

Arguing with Jesus, Pt. 1

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Text: Mark 11:27-12:44¹

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Series: The Passion of the Christ

Introduction: Open your Bible this morning to **Mark 11 and 12** if you will. This morning we are talking about “Arguing with Jesus”.

Playing Games

How many people like to play basketball? Did you know there’s a difference between enjoying a game and actually knowing how to play it skillfully? If you go anywhere in the world, people like to play games, whether its soccer or UNO, or checkers or dominoes. Lots of people liked watching the Olympic Games last summer. People love to play games. Those of us with children love to watch our children play games.

A.W. Tozer was a pastor in Chicago during the 1950s and 60s. Here’s something Tozer said, “Most people indeed play at religion as they play at other games.” Religion itself being the most universally played game. I hope that’s not true among us. Yet I believe there is *Phariseeism* in all of us that we need to confront so that we can be more like Jesus.

We want Tabernacle Baptist Church not to be a place to play games, but a place of shelter and security and acceptance for sinners. You need to know that we are a church made up of broken, hurting people on the road to restoration in Jesus Christ. If we don’t think we fit that description then we are nothing more than people comparing masks with one another. It’s all a show. “Well my mask is better than your mask”. No, we are all hurting people. Let’s admit it. Let’s come clean today.

In Mark 11 and 12, we are going to meet some people that were playing games with Jesus. They were arguing with Him. Mark 11 begins the last week in Jesus’ life. We call it the Passion Week.

The Timeline of Passion Week so far...

We come to the Passion Week, the last week in the life of Jesus Christ.

- We remember *Sunday* – We call it “Palm Sunday”. Jesus enters into Jerusalem on the foal of a donkey to the cry of “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!” (Mark 11:10).
- Then we come to those most controversial public act of Christ on *Monday* – Jesus cleanses the Temple! This is a rebuke to the leaders of Israel and shocking to the people. Jesus uncovers the hypocrisy of the Jewish leaders.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is from the *English Standard Version* of the Bible.

- In **Mark 11:27**, we begin **Tuesday** of the Passion Week – Today we begin a study on Tuesday of the Passion week. It’s a huge day. He starts getting attacked by all the Jewish leaders.

This is the last conversation Jesus has with His enemies as a free man. Even in this conversation, we are going to find that He is merciful to His enemies, providing a pathway to salvation.

Context

As we survey Mark 11:27 through chapter 12 we find four questions—very clever traps that Jesus’ opponents set for Him. They question Jesus on four things: authority, ownership, Scripture, and priorities. We learn from these two chapters that it is useless to argue with Jesus. We need to give in to Him as the One who rescues us from God’s justice. We need accept Him as our King, our God, our Guide in life, and as the Center of our affections.

Five different groups attack Jesus:

1. **The chief priests**— these were workers in the Temple, like Zacharias, father of John the Baptist. They worked very hard and cared for the administration of Temple worship, including sacrifices. Many of them in Jesus’ day were nothing more than greedy merchants who wanted to make money off the animals, instead of helping the people to God.
2. **The Pharisees**—religious conservatives who love Israel. They were the major religious group of Jesus’ day. They despised Roman rule. There were about six thousand (6000) of them in Jesus’ time. The word for Pharisees literally means “separated ones”. The Pharisees were committed to a strict adherence to the ceremonial law, like “make sure you wash your hands in this way”, “make sure the priests have this color fringes on their garments”, and “make sure you don’t do these things to break the Sabbath”. The ceremonial law was the passion of the Pharisees.

They invented the Oral Law. So committed were the Pharisees to not breaking the written ceremonial law, that they established something called the “oral law”. These are additional rules that are not from the Bible, but they had added them in an attempt to make sure they did not break the written ceremonial law. For instance God says to “Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy”, and the Pharisees wrote 600 additional rules governing what is and what is not breaking the Sabbath day. The Pharisees were very focused on this self-invented, outward-focused, legalistic oral law. They were the committed ones, the defenders of the truth, the separated ones. They refused to compromise. ***Yet they could not see themselves clearly.***

3. **The Herodians**— they were a Jewish political party of **traitors** who supported the image and power of the Herodian family of kings. They were in favor of Rome

for their own self-interest and profit. The Herodians, though Jewish are generally worldly, secular, and pragmatic in their outlook.

