

Who has the right to Lord over me?

Matthew 21:23-46 - NCBC, April 18, 2021

- **The Question:** Does Jesus have authority over me? (23-27)
 - If His authority is from people, then no.
 - If His authority is from God, then yes.
- **Parable 1:** How do I respond to God's life-changing power? (28-32)
 - With hollow words of unbelief or fear?
 - With heart-felt repentance of faith?
- **Parable 2:** How do I respond to God's historical patience? (33-41)
 - With hard-hearted rebellion of self-love?
 - With humble fruit of obedient worship?
- **Scripture:** How do I respond to God's biblical promises? (42-44)
 - With the unbelief that submits to people's authority?
 - With the brokenness that submits to Jesus' authority?
- **The Response:** How will I respond to Jesus' authority over me? (45-46)
 - Silence my conviction in willful rejection that leads to condemnation?
 - Submit in repentance and faith that leads to salvation?

Opening Announcements:

- **New Term of Adult Discipleship Electives begins next Sunday!** Please review the options in today's Worship Folder, and plan to join one of the upcoming classes at 9:30a!

<<Behold Our God>>

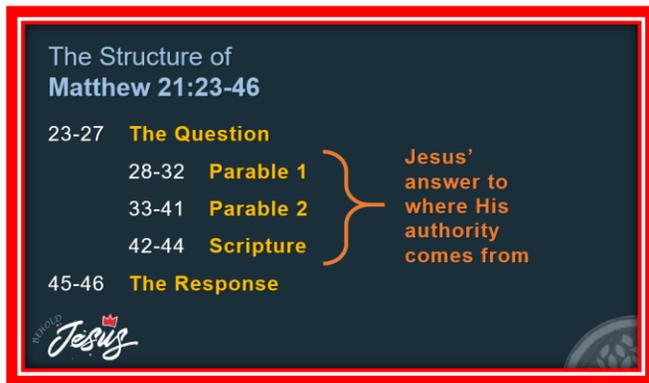


It is so good to worship God with you today! If you are joining us online or in our Extra Precautions Chapel, a very special welcome to you as well. For those online, please use the links alongside the livestream for fill-in-the-blank sermon notes, the preaching manuscript, and children's coloring pages.



Let's continue our worship now by opening God's Word to **Matthew chapter 21**. If you do not have a Bible with you, simply raise your hand to receive a Bible this morning. Today we are focusing on the marvelous authority of Jesus from **Matthew chapter 21:23-46**.

Since we are going to consider a longer section of Scripture this morning, I want to introduce you to the,



structure of this passage, before we read it together.

These entire 23 verses are all about the authority of Jesus Christ, but there's so much going on here it's easy to lose the main flow of the argument if you don't see how this text fits together.

Starting in **verse 23**, the ruling religious leaders of the Jews challenge Jesus about where His authority comes from. Does His authority come from God or man?

But Jesus turns the tables, asking the leaders where John the Baptist got his authority? And when the leaders refuse to answer, Jesus indirectly answers their question with two stories and a Scripture.

So notice: Jesus uses two parables and **Psalm 118** as proof that His authority indeed comes from God, and not people. Then in **verses 45-46**, we see the leaders' response.

So as I read this passage, notice the question about Jesus' authority, the three proofs of His authority, and the leaders' response.



Please stand in honor of the reading of God's Word, as I read from **Matthew 21, verse 23**, in the English Standard Version:

23 And when he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" 24 Jesus answered them, "I also will ask you one question, and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things. 25 The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?" And they discussed it among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' 26 But if we say, 'From man,' we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet." 27 So

they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

28 "What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' 29 And he answered, 'I will not,' but afterward he changed his mind and went. 30 And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, 'I go, sir,' but did not go. 31 Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you. 32 For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him.

33 "Hear another parable. There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants, and went into another country. 34 When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. 35 And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. 36 Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them. 37 Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' 38 But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.' 39 And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. 40 When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" 41 They said to him, "He will put those

wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons."

42 Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: "'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?"

43 Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. 44 And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him." 45 When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them. 46 And although they were seeking to arrest him, they feared the crowds, because they held him to be a prophet.

