

The clash with Ultimate Authority

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 April 2012

Preacher: Sam Low

[0:00] It is good to be back with you guys in church. It feels like a long time. I was here for Easter weekend, but before that have been away for a few weeks, welcoming the new addition to our family, who I think just left the building making a lot of noise.

But I'm glad that he's here making a lot of noise, because hopefully that means he won't make as much later on tonight. But it is good to be back in church with you tonight, and I'm excited to be able to open the Bible with you. And I'm going to pray, and I'm going to ask God to give us ears to hear what it is that he's saying tonight, because that's the most important thing.

So let's pray. Father God, we thank and praise you for the gift of your word. We thank and praise you for this opportunity to meet freely and to sit under it. Lord, keep us from pride that would prevent us from hearing you speak.

Give us the humility to recognize things in us that are not in line with your will. Lord, and give us eyes to see Jesus clearly. Give us eyes that see him as you have made him, exalted and on the throne.

And Lord, may we be moved to obey him and to treat him as king. Amen. Well, we all like the feeling of having power in our lives.

[1:07] Whatever power that might be. It might be the power over the remote control in your lounge room. I thought I had the power in my home, and something that you don't enjoy is feeling that power slipping away.

Fatherhood has been fantastic in a whole bunch of ways. Actually, I should just put a preface here. I'm a new dad, so you're going to expect a lot of dad stories for the next little while. It's not an apology, it's just a warning.

My world exists around a little man who's standing at the back. So, lots of baby stories. So, it's a strange feeling as a new dad to feel yourself losing the power in your own house.

Suddenly, I have almost no say in anything. If he doesn't like the show that I'm watching, I'm sure he can't actually tell, but if he starts crying, you'll start flicking channels just to see if you can find one that will settle him down.

It doesn't matter if I want to sleep. If he wants to be awake, then I'm awake. And that means when he wants to sleep, I'm going to sleep, because that's the only time that I can sleep. And suddenly, all the power that I thought I had is gone.

[2:07] And when we feel somebody else having power over us, it's fair enough that we ask the question, what gives you the right? Now, Bailey is not quite at the point of being able to answer, but I'm sure he will have some answers prepared later on in life as to why he can tell me what I can do.

But you know that feeling when something that you used to be in control of is taken away. You want to know why someone else has the right to have power and have influence in your life.

Whether it's the boss who tells you to do your job their way instead of your way. Whether it's the backseat driver who tells you to drive their way instead of your way. Whatever it is that is telling you that you have to do something not the way that you want, your immediate reaction is, what authority do you have to tell me that I'm supposed to do it this way?

What right do you have to tell me how I'm supposed to live? And that is the question that we come to in the passage tonight in Mark 11 and 12 that we're looking at. Over the next couple of weeks we're going to look at the authority that Jesus has and it's appropriate that we start with this question here in verse 28.

Jesus has just arrived in Jerusalem and he's walking in the temple courts with the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders come to him and they ask, verse 28, by what authority do you do these things?

[3 : 28] Now these things are really, really important there. There's a bit of baggage that we need to drag into this chapter. So if you just turn back one page, we're going to do a skim version of what's gone on just a little bit before.

Basically there's a whole bunch of miracles that have been happening, but a couple of really important ones. Beginning of chapter 11, Jesus rocks up in Jerusalem for Palm Sunday. You know the story, people are laying down branches and their jackets.

Jesus is riding on a donkey and people are shouting out, Hosanna to the king. This is a royal procession. So Jesus arrives in Jerusalem in the eyes of some as a relative nobody, but in his eyes and in the eyes of those at the parade, this is the king arriving.

He shows up and says, I'm the king. I'm in charge. You need to listen to me. You need to submit to me. And just to make it clear, in the next story, Jesus turns up to the temple and drives out the people who are there selling and who have abused the temple and they're turning it into a market and he gets very aggressive.

And there's one little sandwich story in around the temple about a fig tree that Jesus curses. He gets angry with this fig tree because it doesn't have fruit. He curses it. It shrivels up.

[4 : 36] And when they come back, they discover that it's dead. And what's going on there in those couple of stories is Jesus has rocked up. He said, I'm the king. He's arrived. And then he's shown what it looks like to obey the king.