4. **The Sadducees**— the *Sadducees* were the theological liberals of Jesus' day who rejected the supernatural. They were materialists. Jesus says they do not know the Scriptures. They accepted only the first five books of Moses, called the Pentateuch. They could not see how the Pentateuch taught the resurrection, so they rejected the resurrection.
5. **The Scribes**— you will see the Scribes referred to in the New Testament. They are not a separate religious group. Scribes were a certain type of *Pharisee*. They were the professional *scholars*, like the seminary professors of the day.

Jesus is going to get attacked from every side, from every group, yet even in their attacks, He is pointing His enemies toward the Kingdom of God. He answers four arguments that are set as traps for Him. Each time, Jesus in His mercy either exposes the true state of their lost condition and then points them to the kingdom.

Jesus has passion for even His enemies!

Introducing the Chief Priests

The first group we meet are the chief priests— these were *workers in the Temple*, like Zacharias, father of John the Baptist. They worked very hard and cared for the administration of Temple worship, including assisting with sacrifices. Many of them in Jesus' day were nothing more than greedy merchants who allowed the money changers to make income off the sacrificial animals, making money off of the worship to God, and taking advantage of God's people.

Jesus Cleanses the Temple

On Monday, the chief priest witnessed the most controversial action in the life of Jesus. The Temple by its appearance looked like it was a center of worship. It was busy. There were prayers and sacrifices and teaching going on. It looked on the good on the outside, like a hub of godly and pious religious activity. But on the inside, it was a den of thieves. The chief priests were in it for the money. Jesus makes a whip and drives the money changers out!

The next day is Tuesday of the Passion Week. He's going to die on Friday. He walks into Jerusalem, and the chief priests are furious! Here comes the first of four questions that Jesus answers.

Mark 11:27-28, “And they came again to Jerusalem. And as he was walking in the temple, the chief priests and the scribes and the elders came to him, 28 and they said to him, “By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?””

So there's the first question, "By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?" (vs. 28).

Can I tell you something? You don't want to start an argument with the Son of God. You want to know why? You can't win! He is God. You must give in to Him. Jesus Christ is Lord and King, and the only reasonable response when He scrutinizes us is to come confess, repent and come clean!

The chief priests ask a question—"By what authority are you doing these things?" What things? Jesus was scrutinizing their personal business. Do you know that Jesus has the authority to scrutinize all our personal business? We are not our own. We belong to God. We'll all give an account to Him.

The chief priests did not know Christ and did not want His scrutiny. No lost person wants Jesus' scrutiny. But one day we will all stand before Him and give an account of all our personal business.

That brings us to our first point. Jesus is getting a message to Israel, to the chief priests. They need to come to know Him.

I. **Knowing Christ means giving in to Jesus' scrutiny (vs. 27-28).**

The chief priests don't like that Jesus just turned their house upside down. He aired out all their dirty laundry. He opened all the closets and saw all the skeletons.

It's actually an act of mercy that Jesus cleans out our Temple now. He intends to bring us face to face with the sinners that we are.

Those who are running from Jesus don't want to be under His authority. But a Christian knows that everything that Jesus says about us is true. We are "desperately wicked". "There is none good, no not one".

Jesus always looks past our exterior to our heart. On the outside we may look fantastic, but the exterior is not the ultimate test of whether we know Christ. The chief priests looked like very holy people. They did the **WORK** of God. They received the sacrifices of God's people. They administrated the Temple. But they were also part and parcel of the problem. They overlooked the thievery and the commercialization of Christ's Temple.

The chief priests were questioning Jesus authority to reveal who they really were. They didn't like this so they asked Him Who He was that He had the authority to do this. So Jesus responds to their question about authority with another question about authority.

II. Knowing Christ means giving in to the **ugly truth** about myself (vs. 29-33).

When a person comes to know Christ, there is a dilemma. They have to come to the place where they realize that every thing they've done in their life up to that point is a waste. They were totally wrong about life. They deceived themselves. They were bamboozled by the wicked one. That's a hard realization to come to.

When asked by what authority Jesus cleansed the Temple, Jesus answered their question with another question that drew attention to how radically wrong they are about God's work.

