

Luke 12:14

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?

Analysis

And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?— Jesus' response is a sharp rebuke through rhetorical question. The address Man (ἄνθρωπε, Anthrōpe) is notably less respectful than the petitioner's "Master"—a deliberate downgrade signaling disapproval. The question who made me a judge or a divider? (τίς με κατέστησεν κριτὴν ἢ μεριστήν) asserts Jesus' refusal to assume civil jurisdiction. The terms kritēn (κριτήν, judge) and meristēn (μεριστήν, divider/arbitrator) were roles rabbis regularly filled, yet Jesus declines.

This refusal is theologically significant. Jesus came not to arbitrate earthly disputes but to establish God's kingdom and provide salvation from sin. Accepting this role would reduce His messianic mission to social reform and legal arbitration—precisely the misunderstanding that plagued popular messianic expectations. The crowds wanted a political deliverer to overthrow Rome and restore Israel's earthly kingdom; Jesus came to overthrow sin and establish an eternal spiritual kingdom. His refusal doesn't mean material concerns are unimportant but that they're not His primary mission. He immediately transitions to warning against covetousness (v. 15), addressing the root spiritual issue behind the inheritance dispute: greed.

Historical Context

Moses functioned as judge over Israel until appointing subordinate judges (Exodus 18:13-27). Later, judges, kings, and rabbis held judicial authority. The petitioner's

assumption that Jesus should arbitrate reflects this cultural pattern. However, Jesus' mission differed fundamentally from Moses'. Where Moses led Israel out of physical bondage and established civil law, Jesus came to free humanity from sin's bondage and fulfill the moral law. The early church understood this distinction—believers were instructed to settle disputes within the community (1 Corinthians 6:1-8) rather than secular courts, but church leaders weren't primarily civil arbitrators. Jesus' refusal established that Christian ministry focuses on spiritual transformation, not legal mediation, though Christians should pursue justice and reconciliation within proper spheres.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. Why does Jesus refuse a role that other rabbis accepted, and what does this reveal about His unique mission?
2. How does this verse challenge contemporary expectations that Christian leaders should primarily address political and economic issues?
3. What is the relationship between Jesus' refusal to arbitrate this dispute and His subsequent warning against covetousness?

Interlinear Text

ὁ	δὲ	εἶπεν	αὐτῷ	ἄνθρωπε	τίς	με	κατέστησεν
G3588	And	he said	unto him	Man	who	me	made
G1161	G2036	G846	G444	G5101	G3165	G2525	
δικαστὴν	ἢ	μεριστὴν	ἐφ'	ὑμᾶς			
a judge	or	a divider	over	you			
G1348	G2228	G3312	G1909	G5209			

Additional Cross-References

Romans 2:3 (Judgment): And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?

Romans 2:1 (Judgment): Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things.

Romans 9:20 (Creation): Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?

Exodus 2:14 (Judgment): And he said, Who made thee a prince and a judge over us? intendest thou to kill me, as thou killedst the Egyptian? And Moses feared, and said, Surely this thing is known.

John 6:15 (Parallel theme): When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone.

John 8:11 (Parallel theme): She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.

Luke 5:20 (Parallel theme): And when he saw their faith, he said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee.

Micah 6:8 (Parallel theme): He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