The fig tree is an image throughout the Old Testament of Israel. So even though he does curse a fig tree and it withers and dies, it's actually like he's acting out a drama for everyone who's there to see.

And it's his way of saying, see how this fig tree didn't do what it was supposed to do? I get to judge that. It's my authority to say that's not good enough and to curse that fig tree.

When Jesus rocks up to the temple and the Jews have turned it into a marketplace instead of a place where the nations could come and pray, Jesus comes and turns over tables, makes a whip, starts shouting, has a commotion because he says, I'm the king.

I get to judge that. I get to say that's not okay. I get to tell you that God's not happy with that. In fact, what Jesus is saying is, as king, I have authority to tell you what God wants.

[5 : 45] He says, as king, I have authority to tell you God's not happy with you. And so it's understandable that the leaders of Israel, the leaders of God's nation Israel would say, hang on a sec, we're God's people and we're the leaders of God's people.

We're the ones who say what God wants. We're the ones with authority. And so who are you to turn up and start passing judgment?

Who are you to turn up and act like everybody has to listen to you? Jesus is saying, I am king, I am judge, and you must submit to me. He's saying, I'm the only judge, and you must listen to my words. Now, before we get any further, it's worth acknowledging, which came out pretty quickly in our little sharing time before, we don't do submission as an idea very well. I got permission to tell this story. I want to preface this story by saying that my wife is amazing and that she is a very submissive wife and that she honors me very, very much. But I remember when we came to get married and I'd proposed, she said yes, and we met with our minister.

[7 : 00] And you may or may not know that in the green prayer book that was once upon a time what we always did in church, there is two different services for weddings. They're very, very similar.

There is one very significant word that is different in the vows that the husband and wife say. In the first service, it says, better, worse, rich, or poor, etc., etc., and the husband says, to love and to cherish.

The wife says all the same things except, she says, to love and obey. In the second service, that obey word is changed back to cherish, just to make sure that there's no submission going on in this marriage because we would not want that.

So me and Sal sat down, we pulled out the vows and we thought, which one should we do? And Sal said, obey? Don't want to say that, that's a bit weird.

People will think you're going to rule over me and all that sort of stuff. And sure enough, we opted for the second option. And I have to say, I've only done three weddings, but those three weddings and a whole bunch of weddings that I've been to, I don't think I've ever heard anyone do the obey option.

[8 : 10] Because we get really nervous about the idea of submission. We get nervous about the idea of saying, I'm going to be under your authority. I'm actually going to put you in control.

I'm going to give you the authority and the power. And we get nervous because we're not so sure that anyone else is going to look after us as well as we're going to look after us.

I mean, that's the heart of it. I mean, hopefully me and Sal are at the point now where she's getting a little bit more confident that I'm going to look after her. And she might be more confident to say now, I obey. But the reality is, any kind of submission is hard because we are nervous that we're going to get burned.

Or maybe we're just nervous or not nervous. Maybe we're just convinced that we're doing a better job than this other person. If I put this person in control, it's going to go badly, not because they're going to try and not look after me, just because they're not as good at looking after me as I am. They're not as powerful as me. They don't know me as well as I do. And so the issue with submission is fear and pride. And ultimately, that's the heart of every sin that we do.

[9 : 21] It's the heart of sin through the whole of scriptures. It's the non-submission because of fear and because of pride. It starts in Genesis 1 with Adam. Do you remember Satan's temptation of Adam?

She goes, did God really say? Is God really being good to you? Do you actually think he's giving you all this good stuff? Just this question, this seed of doubt and fear that God's not going to look after him.

And ultimately, the sin comes when Adam decides that, hey, I want to be like God. Satan says, you eat this fruit, you won't die. You'll become like God. You can have just as much power as him. Then you won't be under anyone. You'll be in control. And Adam thinks, great. And he grabs the fruit and everything goes wrong because he refuses to submit. It continues on when we get to the Tower of Babel.

People don't want to listen to God and his plans anymore. They figure if we get together and we build a big tower, we'll be as big and impressive as anyone. So we can just do our own thing. And non-submission results in the judgment and scattering of people.

[10 : 22] It's happening here again in Mark 11 and Mark 12. The chief priests hear what Jesus is saying. They hear him saying, I'm the king. They hear him saying, you need to listen to me.

