



GRACE CHURCH

Give Up To Jesus

Luke 20:1-18

Grace Waco | 2.15.25

I would like to get personal this morning and let you into the process of my own heart in the last few weeks. Including an accident that happened just two weeks ago (everyone is ok and safe), I have so far in the last 12 months filed 4 insurance claims on vehicles that were complete losses and purchased 4 vehicles due to accidents and other auto issues. That is a lot of time on the phone with agents and car salesmen, and none of it I asked for. This week I spent far too much time talking to Geico.

The result is, for lack of a better way to put it, that I feel a little disenchanted. The realities of life have leveled me to a place where, even in preparing this sermon, I have questions of God. The pulpit is not the place to spill all of that—but here is what I want to say. I think if we are honest with ourselves, more often than we would like to think, there is a kind of internal growl of discontent with God. That discontent, if not addressed, can boil over to contempt, and that contempt can change quickly into hostility.

No one is born hating God. This world is far too beautiful and complex for that. But what happens is our heads kind of sink down: into real pain and suffering, and also into minute details like dollar signs and insurance policies, politics and opinions, assignments and deadlines. And all of a sudden, we have set our mind, like myself at times this week, on what Paul calls “the flesh”. And in Romans 8:7, we read the problem with the mind set on the flesh. It is not just a mind that is unaware of God, or ambivalent towards God: “the mind that is set on the flesh is *hostile* to God.”

The militant atheist doesn’t begin his spiritual journey as militant. I didn’t wake up on Monday ready to be hostile towards God. Think of the darkest, loneliest moment of your year so far in 2025? Where you felt like God just wasn’t there, where you felt, if you are brave enough to admit it, angry with him—even just for one fleshly moment. You didn’t ask for that. But it came to you as a result of a mind set on the flesh.

We are drawn to set ourselves up against God, bit by bit, piece by piece, moment by moment.

So in our text today, we find a negative example. Look who comes to approach Jesus in **verse 1: “the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders”**. What Luke means is that the entire Sanhedrin is there to confront Jesus. And if you have the ESV you will notice this section is headlined: “The Authority of Jesus Challenged.” That is what the ruling council of Israel is doing: questioning Jesus’

authority. He has come riding on a donkey, triumphantly heralded as Messiah by the crowds, compassionately weeping over Jerusalem, and justly angry with the state of the temple. Now, he is “in the temple” teaching, his last instruction before his death. He is in the temple, in the place of authority, and everyone is “handing on his words” (19:48) because of how he teaches with authority. So there are only two ways to receive Jesus in this text: in opposition to him, or hanging on his words. Challenging his authority, or submitting to it. At enmity with God, or at peace with God. Singing “Hosanna!”, or trying to kill Jesus.

If you want to be on the right side of this (there is no neutrality with Jesus), then today we must see again the negative example of the Jewish leaders and work against it. In order not to “set our minds on the flesh” we must give up three things: our pride; our control; and our dreams.

Give up your Pride. *You may have missed Jesus before, but it's not too late now.*

Pride is of course a universally acknowledged vice, at least amongst Christians. It’s not going to shock you to hear a preacher tell you to give up your pride, nor should it. But the pride that the enemies of Jesus show here is a specific kind: the inability to admit that they really screwed up. Jesus’ answer in **verse 3** to their question with a question is a normal philosophical tactic: he is engaging them in a kind of debate. But it might seem strange to you. They are essentially asking Jesus: who do you think you are? And what Jesus answers with is: “who did you think John the baptist was?”

The reason for this is because both the religious leaders and the people know the link between John and Jesus. They were there or heard when Jesus came to be baptized by John and he called him “the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”. They know that he said that he was unfit to tie Jesus’ sandals, that by John’s own profession he was simply a forerunner, a preparation for Jesus. The baptism of John was John helping the people repent and turn from sin in order to prepare themselves to turn to Jesus.

The implication is that if the Pharisees accept the validity of John’s baptism, they are admitting to the fact that they have rejected a prophet of God. If John’s ministry was “from heaven”, then they rejected God by rejecting his messenger. For them to admit this would take great humility, because it would relinquish whatever trust they had with the people. The whole point of the Sanhedrin was to act as shepherds over Israel, helping them *not* to forsake God. The whole system was set up to avoid the “ancient crime for which Israel and Judah were sent into exile: rejecting God’s prophets.”¹ So if they say that John was a prophet from Heaven, they admit their unfitness to lead the people and undermine their own authority.

