



We're All Under Authority

Mark 11:27-12:12

David Sunday February 23, 2020

Turn to the Gospel of Mark, chapter 11. We're going to read from verse 27 all the way to Mark 12:12. But first, let's pray together.

Father, we bow before the glory of Your Son and gather in the presence of Your Son. We're longing to know the touch of Your Son upon our lives, so grant that our searching, hungry hearts may find and be filled by Your Spirit as we open the pages of Your Word. We pray in Jesus' name and for His sake. Amen.

Hear the Word of God, beginning at Mark 11:27:

²⁷ They came again to Jerusalem. As he was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came ²⁸ and asked him, "By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you this authority to do these things?"

²⁹ Jesus said to them, "I will ask you one question; then answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. ³⁰ Was John's baptism from heaven or of human origin? Answer me."

³¹ They discussed it among themselves: "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say, 'Then why didn't you believe him?' ³² But if we say, 'Of human origin'"—they were afraid of the crowd, because everyone thought that John was truly a prophet. ³³ So they answered Jesus, "We don't know."

And Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

12 He began to speak to them in parables: "A man planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug out a pit for a winepress, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenant farmers and went away. ² At harvest time he sent a servant to the farmers to collect some of the fruit of the vineyard from them. ³ But they took him, beat him, and sent him away empty-handed. ⁴ Again he sent another servant to them, and they hit him on the head and treated him shamefully. ⁵ Then he sent another, and they killed that one. He also sent many others; some they beat, and others they killed. ⁶ He still had one to send, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' ⁷ But those tenant farmers said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him, and the

inheritance will be ours.’⁸ So they seized him, killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard.⁹ What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill the farmers and give the vineyard to others.¹⁰ Haven’t you read this Scripture:

The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

¹¹ This came about from the Lord and is wonderful in our eyes?”

¹² They were looking for a way to arrest him but feared the crowd because they knew he had spoken this parable against them. So they left him and went away.

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of our God abides forever (Isaiah 40:8). This is God’s Word. “Thanks be to God.” I’ve been trying for 20 years to get that response at the end of reading Scripture. Maybe I should make a slide with, “Thanks be to God for His Word.”

How would you like to have absolute authority over your life—no one bossing you around, no one telling you what to think, what to believe, how to behave? No one can expect or demand anything from you and you answer to no one but yourself? If you could have complete control over your life, would you like to have that?

This is what Tim Keller calls “the root idea of modernity.” It’s the idea that there is no authority over us outside ourselves. So we get bumper stickers that say, “Question authority.” We think there’s no tradition, no revelation, no external authority that can stand over us. All of it must submit to the supreme court of our own reason and intuition.

Think about it. Do you believe things because they are true, or are things true because you believe them? The way you answer that question reveals whether you believe there’s an authority outside you or whether you are the supreme authority over your life.

Authority is the key word in our passage this morning. The issue confronting us in this passage of Scripture is the authority of Jesus Christ. The main claim this passage is making is that Jesus has the right to hold absolute authority over our lives because of Who He is. To accept Jesus Christ, you have to relinquish every other authority over your life—including your own.

Who does Jesus think He is?

Now, you might wonder if Jesus claims absolute authority over our lives, who does Jesus think He is? That’s the question the religious leaders in Jerusalem are asking Him. Remember, this is the third day of the last week of Jesus’ life. It’s Tuesday and He’s going to be crucified on

Friday—and He knows it. But He is still working. He will not waste a moment of this holy week. He is pouring every ounce of His energy into doing the will of His Father.

