

Title ideas:  
The King's Righteousness!  
The King's Authority!

## Matthew 21:23-46 - The King's Authority!

Scriptures:

23 Now when He came into the temple, the

chief priests and the elders of the people

confronted Him as He was teaching,

G4334 – come  
near.

and said, “By what authority are You doing

G1849 – ruling  
authority.

these things? And who gave You this

authority?”

Notes:

Being in an election year (2024) we are all familiar with polls. If polls had been conducted right before today's text about who was the Messiah, Jesus would have been the dominant frontrunner of every poll. And just like in our own culture, sometimes the leaders disagree with the polls and reject the will of the people.

This is probably Tuesday morning.

The chief priests and elders were the spiritual authority of the temple and the religious system of the Jews. Sadly, they had wandered from a pure worship of God and had devolved into political preservation of their position, power, and influence over others. Their worship became more about themselves than about God and His will. They are confronting Jesus because He threatens those things. They had the power to destroy Jesus, but Jesus had the power and authority to save them and make them right with God.

What are the 'these things' the chief priests are referring to? Most likely it was His actions inside the temple of chasing out those who were doing business inside the temple areas.

They don't make a judgment about whether what Jesus did was right or wrong, probably because they knew He was right.

'...who gave you this authority?' – They considered themselves to be the highest authority on matters relating to the temple.

As far as they understood, Jesus had no authority that was clearly apparent to them.

Scriptures:

24 But Jesus answered and said to them, "I

Notes:

Jesus is not evading the question. Jesus knew that any answer He gave would be twisted into a reason to have Him arrested and silenced. His question is the answer to their question.

also will ask you one thing, which if you tell

Me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I

do these things:

25 The baptism of John—where was it from?

Notes:

John worked no miracles but taught with such power and authority that sinners from all around Israel turned to God and repented of their sins. Jesus worked countless miracles and also taught with power and authority. The religious authorities rejected them both because they were not a part of their group.

From heaven or from men?" And they

reasoned among themselves, saying, "If we

say, 'From heaven,' He will say to us, 'Why

then did you not believe him?'

Scriptures:

Luke 11:46-51 - And He said, "Woe to you also, lawyers! For you load men with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers. 47 Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. 48 In fact, you bear witness that you approve the deeds of your fathers; for they indeed killed them, and you build their tombs. 49 Therefore the wisdom of God also said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and persecute,' 50 that the blood of all the prophets which was shed from the foundation of the world may be required of this generation, 51 from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah who perished between the altar and the temple. Yes, I say to you, it shall be required of this generation.

26 But if <sup>CP</sup> we say, 'From men,' <sup>o7</sup> we fear the <sup>CP</sup>

G5399 -

multitude, for all count John <sup>J</sup> as a prophet."

Notes:

According to their own laws, a prophet was to be given respect and listened to. A true prophet spoke on behalf of God. To reject a true prophet was the same as rejecting God. Sadly, the Jewish people had a long history of doing that (Luke 11:46-51).

To admit that John was a prophet would force them to admit that he was the promised forerunner of the Messiah. And by doing that, they would have to admit that Jesus was the Messiah. That was something they were unwilling to do.

Scriptures:

27 So they answered Jesus and said, "We do <sup>CP</sup>

not know." And He said to them, "Neither will <sup>CP</sup>

<sup>CP</sup> I tell you by what authority <sup>CP</sup> I do these things. <sup>CP</sup>

Notes:

They knew that one of the two had to be true, but they were unwilling to accept the possibility that it could be heaven and they were afraid of losing their influence with the common people if they said it was from men.

A more honest answer would have been, "We will not answer."

Because they refused to answer the question Jesus knew they would be unwilling to hear the truth. If someone is unwilling to hear the truth, then no amount of truth spoken to them is going to get through to them.

Scriptures:

28 “But what do you think? A man had two

Notes:

This parable is meant to challenge the religious leaders to examine themselves.

sons, and he came to the first and said, ‘Son,

go, work today in my vineyard.’

Scriptures:

29 He answered and said, ‘I will not,’ but


Notes:

This son represents the tax collectors and harlots who the religious leaders despised. They had lived a life far from God, in essence, telling God that they would not serve Him. Then, at the teaching of Jesus, they repented and chose to serve God.

afterward he regretted it and went.




G3338 – to feel  
sad about, or to  
change one’s  
mind about.

Scriptures:

30 Then he  came to the second and said

Notes:

This son represents the religious leaders who made a show of serving God but in reality, did not.

likewise. And he  answered and said, 'I  go, sir,' 

but he  did not go.

Scriptures:

Matthew 7:21-23 - Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. 22 Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' 23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'

31 Which of the two did the will of *his* father?"

They said to Him, "The first." Jesus said to

them, "Assuredly, I say to you that tax

collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of

God before you.

G4254 – go in before.

Notes:

To the religious Jews, the tax collectors and harlots would be the last ones to get into heaven if it was even possible. They presumed they were automatically going to heaven based upon their religion and standing in the religious community. Jesus was trying to help them see that they were not on the right path (Matthew 7:21-23).

