

# The clash with Ultimate Authority

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[ 0 : 00 ] It's a story some of you may have heard before. It was written by a preacher in the 1950s and it's been quoted in a number of places. It says, On a dangerous seacoast where shipwrecks often occur, there was once a crude little life-saving station.

The building was just a hut and there was only one boat, but the few devoted members kept a constant watch over the sea. With no thought for their own comfort, they went out day and night tirelessly searching for the lost.

Some of those who were saved and various others in the surrounding area wanted to become associated with the station and gave of their time, money and effort for the support of the work. New boats were bought, new crews trained and the little life-saving station grew. Some of the members of the life-saving station were unhappy that the building was so crude and poorly equipped.

They felt that a more comfortable place should be provided as the first refuge of those safe from the sea. They replaced the emergency cots with beds and put better furniture in the enlarged building.

[ 1 : 14 ] Now, the life-saving station became a popular gathering place for its members and they decorated it beautifully because they used it as a sort of a club. Fewer members were now interested in going to sea on life-saving missions, so they hired lifeboat crews to do this important work.

The life-saving motif still prevailed in the club's decorations and there was a liturgical lifeboat in the room where the club's initiations were held. About this time, a large ship wrecked off the coast and the hired crews brought in boatloads of cold, wet and half-drowned people.

They were dirty and sick. The beautiful new club was in chaos, so the property committee immediately had a shower house built outside the club where victims of shipwrecks could be cleaned up before coming inside.

At the next meeting, there was a split among the club membership. Most of the members wanted to stop the club's life-saving activities for being unpleasant and a hindrance to the normal social life of the club.

Some members insisted upon life-saving as their primary purpose and pointed out that they were still called a life-saving station. But they were finally voted down and told that if they wanted to save the lives of all the various kinds of people who were shipwrecked in those waters, they could begin their own life-saving station.

[ 2 : 50 ] So they did. As the years went by, the new station experienced the same changes that occurred in the old. It evolved into a club and yet another life-saving station was founded.

History continued to repeat itself and if you visit that sea coast today, you will find a number of exclusive clubs along that shore. Shipwrecks are frequent in those waters, but most of the people drown.

In Mark 10, verse 45, Jesus declares that his life and ministry is one of service. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Jesus tells us that he came to rescue many people. His coming was a life-saving mission. Now we were preaching a short message over the next three weeks from Mark chapter 11 and 12 and as you read these chapters and I'd encourage you to do it at home, it doesn't take long, you get a strong sense that Jesus has come on the scene and he has disturbed a very comfortable club.

And for the leaders of that club, he has become a source of threat and annoyance and from their point of view, he doesn't understand their history, he doesn't care about their culture, he doesn't understand their place and he doesn't understand their authority.

[ 4 : 31 ] And he is not a voice to be listened to, he is a problem to be dealt with. From Jesus' point of view, they do not understand God's purposes for his world and the place that they have with regard to them.

And so, there is this huge clash of authority. Now the early part of Mark's gospel is a series of stories about Jesus which beg the question, who is this man?

Who is this man that teaches with this authority? Who is this man that even the demons obey him?

Who is this man who stills the wind and the waves with a word?

Who is this man who claims to have authority to forgive sins? Who is this man who raises the dead?

And Mark tells one story after another and he brings us to a turning point in chapter 8, verse 27.

Jesus is travelling with his disciples and he asks the question, who do people say I am? What's the gods? What's everybody saying about me?

[ 5 : 43 ] And the disciples say, well, some people are saying you're John the Baptist and others are saying you're Elijah, one of the prophets that died a long time ago. But he doesn't leave it there.

He fingers the disciples personally. He eyeballs the lot of them. What about you? Who do you say I am?

And Peter answers, you are the Christ. You are the king. And he's absolutely right.

But Jesus commands the disciples not to tell anyone about him. And there's a good reason the disciples now have to learn how this king is going to exercise his authority.

They've recognised who he is, but they have no idea how this king is going to reign. And Jesus now begins to teach his disciples what his kingship will mean and how his authority will be exercised.

[ 6 : 51 ] And it says in chapter 8, verse 31, he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the law, that he must be killed and after three days rise again.

It's the first time in Mark's Gospel that Jesus mentions his rejection and his death. So you get to chapter 11 where we are this morning and Jesus has taught about his rejection and his death on a number of occasions.

It's getting closer. Verse 1 says that they were approaching Jerusalem. It's the first time that he's been in Jerusalem in Mark's Gospel.

He rides into the city on a donkey, the crowd giving him a ticker tape parade. They welcome him with palm branches. They rejoice in his coming in the name of the Lord.

They're looking for the promises of God to their great king David to be fulfilled. The king makes his authoritative entry into his capital city. It's late in the day and then he leaves again and stays the night just across the valley in Bethany.