This is the reading of God's Word.

Let's Pray Together.

The Scripture we've just read in **Matthew 21** is all about authority. And if we're honest, most of us here wrestle with some kind of authority issues.

Whether we talk about law enforcement, or bosses at work, or teenagers with their parents, or our expectations for local church elders or political leaders, our relationship with authority is often challenged, isn't it?

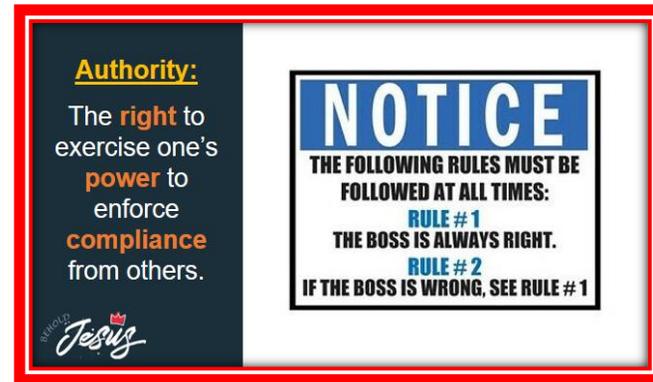
We're all quick to resist our authorities asking, "What gives you the right to control me?"



After all, authority, by definition, is: The right to exercise one's power to enforce compliance from others. Notice the three concepts bound into the meaning of authority. Authority is first a *right*, an authorization or a privilege to exert one's *power* or abilities or knowledge in order to enforce obedience or *compliance* from others.

But none of us like feeling controlled, do we? We value independence and self-rule. So we feel quite justified resisting any authority that gives us any reason at all for disapproval.

For example, check out this popular sign that hangs in work lunchrooms across our nation:



NOTICE: the following rules must be followed at all times: Rule #1, The Boss is always right. Rule #2, If the boss is wrong, see Rule #1.

If you're like me, you don't like this sign, right? It grates against us. We think we should never have to obey someone who demands our submission when we don't agree. No matter if it's our boss, or our parent, or our pastor, or our doctor, or our governor, or our school board... we take issue with anyone claiming to have the right to Lord over us.

After all, we've each been hurt by people who sinfully abused their authority over us for their own selfish purposes. We know the pain of being controlled by people who were very wrong, even when they thought they were right.

But today's Scripture calls us to go vertical in our consideration of authority. For if you are willing to open your heart today, you will find yourself asking right along with the Jewish leaders in our text,

THE QUESTION: Does Jesus have authority over me? (23-27)

Jesus

Does Jesus have authority over me? Does Jesus have the right to expect my obedience to Him? Do I relate to Jesus as my Lord?

Remember what's going on in this account. It's now Tuesday of Passover week. Jesus is just three days from dying in our place. And in **verse 23**, the religious authority of the Jews, the Sanhedrin, confront Jesus while He's teaching in their temple, asking,

By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?

After all, these religious big-wigs had authority over everything that happened in the temple. And obviously *they* hadn't given Jesus any authority to cleanse the temple, receive the Hosanna praises, heal the weak, or teach in their house.

So who, or what, gave Jesus the right to exert such power in *their* house?

You see, there was only two possible answers to this question:

THE QUESTION: Does Jesus have authority over me? (23-27)

Jesus

- If His authority is from people, then no.
- If His authority is from God, then yes.

If Jesus' authority came from other people or just his own self-appointment, then He had no right to be causing such a disruption to their temple worship. But if His authority was from God, then everyone must submit to His teaching and His works.

But the Sanhedrin was convinced that Jesus did not have God's authority; after all, *they* were God's appointed spiritual authority for the nation – or so they thought – and they hadn't given Jesus permission to do what He was doing and say what he was saying. So these leaders are convinced that their question will publicly expose and discredit Jesus as operating outside of His God-given authority.

Now, pull over the minivan for a moment, and let this sink in. If Jesus is just another good teacher, just another human being with a magnetic personality...then He has no spiritual authority over you, and you need not obey Him.

