

# Will you Honour the Son?

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let's pray and we'll look at this passage together. Father we do thank you for your words and we thank you for the way that it shows us Jesus and who he is.

As we look at it together this morning Heavenly Father would you help us to know more of Jesus to not just recognize him but truly honor him as he deserves in Jesus name. Amen.

I don't know about you but I met a new bunch of people recently who are very intrigued by Jesus. Some of them have been coming along to lunch with God on a Wednesday at St Paul's for soup and a bit of a talk from John's Gospel and conversation.

If you've got friends who are thinking about Jesus that might be a good place to bring them if you can do that on a lunchtime. Others have contacted the church through emails or through Facebook and they've got these questions they want to know more about Jesus.

And occasionally I meet people on the golf course who when I'm playing golf and they say so what do you do? I say I'm a vicar. Ah. And about four holes go by until they're ready to talk and they're intrigued about Jesus.

[ 1 : 10 ] They may not trust the church or organized religion but they're intrigued about Jesus. And that's not really surprising is it? He is almost certainly the most famous man in human history.

And even those who deny the claims that we're going to look at today don't deny the impact that the teachings of Jesus and the work of Christians have had on the Western world.

But being interested in Jesus is a very different thing to believing what the Bible says about him.

People can know he existed and be intrigued about that but not look at the Bible and say oh well we can believe it.

And even those who believe it and say okay well what we have is a fairly reliable record here. It's another big step isn't it to say well that therefore he is who he claimed to be.

And even if we think he is who he claimed to be there's a step further on where we say okay he is who he claimed to be and now I'm going to follow him.

[ 2 : 12 ] I'm going to commit myself to being a disciple of Christ. Don't know where you are on that spectrum today but we will all be somewhere. An interested observer.

You wouldn't be in church otherwise. Someone who believes the history. Someone who believes something more about Jesus. And I guess many of you today are committed disciples.

But we'll all be somewhere there. And when we look at passages like this it kind of brings those questions front and centre. And it faces us with the ultimate question. What will we do with Jesus?

Will we honour him as he deserves? Will we as Ella reminded us in her prayers remind ourselves that he is our king our lord? And will we live that out in humble fruitful obedience?

Before we make that step of course we've got to work out whether Jesus truly is worthy of our honouring. See lots of people come along claiming to be someone. The Apprentice is absolutely full of them if you're a fan of that series.

[ 3 : 16 ] Social media channels are packed with them. And lots of people claim to be someone great. Someone worth listening to. Someone worth following in all those different senses of the world. What about Jesus?

Well he made some huge claims didn't he? And as he walked into the temple on that Tuesday morning of the first Holy Week. It was just three days after he had made a more dramatic entrance into the city of Jerusalem.

Welcomed in by huge crowds waving palm branches, singing songs of deliverance and salvation.

The day after that he had come into the temple courts, overturned all the tables of the money changers, the people selling the animals for sacrifices.

Because his father's house, that's a big claim, his father's house should be a house of prayer and not a den of thieves. And of course all of this came on the back of three and a half years of preaching and teaching across the country.

Those miraculous healings, delivering people from evil spirits, feeding vast crowds, raising the dead, calming storms and claiming to do what only God can do and that's to forgive sins.

[ 4 : 29 ] It's pretty clear who Jesus' words and actions showed him to be. But despite those many Old Testament prophecies that pointed to his coming, acknowledging that Jesus was this long-promised Messiah, that he was the son of David, that he was God in human flesh, well that was a huge step to take, especially for those involved in the leadership of the Jewish people.

See for them the implications were just too grand to contemplate. Far better they thought to spend some time checking this man out again, poking some holes in his story, doing everything they could to discredit Jesus and remove him from the sea.

That's what this posse of people who approach Jesus in verses 27 to 33 are trying to do. Mark mentions three groups, doesn't he? The chief priest, the teachers of the law and the elders.

They together make up the Sanhedrin, the ruling body over Jewish people. It's a mixture of clergy, of lawyers and of senior leaders in the various clans. And all of them have got a vested interest in maintaining the status quo.

Because if someone else comes in with greater authority, then their authority is going to be diminished. Things are going to change. So that's why they come to Jesus with this demand. Jesus, you're making these claims.

[ 5 : 50 ] Now show us your credentials. Show us who you are. By what authority are you doing these things? Verse 28. Who gave you this authority? You notice that Jesus doesn't give them a straight answer.

