

Jesus, Lord of the Church

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[0 : 00] We come now to open God's Word together. If you have a Bible to hand, please open it up to Luke chapter 20, and we'll be reading from verse 1 through to 19, and you'll find that on page 880 through to 881 in the Visitor's Bibles.

If you don't have a Bible, raise your hand. One of our welcome team will get one to you. Later in our service, Josh Johnston, one of our ministers, will be continuing his series, working through Luke's gospel with us.

And it's this passage, Luke 20, verse 1 to 19, which we'll be looking at. So Luke writes, And they discussed it with one another, saying, And Jesus said to them, And he began to tell the people this parable.

And he sent yet a third.

This one also they wounded and cast out. Then the owner of the vineyard said, What shall I do? I will send my beloved son.

[2 : 21] Perhaps they will respect him. But when the tenants saw him. But when the tenants saw him, they said to themselves, This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours.

And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others.

When they heard this, they said, Surely not. But he looked directly at them and said, What then is this that is written? The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces. And when it falls on anyone, it will crush him. Amen. The scribes and the chief priests sought to lay hands on him at that very hour.

For they perceived that they had told this parable against them. But they feared the people. Amen. This is God's word. Well, do you open your Bibles once again to Luke chapter 20.

[3 : 38] Who rules the church? There is a perpetual battle that plays out.

It has done throughout history and it continues today. A battle over who it is that will lead and direct and rule and shape the church. And that's the issue at play in this passage.

Luke wants us to be absolutely clear on the reality that Jesus alone is the sole king and head of the church. And so it is the case that for both the church and also for any local church, that it is and they are not merely a human institution to be shaped and molded by whomever happens to be present as they see fit.

Jesus is the sole king and head of the church. It is he who must rule any church and it is his authority that is to be writ large in the life of the church, of our church.

We saw last week that the rest of Luke's gospel from chapter 19 verse 28 until the end splits into two halves that get their shape and theme from two of Jesus' entries into Jerusalem.

[4 : 59] The first is around the triumphal entry that is a very public display of Jesus as king. And so that's the theme for the first half of this final movement of Luke's gospel.

And so Jesus as king is the theme that runs through our passage today. Now, we left off last time with Jesus having cleansed out the temple and the temple continues to be the setting as Luke brings us to this critical question of authority.

And authority is the key theme in this passage. Jesus has entered his capital city as king. He's come to his temple to see it corrupted by the religious leaders and he sought to clear it out.

But, but, the religious establishment will not go down without a fight. Remember, 1947, they seek to destroy Jesus.

And so, friends, we need to be realistic. The fight for the church's future, the fight for the church's rule, its right rule, is very often a bloody one.

[6 : 11] But we need to be clear on this. There is a perpetual fight that needs to be fought in any local church too for who and how it will be ruled. So, here, the religious establishment seek to destroy Jesus.

And it's no surprise that the very next event Luke records for us then is that same religious establishment trying to trap Jesus and undermine all that he's been doing.

And so, the first thing we see in today's passage in verses 1 to 8 is rule. Rule. Jesus is the only ruler of his church. There can be and will be no others.

Jesus as the divine king is lord of the church. Jesus' arrival in this world signals the breaking in of the world to come into this one. Jesus' arrival was the inauguration of his kingdom.

And so, now, rather than prophets or priests or even kings ruling over the Lord's people, and in particular, the temple of the Lord's people, now it is Jesus himself, Jesus alone, as the true and eternal king, who is also the great prophet and priest.

[7 : 23] It is he who rules the church. And his rule has begun already. And Luke wants us to be absolutely crystal clear about that. His first act in arriving to his capital city and arriving to Jerusalem was to set about refining the temple, his temple, which, back in 1946, had been corrupted as a den for robbers.

And so, you see, his rule is not universally accepted. Verse 1, he continues to teach in the temple. And notice he's preaching the gospel. That is, Jesus is declaring the good news of the victory of God's kingdom, his kingdom.

He's unpacking the significance of his own arrival, that the king had come. But the chief priests and the scribes and the elders, notice they're having none of it.

They come to question him. The whole structure of the religious establishment are here, questioning Jesus. Of course they would be.

Jesus has, after all, just exposed them. He has just displayed to the crowds in the temple that they have corrupted the very heart of the nation's life. A place that ought to have been for rejoicing in God and receiving from God, they've turned into a den for robbers.

[8 : 42] And so the establishment needs to tackle Jesus' credibility. And it's so typical of establishment religion, isn't it? So typical of the kind of dead, perverted religion that is so at odds with Jesus.

