

**28<sup>th</sup> May 2023**

**Isaiah 5:1-7**

**The Song of the Vineyard**

**5** I will sing for the one I love

a song about his vineyard:

My loved one had a vineyard

on a fertile hillside.

**2** 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.

**3** “Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and people of Judah,

judge between me and my vineyard.

**4** 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?

**5** 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 nation of Israel,  
and the people of Judah  
are the vines he delighted in.

And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed;  
for righteousness, but heard cries of distress.

## **Matthew 21:23-46**

### **The Authority of Jesus Questioned**

<sup>23</sup> Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. “By what authority are you doing these things?” they asked. “And who gave you this authority?”

<sup>24</sup> Jesus replied, “I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. <sup>25</sup> John’s baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or of human origin?”

They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask, ‘Then why didn’t you believe him?’” <sup>26</sup> But if we say, ‘Of human origin’—we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet.”

<sup>27</sup> So they answered Jesus, “We don’t know.”

Then he said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

### **The Parable of the Two Sons**

<sup>28</sup> “What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work today in the vineyard.’

<sup>29</sup> “‘I will not,’ he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.

<sup>30</sup> “Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, ‘I will, sir,’ but he did not go.

<sup>31</sup> “Which of the two did what his father wanted?”

“The first,” they answered.

Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you; the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. <sup>32</sup> For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.

### **The Parable of the Tenants**

<sup>33</sup> “Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. <sup>34</sup> When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit.

<sup>35</sup> “The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. <sup>36</sup> Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. <sup>37</sup> Last of all, he sent his son to them. ‘They will respect my son,’ he said.

<sup>38</sup> “But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him and take his inheritance.’ <sup>39</sup> So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

<sup>40</sup> “Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?”

<sup>41</sup> “He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,” they replied, “and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.”

<sup>42</sup> Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures:

“‘The stone the builders rejected

has become the cornerstone;

the Lord has done this,

and it is marvellous in our eyes’?

<sup>43</sup> “Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. <sup>44</sup> Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.”

<sup>45</sup> When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus’ parables, they knew he was talking about them. <sup>46</sup> They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.

## Sermon: By what authority (Isaiah 5:1-7 and Matthew 21:23-46)

Please have your **Bibles** open at **Matthew 21:23-46**.

You should have a **sermon outline** to take notes if you wish.

Let me **pray** first...

### Intro/Context

There are **so many areas of our lives** where we have **someone in authority** over us ...

For example - the **Government** come up with **regulations** which we are meant to **comply with**. We saw this in a big way – during the **Covid restrictions** – when we were **ordered to stay home** – even **stay away from church** for a while.

Then there's the **police** – who **enforce the law** – and **punish crime**.

Even the **local council** – have **regulations** we have to follow.

If we **work** – we often come under the **authority of a boss or manager**.

If we're **unemployed or retired** – I'm sure we've experienced the strong arm of **Centrelink!**

Even at **school** – children come under the **authority** of the **principal and school teachers**.

Then there's **sports clubs and groups** we belong to – where someone has to be in charge – for things to run smoothly!

(pause)

But not **everyone** is **happy** to submit to authority.

Look at what happened during the **covid lockdown** – **people blatantly disregarded the restrictions** – some even had **protest rallies!**

Even at school, **authority** is **ignored**.

A few years ago, when I was teaching **Scripture at one school** – I came across a **boy** – who consistently **ignored the class teacher's instructions**. The **children** were **asked** to **put their laptop computers away** so we could start the Scripture lesson. **One boy was asked six times** to put the laptop away but he **ignored the teacher – and me too**. So, I went to his desk closed the laptop and tried to take it off him – he yanked it back – so I **yanked harder and took it from him**. He **didn't like that very much**. So, he said ***"okay – I'm going to cut my hair off"*** – and he picked up some **scissors**.

I replied ***"please go ahead – cut your hair – it's not going to affect me – it's your hair!"***.

He then realised **how silly he was** and kept quiet.

(pause)

In our **NT reading** this morning – **we deal with the matter of authority**.

