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Questioning Authority of Jesus

Matthew 21:23-27

Mark 11:27-33 & Luke 20:1-8

Matthew 21:23-27, *Now when He came into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people confronted Him as He was teaching, and said, "By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?"* ²⁴*But Jesus answered and said to them, "I also will ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things: ²⁵The baptism of John—where was it from? From heaven or from men?" And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' ²⁶But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the multitude, for all count John as a prophet."* ²⁷*So they answered Jesus and said, "We do not know." And He said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.*

The word “authority” is a strong word.

The word “authority,” there is a certain force about that word.

We talk about the authorities, and we rightfully have a sense of respect, awe, and fear.

The word “authority” denotes permission.

It denotes

- Privilege.
- Power,
- Rule,
- Control, and
- Influence.

When someone has authority, that means they are on top of other people.

They can determine things, decide things, render judgments, wield certain rights and privileges.

- In the home there is authority.
- In the government there are authorities, the police and those who govern us.
- In the schools there are authorities.
- In business there are authorities.

In any dimension of life there are authorities, people who have the privilege, power, permission to set the rules, to determine the judgments and the verdicts.

But there is one who has authority that surpasses all other authorities.

Matthew 28:18, *And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.*

An amazing claim to power, to permission, and right. Jesus demonstrated that very well in His ministry.

When Jesus had concluded the Sermon on the Mount, we could see this.

Matthew 7:28-29, *And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, ²⁹for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.*

He taught with authority.

In their culture usually they quote some Rabbi's, but Jesus did not anyone.

Jesus didn't say He had gotten this truth from some eminent rabbi. Jesus didn't say that this was an exposition of some

commentary written by some respected person of another time.

He just spoke with authority.

Matthew 9

Jesus healed a paralyzed man and forgave his sin. The multitude saw it and marveled and glorified God, who had given such authority to men.

Matthew 9:8, *Now when the multitudes saw it, they marvelled and glorified God, who had given such power to men.*

Jesus had authority to say whatever He wanted to say and make it binding on men.

Jesus had authority to heal and authority over disease.

Jesus had authority to forgive sin.

Mark 1:22, *And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.*

Jesus was confronted in that same place with a demon-possessed man with an unclean spirit, and He healed the man, casting out the spirit.

Mark 1:27-28, *Then they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? What*

new doctrine is this? For with authority He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him.”²⁸ And immediately His fame spread throughout all the region around Galilee.

Jesus had authority to teach whatever He wanted to teach and footnote no one.

- ✓ He had authority to heal the sick.
- ✓ He had authority to forgive sin.
- ✓ He had authority to cast out demons.

John 1:12, *But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:*

Jesus had authority to make children of God.

God had given Jesus’ authority to execute judgment.

John 5:27, *and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man.*

Jesus had authority to teach whatever He wanted to teach as truth and make it binding on men’s conscience.

He had authority to heal and to cast out demons.

He had authority to forgive sin. He had authority to determine the children of God and grant that right.

John 10:18, *No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father.”*

Jesus had authority for His own resurrection.

Jesus had authority to give His life.

Jesus had authority to raise it from the dead.

John 17:2, *as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him.*

Jesus is referring to Himself.

Jesus had authority to give eternal life.

Authority to teach whatever He wanted to teach without any resource, without any precedent, and to make it binding on men and determinative of their eternal destiny.

- ✓ Authority to heal the sick,
- ✓ Authority to raise the dead,
- ✓ Authority to cast out demons,
- ✓ Authority to forgive sin,
- ✓ Authority to designate children of God,
- ✓ Authority to give eternal life, and
- ✓ Authority to judge every person.

Tremendous authority.

Jesus had so much authority that He was a problem to the Jewish system.

Because they believed that they were the authorities.

They had a very highly developed and sophisticated system of authority. Jesus absolutely ignored it.

- ✓ Jesus never asked their information for anything.
- ✓ Jesus didn't ask them to approve His doctrine.
- ✓ Jesus didn't ask them to approve His healings.
- ✓ Jesus didn't ask them to approve His casting out of demons.
- ✓ Jesus didn't ask them to approve His verdicts and His judgments.
- ✓ Jesus didn't ask them to help Him decide who were the children of God.
- ✓ Jesus didn't ask for their advice on how to give eternal life.

Jesus totally ignored them.

The authority of Christ, consider two words.