So He wakes up on Tuesday morning and goes with His disciples once again into the city of Jerusalem. He walks into the most holy place in that most holy city—the temple. The day before, He had stormed into that temple and cleaned house. A couple weeks ago Joe preached on that passage. In Mark 11:15, we saw Jesus taking charge. He was overturning tables of the money changers and chairs of those who were selling doves. He would not permit anyone to carry goods through the temple. He would not let them make this a house of commerce. He was teaching them from Isaiah 56, saying, *“Is it not written, My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations? But you have made it a den of thieves!”*

Now, the chief priests and scribes heard what he was saying and were very offended. They were looking for a way to kill Him which was nothing new. It goes all the way back to Mark 3:6, when the religious leaders had been plotting together with the political leaders on how they might kill Him. Now they’ve had it up to their eyeballs and are furious with rage against Jesus. But they’re afraid of the crowds, because the people are all astonished at Jesus’ teaching.

So here we are again. It’s a new day and Jesus is back in Jerusalem, facing these same religious leaders who are intent on destroying Him. It’s Tuesday morning of Holy Week and we read in Mark 11:27, *“As he was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes and the elders came and asked, ‘By what authority are you doing these things?’”* In other words, “Jesus, Who do You think You are?”

I remember taking a youth group down to Mexico back in 1997. In Mexico City, we went into the cathedral and I remember feeling very discouraged as I looked around. It was full of relics. People were selling indulgences. There were remains of dead saints in airtight containers so people could worship the saints. It was a spectacle of religious manipulation of the masses and a dark gloom filled the place. I remember feeling sickened in my heart and angry that in a place where the light of the gospel was so obviously needed, a religious system was in place that was intent on keeping people under the darkness of lies and fear.

I’ve had similar feelings walking around the University of Chicago, looking at some of the religious buildings there, seeing billboards and signs that are proclaiming messages that are absolutely antithetical to the gospel. The truth that sets people free in Christ is not being proclaimed from those buildings.

Now, what would you think if I told you I went into that cathedral in Mexico City and threw all the relics into a pile and set them ablaze? What would you think if I told you I turned over the mummified remains of those dead saints and threw out all the moneychangers in the cathedral?

Or what would you think if I told you I spray-painted the signage of the Unitarian building at the University of Chicago? I hope you'd think, "That was not a very good idea, David. You deserve to be charged and fined for those crimes, because those were not your buildings. You didn't have authority to clean house there."

So Who does Jesus think He is, invading the temple, acting like it's His temple? Who does He think He is, taking charge and turning over the tables of the moneychangers, as if it's His house? Who does He think He is, calling down judgment and calling out these religious leaders for turning God's international house of prayer into a den of thieves? That's what they want to know.

But Jesus won't tell them, because He knows they don't really want to know Who Jesus is. They aren't asking the question because they really want to get to know Jesus and bring themselves under His authority. No, they're asking their question so they can assert power and control over Jesus. In other words, they're not looking for the truth; they're looking for revenge, vindication and a way to take Jesus down. So Jesus, in verse 29, answers their question with a question.

Someone once asked a rabbi, "Why is it that you rabbis always answer questions with a question?" The rabbi responded, "What do you mean?" That's what Jesus does in verse 29. Jesus said to them, "*I will ask you one question; then answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. Was John's baptism from heaven or of human origin?*" I love the next words: "*Answer me.*" "I'm in charge here—you answer Me."

Jesus is not being evasive or clever. He's actually leading them to an answer to their question, because a correct answer to Jesus' question would lead them to the right answer to their question. Think about it. If they say correctly that John the Baptist was a prophet sent from God, then what would that say about Jesus? Well, what did John the Baptist say about Jesus? He said, "*Here is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*" (John 1:29). That's Who He is.

John the Baptist also said, "*He must increase, but I must decrease*" (John 3:30). If they would have acknowledged the truth about John the Baptist, they would have had to bow to the authority of Jesus, because that's exactly what John the Baptist did. He proclaimed—all the way back in Mark 1:7-8—"*One who is more powerful than I am is coming after me. I am not worthy to stop down and untie the strap of his sandals. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.*"

So Jesus is not trying to avoid their question. He's leading them to an answer—if they want it. But He's doing it in a way that calls their bluff. He's unmasking what's really in their hearts. They're trapped now and they know it. So in Mark 11:31, they call a 20-second time out and have a quick huddle. "*If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say, 'Then why didn't you believe him?' But if we say, 'Of human origin...'*"

They can't even finish the sentence. They see the crowds of people going down to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. They knew the people regarded him as a prophet sent by God, so they chicken out and give the lamest possible answer: "*We don't know.*" Come on, guys. That's what you're paid to know. You're the religious leaders of Israel. You don't know if John was a prophet or not? It's like John McEnroe saying he doesn't know which end of the tennis racket to hold. It's a total cop-out.