[ 8 : 06 ] Mark 11 verse 15 tells us that Jesus returned the next day. He came into the temple courts. He wrought havoc.

He drove out everybody who was buying and selling. He turned over the tables of the money changers and those selling doves. Gentle Jesus, meek and mild. Can you imagine what would happen if I left church this morning, go down into Westfield, into Myra and start turning over the tables?

I will be in court in North Sydney on Monday morning. I'd get a reaction. Jesus is incensed.

He quotes the scriptures. My house will be called a house of prayer for all the nations. And then he adds, and you have made it a den of robbers.

He's passionately distressed at the commercialisation of the house of God. And even more so, he is disturbing the club.

[ 9 : 16 ] For the Jews, the temple was the symbol of their own cultural identity. Jesus is picking up on God's promise to Abraham of all the nations being blessed through him.

The temple was meant to be a place of blessing to the world where all nations could come to meet with God. And they do not touch him with a finger when he does these things.

But they set their minds on a course of action. Verse 18, chapter 11. The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this, and they began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him.

Because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching. And so the die is cast, the scene is set for a great contest which is centred around the person and the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Who's in charge? Who's calling the shots? Where does real power lie? In verse 27, Mark tells us that Jesus again returned to Jerusalem the next day.

[10:29] He's walking in the temple courts and he's confronted by the people that he's been teaching his disciples will be the ones who will reject him. They are the ones who the day before determined amongst themselves that they would find a way to kill him.

The chief priests, the teachers of the law, the elders. It is a very prestigious gathering. The groups taken together were known as the Sanhedrin or the Jewish ruling council.

The chief priests were the senior temple priests. The teachers of the law were the leading Pharisee scholars. They were the Bible teachers. The elders were the lay aristocrats, prominent leaders among the Jews.

And so Jesus has stepped into an open confrontation with the senior religious and political leaders from amongst the Jewish people.

He has confronted the establishment, those in control, and they are determined to kill him. And they do what they didn't do the day before.

[11:41] They confront Jesus in public. And in verse 28, they say, by what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you the authority to do this? And it's a trap because as soon as he says God's authority, they will have a basis for accusing him of submitting to a different king and then they would be able to call for his execution.

And Jesus knows it's a trap and Jesus turns to them and says, let me ask you a question. Verse 30, John's baptism. Was it from heaven or from men?

Tell me. He snookers them. If you know the game, they've caught and they won't answer him.

And their reasoning is, look, if we say he's from heaven, Jesus will say, well, why didn't you believe him? And they didn't dare say he was from men because they feared the crowd because all the people believed that John was a prophet of God.

The crowd would rise up against them if they said that. And so they said, we don't know. And Jesus answered, neither will I answer you.

[13:07] Calls them at their own game. They were unwilling to say. They had an opinion. They didn't believe John and they didn't accept his authority. They don't believe in Jesus and they don't accept his authority.

They haven't got the guts to say it. For all their religiosity, they're unwilling to believe. They've made a conscious decision to reject the authority of Jesus.

They are religious and they are unbelievers. Josh Short comes at night. He's one of our young ministry interns. His dad's a minister in Vancouver in Canada and a few years ago I heard Josh Short's dad speak to our ministers here in Sydney and he and his congregation including J.I. Packer which I think this is a badge of honour have been kicked out of the Anglican Church in Canada only recently.

And for a number of years David Short was persecuted by his diocesan bishop. The bishop had no confidence in him because he preached the scriptures as the word of God and he called people to live in relationship to Christ.

But the bishop has walked away from the scriptures. He endorses immoral relationships. He ordains clergy who are openly and unashamedly immoral.

[14:29] His theological college runs courses in shamanism and the tarot. But the bishop is a great civic leader who wears the purple and is probably revered by many in his community because he has a human touch.

Lives like an unbeliever. And appallingly applies a teaching that actively leads people away from Christ. He does not submit to the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's not just unbelieving bishops. Unbelief comes close to home. When we reject the authority of Jesus to rule our lives when we say no to him when we sit in church hearing the words of Jesus without any intention of submitting to them when we know what the scriptures say and we are unwilling to obey we try to create a bit of space to do what we want for a while maybe try a forbidden relationship hold back on time or money that we ought to give to God refuse to forgive the person that we know that we have to because Jesus has forgiven us you might be a person who has heard the call of Jesus many times and you might be one of those people who really don't need convincing that he is real you know that he is you've weighed the evidence maybe you felt great conviction but you have not been willing to count the cost and take the risk of submitting to his authority you know

