

Discipleship According to Mark

Authority Challenged (Mark 11:27-12:12)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at Houston Chinese Church on July 26, 2026

Introduction

- ❖ Last week, we jumped back into our series in Mark's Gospel, and we covered that well-known incident of Jesus clearing the temple courts of merchants and money-changers. He had entered Jerusalem the day earlier on that very first Palm Sunday. That Monday morning, on his way back to the temple, he cursed the barren fig tree. Which, as we explained last week, symbolically represented the temple.
 - Which means, when Jesus arrived at the temple, his intent was not to cleanse it of unjust practices and restore it back to its proper function. His intent was to prophetically curse the temple, predicting its impending destruction. Which was foreshadowed the next day, that Tuesday, when walking back to Jerusalem, they saw that the fig tree he had previously cursed had withered to its roots.
 - **And later that Tuesday, while he was walking in the temple courts, the religious leaders stop Jesus and confront him.** They question his authority. Implicitly challenging its validity. And they ultimately reject his authority. A result that's prophetically foretold in the Parable of the Wicked Tenants.
- ❖ None of this is new in Mark's Gospel. Back in chapter 3:6, after Jesus healed someone on the Sabbath, we're told that the Pharisees and Herodians held counsel to discuss how they could destroy him. And we've already seen three instances of Jesus predicting the rejection and opposition coming from the religious establishment.
 - They've been opposed to his teachings about the kingdom of God; to his acceptance of tax collectors and sinners; to his various claims of authority to either work on the Sabbath, or to cast out spirits, or to forgive sins. The religious leaders have been dead set on getting rid of him. But they can't touch him right now. He's too popular.
 - The opposition and conflict just continues to seethe and simmer under the surface. Intensifying in the last week of his life. As we study this morning's passage, we'll zero in on this conflict because it's the main focus of the text.
- ❖ **But anytime you're dealing with conflict—whether in the text or in our lives—it's always important to examine not just the *nature* of the conflict but its *purpose*.** In other words, every time we're in conflict, we should be asking ourselves, **“What am I supposed to learn from this conflict—about myself and about God?”**
 - That's an important life skill to adopt. Anytime there's conflict—in your marriage, in your family, in the workplace, in the church—anytime you experience conflict in your relationships, you want to figure out what went wrong. But you also want to know what you're supposed to learn about yourself and about God.
- ❖ **Every conflict is a classroom for lessons to be learned.** God intends for us to learn something about ourselves and something about him. So as we walk through the conflict that Jesus has with religious leaders, **I want to identify four things we can learn about Jesus—who's at the center of the conflict—and about God his Father—who put him through it.** We're going to learn something about (1) The authority of God, (2) The patience of God, (3) The judgment of God, and (4) The triumph of God.

The Authority of God

- ❖ Let's start by seeing what we can learn about **the authority of God—particularly the divine authority vested in God the Son**. In the person of Jesus Christ. After he arrives in the temple court that Tuesday morning, he was approached by the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. And the question him saying, in v28, *“By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?”*
 - This was a group of religious leaders that represented the Sanhedrin. **The Sanhedrin was the seventy-one member Jewish ruling council that managed the temple and governed the religious affairs of the people**. They were made up of Pharisees (v13), Sadducees (v18), and scribes (v28). Which you'll notice are the very three groups that approach Jesus in the rest of chapter 12, peppering him with questions. **So this is a concerted effort by the Sanhedrin to somehow trap Jesus in his own words in order to discredit him in the eyes of the public.**
- ❖ **The first round of questions had to do with authority.** They were questioning his authority to do what he did at the temple the day before. These leaders saw themselves as the rightful authorities over the temple and all that took place in it. So what right do you have to kick out those merchants and money-changers?
 - Now the issue of authority surrounding Jesus is nothing new. Back in chapter 1, when Jesus visited the synagogues, people immediately recognized something different about the way he taught. It was unlike what they normally heard in the teaching of the scribes. **Jesus taught as one who had authority in himself** (1:22).
 - And he had a **clear authority over sickness**—healing people of various diseases with a mere touch (1:31). And he possessed **demonstrable authority over unclean spirits**. They obeyed his every word (1:27). And what infuriated them the most was Jesus's claim of **authority on earth to forgive sins** (2:10). Which they rightly recognized as an authority reserved for God alone (2:7).
- ❖ **So now these Sanhedrin members have worked out a plan to catch Jesus in his own words.** If he responds by saying he's his own authority, then they can accuse him of vain glory and conceit. Or if Jesus is bold enough to attribute his authority to God himself, then he walks right into their trap. They'll turn around and charge him with blasphemy with the temple crowd as their witness. So they think they've got Jesus cornered.
 - **But the Son of God is no fool.** He wisely sees through their line of questioning and responds with a question of his own. Look at vv29–30, *“²⁹Jesus said to them, “I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. ³⁰Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man? Answer me.””*
- ❖ He's referring to John the Baptizer, whom we met back in chapter 1. That's when John baptized Jesus in the Jordan. When the heavens were torn apart and the Spirit of God descended upon Jesus like a dove. And a voice from heaven said, *“You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”* (1:11) **By referencing John and his baptism, Jesus is suggesting that his authority comes from the same God who authorized John to baptize.**

