**BEING HONEST TO GOD**

**(Matthew 21:23-32)**

I heard about a rookie police officer who pulled a man over for speeding. The two had the following conservation:

**Officer:** May I see your driver’s license?

**Driver:** I don’t have one. I had it suspended when I got my fifth DUI.

**Officer:** May I see your registration for this vehicle?

**Driver:** This isn’t my car. I stole it.

**Officer:** The car is stolen?

**Driver:** That’s right. But, come to think of it, I believe I saw the owner’s registration in the glove box when I was putting my gun in there.

**Officer:** There’s a gun in the glove box?

**Driver:** Yes, sir. That’s where I put it after I shot and killed the woman who owns this car and stuffed her in the trunk.

**Officer:** There’s a BODY in the TRUNK?!?!?

**Driver:** Yes, sir.

Hearing this, the rookie officer immediately called his captain. Within two minutes, the car was surrounded by police, and the captain approached the driver:

**Captain:** Sir, may I see your license?

**Driver:** Sure. Here it is.

His license was valid.

**Captain:** Who’s car is this?

**Driver:** It’s mine, officer. The registration is in the glove box.

**Captain:** Would you slowly open your glove box so I can see if there’s a gun in it?

**Driver:** Yes, sir, but there’s no gun in it.

Sure enough, there was no gun in the glove box, but the registration was clearly visible.

**Captain:** Sir, would you mind opening your trunk? I was told there’s a body in it.

**Driver:** No problem.

The trunk was opened; no body.

**Captain:** I don’t understand it. The officer who stopped you said you told him you didn’t have a license, stole the car, had a gun in the glovebox, and that there was a dead body in the trunk.

**Driver:** Really? I don’t think you can trust this officer. I’ll bet he’s even told you I was speeding.

Sometimes, we don’t know who we can trust or even what to trust. We are in an unprecedented situation. Can we trust what the government is telling us? Can we trust what the media is telling us? Can we trust what our friends are saying? Can we trust our own instincts?

Beyond the pandemic that we are facing, I have a more fundamental question. I have a question about your relation-ship with God: “Can you be trusted?”

Today, as we examine our text, we are going to meet some untrustworthy characters. They were not being honest with the people God wanted them to serve. They were not being honest with themselves. And, they were not being honest with God who had come to them as Jesus, the Son of God.

Rightly or wrongly, when some people want to affirm that what they are saying is true, they will pledge, “Honest to God.” I suppose what they are really saying is, “What I am telling to you, I would be willing to stand and say in the very presence of God.”

Today, as we look at Matthew 21:23-32, we are going to investigate what is involved in “Being Honest to God.” Let’s first read out text.

1. **BEING HONEST TO GOD MEANS BELIEVING IN THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS.**

Look again at v. 23. It is the Wednesday of Passion Week. Jesus is in the temple precincts. A delegation of religious leaders stops Jesus as He is walking. They ask two questions: “By what authority do you do these things, and who gave you this authority?” By “these things” they are referring to what has already happened this week. On Sunday, Jesus entered Jerusalem, and He allowed the people to praise and honor Him. On Monday, He runs the money changers and the animal sellers out of the Court of the Gentiles, and He calls the Temple, “His Father’s House.”

These religious leaders viewed the Temple and the Temple precincts as being the domain of their authority. What right does Jesus have to come and mess with their territory?

As I was growing up, there were a couple of times my mom said to me, “You are getting too big for your britches.”

Likewise, the authorities may have thought Jesus popularity had gone to his head. We might say, “Who died and made Him King?”

So far, in the Gospel of Matthew, we have seen:

* Jesus taught with authority.
* He claimed to have the authority to forgive sin.
* He had the authority to heal broken bodies and to cast out evil spirits.
* He conferred that authority upon His disciples.
* In John’s Gospel, Jesus says that His Father has given Him the authority to execute judgment.
* Also, in John, Jesus says He has the authority to lay down His life and take it up again.
* Best of all, toward the end of Matthew, Jesus says, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me” (Matthew 28:18).

The stories contained in the gospel accounts bear witness to the fact that Jesus does indeed have incredible authority.

* Jesus has the authority say to a storm, “Pipe down,” and immediately, it falls silent.
* Jesus has the authority to say to an evil spirit, “Be gone,” and immediately, it leaves.
* Jesus has the authority to say to unhearing ears, “Be opened,” and immediately, sound returns to that individual.
* Jesus has the power to say to a man with unseeing eyes, “Go your way, your faith has made you well,” and immediately, light and colors come flooding in where there had been only darkness before.
* Jesus has the power to stand before the tomb of a man four days dead, and say with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come forth,” and he does.

Does this same Jesus who governs the natural world and the spiritual world, have the authority to govern your life? We are called to believe that He does.

Since Jesus was walking on the Temple grounds, it is quite likely that many were around Him when the priests and the elders challenged His authority. Jesus chose not to answer them directly. Instead, He directed at them one little, simple question. We find it in v. 24. He says to them, “John’s ministry? Was that of God or of man?”

Instantly, the men huddle up. Look at vv. 25b-27a. “What do we say? Either way, we are sunk?” Their answer is clearly dishonest. They say, “Uh, we don’t know.” They try to weasel their way out of it.

We come to Jesus’ answer in v. 27b. Jesus says, “Is that the way you want to play it? If you want to play that game, I’ll play along, too.” Since they won’t answer His question, He refuses to answer theirs.

