

John the Baptist – Study Leader’s Questions – Matthew 21:23-27

See also Mark 11:27-33, Luke 20:1-8

A Question for Jesus, Matthew 21:23

- 1. What comparison could be made between what Jesus was doing and what the Jewish leadership were doing?*
- 2. What things would the leaders want clarifying from Jesus?*
- 3. Why did they want Jesus to answer their question?*

A Question for the Jews, Matthew 21:24-25a

- 4. What is the response from Jesus?*
- 5. Why does Jesus ask them about John’s baptism?*
- 6. What does Jesus want them to understand about the importance of coming to the right understanding of John?*
- 7. Since John is the Messenger that would announce the great day of the Lord (Malachi 3:1), what does that mean for Jesus (Malachi 4:5)?*

A rejection of John and Jesus, Matthew 21:25b-27

- 8. Why would the leaders not come to an open decision about John?*
- 9. What did their answer really reveal about the state of their hearts?*
- 10. Why did Jesus refuse to answer their question?*

A Question for Jesus, Matthew 21:23

1. *What comparison could be made between what Jesus was doing and what the Jewish leadership were doing?*

They were both *“instructed out of the law”* Romans 2:18 and the individuals on each side could each be described as *“a teacher...of the truth in the law”* Romans 2:20, just as Jesus *“taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works?”* Matthew 13:54 and just as *“a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews”* John 3:1, was *“a master of Israel”* John 3:10.

The Lord Himself acknowledged the teaching capacity of the Jewish leadership but warned that they were not *“doers of the word”* James 1:22.

“Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not” Matthew 23:1-3.

The Lord Jesus Christ was a doer-teacher.

“The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach” Acts 1:1.

Every saved individual should be as well, according to the Apostle Paul.

“Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” 1 Corinthians 11:1.

2. *What things would the leaders want clarifying from Jesus?*

They wanted to know what His teaching authority was and who gave it to Him. In modern terms, they wanted to know what level of degree qualifications He had and from which accredited institute of higher learning He obtained them from. They still had the same questions as in Matthew 13:54 but now the Lord was teaching in the temple, not the synagogue and that bold step no doubt provoked a confrontation.

The events of Matthew 21 gave the Jewish leaders considerable grounds for confronting the Lord Jesus Christ and demanding that He explain Himself, according to their apparent perception both of the Lord, what He did and how He was received, as the following verses show.

“And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves, And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves” Matthew 21:12.

“And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple; and he healed them” Matthew 21:15.

“And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David; they were sore displeased” Matthew 21:15.

3. *Why did they want Jesus to answer their question?*

First, He was a mystery to them, which they did not like. The Lord to them was a loose cannon.

“And the Jews marvelled, saying, *How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?*”
John 7:15*.

*The Jewish leaders had no chance of answering that question, as John 7:17 explains, because they would not do the Lord’s will. **“If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself”** John 7:17.

Second, they were desperate to attack Him. Note Luke 11:53-54. The Lord had just pronounced 6 woes against the Jewish leaders, in Luke 11:42, 43, 44, 46, 47, 52, so they were not best pleased with Him.

“And as he said these things unto them, the scribes and the Pharisees began to urge him vehemently, and to provoke him to speak of many things: Laying wait for him, and seeking to catch something out of his mouth, that they might accuse him.”

“That they might accuse him” sums up the enemy’s ministry, as that of **“the accuser of our brethren”** Revelation 12:10.

Note therefore the Apostle Peter’s exhortation in 1 Peter 2:12.

“Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.”

That exhortation is especially applicable to believing wives with unsaved husbands.

“Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear” 1 Peter 3:1-2.

A Question for the Jews, Matthew 21:24-25a

4. *What is the response from Jesus?*

He evades their questions and asks a double-barrelled question of His own.

5. *Why does Jesus ask them about John’s baptism?*

He aims to force them:

- either to: declare **“plentifully...the thing as it is”** Job 26:3 as the woman did in Mark 5:33 **“But the woman fearing and trembling, knowing what was done in her, came and fell down before him, and told him all the truth”**
- or to **“durst not ask him any question at all”** Luke 20:40 i.e. put up or shut up, because with respect to His Father and His Father’s will, the Lord sought to **“attend upon the Lord without distraction”** 1 Corinthians 7:35, such as the apostate Jewish leadership.