It's also a piercing illustration of how fiercely the hearts of human beings resist the authority of Jesus Christ. As we see this, we've got to take stock of our own hearts. It's very possible to be a really religious person but not really know God. Here were men who had spent their lives studying the Torah, memorizing the Law, the prophets and history of their nation. If anyone should have been able to recognize God's Messiah when He came and His authority and rule, they were the ones. But all their religious advantages got them nowhere.

The same thing can be true with us. You can grow up in the church. You can learn the Bible in Sunday School and memorize so many Awana verses you get the Meritorious Award. You can go to church every week. But until you come face to face with Who Jesus really is, bow to His authority and submit to Him as Lord, you are not in a right relationship with God. You've got to acknowledge, "He is Lord; He is my Lord," then bow to His authority.

We need to be honest with our questions. Questions are good and Jesus welcomes them. An honest question is a question that's seeking to know the truth and ready to submit to the truth when found. Some questions are just smoke screens. That's what's going on with these religious leaders. They're excuses. They never stop to consider, "What if Jesus really is the Messiah? What if John the Baptist really was sent by God?"

They're more afraid of what they will lose if they accept Jesus than what they will gain if He really is God's promised King. They're threatened by Jesus. He's a threat to their reputation, power and control. I heard a pastor say, "Statistics today suggest that the more educated and the wealthier a person becomes in the Western world, the less likely that person is to commit their life to Jesus Christ."

Why is that? Because they're smarter and less gullible? No. It's because they have the most to lose from a regime change over their lives. By bowing to the authority of Jesus, you've got to yield your wealth, status and power in this world. There's a cost to being a disciple. The wealthier you get, the more sophisticated and socially respectable you become, the more Jesus becomes a threat to the status quo of your comfortable existence in this world.

You may think, "I have good reasons not to believe and accept the authority of Jesus over my life." But honestly ask if you have ever given serious consideration to Who He is and what He

claims to be? Would you be willing to be persuaded that Jesus Christ is Lord of all if all the evidence was pointing in that direction? Would you be willing to take one of the four Gospels—like Mark—read it and honestly ask God to show you the truth about Who Jesus is? Or do you have a bias that prevents you from finding out the truth?

Usually when people don't believe, the problem is not in our brains; the problem is in our hearts and with our stubborn wills. So take stock of your own heart. Where are you in relation to the lordship of Jesus Christ?

Jesus is going to get to the heart of the problem by telling these people a parable. Here's one of these situations in the Bible where you need to not pay attention to the chapter divisions and verse numbers. They're there to help us find our way around, but they were put there many, many hundreds of years after the Bible was written. Here's a literary stop sign that you need to blow right through, because you can't separate the parable of Mark 12 from its context in chapter 11.

Who do you think you are?

They've been asking, "Who does Jesus think He is?" Now, through this story, Jesus is going to turn the tables on them and ask our second question this morning: "Who do you think you are?"

"He began to speak to them in parables," we read in Mark 12:1. *"A man planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug out a pit for a winepress, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenant farmers and went away."* Now, immediately any rabbi who knew Hebrew scriptures would recognize that Jesus was echoing a story from Isaiah the prophet. You can find it back in Isaiah 5, where God speaks of Israel as a vineyard. Listen to Isaiah 5:1-2:.