The first is the word ***Dunamis*** which the Bible translates power. The second is the word ***Exousía*** which the Bible translates power or authority. Best understood as authority.

Dunamis or power is the ability to do something.

Exousía or authority is the right to do it.

When we say Jesus had authority, we mean not just that He had power, but that He had privilege.

God had given Him the privilege of acting in His behalf, in this world, with no regard for the authorities of men.

Jesus had both ***Dunamis*** and ***Exousía***.

Jesus had the power, and He had the privilege. It was given Him by God.

He said that repeatedly.

In **John chapter 5 to 12** at least four times, *“I do what the Father shows Me to do, and that’s exactly what I do.”* He had God-given authority.

When Jesus went into the temple early in His ministry.

John 2:15-16, *When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers’ money and overturned the tables. ¹⁶And He said to those who sold doves, “Take these things away! Do not make My Father’s house a house of merchandise!”*

Jesus did the same thing at the end of His ministry.

He didn’t ask anybody’s permission.

He didn’t check in with the Sanhedrin.

He didn’t ask any permission from anybody ever except the Father.

Jesus sought no earthly approval, no earthly accreditation, no earthly credentials. Because of that, we must understand that He opposed Himself against the authority system that existed in a very dramatic way. Ultimately it led to His death.

The Jews were amazed.

They were distressed.

Jesus' behavior was unacceptable to them.

Rabbinical teaching had no inherent authority. The rabbis quoted the rabbis, and that's the only authority they ever had. They had to get approval from the Sanhedrin. They had to be ordained by the Sanhedrin to function as an accepted rabbi.

But Jesus was His own authority, because all authority had been given to Him by God.

Jesus never had authorization from men for anything at all.

Rather Jesus ignored their whole system of authorization, and this sets up conflict.

All through His ministry, Jesus conflicted with existing authorities in the Jewish community.

Matthew 21 comes to a very severe conflict.

Jesus has concluded His Galilean ministry, concluded His Perea ministry. Crossed the Jordan River and entered Jericho,

healed two blind men. Brought Zacchaeus into the kingdom. He goes from Jericho up the hill to Jerusalem for Passover.

Having arrived in the vicinity of Jerusalem, He stays in the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.

On Saturday, Triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Night again He goes back to Bethany to stay overnight.

On Sunday, He went directly to the temple. When He came to the temple, He saw the wretched, wicked money changers and animal sellers. He cleaned out the temple.

This infuriated the religious leaders who already despised Him and wanted Him dead.

When He had just finished cleaning out the temple, little boys began to sing hosannas and to sing and praise Him. This infuriated the leaders even more.

Cleansing of the temple unmasks their hypocrisy and the falseness of their religious systems.

After cleansing the temple, He returns to Bethany that night again spending it with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.

Now it is **Monday morning**.

Jesus goes back to the temple again, this time walking past the fig tree which has been cursed and teaching His disciples some profound lessons about false pretense and the power of prayer.

Having passed that fig tree, proceeds directly back to the temple.

In the temple, that we find Him in verse 23.

He cleansed the temple the day before.

He now confronts the leaders and the people who are gathered there.

It's almost as if He had to clean the place up before, He could go back and minister.

Jesus begins a confrontation in verse 23 that doesn't end until the end of **Matthew chapter 23**.

Very long confrontations.

It builds up the flames that ultimately lead to the crucifixion.

V 23, *Now when He came into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people confronted Him as He was teaching, and said, "By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?"*

The issue is authority.

Jesus didn't come to overthrow the Roman occupation.
He came to clean up Israel.

He wasn't concerned with Fort Antonia.
He wasn't concerned with economics.
He wasn't concerned with the state of the nation militarily,
economically, or socially.

He was concerned with the state of the nation spiritually.
He was no political Messiah.
He was a Saviour.
He came and confronted the heart of the nation where it
needed to be confronted, and that was at the point of its
religion.

So, Jesus came to the temple. Always temple is the place
where God must begin His work.

This is the reason why the New Testament says, "*Judgment
has to begin at the house of God.*" He has cleansed the place,
and now He takes center stage.

That temple had a tremendous courtyard surrounding these
high walls and pillars. Among those pillars were porches and
colonnades and porticos.

People would mill all about, especially at Passover. The place would be filled with people. Especially having been cleansed, that would invite even more people.

V 23, *He was teaching.*

He went back, took center stage in the cleansed temple. Emptied courtyard and moving throughout that courtyard and up on the steps and into the porticos, porches, colonnades, He was teaching.