Look at what they obsess over. Look at the point of their attack. Do you have proper authorization? That's the word that dominates these verses.

Verse 2, authority. Again, verse 2, authority. Verse 8, authority. Jesus, by what authority do you do these things?

With what authority do you dare tackle the practices of the temple? By what authority do you dare challenge us and our tight grasp of temple religion? That is so often the cry of stifling and perverted religion, isn't it?

Who allows you to do this? Have you been authorized? Did presbytery or general assembly or synod give you permission to do that? Obsessing over procedure and pounds and permission.

[9 : 45] Fussing about who gets to be called what and who holds what role and what title.

Concerned with who gets to do what and have their say. Concerned with procedure rather than with being productive in gospel endeavors.

Fussing about function rather than fruit. It's interesting how quickly lawyers can be wheeled out to protect an institution. To protect its power and its pounds.

Even in so-called Christian denominations. Do you see what the religious leaders are doing? Who gives you permission, Jesus? We haven't. How dare you be going about doing ministry that isn't licensed by us?

They're so blinded. All they can see is the power structure of the temple that they've erected. One that's jolly profitable. With all the money changers going about their business. And so they have tunnel vision to deal with the disruptor.

To deal with the one who would mess up their whole system. To deal with Jesus. And that isn't alien today, is it? That what ends up driving a denomination or a church.

[10 : 52] Is simply the goal of maintaining its existence. Keeping the status quo. Or a church can be so taken up with how we have done things.

We've always run this particular ministry. Couldn't possibly stop it. We've always supported this organization. We must always do so. With little interest perhaps or attention paid to the fruit of these

things.

You see that's the glaring omission from the religious leaders question isn't it? They aren't interested in whether Jesus is speaking truth. Whether his ministry is proving fruitful. They ask where his authority comes from.

And Jesus cuts through it. Verse 3. I have a question for you. Tell me. Verse 4. Was the baptism of John from heaven? Or from man? Who authorized John?

You see John the Baptist's ministry was so evidently powerful. So obviously fruitful that they're snickered. It jars with their whole system. Their whole understanding. So verse 5.

[11 : 59] They discuss it among themselves. They form the theological commission. By the general assembly of the church of Jerusalem. They get a theological commission together to tackle this question. It's so very difficult. And look at what their answers are.

Look at what they come up with. First if we say John's ministry is from heaven. He'll say well why do you not believe him? And they haven't believed John. Luke records for us using Isaiah's words.

That John is the forerunner of the Christ. And Luke tells us in chapter 7. That John is not just a prophet. But the greatest of all the prophets. And that all the people received John's baptism. Believing in God. They repented. But we're told the religious leaders refused. That for themselves. Not being baptized. Into John's baptism. And so notice their answer in that regard is.

Who cares about what's true? All they care about is what it will mean for them personally. And so option two. Verse six. If we say John's ministry is from man then.

[13 : 02] Well the people will stone us to death. Why? Because it was plea in his day to the people that John was a prophet. That his ministry was from heaven. That his ministry had power and was fruitful.

And so both options are bad for the leaders. Both options have consequences that they don't like. Either they're exposed as being the charlatans that they are. Exposed by the truth.

Or they're executed. For denying what is plainly the truth. Either they give up their leadership. Or they give up their lives. And so as is typical of establishment religion.

What do they choose? They choose option three. The fudge. Verse seven. We don't know. Spineless. Pathetic. No courage.

No convictions. But isn't that the kind of fudging that goes on in many a church or denomination today? Well of course. It'd be hard to be sure what Jesus really meant.

[14 : 01] When he said that marriage was between a man and a woman. You know. Of course we believe that. But we also know that of course these things are more complicated. And so whilst we believe that. And it is our official position.

Of course we also know that there are maybe times. And of course we cannot be quite so black and white. And so exceptions can be made. A fudge.

Or perhaps we see it when a message confronts us very pointedly. A great evil in society is exposed. And it's uncomfortable. It's convicting. And we know that it has real implications for us. But we fixate on some sort of minutia. In order to dodge the force of it. Oh of course I'm against such things. But you know really it's the way it's being spoken about.

I just can't get behind that. The fudge is a very tempting position. A supposed middle ground. Staying out of the points of real conflict. But look how pathetic it is.

[15 : 03] The Pharisees don't want to pick a side. They don't want to be stuck in the middle. They don't want to be asked to be in this. They haven't asked to be in this position. They're meant to be the ones asking the questions. But here they have a straightforward question put to them.

And because of what it will cost them they fudge it. The great answer of the theological commission here in the church of Jerusalem. We don't know. Well verse 8.

