

Matthew 21:23-32 The Authority of the Lord to Perform His Will

We have a new study guide today. If you haven't gotten yours, you might want to pick one up. Matthew 21:23-32. So far, we've seen since the beginning of this chapter:

The Lord coming into Jerusalem riding on a donkey at the beginning of Passover week and so fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah. Zechariah 9:9 says Messiah will ride in on a donkey. And they praise Him for it, they acknowledge Him as being the Messiah. Remember this is only the beginning of Passover week. He's got a whole week's activities to go yet.

Then we saw Him purify the Temple, cleanse the Temple, by kicking out all the merchants, all the people buying and selling. The moneymaking and the fundraisers and all the things that they were doing in the courtyard area to charge the people for coming to participate with the Passover meal. He cleansed the Temple. He kicked them out.

And then on His way out of town He placed a curse upon the fig tree outside of town, verses 18 to 22, because it did not bear fruit.

We saw last week that the fig tree in the Old Testament represented the nation Israel. And no fruit upon it and just leaves, and Jesus cursed the tree and Mark tells us it withered from the roots up. And so showing that Israel was producing no fruit. And that's sort of the theme that we need to carry over to what we are going to study this morning. A lot of religion. A lot of religiosity. A lot of religious confession, but not much fruit, if any. Fruit is produced by God's Spirit. Religion is produced by man as we put forth our human effort. Yet the fruit is produced by God's Spirit who comes to dwell within us.

The first thing we study this morning in verses 23 to 27 of Matthew chapter 21 is The Protest Against the Authority of Christ.

Remember He drove the merchants out. He received the praise from the people in the street regarding Messiah that He would come. And now they come to Him to find out who He thinks He is anyway, with all this authority. What does He have to say about Himself?

In verses 23 to 27, The Confrontation with the Religious Leaders. And this all has to do with one of two things in these verses:

- (1) Recognizing Authority
- (2) Response to Authority

Recognizing authority and response to authority. So in recognizing authority in verse 23 it says, **And when He came into the temple, (that is Jesus) the chief priests and elders of the people, came to Him while He was teaching, saying, "In what authority are You doing these things?" And, "Who gave to You this authority?"** Notice there are two questions. It is not

one question in two parts but two separate questions. **In what authority do you do these things?** I want you to notice that they recognized His authority. They didn't say, "You don't have authority." They said, "Who gave you this authority? In whose authority are you doing this?" They recognized that when Jesus comes in and clears the temple area out, He's got authority. Not questioning His authority but recognizing it. In what authority are you doing these things?

The Bible is very clear about the authority of Jesus Christ. The word **ἐξουσία** (exousia) is the Greek word for *authority* and it is found in several places in the New Testament all making reference to Jesus.

In John 1:12, **But as many as received Christ, to them He gave the authority to become the sons of God, even to the ones believing in His name.** He gives people authority to become children of God. He has that authority.

In John 5:22-23 Jesus said, **For the Father judges no man, but has committed all judgment to the Son** (that is a lot of authority) **that all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honors not the Son honors not the Father which has sent him.** And then a couple of verses later in John 5:27, **And He has given to Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man.** He's been given the authority to execute judgment. We answer to Him. He said all must honor Him equally as they honor the Father, as the Father has given Him this authority.

In John 10:17-18, **Therefore does My Father love me, because I lay down My life, that I might take it again. No man takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it again. This commandment have I received of My Father.** Jesus has the authority to voluntarily lay down His life and die for the sins of the world. He also has authority to raise up from the dead. The New Testament is very clear - there are three people involved, three persons involved in the resurrection of Jesus Christ that we will take this coming Resurrection Sunday coming up here in a couple months. The Holy Spirit is said to be involved in the resurrection of Christ. The Father is said to be involved in the resurrection of Christ. And Jesus Himself is involved in His own resurrection. He has the authority to lay down His life voluntarily, He has the authority to raise it up again. That is a lot of authority, and to raise up those that are His, that He has given authority to become children of God.

In John 17:1-2 Jesus said, **These words spoke Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour is come; glorify your Son, that your Son also may glorify You. As You have given Him authority over all flesh, in order that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given to Him."** Jesus has authority over all flesh, all human beings, especially to give eternal life to those that the Father gives to Him. In John chapter 6 He had mentioned before that no one comes to Him except the Father draw him. You can't come to Jesus unless you are drawn by the Father, unless He gives you eternal life.

That is a lot of authority. That is just the spectrum of the different phases of authority which Jesus was presented as having in the Scriptures. In what authority are you doing these things? Clearing the temple out. They recognized the authority, but they want to know what authority He's doing it in.

Notice the second part of the question. The second question of the presentation, **And who gave to You this authority?** What is the source? You can have authority, but it depends where the source was coming from. And we will see this just a little bit later as we will take one of our other Scripture texts about doing the will of the Father. So they want to know, who gave to you this authority?