A vast multitude of gathered around Him.

What was He teaching?

Acts 1:3, *to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.*

He was doing what He always did.

He was talking about the kingdom.

Luke 20:1, *Now it happened on one of those days, as He taught the people in the temple and preached the gospel, that the chief priests and the scribes, together with the elders, confronted Him.*

Mark 11:27, *Then they came again to Jerusalem. And as He was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came to Him.*

Jesus went into the temple and walking about, amidst the mass of people, He is teaching and preaching.

Teaching the kingdom of God and preaching the Gospel.

Likely He talked about sin, the wretchedness of it and the folly of hypocritical religion.

Likely He talked about judgment, the inevitability of hell for those who refused God's truth and God's way of salvation.

Jesus talked about righteousness, the hopelessness of self-righteousness and trying to attain salvation by your own good works.

He must have talked about humility and the place for brokenness, self-emptying, self-crucifixion, and bankruptcy of spirit.

He must have talked about the love of God and the love men should have for God.

He must have talked about peace.

He must have talked about the fact that God wanted to make peace with men, not on a temporary basis, but on a permanent basis.

The people really listened. They were awestruck by Him, hopeful that He would fulfill all their dreams and expectations.

Luke 19:48, *and were unable to do anything; for all the people were very attentive to hear Him.*

He had their ear. He taught.

But the leaders could see a religious revolution taking place. They were in a state of panic, and they wanted Him dead.

As Jesus moves about teaching, they confront Him, and they stop His teaching. They couldn't allow this to go on.

V 23, *“By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?”*

Matthew says the chief priests and the elders.

Those are very general terms to engulf a whole group of people. The chief priests would include all the priests. That would mean the high priests Caiaphas and Annas who was behind the scenes.

This would include the captain of the temple, who was second in command. He oversaw all the worship.

The captain of the temple was able to arrest people who violated the temple rules.

In **Acts 5**, they arrested the apostles.

The captain of the temple was an office from which the high priest was elected. If the high priest was ill on the Day of Atonement, or couldn't serve, then the captain of the temple was elevated to that role. So, it was like being vice president.

Under him came there were **24 priests** for the weekly course, who offered sacrifice and carried out ceremony.

Then there were **156 priests** of the daily course.

Then there were ordinary priests who had charge of the keys, doors, gates, and little areas of administrative responsibility.

Then there were the treasurers who cared for the money. History tells us that these last two categories of overseers and treasurers could be divided into all kinds of people.

- One would be over music.
- One would be over trumpets.
- One would be over the bakery.
- One would be over the salt.
- One would be over the wood.
- One would be over the drink offerings.
- One would be over the lots.
- One would be over the bird offerings.
- One would be over the animal offerings.
- One would be over the water.
- One would over the signs.

- One would over the shewbread.
- One would over the incense.
- One would over the curtains.
- One would over the robes.
- One would take care of people who got sick.

They all had an area of responsibility.

Probably they had other priests.

Then they had the non-priests.

The rabbis and the scribes.

There was a large group of guys involved in wanting to bring Jesus' ministry to a fast stop.

People who can't get together on any other thing can get together against Jesus Christ.

The Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Herodians, maybe even the **Zealots and the Essenes**, none of whom could agree with each other. Everybody had their own rabbi, and his own view. They can't get together on much.

But they all can sure get together on stopping Christ.

Because all the false has this in common of human achievement.

It is a religion of works.

Same way even today.

You can take all the religions of the world, and though they all disagree with each other, they can commonly stand together against the truth of Jesus Christ!

They have been plotting how to get rid of Jesus. They can't take what's going on. He counters everything that they affirm.

V 23, *“By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?”*

Where is Your Sanhedrin approval?

What did they mean by these things?

More than teaching and preaching, cleansing the temple, the royal entry, accepting the praises of the crowd, the miracles and commanding demons, forgiving sin, and whatever else.

Where did You get the authority for this?

Where are Your credentials?

Where is Your Sanhedrin authorization?

They asked the same question.

John 2:18, *So the Jews answered and said to Him, “What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?”*

Very strange thing for someone to do without authorization.

If you wanted to do anything special, you had to get their permission to do it. You just didn't take things into your own hands and exercise your own authority and do whatever you wanted.

But Jesus did that.
They didn't like that.

They were used to authorization.
Either you had to be the disciple of an eminent rabbi or have Sanhedrin approval.