But if Jesus is God... and His authority is divine... then you and I must obey and submit to Him. Right? If Jesus is our eternal Lord and Master, then He has the right to disrupt our life and worship however He believes best!

So in **verses 24 and 25**, Jesus turns the tables on the Sanhedrin, promising to answer their question if they first answer His.

The baptism of John ... from where did it come? ... From heaven or from men?

You leaders believe you are the highest spiritual authority in Israel, so answer me this,

Was John the Baptist's ministry the work of man or God?

Now immediately these leaders huddle up, realizing "Houston, we have a problem!"

For if they answer that John's ministry had God's authority, they'd publicly condemn themselves...for they had all refused to believe John's call of repentance.¹

But if they answer that John's ministry was merely human, they would lose the people's respect, for all the people believed John was sent from God.

And so how do the leaders respond in their hard-hearted unbelief and fear of man in **verse 27**?

"We do not know."

Don't miss the significance of this shocking confession. While they claimed to be the spiritual authority for the nation, this answer exposed that they actually possessed no authority from God at all.

The answer to Jesus' question about John's ministry was self-evident. Even all the people knew the answer to this soft-ball question. But the leaders' refusal to publicly acknowledge that John's authority came from heaven exposed that they were actually willfully opposed to God's authority.

Their answer exposed that they were not living in submission to God themselves, but instead were living in submission to people's opinions and their own hardened unbelief, as confessed in **verses 25 and 26**.

Loved ones... please listen carefully.

The reason people reject Jesus' authority is never because of a lack of evidence. The reason we refuse to submit to the Lordship of Jesus is because we love ourselves and the praise of other people, more than we love God.² We suppress the obvious truth of Jesus' authority, and we refuse to acknowledge Jesus as Lord, simply because we love ourselves more.

And so Jesus refuses to directly answer their question in **verse 27**, but instead shares two parables which reveal His authority for those who have hearts to hear.³

As we consider this first parable about two sons in **verse 28**, let's ask ourselves,

¹ Matthew 3:7ff

² John 3:19-20; Romans 1:18-21, 28, 32; c.f. Rom 8:7; 1 Cor 2:14

³ Matthew 13:10-17, 34-35

PARABLE 1: How do I respond to God's life-changing power? (28-32)

Jesus

How do I respond to God's life-changing power? How do I respond when I see God's authority displayed through the conversion of sinners?

The parable is easy enough to understand, right? A father asked both boys to do the same thing. And each boy *does* the opposite of what he says he will do.

So the first son disobeys his dad verbally, but afterwards repents and submits. The second son verbally agrees to obey, but then never actually submits to his father's wishes.

So Jesus asks in **verse 31**,

Which of the two [boys] did the will of his father?

And they give the correct, obvious answer... the first boy actually obeyed his father.

But these leaders don't realize their answer actually adds to their own guilt! For Jesus explains in **verse 31**,

Truly I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you.

What?? Sometimes when we read Scripture today it can be easy for us to miss the shock value of a verse like this.

For the Jews, sinners like tax collectors and prostitutes, who shamelessly sold their own lives to the highest bidder, were the wretched bottom of immorality.

In contrast however, these religious leaders prayed and worshipped faithfully, they were the moral examples in their religious communities.

So perhaps in our modern vernacular we'd say, "Ku Klux Klan leaders and child abusers will be in Jesus' kingdom before respected pastors and apologists!"

How is this possible? Because the first son represents repentant sinners! In their sin, these sinners rejected the authority of God and refused to obey. But when they heard John the Baptist preach the way of righteousness, they believed, and their lives were converted from law-breakers to law-keepers!

But the religious leaders... who professed to be God's children, never obeyed John's call for repentance, and even after they saw the amazing transformation that God's power brought about in the most wicked of sinners... still they refused to repent and believe!

