

Controversies with the King (Part I)
Mark 11:27-12:17

“Nate, this is just Tuesday” (Chuck Kelly)

We are not looking at just any ordinary Tuesday! And this was no ordinary week in history. It’s a week that changed the world.

Context

**Mark chapters 11-15 is the Passion Week. It covers 1/3 of the book.
Look at the back of your bulletin....**

Harmony of the Events of Holy Week

Day	Event	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Friday/Saturday	Jesus arrives in Bethany				12:1
	Mary anoints Jesus				12:2-8
	Crowd comes to see Jesus				12:9-11
	Triumphal entry into Jerusalem	21:1-11	11:1-10	19:28-44	12:12-18
Sunday	Some Greeks seek Jesus				12:20-36
	Jesus weeps over Jerusalem			19:41	
	Enters temple		11:11		
	Returns to Bethany	21:17	11:11		
	Jesus curses the fig tree	21:18-19	11:12-14		
Monday	Clears the temple	21:12-13	11:15-17	19:45-46	
	Returns to Bethany with the Twelve		11:19		
	Disciples see the withered fig tree on the return to Jerusalem	21:20-22	11:20-21		
Tuesday	Temple controversies in Jerusalem	21:23-23:39	11:27-12:44	20:1-21:4	
	Olivet Discourse on the return to Bethany	24:1-25:46	13:1-37	21:5-36	
Wednesday	Jesus continues daily teaching in the temple			21:37-38	
	Sanhedrin plots to kill Jesus	26:3-5	14:1-2	22:1-2	
Wednesday/Thursday	Preparations for the Passover	26:17-19	14:12-16	22:7-13	
	Passover meal/Last Supper	26:20-35	14:17-26	22:14-30	
Thursday	Upper Room Discourse				13:1-17:26
	Jesus prays in Gethsemane	26:36-46	14:32-42	22:39-46	
	Betrayal and arrest (<i>after midnight?</i>)	26:47-56	14:43-52	22:47-53	18:2-12
	Jewish trial:				
	—before Annas				18:13-24
	—before Caiaphas and part of the Sanhedrin	26:57-75	14:53-72	22:54-65	18:19-24
	—before full Sanhedrin (<i>after sunrise?</i>)	27:1-2	15:1	22:66-71	
Friday	Roman trials:				
—before Pilate	27:2-14	15:2-5	23:1-5		

	— before Herod		<u>23:6–12</u>
	— before Pilate	<u>27:15–26</u>	<u>15:6–15</u> <u>23:13–25</u> <u>18:28–19:16</u>
	Crucifixion (<i>approx. 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.</i>)	<u>27:27–54</u>	<u>15:16–39</u> <u>23:26–49</u> <u>19:16–37</u>
	Burial (<i>evening</i>)	<u>27:57–61</u>	<u>15:42–47</u> <u>23:50–54</u> <u>19:38–42</u>
Sunday	Empty-tomb witnesses	<u>28:1–8</u>	<u>16:1–8</u> <u>24:1–12</u>
	Resurrection appearances	<u>28:9–20</u>	<u>16:9–20</u> <u>24:13–53</u> <u>20:1–21:25</u>

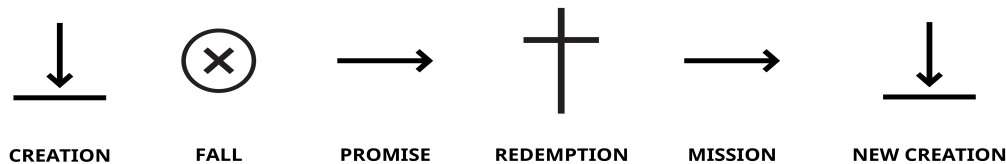
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We are moving to the cross!

Whole Bible Context

“The entire Bible pivots on weekend in outside of Jerusalem.” (D.A. Carson)

The Story of Scripture



Tuesday of Passion Week

Mark 11:20–13:37 appears to be one long day! (We looked at 11:20-27 last week).
Matthew’s version includes even more teaching...

