

## Who's in charge here?

### 1. Intro

- When it comes to authority we often have a love / hate relationship with it
- Referees / Umpires
  - We hate it when the referee penalizes our footy team out of the game
  - We love it when they award our team a penalty that helps us win it
- Government
  - We hate it when the government introduces new taxes
  - We love it when they pay us a family assistance bonuses
- Police
  - We love it when the police assert their authority to arrest criminals
  - We hate it when they use their authority to give us a speeding fine
  
- Passage today there is a good authority that we ought to love ... and there's a a false authority that ought to be hated
  - Mark 11-12 see the religious leaders trying to assert their authority over Jesus but it is a false authority
  - Also see Jesus completely exposing his opponents showing them that God is the one who has true authority

### 2. Context

- Jesus has arrived in Jerusalem with his disciples
- Arrived to a hero's welcome as the crowds praised and blessed Jesus as he rode into the city on a donkey
- But Jesus hasn't come to Jerusalem to be exalted by the crowds ... he's come to die as a ransom for the sins many
- Over the few days he's been there, he's been staying at Bethany just outside of Jerusalem ...<sup>1</sup>
- Each day he's come into Jerusalem and gone to the Temple
- The previous day Jesus pronounced judgment in Israel's leaders when cleared the Temple of the traders and money changers
- Leaders are furious with Jesus and are looking for a way to kill him
- Their intention to kill Jesus leads to a series of confrontations with him as they attempt to trap Jesus and have him arrested and killed

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<sup>1</sup> probably at the house of his friends Lazarus, Mary & Martha. Refer John 12:1 'Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead'

- In the passage we see the religious leaders come to trap Jesus with two questions
  - In between Jesus interprets their assaults on him by telling a parable against them

### **3.A question about who has authority – the leaders or Jesus?**

- After Jesus had cleared the Temple the previous day, we see in 11:27-33 that the conflict between Jesus and religious leaders is really starting to fire up
- So CP's, TOL & Elders come to Jesus > ask a question
  - v28 *"By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority to do these things?"*
  - Referring to Jesus clearing the Temple and speaking against the religious leaders
- Their question in v28 is designed to trap Jesus
  - If he answers that his authority comes from God ...
    - then they will accuse him of blasphemy and claim the right to kill him
  - If he answers that his authority comes from man
    - then they'll say that is no authority at all ... and they'll discredit him
- So Jesus answers with a question
  - v29-30 – *"I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. <sup>30</sup> John's baptism-- was it from heaven, or from men? Tell me!"*
- Jesus is not merely evading the questions
  - Jesus is wanting to expose the religious leaders hard heartedness
- The religious leaders came out to trap Jesus, but now in v31-32 we see Jesus has trapped them
  - "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?'
  - <sup>32</sup> "But if we say, 'From men' " -- they feared the people, for all counted John to have been a prophet indeed.
- The religious leaders and all the people acknowledged John the Baptist was a prophet of God with all the authority of heaven
- But to acknowledge that now in front of Jesus, would just condemn them because they've ignored all that John said about him

- John declared he was preparing the way for the Messiah
- He was not even worthy to stoop down and untie the thongs of Jesus' sandals
- Jesus is the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"
- So by asking the question about John and his authority ... Jesus is indirectly asking the same question about himself
  - If they answer that John has authority from heaven ... they are answering their own question that Jesus authority is from God
- However, they refuse to acknowledge John's authority is from heaven ...
  - And as a consequence ... they refuse to acknowledge Jesus authority
- And so v33 they answered Jesus, "We do not know."
- And in doing so ... they refuse to acknowledge what they know to be true

#### **4. A parable about who will be judged – the tenants or the Son?**

- This confrontation with the religious leaders ... and their refusal to acknowledge him ... leads to Jesus speaking the parable against them
- Jesus starts the parable by talking about a vineyard
  - Man > planted a vineyard > resourced it / set it up ready to run > rented out to some farmers > went away
- Now as we heard in the reading from Isaiah 5 ... Israel was often referred to as a vineyard in the OT<sup>2</sup>
  - Which means that the tenants he places in charge of the vineyard are the leaders over Israel ... the CP's, ToL & Elders
- Jesus continues the parable
  - Owner of the vineyard is away in a distant land
  - At harvest he sent a servant to collect some of fruit > real estate agents going to collect the rent