If you're willfully ignorant on these things. Then Jesus will cease to speak to you. Because the issue here was not. Whether the religious establishment knew the truth.

It was whether they would submit to it. The problem wasn't intuition. But rather inclination. Jesus rules his temple. He must and he will.

But that is a challenge to everyone. It's plain. Jesus is Lord. Jesus is King. The church is his body. And the reality was that Jesus' own ministry made it so obvious.

[16 : 09] Where his authority came from. Jesus says each tree is known by its own fruit. Could they see a fruitful and powerful heavenly ministry in Jesus? Absolutely.

But whether they wanted to accept that was a different matter. Now before Jesus goes on to deal more with this whole question of fruitfulness. It's worth us noticing that there is a distinct flavor to this whole battle for authority in the church.

It isn't a small thing. Down merely to a difference of opinion. Luke in his careful way. Casts this whole issue of Jesus dealing with the temple.

In the language of a demonic struggle. So notice. The language Luke used back in chapter 19 verse 45. Jesus drove out or cast out from the temple.

Those who sold. That's the same word used all the way through Luke's gospel for what Jesus does with demons. He drives or casts them out.

[17:16] And then notice the question that is asked of Jesus. Who gave you this authority? And that too is language that appears throughout Luke's gospel.

The giving of authority. And it's pretty much always used in the context of Satan and his demons. So all the way back in chapter 4.

Satan tempts Jesus by saying. I will give you all this authority. It's been given to me. And I will give it to him I will. But Jesus defeats Satan.

And so Jesus is able in chapter 9 to call together the 12. And he give them power and authority over all demons. Or again in chapter 10.

He says to the 72. That he has given them authority to tread on serpents and scorpions. Beasts synonymous with Satan. And he gives them authority over all the power of the enemy.

[18:17] And so Luke is casting this struggle for authority in the temple. As the struggle between God and Satan. Do you see the implication?

The religious leaders of the day. Are characterized as belonging to Satan. Taking on the character of the evil one and his minions. And so though Satan was defeated in the wilderness.

He continues to set himself against Jesus ministry. By inspiring these Jewish leaders. Do you see if Jesus isn't Lord of the church. The alternative is that Satan is.

That's the very language of the Westminster Confession of Faith. Drawing from Revelation. It uses that language. Of churches that descend into rejecting the clear authority of Jesus and his word.

They are synagogues of Satan. And we need to be clear. Satan continues to do battle against the church. And one of his chief weapons. Is false teachers.

[19:18] Who long to usurp Jesus rule in his church. By twisting and obscuring his clear word. By flattening out how seriously we're to take Jesus. By being ashamed of.

Or afraid of. Trusting that he knows best. Friends. This is not a case of a well. Interpretations may differ.

These religious leaders. According to Luke. Are following after their father the devil. Jesus must have soul. And ultimate authority over the church. And in the church.

Anything else is a disaster. Anything else is Satan. Sending his minions to distort. And deceive. And disrupt. Jesus must have soul.

And ultimate authority over the church. And in the church. And when he doesn't. Well verses 9 to 18. There will be secondly recompense. Recompense.

[20:18] When Jesus rule is refused in the church. When those who. Have been entrusted to lead it. Ignore their calling. Then there can only be one outcome.

For such a church. To be disinherited. Destroyed. This parable has a very plain message. That was aimed squarely at these religious leaders.

Look ahead to verse 19. They knew. That this parable is told against them. And so let's look at the parable. Verse 9.

A man plants a vineyard. Now a vineyard was a common Old Testament image for the people of God. Isaiah 5 speaks of it. Likewise Samiety.

Which we sang at the beginning of our service. God rescued a vine out of Egypt. And planted it fruitfully. It was a vineyard.

[21:11] That had been lovingly planted and tended. And was set up to be very fruitful. And that's the theme of the parable. The vineyard is planted. And then the man goes away. Having entrusted it to tenants.

And then as the owner sought the fruit. That his vineyard was set up. And designed to deliver. Again and again. His servants are sent away empty. That's the picture of Israel's history.

here? Empty church buildings because denominations and congregations refuse to accept Jesus as Lord of the church. Refuse to have his authoritative word driving the church. Refuse to let his gospel word loose in order to raid Satan's stronghold. Tinkering away at hollowed out Christianity that increasingly has up for grabs anything that our society and culture doesn't like.

[27 : 00] Jesus will dispossess. He'll disinherit. He'll remove from churches and denominations his presence. His presence through which his word, his presence that when his word is opened means he meets with his people to minister grace to them. He'll remove it. And these so-called churches will be emptied of the gospel and emptied of the people. Our own national church is a case in point. It's in freefall.