Now, we’re about to look at a series of “temple controversies.” The context is the temple (see **11:11ff**, and verse **27**, **and ahead at ch. 13**). In this temple context, the religious leaders confront Jesus with various questions. But they’re not seeking insight and help. They want to kill him. These events precede his cross.

This q/a time with Jesus isn’t a fun little game of 21 questions you may play with your friends in order to discover strange things out about them. They’re loaded questions intended to trap Jesus. These are conflicts with cosmic implications; this is no ordinary Rabbi that they’re challenging.

This is not the first set of controversies the leaders have had with Christ (remember 2:1-3:6?). They wanted to destroy him then (3:6) and now. Here are the controversies:

- **The question about His authority by the Sanhedrin (11:27-33; parable 12:1-12)**
- **The question about paying taxes by the Pharisees and Herodians (12:13-17)**
- **The question about the resurrection by the Sadducees (12:18-27)**
- **The question about the greatest command by the scribes (12:28-34)**
- **The question about whose Son is the Christ by Jesus Himself (12:35-37)**

Jesus is like a good middle infielder. He fields each question impressively. After the fourth question, “no one dared to ask him any more questions” (34).

Today's Text

11:27-33 & 12:13-17 have the same kind of five-step pattern:

- (1) Jesus being approached by religious/political leaders
- (2) Jesus challenged with a question about authority
- (3) Jesus poses a counter-question, which reveals the opponents hearts
- (4) The opponents respond
- (5) Jesus answers the original question accordingly

#1: The Question About His Authority by the Sanhedrin (11:27-12:12)

You could look at this first question as the introduction to the controversies since the issue of authority is really Jesus' biggest offense for these religious leaders, and his authority runs right through each of these controversies. You could also look at the following parable as an introduction to the controversies, as Jesus is parabolically predicting what these religious leaders will do to him.

James Edwards says this about the issue of Jesus' authority:

“The characteristic of Jesus that left the most lasting impression on his followers and caused the greatest offense to his opponents was his *exousia*, his sovereign freedom and magisterial authority.”

Would you say that it's Jesus' authority that has left the most lasting impression and caused the greatest offense? How about his compassion? His wisdom? His boldness? Certainly all of the characteristics of Jesus are impressive. But I agree with James Edwards. Throughout the gospel of Mark, the authority of Jesus seems to be that one characteristic that the religious establishment can't accept; and it's Jesus' authority that has left people marveling.

Examples:

- He teaches with authority, not as the Scribes
- He forgives sin
- He heals the sick
- He gives sight to the blind
- He gives ears to deaf
- He raises the dead
- He calms the sea
- He feeds thousands with two fish burgers
- He binds Satan
- He redefine the Sabbath and declare himself to be the Lord of the Sabbath

Immediate context

- “Truly I say to you” is him speaking in the place of God
- He curses the fig tree, cleansed the temple
- He corrects the religious authorities

- Twice he said “**Answer me**” to the authorities
- **His refusal to answer them** is also an expression of his authority!

His authority is astonishing! **Let’s look at this issue...**

V. 27:

The Chief Priests, the Scribes, the Elders. This is the Jewish High Court. It exercised political and religious authority. They were involved in both doctrinal and civil matters. They couldn’t execute capital punishment which is why we read of Pilate later.

In the temple. Everything in chapters 11-15 occurs in or around the temple. There are **three big “T’s” in Judaism:** Torah, Territory, and the Temple.

Brief Biblical Overview of the Temple (adapted from Keller):

1. In the beginning, God gave us a “sanctuary,” a place where we could live in the presence of God: Eden.
2. But because of sin, we were banished from the sanctuary of God’s presence.
3. In the wilderness, God created a moveable sanctuary — the tabernacle where people could draw near to meet him (Exodus 25:22). But only the high priest could go into the Holy of Holies, and then only once a year.
4. God allowed Solomon to build a permanent physical sanctuary, but it was destroyed and the people were carried into exile.
5. The temple was rebuilt after the exiles returned to Israel from Babylon, but it didn’t fulfill this grand vision of the prophets. When the new foundation was laid, the older people wept because it was far less splendid than Solomon’s, not more (Ezra 3:12). It was this post-exilic temple that existed in Jesus’ day.
6. Jesus is the final temple. In Mark 15:38, we are told how this could be —the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. He was the High Priest opening the way into the Holy of Holies, but he made himself the sacrifice. We have access to the presence of God because of Jesus. To meet God, you don’t go to a temple, you go to “something greater than the temple” (12:6) namely, Jesus Himself.

