against them. So they left Him and went away."**

They did not fear God, but they feared the crowds, who had not yet turned against Jesus. So they abandoned their quest to destroy Him... for the moment. One of the few times the RLs backed down.

## Wrapup

So the RLs began the confrontation with Jesus on the last Tuesday of His life on earth by questioning His authority and demanding to see His credentials. Jesus ALWAYS addresses the heart issue rather than superficial ones presented to Him. With one brief question, He put His finger on their rejection of John the Baptist's authority... and His own.

Through the parable He told, Jesus illustrated that the RLs were following a longstanding pattern in Israel of rejecting God Himself and His message and harming the messengers sent to them! By doing so, they, in fact, were the ones who were unauthorized: they were functioning as their own authority. They were condemning the only Son of the God they claimed to serve. They stood in judgment of One who would be the Judge of all the

earth, before Whom they would one day stand and account for their unbelief and rejection of Him.

We know Jesus as Lord, and He speaks with authority in our lives. The question: do we listen and respond to Him as the One with final authority? Are we more concerned with what He says or with what the people around us say, and think, and do? During this final tumultuous week of Jesus' life, the division between His life (God revealed through Him) and the evil motives and actions of His adversaries grew wider and starker. A similar separation and division is occurring now in our world and culture. Those who love our Lord Jesus will find their lives, their motives, their actions starkly different than those around them. We will be criticized, even hated for that, and His authority in our lives will be put to the test.

A rock-bottom question for each of us: **are we listening and responding to Jesus as the One with final authority in our lives?** May God use this encounter to spur us to listen more carefully to Jesus and respond to Him as our Lord.

### **Applying God's Word to My Life**

Think of one situation in your life where the opinions, thoughts, or actions of others around you stand in opposition to that of God and His word. What does that struggle look like? How can you show God's love to these people and yet not compromise in following your Lord?

In what area(s) do you struggle with listening and responding to Jesus as the One with final authority in your life? Seek out someone to pray with you and encourage you in this matter.