If we want to play games with Jesus and pretend to be His follower, He will let us, but don’t expect Him to be there when you need Him. Jesus is powerfully present for His followers, not for pretenders

At an earlier time in His ministry, Jesus was asked, “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?” Jesus replied, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent” (John 6:28-29).

What is God asking of you? He is not asking that you do a great deed. He is not asking that you perform a great service. He is not asking that you give a great sum of money. He is asking that you believe and trust His Son as your Savior and Lord. Those two roles of Jesus go together, by the way.

Many people want Jesus as their Savior, but they are not too keen on the idea of having Jesus as their Lord. Jesus can’t be one without being the other. It has been said, “If Jesus is not Lord of all, then He’s not Lord at all.”

In a sermon on the authority of Jesus, Pastor Colin Smith said:

Christ lays claim to your obedience, your energy, your gifting, your time, your dream, your family, and your retirement. You may ask, “How can that possibly be my highest good?” Here’s why: Jesus said, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” Then he gives the reason: “For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it: ([Luke 9:23-24](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+9%3A23-9%3A24)).

Your greatest good is to be wholly owned by the Son of God, because in keeping your life from Christ, you will eventually lose it, but in losing your life to Christ, you will find it, keep it, and gain it forever.

That bring us to the second thing that being honest to God means. Not only does it mean believing in the authority of Jesus . . .

1. **BEING HONEST TO GOD MEANS BOWING TO THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS.**

Jesus went on to tell a story to the religious leaders and to those who were listening to their conversation. Let’s look at it again (vv. 28-30). In this story, the second son who says he will go work in the father’s vineyard but then doesn’t represents those religious leaders with whom Jesus was speaking. The second son also represents religious people today who only pretend to be committed to God. They talk a good game. They look the part. They appear to be close followers of Christ, but there is no depth or reality to their confession. Saying Jesus is your King and actually following Him as your King are two very, different things.

You have seen old western movies where the good guys or the bad guys ride into town. You see all the store fronts and buildings that line the wide, main street. What the camera doesn’t reveal is that behind the front façade there are no buildings. It is just a set that was made to look like real buildings.

The person who says he will follow Jesus but doesn’t really follow Jesus is just a façade of faith. He or she has the appearance of godliness but is a stranger to the power of the gospel in the life of a true believer.

Who does the first son represent, the one who initially said “no” when the father instructed him to work in the vineyard but later did so anyway? According to what Jesus said in the latter half v. 31, the first son represents tax collectors, prostitutes, and the like. These are people who seem to be far from the gospel, but these were the very kind of people who responded to John the Baptist’s ministry. They heard his call to repent, and they did.

Let me ask you to do something. Think of someone you know who in your estimation is the least likely person you know who would ever darken the door of a church, the least likely person you know who would every become a Christian and live his or her life for Christ. Those are the kinds of people who will make into heaven before the outwardly religious who lack a real relationship with God through Jesus.

In the story Jesus told, the father had two sons. Son #1 said *no* but then obeyed his father anyway. Son #2 said *yes* but then failed to obey his father. We don’t have to choose between being either of those two sons. We can be child #3 who says *yes* to God and then lives out that *yes.* That’s who Jesus was to His Father, and when His Spirit comes to live inside of us, we can be like Him.

The saddest words of our text are the last words of v. 32. The religious leaders saw the social outcasts repenting and instead of being motivated by their example to draw closer to God, they refused to repent of their non-repentance. They were not honest to God.

If you and I are going to be honest, we must believe in and bow to the authority of Jesus.

It is an old story. Maybe you have heard it before. There was a young boy who lived in a coastal town. He became interested in constructing a small, model of a large sailing vessel. Every day after school and for long hours over the weekends he sat hunched over his project, gluing pieces in just the right place, shaping the hull, erecting the mast, attaching the sails. The finishing touch of his labor of love was engraving his initials on the bottom of his model ship. This ship became his prized possession.

One summer day, he took his model ship to a nearby stream to test its seaworthiness. He misjudged the strength of the current. He was unable to keep up with it as it sped downstream faster than his legs could carry him. The stream fed into the ocean. His heart was broken thinking his labor of love was gone forever.

Six months after losing the ship he so lovingly created, he walked by the window a gift shop. The sight of what he saw almost made his heart stop. There in the window was his model ship. He raced inside to the window, carefully lifted it aloft and looked underneath. Sure enough, there were his initials.

He took the boat to the front and talked to the shop keeper. He explained that he had made this boat that it belonged to him. The store owner said, “I don’t know if it once belonged to you or not, but now it belongs to me. If you want it, you will have to pay for it.”

The boy looked at the price tag. It cost more than he had. The owner agreed to put it on law away until the boy had paid the full price. Now, every day after school and on weekends, he did odd jobs until he had earned what he needed.

Finally, one day he took his money to the counter of that gift shop, laid out his money, and counted the exact price. With a smile, the owner handed him his beautiful boat.

As he left the store, with a tear in his eye the boy looked at his boat and said, “You are twice mine. I made you, and I bought you.”

If you belong to Jesus, you are twice His. He created you, and upon a cruel cross, He bought you. You have been bought with a price, the precious blood of Jesus. Because you are twice His, He has right and full authority over you.

Trust Him. Follow Him.