

# Who is he?

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Preacher: Chris Fry

[0:00] Welcome to the evening service of Calvary Church Brighton on Sunday 17th May 2020.

! If you've come across this site or YouTube link for the first time,! I have a special welcome and here are links for further contact. My name is Chris Fry, I'm one of the elders of the church. Psalm 118 verses 8 and 9 says this, It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man. It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in princes. We're going to sing a version of this psalm. Give thanks to God for he is good.

Give thanks to God for he is good. The everlasting human. Let all his people praise the Lord, who's love endures forever. For his right hand has made me strong. I am his new creation. He is my God, my God, he is my soul, my strength and my salvation. We for those who've got every sight and made his fears surrounded.

To God, my God, my God, I quickly cried, and soon his help abounded. For God has earned my desperately, and seen my pain and sadness. He came to me and set me free in hearts of peace and gladness.

The old sin now in the Lord, the stone that was dedicated, Has now become the cornerstone that God has resurrected.

[2:34] The day is his, the first of days to celebrate with singing, Rejoice in God, and in embrace, the best of his chosen and spring. The Lord has made his light to shine on all our doubt, depression.

All east to west, believers join his victory procession. O save us, Lord, give us success, your gifts flow like a river. O bless us, Lord, whose name we bless, your love endures forever.

O bless us, Lord, whose name we bless, your love endures forever. Let us pray. Our Father, it is good for us to take this time to thank you for your immense and undeserved kindness to us.

In the psalm, we read, in my anguish, I cried to the Lord, and he answered by setting me free. We all know something of anguish, especially in these days, but you are the one who sets us free.

Whatever our circumstances, we find help and assurance in you. We have proved again and again that it is better for us to take refuge in you than to trust in anything or anyone else.

[4:19] So now we want to once again take refuge in you. We take refuge in you for the forgiveness of our sins. No one can forgive sin but God alone. And you always offer your forgiveness to us because your son Jesus died on the cross to pay the price for our sin.

We confess our sins to you now and ask your forgiveness. And we thank you. And we take refuge in you for the grace to live lives which honour you.

We do not have this strength to resist the devil, to avoid the deceitfulness and lies of the world and the waywardness of our own hearts. But you give us all that we need by the Holy Spirit.

So please do so once again. And we thank you. Now please help us in this time, this service time, to honour you by our hearts which are filled with gratitude for all that you are and all that you do.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

[5:38] When I fear my faith will fail Christ will hold me fast When the tempter would prevail He will hold me fast I could never keep my hope Through my fearful path For my love is often cold He was told me fast He will hold me fast He will hold me fast For my Savior loved me so

He will hold me fast Those He saves are His divine Christ will hold me fast Precious in His holy sight He will hold me fast He will not let my soul be lost His promises shall last For by Him at such a cost He will hold me fast He will hold me fast He will hold me fast For my Savior loved me so

He will hold me fast For my life be bread and I Christ will hold me fast justice has been determined  
He will not let my soul be lost Place with him to endless life He will hold me fast Till I've played this  
earnest night When he comes across He will hold me fast He will hold me fast For my Saviour loves  
me so

He will hold me fast He will hold me fast He will hold me fast For my Saviour loves me so He will  
hold me fast Our Father, we thank you that we can come to you as our Father and ask of you.  
We pray that your kingdom may come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. We pray  
that in spite of circumstances and perhaps because of them, your church will be strengthened,  
especially so in this city of Brighton.

[9:39] We pray for Christians who are struggling and overwhelmed at times  
with a sense of sadness and foreboding at this time, that you will hold  
them fast.

We pray that each of us, and by your resurrection power in our lives, may find that you increase our  
faith and fill us with your hope.

We pray for our Christian brothers and sisters who are under persecution and even facing death  
because they love you and will not deny you.

Please keep them strong and may their fortitude speak to those who are persecuting them. We pray  
for our witness, that you will give us, and we may take opportunity to speak for you by words and  
behaviour, that Jesus may be revealed to many.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Our Bible reading is taken from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter  
22, verses 15 to 22.

[10:53] Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his  
words.

They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. Teacher, they said, we know you are a  
man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth.

You are swayed by men because you pay no attention to who they are. Tell us then, what's your  
opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?

But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, you hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? Show me  
the coin used for paying the tax.

Caesar's, they brought him a denarius. And he asked them, whose portrait is this and whose  
inscription? Caesar's, they replied.

[11:58] Then he said to them, give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God  
what is God's. When they heard this, they were amazed.