The Lord knew they could **“hinder the gospel of Christ”** 1 Corinthians 9:12. That was their ministry. One way or another, He sought to block any hindrance to His ministry because He was constrained to accomplish it.

“Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered” Luke 11:52.

“But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!” Luke 12:50.

“Jesus saith unto them, *My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work*” John 4:34.

6. *What does Jesus want them to understand about the importance of coming to the right understanding of John?*

Ideally, the Lord would want the Jewish leaders to believe John’s testimony of Him and in turn to believe on Him as their Messiah, Daniel 9:25, 26 and for their salvation.

“And I knew him not: but *he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God*” John 1:33-34.

“Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness unto the truth. But I receive not testimony from man: but these things I say, that ye might be saved. He was a burning and a shining light: and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light...And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life” John 5:33-35, 40.

Gabriel said of John in Luke 1:16 that ***“many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God”*** and that would have prompted the Jewish leaders ***“to rejoice in his light”*** if it augmented contributions to the temple but as John 3:32 states ***“And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth; and no man receiveth his testimony.”***

That was the tragedy of both John’s ministry and the Lord’s, which is why He spoke John 5:40.

And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.”

7. *Since John is the messenger that would announce the great day of the Lord (Malachi 3:1), what does that mean for Jesus (Malachi 4:5)?*

See *Question 6* from study on Matthew 11:7-19.

It means that when the Lord Jesus Christ said ***“Behold, your house is left unto you desolate”*** Matthew 23:38 and the Jews said ***“We have no king but Caesar”*** John 19:15 after finally rejecting their Messiah at the First Advent, Daniel 9:26, ***“the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD”*** is postponed 2,000 years and the Lord Jesus Christ will bring in that day at the Second Advent, according to 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9.

“...when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day.”

Peter’s admonition in 2 Peter 3:11-12 should be faithfully obeyed, therefore.

“...what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God...”

See Dr Ruckman’s commentary *The Book of Matthew* pp 511-513.

A rejection of John and Jesus, Matthew 21:25b-27

8. *Why would the leaders not come to an open decision about John?*

They feared humiliation:

- either from God's rebuke i.e. ***"Why did ye then not believe him?"*** Matthew 21:25b, as in Nehemiah 6:16 ***"And it came to pass, that when all our enemies heard thereof, and all the heathen that were about us saw these things, they were much cast down in their own eyes: for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God"***
- or from the people's rebuke i.e. ***"all the people will stone us"*** Luke 20:6. (The humiliation at *the prospect* being stoned might have been worse than the stoning!)

They therefore sought refuge in agnosticism in order to avoid a necessary and life-giving change. See the *Ruckman Reference Bible* p 1277 and Dr Ruckman's commentary *The Book of Matthew* pp 430-433.

"...ye will not come to me, that ye might have life" John 5:40.

They were therefore afraid to bear His reproach.

"Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach" Hebrews 13:13.

They were therefore afraid to stand for ***"the word of truth"*** Psalm 119:43, 2 Corinthians 6:7, Ephesians 1:13, 2 Timothy 2:15, James 1:18.

"And they bend their tongues like their bow for lies: but they are not valiant for the truth upon the earth; for they proceed from evil to evil, and they know not me, saith the LORD" Jeremiah 9:3.

Of the above it can be said ***"such as is common to man"*** 1 Corinthians 10:13, of whom the Lord said ***"...ye will not come to me, that ye might have life"*** John 5:40.

The reasons are found in John 1:9, 3:19.

9. *What did their answer really reveal about the state of their hearts?*

They were prepared to kill ***"the Prince of life"*** Acts 3:15. See John 8:59, 10:31, 11:53. Therefore:

Theirs was ***"a proud heart"*** and therefore a sinful heart.

"An high look, and a proud heart, and the plowing of the wicked, is sin" Proverbs 21:4.

Theirs was ***"a rebellious heart"*** and therefore a doomed heart. See Luke 19:41-44.