*¹ I will sing about the one I love, a song about my loved one's vineyard:
The one I love had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. ² He broke up the soil,
cleared it of stones, and planted it with the finest vines. He built a tower
in the middle of it and even dug out a winepress there. He expected it to
yield good grapes, but it yielded worthless grapes.*

So the vineyard represents the people of Israel, dearly loved by God and well provided for. They had perfect conditions to be fruitful. God has been extremely generous and has every reason to have great expectations of a fruitful harvest from His people. But instead, His vineyard yields worthless grapes.

Now, look at how Jesus continues the parable in Mark 12:2: *"At harvest time,"* when the owner is looking for some fruit, *"he sent a servant to the farmers to collect some of the fruit of the vineyard from them."* But what do they do? *"They took him, beat him, and sent him away empty-handed."* They're not acting like tenants here; they're acting like the owners of the vineyard.

Maybe they're thinking, "Ah, the owner is so far away, he will never come back." So they take advantage of their freedom to deny the owner the fruit that is due him. They're violating the trust the owner put in them and are abusing the servant he sends to them.

It goes on and on. Look at verse four: "*Again he sent another servant to them, and they hit him on the head and treated him shamefully. Then he sent another, and they killed that one. He also sent many others; some they beat, and others they killed.*" So the vineyard is who? Israel. And who are the servants? The prophets. How were they treated? Shamefully.

I'm very moved by the way Hebrews 11, beginning at verse 35, describes some of this: "*[Some] were tortured, not accepting release, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Others experienced mockings and scourgings, as well as bonds and imprisonment.*" This is the noble fellowship of prophets that have gone before us. "*They were stoned,*" like Zechariah. "*They were sawed in two,*" like Isaiah. Can you imagine that—how horrific? "*They died by the sword,*" like John the Baptist. "*They wandered about in sheepskins, in goatskins, destitute, afflicted, and mistreated. The world was not worthy of them.*" Surely! "*They wandered in deserts and on mountains, hiding in caves and holes in the ground.*" Jeremiah was thrown into a pit.

So who are the tenants in this parable? The religious leaders. As they're listening to Jesus tell this story, I believe it's starting to dawn on them: "He's talking about us. He thinks this is us. This is the way we act. This is what He sees in our hearts." God has been generous with them. He's entrusted so much to them. But they abuse all this kindness, then instead, in the words of Nehemiah 9:26, "*But they were disobedient and rebelled against you. They flung your law behind their backs and killed your prophets who warned them in order to turn them back to you. They committed terrible blasphemies.*"

In response to God's longsuffering patience, they rebel and rebel, which escalates more and more. We should be wondering at this point how much more will God's patience tolerate? Think of these words of Martin Luther: "If I were God and the world had treated me as it treated Him, I would kick the wretched thing to pieces." That would be a reasonable response, wouldn't it? But God's thoughts are not our thoughts; His ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8-9).

Look at Mark 12:6. I find these to be the most poignant, heartrending words in the whole parable. "*He still had one to send, a beloved son.*" As these religious leaders heard those words, they surely would have been thinking of Abraham, who had one son who was dear to him—Isaac, his beloved son. They remembered how he was willing to sacrifice him to the Lord, but the Lord intervened and spared Isaac.

Hearing these words, "*beloved son,*" should remind us of the two other places in Mark's Gospel where these very words are spoken by a voice from heaven. At the baptism of Jesus we

hear, *"You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased"* (Mark 1:11). Then at His transfiguration we heard, *"This is my beloved Son. Listen to him"* (Mark 9:7).

So what will the owner do with his beloved son? Look at the middle of Mark 12:6: *"Finally he sent him"*—his beloved son— *"to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.'"* All the prophets were sent by God and they should have listened to them. But here is someone who is utterly unique. He's on a different level altogether. He is one of a kind, dearly loved. He's not merely a spokesman; he is the father's own image, the father's final representative, the father's final word, the father's beloved son. Surely they will listen to him. Surely they will respect him.

But no—their hearts are so hardened. They're so determined to be the owners of the vineyard that when they see the son coming and scheme together in verse seven: *"This is the heir. Come, let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours."* Notice, it wasn't because they didn't know who he was. This was premeditated murder. They knew exactly who they were killing—the son, the heir of the father's vineyard. They didn't want him to have his inheritance. They wanted to be the owners. They wanted to be their own rulers. They wanted to be under no one else's authority but their own; they wanted everyone else under their authority.