I checked this week on its website. It has 109 properties for sale because they're empty. But that shouldn't be a shock, should it? Look at what Jesus says, verse 16.

God will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyards to others. And we can protest all we like saying, surely not, surely not the mother church, surely not our church with all of its history. But look at Jesus' response in verse 17. Can there be anything more serious, more bracing than to have God incarnate, the rightful king, verse 17, look you straight in the eye and say, I'm deadly serious. I can either be the cornerstone or the stone that crushes.

And so, Tron Church, there can be few greater follies for us than to think that this couldn't happen to us. Few greater follies than to think we couldn't be emptied. That in generations to come, the people of God, the fruit is removed from here. If indeed the gospel is removed, if we kick against Jesus' rule over us. If his word confronts us and we decide that it is easier or more preferable for us to attempt to silence it, to go another way, then that is the path to being disinherited and destroyed. There are plenty of warnings to us, plenty of empty church buildings, plenty of crumbling denominations. If Dadasco, our presbytery, were to decide that we would flinch in the face of the world's derision and to accept its agendas, then we can be sure what the future will look like.

[29 : 31] Jesus couldn't be plainer. As he looks directly at those who said, surely not, he asks them what Psalm 118 verse 22 meant. That was the Psalm that was hanging over Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

It was on the lips of his disciples as they praised him on his triumphal entry. But here Jesus says, what then is it that is written? The stone that the builder rejects has become the cornerstone. And Psalm 118, the builders are the nations around about who opposed and tried to destroy the king and his people. But here in Luke's gospel, the builders who oppose the king are not pagan nations, but the spiritual leadership in Israel. And as there was a great reversal so that Israel's king won out in Psalm 118, so it will be here. The one who was despised, who was rejected and opposed, becomes the cornerstone. Do you see, Jesus, to the religious leaders, is the vilified stone. But he will be the victorious stone. And he will also be the vanquishing stone. Now, we've had quite a lot of stone talk throughout Luke's gospel, haven't we? John the Baptist has said that if Israel won't repent and believe, then Jesus can bring sons of Abraham from the stones, like in chapter 3. And we've seen in chapter 19 verse 40, Jesus says that if the disciples were not heaping praise upon Jesus, then the stones would. And so you see, this is a picture of the unbreakable nature of Jesus' church. A cornerstone is the stone in which a structure that holds it together, that everything else is built around and upon. And Jesus has been clear, as has John, stones will be made into followers of Jesus, into those who praise Jesus. Jesus will build his church with living stones, as Peter says. And so where any religious establishment may refuse or reject Jesus' ultimate rule, that won't stop his church. He is the true cornerstone upon which everything else will be built. And that is why anything built not upon him will be devoid of him, will be disinherited.

[32 : 08] Jesus is the foundation. That's what Paul says again in 1 Corinthians 3. Jesus is the foundation upon which a church, the temple of God, is built. To refuse him his rightful place is to build anything other than a church, anything other than his temple. And it will come to nothing. Because do you see, verse 18, Jesus will be the vanquishing stone. He will crush. He will build his church, and he will crush any who would seek to depose him from his rightful place as king and lord of the church. Jesus looked the religious leader straight in the eye, and he said to them that he knows they will kill him. But he says the rejection of him will see them supplanted and squashed.

And Jesus is just as serious today. He must, he will rule his church. Otherwise, it will no longer be a church or be the church. And so that is the perpetual choice that any congregation faces today still.

Who rules our church? Is it the Lord Jesus? Is his word supreme? Will we so submit to his rule that we bear fruit for his kingdom? Or will we be caught up in fussing over the schemes and preferences of men? Brothers and sisters, if we realize the immense privilege it is to be ruled by Jesus, if we will submit to him in all matters, perhaps particularly in matters that we find the struggle to submit to him in, if we take him and his mission seriously, then we're assured that we are his vineyard set up to flourish and bear fruit. We're assured that as we build on him and him alone, that even the gates of hell, the seat of Satan's power, won't be able to topple us.

Not because we'll be a mighty church, but because Jesus' church is unbreakable. Because it is all built around and upon him, the Lord of the church, the cornerstone.

But we need to be clear too, don't we? That this exclusive claim that Jesus alone is the only king and rightful head of the church is something that will inevitably create rift. That's our final point this morning. Rift, verse 19.

[34 : 48] When Jesus' rule is being established in a church, then it will divide and it will spark conflict. Jesus is absolutely fixed on working out his purposes in his temple.

And that will mean dividing those who will have his rule from those who will not. A common way of a king asserting their rule is through battle. And Jesus' rule over the church will provoke battle.