"But this people hath a revolting and a rebellious heart; they are revolted and gone" Jeremiah 5:23.

Theirs was a deceitful and wicked heart and therefore a damned heart.

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings" Jeremiah 17:9-10.

See Matthew 23:32-33.

"Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?"

Of the above it can be said ***"such as is common to man"*** 1 Corinthians 10:13, of whom the Lord said ***"...ye will not come to me, that ye might have life"*** John 5:40.

The reasons are found in John 1:9, 3:19.

10. Why did Jesus refuse to answer their question?

The Lord has no time for dishonest sceptics. He refers to ***“scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!”*** 8 times in Matthew 23:13, 14, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29, Luke 11:44.

Note that the unsaved sceptics’ attitude to the ***“name which is above every name”*** Philippians 2:9 is the same as that of the unsaved *and saved* sceptics’ attitude to ***“thy word”*** that ***“thou hast magnified...above all thy name”*** Psalm 138:2.

It is that of the Bible believer, he that ***“trembleth at my word”*** versus the Bible denier, he that ***“dissembleth with his lips”*** against it, *including those who ‘use’ the AV1611.*

“For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word” Isaiah 66:2.

“He that hateth dissembleth with his lips, and layeth up deceit within him;” Proverbs 26:24.

With respect to the 1611 Holy Bible, therefore:

- To the Bible believer it is ***“the word of God,”*** to the Bible denier it is ***“the word of men”*** 1 Thessalonians 2:13.
- To the Bible believer it is ***“purified seven times”*** Psalm 12:6, to the Bible denier it is fossilised for all time.
- To the Bible believer it is ***“holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens”*** Hebrews 7:26, to the Bible denier it is old, hard, unrefined, saturated with obscurities and made subject to critics’ opinions.

The Book is clearly that by which ***“ye may put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean;”*** Leviticus 10:10, including for purposes of fellowship within the Body of Christ.

“And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” Ephesians 5:11.

Postscript to Matthew 11:7-19 Study

Concerning the different readings in Matthew 11:12, “***suffereth violence***” AV1611 versus “*forcefully advancing*” 1984* NIV. *The date is important.

The readings have been checked against 33 other versions, pre and post-1611 and the better-known ones. They include 3 different Greek-English interlinears.

Of those 33 versions, 27, including the 3 different Greek-English interlinears, support the AV1611 reading against the 1984 NIV reading.

The new NIV, the 2011 NIV from Biblica/Zondervan also supports the AV1611 reading, against the 1984 NIV reading. The 2011 NIV makes at least one change in approximately 40% of 1984 NIV verses and 70% of TNIV verses. It is meant to replace the earlier Biblica/Zondervan NIVs, including the 2005 TNIV, which also has the AV1611 reading.

It is not known what the Gideons NIV will read in Matthew 11:12, with their next edition. The latest Gideons Edition appears to be the 2007 Edition, which retains the 1984 reading. It may be a few years before the Gideons bring out a new edition, if their current edition is the 2007 Edition.

However, it is clear that from the above information, the AV1611 reading “***suffereth violence***” in Matthew 11:12 is right and the 1984 reading “*forcefully advancing*” is wrong, especially insofar as the 1984 reading has been rejected even by the NIV stable.

The above study has been carried out for three reasons:

- Scripturally, to “***Prove all things***” 1 Thessalonians 5:21
- Practically, to ensure that belief, attitudes and behaviour rest on “***sound doctrine***” 1 Timothy 1:10, 2 Timothy 4:3, Titus 1:9, 2:1 and “***a sure foundation***” Isaiah 28:16, see also Luke 6:48, not on error “***without a foundation***” Luke 6:49
- Testimonially, to speak for the purity of “***the words of the LORD***” Psalm 12:6.