By saying the first are those who please the Father, they are condemning themselves as lawbreakers before God.

'before you' – Jesus is saying that the tax collectors and harlots are more likely to humble themselves before God and be saved than the religious leaders were. Mary Magdalene, the harlot, and Zacchaeus, the notorious tax collector would enter God's kingdom before Caiaphas the high priest.

One of the problems with religious people is a kind of spiritual arrogance that assumes God is on their side and approves of them.

Self-righteous people have a hard time getting into heaven because they have determined their own way of getting there. It is hard to make self-righteous people righteous. Sinners know they are not righteous and can more easily be brought to a place of repentance.

This is a word of great hope and encouragement for sinners. It doesn't matter how bad of a sinner someone was in the past. If they repent of their sins they are going to be forgiven and are heaven-bound. Nothing in anyone's past can keep them out of heaven if they will repent.

Scriptures:  
Isaiah 40:3 -  
The voice of one crying in  
the wilderness:  
"Prepare the way of the  
LORD;  
Make straight in the  
desert  
A highway for our God.

32 For John <sup>J</sup> came to you <sup>CP</sup> in the way

G3598 – way of  
life, conduct.

Notes:  
What is the 'way of righteousness'?

'you did not relent' – The religious  
people could see tax collectors and  
harlots repenting of their sins and  
being baptized publicly. That should  
have caused them to pause and  
reflect upon what that meant.

of righteousness, <sup>OK</sup> and you <sup>CP</sup> did not <sup>HI</sup> believe

G1343 – "righteousness n. —  
adherence to what is required  
according to a standard; for  
example, a moral standard,  
though not always."

Unfortunately, all they could see was  
John doing things differently than  
the way they were doing them.  
Because they believed they were the  
only ones who could produce the  
fruit of righteousness and only by  
following the rules of their religion,  
they were blind to the clear work of  
God being done through John. This is  
even though John was doing them in  
the same way their Scriptures said  
the forerunner of the Messiah would  
do it (Isaiah 40:3). All four gospel  
writes attribute this verse to apply to  
John the Baptist. Religion without  
the influence of the Holy Spirit can  
make people blind to the clear  
working of God.

him; <sup>J</sup> but tax collectors and harlots <sup>HI</sup> believed

him; <sup>J</sup> and when you <sup>CP</sup> saw <sup>OB</sup> it, <sup>CP</sup> you did not

afterward <sup>HI</sup> relent and believe <sup>J</sup> him.

G3338 – to feel  
sad about, to  
change one's  
mind.



Scriptures:  
Isaiah 5:1-2 -  
Now let me sing to my  
Well-beloved A song of my  
Beloved regarding His  
vineyard:

My Well-beloved has a  
vineyard  
On a very fruitful hill.  
2 He dug it up and  
cleared out its stones,  
And planted it with the  
choicest vine.  
He built a tower in its  
midst,  
And also made a  
winepress in it;  
So He expected it to  
bring forth good grapes,  
But it brought forth wild  
grapes.

Genesis 22:18 - In your  
seed all the nations of the  
earth shall be blessed,  
because you have obeyed  
My voice.

33 <sup>?</sup>“Hear another parable: There was a certain

<sup>L</sup>landowner who planted a vineyard and set a

hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and

built a tower. And he <sup>L</sup>leased it to vinedressers <sup>V</sup>

and went into a far country.

Notes:  
‘Hear another parable...’ – This  
connects this parable to the previous  
one. They both relate to the same  
topic. Chapter 22 begins with a third  
in this series or parables.

The landowner is God. The vineyard  
is Israel ([Isaiah 5:1-2](#)). God chose the  
land of Israel and set it apart for a  
special use. The whole earth belongs  
to God, but Israel has a special place  
in God’s plan for the world.

The vinedressers are the Jews,  
especially the Jewish religious  
leaders. They were chosen by God  
out of the rest of humanity to be His  
special people. The land and the  
people were prepared by God to do  
a special work – to make God known  
to the rest of the world ([Genesis  
22:18](#)). The vinedressers had made a  
commitment to the landowner to  
work the land. They were to enjoy  
the bounty of their labor but also  
must give to the landowner his  
share. The religious leaders of Jesus’  
time had also made a commitment  
to God to serve Him, but instead of  
giving Him His share they were  
working only to enrich themselves.

This parable is most expressive of  
Christ’s purpose in coming as the  
Suffering Servant Messiah.

Scriptures:

34 Now when vintage-time drew near, he sent

Notes:

The servants are symbolic of the prophets God sent to Israel to remind them to worship God alone and serve Him.

his servants to the vinedressers, that they

might receive its fruit.

Scriptures:

35 And the vinedressers took his servants,

Notes:

beat one, killed one, and stoned another.

Scriptures:

36 Again he sent other servants, more than

Notes:

For thousands of years God sent prophets to call His people into a right relationship with God. This is a clear picture of God's patience.

the first, and they did likewise to them.

Scriptures:  
Mark 12:6 - Therefore still having one son, his beloved, he also sent him to them last, saying, 'They will respect my son.'