- ❖ And another reason he mentions John is because he preached “*a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.*” In other words, he proclaimed a forgiveness apart from the temple system. **You don’t have to go to the temple with a sacrifice in your hand. Just come to the river with repentance in your heart.** John offered a forgiveness for free. You don’t have to exchange any coins. All you need is a repentant heart. That sounds a lot like Jesus.
 - **Jesus is closely identifying his ministry with John’s.** So he poses the question. Was John’s ministry—one that offers forgiveness of sin apart from temple sacrifices—was that ministry legitimate? Authorized by God (heaven)? Or was it merely from man?
- ❖ The religious leaders immediately realized that the tables were turned. They were now trapped. Look at v31, “*31And they discussed it with one another, saying, ‘If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’ 32But shall we say, ‘From man’?’—they were afraid of the people, for they all held that John really was a prophet.*”
 - They clearly didn’t believe John was a legitimate prophet sent by God, but they couldn’t say it out loud. Because the public did. To discredit John would risk a loss of favor in the eyes of man. Which, we’re told, is exactly what they feared.
 - And that’s the irony. **The fact that the Sanhedrin let the opinion of others dictate their behavior just proves that their authority comes from man and not from heaven.** They might claim God’s authority, but they’re actually governed by public opinion.
- ❖ And their refusal to answer Jesus demonstrates that they weren’t truly seeking answers. They weren’t actually curious about the source of his authority. **They had already written Jesus off and were simply trying to discredit him.** So they gave a non-answer. Look at v33, “*So they answered Jesus, ‘We do not know.’*”
 - Recognizing that, Jesus refused to answer them. “*And Jesus said to them, ‘Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.’*” **He had no intention of throwing pearls before pigs** (Mt 7:6). His answer would’ve only fallen on deaf ears and hardened hearts. So he refuses to answer.
- ❖ So that’s the conflict in this passage. It stems from the religious leaders and their effort to discredit Jesus in the eyes of man. **That’s the nature of the conflict, but what’s the purpose?** What can we learn about Jesus and the One who sent him?
 - **We learn the source of Jesus’s authority.** He didn’t have to say it outright. **The non-answer of his opponents spoke volumes.** They know the answer is heaven. They know that John’s authority, and by extension Jesus’s, is rooted in heaven—it comes from God—but they can’t bring themselves to admit it.
- ❖ But what about us? **Do we recognize that Jesus’s authority is heaven-sent?** That his claims to be able to forgive your sins is rooted—not in man’s wishful thinking—but in God’s divine prerogative? Even if we know, deep down, this to be true, are we willing to confess it publicly? **Does the opinion of others dictate our behavior and deter us from confessing Christ—from going public with our faith?**

- ❖ **Maybe you know, in your heart, that Jesus is sent from God and that he can forgive your sins, so what's keeping you from confessing that publicly?** What's keeping you from telling the world? Don't worry about what others might think or what they might say. Because, in the end, they don't have the authority to judge you. Only Jesus does.