So they left him and went away. Amen. Our Father, please help us as we come to this passage of  
your word.

That we may not just bring our own thoughts and interpretations, but be helped by your Holy Spirit  
to understand your truth and to be obedient to it.

We pray for those of all of us that we may both speak and hear your word rightly. And we pray this  
in Jesus' name.

Amen. We have a phrase in English which goes something like, he didn't know what had hit him. Or  
here's another, stunned into silence.

[12:58] Or another, lost for words. And these phrases seem very  
appropriate to the short story found in Matthew 22, but also near  
identically in the Gospels of Mark chapter 12 and Luke chapter 20.

The Gospel record often has words of Jesus that leave his audience silent in amazement or  
astonishment. He almost always has the last word, leaving his audience variously excited,  
enthralled or perplexed.

Who is this man? In John chapter 7 verse 46, the temple guards were given the task of arresting  
Jesus, but they came back empty-handed.

What's the problem? And their reply was, no one ever spoke the way this man does. And this is the  
outcome of this story.

In verse 22, when they heard this, they were amazed. This reaction was the right reaction.

[14:07] It isn't that the people were stupid or just baffled with clever  
oratory. No, Jesus encountered every kind of person with every kind of  
background. But whether they were farmers, fishermen, lawyers, religious

leaders, landowners, the Roman governor, I'm thinking the pilot, soldiers, well, the typical reaction was astonishment.

And it was an astonishment based on the authority with which Jesus always spoke. Never hesitant, never superficial, never faltering, just definite, truthful and strong.

And you look at this story and think, well, this is about taxes. But actually, whilst it has something to say about taxes, it has much more to say about Jesus, and in particular the question, who is he?

This was the question that the disciples asked when Jesus stilled the winds and the waves. By a word. Who is he that even the wind and waves obey him?

The words and actions of Jesus in the Gospel accounts are constantly opposing this question.

Some get it, but many don't. Today's passage is yet another incident, another opportunity for us to face the question of the identity of Jesus Christ.

[15:37] Who is he? Let's unpack this a bit more. Firstly, Jesus astonishes.

It's possible to read this story with the aim of getting some clarity on the interesting issue of what our attitude should be to civil authority, and in particular the payment of taxes.

It was a hot topic then, and it's always a hot topic. Well, this story certainly has something to say on the subject, but probably not as much as some people would like to make out.

There are other portions of God's word that offer more help on specifics. But we would be badly missing out if we could look at this story and just walk away at the end unastonished and unmoved.

The appropriate reaction is amazement, and if we stop being amazed at the words and behaviour of Jesus, we're probably not hearing him properly. But if, by God's help, we're hearing him properly, and that's what we prayed for at the beginning, we're in a place where we could admire his uniqueness and fall before him in adoration and worship.

[16:53] Let me draw attention to the testimony of the Lord Jesus as he describes what is happening when he speaks. And we find his words in John chapter 6, verse 63.

He says, The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. What an audacious and marvellous statement.

Whatever Jesus spoke was spirit and life. They nourish, they challenge, they strengthen spiritual life in us.

This is Jesus' testimony concerning everything he said. But we then also have the testimony of his own father. In Luke chapter 9, verse 35, the occasion is the transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain.

A voice came from the cloud saying, This is my son whom I have chosen. Listen to him. The father tells us to listen to the son.

[18:02] And that's exactly what we're able to do as we read Jesus' words in the Bible. Now, it may be a very long time since we've had such an instinctive, jolting, inevitable reaction to the words and behaviour of Jesus.

But maybe this is the moment. Maybe as you're listening to this message, this is the moment when perhaps for a very long time, or perhaps for the very first time, God by his spirit will cause you to be amazed at the words of Jesus.

Now, in order to put ourselves in the very best place, let's imagine the scene. Let's immerse ourselves in this scene.

And we can do this because the Gospel accounts are rich in details. A challenging question. It's the final week of the life of Jesus. There's been a triumphal entry into Jerusalem with an ecstatic but ill-considered response from the crowds.

But Jesus knows he's not come to the city of David to be crowned as a king, but to wear a crown of thorns. Just a few days left now until agony and death.

[19:24] With increasing venom and frustration, the religious authorities are seeking to destroy him, but Jesus is always one step ahead of them and he is in control of the agenda.

Every day now, he's in the temple courts, the very heart of Jewish history and longing and putting his own stamp, his authority, his interpretation on where that history and longing now stands.