But if they say John was a crock and his baptism (notice how similar Jesus’ language is to Paul’s) was “of man”, that is, “of the flesh”, then they risk stoning from the people who were convinced

¹ Arthur Just, *Luke*

John was a prophet. The reason stoning is mentioned is because that would be the legal punishment for leaders who reject God's prophets and lead the people astray.

So either way, they don't want to end up on the bottom of a rock pile, so they admit nothing. They feign ignorance. "By refusing to confess the truth, they confess a lie."² Their ego prevents them from admitting their fault, and so they set themselves at enmity with God.

We've been reading *Paradise Lost* in our Equipping Hour, and one idea we've covered is the way that Pride prevents us from any means of escape from the consequences of our sin. The deon's in Milton's book devise all sorts of plans to make Hell a little less miserable, but never once do they contemplate repentance.

"[Each] of them is like a man who has just sold his country or his friend and now knows himself to be a pariah, or like a man who has by some intolerable action of his own just quarrelled irrevocably with the woman he loves. For human beings there is often an escape from this Hell, but there is never more than one—the way of humiliation, repentance, and (where possible) restitution. For Milton's devils this way is closed.... They know they will not repent. That door out of Hell is firmly locked, by the devils themselves, on the inside."³

Pride locks us in a hell of our own making, because it prevents us from the only means of escape: admitting we were wrong. All the leaders of Israel need to do here to get back on board with Jesus is admit that they were wrong about John, and therefore wrong about Jesus. It would be humiliating, of course. But it would save them from the destruction coming for them. The further they go into this rejection of Jesus, the harder their hearts become and the tighter they twist the lock to their own hell.

For us, this boils down into a simple principle: it's never too late for repentance. It's never too late to say: "I really botched that." It's never too late to say: "I was totally and completely wrong, and I am sorry." It's not too late for your relationship with others, and it's not too late for your relationship with God. You may have rejected John the Baptist, but you don't need to reject Jesus. Today is the day of humility. ***You may have missed Jesus before, but it's not too late now.*** Don't double down on your rebellious past just because you've dug a big hole of enmity with God. God is bigger than the hole—give up your pride.

Give up your Control. *You're not in control, you are simply a tenant of your life.*

After three different car accidents in my family in one year, you'd think I would have learned that I am not really in control of my life. But I'm still hard headed. And this was the religious leader's problem too. So Jesus tells a parable to show them. It's quite simple: there are several people who are tenants, that is renters, on a piece of property. They don't own it, they just take care of it. They

² Ibid.

³ C.S. Lewis, *Preface to Paradise Lost*

pay their rent by tending to the vineyard and giving a share of its fruit back to the landlord, the owner.

Naturally, the landlord sends his servants to collect their rent in grapes, but each time he does, they decide to beat him up. They are in control, not this distant landlord. They are the boss.

This is another picture of what enmity with God looks like. It's not just a one-time deal. It's a repeated rejection of God. These servants represent God's prophets, bearing God's word and God's law. In several places in the Old Testament, Israel is called the "vineyard" of God. And it was the job of the religious rulers, in the form of judges, kings, and priests, and eventually the Sanhedrin after exile, as we have said, to identify false prophets from true ones, and to help the people receive God's word from the prophets and enact God's law. But time and time again the religious rulers were greedy for their own gain and power, so they persecuted the prophets, beat them, and did not listen. There is a direct parallel here between Isaiah 5:7,

For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts
is the house of Israel,
and the men of Judah
are his pleasant planting;
and he looked for justice,
but behold, bloodshed;
for righteousness,
but behold, an outcry!

The religious rulers know Jesus is talking about them, the text tells us as much in **verse 19**. Jesus is accusing them of rejecting the prophets and leading the people astray due to their greed and pride. But then in **verse 13** he ups the ante. The distraught land owner sends his *beloved son*. Already in John's baptism and on the mount of transfiguration have we seen a voice from heaven calling Jesus Christ the Father's "beloved Son." The meaning is not lost on the crowd. These rulers have not just rejected God's prophets and God's pointers to Messiah, they have rejected Messiah himself, the Son of God, very God of God. They have rejected God, full stop, and made themselves his enemy.

Notice too how they do not simply send away the son, but kill him outside the vineyard. Jesus too is the son who will bear the punishment from Israel's rulers that the other prophets did not—he will bear the very wrath of God as a sacrifice, as Hebrews says, "outside the camp", as he dies not by the hands of Jews but by the hands of Romans. When Jesus treks up to the hill of Golgotha and is crucified there, he is not just being sentenced to death, he is being cast out from his place in Israel. To be crucified was not just to be tortured and killed, but for Jews and Romans, it was to be wiped from the face of history and cursed forever, to be "outside the camp" of God's people, like the scapegoat sent into the wilderness on the day of atonement.

