

Meet Jesus: The stone that the builders rejected

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Date: 23 July 2008

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[0 : 00] Friends, if you'd like to open your Bibles, we're in Mark chapter 11 and we'll read from verse 27. Mark chapter 11 from verse 27, it's on page 848.

If you've not got a Bible, I can see there's a few on the shelf over there to help if you follow in the text. So, reading from verse 27 of chapter 11.

And they came again to Jerusalem and as Jesus was walking in the temple, the chief priests and the scribes and the elders came to him. And they said to him, by what authority are you doing these things or who gave you this authority to do them?

Jesus said to them, I will ask you one question, answer me. And I will tell you by what authority I do these things. Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man? Answer me.

And they discussed it with one another saying, if we say from heaven, he will say, why then did you not believe him? But shall we say from man? They were afraid of the people.

[1 : 08] For they all held that John really was a prophet. So they answered Jesus, we do not know. And Jesus said to them, neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

And he began to speak to them in parables. A man planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a pit for the winepress and built a tower and leased it to tenants and went into another country.

When the season came, he sent a servant to the tenants to get from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty handed. Again, he sent to them another servant and they struck him on the head and treated him shamefully.

And he sent another. And him they killed. And so with many others. Some they beat and some they killed. He had still one other. A beloved son. Finally, he sent him to them saying, they will respect my son.

But those tenants said to one another, this is the heir. Come, let us kill him and the inheritance will be ours. And they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard.

[2 : 16] What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. Have you not read this scripture? The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

This was the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes. And they were seeking to arrest him who had feared the people. For they perceived that he had told the parable against them.

So they left him and went away. Well, chapter 11 from verse 27 to chapter 12 verse 12.

It's a passage all about the authority of Jesus. And perhaps you notice that the passage is in three sections. Did you notice that as we went through it? First of all, there's a section and it's a debate about Jesus' authority.

So that's the first section. And then secondly, Jesus tells a parable about his authority. And then thirdly, Jesus picks up an Old Testament quotation about his authority.

[3 : 25] And we'll just go with the flow, shall we? We'll just follow the passage through with one section blending into the next. Does that make sense? Good. Then we'll begin.

So firstly, it's a debate, isn't it? About Jesus' authority. And you'll remember chapter 11 of Mark's Gospel. And Jesus has been causing absolute havoc in the temple.

You'll remember the scene. He stopped the merchants, didn't they? Bringing their goods in. He overturned tables and seats. Just imagine it if it was in this room. Tables scattered everywhere. Chaos.

Seats overturned. Coins strewn all over the place. It was like Jesus was on the warpath. But friends, what would happen if he visited you like that?

You know, starts reorganising you. Things that you might have sort of overlooked in your life.

[4 : 23] Or else you thought, well, they're sort of private areas that nobody knows about. So he comes in. He turns the TV off. You're not watching that programme, he exclaims.

And then he walks out the front door. You look out the windy. And there he is. Knocking on the neighbours' doors. Inviting them for tea. Well, you'd meant to do it yourself. Just sort of never really got round to it.

And then, well, he phones the employer. To sort out your work pattern. Turns out, the employer, they didn't know that you were a Christian. And, well, there's no stopping him now.

Gets those bank statements out. He's soon online. Sorting out your finances. You shout, stop interfering, Jesus. Verse 28. And they said to him, by what authority are you doing these things? Or who gave you this authority to do them? And the question, friends, is whose authority do we live under? That's the question.

[5 : 28] Last Wednesday in Croydon, down south. You might have seen it on the news. A pack of youth attacked two police officers.

It was in the morning on the pedestrianized street in the centre of Croydon. All they'd done is ask these girls to pick the litter up that they'd thrown down onto the floor.

That's all they'd done. But the mob rejected their authority and attacked them. And the temple leaders want Jesus what? What do they want? They want him dead.

Don't they? It's like they think they're God. The devil had said in the garden, hadn't he? You can be like God. And it seems he's been saying the same sorts of things in the temple to these leaders.

And so the chief priests, the scribes, the elders, they're not happy with the concept of someone, think about it, who's got authority over them. Are you with me? They don't want the Messiah interfering into their way of doing things.

[6 : 32] And so as early as chapter 3, verse 6, they want Jesus what? Dead. Chapter 11, verse 18, they want Jesus dead. But here's the problem.

