Whose Authority? Mark 11:27-12:5 www.waysidebiblechapel.org October 18, 2026

Our passage today took place during the week that would end with Jesus' crucifixion. It started with the Triumphal Entry followed by the temple cleansing. The religious leaders loss of income and respect motivated them to plot Jesus' death. Jesus taught and healed on the temple grounds, which means the people or Jesus had overridden the priests' prohibition of letting maimed or deficient people through the gates (Matthew 21:14[i]). The people clung to Jesus' words.

This is another of Mark's sandwich sections. Our passage today is the leaders questioning Jesus. It is followed by Jesus' parable of the vineyard, and then the religious leaders questioning Jesus again. The prophetic parable unmasked their intentions.

27 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, 28 and they said to him, "By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?"
Mark 11:27,28 The chief priests were Sadducees. They were the ones who compromised with Rome and lived in luxury because of the income they made from the merchants on the temple grounds. Their motives in challenging Jesus were both financial and the desire to retake control. The Scribes were the educated ones who knew the ins and outs of religious law. They worked with the temple authorities to justify their actions and surely benefited in some way from their twisted interpretations. The elders probably refer to some in the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council. They were surely upset that Jesus broke so many norms and were jealous of the public's respect of Jesus and His teachings (15:10[ii]). Only two of the seventy elders considered that Jesus could be the Messiah.

These three groups had a common enemy in Jesus. They decided to publicly confront Him about His actions by asking who gave Him the authority to make all the changes. It certainly did not come from any of them. They thought they were the only authority. They were probably hoping to hear Him answer that God gave Him the authority. That would be enough to call Rome in to stop Him from what they thought would become an insurrection. But as we have seen in Jesus' previous answers, He did not fall into the trap. Instead, He trapped them.

Before we get to Jesus' answer, I would like us to consider that there are times that we do something similar. God allows circumstances to come our way, and we ask Him by what authority could He allow such a hardship in our life (Habakkuk 1:13[iii]; Psalm 42:9[iv]). We resist what He has allowed and demand that things change. Like these religious leaders, we are upset that we are not having our way. The verse about rejoicing in tribulation sounds like nonsense to us (James 1:2[v]).

We ask in a more subtle way than "Who gave you the authority?" Our question is more like, "Lord, why have you allowed this. It is too much for me. Please remove these burdens." Sometimes we even start rebuking Satan, when it is the Lord who is testing us for our good. Instead, we should bow our heads and give thanks that God loves us enough to test us and grow our faith (James 1:3,4[vi]). Then praise is a sacrificial offering and an offering of death to our old nature and completely trusting in our loving Savior (Hebrews 13:15[vii]). Imagine if those religious leaders repented and said, "Jesus , it is You who are faithful to Scripture. Forgive us for being so hardhearted and lead us in the way of righteousness." It would have been a totally different story. The slaughter at the first and second Jewish revolts would not have happened. All human history would have changed.

But that is not why Jesus came. He came to save souls of all who have and will come to Him by faith. Men's egos were too hardened by pride to submit to the One whom they knew was superior to them (John 3:2[viii]).

This was really an audacious question for the chief priests to ask. That is because they were not from the lineage of Zadok, the most respected High Priest, the line that was to hold the priesthood in the vision of Ezekiel's temple (Ezekiel 40:46[ix]; 48:11[x]). The High Priest was chosen by Rome which involved a substantial bribe. That is one reason they needed the income from sales in the outer court. If the question was asked of anyone else they might have responded, "Are you kidding me! You are not of the lineage of Zadok and are chosen by the occupiers for a price and you want to know the source of *my* authority? That is a question you need to answer." But Jesus is not like us. He is always led of the Holy Spirit. He only speaks what He hears from the Father (John 14:10[xi]).

29 Jesus said to them, "I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. 30 Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man? Answer me." Mark 11:29,30 Jesus' Holy Spirit inspired answer was a question. But first He told them, "I will answer your question if you answer mine." That is fair. If you get to ask one then I get to ask one. But if Jesus answered their question first they may have refused to answer His. They thought they had Him cornered and were eager to turn Rome loose on Him. That was their plan and they later followed through with it. "He claims to be a king" (John 19:12[xii]), they told Pilate. But Jesus wants them to examine their own hearts. Rabbi often answered questions with questions to teach through introspection. Questions can help us come to conclusions we are willing to accept.