Verse 24. Now this is one of my favorites. You know that in a sense - or not - but in a sense, I'm a sarcastic person. And when people oppose the truth, I like to put the trap right back on them. So when Jesus takes these people and they say, "In what authority are you doing these things?" And, "By what authority, who gave You the source for this?" I really enjoy how Jesus, who's in charge, He has the authority - **And when Jesus answered He said to them, "I myself also will ask you one thing."** (So, "You asked Me a question, a couple questions, I've got a question for you.") **"Which if you should tell Me, I also myself will tell to you in what authority I am doing these things."** (I'll answer your question if you answer mine.) **"The baptism of John (that's John the Baptist) from where was it? (What was the source?) From out of Heaven, or from out of men?"** (Was it man-made? Religion? And he came in man's authority? Or did he come with the authority from heaven?) **And they were reasoning with themselves.** They said, "Okay, timeout, we've got talk about this."

They were reasoning with themselves, saying, "If we should say, 'From out of Heaven,' He will say to us, 'Why therefore did you not believe him?'" In other words, you rejected what John had to say about Me. So they say if we say that John's ministry did come from heaven then He is going to ask us, "Why didn't you believe what he said about Me if his ministry is from heaven?" John's the one that pointed to Jesus and said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world." So if they say John's ministry was from heaven, then, "Why didn't you believe him? Why didn't you believe what he said?" So they said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He's going to say, 'Well then, why didn't you believe?'"

"But if we should say, 'From out of men,' we fear the crowd."

And Luke adds something to this in his account of this incident in Luke 20:6, "The crowd will stone us if we say that John's ministry came from man, and it didn't come from God."

"We fear the crowd for all are holding John as a prophet."

So the crowds that they're trying to appease are saying John is a prophet from God. So, If we say, "John's ministry is from man and not God," the people are going to be so angry at us they are going to stone us to death. On the other hand if we say that his ministry is from God then He's going to say to us, "Then why didn't you believe him? Why didn't you believe what he said about Me? Why didn't you repent like he said for you to do?"

And when they answered to Jesus, they said, "We do not know."

If you have the King James translation Bible it says, "We cannot tell," but it is literally, "we do not know." So that is their answer. "Yeah, we don't know, we can't answer you."

And He Himself was saying to them, "Neither do I tell to you in what authority I am doing these things." I'm not going to answer your question if you can't answer mine. It's one of the age-old, how would you say... questions? When people come up and they say that you're not from God, and you are not teaching the truth from God. I ask the question, "So is our ministry, the whole ministry, is it from heaven? Is it from the Lord or is it not?" So they have to think about it. Well, if we say it is not from heaven and all these people that are getting ministered to are going to get pretty angry. But if we say, oh the ministry is from heaven, but you're not, then we say, then why didn't you believe it if it's from heaven? When people try to trap people, it's a good come back for people to answer up according to the truth. Jesus would not allow Himself to be caught in the trap. That's authoritative, refusing to give into their trap.

So then next, Jesus, in verses 28-32, gives The Parable of The Two Sons. In verses 28 to 30 is The Comparison between these two sons that is being used, and then The Conclusion in verses 31 and 32.

Jesus says, "**But what do you think?**" So now they are at a standstill. They won't answer His question, He won't answer theirs. He says, "**But what do you think? A man was having two sons, and when he came to the first he said, 'Son, go, today work in my vineyard.' And when he answered, he said, 'I will not.'** (he refuses) **But afterward having regretted, he went.**" So he thought about it and he regretted and so he went.

And by the way some of your English translations are going to say *he repented and went*. There are several words in the New Testament, Greek words, used for *repentance*. This word *repentance* is **μεταμέλομαι** (metamelomai) and it means *to feel sorry*. To feel sorry that you have failed. In Matthew 27:3 it says of Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus, it says that he *repented* himself; and people say, "Well he repented, why wouldn't he get saved?" Because it is not a repentance that is associated with salvation. Judas felt sorry that he had done what he did, but he didn't repent and turn his life over to Christ.

That is what the main word means. **μετανοέω** (metanoēō) means *to repent*; it means *make a decision to change the direction of your life*. That's the word associated with salvation. When a person decides, "I've got to turn my life around and go in a different direction," but at the same time the word includes in it the awareness of the person making the decision that I can't change the direction of my life, it has to be the Lord. So I'm making the decision to change the direction of my life by surrendering it to Christ. But it's acknowledgment that Christ is the one who has to change me. He's the one that has to take me down that path. I'm making the decision to go. I'm making the decision to surrender to Christ. But He's the one who saves me. He's the one who takes me down that path.

This is the word *regret* or *to feel sorry*. So he said, "I will not go," and then after he regretted, he went.