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<sup>2</sup> *Isaiah 5:1-7 I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. <sup>2</sup> He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit. <sup>3</sup> "Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. <sup>4</sup> What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? <sup>5</sup> Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. <sup>6</sup> I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it." <sup>7</sup> The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress*

- As the owner of the property it was the tenants obligation to give to him what was due to him
- But in v3-5 we see that the tenants seized each of the owners servants ... beat them and sent them away or killed them
- Each time they refused to give to the owner what was due to him
- Finally ... we read in v6
  - *"He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, 'They will respect my son.'*
  - In the ancient world, much like it is today ... the son was considered to be the image bearer of the father
  - The son also had the authority of the father
- **Illustration**
- Like Kerry Packer sending James Packer to a business meeting
  - You know he operated with his father's authority
  - So much so ... that by having his son at the meeting was as good as having Kerry there
  - You know if you double crossed James Packer ... then you could expect to experience the full wrath of his father
  - So when you transacted or dealt with the son of a man ... you were as good as dealing with the man himself
- So the man in the parable sends his beloved son to deal with this mess and sort it out ... thinking ... surely 'they'll respect my son' because he in effect is representing the land owner
- But we see in v7-8 ... that the tenants showed complete defiance and contempt for the owner ... and they killed the son
  - The tenants ... acting with wicked and evil motives assume that by killing the son & with the land owner in another country ... the land would be free for them to claim
- In doing so ... they not only show complete disregard for the son by mercilessly killing him ...
  - But most significantly they show utter disregard and contempt for the father ... the man who sent his son and whom they are meant to serve
- In v9 Jesus gives the answer to his rhetorical question

- The fate of these tenants will be that the vineyard owner will come and kill the tenants and give the vineyard to others
- **Implication**
- As in Isaiah 5 ... in the parable ...
  - Vineyard > Israel
  - Owner of the vineyard > God
  - Tenants > Leaders of Israel
  - Servants > Prophets
  - Son > Jesus
- When we understand what Jesus is saying here, we can see the parable highlights a number of things
- Firstly it makes clear that God is extremely patient
  - He patiently sent his prophets to warn his ppl and call them back to him
  - Even after they ignored them and beat ... he patiently sent others ...
  - See God is a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness
- However even God's patience has limits
- Second things we see Jesus making clear is that as the tenants of the vineyard, the religious leaders of Israel will be judged for their wickedness
  - He exposes how they have treated God's prophets in the past
  - He exposes how they have ignored him and ignored John the Baptist
  - And most pointedly ... as the final messenger and the beloved Son of the Father ... the parable exposes their plan to kill him
- Of course Jesus knew this was going to happen >
  - Mark 8:31 - [...] *the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed ...*
  - Within 24hrs ... this would be his fate
- The parable exposes how the religious leaders have
  - have ignored God
  - have failed to give to him what was due to him
  - have failed to honour and revere Jesus
- The parable serves as a warning to the leaders about their opposition to Jesus

- They're scheming and plotting may lead to his death
- But it will lead to an even greater judgment to come for them
  
- Jesus makes it very clear ...
  - because you have rejected me ...
  - you have in effect also rejected the Father ...
    - And you will be judged
  
- Jesus doesn't finish at v9
- He goes on to show that the rejected Son ... would soon become the exalted son
- In v10 Jesus quotes from Ps 118
- Have a look at v10-11
  - *The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone ... the Lord has done this it is marvelous to our eyes<sup>3</sup>*
  
- Capstone
  - Either capstone over a door or a large stone used as the keystone of an arch
  - It was the most important stone in the building
  
- Jesus is applying this verse to himself
  - He's making in clear that while he will be rejected and killed ... God will soon exalt him
  - He may look like the rejected stone as he dies on the cross ...
    - but the reality is God will exalt him to be the most important & exalted stone in the building of God's new kingdom
  
- What this shows ... is unlike the tenants in the parable who think they have authority over Jesus and will get the last laugh by killing off the Son ...
  - The reality is God will be the victorious one
  - Not only will he judge the wicked tenants ... but he'll raise his beloved Son and exalt him to be Lord and Judge over his kingdom
  
- The CP's, TOL and elders understood exactly what Jesus was talking about ... and they understood exactly that Jesus has told this parable against them
- But the warning goes unheeded

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<sup>3</sup> Psalm 118:22-23