Did you know there was a regular ordination process?

There was a regular ordination process.
It started out that eminent rabbis would ordain their own disciples, they abused it then the Sanhedrin took that over.

The chief priest also had the right to ordain people without the Sanhedrin, but he abused that, so they eliminated that.

It came to the time of Christ, the Sanhedrin was the one that gave authorized ordination papers, according to **Edersheim** the Jewish historian.

A person who wanted to be ordained as a rabbi was ordained as rabbi by an elder judge because he was given the right to teach, to show wisdom, and to make decisions.

Those three functions combined in one office.
A rabbi had to come to a special ordination service.

He had to give a discourse.

He had to be approved.

Then after His discourse, there was certain poetry and hymns read. There was a ceremony by which he was granted the power to bind and lose, that is he was granted the power to teach and judge.

Once he had his rabbinical authorization he was recognized as a rabbinically credentialed teacher.

But Jesus had no such credentials, no such authorization. They are big on that.

Jesus didn't hook up with any traditional, eminent rabbi. He didn't have any Sanhedrin authorization. He just wielded authority, and it was totally apart from anything within the Jewish system.

Where did You get this authority to do the things You do?

That was the confrontation.

V 24, But Jesus answered and said to them, "I also will ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things:

Jesus is not evading the answer.

In fact, if they answered the question, they would have the answer to their question.

He is giving them an opportunity to honestly answer the question.

If they answer the question, their own question will be answered.

They knew what authority He acted on. They knew He had said many times that He did what the Father showed Him to do. They knew that.

If Jesus answered and said this is on the authority of the Father they would have accused Him of blasphemy and killed Him. Because earlier, when He had claimed that He had authority from God, they said that He had blasphemed making Himself equal with God.

Perhaps they wanted Him to say that again so that they could accuse Him of blasphemy, and that would be part of hatching the plot that would ultimately bring about His death.

But He didn't answer their question with an answer.

V 24, *If you answer My question, I'll answer yours.*

His question in verse 25.

V 25, *The baptism of John—where was it from? From heaven or from men?” And they reasoned among themselves, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ He will say to us, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’*

A fair question.

John the Baptist, a voice crying in the wilderness, out beyond Jordan, making the people ready for the Messiah, everybody knew about him.

The last prophet of the Old Testament age, a great man. All Israel had been going to John the Baptist and His message was simply this, *“Repent the Kingdom of God is at hand which means Messiah is nearby.”*

People were saying that we must be ready when the Messiah comes. People were confessing their sin. They were willing to make their hearts right so that when Messiah comes, they can receive Him and His Kingdom.

- John was preaching a message of repentance.
- John was preaching a message of confessing sin.
- John was preaching a message of get your heart right with God.
- Then he was baptizing them in the Jordan River to symbolize on the outside the inward cleansing of their hearts.

- He was getting the people ready for the Messiah.
- He was gathering people whose hearts were ready for the coming of Messiah.

All the nation was flocking out to him in excitement.

His attitude, his power, his preaching, and his content all said he was a prophet of God. The people believed it.

Matthew 14, when Herod wanted to kill John, he was afraid to kill him because everybody knew John was a prophet.

Matthew 14:5, *And although he wanted to put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet.*

John was proclaiming to the people that the Messiah was coming. He was collecting people ready for the Messiah.

One day while he was baptizing people in the river Jordan and looking at Jesus he made this statement.

John 1:29-30, *The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.'*

John did say finally that the Messiah is here and none other than Jesus Christ.

When Jesus says “the baptism of John,” He means the whole ministry of John which was symbolized by His baptizing work.

V 25, *The baptism of John—where was it from? From heaven or from men?*”

Jesus questions them.

Tough question.

We may say that it is not at all hard.

But for them it is very difficult because of their circumstances.

Here is their situation.

Let us say they say, “It was from heaven.”

What do they must admit?

Jesus is Messiah, because this is what John proclaimed.

If they say, “No, it was of earth.”

Then the whole nation believed He was from God. They are going to lose their credibility instantly.

People are going to say, “Everybody in the whole nation knows he is a prophet. **How can you not conclude that?**

You are supposed to be the people who figure out all these things. You are supposed to be the observers of religious happenings.

Everybody knows he is a prophet.

So, if they said he wasn't a prophet, to avoid having to say Jesus was the Messiah, they would lose their credibility with the people.

If they say he is a prophet of God, then they put themselves in a position to have to accept his message.