Summary

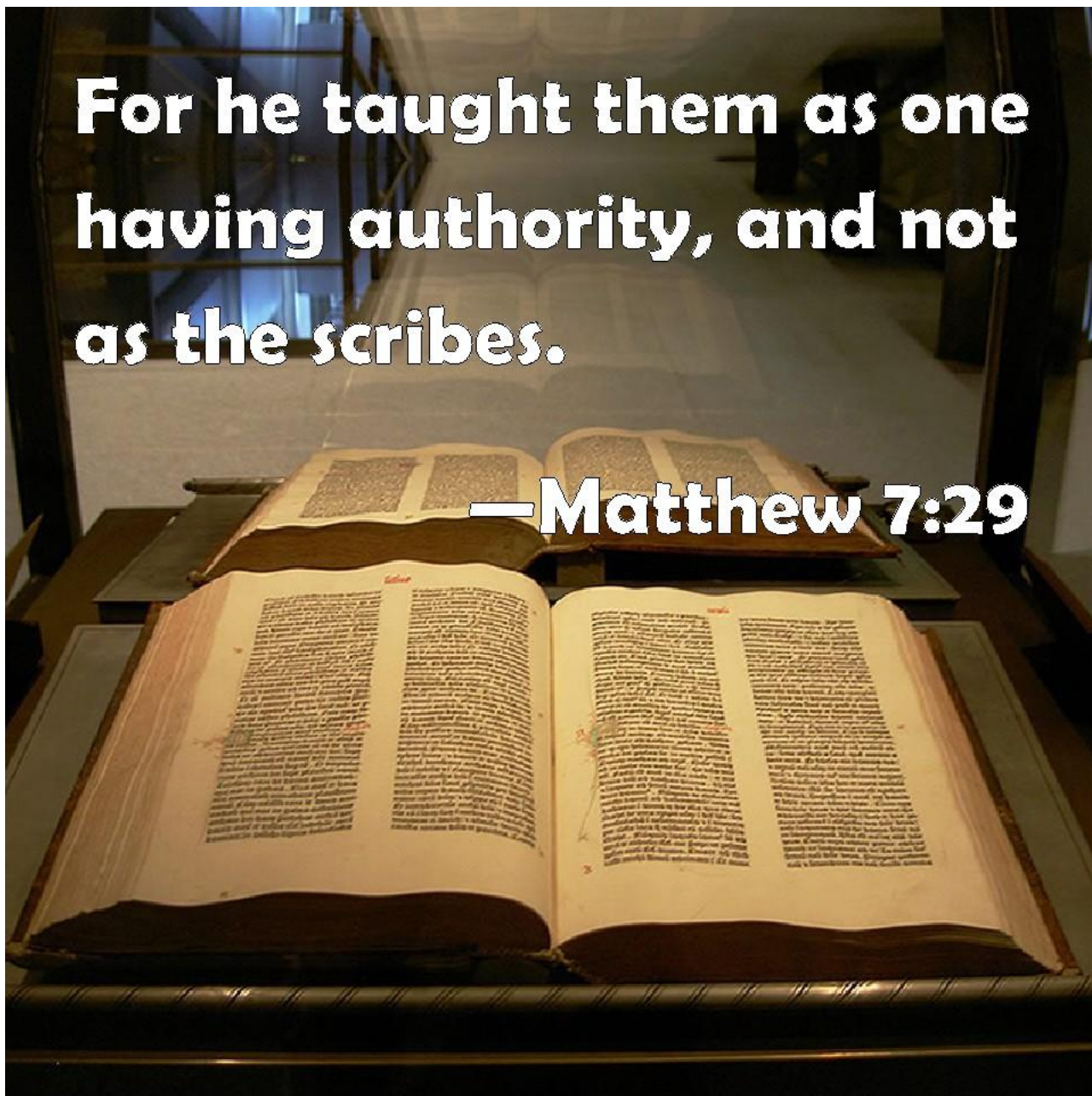
The best summation of the Lord’s abrupt exchange in Matthew 21:23-27 with “***the chief priests and the elders of the people***” Matthew 21:23 aka “***scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!***” is the Apostle Paul’s *practical* exhortation in 2 Corinthians 4:1-2 with respect to what the Jewish leaders *should have done* by receiving John’s testimony, John 3:33.

“Therefore seeing we have this ministry, *as we have received mercy, we faint not; But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.*”

Alan O’Reilly
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**For he taught them as one
having authority, and not
as the scribes.**

—Matthew 7:29



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