As he does seven other times in Mark's Gospel. There's some homework for you later. Go and find them. Seven other times in Mark's Gospel. Jesus answers a question with a question. Why does he do that?

Well, I think he does it for two reasons. Firstly, because Jesus never completely trusts or reveals himself to those who are likely to reject him. He knows what kind of reaction he's going to get if he suddenly says yes.

God above is my father. I am his son. He knows they're not going to believe him. He knows it's going to elicit a violent reaction.

And he knows that the evidence is out there for who he is already. So he doesn't give them an opportunity for a strong reaction against him. Now Jesus doesn't hide his miracles away.

[ 6 : 55 ] He doesn't teach in private. But he reveals himself selectly. And sometimes gradually to those who will come to believe in him.

His disciples. Strangely to people like the woman at the well. But he is very careful with his words with those who oppose him. Secondly, Jesus often asks questions of his questioners to show that their questions are not really honest.

To reveal their hypocrisy. And that's true here, isn't it? Jesus is asked where his authority came from. And he says, well, I've got a question for you. What about John's authority? Where does that come from?

Give me that answer and I'll tell you. See, the question is, what about John the Baptist's ministry? Was his ministry for heaven? Was he a self-deluded false prophet?

And the hypocrisy of the questioners in this occasion is shown up very quickly, isn't it? Because they quickly work out that they cannot give a straightforward answer without damaging their position. Verse 31.

[ 8 : 02 ] If we say from heaven, he will say, so why didn't you believe him? And if we say it's of human origin, the crowd are going to lynch us. They know they can't win.

Admitting that John the Baptist was a God-sent prophet got them into really deep water. Because John had criticised them. And called them to repent of their wickedness and hypocrisy.

But remember, John had also pointed to Jesus. And said, here he is, the one who, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. They couldn't accept John's testimony without also accepting who John said Jesus was.

At the same time, if they denied John's divine appointment, they would face the wrath of the crowds. Either way, they were in trouble. So it wasn't that they couldn't answer.

It's that they wouldn't answer. The truth was staring them in the face. But they wouldn't answer. And so rightly, faced with people who, despite the vast amounts of evidence, wouldn't hear and would not believe what he had to say, Jesus refused to answer their question.

[ 9 : 11 ] What was the point? There was no point. It wouldn't make any difference. And as if to rubber stamp what was going on in their hearts, Jesus then goes on to tell them a parable in which they have a starring role.

The image is one that God's people would have been, that as God's people, they would have been very used to. The Old Testament has a number of prophets who have this idea of God's people as a vine or vineyard.

And it's a similar kind of idea to the fig trees that we looked at last week. And if you think back to the way God treated his Old Testament people, well, some of the images in the start of this parable all fit into place, don't they?

God is the owner of the vineyard as he was the Lord of his people. And just as the vineyard owner had prepared a beautiful vineyard for his tenants, made everything right for them, so God had done that with his Old Testament people too.

He had rescued them from slavery in Egypt. He had cleared the land of those ungodly, idolatrous tribes. He had planted them in the Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

[ 10 : 21 ] He gave them a perfect place to live as his people under his rule. The Old Testament describes God as being a wall of protection around his people.

He blesses them with his law so they would know the right way to live. He sends them judges and kings and prophets to lead them in his ways. And then through Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, through Moses and prophets, through kings like David, God revealed himself to his people, gave them his words, gave them great promises.

And astonishing, most astonishing of all, he made his home amongst them. What an amazing privilege they had. And yet the history of God's Old Testament people was one almost entirely of rebellion.

Of constantly rejecting God's word, of ignoring his ways, of behaving like the other nations around them. To bring you back to the parable, they acted like the tenants do.

As if the land belonged to them. The vineyard belonged to them. And the owner of the vineyard, God himself, well he was too far away to worry about. They could live as they wanted.

[ 11 : 35 ] That's what the tenants do. As time goes by, it seems that they began to feel as if the vineyard belonged to them. That all the crops and all the fruit belonged to them. So when the servants of the owner come along to collect the rent, it's probably on a crop share agreement.

Here is this vineyard. You run it. You look after it. And I will come and take a share of the wine, of the grapes. But when the servant comes along saying, you need to give the rent now.

You need to pay what's due. What your rental agreement says. What do they do? They beat him up and send him packing. No, no, no, no. We're not giving any of this away. Incredibly, just as the Lord showed incredible patience with his Old Testament people, so the vineyard owner shows amazing patience with his tenants.

