

# Matthew

## Bible Study

### Christ's Authority Matthew 21:23—46

We are in the last few days of Jesus' life. Jesus was staying in Bethany at night, most likely at the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus. In the morning He and the Disciples would travel less than two miles to go into the temple at Jerusalem probably passing over the Mount of Olives (about a half mile from Jerusalem), down the Kidron Valley and through the Eastern (Golden) Gate. When God's presence (the Shekinah Glory) left the temple just before the Babylonian Captivity (Ezekiel 9—11) they watched as He went out of the temple, through the Eastern Gate, to the Mount of Olives and up into heaven. When Jesus Christ comes back He will set His foot down on the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:4), enter through the Eastern Gate and fill the temple with His glory once again (Ezekiel 43:1—5; note 1 Kings 8:11). When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the colt, He traveled the same route that He will use at His Second Coming.

#### **Challenged by the leaders** (verses 23—27)

Each day Jesus entered the temple He was not only teaching the people (Matthew 26:55; Luke 21:37) but was also healing the sick (Matthew 21:14) and cleansed the temple of the dishonest money changers on at least two occasions (John 2:14; Mark 11:15—17). The leaders were struggling with how they should respond to Jesus because they saw Him as a threat to their power over the people. They desired to kill Him but feared the people because they were hanging on every word Jesus said (Luke 19:45—48; John 11:48).

They approached Jesus and asked Him by what authority was He doing these things in the temple. They viewed the temple as belonging to them when in fact it was to be the dwelling place for God from which they would serve Him. They didn't want someone like Jesus messing with their territory and power over the people. In typical fashion, Jesus didn't answer them directly but asked them a question: the baptism of John, was it from heaven or from men? This question put them in a quandary because if they answered that John's ministry was from God then they would be condemning themselves for rejecting what he was preaching. If they said John's message was from man then they risked getting the people mad because they viewed John as a prophet. This was all said publically with the crowds surrounding Jesus and the leaders. It must have been quite embarrassing for them to be called out in front of the people.

It's clear from Luke 7:28—30 that the leaders of Israel almost universally rejected John's ministry. When they rejected John's baptism they rejected God's purpose for them and therefore rejected eternal life in the Kingdom. John came to Israel from God because it was now time to announce that the Kingdom of God was ready to be set up (John 1:6; Matthew 3:1—2). He came preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Luke 3:3). Notice that baptism was necessary for those who wanted to come to Christ. The crowds were receptive to this message of the Kingdom and eagerly accepted what John was preaching while the leaders wanted nothing to do with his message. When John saw the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism he knew their hearts, called them a brood of vipers and told them to bear fruit that would indicate that they had truly repented (Matthew 3:7—8).

Jesus was actually telling them the source of His authority by pointing them to John. He was sent by God the Father to be a forerunner for Jesus announcing the arrival of Israel's Messiah (Matthew 11:10). If the leaders of Israel had actually believed that John was sent from God and was announcing the coming of their Messiah they would know immediately that Jesus' authority came from the Father. By rejecting John they reject Jesus. Their hardened hearts refused to believe who Jesus was and Jesus refused to answer them because He knew they already knew the answer.

#### **Parable of the two sons** (verses 28—32)

Jesus once again tries to penetrate the hardened hearts of the leaders by telling them a parable and giving them the opportunity to see their need to repent. In this parable each son is asked to work in the vineyard. The first son says he will but doesn't while the second son says he will not but does. The two sons represent a polarized Israel with the pious religious leaders on one side and the common, "unrighteous" people on the

other. The vineyard represents Israel (Isaiah 5:1—4). Those who seem willing to work in the vineyard to get Israel to bear fruit are actually destroying Israel. They are the ones who refuse to work in the vineyard. Those who initially are said to refuse to go actually conform to the Father's will and obey Him. The tax collectors and prostitutes end up believing what Jesus was preaching while the religious leaders reject the same message.

This parable was used to point out to the religious leaders how they blatantly rejected Jesus' authority. Jesus was sent from the Father and they had already rejected the Father so it was natural that they reject the Son. If these leaders were perceptive they would have seen that Jesus was directing this parable squarely upon them and condemning them for rejecting His authority.

#### **Parable of the vineyard** (verses 33—41)

This next parable is a continuation of Jesus' answer to the religious leaders as to the source of His authority. In this parable the landowner is God the Father, the vineyard is Israel, the vine-growers are the religious leaders put in charge of Israel and the slaves sent by the landowner are the prophets sent to Israel. From this parable (and from Isaiah 5) we can see how carefully God formed the nation of Israel. They were given everything needed to produce the best fruit. The goal of a vineyard is to produce fruit so the Father sent His prophets to Israel to see if they were bearing (spiritual) fruit. They would be able to do this by being connected to the vine (John 15). Since the men put in charge of the vineyard were corrupt, Israel was producing no fruit. They were so evil that they abused, mistreated and killed the prophets that the Father sent. When the Father sent His Son they took and killed Him thinking that they would then have the inheritance (Israel) all for themselves. As Matthew 11:12 states, there are those who want to violently take the Kingdom of heaven by force.

The parable ends with Jesus asking the leaders what the owner of the vineyard should do to those who killed the father's slaves. Sadly, they unknowingly predicted their own fate when they said the owner should bring those wretches to a wretched end and bring in trustworthy vine-growers to oversee the vineyard. Just as the vine growers who were put in charge of the father's vineyard did not heed his authority, the leaders of Israel did not recognize the authority of the Father nor His Son. After all of the signs and miracles the Son did in front of these leaders, there was absolutely no excuse for them to reject His authority.

#### **Christ, the Cornerstone** (verses 42—46)

Christ is the Cornerstone, the most important foundational stone in a building. Without a cornerstone a building cannot be properly built. A building that does not have a proper foundation will eventually fail. Israel's leaders were to build Israel on God and eventually on Jesus Christ. The builders (spiritual leaders of Israel) failed by trying to build up Israel for their own benefit, leaving God out of the building plans.

Jesus quotes verses out of Psalm 118, a passage that pertains to Christ's Second Coming as He takes His rightful seat on His throne in Jerusalem. This stone is the one cut out without hands in Daniel 2:34 and 45 that crushes all other kingdoms on the earth. This is the stone that many in Israel will trip over and it will crush those who refuse Him (Isaiah 8:14). It was predicted in Luke 2:34 that Jesus would be the fall and rise of many in Israel.

Verse 43 is often misinterpreted to mean that the Gentiles will now be given the Kingdom of God because Israel rejected it. Instead of receiving all the physical land and blessings we will now have spiritual blessings. The Greek word ETHNOS is normally translated nation or Gentile. The Body of Christ is never called a nation so this word does not mean today's Church. Since this word is singular, it could only refer to one nation. This nation is the Jewish nation composed of remnant Jews. It is this nation that will go into the Millennial Kingdom with new leadership, the Disciples (Matthew 19:28).

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