V 25, *And they reasoned among themselves.*

They dialogued, in perfect tense verb means continuous action. They got in a continuous discussion.

What are we going to say?

They were all in this little huddle.

V 25, *saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?'"*

V 26, *But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the multitude, for all count John as a prophet."*

The people would say to them what kind of religious leaders you are. We don't need you. We know more than you do.

John had announced Jesus was the Messiah.

John had made it so beautifully clear.

John 3:30, *He must increase, but I must decrease.*

Look at the conversation that took place.

John 3:25-29, *Then there arose a dispute between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purification. ²⁶And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified—behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!" ²⁷John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven. ²⁸You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent before Him.' ²⁹He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled.*

John the Baptist message was very clear that Jesus is the Messiah.

Jesus said He had the witness of John.

John 5:31-36, *"If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true. ³²There is another who bears witness of Me, and I know that the witness which He witnesses of Me is true. ³³You have sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. ³⁴Yet I do not receive testimony from man, but I say these things that you may be saved. ³⁵He was the burning and shining lamp, and you were willing for a time to rejoice in his light. ³⁶But I have a greater witness than John's; for the works which the Father has given Me to finish—the very works that I do—bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me.*

Jesus did have the witness of John that He was the Messiah. If they say that it is from heaven that John has come, then they have to accept the messiahship of Christ. They were not going to do that.

On the other hand, they were going to have the fear of the rejection of the people. They were afraid of that.

These religious people were trained at ignoring facts. They had trained themselves no matter what the evidence was, they could ignore it.

It didn't matter what Jesus said and what He did. It didn't matter how powerful His miracles were, how utterly inexplicable they were on a human basis. It did not matter how utterly unanswerable was His teaching, they still refused to believe.

In **John 5** Jesus heals the man at the pool of Bethesda. **John 5:16**, *For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath.*

They wanted Him dead.

John 9, healing of a blind man. Jesus made the blind man see.

John 9:24-34, So they again called the man who was blind, and said to him, "Give God the glory! We know that this Man is a sinner." ²⁵He answered and said, "Whether He is a sinner or not I do not know. One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see." ²⁶Then they said to him again, "What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?" ²⁷He answered them, "I told you already, and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become His disciples?" ²⁸Then they reviled him and said, "You are His disciple, but we are Moses' disciples. ²⁹We know that God spoke to Moses; as for this fellow, we do not know where He is from." ³⁰The man answered and said to them, "Why, this is a marvellous thing, that you do not know where He is from; yet He has opened my eyes! ³¹Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him. ³²Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind. ³³If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing." ³⁴They answered and said to him, "You were completely born in sins, and are you teaching us?" And they cast him out.

When unbelief investigates the truth, it comes up with the wrong answers. Because it is already predisposed to ignore the facts.

Typical of people who come to look at the Gospel message and look at the virtue of Jesus Christ, already having convinced

themselves that their way is right, and the way of God is wrong.

No matter how much evidence you give them, they will still reject, because that's their predisposition.

The smart answer of the mass of religious leaders of Israel.

V 27, *So they answered Jesus and said, "We do not know." And He said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.*

It was their duty to be serious observers of religious matters. It was their duty to know.

They ignored all the evidence because they would not be put in a position where they would admit Jesus Christ to be the Messiah.

The hardness of their hearts refused to accept Him.

V 27, *He said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.*

Why cast pearls before swine?

They rejected the light, so He turned it off.

Matthew 23:33, *Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?*

Matthew 23:38, *See! Your house is left to you desolate;*

Desolate. I mean it was over. He turned off the lights.

When He was confronted before Caiaphas.

Matthew 26:63, *But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest answered and said to Him, "I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!"*

Matthew 27:12, *And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, He answered nothing.*

They had so long rejected, that He rejected them.

Genesis 6:3, *And the Lord said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years."*

Hosea 4:17, *"Ephraim is joined to idols, Let him alone.*

Isaiah 63:10, *But they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit; So He turned Himself against them as an enemy, And He fought against them.*

Fearful thing.

In a very, very poignant and provocative statement,

Luke 19:41-44, *Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, ⁴²saying, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. ⁴³For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, ⁴⁴and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation."*

So, the confrontation and the counter question. Jesus was not through with them though. He has nothing more to say to them of light.

But He does have something more to say to them of judgment.

Jesus gives them in 3 parables! Profound lesson.