These chief priests are people who are supposedly doing the work of God, but they rejected the entire ministry of John the Baptist. They were wrong. Jesus pushes all of us to see how wrong we are. That's the only way we can know Him is by coming totally clean about our sin.

We read in **verse 29**, “Jesus said to them, ‘I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. 30 Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man? Answer me.’ 31 And they discussed it with one another, saying, ‘If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’ 32 But shall we say, ‘From man?’”—they were afraid of the people, for they all held that John really was a prophet. 33 So they answered Jesus, ‘We do not know.’ And Jesus said to them, ‘Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.’”

Jesus refuses to play their games unless they get honest and repent.

Application: Dear brother and sister in Christ, we must never go back to playing the games of hiding our sin. We must come clean. If you have a problem with lying and dishonesty, you need to make that right. If Christ is in you, He's pushing you toward the truth.

Transition: Jesus now goes a step further in His mercy to try to reveal how rebellious and far away these chief priests are from the God they think they are serving. Jesus tells a story or parable that points to the fact that these very people have rejected God's prophets and are about to crucify God's own Son. We know this as the parable of the tenants. The truth we get is radical.

III. Knowing Christ means I end my **rebellion** against God (Mark 12: 1-12).

Jesus exposes the rebellion of the Jews. They thought they were faithful, but of course they are about to crucify the Son of God. Many who think they are faithful may actually be God's enemy.

Mark 12: 1-12, “And he began to speak to them in parables. “A man planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a pit for the winepress and built a tower, and leased it to tenants and went into another country. 2 When the season came, he sent a servant to the tenants to get from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. 3 And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. 4 Again he sent to them another servant, and they struck him on the head and treated him shamefully. 5 And he sent another, and him they killed. And so with many others: some they beat, and some they killed. 6 He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ 7 But those tenants said to one another, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’ 8 And they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard. 9 What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. 10 Have you not read this Scripture: “ ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; 11 this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes’?” 12 And **they were seeking to arrest him but feared the people**, for they perceived that he had told the parable against them. So they left him and went away.”

One thing is clear. I can be in God’s vineyard and still be a rebel. Going to church doesn’t make me a Christian anymore than going into a Car dealership makes me a car.

The chief priests could not see themselves as having been all wrong and rejecting God’s prophets and rejecting God’s son.

So we read something devastating about the chief priests. **Verse 12**, “**they left him and went away.**”

They go away to plot His death. This is Tuesday, and they’re going to have Him dead by Friday. These chief priests were fighting against Jesus, they wanted to arrest Him then and there so they could put Him to death.

It’s the people right at the hub of religious worship in Israel who are plotting Christ’s death. Shouldn’t this disturb us? Being in worship with God’s saints does not mean we are close to God.

Salvation means ending our rebellion and receiving God’s Son in all His fullness, to control every aspect of my life. That is the only way we can really identify ourselves as Christians. A Christian is in submission to Christ. He’s not fighting and rebelling.

Application: Whatever your questions are about God, do not spend your life fighting against God with your long list of questions. End your rebellion against God. Give up the fight. You cannot ever win against God. The heartbeat of Christianity is responding in glad submission to God. It is relationship, not ritual.

Conclusion: It is not wise to argue with Jesus. Next week we are going to meet four more groups that want to argue with Jesus.

Listen, it is not wise to play games with God. It is not wise to argue with Jesus. Without Christ we are nothing. Let us remember that saints of God. He came to save us!

- In order for us to receive Christ, we had to come under that scrutiny. Jesus had to clean our house. He had to reveal that no matter how bad we thought we were, we were much more deserving of hell and condemnation.
- We had to given in the ugly truth that all life lived without Christ was a waste!
- We had to end our rebellion against Christ. No more doing my own thing with all God's precious gifts. I'm now going to use my life, my family, and everything I have for the glory of God.

It is not wise to argue with Jesus. It is not wise to play games with God. Without Christ we are nothing. Jesus has come to clean your Temple. Don't argue with Him about it. If you know Christ you are His Temple. We can never go back and live according to our old life ever again. Christ has blown through our Temple with His Holy Spirit. We are renewed. We are changed! We are transformed! We've stopped arguing and we've begun resting by faith.