Because he could have evicted them at that moment, couldn't he? You haven't paid the rent.

You've beaten up my servant. Out you go. But instead, he sends other servants. Mark says, some they beat up, some they killed.

None of them got the respect they deserve. None of them went home with the rightful rent belonging to the owner. The writer of Hebrews chapter 11 makes a grand point about how God's Old Testament people treated the prophets through the centuries.

[ 12 : 51 ] Some faced jeers and flogging, even chains and imprisonment. They were put to death by stoning. They were sawn into. They were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins, goatskins, destitute, persecuted, ill-treated.

See, in this parable, Jesus is simply mirroring what God's Old Testament people had done to his servants, the prophets.

But the owner of the vineyard is not done. Such is his patience, and it is amazing patience. Such was his love, verse 6, that he decides to send his son saying they will respect him.

Now, in what comes next, Jesus isn't looking back to Old Testament history, of course. He's looking forward to what will happen at the end of that very week.

Verse 7, the tenants said to one another, this is the heir. Come, let's kill him. The inheritance will be ours. So they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard.

[13:57] It's interesting here, isn't it, thinking about those parallels between the parable and real life events. The tenants in the parable knew who this final messenger was.

They knew he was the son, but they weren't going to treat him like that. And the Jewish leadership were doing exactly the same. They may not have joined all the dots together.

They may have had doubts or questions, but they knew who Jesus was claiming to be. And they saw the evidence that was laid out in front of them over the last three and a half years.

And yet, knowing that Jesus had spoken this parable against them, verse 12, they don't fall on their knees in repentance. They look for a way to arrest him and shut him up.

So it's not that the Jewish leadership couldn't see who Jesus was. It was that they didn't want to see who he was. They wouldn't see who he was.

[14:55] They couldn't handle the truth nor the consequences of that truth. They would not honour God's son in a way he deserved. And that, it turns out, is a very dangerous position to take.

See, as the parable explains, we cannot dishonour God or his son and get away with it forever. God is patient and long-suffering, incredibly so. He loves lost sinners.

He doesn't want any to perish, but all to come to repentance. That's how God behaved towards his Old Testament people. That's how he behaves towards us today as well.

God is patient. He wants to save. He wants to forgive. That is the whole reason Jesus came. But there comes a time when that door of opportunity to receive that forgiveness, to honour the son as we should, comes to a close.

It comes to a point when judgment falls. And here it's there in verse 9. What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.

[15:59] As tenants, they were supposed to pay the rightful rent. And so God's people were supposed to honour the Lord with their obedience and worship, thankfulness and praise.

And when the fruit of that wasn't forthcoming, when all attempts at reconciliation had failed, God, their ultimate landlord, acted. And brings a swift but absolutely fair judgment down on their heads. See, no one would have batted an eyelid, would they, if a landlord had behaved like this towards his tenants. Of course they wouldn't. In fact, people would have been amazed that they'd let it go on so long. But this isn't just a story about tenants in the vineyard.

It's a powerful parable aimed at the Jewish leadership. By rejecting Jesus, they were rejecting the Lord. They were rejecting the Lord's cornerstone. And as a result, God would reject them.

But his cornerstone, his son, would be glorified. That's where we get to verse 10 and 11. And those verses from Psalm 118, the stone the builders have rejected has become the cornerstone.

[17:13] The Lord has done this and it is marvellous in our eyes. Interestingly, those words were originally in a song for God's people to sing about the way that he had lifted them up from the oppression of other nations.

Nations that were rejecting God. And now God's people were doing the same to him. But God's son had come.

And he would be the key cornerstone. And God's own people would face his judgment. See, they were loving God's things. They loved the land.

They loved his blessing. They loved his protection. They didn't love him. They didn't want his rule. They didn't want his king. But God's plans, wonderfully, cannot be derailed.

When Jesus talks about giving the vineyards to others, he's speaking about God's kingdom being thrown open wide to people from all nations and backgrounds to come in. No wonder the Jewish leaders took offence.

[18:26] This was the end of all they held dear. Their positions of power, their temple worship, their privilege. But these were the consequences of failing to honour the king, failing to honour the son.

It's a really stinging parable. It was obvious to those listening what Jesus' parable meant for them.

They knew what Jesus was saying. But what about us? Here we are those 2,000 years later, a long way from the temple in Jerusalem and those ancient practices.

What does it mean for us? Well, I'm going to give you three challenges. Let me give you an encouragement first. This parable reminds us again of the authority and power and majesty and glory of Jesus.