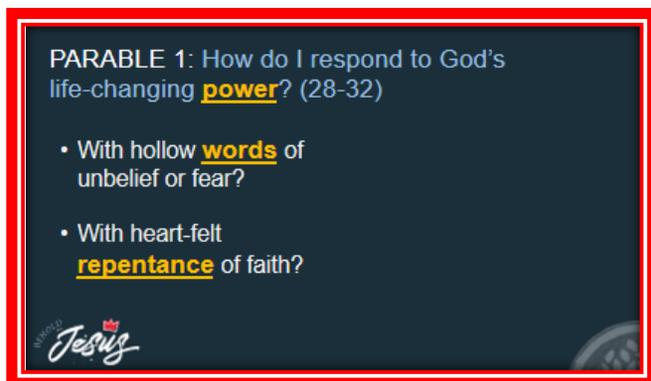
So listen friends. This parable teaches that humble repentance, not moral religion, is the only way into God's kingdom. Submission and obedience, not lip-service, is the only proper response to God's authority in your life.

You are not saved if your relationship with Jesus is only verbal. Any profession of faith that does not bear the fruits of repentance and obedience is a dead faith that cannot save.⁴

After all, only God has the authority to transform the most wicked and vile sinners into children of God! No man has the right to make sinners righteous! Only the resurrection power of God's Spirit can ever produce the fruits of obedience that please God in any of us!⁵

But even when the Sanhedrin saw the conversion of sinners which clearly proved John's ministry was from God – they persisted in unbelief.

So let's get personal, shall we?



How do you respond to God's life-changing power when you see it in others? When you see sinners supernaturally transformed by the power of God's gospel, does this motivate you to greater submission to God's authority?

⁴ James 2:14-26; c.f. Matthew 3:8
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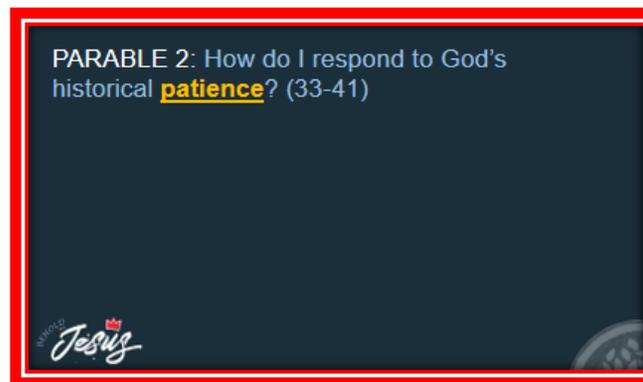
Or do you simply respond to God's power with hollow words of unbelief or fear?

Perhaps you might say to others: "I'm so happy for you!" "I'm amazed at how much God has done for you!"

But deep down inside you don't believe God's power is strong enough to really change you. You are too scared to surrender any control for your own life. And so you content yourself with hollow words, rather than the heart-felt repentance and the submission of faith.

Will you believe that Jesus is Lord, and only submission to His authority will unleash His life-changing power in your life?

In **verse 33**, Jesus tells a second parable to highlight,



How I respond to God's patience.

In this parable about a master's relationship with his wicked tenants, Jesus is making a connection to **Isaiah 5** that should have been easily recognized by these Jewish

⁵ Galatians 5:22-23

leaders.⁶ Because Old Testament prophets often referred to God's chosen people like a vineyard.

So in this parable, the master represents God, the tenants represent Israel and her leaders, the master's servants represent the Old Testament prophets, and the master's son represents the Messiah – who of course is Jesus Himself.

And here's the point: The history of God's dealings with Israel is one of grace, but the history of Israel's response to God is one of rejection! Over and over Israel rejected God's prophets, spurned God's authority, and over and over God continued to patiently send more prophets to represent His authority and call them to bear the fruits of repentance!!

When you consider Israel's horrific persecution of God's prophets in **verse 35**, there's only one word to write down in your Bible beside **verse 36**, and that's the word *grace*!! Supernatural, marvelous, patient grace!

And of course God's grace is fully revealed when the Master sends His own son⁷ in **verse 37** saying,

Certainly they will respect my son.

I wonder whether Jesus' voice cracked, or His tone changed, when He spoke **verses 38-39**?