Jesus' question was about the authority of John. There is another issue going on behind these questions. Jesus had sometimes contradicted the teaching of the early sages. By the term sages I mean respected rabbi that had come before Jesus. Rabbi, which at the time only meant teacher, quoted other respected rabbi that had gone before rather than forming their own interpretation. Those earlier respected ones were referred to as sages. Rabbi did not carry the meaning of officially trained persons until around AD 50. There were a special class of rabbi who had memorized the entire Law and Prophets. If two others of that class affirmed them as having done this then they were called Smikah Rabbi. Their sayings were authoritative. They could give another view than those who had gone before. Jesus spoke as if He was of that status. He sometimes said, "You have heard that it was said… but I say to you...." It is used nine times in the Gospel of Matthew. (See Matthew 5.) So, if Jesus' authority was of men, who were those two that qualified Him? If He could not name them, then He is claiming to be the Messiah or at least a prophet.

Jesus' answer turned the table and put them on the spot. By whose authority did John the Baptist preach? Now they are on the spot, not with Rome but with the people who came to the Passover feast. Jesus was exposing their hypocrisy. John warned them to repent to flee from the wrath to come (Matthew 3:7[xiii]). He called them a nest of baby snakes. Jesus was not only challenging their authority but the very basis of their faith.

This reminds us of Jesus asking the disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" (8:29[xiv]) Do you believe that He is the One God sent into the world to save us from our sins?" Is He the one unique Son of God? Then what will you do about His teaching? He taught that the Old Testament accounts are true. He taught that we will go to eternal judgment if our sins are not atoned for, and that He is the Lamb of God who would be our

ransom to deliver us from the power of Satan into the kingdom of God (Matthew 20:28[xv]; John 3:36[xvi]). If you believe that, everything about life changes. If you do not, then you either believe you die and there is nothing, or that you might go to judgment before a holy God who knows you rejected His provision for your sins out of pride and arrogance.

If a person has faith in what Jesus has done for him or her and lives a life of service but then dies and is no more, what have they lost but some selfish pleasures that were passing (Hebrews 11:24,25[xvii]). But if one lives their life for those passing pleasures believing there is nothing after this life and finds that Jesus was right about sin and hell, what have they lost? Simple reason says the author of the intricate code of DNA with its self-correcting nano machines who made us the top of created beings did not make us for mere entertainment. And if He wanted to make Himself known to the world, His revelation of Himself would certainly be the most translated book in the world by far. That book is the Bible, a revelation of God and His plan for mankind.

31 And they discussed it with one another, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?' 32 But shall we say, 'From man'?"—they were afraid of the people, for they all held that John really was a prophet. Mark 11:31,32 They were stuck because either way they answered their sinful nature would be exposed. They did not believe John's authority was from heaven or they would have repented. Then again, maybe they did believe it but were too proud to repent. If they said it was from heaven they would be condemning themselves as those too proud to repent. They would be confessing that they were that brood of vipers John described. It would disqualify them from their positions.

If they said his authority came from man, which men? If John was speaking with God's authority, they should have believed what he said about Jesus. If they said he had no authority then they would discredit themselves in the eyes of the people who knew John was a prophet.

The verse declares they feared the people. Jesus had already upset their ways in the temple and exercised authority over it. Saying they did not believe in John would only discredit them further. They came to trap Jesus and ended up in the very trap they dug (Proverbs 28:10[xviii]).

Who do you say Jesus is? It is not a trap, but the answer does have eternal consequences. You can convince yourself like much of the world that it is all a myth, but you would be ignoring reason, archeological evidence, and the wonder of this mathematically perfect book, the Bible, the amazing life of Jesus attested to by those who lived with Him, the lives of millions who have been changed from debased living to productive lives, the way cultures have changed for the better once accepting faith in Jesus. If you ignore all that, nothing can convince you. As Jesus said to the rich man in Hades, they have Moses and the prophets, in other words hundreds of prophecies fulfilled in Jesus. Even if someone rose from the dead they would not believe (Luke 16:31[xix]). And Jesus did just that. It was witnessed by hundreds. Most of the disciples died for refusing to deny it. What will you do with the only man who conquered death and tells us He has the power over death (John 11:25[xx])?

