

Study Guide – October 1, 2017

Theme: **Authority** Matthew 21:23-32 (Psalm 25:1-9; Philippians 2:1-13)

This passage is a part of the intense, growing, and dare I say violent controversy between Jesus and the leadership at the Jerusalem Temple. Over the last few weeks we have seen how Jesus has called the Pharisees out for abusing their power and using the law to their advantage. Without getting into a deep study of the Pharisee's history and Jew law, suffice it to say they are "the good guys" dedicated to God and live only to uphold God's laws. Then comes Jesus. Not only does Jesus know God's law as well as they do, but also understands the intent, the spirit, of the law. More than being literally "carved in stone," Jesus realizes the law is alive, and was given to change people, not restrict them. The temple leaders were using it to keep people out of the temple, and even "charging" them to get in where they could worship God. Power makes people do bad things. Thus when Jesus questions their motives, points out their faults, publicly addresses their weaknesses, and exposes their sins...the leaders are willing to do anything to keep their status and position, even if it means they will have to kill him.

Read: Matthew 21:1-22; Exodus 40:34-38

The previous verses in Matthew 21 offer the context we need to fully understand today's passage by providing a good account of the last 24 hrs. Note: while reading the backstory and getting context, you will notice the real action takes place at the Temple. Read the Exodus passage and see if you can figure out why this is so important for Matthew to note.

Q: Put yourself among the people who are lining the streets cheering Jesus on, and shouting "Hosanna..." (God save us). How do you relate to your ancient relatives there in Jerusalem?

Q: Can you name things in your life that you need God to save you from today?

Q: Where is God alive and present in your life?

Read: Matthew 21:23-32

This is broken into three parts, in which we could draw three separate sermons. The first is the confrontation and the question to Jesus, "Who gave you authority?" (v.23); the second is Jesus returning their question with a question of his own about John the Baptist and his authority "Where did his authority come from?" (vv. 24-27); and lastly a parable that puts the leaders on the hot seat, "Which one did the will of the father?" (vv. 28-32) .

Q: Which character in the parable best describes you? And why?

We all want to have power or authority of some kind. And rarely are we willing to give up that up without a fight. Think about struggles in your home life, church life, work life, and community life where you believe you are doing it the right way but someone comes in a wants you to change to do it there way because they believe theirs is better.

Q: What beliefs, rules/rituals, or values are you willing to make a stand for? Which ones are so important that you would do anything (fire, condemn, cast out, or kill) a person who disagreed with your position?

Q: How do you see the NFL protests (where people are kneeling and locking arms during the national anthem to make a statement about racial injustice), play into this story? If not familiar with this protest, then replace it with your “political” point of view. (Try not to get in a fight over this!)

Read: Philippians 2:1-13

Often called the Philippian prayer, Paul offers us one of the most poetic and beautiful descriptions of Jesus, and His divine authority. But it also teaches the church (and all of God’s people) of their unity in Jesus Christ. Paul encourages us all to be humble and loving towards one another. Imagine if the person you are talking to or confronting is Jesus.

Q: What area’s of your life need the most attention to help you see Jesus in others? And how might you pray to God to ask for it in Jesus’ name (Matt. 21:22)?

Take time this week to read and reread the Philippians passage; slowly and intentionally focus on verses 5-11. Remember to focus on your breathing. Listen to your heart beat as you empty yourself and humble yourself before God in prayer.

Prayer:

Holy God, come to me today and hear my cries for help. I have not done the things I ought to do, but I am trying to love you and others as Jesus taught. But I cannot do this alone. Please give your Holy Spirit, to fill my life and to shepherd my heart. Take the burdens that are weighing me down so I might be better able to focus on not being selfish but instead on loving others, showing the same compassion and sympathy you have shown me. By your Spirit and the grace you have given me through Jesus Christ, enable me to do your will, and not my own. For you alone God make my joy complete. Amen.