Group Study Questions – Matthew 21:23–32 (NKJV)

(Plus 2 additional questions from Matthew 21:33–45)

This passage is not just about authority—it's about **response**. Two people can hear the same truth: one resists and one repents. The difference is not knowledge—but willingness.

Parallel Passages:

- **Mark 11:27–33** – Questioning Jesus' authority
- **Luke 20:1–8** – Same confrontation
- Related themes: **Luke 7:29–30; John 3:19–20; Hebrews 3:15**

Study Questions and Responses

1. What is really behind the leaders' question about Jesus' authority? *(Matthew 21:23)*

On the surface, they are asking a theological question—but in reality, they are **challenging Jesus' right to disrupt their system** (Matthew 21:12–13).

They are not lacking information—they are resisting implication. If Jesus' authority is from God, then they must submit. Their question is less about truth and more about **control and accountability** (John 5:40).

Everyday Application: We may question God not because we lack answers, but because we resist what those answers would require of us. The real issue is often not understanding—but surrender.

2. Why does Jesus connect their question to John the Baptist, and what does that expose? *(Matthew 21:24–25)*

John's ministry clearly pointed to Jesus (John 1:29–31). The leaders had already rejected John, so their inability to answer exposes a deeper pattern—they **consistently reject God's messengers**.

Jesus is not avoiding the question; He is revealing that **their problem is not lack of clarity, but a pattern of rejection**.

Everyday Application: Sometimes we want new insight while ignoring past conviction. Spiritual growth often requires responding to what God has already shown us.

3. What does their internal reasoning show about how truth can be filtered through self-interest? *(Matthew 21:25–27)*

They do not ask, "What is true?" but "What will happen if we say this?" Their thinking is driven by **fear of consequences**, not pursuit of truth.

This reflects a deeper issue:

- **Fear of man** (Proverbs 29:25)
- **Love of approval** (John 12:43)

Truth becomes secondary when identity and position are at stake.

Everyday Application: We can subtly filter truth through how it will affect our relationships, reputation, or comfort. This passage challenges us to ask: *Am I seeking truth, or managing outcomes?*

4. What does their answer, "We do not know," reveal about spiritual avoidance? *(Matthew 21:27)*

Their answer is not ignorance—it is **strategic neutrality**. They choose not to commit because commitment would expose them.

This reflects a broader biblical pattern: "Men loved darkness rather than light…" (John 3:19)

Avoidance becomes a way to delay obedience while maintaining appearance.

Everyday Application: We may avoid clear spiritual decisions by staying vague—"I'm not sure," "I'm still thinking." But sometimes, that hesitation is actually resistance in disguise.

5. What does the first son's change of mind reveal about repentance? *(Matthew 21:28–29)*

The first son initially refuses but later obeys. The word implies a **change of mind that leads to action**—true repentance.

This reflects the biblical idea of repentance:

- **Ezekiel 18:30** – turn and live
- **Acts 3:19** – repent and be converted

Repentance is not just regret—it is a **reorientation of direction**.

Everyday Application: It is not where you start, but how you respond. God values a changed heart that leads to action more than a perfect beginning.

6. Why is the second son more dangerous than he appears? *(Matthew 21:30)*

The second son says the right thing—"I go, sir"—but does nothing. This represents **external agreement without internal transformation**.

Jesus repeatedly warns about this kind of disconnect:

- **Matthew 15:8** – lips vs heart
- **James 1:22** – hearers, not doers

This is more dangerous because it creates the illusion of obedience.

Everyday Application: It is possible to agree with truth, affirm it, even teach it—without actually living it. This passage calls for alignment between belief and behavior.

7. Why do the "obvious sinners" respond to God while the leaders do not? *(Matthew 21:31–32)*

Tax collectors and harlots responded to John because they were **aware of their need** (Luke 7:29). The leaders did not because they believed they were already right.

This reflects a key principle: "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6)

The issue is not sin level—but **openness to repentance**.

Everyday Application: Spiritual growth begins with recognizing need. When we feel "fine," we may actually be less open to change than those who know they need it.

8. What is the deeper issue Jesus exposes in verse 32—not just unbelief, but something more?

Jesus says they **saw** others respond but still did not repent. This reveals not just unbelief, but **resistance despite evidence**. This is a hardened condition:

- **Hebrews 3:15** – do not harden your hearts
- **Romans 1:21** – knowing God but not responding

They are not uninformed—they are unmoved.

Everyday Application: Exposure to truth does not guarantee transformation. The question is not "Have I seen God work?" but "Have I responded to it?"

Additional Questions – Matthew 21:33–45

9. What pattern do you see in how the tenants respond to the servants and the son, and what does that reveal about the human heart? *(Matthew 21:33–39)*

There is escalation:

- Servants rejected
- More servants rejected
- Son killed

This shows how rejection of truth can **harden over time** (Jeremiah 7:25–26).

The issue is not a single moment—it's a pattern of resisting God's authority.

Everyday Application: Ignoring God repeatedly can make it easier to ignore Him again. Sensitivity to God's voice grows—or diminishes—based on how we respond.

10. What does "bearing fruit" mean in the context of being given the kingdom? *(Matthew 21:43)*

Fruit represents the visible outcome of a life aligned with God—obedience, repentance, and transformation (John 15:8; Galatians 5:22–23).

The kingdom is not just received—it is reflected in how someone lives.

Everyday Application: Faith is not just internal belief. Over time, it produces visible change. This invites us to ask: *Is there evidence of God's work in how I live?*