Humanly speaking, the Jews are a broken, frustrated people under the yoke of Roman oppression. That's the daily news. But Jesus has far bigger things to talk about a note of judgment, a call to repentance, an urgent cry to get right with God.

The clock is ticking, but no one seems to be aware. The only clear-eyed person is Jesus. In these days of COVID-19, what words would Jesus speak to this nation?

If he was given a platform in the Houses of Parliament or St Paul's Cathedral or a Zoom meeting with the nation, it's a fair question and these gospel stories give us a big clue.

[20:40] But it isn't a hypothetical question. Whilst Jesus is in heaven, his disciples need to speak on his behalf and with his authority and as we are scattered all over the world, we need to speak in the very places where in God's providence, God has placed us.

The Pharisees always ringleaders in the matter are finding their authority and credibility constantly undermined by the searing words of Jesus, exposing their worldliness, self-seeking and hypocrisy. Anniance has turned to anger and anger to plotting as to how to silence the upstart religious leader. So here in chapter 22 and verse 15, stung by Jesus, not so subtle words in the parable of the wedding banquet, the Pharisees hatch yet another plot to trap Jesus by forcing him to say things which will incriminate him.

It's a clever plan, but it needs the support of the Herodians. The Herodians are the cheerleaders for Herod Antipas, one of four puppet rulers under the Romans.

Basically unloved, proud and willful, he rules by force and patronage and the Herodians are the beneficiaries, no doubt, by backhanders and general cronyism.

[22:10] They're propping up the Roman occupation. The Pharisees have to hold their noses even to think of talking with the Herodians, but seem to get over this if they can make common cause to silence Jesus, who seems like a threat to both parties.

If your enemy is my enemy, I'm your friend. So here's the plan. To get Jesus to address a hot and contentious topic and come down on one side or the other.

The issue of taxation was an endless source of argument and disagreement. Here's the situation. The Romans are an occupying and Gentile force who govern by intimidation and power and they tax the occupied people.

Is it right for the Jews to pay those taxes? Popular feeling amongst the people quietly stirred by the religious authorities would say no. But to say no is to rebel against the Romans.

So what will Jesus say when given the question is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not? If he says yes it is right, he will be flying in the face of popular opinion and any support he might have had with the people will drain away.

[23:33] He'll be regarded as a collaborator no better than the despised sold out tax collectors lumped together with sinners. But if he says no this will be reported to the Roman authorities and he'll be regarded by them as a rebel and a traitor.

Roman justice will be very swift and final. Either way Jesus will be finished. This is the set up the plot that the Pharisees and Herodians hatch to be rid of Jesus.

But their brazen dishonesty in the matter is revealed by their honeyed flattering words. Verse 16 Teacher they said We know you're a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth.

You aren't swayed by men because you pay no attention to who they are. I think this is probably the very first time in the Gospel record where an attempt at flattery is made by the religious authorities. But here it is they're that desperate. Oh we'd love to hear what you think because there's no one like you with such honesty and grasp of the truth.

[24:51] In fact we'd hardly know where else to go to get an answer to this question and that's a real problem for us. You can help us here and we're especially pleased because we know that you're not in the pay of any faction you're your own man.

Well actually and rather amazingly what they said was totally true but they didn't mean a word of it. Their words coming from the lips or by proxy from the lips of those who had recently accused Jesus of having a demon and driving out demons by the prince of demons.

But they press on verse 17 Tell us then what's your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Jesus will have none of it.

The biggest issue here is not the question but the hearts of those who ask the question. Verse 18 You hypocrites why are you trying to trap me?

Come clean. Jesus reserved his strongest words of condemnation for those who pretended to be one thing but were actually another.

[26:08] play actors hypocrites. May God help us to be honest before him. Nothing is hidden from the sight of him with whom we have to do.

God sees our hearts. Everything said or done in secret will one day be revealed. If you want to have dealings with Jesus Christ come in sincerity with an honest heart.

But still they've come with a question and there is a question. The stakes of this discussion are made even higher by the conversation being held in the temple courts.

This was really good news for the Pharisees. This was a vast area thronged with Jews during their duty as Jews a place rich with symbolism and significance a statement that the Jews did not and never would belong to Rome but to the one true living God who had firmly covenanted to be on the side of his people.

Well that suits the Pharisee elements of Jesus' questioners very well. Add to that the particular tax that is going to be discussed.

[27:33] Verse 19 Show me the coin used for paying the tax. Please notice the definite article. Show me the coin used for paying the tax.

Now there were plenty of coins and there were plenty of taxes. taxes. There were plenty of taxes both levied by the religious authorities for temple purposes and secular taxes levied by the Romans through their tax collectors.

