Will you honour the Son?

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[0:00] Heavenly Father, we ask that you would come and open this reading to us this morning, that we might know its truth and its wisdom, and that we might be able to implement it in our! In Jesus name, Amen.

So we want to go back to that chapter in Mark, we're looking at Mark 11, the end of it, and the beginning of chapter 12. Those two things link together, Jesus' authority being questioned, and then his response to that, authority being questioned, teaching a parable and how people might understand it.
So where are we in the story? Well, we're on about a Tuesday, we think, in Holy Week. Jesus has turned the tables in the temple, he's made a mess, he's made a scene, he is on his way to be crucified.
Now the important thing to remember about all of this is that Jesus has the knowledge and the plans, he knows what's going to happen. If you think back to earlier in our readings of Mark, you will remember that Jesus tells his disciples, this is what's going to happen to me. And we've got to the stage in Mark's Gospel where Jesus is no longer hiding and saying, don't tell anybody, he's starting to become a little bit more confrontational. And this is the beginning of that confrontation. So Jesus turns over the tables and things are going on, and then we hear that he arrives in Jerusalem and the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders came to him and said, by what authority are you doing these things? And his response is a very Jesus response.
Often in the Gospels, Jesus likes to respond to a question with a question. And the question he responds here, he says, and basically makes a deal with them, if you answer my question, I'll answer yours. And his question is about John and his baptism. And he puts them in a hard place. [2:08] He puts them in a place where either they have to admit that John, and then by default, Jesus, who John was talking about, is of God, or they have to risk the wrath of the people. And all of that doesn't look good to them. And so they say, we don't know. And Jesus says, well, neither will I tell you by what authority I'm doing these things. And instead, he tells our parable. And I think this question about authority is really challenging, because we quite like to stand here in our own being and say that we're good people, because we turn up to things and we do things and we're here on a Sunday morning. I don't have a problem with authority. But I bet if I probed a little bit deeper, some of you might have some challenges. If you're a car driver, I reckon that more than one of you in the congregation today has travelled faster than the speed limit, because you had somewhere to go.

I'm not getting people with their hands up. Collect names for later. Equally, some of you will have a problem with following normal directions, like if you could just make your way down the centre of an aisle. I see people going anywhere else but the centre of an aisle. If I suggested that people come down the centre and go back around, people go, oh no, I'm going to go straight back to my seat through all the people. All of those things happen because we innately have a problem with authority. And we have from the right from our young days.
I am bringing up three children. And that word, no, has been a constant source of contention from the beginning of their life right until now. So let's all agree, shall we, together, corporately, that we all to some level have a problem with authority. And that problem continues in our relationship with God. We're going to look today at how that authority affects our relation, how our reaction to authority affects our relationship to God. And we're going to use the parable of the tenants as the vehicle for that. And in many ways, what we're going to do is we're going to use this parable as a mirror. And we're going to look into the parable and ask ourselves the question, where am I in this? Because I think it's really easy to look back 2,000 years and say that those Pharisees, those teachers of the law, those chief priests, if I was there, I would have sorted it out. If I was there, it wouldn't have been a problem. If I was there, I would have recognized who Jesus was and we

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would have nailed this 2,000 years ago. My belief is probably we're not like that.
So let's have a look at this parable. Chapters 12 starts like this. Jesus then began to speak to them in parables. A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it. He dug a pit for the wine press and built a watchtower. Basically, that beginning, the allegory there, the beginning is, and God, the creator of the wine field, created all the things that you needed to be successful.
He created the earth. He made it safe and secure. He allowed it to be flourishing and have good commerce by building a wine press. And he made sure it was protected by a watchtower. In many ways, that's creation. God gives us on this earth everything we need. You have everything you need to be fruitful in this place. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. Notice there, he didn't give the vineyard to some people. They didn't purchase it from him. He rented it. There was a deal done. You will look after this place. You will have use of it. But I want something back from that. I want there's a deal. There's a relationship that is going here that will be ongoing relationship.
[6:52] And so then at half his time, he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. Now, if there were being good tenants, so we recognize that you've given us a great vineyard with the walls and the tower and the wine press and everything we need. And we're going to give you some of the fruit back because that's the deal we had.