28: “these things” refers to the previous temple incidents. They may have also had other events in mind too, but what Jesus did in the temple incited great hostility!

- **They’re implying something like this: “What gives you the right to do this?” “Who do you think you are?” “You are an un-credentialed Rabbi, from a backwater town of Nazareth!”**

29-30: Jesus answers a question with a question. Seriously. The question has the answer in it. “Was the baptism [i.e., the ministry] of John from heaven or man.” (30)

- Side note: *Questioning Evangelism*
- “Try to put a rock in someone’s shoe”
- **Examples:** “Well, what makes you believe that?” “How did you come to that conclusion? Did you read some helpful books on that view?” What’s the best argument for holding that view?

31-32: The leaders who were trying to trap Jesus, ended up in a trap.

- If they answered “**from heaven**,” meaning John’s authority came from God, then they **would be condemned by the people for not listening to John!**
- To say that his authority was “**from man**” could mean inciting the wrath of those on the side of John!
- So, they claim ignorance! **They were actually unwilling to know.**

John’s authority was obviously from heaven.

Jesus is **not evading the question**. He’s saying “If you get John right, you can get me right.” A right answer will lead to a right answer.

How so? John is associated with Jesus in a variety of ways...

- Jesus was like John. Like John, Jesus bypassed the religious authorities and the temple. He was sent by God. The people accepted this.
- John pointed to Jesus. If John was sent by God, then listen to John!
- When John baptized Jesus, the question of Jesus’ authority was answered! Everything they needed to know about Jesus’ authority happened at his baptism, as the Father declared, “This is my beloved son!”

33: The religious leaders’ failure to embrace John meant that they were incompetent to judge Jesus. So Jesus refuses to answer them revealing their stubbornness, ignorance, and lack of sincerity.

They should have bowed down before Jesus instead they are motivated by self-preservation.

Application: Why don’t some people follow Jesus?

Jesus has called people to come and follow Him, but not everyone in the gospels do so? Why not? Here is a big reason people didn’t follow Jesus then and now: If you confess Jesus as Lord then everything in your life will change – and that scares people!

Jesus’ authority threatened the Sanhedrin’s authority and that scared them. They didn’t really want to examine the evidence because they knew the implications.

Beneath intellectual questions are often deep fears and selfish desires.

Aldous Huxley “...the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation from a certain system of morality. We objected to morality [imposed by God] because it interfered with our sexual freedom.”

Underneath the religious leaders' question was a fear of losing control/power. Many fear losing idols and refuse to follow Jesus.

There are two kinds of open-mindedness: cowardly and courageous. The latter says, I'm willing to be proven wrong. They former masks unbelief with more and more questions. Like the Sanhedrin refuse to hear answers.

If you're an unbeliever, and you are sincerely seeking questions, we will spend time with you! But there's another kind of unbelief that's just unwilling to consider the claims of Christ...

But He is an Authority worth submitting to! He's the King who gives you life! Don't turn from Him, but to Him.

12:1-12 - Parable: Rejecting Jesus' Authority

- This is the final parable in Mark's gospel.
- It's a parable of judgment.
- It resembles Nathan's parable about David – only David repented, and these guys refuse.

V. 1:

- The man who plants the vineyard is God **the Father**.
- The vineyard is **Israel**. (see Isaiah 5:1-7; Psalm 80:8-18).
 - God planted Israel vineyard. He wanted her to bear fruit and produce wine. But the vineyard wasn't producing.
- The tenants are **the religious leaders of Israel**.
 - They were to care for the vineyard.
 - The owner is dealing with self-serving tenants, i.e., religious leaders. They aren't caring for the people.

