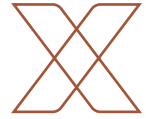


# Authority

Session 9 • Matthew 21:23-32



## ENGAGE

**PREPARE:** Display **Pack Item 1** (*Map: Jesus's Ministry Beyond Galilee*) on a focal wall. Make copies of **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Praying Scripture in Matthew's Gospel*) and **Pack Item 13** (*Handout: Interpreting Parables*).

**ASK: What are the results of rejecting established authority?** (p. 73) Discuss the responses.

**READ:** Enlist a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 73. Encourage adults to identify authority figures in their lives. Draw their attention back to the opening question. Allow them to share how rejecting authority carries different consequences depending on the authority being rejected.

**SHARE:** *As followers of Christ, we believe He holds ultimate authority in our lives. But even the best of us still might be tempted to question that authority at times. We can be like the religious leaders in the verses leading up to our focal passage for this session.*

**CONTEXT:** Summarize this information from **Understand the Context** (p. 73) to set the stage for today's focal passage:

- "Matthew 21 moves into the final week of Jesus's ministry before His crucifixion.

Much of the action recorded by Matthew in chapters 21-22 occurred in the temple. The week began with Jesus entering Jerusalem to the shouts of praise from the crowd of pilgrims entering the city for the Feast of Passover. Once inside Jerusalem, Jesus moved into the temple precinct. Here began a series of confrontations with the religious leaders who opposed Jesus."

**TRANSITION:** *As we study today's verses, let's examine our hearts. Let's determine how we tend to respond to Jesus's authority in our lives and surrender areas we've been holding back from Him.*

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

**BACKGROUND:** Show adults **Pack Item 1** (*Map: Jesus's Ministry Beyond Galilee*). Point out that Jesus had moved out of Galilee and had arrived in Jerusalem to the south.

**READ: Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 21:23-27 aloud** as the group counts how many times the word "authority" is used.

**ASK: What were the chief priests and elders trying to accomplish by interrogating Jesus?** (p. 75)

**EXPLAIN:** Point out that Jesus had created a stir during the “triumphal entry” and when He had cleansed the temple. Note that He represented a threat to the religious leaders’ power, so they questioned His authority.

- **(21:23)** Their questions were designed to put Jesus on the horns of a dilemma. If He said His authority came from God, He would be charged with blasphemy (see Matt. 9:3; 26:59-66). If He responded that His authority was from another source, they would argue endlessly about its legitimacy.
- **(21:25-26)** Jesus shifted the focus from Himself to John the Baptist: “Did John’s baptism come from heaven, or was it of human origin?” John’s baptism represented all of John’s prophetic ministry. Jesus set up a contrast between divine mission and human origin. Of course, the proper response (“from heaven”) would have affirmed Jesus’s own authority and led to another uncomfortable question: “Why didn’t you believe him?” The second option (“human origin”) risked the crowd’s anger since the people saw John as a prophet. Ironically, the leaders were “afraid of the crowd” they supposedly represented. Indeed, Luke 20:6 states that they were afraid the people might stone them.

**ASK: For what reasons do people not accept Jesus’s authority?** (p. 75)

**EXPLAIN:** *The leaders ended up affirming Jesus’s authority through their silence. Since Jesus and John shared the same Source of authority (God), the prophetic authority of*

*both was valid. The leaders fell into the very trap they had hoped to set for Jesus.*

**READ: Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 21:28-32 aloud** as the group notes the responses of the sons.

**DISCUSS:** State that after the confrontation with the religious leaders, Jesus told three parables (Matt. 21:28-32; 21:33-46; 22:1-14). Distribute copies of **Pack Item 13** (*Handout: Interpreting Parables*) and remind adults of the basic principles of explaining parables. Lead a brief discussion on the characters in this parable and what they represent. Highlight the role of obedience—not just in words, but in actions.

**EXPLAIN:** Affirm the role of submission to Jesus’s authority in entering the kingdom of God:

- **(21:32)** Although John’s message was a call to repentance (3:1-12), these religious leaders probably thought it did not apply to them. The phrase “the way of righteousness” was a Hebrew way of referring to God’s will or His directed path. The chief priests and elders “didn’t believe” John’s message. The “tax collectors and prostitutes did believe” John’s message. Along with Gentiles and lepers, most Jews saw tax collectors and prostitutes as the worst society had to offer. They recognized that John was the forerunner of the long-awaited Messiah. The religious leaders failed to see how John’s message was drawing even the socially outcast to believe and repent. In their pride and self-righteousness, the religious elite didn’t change their minds and believe in John.

They failed to follow the example of the first son, who recognized his father's authority and allowed his mind to be changed. Instead, like the second son, they knew what was expected and said all the right things; but they failed to do what the father had asked. By what authority had Jesus been doing these things? What was the authority behind John's ministry and message? It came from God the Father. Such a truth called for nothing short of radical obedience.

**ASK: Practically speaking, what does it look like to recognize Jesus's authority?** (p. 75)

**REFLECT:** Invite adults to scan the QR code for the **Explore the Bible Prayer Guide** (p. 59). Lead them in praying this session's memory verse, Philippians 2:9, back to God. As an alternative, distribute copies of **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Praying Scripture in Matthew's Gospel*).

---

## CHALLENGE

**SUMMARIZE:** Review these points from this week's Bible passage:

- We can expect some to oppose or reject Jesus's authority.
- We demonstrate our acceptance of Jesus's authority by our obedience to Him.

**DISCUSS:** Lead a brief discussion about where adults see people rejecting Jesus's authority in our culture. Remind them of the responses to the question, "*Practically speaking, what does it look like to recognize Jesus's authority?*" (p. 75). Challenge them

to find ways to demonstrate the authority of Jesus as they go through their days.

**DISCUSS:** Enlist a volunteer to read the **Apply the Text** question on page 75 aloud: **What steps might each of your group take to ensure they recognize and respect Jesus's authority?** Encourage adults to take time this week to assess Jesus's authority in their own lives and to remember that their example will serve to guide others to do the same. Suggest they read and reflect on the **Apply the Text** questions on page 79 during the week ahead.

**PRAY:** Allow the group a time of silent confession, inviting adults to speak with God about how they embrace His authority and any changes that need to be made. Close the session in prayer, inviting the Holy Spirit to let each person see where and how He would guide them as they take steps into deeper obedience and surrender to Jesus's authority.

---

## AFTER THE SESSION

During the week, text or email the adults in your Bible study. Remind them of Jesus's question from Matthew 21:31: "Which of the two did his father's will?" Encourage them to consider their own willingness to yield their focus and authority to God. Suggest they continue using the **Explore the Bible Prayer Guide** to reflect on God's truth as they dig into His Word each day.