Mark 11: 27-12:12 – Jesus: The Chief Cornerstone

Introduction

There are several things that make us who we are and really affect how we live our lives. The first is what do we trust? The second is what do we fear?

Usually these two questions are interconnected. The answer to one determines the answer to the other. These are very serious questions that warrant great thought and energy. Let me rephrase them a bit.

1. **Is there something you rely on more than anything?** In other words, is there something that guides you or keeps you centered? It could be a motto. It could be a person you trust. It could be yourself, your strength, your beauty, your wisdom. There are many others. We might call these things gods, or God replacements.

2. **Is there something in your life that you can’t live without?** In other words, is there something that if taken away would crush you? For some it might be Netflix or a TV series. For some it might be food. For others it might be sex. Still for others it might be a spouse or some relationship. There are many others. We call these things idols. They are God replacements, or little gods.

Background

Jesus has just inspected the temple and found it wanting. The temple was supposed to be a place of prayer for the nations but had become a mockery. It had become a place of profit for the Sanhedrin, a group of 70 men made up of chief priests, scribes and elders. They governed all of the religious happenings within the temple, and they had turned it into a place where they were exalted and they profited.
When Jesus came, his people were supposed to be ready for him. They were supposed to have hearts of worship and lives lived in repentance. Instead, they were hard-hearted. The leaders had not cultivated God’s field, his people, and even if God had cultivated them himself, they weren’t willing to give God his glory and the fruit of praise and glory from the people. They wanted it for themselves.

This is what Jesus found when he came to Jerusalem, and so he cleansed the temple. Afterward he told the disciples by way of a sign that the temple would soon be destroyed. Jesus had judged it and he, the living temple would replace it.

Now the unfaithful leaders of Israel were furious. Their glory is being taken away by some upstart from Galilee. They did not give him his authority and so he is obviously an imposter. Something must be done.

**Exposition**

Have you ever read a book, or seen one of those movies where the bad guys are sitting around a table plotting the demise of the world? In Psalm 2 we read this, “Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, ‘Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.’”

This is a good picture of what the leaders have been doing since the clearing of the temple. They are plotting how to destroy Jesus, how to make sure they never have to be under his authority.

*Who will you trust or believe?*
Jesus and the disciples have come again to Jerusalem. They are taking a stroll through the temple. The buzz of the previous day must be going around. The money changers and animal sellers more than likely have not dared to peddle their wares inside the temple, because they know Jesus is in Jerusalem. Things are much likely different on this day.

But the Sanhedrin, a group of 70 men, made up of the chief priests, scribes, and elders, has been plotting what they are going to do with this Jesus. Where did he come from? What gives him the right to upset the system of religion that we have been overseeing? This is the second upstart that has challenged us within the last 3 years. Where are they coming from? Why at this time? Yes, one of them is dead...good riddance. But who authorized this Jesus to cleanse the temple? And why are all the people so bent on his every word?

They may have been thinking, “He is interrupting our God-given right to rule over the temple and we can’t stop him because the people love him. If we try to get rid of him, the people will kill or oust us. What can we do?” So, they devise a plan, “We will discredit him publicly. He has never been authorized by us, so we will call him out on it. The people know you have to have proper Rabbinic authorization to teach.”

So, they find Jesus and say, “Show us your ordination credentials! Who authorized you to teach the people and interrupt the temple service?”

Jesus was not trying to trick them. He answered their question with a question, “Was John the Baptist a prophet sent from God?” John testified that Jesus was from the Father, God, and called on all people to repent and believe on Jesus because God’s kingdom was here.

Almost everyone believed John was a prophet from God, so, Jesus’ appeal to John was a very clear answer to the question. Jesus is the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, the promised One,
the hope of all history, and his authority came from God himself, for he is God and the Father has vindicated him twice (at his baptism and at the transfiguration). And clearly, though the elders did not hear this, the Father said that Jesus is the beloved Son and should be listened to.

So, Jesus’ answer was that his authority is grounded in a commission from God, attested to by the prophet John. The representatives of the Sanhedrin knew this, but they didn’t believe that John was from God, and so they certainly didn’t believe that Jesus was from God. Thus, they rejected the testimony of John. But, the problem was that if they let the people know this, they feared that the people would oust them from their positions of authority and power. The thing that they valued the most, the thing that they trusted in the most, the thing they believed in the most was their authority and power. Here you see a most vivid picture of leaders who are power mongers who want nothing of the truth. They will say what works best for them to keep their power and position. The ultimate thing they trust is their own authority.

Jesus does not need to answer them any further, he has answered them. His credentials are from God himself. He is the Son of God.

The Sanhedrin has heard John the Baptist preach, they have witnessed the miracles of Jesus, they have heard the power of his preaching, yet still refuse to believe and trust in Jesus. Their absolute trust is in themselves and their authority and how the view the kingdom of God. They are their own god. To them Jesus isn’t the Messiah, because the kingdom he preaches doesn’t line up with their view of God’s kingdom.

What do you ultimately trust or rely in? If you want something, will you submit to Jesus’ authority and trust him as God?

*Who will you fear?*
What is the biggest motivating factor in your life? Why do you do the things you do? Let me tell you a story.

Years ago, I was working a job at a small company. We had a lot to do and we were on a tight timeline. Many times, when I was asked to do thought things, I would say yes, but would tell them the time that it would actually take. Often, this did not align with what had been sold, so when I said that I couldn’t do it, there was a problem.

One of the people that was over me knew that I liked to please people. So, they figured out how to control me. All they had to do was act disappointed in me and challenge me with, “Well, that’s ok, you probably couldn’t do it anyway.” This immediately set off two things in my mind and heart. The first, one of the ultimate fears in my life, that I would not please people. Somehow, my identity was caught up in people’s view of me, so, if they weren’t happy with me then somehow, I wasn’t worth the weight of my body in the cosmos. The second was being told that something wasn’t possible. I like to be in control, and something being out of control set a time bomb off in me.

