

Do You Know Who You're Dealing With?

Mark: The Gospel of the Kingdom

Mark 11:27-12:12

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Good morning. My name is John Song, I'm the Director of Youth Ministries here at Columbia Pres. Let's get right to God's word. Let's turn our Bibles to Mark Chapter 11. Mark Chapter 11, verse 27. And we're going to read all the way to Chapter 12, verse 12. Mark 11, verse 27, all the way to Chapter 12, verse 12. There's a lot of ground to cover here today. So Mark Chapter 11, verse 27, all the way to 12:12.

²⁷ And they came again to Jerusalem. And as he was walking in the temple, the chief priests and the scribes and the elders came to him, ²⁸ and they said to him, "By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?" ²⁹ Jesus said to them, "I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. ³⁰ Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man? Answer me." ³¹ And they discussed it with one another, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?' ³² But shall we say, 'From man'?"—they were afraid of the people, for they all held that John really was a prophet. ³³ So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

And he began to speak to them in parables. "A man planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a pit for the winepress and built a tower, and leased it to tenants and went into another country. ² When the season came, he sent a servant to the tenants to get from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. ³ And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. ⁴ Again he sent to them another servant, and they struck him on the head and treated him shamefully. ⁵ And he sent another, and him they killed. And so with many others: some they beat, and some they killed. ⁶ He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' ⁷ But those tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' ⁸ And they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard. ⁹ What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. ¹⁰ Have you not read this Scripture:

"The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
¹¹ this was the Lord's doing,
and it is marvelous in our eyes?"

¹² And they were seeking to arrest him but feared the people, for they perceived that he had told the parable against them. So they left him and went away. [ESV]

This is the word of the Lord. (Thanks be to God.) Can we pray together? Father, we ask that your word, indeed, take root in our hearts as we just sang. Lord, we pray that we would be able to see, amidst our fears, amidst our feelings of rejection, Lord, we have a Christ who is our firm foundation, who is victorious and validates all of us here today. God, be with the preaching of your word. May your Spirit guide this time together. And it's in the name of Jesus Christ we pray all these things. Amen.

I love ironic stories. And one story that has captured my heart recently comes from a biography of a man that you've probably never heard of, but my guess is you've probably heard of his brother. If you've ever taken an art class before, the name Vincent Van Gogh is perhaps one of the most recognizable names, if not the most recognizable name in the art world. Everyone has probably seen at some point in your lifetime a painting called "Starry Night," for example, and you will know that it stands as one of the most recognizable and significant pieces of art ever created. Now Vincent Van Gogh died young, at the age of 37, but in a little over a decade of his career as an artist, he produced over 2,100 artworks, most of them within the last two years of his life. And in spite of this, Vincent could only manage to sell one of his paintings in his lifetime, just months before his death. He died completely unrecognized and widely considered to be a failure. But the biography I was reading was about younger brother, who made him famous.

One of the greatest ironies about Vincent Van Gogh is that he wouldn't have even become a painter if it weren't for his brother, Theo Van Gogh. You see, there was a time in Vincent's early life where he wanted to be just like his father. His father was actually a Dutch Presbyterian Minister. And so he moved in with his uncle, and he tried his hand at it. But Vincent Van Gogh couldn't get past his ordination exams and failed as a lay preacher to this poor mining community. (You can see why I'm fascinated with this story). Vincent was poor and destitute, and he was extremely erratic and fearful that his life wouldn't amount to anything. But this was in stark contrast to his brother Theo. You see, Theo was a successful man with a stable job and career. And so Vincent had to humble himself and really ask himself some hard questions. Well, I've got no job, no career. I've alienated myself from most of my family, so what do you do? You go to your younger brother and ask him for some cash to help support him as an artist. And so that's what Vincent did.

In fact, the only reason why Vincent was able to paint at all was because of Theo, who gave him a monthly allowance, 150 francs, so that he could survive and buy art supplies to paint paintings. But for the most part, Theo didn't really think his brother had any talent. He merely just gave financial support. In fact, in one of the letters that Theo wrote to his friends, he says—and I quote—"Once Vincent's work becomes good, he will become a great man." Ouch. Right? Think about the irony, right? One of the greatest artist ever to live, living on the welfare of his younger brother. Now what's even more ironic about this story? Theo's successful career was an art dealer. You've got to see the craziness of the irony here. Your own brother is an art dealer, and he doesn't even want to sell his own brother's paintings! So what would Vincent do. Vincent would give Theo all his artwork as "payment" for all the help Theo was giving him as an allowance, but Theo never wanted to risk his reputation to speak on behalf of Vincent. Theo had no idea who his brother was or the significance of what his brother's work would do.