But when the tenants saw the Son, they said to themselves, This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance. And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

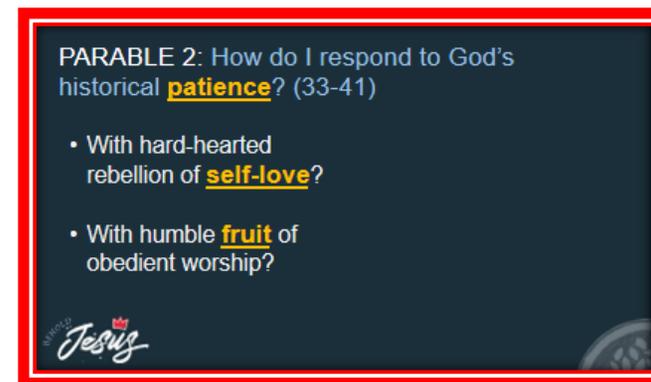
⁶ Isaiah 5:1-7; c.f. Psalm 80:1-16

Jesus spoke these words three days before the cross, and He knows Israel's hearts are hard...their necks are stiff. They would rather kill the Master's son than submit to the Master's authority, and give Him the fruit of obedience.

What about you? As you look back over your life, do you see the fingerprints of God's grace and patience?

How many times have you spurned God's authority, only for God to send another witness, another conviction, another servant to encourage you to turn from your sin, and experience the joy of obedience to His will?

Loved ones, God has been so patient with us! We are all sinners, and God would have been right to condemn us all to hell the moment we were born! Whether we recognize it or not, every single part of our life story is marked by the historical patience of God.



So how will you respond to God's patience towards you? With hard-hearted rebellion of self-love, like Israel's leaders? We must not continue in sin, that grace may

⁷ John 1:14-16

abound!⁸ Instead, will you respond to God's patience with the humble fruit of obedient worship?

When Jesus asks these leaders how the master will respond after the tenants kill his son, they immediately give the right answer without realizing again that they are only adding to their guilt.

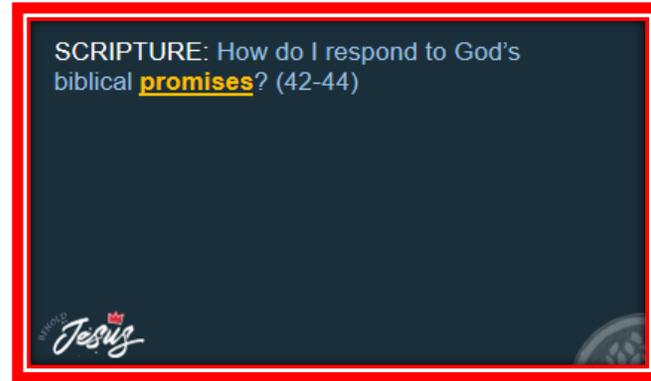
Verse 41 is a bit of a play on words. The leaders reply,

He will badly destroy those bad men... and he will give his work to others who will give him the fruit he deserves.

Without knowing it, they predict the very judgment of God that will "cut off" Israel and usher in God's plan of His church.⁹

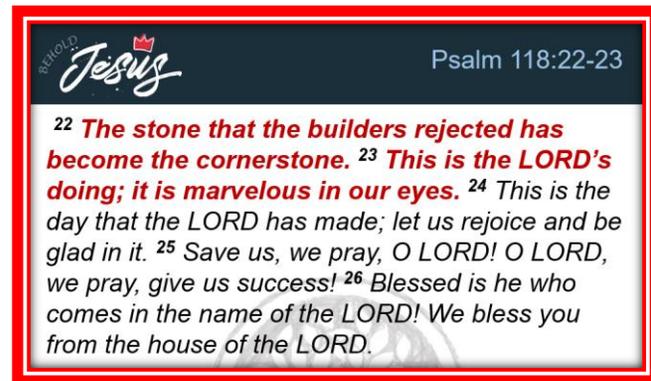
These leaders should have seen clearly that Jesus had God-given authority over them. The transformation of sinners' lives was proof that His forerunner was sent from God. The entire history of Israel testified that God's authority was gracious and patient. And then in **verse 42**, Scripture itself testifies that even their rejection of Him was a sign of God's authority.

