

Main Idea: In Matthew 21:33-46 King Jesus confronts religion and in so doing teaching us much about who He is, why He came, and how we should respond to Him.

- I. The Setting: Religion confronts Jesus (23-27).
 - A. The religious leaders challenged Jesus’ authority (23).
 - B. Jesus exposed their authority problem (24-27).
 - 1. They saw themselves as being okay.
 - 2. They refused to consider their need to change.
- II. The Stories: Jesus confronts religion (28-46).
 - A. He tells a story about two sons (28-32).
 - B. He tells a story about a vineyard (33-41).
 - C. He gives the punch-line (42-44).
 - 1. God is taking the kingdom from Israel.
 - 2. God is giving the kingdom to the nations.
 - D. He is forcing His hearers to face reality (45-46).
 - 1. The story teaches us about God.
 - ⇒He is longsuffering and merciful.
 - ⇒He is also just and righteous.
 - 2. The story teaches us about Jesus.
 - ⇒He confronted sinners because He loved His Father.
 - ⇒He confronted sinners because He loved sinners.
 - 3. The story teaches us about ourselves.
 - ⇒We are born with an authority problem.
 - ⇒We are prone to take God for granted.

Take Inventory: How am I responding to the King?

Sabbatical reflections: Thank you so much WBC family for the gracious gift you have given Sherry and me! Sabbath rest is important. The Lord Himself rested on the seventh day. He commands us to rest as well. And we have, gratefully so.

Back in April I mentioned Paul’s exhortation to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:16, “Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching.” It is the *on yourself* part of that command that a sabbatical seeks to address.

The Lord used the past three months in wonderful ways, and I’ll focus on one specific outcome in this evening’s message, which I’ve entitled, “*Sabbatical Reflections: The Importance of Rejoicing in the Lord*” from Philippians 4:4.

But to summarize, we enjoyed uninterrupted time together, which is indeed a precious gift. In summary, we traveled together the first month. We spent meaningful family time together the second month (with our children and grandchildren, with extended family celebrating Sherry’s mom’s 90th). During the third month we did projects around the house (i.e. manual labor, laying pavers, digging holes for 4x4 posts, building fence, etc). Physical activity, a break from my normal routine of studying and computer work.

We were grateful to know that while you were caring for us, you were being well cared for here. Thank you to our pastoral team (Matt, Douglas, Michael, and Rex) as well as our combined board for demonstrating Christ’s care during this season. I’ve heard good reports and am grateful it was not a time of coasting, but moving forward.

^{**} Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a look at a parallel passage, see Mark 4:1-20 in the Mark series in 2004 and in 2022.

I'm thankful for those who preached God's Word, for Matt, Michael, Douglas, Dave, Scott, and Aaron in the parables series; for Rex in a series in 1 John; for Kevin and the Preachers in Training on Sunday evenings; as well as for our missionary Steve Stairs in a Sunday evening series, "Learning How to Talk about Significant Theological Differences: A Comparison of Covenant Theology and Dispensational Theology." On Wednesday evenings Ed and Dennis led times interacting with our missionaries.

Again, thank you!

Current Series: As we come to the Word this morning, we're finishing our series on the King's parables in Matthew's Gospel. It was my joy to give the first message in this series back in April and then hand off the baton to a team of brothers who expounded on Jesus' parables. It was indeed radical for a Jewish man to speak about another kingdom in the days when Rome ruled, but that's what King Jesus did. *The kingdom of heaven is like*, He said again and again, with story after story.

Now it's my joy to finish our series by taking us to Matthew 21. We're going to listen to our King tell a parable that addresses a vital question. If He is the King, how do we explain why He ultimately was rejected and crucified? Some might conclude that there's something deficient about this King. If we did, we would be severely mistaken, as today's parable makes perfectly clear. Let's listen to it, and ponder carefully.

Scripture Reading: Matthew 21:33-46

You would think that religious people would be the most receptive of all to Jesus, but they're not. Not in Jesus' day. Not in our day either. One of the greatest mission fields in the United States is not *out there*. It's people who this weekend are sitting right in here, in church buildings, and synagogues, and mosques. It's not the irreligious (sure, they don't have God, and know it), but the religious. It's to those who are convinced they are right with God that Jesus now speaks. And what He says is shocking.