33 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." Mark 11:33 The only way out was to not answer. Even that declared their duplicity. But it gave Jesus the opportunity to not answer their question. One of their own, Nicodemus, already said to Jesus what many of

them believed. [2] *This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him."* John 3:2 Jesus' authority came from God.

Jesus deflected their attack for the moment, but He also exposed their hypocrisy in the process. By not answering Jesus, the public could see that the real answer was that the religious leaders did not accept John's prophetic calling. That meant their judgment of Jesus was also misguided, for John had said to believe on the One who came after Him (1:7,8[xxi]). If these leaders knew in their hearts He was from God, as Nicodemus declared, then like Saul of Tarsus, they were becoming increasingly resentful as they kicked against the goads (Acts 26:14[xxii]).

Jesus followed this confrontation with a prophetic parable in which the Jewish leaders will condemn themselves. They were so blinded by their pride they did not even know until Jesus quoted a prophecy which affirmed what they were doing.

I am going to take us halfway through the parable of the vineyard and conclude next week. Jesus followed the attack on His authority with a masterful parable. [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.* Mark 12:1 We saw in the drama parable of the fig tree that the fig tree represented the nation of Israel. The grapevine or vineyard is another representation of the nation. The first verse in the parable is almost an exact quotation of Isaiah 5:2[xxiii]. The Isaiah passage speaks of the nation being the Lord's vineyard. Everything that could be done to make it fruitful was done, but it bore wild grapes (Isaiah 5:4[xxiv]). Then the Lord warned that He would tear down the wall and let the wild animals devour it and trample it down. He would cause the rain to not fall on it so it would be destroyed. That was fulfilled when Babylon conquered Jerusalem.

When Jesus quoted the second verse of the Isaiah parable, it should have shook the hearers. Those who knew the Scriptures would know it was a pronouncement of the destruction of Jerusalem.

The landowner did all that could be done to make the vineyard successful. He planted the vines. He fenced it off so wild animals could not get to it. He built a watchtower which was used to watch for thieves or animals breaking in. He dug a winepress. This is a two level basin cut in limestone. The upper level is where the grapes were crushed and the lower level caught the juice as it ran down. One such winepress was uncovered in Nazareth recently.

This tells us that all that could be done for Israel was done. It is true of our lives as well. God does all that is necessary to produce fruit in nations and in individual lives. Sometimes that includes hardships to help us see what is truly valuable. But like the keepers of the vineyard, we must do our part in nurturing what has been given to us. God expects good fruit from nations and from our lives. That is only right. If you did all you could for your child, loved and nurtured them, provided their needs, got them started off in life, you would expect their love and honor in return. God expects good fruit. In the Isaiah parable the fruit God sought was justice and righteousness (Isaiah 5:7[xxv]). It is the same in nations and our lives. Jesus' parable is going to focus on the injustice He sees.

[2] *When the season came, he sent a servant to the tenants to get from them some of the fruit of the vineyard.* Mark 12:2 It came time to collect the promised rent. In ancient Israel it was a percentage of the crop. The owner sent a servant to collect what was due,

the owner's portion of the vineyard. The prophets in the Old Testament are referred to as servants of the Lord. He probably brought a wagon large enough to haul back the grapes or vats of juice. Time comes for every nation and every individual to begin evaluating what they have done with all that has been given to them. Have we produced righteousness and justice? Have our lives demonstrated the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22,23[xxvi]). Have we become loving and gracious like God is to us?

3 And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. 4 Again he sent to them another servant, and they struck him on the head and treated him shamefully. 5 And he sent another, and him they killed. And so with many others: some they beat, and some they killed. Mark 12:3-5 Listen to Jesus' lament over Jerusalem. *37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!* Matthew 23:37 They beat the servant and sent him back without what was due. If you or I were the landowner we would immediately send a notice of eviction and file charges of assault. But God is more gracious and patient than we are. He considers that they worked hard to tend that vineyard for at least three years, which is about the average time it takes to produce good grapes. Three years of labor is quite an investment. So, he sent another servant. They treated him worse than the first. The humiliation and danger he endured was to warn the owner not to send any more. Would we not say, "That is it!" I am done with these ungrateful tenants. I will have them arrested. But God is more gracious. He sends a third servant. This time the tenants kill him. "That is it!" Right? No, he sent many others and they beat some and killed others.