⁸ Romans 6:1ff
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And so let's ask ourselves, **How do I respond to God's biblical promises?** Because how I respond to God's Word is a key indicator of whether I'm submitted to God's authority.

Jesus' rebuke in **verse 42** is sharp: *Have you leaders never read **Psalm 118**?*



The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.

⁹ C.f. Romans 11:17-21, 25; Ephesians 2:13-22

This is the Lord's doing... it is so clear! Where did Jesus' authority come from? From the Lord, not from man! *This is the Lord's doing!*

Psalm 118 predicted how the Messiah would be rejected by the very people He was sent to save! The very stone the builders rejected becomes the cornerstone – the chief building block upon which the entire building rests! This is the Lord's doing...and God's right to exercise His own power is marvelous to behold!

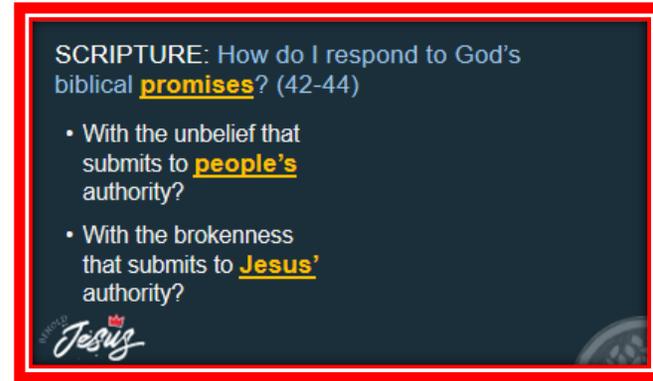
Then in **verse 43** Jesus adds,

Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.

So listen carefully church: Our response to Jesus' authority is the central issue for our lives. Jesus knows that every human soul will either submit to the authority of people, or the authority of God.

Those who serve self and live for the praise of other people, will never enter God's kingdom, and will ultimately be crushed in judgment when the authority of our Lord Jesus falls upon them at the end of time.

But those who submit to the Lord's authority, and break their self-reliance by falling upon Jesus in repentance and faith, will receive the kingdom and go on to produce the fruits of righteousness.



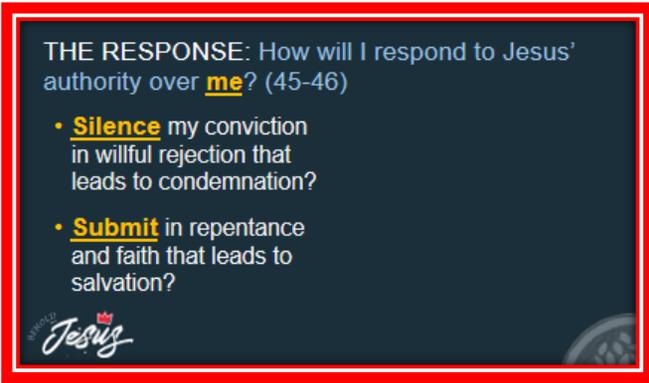
So again, How do you respond to God's Word?

When God's Word clearly reveals His authoritative design for your gender, or your marriage, or your finances, or when God's Word commissions you to live as His ambassador for His glory... how do you respond?

Do you respond with unbelief, more concerned about what people think of you, than what God's Word actually says? Or do you respond to God's Word with the brokenness that submits to Jesus' authority?

After all, saving faith is believing the Word of God, and acting upon it no matter how I feel, because I trust God to bring about a good result for His glory in His time.

All of this leads us to the religious leaders' response in **verses 45-46**, which again punctuates today's question,



How will I respond to Jesus' authority over me?

Will I Silence my conviction in willful rejection that leads to condemnation? Because that's how the religious leaders responded in **verse 45**, right?

It's almost like they suddenly realize that Jesus has been talking about them the entire time. All of the sudden it became clear that they were indeed rejecting the very authority of God!

And so did they fall down in repentance and cry out for God's mercy and grace?