- Far from repenting ... we see in v12 they're still looking for a way to arrest Jesus
- **Application**
- It's easy to stand on the outside and point the finger at the CP's, ToL & elders who were at the end of Jesus rebuke
  - But what we need to remember ... these were God fearing men
  - They were pious, devout, disciplined and religious
  - Yet they were facing God's judgment ... because they had rejected God's Son
- **Illustration – Bianca**
- At a party once chatting to a lady who embraces
  - both Greek Orthodoxy ... as well as Aboriginal spiritualism
  - She loves going to Orthodox Easter
  - She speaks openly and joyously about God
  - She says she believes in God
  - But she has no place for Jesus in her life
- Sadly ... like this lady and like the religious leaders ... very easy to be a person who professes a sincere belief in God
  - But has no place for Jesus in their life
- We may be religious ... we may be nice ppl ... we may talk about God
  - But if we don't honour Jesus ...
    - as the one who died for us, and
    - saved us, and
    - who calls on us to make him our Lord
  - Then we're rejecting Jesus ... and we're therefore rejecting God and we stand under his judgment
- If we're unwilling to listen to and obey the Son whom the Father has sent ... then we will face his wrath
- Many people don't like to talk about God's anger and judgment
  - Ppl look at verses like v9 and say
    - "God is spiteful" > "God is a tyrant" > "God is vengeful" > "I don't like this type of God"
- But when we remember who God is and how we has treated him ... it totally makes sense and completely just
  - God has sent his servants

- In those days it was a prophet or a king or a priest
- In our day it's a missionary, an evangelist, a minister or a Christian
- And when we reject the truth > when we rebel against the truth
- And when we oppose his messengers year after year and then reject his Son ... of course he's not happy
- That's obvious > that's fair > that's just
  
- How can we expect anything less?
  - You can't do all that and expect God to turn up on judgment day and give you a lollipop and a free trip to Dreamworld
  - You pick a fight with God and you're going to lose
- Somebody who breaks the Law over and over and over ... they get arrested and go to jail.
  - Nobody says "I can't believe that happened?"
  - Everybody's like, "Well, that's fair enough"
- And we shouldn't be surprised that's what happens to those who rebel against God and turn their backs on him and his beloved Son
  
- Friends the warning is plain
  - You don't want to reject the Son
  - You don't want to dismiss Jesus from your thinking
  - You can't push Jesus to the periphery of your life
- Because if you do you will one day have to face the judgment of God
  
- The great news of Christianity ... is that you can be spared that judgment when you do trust in and obey Jesus
  - That forgiveness and mercy are on offer when we stop treating God contemptuously ... and instead give him the honour he's due
  
- That's' what our last section is about

## **5. A question about who to honour – Caesar or God?**

- In v13 we are told THEY sent the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus
  - They are ... the CPs, Elders, and ToL > previous section
  - Religious leaders have gone back licking their wounds after hearing the parable about the wicked tenants and then enlist the Pharisees & Herodians to continue the confrontations with Jesus
  
- Pharisees
  - Lay religious group > zealous in keeping the OT law



- Although many were no doubt Godly, the ones Jesus often conflicted with were hypocrites
- Herodians
  - Influential Jews who were supporters of King Herod and the Herodian dynasty
  - Because Herod was a puppet king who was put in place & given his authority by the Romans ... it meant the Herodians were supporters of Rome
- Pharisees had theological interests > Herodians had political interests
- The two groups joined forces despite their political differences because they had a common objective ... to get rid of Jesus
- Pharisees & Herodians come to Jesus and ask him another question
  - v14 – *'Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?'*
- Jews required to pay tax to Rome as tribute
  - As expected ... with any tax ... it was highly unpopular and offensive
  - No one likes a new tax imposed on them ... only have to think of
    - Poll Tax instituted by Margaret Thatcher in the UK
    - GST or Carbon Tax here in Australia
  - New taxes are bad enough when implemented by your own government
  - but when it's imposed by a foreign country that is ruling over you ... that's even worse
- Unsurprising that the Jews hated being under Roman authority and even more they hated having to pay taxes to their oppressors<sup>4</sup>
- So Jesus knows he's being tested with something that is very political and highly emotive amongst the people
  - A wrong answer could be disastrous
- But the way the Pharisees & Herodians phrased the question ... "Is it right to pay the taxes or not?" ... meant Jesus would be forced to take sides
  - There was no room for maneuvering
- Problem facing Jesus in this is no matter which way he decides to answer this question ... he's guaranteed to fall foul of either party
  - If he says "Yes" – it is right to pay taxes to Caesar