That's a picture of what's at the heart of every human being if God doesn't give us a new heart. We want to be number one. We want to be independent of God's rule. We want to take what rightfully belongs to God and seize it for our own selfish advantages. The prayer we want to pray is not, "Thy Kingdom come." No. Our hearts cry out, "My kingdom come. I'm going to be the center. Everyone else is going to be under me."

So who do you really think you are? Do you think of yourself as the owner of your life, as the owner of all God has entrusted to you? "I am my own!" This phrase, someone said, is the core principle of hell. If you don't repent of thinking of yourself as your own ruler, your own authority, your own boss—free to do whatever you like—you will not escape God's judgment in the end. Look at verse nine. These are sobering words and remember, these are Jesus' words: *"What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill the farmers and give the vineyard to others."*

Friends, if you reject God's Son, there's no other hope of a flourishing life in God's vineyard. All hope is gone. Charles Spurgeon put it so movingly: "Love, when it turns to jealousy, is the fiercest of all passions. When the love of Christ, in infinite justice, shall be turned into holy indignation against unrighteousness, then it will be something terrible to think of and to bear it will be the second death."

Are you prepared to bear the awful weight of a Savior's anger? I'm not. I'm thankful that God is not finished with this story. I'm thankful that instead of closing down His vineyard, He's going to put it under new management. I'm thankful that there's hope for those who will repent.

I'm thankful there's a rescue operation underway which we see emerging in verses 10 and 11. Jesus turns to one more place in Scripture, Psalm 118, and applies it to Himself. Look at what He says in Mark 12:10: *"Haven't you read this Scripture: The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This came about from the Lord and is wonderful in our eyes?"*

Jesus is showing here that redemption is going to wonderfully expand beyond the nation of Israel, as God intended from the beginning. The builders rejected the stone and cast Him out of the vineyard. But the rejection of the stone, Who is Jesus, led to His death on the cross and that's where He's heading. It's Tuesday and Friday is coming. He knows He's the beloved Son Whom they're going to crucify outside the gates of the city.

Like Joe said a couple weeks ago, He has his face set. He's like a wingsuiter—nothing is going to deter Him from His mission. He will be rejected. He will suffer. He will be crucified. But His rejection is going to lead to His resurrection, then God is going to create a new humanity, a new building made up of living stones of redeemed people from every tribe, language and nation.

When you realize that you're welcomed into that new humanity and into that new building made of living stones, you say, "How wonderful this is in my eyes. How marvelous, how wonderful and my song shall ever be my Savior's love to me." Charles Spurgeon once beautifully described the grace of God like this: "If you reject Him, He answer you with tears. If you wound Him, He bleeds out cleansing. If you kill Him, He dies to redeem you. If you bury Him, He rises again to bring resurrection."

Jesus is love made manifest. Oh, we've wounded Him through our sin, but Jesus bleeds out cleansing. We kill Him, but through His death He redeems us. We bury Him, but He rises again to bring resurrection. And through His risen life God is building a new humanity, a new temple made of living stones. The thing they all have in common is they're all connected; they're all aligned to Christ, the Cornerstone.

You can get in on this. You can experience this grace and mercy, no matter how vile and vicious your sins have been. Even the crucifying of the Son of God can be forgiven, because as we sing, "God's mercy is more. Stronger than darkness, new every morn. Our sins they are many; His mercy is more."

What will you do with Jesus?

This all comes down to our third question this morning—what will you do with Jesus? Christ is the cornerstone of the new redeemed humanity. All the living stones in this new building need to be aligned to Him. A cornerstone is the stone that calibrates the rest of the building. It sets everything else in relation to it and that's Who Jesus is. He's the cornerstone. If you want to get in

on this marvelous work that God is doing, you need to be rightly related to Jesus. You need to be set rightly in relationship to Him and your life needs to be calibrated by His Lordship.