No... they determined they must find a better time to arrest Jesus and put Him to death, for such God-given authority had to be silenced.

So dear friends... it really is true: Jesus has the right to Lord over us. But His authority is far better than any human boss, policeman, pastor, parent, or politician. God's authority is perfect and good. God's authority is marvelous in our eyes! God's authority is true and

faithful. God's authority is gracious and patient. And God's authority forgives sins and transforms lives. So will you submit every part of your life to the authority of Jesus, our Lord, today? Will you Submit in repentance and faith that leads to salvation?

Jesus died and rose again so that we could have His inheritance. Jesus reigns as Lord and bestows His riches on all who call upon Him in humble dependence.¹⁰

You'll never merit His mercy. In fact, it is the very power of God that raised Jesus from the dead, that is enabling you right now to believe, and turn from your sin, and submit to the life-giving authority of Jesus Christ our Lord.



Let's pray.

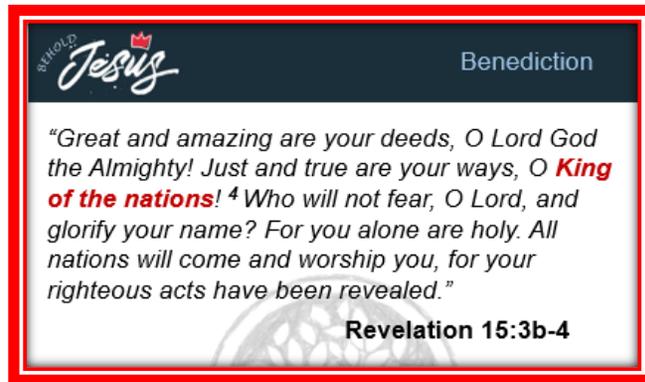
<<On Christ the Solid Rock>>

¹⁰ Romans 10:12-13

All are invited to join our Church-Wide Prayer Meeting today at 9:30am in the Family Center!

Now please stand, as we pray our benediction together,

Let's pray our benediction together:



Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.

Revelation 15:3b-4

Recommended Resources on Matthew 21:23-46:

- Psalm 118:22-26
- Isaiah 5:1-7; 8:14-15; 28:16
- Daniel 2:34-35, 44-45
- Matthew 7:29; 9:6-8; 10:1; 28:18
- Mark 11:27-12:12
- Luke 20:1-20
- John 5:27; 10:18; 17:2
- Acts 4:11
- Ephesians 2:20
- Colossians 2:10
- James 2:14-26
- 1 Peter 2:4-8
- Jude 25

- <https://www.wordboard.org/psalm118v24>

- “A People Built by Mercy” NCBC sermon on 1 Peter 2:4-10 preached 5-6-18
- “A People Built by Mercy – Part 2” NCBC sermon on 1 Peter 2:4-10 preached 5-13-18

- *The Gospel According to Jesus*, John MacArthur
- *The Walk of Repentance*, Steve Gallagher

Growing Deeper: Life Group Questions

1. Read Matthew 21:26 and Proverbs 29:25. How does the fear of man result in rejecting Jesus’ authority? Describe how you’ve seen this play out in your own life.
2. Review Matthew 21:28-31. Define submission in your own words. How would you counsel someone who is rejecting God’s authority because of bad experiences with sinful authority figures? Read John 3:19-21. What is at the root of all rejection of Jesus?
3. Read Matthew 21:33-44. According to 1 Peter 2:5, what are the fruits Jesus spoke of in Matthew 21:43? (C.f. Romans 12:1, 15:15-16; Ephesians 5:1-2; Philippians 4:18-19; Hebrews 13:15-16; Revelation 8:3-4) Is your life marked by these superior new covenant sacrifices now? Why or why not?
4. Read Psalm 118:22-26. Watch the ~3-minute video found at <https://www.wordboard.org/psalm118v24>. How does this enrich your understanding of these verses?
5. Read James 2:14-26. Explain why repentance is absolutely necessary to enter God’s kingdom. Where do you see the fruits of repentance (Matthew 3:8; Galatians 5:22-23) most evident in your life presently?