Now, I'm going to come back to this story a little bit later, but I think one of the reasons why I love this story is that we love stories with great amounts of irony. I mean, this is a classic trope in all the movies that we watch. I mean, you know what I'm talking about, right? There's this scene in all superhero movies where the superhero confronts and sort of defeats one of the lesser henchmen of the main villain. You know, this classic tough guy figure, and the henchman is always looking at this hero and says this classic line: "Do you know who you're dealing with? When my boss finds out, you're in trouble!" And just as predictably, the superhero will say—he's staying in character—he says under his breath, "Do you know who you're dealing with?"

Now, never mind that the statement "Do you know who you're dealing with?" is bad grammar. I know that there's some grammar people in this room, right, who are saying it should be 'whom.' And I get it, I get it. Let's just focus on the exchange here. Let's just focus on the exchange.

Why do we love moments like this? What draws us to irony? Why do we engage in this? You see, when we watch the drama unfold in these stories, the reason why we love them is because we have access to facts in the story that the characters in the story don't realize. The villain doesn't know how foolish he's acting. Theo doesn't know what Vincent was going to become. And even though we see what's coming, even when the characters in the story can't, we can't help but be drawn in. If only they knew who they were dealing with. Today in our text in Mark 11, Jesus deals with a set of chief priests and elders and scribes that are just of this nature. They have no understanding of who Jesus is. They have no idea what they're getting themselves into.

Now a little bit of background on these chief priests and scribes and elders. They belonged to a group called the Sanhedrin, which at the time was the highest court of justice for the Jews that lived in Jerusalem. They decided all matters of religious error and also were the judge, the jury, and the executioner for anyone teaching heresy or living outside of Jewish principles. And they've got quite a problem on their hands when confronting Jesus. As PD and Randy have talked about in the past couple of weeks, Jesus isn't exactly playing nice at this point in the Gospel of Mark. I mean, he's throwing over tables in the Temple, he's cursing fig trees, he's riding unclaimed donkeys into town. I mean, people are just saying "Hosanna in the Highest" and they're praising him and worshiping him. Jesus isn't exactly under the radar here. And so as Jesus is sort of building up this following in Jerusalem, the Sanhedrin is distressed. They don't know what to do with him. And they came up to him at this point in this story in verse 27 and verse 28, in the effect of, along the lines of "Jesus, who do you think you are? What right do you have to teach and do the things that you are doing? I mean, don't you know who we are?"

Now in this they're trying to trap Jesus in his words. They're trying to get Jesus to admit to the idea that he is basing his power and authority in something other than God himself. They want him to sort of say it so that they could persecute him and they can prosecute him. They can get rid of the Jesus problem. They're out for his head. They're fearful of what they don't understand. They're rejecting who Jesus claims to be. And

they're seeking validation for their own status as the alpha males in Jerusalem.

Mark, in the brilliance of how he's constructed his gospel, is pointing out that the most ironic thing about the Sanhedrin's interaction with Jesus is that these are supposed to be the most educated, most spiritual, most knowledgeable, most ready to understand Jesus for who he is. If anyone should know who the coming Messiah should be, it should be these guys. And they simply don't have a clue. And so that leads the Sanhedrin to three wonderful ironies that will guide the rest of our time here. And in doing so, I hope that it will help us to understand the ways in which our world deals with Jesus and how we deal with Jesus.

So the first irony. This is the **Irony of Fear**. You see, the Sanhedrin, by challenging Jesus, they were not only trying to get Jesus scared of their own authority, their own power, but see, they're also trying to influence the crowds that were following him. They believed they control the terms because they were the established authority of the age. They were the Sanhedrin. What they say and what they did mattered, and they were visible before the community. They were used to the type of authority and rule that came to be known as the ones who, quote unquote, be the interpreters of God's word.