[Slide 1-Authority]

So, we should define what **"*authority*"** means in Bible terms. The Greek Word used for authority [*exousia*] – means ***"the power of someone whose will and commands must be submitted to by others and obeyed"***

So, before we look at how Jesus handles the matter of His authority – let's get the **context** from last week.

[Slide 2-Context]

Jesus has just **cleansed the temple** by overturning the tables of the money changers and merchants – because they have been **ripping off visitors** to the temple – **charging inflated prices for currency exchange** – and **charging inflated prices to buy animals for sacrificing in the temple** – so Jesus reacted and said in v13 – “***My house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it a den of robbers***”

So having cleansed the temple of these corrupt people

The chief priests and the elders of the people came to Jesus – whilst he was teaching in the temple courts – v23 – and **asked Him two questions**: “***By what authority are you doing these things?***” and “***who gave you this authority?***”

Why would they **ask these questions?**

Because **their power, status, authority and popularity are being threatened by Jesus** who is demonstrating greater power and authority than they are – and they are supposed to be the ones in charge of what happens in the temple – and **Jesus has just ignored their authority.**

So, this morning we’re going to look at **3 things**

1. God is the **ultimate source of authority**
2. We must obey **God’s authority**
3. We must submit **to God’s authority**

**God is the ultimate source of authority?** (Matthew 21:23-27)

First then **God is the ultimate source of authority.**

[Slide 3a-source]

Before answering their questions, Jesus asks a question of His own –

I love it when Jesus answers a question - by asking a question

Jesus' question is regarding the source of authority for John the Baptist's ministry – look at v25...

***“John’s baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or of human origin?”***

What Jesus is doing here is making the religious leaders realize – just like God sent John to preach repentance and baptism – God also sent Jesus – and that both John and Jesus – came on God’s authority!

Jesus is **questioning** the **religious leaders’ competency to judge such issues**.  
Their ability to judge John the Baptist and his ministry was a measure of their ability to judge Jesus and His ministry.

**Jesus’ question is very profound.** If the religious authorities rightly answer His question; then they will already have the correct answer to their own question.  
 So – the **religious leaders** – vv25-27 - **discuss their possible answers:**

If they answer that John’s baptism came from Heaven – then Jesus will ask them why they didn’t believe John and why they didn’t believe Him [Jesus] because John’s ministry pointed to Jesus!

If they answer that John’s baptism came from human origin – they are afraid of the popular opinion of the people – who believe John is a prophet sent by God!  
 So, they **come up with** their ***“we don’t know”*** answer!



Because they don't give Jesus a proper answer – v27 – He **won't** give them an answer.

Jesus has **given them two options** – and “**don't know**” is not one of the options.

Application:

For us it means – Jesus **doesn't** give us the option of “*I don't know*” – Jesus must be either “accepted” or “rejected”

Also – the source of authority for John and Jesus' ministries is the same – they are both from God – and their message goes hand in hand. John's message to “**repent**” – is the pre-cursor to Jesus' message of “**believe and follow**”.

Every person who follows Jesus must **repent** and **believe** the Good News – and then **follow** Jesus. (Mark 1:15)

(pause)

Why is God the **ultimate source of authority**?

- Because - He **created everything** just by speaking His Word (Genesis 1-2)
- Because - He is **unique** – there is none like Him (Jeremiah 10:6) – and He is the **Lord of all** and **there is no other** (Isaiah 45:18) – He is **all powerful** – **all-knowing** – and **everywhere**.
- And - because – **God's authority** is **revealed in His Word**
- And **God's Word** is breathed out – and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16)
- What God says will happen in His Word – **always happens**
- What God promises in His Word – **always comes to pass**
- And because God's authority is revealed in His Word – **we need to make sure we know what God's Word says**

Application: Are we **spending time in God's Word** – or are we just settling for what we hear on Sunday? Do we read and study God's Word daily? Have we considered joining a Bible Study/Growth Group?

If God's Word is the ultimate authority, it makes sense for us to come to His Word and rely on it – rather than relying on ourselves or others – as our authority!