Their problem was their thought that their actions did not have any consequences. The power of ruling over Israel got to their head. They forgot that they were answerable not just to men, but to

God. They believed that if they followed the rules before men, no one would notice their subtle hatred of God. They forgot that they were tenants.

And so do we. Our body, our mind, our money, our gifts: none of it really belongs to us, but is a stewardship from God. We live on a rented earth that he owns. The authority we are given is only from him. We are not our own masters.

You know that famous poem “If” by Rudyard Kipling? Perhaps that personifies the lie we believe far too often:

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don’t deal in lies,
Or being hated, don’t give way to hating,
And yet don’t look too good, nor talk too wise:

If you can dream—and not make dreams your master;
If you can think—and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same;

....

Yours is the Earth and everything that’s in it...⁴

If you can do this, if you can be humble and wise and work, work, work, follow the rules... then you are the master. Then the earth is yours, the kingdom is yours! What a bunch of anti-gospel nonsense. The earth and everything in it is yours only when the owner of all things lets you rent it out—and he is due the fruit of the field!

Give up your control, and you will strike a blow to any enmity you are quietly harboring towards God.

⁴ Voted on several occasions the most popular poem in England.
<https://momobookblog.blogspot.com/2017/02/bbc-nations-favourite-poems.html>

Give up your Dreams. *Your life as you know it may have to be broken and shattered before it is built up again.*

Now I want to show you how giving up all this is good news. The irony of the leaders trying to avoid getting stoned is that in the parable they are destroyed, and Jesus says what is really the crux of this whole passage in **verse 18**: they will be crushed by Jesus, the cornerstone. And it's actually *through* Jesus' rejection that he becomes the cornerstone, the foundation of the true Israel.

Because he is humbled, he is exalted. Israel as they know it is coming to an end, and the promises of God will be caught up again in God's chosen people: not the Jews and their leaders who reject Jesus. God's new people will not be Israel but his church: all those who humble themselves and are built on the rock of Christ and into the temple of Christ.

But all of this is just a germ of an idea in the mind of Jesus' hearers. They cannot fathom how the promises made to them as a people group centuries ago could not be coming to fruition not through their religious rulers and old laws, but through this Galilean whose kingdom will go to the ends of the earth. They cannot fathom that the true Israel, the true Son of God, will be Jesus and all those who are found in him.

This is why they are so confused in **verse 16**. It's not just because of the destruction of the leaders of Israel. That is shocking enough. But it's because the vineyard—the promises of God for Israel—are given to "others".

The dreams of the Israelites were that Messiah would lead their nation to prominence in a new, expanding world. They dreamed of rivalling Rome. They dreamed of finally overthrowing their captors forever. They dreamed of their place as God's chosen people, with God's chosen king again ruling them in justice and righteousness. They set their mind on earthly things and earthly kingdoms. And without knowing it, they set themselves in enmity against God—the very reason why in just a weeks time the crowds will call for Jesus' death. They were ready to accept Jesus as Messiah, but they were not yet ready to accept the kind of upside-down kingdom Jesus was bringing, where even *gentiles* had a place at the table.

But Jesus offers a way to get there. He says in **verse 18** that there are two ways to go. One, you can get crushed by this stone, this rock. You can be an enemy of God by being an enemy of Jesus, and you may feel you are saving yourself, but really you are just locking hell from the inside and your fate is sealed to destruction. Or, you can "fall on the stone".

Falling on the stone is not easy, safe, or even pleasant sounding. When you fall on the cornerstone, you will be "broken to pieces". *Your life as you know it may have to be broken and shattered before it is built up again.* The dreams you have about what you think is success, what you think is happiness, may have to die. When Jesus says: "follow me", he calls you to his death, broken like he was.

But he also calls you to his resurrection. But it's from those pieces of repentance that Jesus builds his church. You may trip and fall and be shattered, but if in that place of humility you come to Christ, you become a "living stone".

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood...

The opposite of being hostile to God is being at peace with God. And you can have peace with God. All it requires is—today, for the first time or again—giving up your pride, giving up your control, and giving up your dreams. What Jesus offers is not just that you won't be crushed, but that you will be built, holy brick by brick, into a place where God dwells, a temple of peace where God is near, where alongside your brothers and sisters in Christ, you are known by God, seen by God, loved by God, and totally and completely unashamed of it.