Jesus is a friend for sinners. He welcomes all to Him. But He is not a friend of sin. He's not willing to be your buddy and let you go on living your life however you please. He's not willing to be just one of your spiritual gurus whom you look to for life lessons. No, He is Lord of all. If you want to get in on this wonderful work that God is doing of rescuing rebels, raising them to newness of life and giving them hope of resurrection life forever, you need to align yourself to the Lordship of Jesus.

You need to say, "Jesus, You will now be the Ruler of my thought life. Jesus, You will now be the Director of my future. Jesus, You will now be the standard of my behavior. Jesus, You have the right to question me, call me to account, correct me, rebuke me and demand my obedience. I am not my own. I've been bought with a price, the price of Your own blood. Therefore, I will no longer live for myself, but for You, my Savior, Who died and Who rose again so that I might live."

Sadly, the religious leaders refused Him. Look at verse 12: *"They were looking for a way to arrest him but feared the crowd because they knew he had spoken this parable against them. So they left him and went away."* I am pleading that wouldn't be the story for anyone in this room today. Don't leave Jesus and go away from this place. Don't leave this place without Jesus being Lord and you surrendering to His Lordship. Don't let that be you.

Someone is going to be your authority. You can try to run your own life. You can try to be your own authority. But that's like trying to get out of the middle of the Sahara Desert on foot, without a GPS and without a compass. You will not make it. You will starve spiritually, you will get dehydrated and you will wander in the wasteland, exposed to the elements of this brutal world. We were not made to be our own masters. We were not made to be our own authorities. Someone or something will rule us.

The only choice you have to make right now is who will be the authority over your life and is that authority worthy to play such a vital role? Is that authority someone or something you can trust to lead you to safety, wholeness, flourishing and to the life that is truly life? C.S. Lewis said this: "Authority exercised with humility and obedience accepted with delight are the very lines along which our spirits live." That's true.

So I commend to you my Savior, Jesus Christ. He is the King. He is authority expressed with humility. He's the only King Who came, not to be served, but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many. All of us can be among the many He ransoms today. I call you to repent, to turn away from ruling your own life and to obey Him with delight.

With delight cast yourself before King Jesus and say, “Who else but You, Lord Jesus, if He were rejected, would answer with tears? Who else, if you wounded Him, would bleed out cleansing? Who else, if you killed Him, would die to redeem? Who else, if you buried Him, would rise to resurrection life?” Only Christ. As we sing, “Christ alone, cornerstone, weak made strong through the Savior’s love.” Through the storm of the insanity of our sin and rebellion, He remains Lord. He is Lord—Lord of all. Will you submit to His authority today? Will you say, “Jesus, I delight to have You be Lord of my life”? Amen.

We’re going to give you an opportunity to respond and align yourself to Christ the cornerstone today. You can come under His gracious rule today. Believers in Jesus delight to do this over and over and over again. We obey Him with delight, because He’s such a humble and gracious King.

So God’s people, right now we’re going to say from the heart this pledge of allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ together. If you have not yet surrendered your life to the Lordship of Christ, you can do that today from the heart, as you join with us in this prayer of consecration. It’s a getting over of ourselves to the Lordship of Jesus. Let’s do this together.

I confess that Jesus is Lord. I confess that Jesus shares the name and nature, the holiness, the authority, power, majesty and eternity of the one and only true God. I confess that Jesus died and was raised, opening heaven up to unworthy sinners. I am such a sinner and I gladly embrace His atonement for me. I confess that Jesus rightfully owns me, every part of me, every moment of my time, every dollar in my possession, every opportunity granted me, every responsibility thrust upon me, every hope I cherish, every person whom I love and treasure.

I am personal property of the Lord Jesus Christ. He deserves my allegiance, loyalty and trust, 24 hours a day, in all places, in all aspects of my life, both public and private. He is worthy of my obedience. He is worthy of my utmost. He is worthy of my very blood. Amen.

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