

Matthew 21:23-32

Introduction. Between Mt. 21:23 & 22:46 there are 5 recorded controversies between Jesus and the religious leaders; in each case Jesus' authority is questioned.

Vv. 23-27. Jesus' authority is questioned -

1. Jesus is teaching in one of the temple courts when 'chief priests (former high priests) and elders'(civil and religious leaders) questioned his authority for teaching and his earlier 'cleansing' of the temple (21:12-17). Was his authority from God or from men?
2. Jesus answers by asking another question about the authority by which John the Baptist exercised his ministry. This approach is a means of leading people to the right answer or of trapping an opponent into conceding a point which implies the answer to the original question.
3. The deliberate obtuse response of the leaders, 'we do not know' reveals their lack of moral authority to act as religious leaders.

Reflection/Response. The responsibility of religious leaders to lead people to Jesus is clear - to fail to do so is to forfeit their authority as religious leaders. Jesus' authority comes from God therefore to honour Jesus is to honour God. How is God's authority seen in our lives?

Vv. 28-32. The parable of the two sons.

This parable deals with the theme of those who ought to have believed in Jesus but who reject him - the religious leaders. However, the parable is extended to include all hearers - raising the question, 'what do you think?'

1. the first son refuses to obey his father and then changes his mind (repents).
2. The second son said he would obey his father but did not.
3. Jesus asked the listeners, 'which one did his fathers will?'
4. Those who are entering the 'kingdom of God' (coming under God's rule) are not those who are pious or religious, but those who listen to Jesus (and John the Baptist before him), recognise their sin, repent and believe in him.

Response. Recognition of our need for forgiveness and our willingness to repent (change our mind) is the response to Jesus which honours and obeys him. How do others see how we are responding to Jesus? How do our words and actions point people to Jesus made known in the Bible?