

The authorities begin to challenge Jesus

After Jesus' casting out the sellers in the temple, the authorities in Jerusalem get angry and begin to challenge Jesus. But Jesus' popular support is great, and they cannot simply arrest Him. The next thing they do is to challenge His authority and try to refute His teaching. The **Tuesday** of Jesus' last week on earth is a day of questions.

Jesus' authority questioned

• A good question but not sincerely asked

First comes a **question concerning Jesus' authority**^{□1}. The Jerusalem leaders have a question: by what authority does He act in the way He does, and who gave Him His authority? The question was a good one, but there was no sincerity in their asking it, and they had no interest in the answer. If they had received a plain answer they would only have used it against Jesus. How often men and women will pretend interest in some kind of religious matter when their only real interest is their own ambitions.

• A non-provocative answer

Jesus answers the question but not in a way that will get Him into trouble too quickly. His answer is: my authority is the same authority as that of John the Baptist! But the Jerusalem leaders cannot do much with this answer, because they are not willing to publicly admit John's authority.

• True authority – by the Holy Spirit's anointing

True authority comes from God and by the Holy Spirit. For men and women of this world authority is largely a matter of political power or social eminence or intellectual cleverness. The people in Jesus' day who might be thought to have authority were Pontius Pilate and Caiaphas and the clever intellectual scribes in Jerusalem. But actually in the things of God they had no authority at all! Authority is a matter of spiritual power. It comes by the Holy Spirit's anointing. It gives spiritual understanding and spiritual power. Jesus' authority came from heaven. He was sent by God and had the obvious power of the Holy Spirit resting upon Him. The leaders of the Jerusalem authorities had a good question, but they had no real interest in knowing what was the answer to their question.

The Parable of the wicked husbandmen

1. The greatest of all of the servants of God

In the parable of the wicked 'husbandmen'^{□1}, Jesus is still answering this same question concerning His authority. Who is Jesus?

1. He is **the greatest of all of the servants of God**. Israel was like a vineyard. God is like an absent owner. He sends workers along to collect the fruit, but the workers are rejected. Finally He sends His son as the greatest and most reliable of all who serve Him. Jesus is in a category of His own, but He comes to serve God. He is in the line of the prophets and the servants of God who have been sent to Israel throughout the nation's history.

God is looking for fruitfulness in His people. He provides enough for us to be fruitful. In the story of Israel He had given them redemption. He had given them His law and had provided for them a system of worship in the tabernacle. He had often sent them His prophets. Recently in the history of Israel God had sent them John the Baptist.

He has given His vineyard plenty of supplies. So now God has the right to expect His people to be fruitful.

2. God's Son.

2. He is **God's Son**. This final servant of God is in a category that puts Him above any of the servants that have been sent before. He is the owner's son. Here Jesus is claiming to be the unique Son of God. He is a servant of God yet He is more than a servant of God.

□1 11:27–37

□1 12:1–12

3. *Someone destined to be killed.*

3. He is **someone destined to be killed**. The parable Jesus tells is in line with the various predictions Jesus has given concerning His death. He knows – and they know – what is being planned for Him. Jesus knows that He is about to die. He has already spoken of Himself as ‘a ransom for the sins of many’^{□1}.

□1 10:45

4 *The criterion of God’s judgement.*

4. He is **the criterion of God’s judgement**. If the owner of the vineyard comes he will find out what has happened and the thieves and robbers who have misused the produce of the vineyard will be destroyed. Jesus refers here to the destruction of Jerusalem which will take place a generation later in AD 70.

5. *The stone which the builders rejected*

5. He is **the stone which the builders rejected**. Jesus is referring to the prediction of Isaiah 28:16. It is a picture of some builders who are constructing a building and they want a large stone to be the cornerstone, a stone which will be the largest and most important stone in the foundation. The builders find a large stone but they reject it.

Jesus is God’s ‘stone’. He is the foundation of salvation. He is the Saviour on which we can build our lives. He is one who will stay firm amidst the floods and storms which life may bring. But the ‘builders’ – the people who thought they were religious experts – rejected God’s perfect and precious stone.

6. *The stone which has become the head of the corner.*



6. He is **the stone which has become the head of the corner**. The religious experts in Jerusalem have rejected Jesus but God is about to make Jesus the ‘head of the corner’ – the chief stone in the building which He is building.

The Jewish leaders are rejecting Him; the Father is accepting Him. The Jerusalem leaders think He is soon to be got rid of; the Father knows that His death on the cross will carry forward His everlasting kingdom. The leaders think that in a few more years He will be forgotten; the Father will use Him to pour out the Holy Spirit and His kingdom shall have no end.

• *Jesus’ authority rejected but not defeated*

Jesus had given an answer to the question of Mark 11:29. They wanted to know what His authority was. Jesus has given them two answers – one indirect and one in parable. But now they did not like it! They understood it only too well!^{□1} They had pretended to want information about Jesus’ authority but their questions were only ways of rejecting His authority. Yet they will not defeat Jesus. Jesus has the authority of God no matter what they think.

□1 12:12

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