Tax collectors like Levi known to us as Matthew the author of this gospel. And Matthew would have been very aware of the tax that was being referred to here because he would have found this to be the most contentious tax to collect.

It was a poll tax. That is a tax that every male person between the ages of 14 and 45 was obliged to pay at a standard rate regardless of circumstances.

In Latin this was the tributum capitis the tribute tax. this would have been the hidden agenda behind the census of the entire Roman world that Caesar Augustus had instigated at the time of Jesus' birth that caused Mary and Joseph to take the journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem to register.

[29:03] It wasn't that Caesar Augustus was that much interested to know just how many people there were in his empire. There were other motives behind the call, the disruption of this registering process.

They didn't pay a tax then but they did register and it was this register that enabled a person or poll tax to be introduced. Have you paid this tax?

That's a question Matthew would have asked when he was a tax collector. Well let's look at the register. Here you are. You haven't paid. Not only was this tax regarded as unfair in that it took no account of people's circumstances and like incidentally the religious taxes dating back to the early days of Israel but it was ring fenced for the support of the occupying Roman army.

The people were being charged to pay the wages of soldiers. They were charged to be oppressed. And to demonstrate its distinctiveness rubbing salt into the wound a particular coin was authorised by Caesar to be minted in order to pay this tax.

Verse 19 show me the coin used for paying the tax. They brought him a denarius. This was the coin. It was a silver coin known as a denarius and it was worth a day's wages for a Roman soldier.

[30:41] And here's a picture showing both sides of this coin. And you can even get one of these today although it will cost you about £150 and it won't be much use in Sainsbury's let alone paying your taxes.

Jesus had undoubtedly seen one of these before and he and his disciples would each have been obliged to make the poll tax payment with this coin. But he doesn't search in his own pocket or ask the disciples.

He gets his hypocritical questioners to get one. One can imagine an awkward pause in proceedings when the Pharisees not wanting to declare their hand as it were probably went into the crowd to get or borrow a denarius.

It would have been particularly embarrassing for them with their quiet agenda of don't pay taxes and especially not the poll tax to be found with the very means of payment in their own pockets. The coin is given to Jesus and one can imagine him having the coin in the palm of his hand and tossing it turning it whilst he asks the question in verse 20 whose portrait is this and whose inscription?

[32:06] Not a tough question. The portraits and there are two of them one each on both sides they're a bit crude and the writing is in Latin but everyone knew the answer to that question and at this point there's probably a bit of hesitancy on the part of the questioners where's this brief discussion heading?

We seem to have lost the initiative and they had. What a blessing when Jesus takes the initiative in our lives.

We think we're in control and then Jesus appears to take the steering wheel he's in charge spirit and life. Pray that God would take the initiative in your life.

This can only be for your good. Well there's only one possible answer and whilst it might stick in their throats verse 21 Caesar's they replied.

Now where does the discussion go from here? A God centred response. Reluctantly the questioners give the answer and this is a platform upon which Jesus will make a decisive discussion closing statement.

[33:40] Verse 21 Then he said to them, Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's. They're probably still looking at this single coin with the unmistakable portrait of Caesar.

But there's something more that Jesus hasn't raised but they're all well aware of. It's the inscriptions on the face and the rear of the coin. Assuming the coins have been issued during the reign of the emperor or Caesar Tiberius the step son of the emperor Caesar Augustus this is what the inscriptions say.

On the face the inscription reads highest priest in Latin Tiberius Caesar Augustus son of the divine Augustus son of the divine Augustus and on the rear there is a picture of someone seated on a throne and the inscription reads highest priest yes that's right son of the divine and highest priest that's what Caesar was calling himself Jesus is turning and tossing this coin reading along with the others the blasphemous usurping words asked he himself is the true son of the divine and the true highest priest does anyone realize this Jesus does and by grace we do and it's an astonishing thought that at this moment

Jesus comes face to face as it were with the most powerful man in the world knowing that one day he will judge this man just as he will judge all that one day Tiberius Caesar will bow the knee before Jesus just as everyone else will that one day all things shall be put up beneath the feet of Jesus and he will rightly and unarguably have the titles king of kings and lord of lords and the majesty and magnificence of that will not be containable on a silver coin but will need a new heaven and a new earth and an awesomely renewed creation and he will reign over all unopposed and in righteousness and forever but back to the here and now and Jesus looks at his questioners yes the ones who will no doubt in two or three days time be in obeying crowd asking for