They hear him saying, some of the stuff you're doing is not okay and you need to obey me and listen to what I'm saying. But they are nervous that if they do, they might not be so powerful anymore.

They might not be the popular guys in Israel anymore. And so out of fear and out of pride, they don't submit. And it still happens for you and me today.

Think of a little example like giving. Like being generous in our offertory at church, in the money that we give to the work of ministry. We know that God calls us to give generously.

We know that he calls us to give our best and our first. But we just have this moment every time of thinking, if I give this, will God look after me?

[11 : 22] I mean, I kind of need it. Or maybe if I give this, the church isn't going to use it very well. So maybe it's better if I hold on to it and make my own decisions about who gets it and when they get it.

We just don't like to submit. We don't like anyone, including God, to have authority over our lives. And often our trick as Christians is that we say, yes, God, you're in charge.

But then we just ignore what we've said in all the little decisions that we're making, which basically equals one big decision of God, no, you're not in charge. And the picture here in Mark 12 is very similar because this is more than just fear and pride for them.

This is more than just a non-submission because they think they've got a better deal. Have a look at it with me. It says, Jesus replies to them, I'll ask you one question. Answer me and I'll tell you by what authority I'm doing these things.

John's baptism, was it from heaven or from men? Tell me. Simple enough question. And so these men who are smart, learned men, disgusted among themselves, and they realize that if they say that John's baptism is from heaven, then they'll get in trouble because they didn't listen to John either when John said the king is coming and you're doing the wrong thing.

[12 : 40] So they can't say that. But they also realize if they say from men, they'll get in trouble because the people that they're trying to have authority over think that John was important and so

they'll lose their power. So the fear is there, but it gets worse.

They answer Jesus, we don't know. They do know, but they don't want to know. It's not an issue of fear or pride here anymore.

It becomes an issue of hard-heartedness. The answer is right in front of their eyes, but it's something that they don't want to hear. It's not like they're asking Jesus if he's over 18 and all he's got to do is show a license and then they'll say, okay, you're king, we're on board.

It doesn't matter what he does. It doesn't matter how he answers. They're not interested in his authority. They're just trying to find a way out.

They're just trying to find a loophole. They're trying to justify the position that they already have. It's not a genuine question and it's not an answer that they're willing to hear. And so we get to Jesus' response here in chapter 12, the parable.

[13:43] Now, this is a parable from the Old Testament, which was in the Isaiah passage, which Jesus grabs and kind of revamps for this modern context. So in Isaiah 5, in the passage that Joe read out, it's a parable about a vineyard.

And in that passage, that vineyard is representative of Israel and God is the one who plants the vineyard and looks after it and does everything that could possibly be done and yet still it doesn't produce fruit.

But here, the story is not so much against the vineyard, but against the people looking after the vineyard. Jesus kind of aims his focus in on these chief priests, these hard-hearted leaders of Israel who have rejected the king that God has sent.

And so the story unfolds. The man plants the vineyard. He puts the watchtower in. He puts the pit around it for the wine press and then he rents it out to some farmers and goes on a journey.

Eventually, he knows it's time to come and collect some of the fruit of the vineyard.

He sends some of his servants to get it. They beat them and throw them out. And then he sends more and some they kill, others they beat. And he sends more and more and more. And then finally in verse 6, he had one left to send a son whom he loved.

[14:53] He sent him last of all saying, they'll respect my son. They'll give my son the respect that they would give to me as the owner of the vineyard. But the tenants said to one another, this is the heir.

Let's kill him and the inheritance will be ours. So they took him, killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard. Jesus tells this story, which is not at all subtle, to explain to these chief priests what they are doing in God's eyes.

God has given them as a nation his law. He has been with them. He has protected them. He has provided for them.

He has made promises to them. And yet with everything he has given them, they have mistreated him.

With everything that he has given them, they have abused it. They have taken it for granted. And they are not content with all the stuff that he's given him. They want more. They don't just want to work in a great vineyard that's been set up for them, that they didn't invest in.

[16:01] They want the vineyard for themselves. They don't want to have a boss. They don't want to be accountable to anyone. They don't want to submit to anyone. See, the hard thing I think here is that there's almost a good desire in these chief priests.