But the irony here is that by trying to use that fear as a weapon against Jesus, their own fears get exposed. Jesus had claimed at this point a type of authority that the Sanhedrin could never have. I mean, word has been spreading about this Jesus who was baptized by John the Baptist, who was seen as a legitimate prophet. You know. This Jesus who went out healing death. This Jesus that went casting out demons. This Jesus was walking on water, feeding the thousands, showing sympathy and compassion to Gentiles. And even intellectually going toe to toe with the Pharisees. Jesus has earned a credibility and a capital that the Sanhedrin can't buy. And so the empty and veiled threat of a question from the Sanhedrin that we see in verse 27 and verse 28 doesn't have any power to it. There is nothing to fear here from Jesus' eyes, and the crowds that are surrounding him know it, and he knows it. Jesus's authority isn't an established authority, but it came from rather a respect for who he is and what he has done.

And this is what makes Jesus's response all the more brilliant to these chief priests and scribes and elders. Jesus answers their veiled, loaded trap of the question with a veiled, loaded trap of a question of his own. He says, "Was the baptism of John from heaven or from men?" Now, you've got to see the tension that's created when he asked this question. I mean, Jesus has basically done the equivalent of sort of a rap battle rebuttal, you know. This is....All you millennials, you know what I'm talking about here, right? Right? This is sort of like '8 Mile' stuff right here. Jesus is asking the question back to another question. This is using what the Sanhedrin would have known as a sort of a rabbinic tradition of argumentation. You see, when authoritative rabbis are faced with a question, what an authoritative rabbi would do is to answer with a question, to demonstrate your credibility and to show your own level of understanding and witness and how authoritative you really were. So what Jesus is doing, [he's] saying you're trying to talk down to me with your question, but I am exactly on your level. And this is like Mayweather McGregor, you know, Kylo Ren and Rey. This is... you know, for you kids, Woody and Buzz versus Stinky Pete. You know, this is like that kind of level of, like, two equals battling each other.

He flips it on its head on them. And the Sanhedrin, as soon as Jesus asked his question, they're suddenly faced with the gravity of what they just started. Look at verse 32 with me. "They were afraid of the people, for they all held that John was really a prophet." I mean, do you see the irony here. In trying to establish their own authority, to try and bring fear to Christ, it actually showed what little authority they actually had and exposed them for who they really were. I mean, they weren't asking Jesus this question because they necessarily wanted to correct heresy. They were trying to use worldly fear as a weapon, because they feared, as it shows in verse 32, what others thought of them. Their identity wasn't rooted in the God whose justice they were sworn to uphold or whose teachings would have clearly shown them that this was the Messiah. No, rather they feared the approval and their own safety in the eyes of men, without fearing the very nature of God that was right before their eyes.

Now we have to pull back in the story and sort of take a self-critical look at ourselves here. I mean, isn't this the story of our lives from time to time? I mean, we should at this point be looking at the Sanhedrin and seeing both the continuity that we have with the Sanhedrin and the discontinuity that we have with the Sanhedrin. Now sure, we're not Pharisees, right. Point taken. And perhaps we have more inside knowledge about Jesus in the story, for sure. But aren't there times where we hold the world's view of us with too much importance? Aren't there times when we grow anxious with the idea that someone, somewhere is holding a negative thought against us? Don't we lose sleep over those who mock us and mock what we as Christians believe? And don't we find ourselves in moments where we need to proclaim with boldness what we believe—and we, just like the disciple Peter, say, you know what, I never knew that man.

Some of us—and this is just true of my life, as well—some of us are too afraid of what others might think of us. And I say this to help us to see that as Mark does, so many times in his Gospel with Jesus's opponents, he presents the problem of the opponent's sin as a way for us to reflect on our own sin, for us to reflect on our own fears. Now, when I say this, I know that there will be at least two different types of reactions to what I just said. And these two reactions are on opposite ends of the spectrum here. Some of us might hear this and we might be thinking on the spectrum of pride. And some of us when they hear this they might be thinking on the spectrum of guilt. So let me just exhort both groups here, and if you fall in the middle, that's all right. Let me exhort both groups here for a second.

Now for the prideful ones here in this room—I'm included in this—you might just hear what I just said about the Sanhedrin, and you might think, oh yeah, that's right. Mm hmm. You tell them—um, I don't know what to call you...Director Song—you tell them, right? Look at all these heathens who don't have a fear of God in their hearts. I mean, they don't even sit in the front row in the service, right. No offence, right. They don't even sit, right. I mean, I've got a Bible verse for this: Proverbs 29:25. The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe. Now obviously I'm presenting a character, but I want you to hear this—for those of us who may struggle with pride, to hear this. For those who think this message isn't for you, it's for someone else.