The Patience of God

- ❖ So the first lesson to draw from the conflict in our text is a lesson on the authority of the Son of God. Next, Jesus goes on to tell the religious leaders a parable, and through that we learn something about **the patience of God**. Through the conflict figuratively represented in this parable, we see just how merciful and long-in-suffering the Lord is, patiently enduring our sin and rebellion.
 - Start in chapter 12:1, *"¹And 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. ²When the season came, he sent a servant to the tenants to get from them some of the fruit of the vineyard.'"*
- ❖ **So this is an allegorical use of a vineyard to represent God's covenant people.** It's nothing new. It's drawing from Isaiah 5 where the LORD sings a love song to Israel, which he called his vineyard. Listen to how it's similar to our parable. *"²He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. ³And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. ⁴What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?"*
 - **Jesus's audience knew exactly *who* represented *what* as he told this allegorical parable.** They knew the **man** who planted the vineyard is God. The **vineyard** represents Israel. The **tenants** in charge are the religious leaders, the members of the Sanhedrin. And the **servants** sent by the landowner to collect fruit are the prophets of the OT, including John the Baptizer, the last in the line of prophets sent by God.
 - And as you can see, this parable flows seamlessly out of the previous passages. The temple clearing. The fruitless fig tree. The leader's rejection of John. **All of those themes are carried forward in a parable focused on the lack of fruit and the rejection of God's messengers.**
- ❖ Keep reading in v3, *"³And they took [the servant] and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. ⁴Again he sent to them another servant, and they struck him on the head and treated him shamefully. ⁵And he sent another, and him they killed. And so with many others: some they beat, and some they killed."*
 - **What sticks out is how patient this landowner is.** He sends a servant to collect the fruit that rightfully belongs to him, and the tenants beat up the servant and send him back empty-handed. So he sends another servant, and they treat him no better. So he sends another, and they end up killing him. Over and over again this occurs.

- ❖ The repetitive nature of these events demonstrates the hardness of the tenants' hearts. But it also demonstrates the long-suffering patience of the landowner. **And to be honest, it's surprising that he'd allow such stubborn resistance to persist for so long.** You'd think he'd get the picture and stop sending more servants to their doom. He seems a bit naive.
 - But the same could be said of God and his mercy. **You don't know his mercy until you've encountered it to such a degree that it seems naive.** Like he doesn't know what he's doing letting sinners get away with so much. But that's how merciful God is. That's how patient he is. To the extent that we don't get it. It doesn't make sense.
- ❖ **I think of my lack of patience towards my own kids.** I might give them instructions on how to wash the dishes or to put them away. But if I see them loading the washer wrong or putting the plates or utensils in the wrong place, it drives me nuts. And I'm like, "Stop, stop. Never mind. I'll do it." **I have little patience. My mercy is limited.** I'll bear with only a couple mistakes, and then I'm taking over.
 - So I look at this landowner, and he seems like a sucker. He's so naive. **What does he think is going to happen when he sends another servant?** And then he goes on, in v6, to send his one and only beloved son. *"He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.'"*
- ❖ *"Beloved"* was a term commonly attributed to a family's only son. **The landowner is going to naively send his only beloved son into the hornet's nest.** Hoping that, this time, things will be different. That, this time, they'll respect his son. Listen to v7, *"⁷But those tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.'*⁸*And they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard."* **That's an obvious reference to Jesus and his impending death.**
 - **Friends, if the gospel we share doesn't sound a bit naive, then we're failing to convey the full measure of God's mercy.** We haven't captured it if God doesn't sound like he's being taken advantage of. Because that's just how merciful he is to sinners. How patient he is towards us. To the extent that it makes little sense to us.
- ❖ But that's our only hope. **Our only hope of salvation is that God would be so patient as to grant us mercy time and time again.** Opportunity after opportunity. A multitude of chances. Overlooking not just our failures and mistakes but our sinful resistance and rebellion.
 - **If God were merely patient enough to allow us three strikes—or maybe even generous enough to make it four or five—we could actually understand that.** We could even picture ourselves doing the same. But then we'd all be doomed.
 - Our only hope of salvation is that God would be so patient with sinners like us that he would give his one and only Son to die on the cross for us. That whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.
- ❖ Is that the gospel you believe in? The gospel you share? **A gospel that conveys a degree of patience and mercy from God that never stops amazing us.** That still, to this day, sounds too good to be true. But it is true. That's how patient God is towards sinners like us.