2-5: The servants are the faithful prophets.

- They are rejected.
- These tenants pay rent with punches....
- Throughout redemptive history, the prophets suffer
 - Jeremiah was beaten and put in stocks (Jer 20:2).
 - Isaiah, tradition says, was sawed in two. Zechariah was stoned to death in the temple (2 Chron 24:21).
 - See **Jer 7:25-26**
 - See also **Neh 9:26-27**
 - John the Baptist was beheaded.
 - See **Matt 23:34-35**

Two Applications:

- **Marvel at the patience and mercy of God!**

- **Don't be surprised by opposition when spreading the gospel!**
 - We haven't been called to a life of ease (Matt 5:10-12). Lady on a plane, **"You guys don't do any crazy [expletive] like go to Iraq or Afghanistan, do you?"**
 - **Denver: More Marijuana dispensers than McDonalds and Starbucks combined.** It will be difficult.

6-8: The beloved son is Jesus.

- **He's unique.**
- **He's the heir.**
- **He's the final "servant."**
- The owner is saying, **"Surely they will respect the authority of my son!"** Nope. God sent his Son and they killed him.
- In the parable, seeing the son may have led the tenants to wrongly conclude that the landowner was dead. They surmised that if they assassinate the son, then they could claim his property as their own.
- Throwing the landlord's son out may allude to Jesus' crucifixion outside the city walls.
- John 1:11: "He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him."

But in this death, Jesus was saving repentant sinners!

What love!

The Spurge: "If you reject Him, He answers you with tears. If you wound Him, He bleeds out cleansing. If you kill Him, He dies to redeem. If you bury Him, He rises again to bring us resurrection. Jesus is love manifest."

Yes, and amen. But we must not presume upon his love. God will not clear the guilty, as the next verse shows...

9: Judgment. The one who rejects the vineyard owner's son rejects the vineyard owner.

- Romans 11:22: "Note then the kindness and the severity of God."
- To reject the Son is to invite the "wrath of the Lamb" (Rev 6:16).
- Repent or perish.

10-11 - The Great Reversal

- **Psalm 118:22-23:** The metaphor changes to a building. It is the same psalm shouted by the people at His triumphal entry.
- Many rejected Jesus. They regarded him as a worthless stone.
- But God takes what has been rejected and makes it the cornerstone! The Lord did it! It's marvelous!
- The cornerstone was the most important stone of a building. It provided both, stability and symmetry.

Application:

If you don't answer the question, "Who is Jesus?" rightly, then your whole life will be out of alignment. Your life will have no foundation. But if you have a relationship with Jesus then you can answer the rest of life's most important questions like, "Who am I? and "Who are we?" and "What's our purpose?" **If you get Jesus wrong, then you get yourself wrong, you get community wrong, and you get meaning wrong.**

Is he your cornerstone?

Don't try to make something else your cornerstone! Don't build your life on money, beauty, sexual pleasure, etc. Everything else in your life will be jacked up if you don't get Jesus right.

#2: The Question about Paying Taxes by the Pharisees and Herodians (12:13-17)

13: The trap set by strange bedfellows.

- Jesus unites enemies.
- Jesus messed up the Pharisees religious agenda.
- Jesus threatened the Herodians' political agenda.

14: Flattery and the Question.

- They tried to force an either/or scenario
 - Traitor of the Jews?
 - Revolutionary against Rome?

15-16: Jesus knows their hearts. Jesus is wise.

Coin: "On one side of the coin was a bust of Tiberius Caesar with the inscription, 'Tiberius Caesar Augustus, Son of the Divine Augustus.' The other side had an image of Tiberius's mother Livia with the words, "*Pontifex Maximus*," meaning "High Priest." The Jews found this to be idolatrous: a man claiming to be a god and a woman a priest—blasphemy!"

17 - Some of the most significant words in human history, reflected in Western Civ.

Kent Hughes: "The statement by our Lord was not only astounding the instant it was uttered, but is even today universally acclaimed to be the single most influential political statement ever made in the history of the world" (Mark, 2:103).

