

We are finishing up The Gospels Series. Over the next few weeks, leading up to Easter, we are focusing on the Passion Week: the final days of Jesus' life. **Today, we are talking about the heated exchange between Jesus and the religious leaders in the Temple.**

The story takes place in Jerusalem in the year 33AD, almost 2,000 years ago, during the annual Passover Festival. Tensions were very high, because the city was literally overflowing with people attending the festival, and Jesus threatened the power of the political and religious leaders.

Two days before, on Sunday, Jesus caused an "uproar in the city" when he rode a donkey into Jerusalem. By doing this, Jesus was publicly claiming to be the "Messiah King arriving in the name of The Lord to bring peace to all the earth."

The next day, Monday, Jesus caused a dramatic scene in the Temple by turning over the tables of the money changers and stopping people from buying and selling.

This brings us to Tuesday in the story. Everyone was on edge, waiting for Jesus' next move. And the religious leaders were determined to find a way to kill Jesus.

"27 Again they entered Jerusalem. As Jesus was walking through the Temple area, the leading priests, the teachers of religious law, and the elders came up to him. 28 They demanded, 'By what authority are you doing all these things? Who gave you the right to do them?' 29 'I'll tell you by what authority I do these things if you answer one question,' Jesus replied. 30 'Did John's authority to baptize come from heaven, or was it merely human? Answer me!' 31 They talked it over among themselves. 'If we say it was from heaven, he will ask why we didn't believe John. 32 But do we dare say it was merely human?' For they were afraid of what the people would do, because everyone believed that John was a prophet. 33 So they finally replied, 'We don't know.' And Jesus responded, 'Then I won't tell you by what authority I do these things.'" Mark 11:27-33 NLT

The religious leaders were looking for a way to arrest Jesus so that they could have him tried and killed. This question about his authority was a trap, and Jesus knew it. So he said he would only answer their question if they first answered his question. **Jesus' question about John's authority was an impossible question for the religious leaders to answer.** If they said, "John's authority was from heaven," it would confirm John's testimony about Jesus being the Messiah. If they said, "John's authority was merely human," they would potentially cause a riot with the people, because the people believed John was a prophet from God. So they eventually said, "We don't know." And so Jesus refused to answer their question.

"1 Then Jesus began teaching them with stories: 'A man planted a vineyard. He built a wall around it, dug a pit for pressing out the grape juice, and built a lookout tower. Then he leased the vineyard to tenant farmers and moved to another country. 2 At the time of the grape harvest, he sent one of his servants to collect his share of the crop. 3 But the farmers grabbed the servant, beat him up, and sent him back empty-handed. 4 The owner then sent another servant, but they insulted him and beat him over the head. 5 The next servant he sent was killed. Others he sent were either beaten or killed, 6 until there was only one left—his son whom he loved dearly. The owner finally sent him, thinking, 'Surely they will respect my son.' 7 'But the tenant farmers said to one another, 'Here comes the heir to this estate. Let's kill him and get the estate for ourselves!' 8 So they grabbed him and murdered him and threw his

body out of the vineyard. 9 "What do you suppose the owner of the vineyard will do?" Jesus asked. "I'll tell you—he will come and kill those farmers and lease the vineyard to others. 10 Didn't you ever read this in the Scriptures? 'The stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone.

11 This is the Lord's doing, and it is wonderful to see. 12 The religious leaders wanted to arrest Jesus because they realized he was telling the story against them—they were the wicked farmers. But they were afraid of the crowd, so they left him and went away. Mark 12:1-12 NLT

Jesus told this story to get the religious leaders' attention. The man who planted the vineyard represented God the Father. The vineyard represented the nation of Israel. The tenant farmers represented the religious leaders responsible to take care of the vineyard. The servants represented the prophets of God who had been killed by religious leaders over the years. The son represented Jesus, God's son who was sent to the nation of Israel, but would be killed like the other prophets. And like the vineyard owner would, "come and kill the tenant farmers and lease the vineyard to others," God would judge and kill the religious leaders of Israel and extend His Kingdom to include non-Jews around the world.