That would be what we would expect, wouldn't we, if there was a good relationship. But they don't do that. But they seized him, beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Then he sent another servant to them.
They struck this man on the head and treated him shamefully. He sent another and that one they killed. He sent many others. Some of them they beat and others they killed.
Now, in our story, the religious leaders are the tenants. But I think as we view what's going on in this and put a mirror to us, we might be considering ourselves now, where am I in this tenant story? Those people that the owner or God sent, they to us are the prophets. We heard some of Habakkuk's reading earlier. God consistently and persistently sent prophets and consistently and persistently they were treated badly. It's hard to find a prophet in the Old Testament that was treated nicely.
[8:14] It's hard to find one that they said, yeah, we're really joyous of your coming and telling us that we're sinful. Most of them, they treated badly. And here, Jesus is reminding the chief priests and the Pharisees and that, you have been sent people by God.

And you have done this. You tell the stories in the synagogue week by week, Sabbath by Sabbath. You get the scrolls out and you read the stories, but you do nothing.
So then, the agreement breaks down. They don't follow the agreement. And instead, they treat the vineyard as if it's theirs and it's theirs only.
And nobody gets to have any words against them or tell them what to do. So they stop acting like tenants. This is the crisis that we enter into.
And start acting like the owners. They treat the servants or the prophets with violence because they represent the owner's claim. We're not like that, are we? In our lives, we don't behave in that way, do we?
[9:26] We don't just acknowledge God as Lord on a Sunday and then Monday to Saturday behave in a different way. We don't come to church on a Sunday and just think, well, that's my thing.

And then on Monday, we send the servant away regarding our money, our relationships, our time. We don't do that, do we? As we hold that mirror of this parable up to us.
When we refuse to give God the fruit of our obedience, we are silently claiming, this life is mine, not yours.
This life is mine, not yours. This world is mine, not yours. The choice of how I use my money is mine, not yours. The choice of how I use my time is mine, not yours.
The choice of how I treat other people is mine, not yours. That's the call that's going on here. And so then, the vineyard owner does the only thing he can think that will possibly work.
[10:35] We see that in verse 6, he had one left to send a son whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, they'll respect my son.

It seems so sensible, doesn't it? And Jesus is saying, I am here in front of you, the son of God. Surely, surely you'll respect me.

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Surely you'll do that. Surely you will make the changes that you need. However, then comes some shocking logic. In verse 7, the tenants say this.
But the tenants said to one another, this is their, the heir, come, let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours. Notice it's a corporate thing. It's a decision by all of the tenants.
Wasn't a tenant said to himself, this is an I can. So when we're thinking about how we behave, this is a corporate thing. We all have a choice in this.
[11:42] We can be either for the vineyard owner, or against the vineyard owner, or at the very least, silent in apathy about doing anything in any way, either for or against.

We're just going to sit there and watch it all play out in front of us. But the tenants weren't confused about who this person was.
There's no mistaken identity here. They didn't accidentally kill the son. Their words show that they knew who he was. The Pharisees knew who Jesus was.
They knew what he was doing. They weren't uncertain about John. We know that through the previous question. They understood that it wasn't like, oh, we don't believe that John was. They knew where he was.
And so they knew who Jesus was. But they believed that if they eliminated the heir, they could claim squatters' rights. They wanted the vineyard, the world, the earth, without the landlord.
[12:44] Like I said, it's easy to judge the Pharisees here. But this is a story about the fall in Genesis, where you see this good land break down, and we live in that fall now.

It's a story about our modern life. And every time that we sin, every time that we do the wrong thing, every time that we fall short of what God calls us to be, and David read to us at the beginning, he reminded us of that Lord.
It's really quite simple. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, your mind, your body, and your soul, and love your neighbour as yourself. And every time we fall short of that, it's called sin. And effectively, we're saying to Jesus, we want your inheritance.
We want the world our way. We want it done in exactly the way that we want it done. We don't want you ruling over us.
Step aside. We can do it on our own. And almost inherently, when we try and live that life on our own, life goes wrong. Life doesn't go as it should do.
[13:53] It's not provided for. As somebody who has and does let out a house, I am a landlord. And it's been really interesting, as you see different tenants come and go, about how well they treat my house.

Some of them have treated it as if it has no value to them at all. And it's okay. This person will come and fix it in the end.
The landlord who I don't have a relationship, I just give some money. He'll come and fix it in the end. And others have said, can I paint it? Can I do this? Can I look after it? Because I want to treat it as my own home.
The call is to ask, what are you doing? Are you treating this as your own world of which you have no relationship with the Creator?
So I want to make sure you understand that the cross happened. The reason why, at the end of the week, Jesus went to the cross, the reason why that was a reality, wasn't just because of the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the people of the times actions.
[15:02] It wasn't because Pontius Pilate did what he did. It's not because Herod did what he did. It's not because the people cried out for Barabbas. It's because you and I sin. That's why Jesus went to the cross.