I think we're overly harsh if we read this passage and think these guys just set out at the beginning to be evil, to be sinful, to be rebellious. These are the leaders of God's people.

Somewhere in there, they desired to lead God's people towards God's design. Somewhere in there, they desired that Israel would become a great nation again, that God's name would get heard all over the world because of this great nation.

And they wanted to be at the front of the pack, leading, making that happen. But progressively, that good intention got derailed by a sinful agenda.

That desire for God's will to be done got derailed by a desire for their own power, for their own position, for their own prestige, for their own freedom to do whatever they want, for their own lack of accountability to anyone else.

[17:09] And I want to warn you that we are in the same danger here at church now. I don't know how long you've been a Christian and ultimately it doesn't matter. We can start out in our journey as Christians with this amazing desire to be Christ-like, with this awareness of sin and this awareness

that we need to change and this awareness that it's going to be a whole life journey and then suddenly we find ourselves derailed by a desire to be a little bit comfortable.

Suddenly derailed by a desire to at least feel at peace with the person that I am. We don't like that sense of I'm not doing okay and there's things in me that make God angry and I need to confess and feel forgiven and so that good intention to be more Christ-like gets dragged away by a desire to be comfortable and church is an easy place to do that.

We're in danger as a community. We may begin as a 5pm congregation, we're a young congregation and we did begin with a desire that more people would join this community, that this would be open, that others would be welcome but it's really easy for that to get derailed.

For us to start to feel kind of comfortable with the group that's here. I've got a few good friends, some people I enjoy sitting with, I like the way we do music, if there was more people it'd be hard to park, I might not get to sit where I want to sit, maybe I'd have to talk to a stranger at church on Sunday.

And so good intentions can become very easily derailed and ultimately that reflects that we don't want to listen to Jesus anymore.

[18 : 47] Ultimately that reflects that we're ignoring his agenda and we're listening to our agenda. That like the chief priest when Jesus says get uncomfortable, go and speak to people about Jesus, we want to know what right have you got to make me uncomfortable.

We want to know what right have you got to tell me how to live my life because I think I'm doing an alright job. We need to be very careful that we don't get too comfortable because the best of intentions can be derailed because we are sinful to the core.

And we live in a world that is at war with God's design and desire. And as soon as we stop fighting we will lose ground. Be warned, this is a danger for us as well.

And so God speaks this parable against these chief priests and the elders and the teachers of the law and ultimately he says you are refusing to submit to the owner's authority.

See the danger is that it's a progressive slope for us because we start by becoming a Christian and being eager for the word and then we make this shift where we feel like we're doing okay and we're still eager for the word but we're kind of eager just to hear it.

[20 : 08] You know, if I open it and read a passage out loud or maybe in my head or if I'm near church if I'm sitting in church but not really paying attention the word's still kind of floating around and then we just get further and further away.

We stop listening to what it says and then ultimately we stop looking at it for any kind of guidance or direction because it's just easier because we figure I'm in charge I know how to do this now.

Jesus, you were helpful at the beginning but it's easier just to submit to me than to submit to you. It's easier to not hear that I wasn't perfect today and I need to confess some stuff.

It's easier to be the only one who has to decide whether or not you get to heaven because it's much easier to tell yourself that you're a good person. I was reading an article recently that my mum sent me.

She's wrestling with Christianity possibly a new Christian and she sent me an article written by a homosexual guy a practicing homosexual guy basically unpacking what the Bible says about homosexuality and it was a fairly straightforward article he pretty much said look all those people who have read in the Bible that homosexuality is wrong they're reading the Bible wrong.

[21 : 29] He said these verses and listed off a bunch if you read them in context then actually it says something different and leaving aside the fact that I'm not sure that he's reading those verses correctly it was amazing how he was still looking to the Bible for guidance but he'd actually stopped listening to what it was saying.

He claimed that he was submitting to the authority of God but what he was doing was finding the bits of God's authority that he didn't like and then making them say what he wanted them to say. He was claiming to submit to someone else but ultimately he had decided I'm in charge what suits me and what is comfortable for me that is what I'm going to do. Now I know that that is a controversial issue but it is true of so many areas of our life.