Which brings us to the 2<sup>nd</sup> point – **We must obey God's authority**

[Slide 3b-Obey]

### **We must obey God's authority** (Matthew 21:28-32)

It's one thing knowing where the source of authority is - but Jesus says obeying authority is paramount

He tells a **parable** – in verses 28-32 –about **two sons** - to **illustrate the importance of obedience**

A **man** owns a **vineyard** and he has **two sons**

The man tells the **first son** to go to work in the vineyard – the **son initially says no** – **and then changes his mind and goes to work.**

The man tells the **second son** to also go to work in the vineyard – the **son says yes** – **but then doesn't go.**

Neither of the two sons' response is ideal – it would be **best if they both simply obeyed and said yes and actually went to work in the vineyard.**

But Jesus says the **first son** – at least **obeyed eventually.**

As we've said before in a parable – the people mentioned **represent someone in Jesus' context.**

The first son in the parable is like the outcasts of society in Jesus' time – people like the tax collectors and prostitutes. They initially ignored God but when John the Baptist came along – they repented of their sins and turned back to God.

Whereas the second son in the parable is like the religious leaders that are questioning Jesus' authority. They say they follow God's Word – but when John the Baptist came – they didn't repent of their sins – because they think they are okay as they are – they don't sin – they have appointed themselves as righteous – and Jesus says to them – even though you saw the tax collectors and prostitutes repenting – you didn't repent and believe.

Application: What about us? Which son are we like in the parable? Are we more like the tax collectors and prostitutes who admit their sin and repent? Or are we more like the religious leaders and think we're, okay?

Are we - someone who says we're a Christian but doesn't show it?

**Talk is cheap!**

We need to walk the talk! There's a difference between saying and doing!

The parable also teaches – no one's too bad that they can't repent and be saved! And it's never too late to turn back to God – and repent.

God wants us to obey His authority – because He is Holy and perfect and He knows what's best for us.

If we don't obey – there are **consequences**.

Jesus' bottom line to the religious leaders is – ***“these tax collectors and prostitutes have repented and they're entering the kingdom of Heaven – and you religious leaders might not even get into the Kingdom – if you don't start obeying God's authority!”***

### **Submitting to Authority?** (Matthew 21:33-46 and Isaiah 5:1-7)

Which brings us to the 3<sup>rd</sup> point – **We must submit to God's authority**

**[Slide 3c-Submit]**

Submit – ***is to give way or yield to someone else's power over us.***

It might seem like **submit is the same as obey**. But not quite!

When we submit to someone – **we do it out of respect for their power and authority and leadership over us.** Whereas with obedience, there doesn't need to be any sentiment involved – we can simply follow orders – even if we don't like the orders – even if we don't like the person giving the orders - **we just obey and do it.**

When we submit to authority – we **follow the orders**, we respect the person in **authority** and **willingly** (not begrudgingly) **comply with their instructions.**

When it comes to God's authority over us, **we submit to God because there is love and respect for His greater power.**

To illustrate this - **Jesus tells another parable about a vineyard** – in verses 33 to 41

In this parable **a landowner has a vineyard**

The landowner represents **God**.

The vineyard represents **Israel**. Often in the Old Testament – **Israel is pictured as God's vineyard** (Deuteronomy 32:32; Psalm 80:8; Jeremiah 2:21) – as it is in our Old Testament reading this morning from Isaiah 5:1-7.

The **landowner rents his vineyard** to some farmer tenants and moved to another place.

Later the **landowner sent** some of his **servants to collect fruit** from the tenants. But the tenants seized the servants – beat some up – killed some – and stoned others. When the **landowner sent other servants** – they were **treated the same way**.

So, then the **landowner sent his son** to the tenants to collect the fruit – **he thought they would at least respect him**.

**But no!** Instead, they thought, the son is the heir of the vineyard – if we kill him – **we can inherit the vineyard** – so they killed him.

The tenants in the parable – are the **religious leaders**

The servants are – the **prophets God sent to Israel over centuries** – who were mainly ignored and rejected

The landowner's son is – **God's Son - Jesus** –

The tenants (aka the religious leaders) foolishly think that if they kill the son (Jesus) – **they will keep the vineyard**. But the vineyard belongs to the landowner (God) – who is still alive – and **He decides who inherits His vineyard** – not the tenants (religious leaders)

The bottom line is – **the tenants have not submitted to the authority of the landowner.**

So, Jesus cuts to the chase – see v40 - *“Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?”*

The religious leaders answer in v41 – and they **incriminate themselves.**

They say *“the landowner will bring those wretches to a wretched end and he will rent the vineyards to other tenants, who give the landowner his share of the crop”*

The **religious leaders** knew the parable was about them (v45).