When Jesus began His ministry He said, "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God (Matthew 5:9)." Jesus Himself is the ultimate peacemaker. It's why He, the God-man, came into the world, so that He might reconcile sinners back to God and to each other. He Himself is our peace, says Ephesians 2:14. He made peace by removing the barrier of sin through the shedding of His blood.

Yet this reality is what makes today's text so, I'll say it again, *shocking*. Jesus, the peacemaker, sometimes disturbs us. Sometimes He shatters our pseudo-peace. The Peacemaker is at times a confronter. It's true that sinners loved to be with Jesus, but not all sinners. Sinners who did not see themselves as sinners resisted Him. And when they did, they saw a side of Jesus we hear little about these days.

In Matthew 21:33-46 King Jesus confronts religion and in so doing so teaches us much about who He is, why He came, who we are, and how we should respond to Him.

I. The Setting: Religion confronts Jesus (23-27).

Matthew sets the stage in verse 23, "And when he entered the temple." It's Tuesday morning of Passion week. Good Friday is coming. Just two days prior, when Jesus entered Jerusalem riding the foal of a donkey, the Jewish crowd cheered. On the next day, Monday, Jesus entered Jerusalem, went to the temple, and cleaned house, overturning tables, and putting a halt to the religious farce.

Then He left the temple. Mark's account says, "as it was already late" in 11:11. And I don't think he meant merely that it was late in the day. Things are coming to a head in the divine plan.

The following day, Jesus and the Twelve walked back into Jerusalem, specifically into the temple courts. It's there that the confrontation occurs.

Barclay describes the scenery in the Court of Gentiles. "It was a magnificent arcade made by Corinthian columns 35 feet high. The one on the south was even more splendid. It was called the Royal Cloister. It was formed by four rows of white marble columns, each 6 feet in diameter and 30 feet high. There were 162 of them. It was common for Rabbis and teachers to stroll in these columns and to teach as they walked."²

There beneath those columns the religious leaders approached Jesus. They're not there to chit chat. They're fuming, and their anger is laser-focused on one topic. *Authority* (the word "authority" appears four times in this section).

A. The religious leaders challenged Jesus' authority (23). "And when he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, and said, 'By what **authority** are you doing these things, and who gave you this **authority**?'"

Please realize, these men are not after information. They're trying to trap the Lord. They ask two questions, and both have to do with Jesus' *authority*.

"By what *authority* are you doing these things?"

"Who gave you *authority* to do this?"

Authority to do what? To do what Jesus did the previous day, to turn over tables in the temple, to accuse us of turning the temple into a 'den of robbers.' Who gave you *authority* to do all this?!

It's significant that they don't challenge *what* Jesus did, just the basis of it. They couldn't deny the corruption that existed in God's house, nor that what Jesus did was necessary. What they want to know is who authorized *Him* to do these things? This was *their* jurisdiction, and they didn't like anybody interfering with their religious system, corrupt as it was.

Jesus responded to their questions with a question of His own. In verses 24-25a, "Jesus answered them, 'I also will ask you one question, and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what **authority** I do these things.'²⁵ The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?"

Interesting way to handle the critics. At first glance we might conclude that Jesus was avoiding the issue. Not so. Jesus didn't avoid the issue. By asking this question He raised THE issue. And what is the issue? The issue is *authority*. These ultra-religious men have an authority problem and Jesus is about to put it on display for all to see.

B. Jesus exposed their authority problem (24-27). Keep in mind who Jesus is addressing. These are the chief priests, the teachers of the law (known as the scribes), and the elders, the three groups that made up the Sanhedrin, the high court of the Jews. As far as first century Jewish religion goes, these guys *are* the authority. They call the shots. They determine what's right and wrong for the Jews. They are the gate-keepers, the standard-bearers. They ask the questions, and no one questions them.

But Jesus did. He asked them a very pointed question. *Was John's baptism from heaven (that is, from God), or from men? Answer me!*

² William Barclay, p. 278.

He's talking about John the Baptist, the God-sent prophet whose assignment it was to prepare people for the Messiah. John preached a message of repentance. And he called people who repented to be baptized, to go into the water, under it, and out of it, to symbolize their desire for God to change them.

"I baptize you with water for repentance," John had said in Matthew 3:11. In Acts 19:4 Paul explained, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus."

We baptize people at WBC which is a different baptism. It is Christian baptism. Those who go into the water are individuals whom God has saved, who have repented and placed their faith in the One who saved them, the One to whom John pointed, Jesus the Christ. "He has come, and we believe He died for our sins, and rose from the dead for our salvation." This is what we say by word and action through Christian baptism.