Christianity will be uncomfortable transformation is uncomfortable the Bible the Bible describes the Christian life as one of pruning of one of being refined by fire expect to open the Bible and be made uncomfortable because you are not perfect and God is in the business of transforming you from one degree of glory to another and it is his authority that matters and when we refuse to submit to his

authority we reject him and we presume the role of king we presume the role of judge and if you don't think you do it just think in the past week how many times you have looked at someone else and thought wow that is sinful wow that is not okay but the good news in this passage is significant there is a significant warning in verse 9 when it says the owner of the vineyard will come and kill those tenants but he's the encouragement he will give the vineyard to others have you not read the scripture the stone the builders rejected the stone the chief priest rejected the stone that we often reject has become the capstone the son the last messenger that God has sent who was rejected and sacrificed and crucified by us on the cross has been raised by God and has been made the capstone the centerpiece the foundation the everything for the kingdom of God he has been made the only way in no amount of good effort no amount of anything else counts now all that matters for God's kingdom all that matters for entry into God's kingdom is the verdict of the king we were looking at this in our young adults bible study group during the week when God raises Jesus from the dead it's at that point that he defers all authority onto Jesus at the end of Matthew in chapter 28 the risen Jesus as he's about to return to the throne in heaven says all authority on heaven and on earth has been given to me he's saying I'm the king I'm the judge I'm the one who decides who goes to heaven and who doesn't I am the only way by trusting in me alone in Philippians 2 we know that Jesus humbles himself to death on the cross and that God raises him up and exalts him to the highest place and gives him the name that is above every name that every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord he's given absolute authority to judge I shared this with our youth ministry a little while ago when we were looking at this passage but so often the barrier for people when it comes to following God is how can God be loving and send people to hell how is that fair but this passage makes it really clear for us if you reject the king you reject the kingdom it is right that the one who sits enthroned with all authority over his kingdom will not include those who do not submit to his authority there is nothing wrong with that and Jesus has that authority in this passage but he also has the authority to forgive it's just a little hint in there in verse 9 he'll come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others that authority has been given to Jesus as the risen ascended Lord that he alone will decide those who will enter into his kingdom and who will it be?

[26 : 16] those who submit to his authority that doesn't mean those who are good that doesn't mean those who try hard it means those who submit to him as the king who died to take their place and rose again those who put their hand up and say I'm not good enough I need you and you're in charge those who recognize that they need his input and his guidance those who recognize that his agenda is the one who matters his authority is not negotiable his authority is absolute the vineyard in this parable belongs to the owner the son of the owner carries the authority of the owner God is the owner of everything God is the creator of everything Jesus is the son of God and he carries the authority of the creator father who made every single one of us it doesn't matter whether you acknowledge it or not ultimately one day every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is

Lord I remember in year 8 at school we had the strange tradition of going on a maths excursion to Wonderland I'm not sure why usually you had a worksheet that lasted about 10 minutes of the day and the teachers gave up and let you run riot but I remember my year 8 excursion quite distinctly because I never made it to Wonderland we were all waiting fairly excited to get on the buses at school there was a bit of a crush with our whole year group trying to get on the bus first giddy with excitement and as we were trying to get onto the bus one of the teachers was standing at the bus door making sure we wouldn't get on the bus and I was at the front of a group of my friends and we were all pushing and then kind of being pushed back and it was kind of a little bit strange but we all got pushed forward and at that point as several of us got pushed forward this teacher thought it would be appropriate to push me to make sure we all went back I then thought it would be appropriate to push him seeing as he had pushed me he then thought it would be appropriate to send me to the principal and not let me go on this excursion I then dropped my bundle and said a list of expletives that won't be repeated and the situation descended but I remember getting down to the principal's office feeling very angry and very defiant I remember walking into his office and not sitting in the chair that he offered me but standing and eyeballing him and demanding an apology for the fact that I had been robbed of the opportunity to spend the day at Wonderland with my year 8 friends and I demanded and I demanded and he just kind of stood letting me yell and complain and do whatever and eventually at the sort of point where