Now the listeners know this is ridiculous. Who would do such a thing? And the answer is, only a God who is full of grace and mercy who longs for His tenants to love Him in return. That is what the nation had experienced throughout its history. The sawed Isaiah in two. The stoned Jeremiah. Zechariah was stoned in the temple (2 Chronicles 24:20,21[xxvii]). Uriah was slain with a sword (Jeremiah 26:23[xxviii]). John was beheaded.

We wonder how the Jews could have been so ungrateful after God made them a nation and blessed them with freedom and a land that already had dwellings and fields. But even more than the physical, He gave them His decrees to bless their lives. And what about the many blessings each of us has been given. People were put in our path to direct us to Christ. We have the entire Bible, not just one prophet. What have we done with all that has been given us? Is God collecting righteousness and justice, love, joy, peace, patience and kindness, from our lives?

We are going to stop here and continue next Sunday with God sending His only Son to collect what is due. That is God's greatest act of grace to Jerusalem! Then as now, it all depends on what we do with the Son.

Questions:
1 What was the motivation of the chief priests? 2 Why was their question audacious? 3 In what ways can we ask the same questions? 4 Why were the priests unable to answer Jesus' question? 5 Where do you say Jesus' authority came from? 6 If Jesus' authority is from God, how should we then live? 7 Where did Nicodemus say Jesus' authority came from? 8 What is Jesus quoting in 12:1? 9 How does the vineyard preparation parallel our lives? 10 How gracious is God to Isreal and to each of us?

[i] **Matthew 21:14 (ESV)**
14 And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them.
[ii] **Mark 15:10 (ESV)**
10 For he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up.
[iii] **Habakkuk 1:13 (ESV)**
13 You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong, why do you idly look at traitors and remain silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he?
[iv] **Psalm 42:9 (ESV)**
9 I say to God, my rock: "Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?"
[v] **James 1:2 (ESV)**
2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,
[vi] **James 1:3-4 (ESV)**
3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.
4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.
[vii] **Hebrews 13:15 (ESV)**
15 Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.
[viii] **John 3:2 (ESV)**
2 This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him."
[ix] **Ezekiel 40:46 (ESV)**
46 and the chamber that faces north is for the priests who have charge of the altar. These are the sons of Zadok, who alone among the sons of Levi may come near to the LORD to minister to him."
[x] **Ezekiel 48:11 (ESV)**
11 This shall be for the consecrated priests, the sons of Zadok, who kept my charge, who did not go astray when the people of Israel went astray, as the Levites did.
[xi] **John 14:10 (ESV)**
10 Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works.
[xii] **John 19:12 (ESV)**
12 From then on Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar."
[xiii] **Matthew 3:7 (ESV)**
7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?
[xiv] **Mark 8:29 (ESV)**
29 And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Christ."
[xv] **Matthew 20:28 (ESV)**
28 even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."
[xvi] **John 3:36 (ESV)**
36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.
[xvii] **Hebrews 11:24-25 (ESV)**
24 By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter,
25 choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.
[xviii] **Proverbs 28:10 (ESV)**
10 Whoever misleads the upright into an evil way will fall into his own pit, but the blameless will have a goodly inheritance.
[xix] **Luke 16:31 (ESV)**
31 He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'"
[xx] **John 11:25 (ESV)**
25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,

[xxi] **Mark 1:7-8 (ESV)**
7 And he preached, saying, “After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.
8 I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”
[xxii] **Acts 26:14 (ESV)**
14 And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’
[xxiii] **Isaiah 5:2 (ESV)**
2 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.
[xxiv] **Isaiah 5:4 (ESV)**
4 What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?
[xxv] **Isaiah 5:7 (ESV)**
7 For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry!
[xxvi] **Galatians 5:22-23 (ESV)**
22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,
23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.
[xxvii] **2 Chronicles 24:20-21 (ESV)**
20 Then the Spirit of God clothed Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, and he stood above the people, and said to them, “Thus says God, ‘Why do you break the commandments of the LORD, so that you cannot prosper? Because you have forsaken the LORD, he has forsaken you.’” 21 But they conspired against him, and by command of the king they stoned him with stones in the court of the house of the LORD.
[xxviii] **Jeremiah 26:23 (ESV)**
23 and they took Uriah from Egypt and brought him to King Jehoiakim, who struck him down with the sword and dumped his dead body into the burial place of the common people.