John's baptism was preparatory. He pointed his listeners to Jesus, as Mark 1:7 indicates. "And this was his message: 'After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.'" When the Baptizer saw Jesus he stated emphatically, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29)."

This is what John did, and it didn't phase him who was in the audience, whether Jewish peasants, or Roman soldiers, or religious leaders from the temple. They all came, and he called them all to repent, and prove their repentance by being baptized.

Is Jesus skirting the issue by asking this question? Not at all. This *is* the issue. If someone had really listened to John the Baptist, if in obedience he had gone through the waters of baptism signifying his agreement with John's message, he would have been ready for Jesus. The same authority that sent John also sent Jesus.

These Jewish leaders rejected John as a fanatic, thus rejecting the authority of God. It's not surprising then that they've become both prosecuting attorney *and* judge with Jesus. They have an authority problem. These religious leaders refuse to submit to any authority other than their own.

They're not alone. It's the problem we all have, from birth. This is God's world. He made it. He's the authority. But we all go our *own way* (Isa. 53:6). We want to do what *we* want to do with our lives. And we resist anyone, including the Messiah Himself, who interferes with our self-focused agenda.

And this is especially true for religious people (which could include us). We're prone to use our religion to convince ourselves that *our* way is indeed *God's* way.

So what happened? Notice verses 25b-27, "And they discussed it among themselves, saying, 'If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?'²⁶ But if we say, 'From man,' we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet."²⁷ So they answered Jesus, 'We do not know.' And he said to them, 'Neither will I tell you by what **authority** I do these things.'"

Now who's skirting the issue?! "We don't know," the religious leaders said. But that's not true. They know the answer to Jesus' question, but they are not about to give it. They're lying. They're lying because they don't want the Jewish laity to know the truth about what they think about John the Baptist. They're *peace-faking*, at least for now. In two days, they'll show their true colors and start *peace-breaking*.

But why? Why are these religious leaders so antagonistic with Jesus? To put it simply, it boils down to two realities.

1. *They saw themselves as being okay.* Again, they have religion. They are *priests*, men who worked in the temple for a living, *chief* priests in fact, men who were the most reputable servants of God (or so everyone thought). And they are *teachers of the law*, men who had studied the Scriptures and instructed others in the same all their lives. And they are the *elders*, the respected authorities of the Jewish people. These men aren't *sinners*, but *good men*.

And that's why they rejected John the Baptist, and now Jesus. Good men don't need to repent. They are *good* men, and proud of it. Consequently...

2. *They refused to consider their need to change.* That's why, when Jesus asked them a question that forced them to be honest about their spiritual condition, they gave in to their fear of man and resorted to deception. "We don't know," they said, refusing to come out from their hypocritical masks.

A person who sees himself as being okay will refuse to admit his need to change, every time. That was true of the majority of religious leaders in Jesus' day. It's also true of many religious people in our day. Perhaps it's true of you, my friend. Unless we're willing to be honest with ourselves, we'll never admit our sinfulness. And unless I admit that I am a hell-deserving sinner, I will never admit my need for the Savior. And unless I admit my need for the Savior, I will remain in my sins, and perish forever.

This is why Jesus began His Sermon on the Mount with these words. "Blessed are the *poor in spirit*, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:3)." In order to experience God's kingdom, there's a very simply prerequisite. One must first admit one's spiritual bankruptcy. And that's something religious people refuse to do, to their own condemnation, apart from the miraculous intervention of the grace of God.

Barclay comments, "The whole story is a vivid example of what happens to men who will not face the truth. They have to twist and wriggle and in the end get themselves into a position in which they are so helplessly involved that they have nothing to say. The man who faces the truth may have the humiliation of saying that he was wrong, or the peril of standing by it, but at least the future for him is strong and bright. The man who will not face the truth has nothing but the prospect of deeper and deeper involvement in a situation which renders him helpless and ineffective."³

Not long ago I shared an illustration that's worth repeating. Kent Hughes tells a story about an African chief who visited a mission station: "Hanging outside the missionary's hut on a tree was a little mirror. The chief happened to look into the mirror and saw her reflection, complete with terrifying paint and threatening features. She gazed at her own frightening countenance and started back in horror, exclaiming, 'Who is that horrible-looking person inside that tree?' 'Oh,' the missionary said, 'it is not in the tree. The glass is reflecting your own face.' The African would not believe it until she held the mirror in her hand. She said, 'I must have the glass. How much will you sell it for?' 'Oh,' said the missionary, 'I don't want to sell it.' But the woman begged until he capitulated, thinking it might be best to sell it to avoid trouble. So he named a price and she took the mirror. Exclaiming, 'I will never have it making faces at me again,' she threw it down and broke it to pieces."⁴

That's exactly what religion does to Jesus. See these men in Matthew 21. They want desperately to get their hands on Jesus, not so they can see the truth about themselves, but

³ William Barclay, p. 280.