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<sup>4</sup> There had been in the past ... zealous Jews who started an uprising to rid Israel of the Romans some years earlier  
Other Jews flatly refused to pay the tax in protest of the Roman occupation

- Pharisees would denounce Jesus to the people as a traitor and disloyal to the Jews and to God
- If he says "No" – you shouldn't pay taxes to Caesar
  - Herodians would report him to the Roman governor as a rebel against Roman overlords and he would be executed for treason
- They had pulled the old pincer move on Jesus
  - They've come at him from both sides ... in order to trap him
  - He was being forced into a compromising position – either theologically or politically
  - It was a well planned strategy that seemingly left Jesus nowhere to move
- As usual ... Jesus is aware of their hypocrisy and sees straight through their strategy
  - this is just another scheme to try and trap him and have him killed
  - So he asks for a Denarius and asks
    - "whose portrait is this? And who's inscription"<sup>5</sup>
  - They replied
    - "Caesar's"
- Denarius was a common Roman coin of the day
  - On one side was
    - Portrait of the Emperor Tiberius with the inscription in Latin
      - 'Tiberius Augustus Caesar, son of the divine Augustus'<sup>6</sup>
- And Jesus beautiful response at the end is
  - "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and give to God what is God's"
- Give to Caesar what is Caesar's is obvious
  - They live in the Roman empire ...
  - They benefit from the roads and public buildings they construct
    - Yes ... Medicare is not quite what it should be there in Jerusalem ... and the school system could be a bit better ...
    - But none the less, it's right to pay what you owe to your governing authority

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<sup>5</sup> Portrait = image [Gk εἰκων]

<sup>6</sup> Other side inscription were the words 'Pontifex Maximus' = high priest. Both inscriptions and the image portray Tiberius as the semi-divine son of the god Augustus<sup>6</sup>

- Jesus shows there is a duty / obligation owing to Caesar and these do not conflict with those things that are owed to God
- Jesus is making it clear that this is not an either or proposition
  - There is a rightful place under God for human authority ... even if it is a pagan ruler like Caesar
  - And so they should pay what they owe
  
- However there are limits to what is owed to Caesar
- Which is why Jesus adds
  - "And give to God, what is God's"
  
- In the context of where we are in Mark's gospel ... this
  - Giving to God what is God's ... this must mean
    - the fruit which is Jesus expected to see on the fig tree
    - the proper worship of God that had been lacking in the temple
    - the fruit which was should have been given vineyard tenants
    - the rightful acknowledgement of the Son in the parable
- To give to God what is God's ... is a call for worshipful obedience which recognises Jesus as the Son
  
- And they were amazed
  - They'd come with this great plan to trap him
  - Set it up so that no matter how he answered ... he would be trapped
- And in one simple statement
  - He not only avoids falling foul of their evil intentions ...
  - But he yet again manages to give them another hefty rebuke
- They came to trap him with their wisdom ... yet they're left marvelling at his wisdom!
  
- **Application**
- There's an obvious application here
  - We ought to give the government what we owe and pay our taxes
    - You earn and income, pay what you owe
    - Don't cheat on your tax return
    - Don't fudge your expenses
    - Don't leave out the cash-in-hand payments you get
  - Give to Gillard what is Gillard's and give to God what is God's
  
- Our government is our elected authority and whether you like the government or not ... we need to be good citizen's

- But the main point of what Jesus is saying here is that
  - There's an even greater authority than the Premier and PM ... and that is God
  - God has absolute authority over all my life ... and my primary duty is to give to God what is his
  
- If we're following Jesus, then he calls on us to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Jesus
  - Where to give our life to him
  - Surrender ourselves to him
    - Our money > family > home > work > friends > ambitions > desires > sex life > drinking habits > everything > whole lives
  - As we live our life in worshipful obedience to Jesus ... then we are giving back to God what he is rightfully owed

## 6. Conclusion

- God is the one with ultimate authority > he's the one who is in charge
  - And to reject his authority will only lead to his judgment
- But God is a God of great patience and mercy
  - He sent his son Jesus, in his image, with all the authority of the Father to be our saviour king
  - And as such we're to give him the honour and praise he is due
  - As we live our lives in worshipful obedience to Jesus