These two things are examples of fearing something other than God. When we do this, we are off kilter as humans. We become warped and will do anything to preserve these idols. For this is what they are, they are gods that we try to appease. For me, approval and control. These would define me. They were the altar at which I worshipped. If I didn’t have them, somehow my life was empty and meaningless.

This is what the Sanhedrin experienced. Theirs was probably control and power. They wanted control over people and the notoriety of being in charge. Their idols caused them to miss the kingdom of God in Christ and they were enslaved to their passions and their little gods.
Jesus sees their hearts and their goals to be in control and to suppress the people of God by following their rules and their forms of religion. He is furious at what they have done. So, he tells them a parable based off of Isaiah 5:1-7, but modified to expose the real problem. In Isaiah 5:1-7, God has taken great care to plant and build up his vineyard which is the people of God. Instead of growing fruit for him that is pleasing, their fruit is displeasing to him, so he will destroy the vineyard. In this parable the vineyard is Israel and refers to all the people. In the parable of the tenants here, Jesus isn’t going after the vineyard, but rather the tenants, or leaders of Israel who are supposed to be helping Israel to bear the fruit that God wants. Jesus parallels this but doesn’t say that Israel isn’t bearing fruit, but the leaders are refusing to give it to God.

Essentially, God expects the vineyard, his people, to be an accepting, prayerful, forgiving, devoted, missional and loving fellowship built around his Son, the stone that binds everything together. Yet, the leaders have harvested the vineyard for their own profit. The people are seen as objects for the leader’s own purposes and not God’s.

The story is quite simple. The meaning is incredibly rich. The vineyard is Israel. The land owner is the Lord, God the Father. The farmers are the spiritual leaders over Israel that God has put there. The expected crop, in context, seems to be the radiation of God’s glory as a light to the Gentiles so God’s kingdom can be spread throughout the earth. The servants are the prophets who, for 100s of years, have been driven into the wilderness, sawn in two, stoned to death, beheaded, living in destitution, been persecuted, and been mistreated by the leaders of Israel. The beloved son is Jesus who will be killed because he has come to provide fruit for God.

The interpretation of this parable is bound up in Jesus’ answer that he posed to the representatives of the Sanhedrin. Interpreted in light of these allegorical relationships, “What will God the Father do to the
leaders of Israel who have refused to give God the glory that he deserves by suppressing his people?” Jesus’ answer is that he will give the leadership to other tenants.

And what does this mean? It is answered by the Scripture that Jesus cites from Psalm 118 that the people were quoting during his triumphal procession into Israel. “Have you not read this Scripture: ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes’?”

The quote carries the idea that the Son, Jesus, is being rejected just like one of the stones gathered for Solomon’s temple might have been rejected, yet it then became the keystone of the entrance, or the very foundation stone that provided the structure and stability for the entire temple. Christ is saying that he is the keystone in the eternal, spiritual Temple of God. Though he was rejected, he is ultimately exalted to the highest position. No one can come to the Father without him, and the temple, his body, cannot stand without him.

Jesus is the beloved Son who has come to give the final message to Israel, he is about to be killed by the tenants. Despite his death, the Son they reject will become the chief of cornerstone. Jesus will bring about a people who will give God his due...a life of repentance and worship. He will ultimately be the new leader of a new spiritual Israel.

The reality of what is happening is that Israel’s leaders have rejected God himself. They have rejected God’s final messenger. Disaster and judgment is coming and the sacred trust of the chosen people will be transferred to the new Israel of God.

Rabbinic literature understood the rejected stone to refer to Abraham, David, or the Messiah. The builders referred to the doctors of the Law. God is warning that he will reverse the evil judgment of men with
regard to the final messenger in a startling display of power...from defeat to triumph. Jesus is the true Son who came to claim his father’s property and the right to the throne, and the rebellious tenants kill him.

Peter says to the leaders that have arrested he and John after Jesus had risen and returned to heaven, “This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” And then later, in his first epistle, he says, “As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

You see, Jesus came to earth to create a new Israel, a people who are true children of Abraham, by faith and not by flesh. He has called them and commissioned them to be about his work of making disciples who make disciples. To be a people who are fulfilling God’s original plan and purpose of the world...to subdue and have dominion over the whole earth, being a people who bear fruit for him.

**Application**

So here is the question for us today: Who is our authority? Who or what do we fear? Is it ultimately God, or is it something else? What are we working for and are we producing the fruit that God wants?

The leaders of Israel feared the people. Their god was their control and power. This is what they could not live without. This was their true authority and ultimate trust. Even when Jesus confronted them with this parable, it only galvanized them in their hatred of him. For he represented a loss of their power and control. He was demanding to be
first place in everything, that he would have preeminence in all things. And they would have none of it.

The reality is that we all have these types of idols. The question is what happens when the Holy Spirit confronts us with them? Are we willing to give them up? Are we willing to turn from them, repent of them and give our lives to God in worship and true spiritual service?

When I am told or shown by God that I can’t have something that I want, will I submit to his sovereign will and obey him, or will I be like the leaders of Israel and reject God’s authority, the Son that he sent?

Peter goes on to say after he quotes Psalm 118, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.”

This is God’s fruit. We have been asked to do the same thing that the leaders have been asked. To proclaim the glory of the Lord and call people to come to worship God through Christ before it is too late and God comes to bring judgment upon those who refuse to give him his due. We are to be a nation of priests, mediating the message of the cross of Jesus Christ, making disciples who make disciples.

Are we living our lives like we are the living stones in God’s temple that is founded by the Chief Cornerstone, Jesus Christ.