⁴ Kent Hughes, *Mark*, p. 189.

so they can crush Him under their feet and not have to face the condemning truth He is revealing to them.

So, how do we help people like this who refuse to admit the truth about themselves? Let's watch how Jesus did it. In scene one religion confronts Jesus. In scene two Jesus confronts religion.

II. The Stories: Jesus confronts religion (28-46).

How did He do it? With stories, two stories in Matthew's account. Throughout Matthew's gospel Jesus has used stories to teach truth. Here He uses stories to confront His critics with the painful truth they'd been refusing to face.⁵

A. He tells a story about two sons (28-32). Our brother Douglas preached this text last week. It's a curious story about a man who had a vineyard and two sons. He told both sons to work in the vineyard. The first said, no, but later changed his mind and obeyed. The second said, yes, but didn't obey his father. He was all talk. Which pleased the father, Jesus asked. The first did, said the people. You're right, said Jesus. The Father is not interested in mere talk, but obedience. Which is why He is more pleased with tax collectors and prostitutes than you religious people, because they're coming to Me and entering God's kingdom, and you're not.

That's a shocking story, with a shocking conclusion. Yet as soon as Jesus finishes it, He tells a second story. It's even more shocking. In both stories the Peacemaker confronts religion head on.

B. He tells a story about a vineyard (33-41). Listen to Jesus in verses 33-39, "Hear another parable. There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants, and went into another country.³⁴ When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit.³⁵ And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another.³⁶ Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them.³⁷ Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.'³⁸ But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.'³⁹ And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him."

Though foreign to most of us, this story actually reflects a common scenario in first century Israel. Much of the land was in the hands of absentee landowners who contracted with tenants on a crop-sharing basis.⁶

Keep in mind that this is a parable, an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. It uses the known to communicate the unknown. It takes something the hearers can easily picture to help them grasp spiritual truth they need to picture.

A man planted a vineyard. It's his vineyard, so obviously the fruit will be his.⁷ He takes steps to ensure there will be fruit, putting up a wall and building a tower for protection. He hires farmers to care for His vineyard. They agree on their wages. The terms of the contract are clear.

⁵ Mark indicates the Master told them *parables* (plural), but includes only one of the stories in this narrative (we see others in the parallel accounts).

⁶ Wessel, p. 731.

⁷ Leviticus 19:23-25 explains that a farmer would not use the fruit until the fifth year.

But in time, they break the contract. They're not satisfied with a percentage. They want the whole thing for themselves. Worse yet, they'll willing to take drastic action to satisfy their greed. They beat servants, not once but repeatedly. They even kill servants. Then worst of all, they conspire and kill the owner's son.

Some parables are difficult to interpret. Not this one. It's so plain that Jesus' hard-hearted critics get the message, as we'll soon see. The owner of the vineyard represents God. The vineyard represents Israel (this is a common image for Israel in the Old Testament; see Isaiah 5). The tenants represent the religious leaders. The servants are the prophets. The son is *the Son*, Jesus Himself.

The story of the vineyard is the story of Israel. God formed the nation of Israel for His purposes, to bear fruit and display His glory to the world. He gave Israel everything necessary to produce a good crop.

But Israel got it turned around. Israel started treating God as if He existed for them. Israel's leaders started robbing God of His glory. God sent prophets to them to call for a harvest, but they beat them, and even killed them.

Tradition says Isaiah was sawn in half. Zechariah was stoned to death. Jeremiah was thrown into a pit. John the Baptist was beheaded.

Finally, God sent His Son, His beloved only Son, to His vineyard Israel. Yet those who should have known better, the most religious people in the country, rejected Him. "Come," they said, "let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours." They chose the vineyard (their religion) over the One who created the vineyard and entrusted it to them.

