

Do you know who Jesus is?

In Matthew 21, the religious leaders of the day didn't recognize Jesus as the Messiah, and they questioned his authority, challenging,

"By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" (Matthew 21:23).

Jesus took control of the conversation by returning their question with one of his own,

"The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?" (Matthew 21:25).

Jesus placed them in a difficult corner; he knew that they could not respond honestly to his question. If they said John's ministry was from heaven, then they would be responsible for rejecting John's ministry, ignoring his call to repent and be baptized. If they said his ministry was from man (in other words saying John's ministry had no authority at all), they would be at odds with the crowds who believed that John was a prophet sent from God.

They were caught, and they knew it. They lied, saying, "We do not know", to try and save face (see Matthew 21:27).

Today, many people face the same dilemma: what to do with Jesus? This is the question that faces every human being. One day, every person will bow before Jesus. By then, it will be too late for many.

C.S. Lewis famously wrote, *"Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God."*

There is terrible spiritual apathy in the world today, a willful ignorance of Jesus (see Romans 1:19-20). To ignore Jesus as the Son of God is willful rebellion.

Albert Mohler said, *"When people respond to the Gospel of Jesus Christ with this kind of intellectual resignation, they send their souls to hell."* Since the religious leaders refused to answer his question Jesus refused to answer theirs. Instead he taught a series of parables.

#1: The Parable of the Two Sons (Matthew 21:28-32)

To the Jewish hearers listening to this parable a man having two sons would have been blessed by God. But the older son, the heir of the estate, initially refused to work in his father's vineyard. The older son showed disrespect towards his father; he didn't really know him, even though he later changed his mind and went to work. The younger son said he

would work but then disrespected his father by not following through on his word. In verse 31a, Jesus asked, *“Which of the two did the will of his father?”*

Jesus’ audience got it right: the obedient one did the will of his father. But Jesus rebuked them, telling them that the very people they viewed as the worst sinners possible were entering the kingdom of God before them. The religious leaders viewed the tax collectors and prostitutes as unclean people, not even worthy of their attention. But these people had responded to John’s call to repentance, unlike the religious leaders.

Jesus explained the parable, showing that they were neither the first nor the second son (see Matthew 21:32). The religious leaders were desperately lost.

The key to a right relationship with God is not religious posturing or performing duties, but rather humble frequent repentance.

#2: The Parable of the Tenants (Matthew 21:33-46)

Jesus knew that within a few days, he would be crucified. This parable was a direct indictment of those who were questioning his authority.

The hearers of the parable would have understood that the master of the house was someone of extreme wealth and authority. The master built a fence around his vineyard, protecting his investment. He also dug a wine press, indicating that he expected to receive fruit from his investment. In addition he built a tower to further fortify his investment. All these actions refer to dominion, ownership, and rulership. The religious leaders would have heard the echoes of Isaiah 5 in the parable; it would have been hard for them to miss.

Jesus said when the harvest time came, the master sent servants to the vineyard, but the tenants beat and killed them (see Matthew 21:35-36). Jesus is clearly speaking about the prophets from the Old Testament and even John the Baptist.

But then the master sent his own son, the heir to the kingdom. The one with the authority. And the wicked tenants, thinking they would take the land, killed the son (see Matthew 21:39).

This is exactly what the Jewish religious leaders would later do to Jesus. They were plotting the death of Jesus, but they had no idea who he truly was. They didn’t know they were talking to their creator. Jesus indicted them further as they declared their own judgment and punishment (see Matthew 21:41).

The door to a right relationship with God is recognizing and knowing Jesus for who he truly is.

Jesus the Cornerstone

Jesus kept on the offensive, attacking the source of their pride. The religious leaders were proud of their knowledge of the scriptures, their memorization and knowledge of the Torah. Jesus asks in verse 42, *“Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures:*

*“The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
this was the Lord’s doing,
and it is marvelous in our eyes”?*

Jesus was quoting Psalm 118. But the theme of Jesus being the cornerstone of the Kingdom of God is found throughout the Old and New Testaments.

Then the penny dropped, *“...they perceived that he was speaking about them”* (Matthew 21:45).

The chief priests and the elders heard the parables, but because of their pride—their position and self-righteousness—they refused to recognize who Jesus was. They rebelled against the son of God himself, crucifying him on a cross. Even their rebellion was part of God’s perfect plan, for Jesus became the perfect sacrifice for our sins. This rebellion against Jesus still happens today. Even in the church, there are people who don’t truly know Jesus. They know the stories, the history, the theology, but they don’t know Jesus, the Son of God. They don’t have a relationship with him. They do all the religious duties but live in rebellion to the Cornerstone.

It doesn’t matter how many years you have attended church, if you don’t know him, you are in rebellion.