

Authority
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Matthew 21:23-32

Today's text is about AUTHORITY. What is the difference between QUESTIONING authority and CHALLENGING authority?

Questioning authority says, *"I want to understand—why should I accept your authority?"*
Challenging authority says, *"I've already decided—you don't have the right to tell me what to do."* Questioning seeks clarity; challenging resists control.

The Billy Graham organization called those who walked the aisle "inquirers." That is a great description of someone sincerely seeking to know Jesus. Jesus never rebuked those with sincere questions about His identity and authority, but He confronted those with hardened hearts who refused to accept Him as God's Son. In Matthew 21 He boldly proclaimed His divine authority and warned about the condemnation awaiting those who rejected Him.

The Point: All authority in heaven and earth belongs to Jesus (Matt. 28:18). We cannot follow Him unless we accept and embrace that truth. This side of heaven we won't follow His authority perfectly, but we MUST willingly submit to it daily.

Early in His earthly ministry, Jesus displayed His authority through teaching and miracles but not public pronouncements. Gradually as He approached the cross, He spoke more plainly about His authority and His coming sacrifice. Now it was the Tuesday of Passion week. The religious establishment, feeling threatened by Jesus' ministry, sought to discredit Him and then to destroy Him. Matthew records five confrontations they had with Jesus in the final days before His crucifixion. Today's text was the first.

(NLT) — 23 When Jesus returned to the Temple and began teaching, the leading priests and elders came up to him. They demanded, "By what authority are you doing all these things? Who gave you the right?"

- The religious leaders were not seeking answers, they were seeking to trap Jesus. If they could lure Him to say His authority came from God, they could accuse Him of blasphemy. Jesus was too wise to fall for their scheme.
- Instead, He diverted them by answering a question with another question:
24 "I'll tell you by what authority I do these things if you answer one question," Jesus replied. **25** "Did John's authority to baptize come from heaven, or was it merely human?"
- Jesus was tying their argument up in a knot. It's fun to eavesdrop on their dilemma. Back to verse 25:

They talked it over among themselves. “If we say it was from heaven, he will ask us why we didn’t believe John. **26** But if we say it was merely human, we’ll be mobbed because the people believe John was a prophet.” **27** So they finally replied, “We don’t know.” [Talk about a lame response!] And Jesus responded, “Then I won’t tell you by what authority I do these things. **28** “But what do you think about this? A man with two sons told the older boy, ‘Son, go out and work in the vineyard today.’ **29** The son answered, ‘No, I won’t go,’ but later he changed his mind and went anyway. **30** Then the father told the other son, ‘You go,’ and he said, ‘Yes, sir, I will.’ But he didn’t go. **31** “Which of the two obeyed his father?”

- Let’s unpack this story about obedience. Which son in the story represents the religious establishment? Which one represents sinners who repent?
- Actions speak _____. Obedience isn’t about what we say, it is about _____.
- For example, I might say “*I am a careful and law-abiding driver.*” That is what I say, perhaps what I believe, but does my driving match up with my statement?
- We live in a world where what we say can easily be compared with what we do.
- There are security cameras, your cell phone maps your location, everywhere you go on the internet leaves digital footprints, and “this call is being recorded for quality assurance.” Everyone you meet has a camera and voice recorder in their pocket and some have a dash cam in their car [Illustration: Dash cam drama].
- When son #1 says, “No, I won’t go.” We would say, “What a rebellious brat!”
- When son #2 says, “Yes, sir, right away!” We would say, “What a good boy!”
- Who was the brat and who was the good boy? Who was real and who was fake?
- Son #1 changed his mind. What is the theological term for that? (See V. 32)
- James 4:17 says, to know what you ought to do and then not do it is sin.
- That sounds like son #2 doesn’t it? It’s not about knowing but DOING.
- Even the hard-hearted Pharisees understood this concept. Jesus asked them, “Which of the two obeyed his father?” They replied, “The first.”
- They understood the story, but they would be livid about Jesus’ point:

Then Jesus explained his meaning: “I tell you the truth, corrupt tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the kingdom of God before you do. **32** For John the Baptist came and showed you the right way to live, but you didn’t believe him, while tax collectors and prostitutes did. And even when you saw this happening, you refused to believe him and repent of your sins.

- Imagine the anger welling up in the hearts of these pompous hypocrites.
- Jesus went on to share another vineyard parable about evil tenant farmers who killed the landowner’s son so they could steal the vineyard.
- The Pharisees said the landowner should have put those murderers to death!
- They realized Jesus was talking about THEM. They were the wicked farmers.
- Verse 42: Jesus quoted Psalm 118:22 & 23:

(NLT) — 42 ...‘The stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone. This is the Lord’s doing, and it is wonderful to see.’ **43** I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation that will produce the proper fruit.

- A point of clarification. Some read the word “nation” and misinterpret that verse.
- This does not mean God rejected the Jewish people and replaced them with another nation. (See Paul’s words in Romans 11)
- Jesus was speaking to specific individuals who rejected Him.
- The issue is **unbelief and rejection of Him**, not Jewish identity.
- Back to verse 42: Jesus is the “cornerstone” and He said in verse 44:

44 Anyone who stumbles over that stone will be broken to pieces, and it will crush anyone it falls on.”

Romans 9:31–33 (NLT) — **31** But the people of Israel, who tried so hard to get right with God by keeping the law, never succeeded. **32** Why not? Because they were trying to get right with God by keeping the law instead of by trusting in him. They stumbled over the great rock in their path. **33** God warned them of this in the Scriptures when he said, “I am placing a stone in Jerusalem that makes people stumble, a rock that makes them fall. But anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced.”

1 Peter 2:7–8 (NLT) — **7** Yes, you who trust him recognize the honor God has given him. But for those who reject him, “The stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone.” **8** And, “He is the stone that makes people stumble, the rock that makes them fall.” They stumble because they do not obey God’s word, and so they meet the fate that was planned for them.

- Jesus holds all authority and those who reject Him will be condemned. However, there is NO condemnation for even the worst sinner who trusts Him. (Rom. 8:1)
- This confrontation set the stage for the crucifixion. What is the lesson for us?
- We said earlier, even if we’ve professed faith in Christ and embraced the truth of His authority, this side of heaven we won’t follow His authority perfectly.
- What are some subtle ways we can slip into quietly resisting Jesus’ authority?
- Here are some examples of how we can quietly resist Jesus’ authority:
 - Selective obedience - *“I’ll follow Jesus, except in this area of my life.”*
 - Delayed obedience - *“I know what He says, but I’ll get to it later.”*
 - Redefining truth - reshaping Jesus’ words to fit our preferences
 - Justifying sin - explaining away what we know is wrong
 - Comparison - measuring ourselves against others instead of Christ
 - Emotional authority - letting feelings override what Jesus has said
 - Cultural pressure - prioritizing what’s acceptable over what’s true
 - Spiritual apathy - knowing truth but not acting on it

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- All authority in heaven and on earth belongs to Jesus (Matt. 28:18).
- We cannot follow Him unless we accept and embrace that truth.
- Obeying His authority over our lives requires daily submission and surrender.
- We need to reflect on those two sons. Am I like the one who said “no” but then repented and obeyed? Or am I like the one who said “yes” but didn’t obey?
- Following Jesus isn’t about what we say or intend—it’s about what we do.
- In the “dash cam” of Jesus’ watchful eye, does what I do match what I say??