The Judgment of God

- ❖ Now having said all that, it might come as a shock to read of the landowner, in v9, returning to his vineyard ready to drop the hammer on those tenants. So apparently there still is a limit. At some point, his patience *does* end. And consequences *do* come. **But the emphasis has been on how God's patience stretches far longer than we could even ask or imagine.**
 - And yet a third thing to learn from the conflict in this text is—not just something about the authority of God and the patience of God—but the reality of **the coming judgment of God**. Listen to v9, *“What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others.”*
- ❖ So there is a judgment to come. Don't overlook that. **Don't allow the long-suffering patience of God to lull us into an ignorant state of indifference.** Assuming that we'll simply get away with any unrepentant sin and rebellion.
 - Peter had to deal with this kind of cavalier attitude in 2 Peter 3. **Where scoffers were scoffing and asking, “Where is this promised coming of God?** Everything has continued as it has before. Where is this judgment to come? **2 Peter 3:8-10**, *“⁸But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. ⁹The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. ¹⁰But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.”*
- ❖ The Lord is not slow in judgment. He's patient. Not wishing that any should perish but that all should reach repentance. **But the point is that we shouldn't take God's patience for granted.** Because the day of the Lord *will* come when we least expect it. Like a thief in the night. This landowner is no pushover. He will return and destroy the wicked tenants. Their rebellion will not persist forever. They will be called to account.
 - And not only will they be removed from their positions of authority, it says he'll give the vineyard to others. **The landowner will entrust the care of his people to a new set of leaders.** That's a reference to the apostles and future church leaders who will eventually replace the Sanhedrin in tending to God's vineyard, to his Church.
 - Previously, his opponents walked away from his parables dazed and confused. But this time, v12 says they clearly perceive that Jesus told this parable against them. That they're the wicked tenants. **But sadly, that kind of clarity didn't lead to conviction of sin and repentance of heart.** No, they dug their heels in even deeper and sulked away to continue their plotting.
- ❖ That's *not* the right way to respond when you hear a warning about the coming judgment of God. Don't repeat their mistake. **Don't try God's patience.** Yes, it's greater than you think. But take it seriously when Scripture says the day of the Lord (the day of judgment) will be like a thief and come when you least expect it. Don't try his patience. **Treat every day, as long as it's called “today,” as an opportunity to repent and be forgiven of your sins.**

The Triumph of God

- ❖ So out of this conflict with members of the Sanhedrin, we've learned something about the authority of God, about the patience of God, and about the judgment of God. Jesus concludes his parable with a description of **the triumph of God** that can arise out of the rumble and ash of life's conflicts. **In other words, you can always find a redemptive purpose in every conflict if you have the eyes of faith to look for it.**
 - Look with me at vv10-11. Jesus follows up his parable by quoting from Psalm 118. Which if you recall last week, the crowds were singing Psalm 118 as Jesus's entered Jerusalem. *"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"*
 - So with that psalm fresh on everyone's mind, Jesus asks in v10, *"¹⁰Have you not read this Scripture: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; ¹¹this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?"*
- ❖ **Jesus is that Stone rejected and discarded.** And the builders in the psalm are the same as the tenants in the parable, and both represent the religious leaders in the temple. And in a mere three days, they play their role by arresting Jesus on Good Friday, trumping up false charges, dragging him before Roman authorities, calling for his death.
 - **Those acts of rejection—as wicked as they were—in the end, they were the Lord's doing.** That's what it says in v11. The Lord works in mysterious and marvelous ways. No one would've predicted that he'd defeat sin by putting it on the back of his sinless Son. No one would've guessed that he'd defeat Satan by allowing the Accuser to condemn his beloved Son.
 - No one would've thought that he'd defeat Death by sending his Son to his death. **No one knew that God would take the cast-away, rejected stone and use it as the foundational cornerstone for a new temple that he's building, made of living stones, called the Church.**
- ❖ That was the goal. Jesus went to Jerusalem knowing full well that he would be rejected and killed. **But he knew that, on the other side of the cross, awaited a resurrection and ultimate triumph.** That he would serve as the cornerstone upon which God would build his Church. Of which you and I can be a part, if we see the cross and resurrection as the Lord's doing and consider it marvelous in our eyes. **We can be living stones in this new temple, if we come to Jesus.** If we believe in him and repent of our sins.
 - Listen to **1 Peter 2:4-5**, which builds on this new temple imagery, *"⁴As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, ⁵you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."*
- ❖ **Church, we have the privilege and honor to live in light of the triumph of God.** He has called us together and formed us into his new temple on earth. And Jesus is the cornerstone, the foundation, that holds us up and keeps us all together.

- ❖ **Whenever and wherever the Church gathers to worship God and preach his gospel, that's where you can meet with him.** That's where his presence uniquely dwells on this earth. And that's what we aim to *do* and aim to *be* every Lord's Day as we gather in this place. This is a house of prayer for all the nations. We are the new temple where the forgiveness of sin is found.
- ❖ And we invite anyone who claims the identity of a Christian to regularly join us every Lord's Day, so that together we can be a holy temple, a holy priesthood, that offers spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.
 - **If you don't have a church home, then make it your highest priority to find one.** Whether here at HCC or at any other gospel-preaching, disciple-making church in our city. There are plenty to choose from.
- ❖ **If you're a Christian who's not actively connected to a church, then you're just a rock on the ground.** But you can be a living stone set within the new temple of God when you step into community with other Christians.
 - Friends, if finding a church home is something God is impressing upon you, then come to our membership class next month and see if the Lord is calling you to make a home here among us.