Jesus then goes on to quote Psalm 118, "The stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone." **Jesus was the cornerstone on which God would build the new Temple, the people of God.** In the words of my son Asher, "Jesus was insane at roasting people." This story was the ultimate roast of the religious leaders.

13 Later the leaders sent some Pharisees and supporters of Herod to trap Jesus into saying something for which he could be arrested. 14 "Teacher," they said, "we know how honest you are. You are impartial and don't play favorites. You teach the way of God truthfully. Now tell us—is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not? 15 Should we pay them, or shouldn't we?" Jesus saw through their hypocrisy and said, "Why are you trying to trap me? Show me a Roman coin, and I'll tell you." 16 When they handed it to him, he asked, "Whose picture and title are stamped on it?" "Caesar's," they replied. 17 "Well, then," Jesus said, "give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God." His reply completely amazed them. Mark 12:13-17 NLT

This question was another attempt by the religious leaders to trap Jesus. Right away, the fact that the Pharisees and the supporters of Herod are working together is suspicious, because they did not like each other. We also know this was a trap because the scripture says it was, and Jesus knew it, not only because he is all knowing, but because they were acting strange by trying to flatter him. The religious leaders knew that if Jesus said yes to paying taxes to Caesar, the people would have seen this as a compromise in Jesus' loyalty and faith in God, and caused doubt that he was the Messiah. But if Jesus said no, the religious leaders knew that Jesus would have been arrested for causing a rebellion against Rome. **So Jesus says, "give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God." This was a brilliant response that satisfied everyone, and completely amazed and silenced the religious leaders.**

18 Then Jesus was approached by some Sadducees—religious leaders who say there is no resurrection from the dead. They posed this question: 19 "Teacher, Moses gave us a law that if a man dies, leaving a wife without children, his brother should marry the widow and have a child who will carry on the brother's name. (Note: See Deut. 25:5-6.) 20 Well, suppose there were seven brothers. The oldest one married and then died without children. 21 So the second brother married the widow, but he also died

without children. Then the third brother married her. 22This continued with all seven of them, and still there were no children. Last of all, the woman also died. 23So tell us, whose wife will she be in the resurrection? For all seven were married to her." 24Jesus replied, "Your mistake is that you don't know the Scriptures, and you don't know the power of God. 25For when the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage. In this respect they will be like the angels in heaven. 26 "But now, as to whether the dead will be raised—haven't you ever read about this in the writings of Moses, in the story of the burning bush? Long after Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had died, God said to Moses, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' 27So he is the God of the living, not the dead. You have made a serious error." Mark 12:18-27 NLT

This question was also suspicious because the Sadducees didn't even believe in the resurrection from the dead. They were trying to make Jesus look stupid by asking him to explain a theological concept that they thought was ridiculous. I love Jesus' response, "Your mistake is that you don't know the Scriptures, and you don't know the power of God." He goes on to explain that their story doesn't make sense because there will be no marriage in heaven. Then he asks them if they have read the story of the burning bush in the writings of Moses. Remember, these were religious leaders, of course they had read the writings of Moses. "God said to Moses, I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. So God is the God of the living, not the dead." **Jesus was making the point that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are no longer on the earth, but they are fully alive with God, because they have been resurrected from the dead!** The Sadducees were the only ones looking stupid after this conversation.

28One of the teachers of religious law was standing there listening to the debate. He realized that Jesus had answered well, so he asked, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" 29Jesus replied, "The most important commandment is this: 'Listen, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only Lord. 30And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.' 31The second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' No other commandment is greater than these." 32The teacher of religious law replied, "Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth by saying that there is only one God and no other. 33And I know it is important to love him with all my heart and all my understanding and all my strength, and to love my neighbor as myself. This is more important than to offer all of the burnt offerings and sacrifices required in the law." 34Realizing how much the man understood, Jesus said to him, "You are not far from the Kingdom of God." And after that, no one dared to ask him any more questions. Mark 12:28-34 NLT