They actually took the Son, killed Him, and threw Him out of the vineyard. Unthinkable, yes. But true. The deadly plot is already in motion. In just two days, these same religious leaders will have Jesus arrested, subjected to a mock trial, beaten, and then on the next morning, executed.

Jesus asks a question in verse 40. "When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" The audience responds in verse 41. "He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons."

What else can the owner do? His tenants obviously broke the contract. They've rejected his authority, spurned his mercy repeatedly, even killed his son. And they did it all thinking he would do nothing in return.

They thought wrongly. Jesus says that the owner will take two appropriate actions to deal with the wicked tenants. One, He will come and destroy them. And two, He will give the vineyard to others.

What? Give it to others? How can it be? Here's how.

C. He gives the punch-line (42-44). Jesus cites the very authority His critics prided themselves in upholding. He quotes the Scriptures. He asks in verse 42, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?"

The passage Jesus quotes is Psalm 118:22-23, part of the Hallel Psalms. It's worth noting that the Jews were singing this Messianic psalm during this very Passover week. In fact, the cry of "Hosanna!" and "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" (which the people shouted on Palm Sunday) also came from Psalm 118.

Then Jesus declares this shocking conclusion. He says in verses 43-44, "Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people

producing its fruits.⁴⁴ And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.”

Jesus reveals that two appropriate actions are coming.

1. *God is taking the kingdom from Israel.* Israel’s leaders rejected God’s Son. Therefore, God is rejecting Israel’s leaders. “He will come and kill those tenants.”

But it wasn’t just Israel’s leaders. *Israel* rejected God’s Son. The people followed their leaders. As the apostle John explains, “He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him (John 1:11).” Israel rejected the Messiah, and in so doing, brought about their own destruction.

Did this catch the Master off guard. Not at all. In less than a week, the Stone the builders rejected will become the cornerstone when He walks out of His tomb alive. Indeed, this is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.

This too is the Lord’s doing. Forty years later, in AD 70, the Romans will destroy this city, including the temple, and the nation of Israel will cease to exist.

Yes, because of unbelief, God is taking the kingdom from Israel. Yet there’s more.

2. *God is giving the kingdom to the nations.* Jesus says, “He will...give the vineyard **to others**.” To whom is Jesus referring? Who are these “others”? At the end of verse 43 Jesus identifies who the *others* are, saying, “I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you, **and given to a people producing its fruits**.”

And who are these people? As we read the book of Acts, we discover the answer. For the first decade or so, the church was basically comprised of believers in Christ from a Jewish background. But then it shifted to the Gentiles, the *ethne*. The Holy Spirit began to work with and through non-Jews to produce a harvest in the Owner’s vineyard.

He literally gave it to others, to the nations in fact. Indeed, by the time Jesus is done building His church, there will be people from every nation, language, and tribe in His vineyard.

They’re actually singing a song to Jesus in heaven right now. Do you know what it is? The lyrics are recorded in Revelation 5:9–10, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation,¹⁰ and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”

God is giving His kingdom to the nations even as we speak. You say, “Is God through with Israel?” That’s the very question Paul addresses in Romans 11:1a. “I ask, then, has God rejected his people?” And his answer? “By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew (Romans 11:1b-2).”

Yes, He gave His vineyard to others. But, no, He’s not done with the original tenants. He’s actually using the new tenants to stir the hearts of the previous tenants. As Paul explains in Romans 11:11–12, “So I ask, did they [Israel] stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather, through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!”

So why did Jesus tell this story? It boils down to this.

D. He is forcing His hearers to face reality (45-46). Just like the mirror to the African chief, this parable forces the religious people listening to Jesus to ponder the not so pleasant truth about themselves. And they got the point too.

Matthew tells us in verses 45-46. “When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them.⁴⁶ And although they were seeking to arrest him, they feared the crowds, because they held him to be a prophet.”

But this story isn’t just for the men standing in the temple that day. This story is for us, and it teaches us about three vital subjects we all need to consider.

1. The story teaches us about God. What does this story teach us about God? Think carefully. The owner of the vineyard sent a servant. The tenants beat him. The owner sent another servant. The tenants beat him. It happened again and again and again. Finally, he sent his son, and they killed him. What does this teach us about God?

First, it teaches us that He is *longsuffering and merciful*. Martin Luther once said, “If I were God, and the world had treated me as it treated Him, I would kick the wretched thing to pieces.”⁸

Thankfully, God isn’t like us. Indeed, He is longsuffering with us, and so merciful. If He ever treated us as we deserved, for just one split second, we would find ourselves in hell forever.