You know, they'd killed Jesus immediately. But for one thing, just have a look, you'll see it. Chapter 11, verse 32, it's nestled in the middle there of that verse.

They were afraid of the people. Chapter 12, verse 12, just look at that. And they were seeking to arrest him, but what? They feared the people, do you see?

Unlike the religious leaders, they want Jesus as their king. Chapter 11, verse 10, you remember them shouting as he entered Jerusalem, Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David.

And so the religious leaders, what did they do? They hatch a plot. Just like King David, he tried, didn't he, to disguise murder with the appearance of an accident. So they've got this plan.

[7 : 37] You know, perhaps they can sort of dress murder up with a veneer of sort of religious judicial procedure. That's the plan.

You know, disguise murder with the appearance of justice. So they've asked Jesus this question, haven't they? Do you remember? This question about authority.

And they're hoping to either get him convicted on a blasphemy charge or else of inciting deceit in the Roman Empire. Caesar would be very interested about other gods in his empire with authority. So verse 28, by what authority? Who gave you this authority, they say to Jesus? And friends, it's dangerous, isn't it? To play games with the incarnate God.

Think about this. He is authority. Paul says, doesn't he, all things were created by him. And through him, all things hold together.

[8 : 42] And so they have before them, what? The incarnation of authority, do you see? And in trying to outwit Jesus, well, they've bitten off more than they can chew.

Verses 29 and 30. Look with me, friends. He turns the tables on them. Look, do you see? Verse 29. Jesus said to them, I will ask you one question, answer me.

And I will tell you by what authority I do these things. Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man? Answer me. Answer me, he demands, doesn't he?

Answer me. And it's like you've run up an astonishing amount of debt. You know, there's not a penny in the house. Not a penny in your bank account. You owe this massive amount of money.

And the debt collectors are at the front door, banging on your door. Bang, bang. Answer me.

Answer me. And they're up against the ropes, aren't they? These religious leaders.

[9 : 42] Their scheme backfiring. And when it comes to logic, well, they're totally bankrupt. Nowhere to hide. And Jesus is demanding a response from them.

But they discussed the predicament with one another. A bit like criminals colluding together in the back of the police van as it trundles along towards the police station. Just look there at verse 31. Can you see? And they discussed it with one another, saying, If we say from heaven, he will say, Why then did you not believe him? But shall we say from man? They were afraid of the people. For they all heard that John really was a prophet. So here it is. He's a fudge. Verse 33. They answered Jesus. We do not know. We do not know. Evasive tactics, isn't it? When our souls are probed. We don't know.

[10 : 40] And what does Jesus say to that, friends? Just look there at the end of verse 33. Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

Total control, isn't it? And I think they know it. See if you agree with me about this particular situation. I think they've got used to being in charge of things. Haven't they? These elders and priests. They're used to being in charge of things. And it's like Jesus is a spanner in the works. And Jesus can be like that, can't he? He can be like that in the life of our own churches. You know, changing things that we'd rather he wouldn't. He can be like that in our own lives. Seemingly interfering. Changing things around. And the question is, will we submit to his authority? Alexander McLaren says this. Beautiful language.

[11 : 43] They could have known that he was the sun. And they suppressed dawning suspicion that he was. Alas, they have descendants in many of us.

Who put away his claims. Even while we secretly recognise them. In order that we may do as we like. Without his meddling with us.

So that was our first section. And we'll leave these Jewish leaders. They're silent, aren't they? Unable to answer Jesus. And Jesus is silent.

Refusing, isn't he? To play their games. And friends, it's dangerous, isn't it? To play with the living God. Because it always ends in judgment. And that's the second section here.

This parable is about Jesus judging these religious leaders. It's like a judge in court bringing in the verdict. But the problem is, we already know the problem, don't we?

[12 : 44] They don't listen to a logical argument. Like us sometimes, isn't it, friends? So, how's Jesus going to break this deadlock? This silence?

Well, he wheels into their thinking. A Trojan horse. Look down at verse 12. And he began to speak to them in parables.

A man planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a pit for the wine press and built a tower and leased it to tenants and went into another country. A man, tenants. Friends, can you see what's happened?

Jesus is moved from a one-to-one first party debate into the third party. It's a story, isn't it? We all like stories, don't we? Can you see what's happened here?

Do you see? A man, tenants. What a relief, they think, to this. It's a story. And they're enjoying it. The chief priests, scribes, elders. They think, we've been saved by the bell here.