Jesus points out in v42 – quoting from Psalm 118 – that by rejecting Him – **they are like builders rejecting the most important stone to be laid when building - they are rejecting the ONE – that the Old Testament describes as the Cornerstone – they are rejecting the ONE – God has sent to be the foundational stone of faith – the rock/stone that everyone should build their live on.**

And because they have rejected Jesus and have not submitted to God’s authority - when He sent the Prophets and John the Baptist and now Jesus – **there will be severe consequences.**

See v43 – the Kingdom of God **will be taken away** from the religious leaders and **given to other people** who will produce fruit.

These other people will be – the **Apostles** (rather than the religious leaders) – the **outcasts who have repented unlike the religious leaders, some loyal Jews**

who do repent – and of course the non-Jews, **the Gentiles**. Ultimately these other people – **will be the Church!** [more about that next week in chapter 22].

And v44 – **the consequences are severe** – Jesus will be a stone – **that either causes people to rise or fall**. Jesus will be either the rock who humbles us into submission and we follow Him – or He will be the rock that falls on us in judgment.

Even as Jesus speaks – **it's not too late** for the religious leaders to repent – but instead - v46 – **they look for a way to arrest Jesus**.

Application:

The religious leaders in Jesus' time – were **just like the vineyard in Isaiah's time** – in our Old Testament – **the vineyard showed great potential** – the landowner (God) had been meticulous in preparation – **but the vineyard** (Israel) **had produced bad fruit – bad grapes instead of good grapes!**

Why was their fruit – bad fruit?

Because **they had not submitted to the authority of God**.

Even when they followed God's rules – **they made it into a religious exercise** rather than out of a heart-felt love for God and others.

They kept the sacrificial system – they presented their sacrifices – **but they didn't give up their sins – their hearts were still corrupt**.

Yes, they kept the sabbath rule and didn't work – but if someone needed help on the Sabbath – **they didn't help!**

When they saw the outcasts of society – **they saw them as written off by God – rather than as sinners needing a saviour!**

When people came to them for justice and compassion – **they got ignored and oppressed.**

This parable teaches us - **we need to be like sheep who humbly submit to Jesus our Good Shepherd – and hand over our lives to Him – totally trusting Him with our whole lives – trusting He knows what's best for us.**

And this parable is also telling us - **God wants more than lip service – He wants us to bear fruit.**

As we hear God's Word – either on Sunday – or as we read it ourselves.

We need to not only hear it – but **apply it to our lives!**

Our head knowledge – has to become **heart and hand knowledge.**

Are we obeying God because we have to – or because **we love to!**

Are we helping others because we have to – or because – **we genuinely care and want to show the love of Jesus to them – and we want to please God**

Have we written off people as lost from God – or do **weep and pray for those who are lost from God**

Are we serving others because the Bible says 'be a servant' – or because **we are ever so thankful for what Jesus – our servant King - did for us – and want to model our lives on Him!**



## Conclusion

Just one final thought.

**Jesus has God's authority.**

The Good News is - Jesus has authority over sin (Matthew 9:1-2) and authority over death (See - Jairus' daughter Matthew 9:18-26 – and Lazarus John 11 – and His own resurrection)

And **Jesus has been given all authority in Heaven and Earth from God the Father** (Matthew 28:18) – and **He calls us to be obedient and submit to His authority and share the Good News of forgiveness and eternal life** (Matthew 28:19-20). That's how we bear fruit!

Let's pray...

*Father God, thank you that you are the ultimate source of authority.*

*Thank you that Jesus has authority over all things – including sin and death.*

*Help us through your word and your spirit – to submit to your authority and obey your word.*

*Help us to build our lives on Jesus – the cornerstone of our faith.*

*Enable us and equip us to share the Good News with others – and bear much fruit for your Kingdom.*

*In Jesus Name. Amen.*