Jesus is true yet you remain unwilling to trust him that is an expression of unbelief in chapter 12 Jesus continues to confront his questioners he tells a parable which they know is against them Jesus actually takes an old testament story from Isaiah chapter 5 and he updates it to explain the current conflict in Isaiah it's a parable of the vineyard this vineyard it's loved it's tended it's fertilised it's protected from wild animals it's watched over and it never produces a decent crop of anything and in Isaiah 5 the garden is Israel and Judah the people of God and the gardener is God and he looks for righteousness and justice amongst his people and he sees only bloodshed and hears only cries of distress and in the end God's justice will be to destroy the garden that has only produced bloodshed instead of justice and cries of distress instead of righteousness in in Mark in Mark 12 when Jesus picks up on this story and tells it again it's similar but different a whole series of people are sent by the owner of the vineyard to collect the rent and the tenants beat them up and they shame some and they kill some and they reject the authority of the owner of the vineyard by rejecting every messenger that he sends to them and finally the owner sends the son that he loves and he says they'll listen to him they'll respect him and the tenants make a greedy grab for ownership kill the son claim the vineyard as their own and what Jesus has just done is give an Old Testament history lesson the people of God have rejected one prophet after another including the very last one John the Baptist and now they are in the process of rejecting not just a prophet but God's dearly loved son and if the parable ended there it would be a tragic story it would appear as though evil had triumphed over good injustice over justice but not so the owner of the vineyard will have the last word and you see it in verse 9 chapter 12 he will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others the rejected son will become the keystone that holds the whole show together and the leaders respond to Jesus parable in verse 12 they looked for a way to arrest him because they knew that he had spoken this parable against them but they were afraid because of the crowd so they left him and they went away and so in the immediate context

[19:36] Jesus is heading to death and apparent defeat yet the parable foreshadows that his death will not be the end of the matter the owner of the vineyard will come and he will destroy those who have rejected his son they reject his authority when they reject his son and it's a tough bottom line but the judgment of god will come and it will be fierce against those who reject his son but his judgment will not be whimsical and harsh it won't be the act of an unfair despot it will be an act of justice it will be the result of the rejection of his authority it will come after all the warnings in the world it will come to men and women who continue to reject the much loved son of god sent into our world it will come because they reject his authority and so right through mark's gospel mark tells one story after another establishing jesus authority as king and the passage this morning is a confrontation with the religious establishment the club and i could leave the message there and i could say look jesus is king he is lord in terms of the parable of the vineyard he is the very last word from god there will not be another one he is god's much loved son and if we do not listen to him there will be no other but i want to press further and say that this is much more than a power struggle the battle is really interesting but what is at stake is priceless the battle between jesus and the religious leaders in the end is about people's souls the king has not come to big note himself and for self aggrandisement he has come on the most extraordinary rescue mission he's god's much loved son who comes as a slave to rescue us it just demonstrates to us that god loves us god is wonderfully kind to us and his heart is to see men and women and boys and girls brought into the safety of his kingdom the club the religious establishment had lost the vision for why they were there they thought that they were upholding god's purposes they had the temple humming and they were making a motza and the temple services looked fantastic and the priests looked magnificent in all their gear the liturgy was rich the oldies were happy the young loved to be there the music was both contemporary and it was ancient and the club was an exciting place to be and the club had moved the killing of its founder and owner to the main item on its agenda the main item on our agenda must be the purposes of god's king the lord jesus christ he did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many and the agenda for us becomes to proclaim the glory of god's king i do not want

to put you on a guilt trip but i do want to ask you in the same way as i ask myself do you care about the lost do you care about the outsider i sat at the rugby league at brookvale oval last night thinking about people it's really easy to be judgmental about the number of cans of twosies and jim beam going down all around and to think about people and their relationships and the families without

wedding rings and all the things that you see and the drunk man hugging one woman after another that was last night brookvale oval and that was me wrestling with my feelings or over the fence my next door neighbours my buddhist neighbours who have only just begun to talk to in the last couple of months after being there for nearly two years without christ they are lost and christ does want us to proclaim him and i think if i go next door and try to do that with my taxi driver neighbour under the bonnet of his car i don't think if i do that cold it will work so i think i want to pray for them and i want to pray for opportunities to get to know them and i want to think about how maybe i might show some kindness to them and i'm wondering if a plate of chocolate chip cookies cooked by kerry might be a way of showing appreciation for the work that they've just done fixing our boundary fence so i'm wondering if developing relationship like that would lead to opportunity down the track to share something of what i believe or even to invite them to something special that happens here at church and dream a bit more what if lots of us were living like that some of you are but what if lots of us were engaging our friends and our neighbours with the love of christ we would move beyond being like a club we would be impacting our community we would be showing that we treasure the lord jesus in our concern for the lost jesus engaged in a massive power play and he would seem to lose when he died but his death was the ransom price for yours and for my sins and they are many so i don't think it matters if we are older and conservative younger and wanting radical change we must not be a club in a new generation that has lost its vision for saving souls may god so bless us that saint paul's might be a church with a people whose ministry brings many people to safety in christ amen