[13 : 43] It's a breather for them, isn't it? A momentary relief. And we're imagining the scene, aren't we, in our mind's eye. That vineyard, Jesus paints the picture.

He takes us around. It's like an accompanied estate agent. Viewing in a flat somewhere. We think, this really is a first-class facility.

It's fit for purpose, isn't it? This vineyard. And they've dug a nice pit for the new wine press when it arrives. And you can almost smell, can't you? The smell of drying paint in the living quarters.

And the temple leaders are thinking, what a great place to work. Isn't this owner so trusting? You know, not breathing down our necks all the time. I'd love a boss like that, they're thinking to themselves.

And Jesus has us hooked, friends, as the Trojan horse makes its way through the gates of our minds. The vineyard is Israel. The temple leaders are the tenants.

[14 : 45] The servants are the prophets. The son and heir is who? Jesus. And the owner is God, the Father. One servant comes after another.

You know, they only want some of the fruit, don't they? That's rightfully the owner. That's all they want, to take it back with them. But two of them return with no fruit. What do they return with?

Cuts and bruises. And then others return not carrying fruit, but by being carried themselves. They're dead.

They've been killed. And think about this. The tenants have effectively stolen the vineyard, haven't they? From the owner, do you see? But for some reason he loves them.

Did you know God loves you? Despite your rebellion, he loves you. And so he persists. He wants them to enjoy a relationship with him, to live by the covenant that he's made with them.

[15:48] It's like a couple in marriage trying to work through difficulties despite the problems that come their way. But the tenants detest the owner.

And like Auschwitz, murder can become routine. They kill one after the other. John the Baptist arrives in the vineyard and they've soon arranged his beheading, haven't they?

After me, John had said, comes one whose sandals I am unworthy to untie. King Herod killed John the Baptist, didn't he?

But he couldn't kill his words. Verse 6. He had still one other, a beloved son, finally he sent him to them, saying, they will respect my son.

And so, yes friends, the son and the heir arise. What a beautiful verse that is in verse 6 there, isn't it? You could write a PhD on that.

[16:57] Still one other, a beloved son. Finally, finally, the Greek word is eschaton. It's used to describe the end times.

It's the ultimate revelation of God. So here we have the son, the heir, the eschaton, coexisting in one person.

Only if we had, if we had all wheat, we could never plumb the depths of that verse. So there's verse 6. Jesus is sent by the Father.

And everybody hears him arrive. Chapter 1, verse 11. A voice came from heaven. You are my beloved son. With you, I am well pleased. Chapter 12, verse 7.

What do they do? For those tenants said to one another, this is the heir. It's one of the most devastating verses in Scripture. The, probably. This is the heir. Come, let us walk, kill him.

[17:54] And the inheritance will be ours. And they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard. There is a green hill far away, outside a city wall, where our dear Lord was crucified.

He died to save us all. What a staggering parable, isn't it, friends? Uttered by the sun and air.

And the religious leaders, they thought that they were in control. But it was mutiny in Israel. But God is still God, isn't he, friends?

God is still God. And the Trojan horse has drawn to a halt. And its devastating freight has entered the citadels of their minds.

Verse 12. They perceived that he had told the parable against them. Verse 9. What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others.

[19:06] And a wee band of disciples takes the message into the future. Don't they? The church. The owner gave them the vineyard. And unlike the tenants.

They love the Father, don't they? We love the Father. We love the Son. And we finish with the third section. The psalmist gives us the verdict.

How staggering. From 1,000 years before it even occurred. Just look, friends, there. Verse 10.

Have you not read the scripture? Don't you know your Bible, says Jesus?

The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing. And it is marvellous. Can't you just feel the glory of God there written all over it?

It is marvellous in our eyes. Here it is, friends. The Messiah. The Son. The Air. Absolute authority on earth.

[20:08] Shall we pray? Amen. A few moments to reflect on what we've heard. Dear Heavenly Father, through your word, you confront us afresh with the magnitude of your love that you should send your beloved Son into such hatred for us.

It's not that we deserve salvation because we've not loved you but have rejected you. Yet you came and through the agony of crucifixion you gave you gave us eternal life, Father, the life of your Son that was snatched from him.

and you gave us, your church, the vineyard that we should be sent into the world to bear fruit. Help us then, we pray, to live under your authority and to bear fruit for you in our lives for your glory.

And to that end, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us now this day and forevermore.

Amen.