

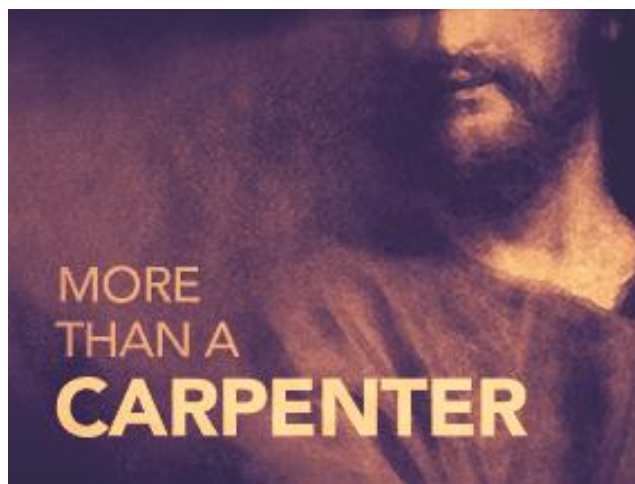
## MORE THAN A CARPENTER

30th April 2017

Readings: Matthew 21:33-46; John 10:31-33

As you know Alpha is beginning Monday week and though a number have done Alpha the team is encouraging you not only to invite someone, but to sign up yourself. The course is great for helping folk outside the church explore what our faith's about but is also a real boost to Christians. The teaching material's had a major revamp. It's sharp and compelling. So today I'm going to start with the first 6min or so of an Alpha session. This will give you a taste of the new material and also springboard into a message about

"Who is Jesus" where we'll certainly see he was more than a carpenter.



*Show first 6 minutes of Alpha session 2, Who is Jesus?*

Wasn't the montage of street interviews interesting? Taken from all over the world people were asked who they thought Jesus was. What a variation! The one that struck me, and what I'll to pick up on this morning, is the young lady who said

"Personally I think Jesus was probably a really cool dude who lived a long time ago and gave great advice to people and it snowballed from there."

Now why this common response? Because with it people can "sort of" show respect to Jesus on the one hand while dismissing him on the other. "He was good man doing good things but has no claim on my life. For, after his death things just snowballed."

This line of thought is attractive, compelling and common today. It's been popularised by theologians, who should know better and by popular culture. Of the theologians the Jesus Seminar is a prime example. They take the view science rules out all miracles, including the resurrection. They then ask, "If this is so, who was the historical Jesus?" Their conclusion: Jesus was just a carpenter who became a respected teacher. After his death his followers intentionally misinterpreted and exaggerated his claims. From popular culture we see this reflected in Monty Pythons, *Life of Brian*. The hapless Bryan is born at the time of Jesus and throughout his life he happens to be at the wrong place at the wrong time and mistaken for the Messiah - the movie's premise is the gullibility of his followers and it all snowballed from there.

So that Jesus was a good man, whose followers exaggerated everything about him is a powerful train of thought, even today. Why? Like I said it gives people the option of being respectful to Jesus while dismissing his claims.

But amongst the claims and counter claims by Christians and opponents there's a key question often missed. What did Jesus say about himself? In a time when a number claimed to be the Messiah, gathered a following and then were invariably killed by the Romans, what did Jesus say? Did he claim to be more than a carpenter? Did he, in fact, claim to be Messiah, the Son of God? For if he did, and given the historical reliability of the resurrection, then whatever we think about Jesus we can't dismiss him by claiming things just snowballed after his death.

So let's look at what Jesus said about himself. We'll look at two incidents, one in Matthew and the other in John. Both occur in the temple. Both responses to his enemies as they question who he is. Both show us who Jesus thinks he is.

First of all we'll look at the Parable of the Tenants. It's the Parable of the Tenants from Matthew 21:33. While you're turning here's a brief background. It's the week of the crucifixion. Jesus has entered Jerusalem on what we call Palm Sunday to adulation of the people. But he has his detractors.

Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you this authority?" Matthew 21:23

As part of his response Jesus tells this parable

"Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. 34 When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit.

"The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. 36 Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. 37 Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said.

"But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.' 39 So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

"Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" Matthew 21:33-40

How are we to understand this parable? Well the landowner is God and the tenants are the Jews, God's people. While the landowner was away, the tenants rebelled. This certainly describes the Israelites, who over the centuries often turned from God's ways to their own. The servants who were rejected are the prophets. We know their names, Elijah, Jeremiah, Amos and the like. But who are the tenants or the son. Even

the chief priests and elders aren't sure, but drawn into the story they reply to Jesus' question of what to do with the wicked tenants...

"He will bring those wretches to a wretched end," they replied, "and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time."

And by doing so they unintentionally condemn themselves. For Jesus now make's it clear who the tenants and the son are - much to the angst of the chief priests.

Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes'? Matthew 21:33-42

It's as Jesus quotes Psalm 118 the listeners realise who the tenants and son are. The chief priests are the wicked tenants and Jesus the landlord's son. With this double bombshell "What? You're saying we are wicked tenants and you the Son of God. No way!"

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them. They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet. Matthew 21:45-46

Now, most clearly, this parable shows what Jesus said about himself. That he was the son of the landowner not a servant. Jesus saw himself as the Son of God, not a prophet. He was in the line of the prophets in that he came to call the tenants to repent and give the landowner his due but he was more than a prophet. And this describes the Messiah who would be God's own Son calling God's people to repent. On top of this Jesus also makes it clear that while being obedient to his Father he would be rejected and pay with his life. That the rejected stone becomes the cornerstone, the most important in the building, points to Christ's resurrection and final victory.

Now this is all in Jesus words. It's not in some made-up words of Matthew or a cleverly invented story by the apostle Paul. Jesus clearly sees himself as...

God's Son, sent in the line of the prophets (ie Messiah) who would give up his life in obedience to his Father. But once rejected he would be restored as the very capstone. Jesus clearly understood himself as more than a carpenter, more than a teacher or rabbi. He was God's Son.

Let's now turn to the second passage dealing with what Jesus says about himself. Having looked at the Matthew passage let's turn to John 10:30. Again Jesus is in the temple and he's responding to the Jews who're demanding he say if he's the Messiah or not. Picking up at the end of his reply he says...

"... I and the Father are one."

Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus said to them, "I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?"

"We are not stoning you for any of these," replied the Jews, "but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God." John 10:30–33

Again it's his enemies who first see the implications of his words and again they are incensed. Whereas in earlier Parable of the Tenants Jesus claimed to be God's Son, here he's claiming equality with God – he's claiming divinity. Now such a claim was considered blasphemy and blasphemy, once established, was punishable by stoning

Again "I and the Father are one" are Jesus' words. There're not words of John who wrote this gospel or one of the later followers. They put an end to the claim that Jesus was good merely a man, giving good advice and everything snowballed after his death. Because a good teacher would never claim to be God's only son and equal with him. No founder of any other religion - Moses, Mohammad, Buddha whoever - ever claimed such authority.

Indeed C S Lewis, responding to the claim that Jesus was just a good man, wrote

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic - on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg - or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.  
*Mere Christianity*

So as we come to a close, where do you stand with Jesus? Is he just a good man, who offered good advice and well - it just snowballed from there? Is he merely your insurance, your "get out of jail free" card to keep God off your back and make sure you're sorted when you die? Though some theologians, who should know better, and popular culture see him as a good man giving good advice what do you think? Well, no matter what others say we have clear evidence from what Jesus' own words. Jesus said he was God's own Son and that he and the Father were one - he was divine. With these words Jesus narrows our choices to but three.

For we "can shut Him up for a fool, we can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or we can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God." My prayer is each us will gladly fall at his feet and call him both Lord and God. Amen.