Jesus blood the immediate issue facing Jesus is death upon a cross a physically and spiritually dreadful death he needs to tread that path because unlike the Caesars that's the sort of king he is he's a servant king but there is coming another day when in his exalted glory the risen lord Jesus Christ will be questioning his questioners and even questioning Caesar Tiberius and indeed all earthly rulers over all time and questioning us he says give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what his gods and that's it nothing else is said the very brief dialogue is finished the questioners are amazed and leave

[37:31] Luke says they became silent suggesting they'd been noisy before but now there are no more words in the busy clamouring temple courts there is a little pool of silence as the powerful words of Jesus the son of God have been spoken and mouths have been stopped the apparently perfect plot to trap Jesus has been foiled by a few authoritative words of Jesus they thought they had a perfect plan that he'd be bound to say something that would destroy him but they completely misunderstood the person they were talking to Jesus astonishes his enemies are silenced but

what of these words the meaning of these words people in every century have wrestled with these words on the face of it there is the perfect answer for the

Pharisees give to God what is God's and the perfect answer for the Herodians give to Caesar what is Caesar's but there's no apportioning there's no detail of working out what this might mean because that's not the point this isn't about mathematics percentages or a diarized plan for our lives what we can surely say because other portions of God's word teaches us this is that we are to honour earthly kings 1 Peter 2 17 and recognise that the powers that be are ordained of God Romans 13 and that we have a duty towards them but we're not living in a compartmentalised world where God has some calls upon us mainly on Sundays and the other spiritual moments of life and another authority as another part of us and the two are disconnected no God rightly requires 100% of us everything that we are is to be given to him but under and within that authority we do have responsibilities and duties yes to pay taxes because that matters it matters to God because that's the way he's ordained things but it's much more than taxes that just happens to be the subject of this one-off discussion it's about much more it's about obeying the law it's about being the husbands and wives that

God wants us to be it's about having children that obey parents and parents that bring up children in a God honouring way employers or line managers who need to care for their staff and employees who need to do their best in the workplace it's about neighbours who look out for others and you could add to that list this is all under God's authority and without dispute accepting with any authority demands things of us that are directly contrary to the revealed will of God 1 Corinthians 10 verse 31 is all encompassing so whether you eat or drink or whatever you do do it all for the glory of God that's the filter and the calling active lives with everything given over as a daily offering to God it's rather wonderful that God should be so concerned and intimately involved with the whole of life including the vexed subject of taxation salvation we can offer all of this to and for the glory of God and that's the way God wants it and here's a question are there any areas of life that you're not allowing God into a little gated community of issues which say no entry to God I'll sort these things out myself without reference to God while you're standing in rebellion against God at this point you're deciding who's going to be in charge of a part of your life and God will never have that he requires the whole of you and the whole of your life but what a joyful and joyous thing it is to be in that position without doubt without ambiguity to be saying willingly I submit to you I give all of myself to you so confess repent and we all need to do that and welcome him without debate as Lord there is a time coming when every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord but do not wait for that day of judgment and find yourself on the wrong side of the judge this is the time to submit to him to give over your all and acknowledge him Lord of all we're going to sing a great hymn of acclamation crown him with many crowns crown him with many crowns the lamb upon his throne crown him the song of all music but it's home awake my soul and sing of him who died to be your saviour and your majest king through all eternity crown him the son of god before the words began let all who tread where he has trod crown him the son of man who every [44:19] Greek has known by which we are oppressed and takes and bears them for his own that all in him may rest crown him lord of life triumphant from the grave who rose victorious from the strife for those he claimed to say his glory is now we sing who died the rose on high who died eternal life to bring and lives and death may die crown him the lord of love behold his hands and side those wounds yet lives all above in beauty glorified no angel in the sky can fully bear that sight but down the pence his burning heart that mystery is so bright crown him the lord of peace that grace fill every land from pole to pole that warfare cease his kingdom is at hand forever he shall reign and earthly princess fall before his throne the land once slain the sovereign lord of all crown him the lord of years the potent date of time creator of the rolling sleeves in majesty sublime all hail redeemer hail for you have died for me your praise shall never never fit through all eternity our father we thank you for your word we thank you for speaking to us again we thank you for revealing the lord jesus christ to us how we need to know him how we need to understand him his glorious uniqueness his wonder his majesty his

worthiness of praise and adoration and we ask our father we do ask that he should be lord of our lives the whole of our lives please grant us that grace that willingness that readiness to submit to him and crown him lord of all amen and

Thank you.