What Jesus Essentially Says:

Give to each what they rightly deserve.

1. Obey the Government as Long as You Can

- Jesus is not an anarchist!
- God has ordained the family, the Church, and human government.
- The state has right to impose taxes, and we have the responsibility to pay.
- The state the right to make laws, and we have the responsibility to obey.
- Paul and Peter expand Jesus' statement, even though Nero (AD 54–68) was emperor! (see Romans 13:17, 1 Peter 2:8ff)

As long as these obligations do not interfere with our ability to honor and worship God, we must fulfill them.

2. Worship God as Long as You Live

- It's not exactly a neat distinction between state and God.
- Jesus is subtly implying that Caesar isn't God.
- Caesar is under God – as are all rulers/kings/presidents.
- Mark 13 – nations rise and fall under God's sovereign hand.
- We worship God alone... He is the only Sovereign!

Summary statement:

**The Coin bears Caesar's image, so give it to him.
You bear God's image, give your life to Him!**

Dr. Akin brings this together helpfully with a "manifesto"

As a devoted follower of King Jesus, my Lord, my Savior, and my sovereign God, I pledge the following to the governing authorities, which are ordained by God:

- 1. I will be a good citizen living in subjection to governmental authority, even a pagan one (Rom 13:1-7; 1 Pet 2:13-17).**
- 2. I will responsibly engage the political process. If allowed, I will vote, seeking to bring my Christian convictions into the public arena (see Prov 14:34).**
- 3. I will live internationally like Joseph in Egypt, Daniel in Babylon, and Jesus Himself on earth. My ultimate allegiance is to Christ and His kingdom.**
- 4. I will obey the state but worship only God. And I will thank God for all the good He does through the government, praying always for all who are in authority (1 Tim 2:1-5).**
- 5. I will acknowledge that all governmental authority is established by and comes from God (Mark 12:17; Rom 13:1,4,6).**
- 6. I will acknowledge that all government serves in some measure the purposes of promoting good and punishing evil (Rom 13:3-4). Bad government is almost always better than no government.**
- 7. I will pay all taxes levied upon me by my government, recognizing its right to do so (Mark 12:17; Rom 13:6-7).**

8. I will engage in “civil disobedience” only when my government prohibits me from doing what the Bible commands, or when it commands me to do what the Bible prohibits.

Akin: “So, as a devoted follower of Jesus, I will say “yes” to obeying the government and paying taxes to Caesar, but I will say “no” to disobeying the Word of God and worshiping a man or institution. Independence Day for the Christian is not marked by a flag. No, our independence day is Easter, marked by a cross and an empty tomb.”

Conclusion

Jesus has absolute authority. His credentials come from heaven.

It was his authority that led to his death...

His authority is over all kings and leaders. He is the King of Kings. He is the Lord of Lords.

Soon, He is coming to establish a one-party kingdom, which He will rule with perfect peace of justice forever.

The question is:

Will you acknowledge Jesus' authority?

Be reminded of his authority... Allow his authority to...

1. **Change you** – submit every aspect of your life to him.... It’s not Jesus plus my feelings, or Jesus plus my tradition, or Jesus plus what I like... Will you allow Jesus to have authority over your sex life, your drinking, your anger problem, your laziness, your wallet. Unbeliever, will you submit your life to this King!
2. **Lift you.** It is because of his authority that his death on the cross was effective in securing our forgiveness of our sins. He is the one who said, “the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins” (Mk 2:10). If he says, “My son, your sins are forgiven,” then you are forgiven! “Bless the Lord oh my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquities...”
3. **Comfort you.** Rest in this one who secures you. He has us forever! Jude writes: “Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and *authority*, before all time and now and forever. Amen.” (Jude 24-25)

Jesus has us! And Jesus will reign forever. Be comforted by this truth.

4. Embolden you. It's this King who says, "All authority in heaven and earth is mine, therefore, go make disciples of all nations. We go in his authority with his presence. We go with confidence!"