Verse 30, **And having come to the second son, he said likewise.** That is, "Go today and work in my field, my vineyard." **And when he answered, he said, "I will go, sir;" and he did not go.** You have role reversal here. Somebody who confesses and says they will go and then not do it. We've all come across people like that. We've probably all committed that offense to other people by saying we will do it and then not do it or not show up. Words not actions. That is the comparison between the two sons. Words are just religious. Just speak. The person that just talks their belief but doesn't live it is a religious person; but there's no fruit. What we do is what we believe and not confession only. If you want to know what you really believe about Christ, or in regards to Christ, you look at your life and how you live your life. That is what you believe. Not just what you say. Not just the beliefs that you confess, but the life that you live.

In James 2:20 James says, **Faith without works is a dead faith.** The word *works* means *activity*. If there's no action going along with the faith that you say you have, it's dead. It's just religion. There's no spirituality to it at all. Christ is not involved at all.

In fact in James 1:22-25 - an interesting text - James says, **Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.** It is not enough just to hear. It is not enough just to make a confession of what you believe, but be a doer. **For if anyone be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholds himself, and goes his way, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But whoso looks into the perfect law of liberty, and continues therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.** In other words, he's calling *the perfect law of liberty* the Word. When you look in the Word and you see yourself - like looking into a mirror, in a glass - and you make application of what the Word is saying to yourself, you're a doer of the Word. When you just sit and listen and say, "Yes I believe that," but you leave forgetting what you've heard and you leave forgetting the application of what you're listening to, he says, "It's dead. It is a dead faith." Relationship based on response, not just confession. Not just confession of our beliefs but our relationship with Christ is built on our response to His authority and to Himself.

Look at verse 31. Verses 31-32 The Conclusion of it all. So He asks them, "Which of the two did the will of the father?" What a question! Not, "Which of them believed?" or, "Which of them owned up to his responsibilities," but, "Which of them did the will of the father?" That is really the crux of it all. Doing the will of God is the fruit of our salvation. Let me repeat that. Doing the will of God is the fruit of our salvation. We are saved for the purpose of doing God's will. Period. Not just looking forward to going to heaven, that's all fine and good. Not just rejoicing over the forgiveness of our sins, that's all fine and good. But while we are here the Lord saves us with His authority to do the will of God. Which one of these did the will of God? The one who said, "I'm not going," but then eventually did? Or the one who said, "I am going," but then eventually didn't.

They said to Him, "The first one." Jesus says to them, "Truly I say to you, the tax collectors and the harlots are going before you into the kingdom of God." So now He is making application of this comparison He made with the two sons. The will of the Father. It's important to understand that our judgment is going to be based on: Did we do the will of the

Father for our lives?

In Matthew 7:21-23 Jesus says, **"Not everyone that says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of my Father which is in heaven."** And then He lists many things, many activities that people do, but who are not doing the will of the Father: **Many will say to me in that day, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in Your name have cast out demons? and in Your name did we not do many wonderful works?" And then will I profess unto them, "I never knew you: depart from me, you who work lawlessness."** It will be those who do the will of the Father, not those who are religiously active, not those involved in activities that are stimulating and prophesying and miracles being done. Satan can even do that. But those who are seeking to do the will of the Father for their lives.

Jesus said in Matthew 7:20, **"Wherefore by their fruits you shall know them."** Not their confession. Not their beliefs. But the fruit of God's Spirit in and through a person. It can come out in a confession. It can come out in beliefs. But that in and of itself is not salvation. Doing the will of God is the fruit of our salvation and seeking out His will for our lives.

So He tells them, **"The tax collectors and the harlots are going to go before you into the kingdom of heaven. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him."** So you're the ones that listened and didn't believe. But the tax collectors and the harlots (or prostitutes), they believed him. And you after seeing it, after seeing them that believe, you did not regret afterwards to believe him. You saw people turning their lives over to Christ through the ministry of John; and after you saw it you still did not believe. You didn't regret. You didn't say, "Oh I made a mistake. I'm sorry. I need to turn my life over to Christ."

Now it is interesting, as we close for today. The Lord has His will for every situation in our lives. He has a will for every situation in our lives. We are to seek His will and submit to His authority performing His will. See how we are putting all of this together? It is not whether I do His will or not. It is I am seeking the Lord's will for my life so that with His authority - and He has a lot of authority - so that His authority will perform His will, the one that I'm seeking, in my life. He has authority to perform it and we are the vessels.

So just realizing this, every circumstance and every situation in our life, God has a will; He has a design and He has a plan. He has a plan and timing when it is to happen and how it is to happen. It is all up to His will. I am not to seek all the religious activities that stimulate me; but I am to seek His will and what He would have me to do; but again, it is not me doing it. It is the fact that He has the authority to fulfill His will in my life as I seek to surrender my life to Him as He performs His will in my life. I hope that's clear. I hope that's clear because it's not just about going to church. It is not just about having religious beliefs. It is about seeking the will of God for every situation in our life and then surrendering to Christ for His authority to perform it. That's what it's like to walk with the Lord.

Let's close in prayer.