we weren't making any progress my parents were called in and as we were sitting in the room with me and my parents and this principal I realised that it didn't matter how much I didn't want to submit to him ultimately I had the choice to submit to stay a part of his school or to not submit and leave it didn't work that I could not submit and stay because he had absolute authority in that particular sphere and see what we need to understand is that if we consider ourselves part of the kingdom of God if we want to be part of his agenda part of his will part of his plan to bring all things under the headship of Christ it's not okay for us to just keep not submitting it's not okay for us to pretend like his authority doesn't matter it's not okay for us to act like we're in charge and we're the one who makes the decisions it's not okay for us to think we can find some other way of being a part of the kingdom some other way of making God happy according to this parable the thing that matters is the way you treat the son the thing that is the difference is the way you acknowledge the son as king the point is this the son matters the king matters it's his authority that matters it's his agenda that matters and the son and the son's agenda is the father's agenda and hopefully after six weeks of looking at the kingdom of God here as a congregation you will have learnt that God's agenda is God's kingdom what he is about is exalting

Jesus as king so that every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord that is God's agenda that is the agenda that matters that is what Jesus demands of us and anything less will bring judgment the chief priests have lost focus the chief priests have got distracted from the purpose that God has given Israel and they have rejected the son and they have killed the son but the question we've got to ask ourselves is have we lost focus I don't know what point it was when you came to know the forgiveness that God offered you in Jesus I don't know if you don't even know that feeling yet but if you do when God gave you new life and called you to be a part of his kingdom called you to follow his king have you lost focus have you compromised the chief priests even after hearing this story where Jesus says you are too proud to call on me to save you their reaction is not please help us their reaction is how can we kill him do you come to church and hear the bible say you need to love your neighbour do you come to church and say the truth matters to God don't lie do you come to church and hear the bible make demands on the way that we live and instead of falling on your knees and asking God to do that work in you by his holy spirit you just kind of dismiss it you just kind of ignore it you just kind of write it off as out of context or out of date or unimportant or maybe even worse you don't even look at yourself to see if there's any possibility that something might need to change have we lost focus submitting to the authority of Christ is about humble dependent submission it is about an eager desire that we would be transformed more and more to be like Jesus because that's what the kingdom is it's us becoming more and more

Christ-like so that his name is exalted have we lost God's desire that every knee would bow and every tongue confess are we more about just enjoying the relationships we've got here are we more about just enjoying the cozy community that is 5pm that is the after party or are we burdened every week we sit in here and there is space on the seat next to us for somebody who right now sits under the judgment of God because that is God's agenda that is what Jesus in his authority as king of the kingdom demands of his people Jesus' authority is marvelous in our eyes verse 10 the stone the builders rejected has become the capstone the Lord has done this and it is marvelous in our eyes because God raised Jesus from the dead and gave him the name above every name so that we might submit so that we might rejoice so that we might have certain hope that even though we don't deserve it even though we're not good enough the king welcomes us with open arms

[34 : 34] I want to pray for us but just before I do I want you to take a minute right now to ask yourself the question however long you've been following Jesus remembering the call that he made on your life when he forgave you and gave you life and called you to follow him until he returns have you lost focus have you stopped listening to the bible like it's got something to say to you have you stopped looking at the world around you like God has something he wants you to do in it have you stopped treating Jesus like he has absolute authority let's pray father god we want to acknowledge that we fall so far short of the life that you call us to we want to thank and praise you that even after we had kicked out messenger after messenger even after we have ignored you time after time you were willing to send your son to pay the debt that we owed father we want to thank you that you have raised

Jesus up and that we have a hope that is certain and unshakable lord we ask that you would not allow us to use that hope as a license to stop listening to you but that you might fill us with a deep desire that you would be lord of absolutely every part of our life god please give us eyes to see

where we fall short give us hearts that want more than anything not comfort but christ likeness give us hearts that desire what you desire that jesus would be exalted that his name would be known in us and through us that others might come to know the joy that is only found in him god if there is people sitting here tonight who don't yet know the forgiveness that you offer who are still hoping out of their own wisdom or their own power or their own effort that they might please you may they hear your word tonight that what matters is the son what matters is jesus lord for those of us who have been following you and known you for most of our lives don't let us ever forget don't let us ever become familiar with that gospel message daily may we wake deeply desiring that we would submit every minute of every day to the lordship of christ father thank you for your incredible grace to unworthy sinners like us please transform us that others might come to know that grace as well amen