John 3:16 - For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

37 Then last of all he sent his son to them,

saying, 'They will respect my son.'

G1788 -

Notes:  
If they interpret the 'landowner' to refer to God, as they should, Jesus is saying He is the Son of God, which He is. The religious leaders had asked for proof of His authority. Jesus is claiming the authority as the Son of the Landowner.

Mark's gospel tells us this was his only son and that he was beloved (Mark 12:6).

Even after everything the vinedressers did to the servants, the landowner sent his only son. Most of God's prophets were ignored, rejected, abused, and killed. But God's love is so great that He sent His only beloved Son (John 3:16).

Scriptures:

38 But when the vinedressers saw the son,

they said among themselves, 'This is the

heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his

inheritance.'

Notes:

Scriptures:

39 So they took <sup>Y</sup>him and cast <sup>LS</sup>him out of the

Notes:

'cast him out of the vineyard' – The vineyard is symbolic of Jerusalem. When Jesus was crucified, He was taken outside the city.

vineyard and killed <sup>Δ</sup>him.

Scriptures:

40 "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard <sup>L</sup>

Notes:

comes, what will he do to those

vinedressers?"

Scriptures:

41 <sup>CP</sup> They said to Him, <sup>st</sup> “<sup>L</sup> He will destroy those

G622 -

Notes:

‘destroy those men miserably’ – Without realizing it, they confess what they deserve from God for their hypocritical religious arrogance and rejection of Jesus as the promised Savior-King of Israel.

God calls all His people to work in His vineyard. The fruit He is looking for is the fruit of righteousness.

wicked <sup>V</sup> men miserably, and lease <sup>L</sup> *his* vineyard

G2556 – “evil person n. — a person characterized by evil actions and immoral character.”

G2560 – badly, severely.

to other vinedressers who will render to him <sup>L</sup>

G591 – pay.

the fruits in their seasons.”

Scriptures:

42 Jesus said to them, "Have you never read

Notes:

Jesus quotes from Psalm 118:22.

Jesus is the cornerstone. The builders are the Jewish religious leaders. They rejected Jesus because He did not appear as the Messiah they wanted.

in the Scriptures: *The stone which the*

*builders rejected has become the chief*

G593 - regard as unworthy, reject as not genuine.

*cornerstone. This was the LORD's doing, and it*

*is marvelous in our eyes'?*

Scriptures:

43 “Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God

Notes:

Both of these parables were directed at the religious leaders.

God chose Abram out of all the people on earth and determined to make a great nation from him and his descendants. They would become the people we know as the Jews. They are God’s Chosen People. They always have been, and they always will be. God chose them on purpose and with a purpose. Their purpose was to lead people to the One True God by their faith, obedience, and worship of Him and Him alone.

By corrupting their worship and rejecting the Messiah, they have abandoned their God-ordained purpose. God would give that purpose to another ‘nation’. That ‘nation’ is the Gentile church. This does not mean that the church has replaced Israel as God’s Chosen People. God has a plan to restore and redeem his people. Until He does that, the church exists to make God known through faith, obedience, and worship of God, by the power of the Holy Spirit, and in the name of God’s only Son, Christ Jesus.

will be taken from you and given to a nation

G142 -

G1325 – granted. G1484 - ἔθνος (ethnos). “people group (social) n. — a large group of people based on various cultural, physical, or geographical ties.”

bearing the fruits of it.

Scriptures:

44 And whoever falls on this stone

Notes:

To those who have been exposed to the grace of God and rejected it, only judgment remains.

In just a few decades after Jesus said this, the Romans came and destroyed Jerusalem and the temple and ended the Jew’s ability to practice their religion the way they had for thousands of years.

will be broken; but on whomever it falls,

G4098 – broken in pieces.

it will grind him to powder.”

G3039 – pulverize.

Scriptures:

45 Now when the chief <sup>CP</sup> priests and Pharisees <sup>P</sup>

Notes:

heard His <sup>CP</sup> parables, <sup>CP</sup> they perceived that He <sup>t</sup>

G1097 – understood.

was speaking of <sup>CP</sup> them. <sup>P</sup>

Scriptures:  
John 14:6 -

46 But when they <sup>CP</sup> sought to lay hands on Him, <sup>t</sup>

G2212 -

G2902 – to take into custody.

Notes:

Jesus will continue this encounter with the Jewish religious leaders with another parable in the next chapter.

<sup>CP</sup> they feared the <sup>M</sup> multitudes, because they <sup>M</sup> took

G5399 -

The parable of the two sons challenges us to examine our faith. Am I depending on my religion or my good works to get to heaven? Or am I trusting solely in the finished work of Christ on the cross to cleanse of my sins and to bring me to heaven. Only Christ provides a way to heaven (John 14:6).

<sup>t</sup> Him for a prophet.

The parable of the landowner and His vineyard is a call to examine our service to God. Everyone is called to serve God in some way. But there is a right way to serve God. Are you doing it for self-gain or are you humbly serving others for God's glory.

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