Charles Spurgeon observed, “If you reject him, he answers you with tears; if you wound him, he bleeds out cleansing; if you kill him, he dies to redeem; if you bury him, he rises again to bring resurrection. Jesus is love made manifest.”⁹

Indeed, God is longsuffering and merciful.

But He is also *just and righteous*. This, too, we see in the story. Listen again to Jesus, “What will the owner do? He will come and kill those tenants.”

My friend, today is the day of salvation. If you will repent and believe in Christ, God will save you. But if you reject His Son, there is no hope for you. You will experience the just, eternal judgment of a holy God. Please, don’t waste His mercy. Come now to the ark of safety while the door is still open, for as in the days of Noah, the day is coming when God will shut the door and destroy those who refused His offer to save.

2. The story teaches us about Jesus. Think about why Jesus told this story in the first place. Didn’t He know it would infuriate the Jews, that it bring out their worst hostility against Him? Yes, He knew. Why then did He confront them?

For two reasons. First, because He loved His Father. It was His Father’s will that He come to earth, proclaim the truth, call sinners to repent, and then die in the place of sinners. It was His Father’s will that He then conquer death and thereby reconcile sinners to their Maker. Jesus didn’t live to please men, but only His Father. That’s why He confronted these powerful men, because He loved His Father.

But there’s a second reason. He confronts sinners because He loves sinners. I love this about Jesus, don’t you? He doesn’t tell us what we *want* to hear, but what we *need* to hear, for our good and the glory of God.

Several years ago when my father was still alive, he went to his doctor to check out a dark mole growing on his chest. The doctor eventually removed and biopsied it. “It’s melanoma cancer,” he said. “I need to remove more tissue.”

⁸ Taken from Kent Hughes, p. 97.

⁹ Taken from Kent Hughes, p. 97.

Why would a doctor use a knife to inflict pain on someone? Love doesn't hurt people, does it? Friends, I'm thankful for doctors that take dark skin blotches seriously. I'm eternally thankful for a preacher that took my sin blotches seriously and told me the painful truth about my condition. And most of all, I'm thankful for the Savior who took my sin seriously and paid its penalty in full.

Are you thankful for such a Savior? My friend, is He confronting you even now about your sin? Don't resist Him. He's confronting you because He loves you, and there's no greater love than His!

3. *The story teaches us about ourselves.* It teaches us that we have an authority problem. We were born with it. It's why we disobeyed our parents when we were growing up. It's why we still don't like to be told what to do today. It's why we instinctively bristle when someone confronts us. We simply resist any authority outside of ourselves. Why would we do that? It's because we want to be in control, even though when we are the captain of the ship it always sinks.

Can we change? Yes, and we must. How? By turning to Him.

Take Inventory: How am I responding to the King?

This morning we've seen religion confront Jesus, and Jesus confront religion. When confronted by the truth, the Jewish leaders clung to their self-righteousness and rejected the Savior.

What are we doing with King Jesus? Dear friends, let's run to Jesus today, not away from Him. Let's submit to His good and gracious authority.

Before we close the Book, there's one more nugget of truth to consider. God gave His vineyard, Israel, everything she needed to produce a wonderful harvest. But Israel began to love the gift more than the Giver.

We can relate to this, can't we? God gives us a family, a good gift for sure. But if our family becomes more important to us than living for the glory of King Jesus, something's wrong. Likewise, He gives us jobs and healthy bodies so we can work. Good gifts, yes. But when our jobs become so important to us that we miss opportunities to worship King Jesus with our church family, we've elevated the gift above the Giver.

Listen to commentator J. D. Jones: "The parable insists...that privilege carries with it responsibility. If God lets out a vineyard, He expects fruit. That is to say, gifts and privileges are all for service and use. God expects a return for them... It does not matter what the privilege may be. One man's gift may be wealth, and another's may be learning, and another's may be leisure. It matters not; God expects wealth, learning and leisure to be used for His glory, for the good of men."¹⁰

Well said. Privilege carries with it responsibility. By His grace. For His glory.

Closing Song: #228 "*Rejoice, the Lord is King*" (all four verses)

This evening's message: "*Sabbatical Reflections: The Importance of Rejoicing in the Lord*" Philippians 4:4

¹⁰ J. D. Jones, p. 440.