He went to the cross for all of our sins. And so every time we, humanity, do what we do, we join forces to push the sun out of the world.
That's why the cross happened. But there's a joy at the end. There's something that happens at the end. And the stone the builders rejected is the resolution. So this, Jesus comes, and we hear a little bit in Psalm 118, of Psalm 118 here, the stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. The Lord has done this, and it's marvellous in our eyes. So the one that people looked at and said, this is no good to us, ends up being the one that everything is built upon and holds everything together.
The tenants thought that killing the son would secure their ownership. Instead, it secured their destruction. We see that, don't we, when they decide to kill him.

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[16:14] What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others. That there is a judgment at the end. No action comes without judgment.

And Jesus is part of that judgment. He comes and says, I will judge justly in this world for our behaviours and what we've done. Because you cannot kill the heir and get away with it.
God vindicates Jesus by raising him from the dead, and he is now unshakably the foundation of the new temple, the church. The people of God come under his reign. In our story, we get a little bit at the end where we have the reaction of the chief priests and the teachers of the law.
Then the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders looked for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken the power of the bull against them. But they were afraid of the crowd, so they left and went away.
They had the opportunity again. They could have known. They could have said, OK, we'll change the way we behave. We'll do that, and then things will be better. So, where are you in this story?
[17:29] Where are you, not just historically, but where are you going to be in this story tomorrow?
What I want to do is encourage you to move from a place of being a rebellious tenant in your life, saying everything's about me, to being a faithful steward of the gifts that God has given you.

First of all, to take a moment to acknowledge the owner. Not just on a Sunday for an hour and a bit when you're together. Not just on a Wednesday when you come into this building or something like that.
Not just when you're amongst other Christians, but in everything, in all ways and at all times. Stop living as if it's your own life. 1 Corinthians 6, 20, says that you were bought with a price.
You and I were ransomed from our sins. That ransom cost Jesus his life. He went to the cross for us. And that should mean something.
If you're somebody who's trying to work out what Christian faith means, in many ways, this is a great time to be learning about it in these kind of things. because what God wants from you is a after the relationship, not before the relationship.
[18:37] There's nothing you can do to buy this forgiveness. You can't be good enough to be forgiven. You're forgiven because God is gracious and merciful. But after that, he says, here's all the goodness of the world and I want to bestow this on you but I want to have a relationship with you that you do the things that I'm calling you to do.

I want you to acknowledge me as the owner of the world and the owner of your life because I bought you at a price and therefore I want you to live your life differently from this day forward. So if you're sat here today and you're not a Christian, you haven't put your faith in Jesus, then it's okay to do so.
It's okay to do this because submission to Jesus' authority isn't oppression, doesn't cause problems. It's the only place of safety.
If you build your life on this cornerstone that's mentioned here, it's the only way to ensure that your life doesn't collapse. You might look to other things to build your life on but ultimately each one of those things will cause it to collapse.
I don't say that when you become a Christian that life becomes easy. We all still go through problems and challenges and difficulties. We all have times when it feels like it's really hard.
[19:55] God ultimately walks with us in that. I think one of the things you remember about a vineyard and it being given to us is that a vineyard still needs work, doesn't it?

God doesn't say go and work, go and live in the vineyard and I will make the vines grow and I'll create the wine for you and all those things. He says, this is for your work. We're expected to have a life that involves a little bit of difficulty and challenges and stuff like that.
Some days the work is hard, some days it's easy. But if you build your life on the cornerstone, it won't collapse. Then once you've built your life on that cornerstone, the next thing to do is to render the fruit.
In our reading here, it reminds us, doesn't it, that at harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. Your and I's life is the vineyard.
God comes and says, if you're going to work with me and be in relationship with me, I want to see some fruit from that. It can't always be about how God can come and help you, how you want to know more about God and he needs to come and help you.
[21:04] Sometimes it has to be about the fruit that you give and the way you change the world. Galatians 5, 22-23 reminds us of love, joy, patience and all those good fruits, self-control, things like

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that.

We don't produce the fruit to buy the vineyard. We produce the fruit because we're delighted to work for such a gracious father. This week, maybe go back to this.
Don't treat this as a Sunday reading. Treat this as a reading for the rest of your week. And ask yourself that question when you hold the mirror up to yourself. Where am I in this story?
Have I changed? Am I better? Do I want to be better? And then use that as a jumping off point for your prayers this week. When you reach out to God and say, I have this thing that makes me a rebellious tenant, but I want to be a faithful servant.
Will you help me take this thing away? I can be better and produce more fruit for you in your kingdom. Amen. Amen.

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