He is the son. He is the son of the great father. He is the one who is worthy. He is the ancient of days. He is the cornerstone.

[ 19 : 28 ] He is the light of the world. When we come to him, we are not being foolish. We're seeing things as they are. We're coming and bowing before the one who is ultimately worthy.

The world may tell us something else, but when we look at who Jesus is, that's what we see. He truly is worthy. Let's remember that. So three challenges then.

One for us as a body, and then two for us as individuals today. Here's the corporate one. Are we a parish? Are we a church? A church that truly honors the son.

It's very easy to be a casual observer, to look at the vineyard and what the tenants were doing and think that everything was fine. See, they were producing grapes. They were making wine.

Everything looked smart and tidy. It was great, except they weren't playing their role. They were ignoring the landlords. It was all going on for the good of the people, not for the glory of God.

[ 20 : 34 ] And church, with all its busyness, can get like that as well. We can turn up on Sundays thinking, oh, I'm coming to church, it's good for me. Well, it may be, but our purpose is to gather and to worship God.

Sometimes we can volunteer for rotas, because actually we want good coffee and we want the church to be clean. So we're going to do our bit because I don't want to come and meet in a dirty church where there isn't any coffee afterwards.

But actually our motivation should be different from that, shouldn't it? That we're part of a family that we want to love and serve because we worship a God who loves and serves us. It's very easy to be a church where God and his glory is pushed to the side.

It's a question about our motives. So are we as a church family honouring the son or is all the talk of God and his kingdom, all the songs about Jesus, just a nice religious window dressing?

That's our corporate challenge. What about for us on our own? Firstly, for those of us who are followers of Jesus, here's a challenge for us here.

[ 21 : 44 ] See, if our lives are the vineyard, if our gifts, our talents, the opportunities, or the wall, the towers, the wine press, to what extent are we truly using them, living for the glory of the vineyard owner?

To what extent are we acknowledging him in all things, serving him, working for him, bearing fruit for him? To what extent are our efforts and energies spent on the glory of God or doing things for ourselves?

That's a hard question to wrestle with. It's one I have to wrestle with as well. Very easy when you're the person up the front leading the church to think, well, if the church grows, that's going to be really good for my reputation.

Wouldn't it be good for my CV? Wouldn't it be great if I got invited to talk at some of those church growth conferences? That'd be marvellous. Am I leading the church for my glory and renown or is it for the glory of God, seeking to be obedient to him in all things?

So how do we spend our time? What do we daydream about? What are our ambitions for ourselves and our children? Is God and his glory front and centre on those? That question will tell us what kind of tenant we are.

[ 23 : 01 ] And for those of us, and I'm sure there will be some this morning who haven't maybe made our minds up about Jesus yet, can I ask you this? What are you waiting for?

What are you waiting for? God has revealed his glory in creation. He has revealed his glory through Jesus. He has given us his word, the Bible, and everything we need to know about salvation and how to live in God's word is there.

What are you waiting for? So the question for you today is, is your reluctance to say, yes, I want to follow Jesus, is that reluctance really more of a won't or a can't?

It's right to count the cost and to think things through, absolutely. Jesus encourages that. But there comes a point when our refusal to bow the knee before him isn't a can't, but it's a won't.

Where are you on that today? For the Jewish leaders then, for many people today, it is a matter of won't. The cost seems too high, the embarrassment factor too great, the pull of the world too strong.

[ 24 : 10 ] Life is just too busy. But the thing is, the longer we stay away, the harder it gets to come in. And one day, that time and opportunity will run out as it did for the tenants in the vineyard.

Yet today, the Lord of the vineyard invites you to come and honour the son by giving yourself to him. And in return, he doesn't treat you any longer as a tenant, but as a son, a precious child of

God.

And as he wraps you in his arms and brings you to himself, we have those glorious promises of life in all its fullness, of peace like a river, of hope that never runs out, freedom from the past, a purpose in the present, and such a glorious hope for the future that whatever consequences we might face in this life, the cost is insignificant in comparison.

And all this is on offer, of course, because the Lord of the vineyard loved us so much that he sent his son, whom he loved. And although he was rejected, despised, crucified, by his death, our rejection is pardoned, our sins are washed clean, and we can be brought into his family.

Will we come to him? Will we honour the son? May we do that. and know his joy and his love in greater measure.

[ 25 : 45 ] Amen. Amen.