

# JESUS' AUTHORITY CHALLENGED

Matthew 21:23-32, 45-46; Mark 11:27-33; Luke 20:1-8

## STRUCTURE

**Key-person:** Jesus

**Key-location:** Jerusalem

**Key-repetitions:**

- Conflicts between Jesus and religious leaders: Jewish leaders challenged Jesus' authority and he challenged them with a question about John the Baptist (Mat 21:23-27; Mk 11:27-33; Lk 20:1-8); religious leaders argued among themselves (Mat 21:25-26); religious leaders knew Jesus told the parable about them and they looked for a way to arrest him (Mat 21:45-46).

**Key-attitudes:**

- Hostility between Jesus and the leaders during the controversies in the temple.
- Serenity and magnetism of Jesus, the storyteller, when he told parables.
- Religious leaders' conspiracies to eliminate Jesus.
- Religious leaders' fear of the crowds' opinion.

**Initial-situation:**

During the second half of Jesus' third year of public ministry, he made three trips to Jerusalem. The first trip was for the Feast of the Tabernacles. Jesus' second trip to Jerusalem was for the Feast of Dedication. Jesus claimed that God was his father, and the Jews picked up stones to kill him.

Jesus went back across the Jordan River. Jesus returned to Bethany where he resurrected Lazarus from the grave. The Sanhedrin began to plot to kill Jesus. Therefore, Jesus withdrew to a secluded village.

Jesus made his third trip to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. On Sunday before Passover, Jesus made his Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. On Monday, Jesus expelled those who were buying and selling in the temple. Religious leaders began looking for a way to kill him.

**Initial-problem:**

On Tuesday, the chief priest and the leaders of the Jewish people asked Jesus who gave him authority to do the things he was doing.

**Final-situation:**

The chief priests and the Pharisees looked for a way to arrest Jesus, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people asserted that Jesus was a prophet.

## BIBLE STORY

### Jesus' Authority Is Challenged

On Monday of Passover Week, Jesus entered the temple area and drove out those who were buying and selling.

The next day, Tuesday morning, Jesus entered the temple courts. The chief priests and the Jewish leaders came to Jesus and asked, "What right do you have to do these things? Who gave you this authority?"

Jesus replied, "I'll ask you just one question. You answer me and I'll tell you who gave me authority to do these things. Who gave John the Baptist the authority to baptize: God or people?"

They argued among themselves, "If we answer, 'From God,' he'll ask, 'Why didn't you believe him?' But if we answer, 'From people,' we're afraid of what the people might do to us, for they're convinced that John was a prophet."

They answered Jesus, "We don't know."

Jesus replied, "Neither will I tell you who gave me authority to do what I do" (Mat 21:23-27; Mk 11:27-33; Lk 20:1-8).

### Jesus Tells a Parable

Jesus said, "I'll tell you a story about a man and his two sons. Then you tell me what you think.

"The father went to his older son and ordered, 'Son, go work today in the vineyard.'

"The older son answered, 'I will not,' but later he changed his mind and went.

"Then the father told his younger son to go work in the vineyard. The younger son answered, 'I will, sir,' but he didn't go."

Jesus asked, "Which of the two sons obeyed his father?"

The religious leaders answered, "The older one."

Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, tax collectors and prostitutes will enter the Kingdom of God before you. John the Baptist came to you to show you how to do right, and you didn't believe him. But tax collectors and prostitutes believed him. Even after you saw this, you didn't repent and believe him" (Mat 21:28-32).

The chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables and knew he was talking about them. They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people asserted that Jesus was a prophet (Mat 21:45-46).

## GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

1. What catches your attention in the story?
2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand?
3. Who are the main characters in the story?
4. What problems did the characters face?
5. How did the characters face their problems?
6. How have you faced similar problems?
7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you?
8. What does the story tell about God?

## SPECIFIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why was the religious leaders' question about Jesus' authority a trap?
2. How did Jesus deal with the religious leaders who tried to trap him with their questions?
3. How did Jesus' counter-question force the issue with the religious leaders?
4. How was Jesus' authority linked to John the Baptist's authority?
5. What is the connection between the religious leaders' question about Jesus' authority and the parable about the two sons?
6. Describe the parable:
  - What was the father's request?
  - What does each son say?
  - What does each son do?
7. What is the main lesson in the Parable of the Two Sons?
8. How are people today trying to get rid of Jesus?
9. Which son's story is most similar to your own story?

## LIFE-LESSONS

1. **Honest questions about faith deserve an answer; questions asked to challenge the faith do not.** Jesus avoided answering the priests' question about his authority. The Pharisees' question was intended to trap Jesus. They only wanted the truth if it supported their views and causes (Mat 21:23-27; Mk 11:27-33; Lk 20:1-8).
2. **Fear of people's opinions keeps people from being honest.** The religious leaders would not honestly answer Jesus' question about John the Baptist because they were afraid of what the people would do to them (Mat 21:25-27).
3. **The main lesson in the Parable of the Two Sons is that a person is only a faithful servant of God when he is obeying God.** The father symbolizes God. The older son symbolizes social outcasts like tax collectors and prostitutes who rebelled against the Father's will, but later repented and obeyed. The younger son symbolizes the nation of Israel and its religious leaders who promised obedience to God but never fulfilled their promises (Mat 21:28-32).
4. **People's actions need to match religious confessions.** In the Parable of the Two Sons, the older son said he would obey and then didn't. He's similar to phony Christians who participate in religious activities and say they want to do God's will, but constantly disobey (Mat 21:28-32).
5. **People who realize that God's word is talking about them, will usually accept the word and repent or they will reject the word and attack the messenger.** The religious leaders knew that Jesus' parables were talking about them. They looked for a way to arrest him (Mat 21:45-46).

6. **Oftentimes, people with theological education have less spiritual discernment than the uneducated.** The religious leaders looked for a way to arrest Jesus, but the common people asserted that Jesus was a prophet (Mat 21:45-46).

### LEARNING ACTIVITIES

#### **Pantomime:**

The storyteller tells the parable of the two sons once. Then the storyteller designates three people to stand in front of listeners and dramatize the story while he retells it.

- One dramatizes the father.
- Another dramatizes the older son.
- The other dramatizes the younger son.