My guess is that this question was more of a theological test than a trap. The man who asked the question seemed genuinely interested in what Jesus knew about the Law, almost as if he was wondering if Jesus could be the real Messiah. This man was a teacher and expert in the law, so if he wanted to, he could have asked a very sneaky question to trip Jesus up. Jesus' answer was amazing, he summarized the 613 laws of the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament. No one had ever done this. The man was impressed with Jesus and Jesus was impressed with the man. The story says, after Jesus "realized how much the man understood," Jesus said, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." **This kind of summarizes the religious leaders' relationship to God, they were so close, because His Word was "on their lips," but not close enough, because "their hearts were far from Him."**

After the religious leaders grilled Jesus with questions about his authority, loyalty and theology, "No one dared to ask him any more questions."

35Later, as Jesus was teaching the people in the Temple, he asked, "Why do the teachers of religious law claim that the Messiah is the son of David? 36For David himself, speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, said, 'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit in the place of honor at my right hand until I humble your enemies beneath your feet.' 37 Since David himself called the Messiah 'my Lord,' how can the Messiah be his son?" The large crowd listened to him with great delight. Mark 12:35-37 NLT

Jesus went on the offensive by asking his own question, "Since David himself called the Messiah my Lord, how can the Messiah be his son?" This is a confusing question at face value. To make sense of it, you need to know that Jesus was attacking the religious leaders' assumption that the Messiah would only be a human, from the line of David. Although, this was true, it wasn't all of the truth. The Messiah would be both human and divine. And to make this point, Jesus quoted Psalm 110, "The Lord said to my Lord...", which highlights the divinity of the Messiah. **Jesus blew their minds by expanding their expectation of the Messiah from being merely human, to being both human and divine.** The religious leaders had nothing to say in response to Jesus, and "the crowd was delighted."

38Jesus also taught: "Beware of these teachers of religious law! For they like to parade around in flowing robes and receive respectful greetings as they walk in the marketplaces. 39And how they love the seats of honor in the synagogues and the head table at banquets. 40Yet they shamelessly cheat widows out of their property and then pretend to be pious by making long prayers in public. Because of this, they will be more severely punished." Mark 12:38-40 NLT

Jesus then went on to publicly shame the religious leaders, specifically, the teachers of the law and the Pharisees. He called them out for being arrogant, seeking honor and respect, cheating widows, pretending to be holy and being hypocritical. (For more see Matthew 23.)

In three days, Jesus publicly shamed and judged the religious leaders by riding a donkey into Jerusalem, turning over the money changers tables and dismantling their questions. **There was no turning back for Jesus, it was only a matter of time before he would be arrested and crucified.**

What can we learn from this story that is relevant to our lives today? There are so many things, but the theme that sticks out to me the most is the question of authority. The main problem with the religious leaders was that they refused to accept Jesus' authority as the Messiah, even though it was clearly evident that he was. On this side of history, it's easy to give the religious leaders a hard time for not believing Jesus was the Messiah. But I can imagine it being difficult to believe Him, after he had dismantled everything I had learned and experienced over my whole life. We need to make sure we don't do the same thing as the religious leaders.

Have you surrendered your life to Jesus? I'm not simply talking about becoming a Christian, of course that is the first step of giving up authority. What I am talking about is, have you surrendered all of your life, all the details of your daily life to Jesus? If you're honest, you probably have some areas of your life that you are holding on to. We all do. Maybe you are holding on to your marriage, or the way you date, or your parenting, work or finances? Ask yourself why are you holding on to these things. Do you trust God with your dreams?

The good news for you is that you can give God authority over your life, you can trust Him with the details of your life. God is good, and has the best plan for your life. He loves you and wants to see you thrive, even though he allows you to go through difficult circumstances.

Take a step of faith today by surrendering that part of your life that you are holding on to, to God. Tell Him what you're afraid of and what you want to happen, and then trust Him to respond in the way that He sees fit.

Prayer– Thank you Father for sending your Son Jesus Christ into the world, to bring us the good news of your love, forgiveness and your kingdom come. We are eternally lost without you. Help us, by the power of your Holy Spirit, to trust you with all of our lives. And as we do, we pray that you would blow our minds and expand our faith by your goodness. Amen.