Jesus has been totally plain, absolutely clear that his authority over the church is a God-given one. It's a heavenly authority. His ministry, much like John the Baptist, was obviously powerful, clearly very fruitful, and obviously from heaven.

But more than that, the parable, Jesus tells, makes clear that his authority comes from being the beloved son of God the Father. And so his is a real authority.

But a refused one. Jesus has just told this parable against the scribes and chief priests. In verse 19, what do they want to do? They want to lay their hands on him.

[35 : 58] That very R. They want to do what Jesus has just prophesied they would do. Kill him. But notice the little caveat at the very end.

They couldn't yet. Because they feared the people. The people are still hanging on his words. There's a rift.

Those who would destroy Jesus and those whose devotion is towards Jesus. And we need to be realistic. When Jesus' authoritative rule is carried out in his church, when his authoritative word is brought to bear in his church, by really confronting his people with the implications of his words, not just spouting spiritual-sounding things and lofty thoughts, but really applying the Bible in the church, then that can be uncomfortable.

And at times it must be uncomfortable. It will produce rifts when it confronts us with ways that we must change. Because there'll be some who don't want to listen.

Some who'd prefer the false prophets, whose modus operandi is to never call people to change. Because you see, when Jesus runs his church, he really does make demands upon us.

[37 : 14] Demands upon our lives. Upon our money. Upon our time and our priorities. Upon our loyalty. He does demand that we stand on the truths that are most under fire in our day.

Where we cannot embrace things like feminism or trans ideology. Because God's word is clear on what a man is. What a woman is. And they're not the same and mustn't be the same.

Because they were wonderfully created to be different. In order to truly complement each other. And Jesus' word would demand that we contend wholeheartedly for ethical issues.

To take a public stand on matters that whilst our society pushes them. We know that his word is clear on what is good and right. And what is awful. And against all that God has made.

And so will we listen to Jesus' authoritative word on matters like abortion and euthanasia. Never far from the political realm. Or will we perhaps try to find a fudge.

[38 : 18] Just like the Pharisees. Jesus' rule over the church will always provoke ructions and rifts. It will divide and expose.

At times painfully expose. Where true loyalties lie. But that is why God's word must be pressed to him in the church.

Not in ethereal ways. It's no use for God's word to be applied in the abstract. We should at times feel uncomfortable at the preaching of Jesus' word. Because there's a battle raging on.

A battle to have Jesus as a sole king and head of the church. And it shows Jesus' commitment to bring to completion the work that he has begun in us. He wants to do that.

He will do that. A battle rages on to have Jesus as king of the church. But remember too.

[39 : 12] That the picture of the temple carries through yes to the church. Paul says that in 1 Corinthians 3. But remember too. Jesus' supreme authority in his temple. Is also a claim on the individual lives of believers.

Paul also tells us that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. And so the question doesn't just come to us as a church corporately about who will rule us. It comes to each of us individually. Who rules you? If you claim the name Christian. If you profess to belong to Jesus. Then Jesus demands to have authority over you.

He gifts you his spirit. That you might bear fruit. He plants his gospel word within you. So that your life might be fruitfully growing in the likeness of Jesus.

And might be engaged in fruitful service of his kingdom. And so will our own lives be marked by receiving Jesus.

[40 : 17] Refusing him. Bowing to his authority. Or bellowing against it. Jesus says to us as a church.

And as individuals too. That he can either be the crushing stone. Or the cornerstone. These are stark words.

But remember. Jesus is the king who pronounces judgment through tears. He doesn't say to us coldly and indifferently. That he can either be the cornerstone or the crushing stone.

And he doesn't really care which one we choose. No. He speaks so pointedly. So persistently. With tears in his eyes. Because he longs for us to choose life. And not death.

To choose that Jesus needn't be the stone that crushes us. But rather can be the cornerstone upon which. And around which. Our life as a church.

[41 : 13] And our lives as Christians can be built. And that is an unshakable foundation. A foundation that will enable us to be fruitful from now.

Into his eternal kingdom. Into his kingdom which will never be shaken. Who will rule this church?

Who will rule you? Let's pray. Let's pray. Lord God.

Lord God. Grant us your grace and help. That we would be prepared to submit to you in everything. Oh how we knew.

That the world. And the flesh. And the devil. Would seek to prevent us from doing so. And so we need your help. We need your strengthening. And so grant to us.

[42 : 23] That we would be a church. That is fruitfully ruled. By you. Not just now. But for generations to come.

And so where we need to be challenged. Would you make us willing. To receive it. And where we need to be refined and revived. Would you do these things.

For our good. And for your glory. We pray it in Jesus name. Amen.

Amen.