So you've got to understand something about the Sanhedrin . The Sanhedrin have been

living in the space of moral godliness and maintaining that status of moral godliness in the sight of others for so long, that they've become disconnected to the reality of how sin affects them. I mean, this is why Jesus saves so many of the strongest words for those that are blind to the fact of how their pursuit of a visible, moral godliness was actually rooted in idolatry and people pleasing, fear of men. And what we should always be safeguarding ourselves in our pursuit of godliness and sanctification—and by the way, these are good and godly things to pursue.

But the question we should be asking ourselves here is, how the Sanhedrin's motivations relate to our motivations. And whether or not we would live the Christian life if absolutely no one gave you credit for it, whatsoever. Would you still do it? Ask yourself: Would you seek Christ, would you love Christ, if there was nothing to gain socially from being a Christian whatsoever? Would you seek the purity of God that God has called you to, with your eyes on the Internet and television, if you knew for a fact that no one would ever know or see what you felt. Would you serve the church with your gifts and talents if no one gave you any applause or accolade or support? You see, I mean, this is the challenge for us who struggle with pride. Because if what is motivating us to be here in the room right now, and dressed up the way that we dressed up, and to be involved in church in the way that we've been involved in the church, is simply to be seen, then naturally and very easily we will compromise our testimony as Christians to appease our own selfishness. This is what the fear of man does.

We'll be quiet when Christians have to speak up to explain our ethical boundaries to the world. We'll fall into a trap in believing that we don't have moral ground to stand on when we're talking to non-Christians. I mean, we'll be crushed when family and friends turn our backs on us because we profess Jesus as Lord. And we will place more weight on the approval of another's subjective feelings of love for us, rather than realize that we are objectively loved by Jesus day in and day out, because he is said to us over and over again, he has shown us over and over again, that he loves us through his death on the cross. Those of us who struggle with pride, once we realize the glories of God and his splendor and his majesty and his worth and his beauty, and see the ways in which we try to corrupt it with our good works, it should break us of our pride. As a famous English preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon would preach, he would say this often. "The more God's glories strike your eyes, the humbler you will love." That's for us here today.

But maybe that's not you. Maybe you're on the other end of the spectrum. Maybe you hear us talking about the fear of man versus the fear of God and you're suddenly gripped with this sense of immediate guilt in your heart. There's this internal voice inside your head that says, you know, I failed, I'm not righteous enough. I do desire the world. Do I really know and love and believe in Christ? What if I've been living a lie? What if. . . And sort of doubt creeps in and Satan uses those doors to sort of just bring about disbelief.

And so for those who are feeling this way, let me assure you that these words are not coming as a condemnation to your soul, but rather the assurance of knowing that we live in between two kingdoms and we're not home yet. The Lord is helping us. Yes, by God's grace, convicting us of our sin. But he isn't doing that merely so we can just stand here condemned in our guilt, but rather to find assurance and power in a Savior who

works in our weaknesses, in our guilt, in our doubt, in our, like, just lack of self-confidence. And helps us to see him. This should lead us not to guilt, but into the arms of the Capable One, into the arms of a God who is more powerful than we could ever imagine.

Spurgeon says this—and he is really known for being bombastic, so I'll try and do my best to try and replicate him here. But he says this about the capability of God. Listen. “Why it matters not what God has given us to do, if he helps us, we can do it. Give me God to help me, and I will split the world in half and shiver it until it shall be smaller than the dust of the threshing floor. And if God be with me, this breath could blow whole worlds about as a child bloweth a bubble. There is no saying what man can do, what God is with him. Give God to a man and he can do all things. Put God into a man's arm and he may only have a jawbone of a donkey to fight with, but he will lay the Philistine in heaps. Put God into a man's hand and he may have a giant to deal with and nothing but a sling and a stone, but he will lodge the stone into a giant's brow before long. Put God on a man's eye and he will flash defiance on kings and princes. Put God into a man's lip and he will speak right honestly, though his death should be the wages of his speech.” Oh, that's good.

Christian here who is struggling with guilt, wracked with your own incapability—seek and look to the eyes of the Capable One. You see, the key for both the prideful and the guilty is that they need to surrender themselves to the authority of God, who is all-sufficient for their weakness. What makes fear of man ironic, is only in the end—is only in the end result of what you fear. It's ironic if you place your fear in man, but it's not if you place it in the hands of a loving and capable God.

That leads us here to our second irony, and that's the **Irony of Rejection**. Jesus in Chapter 12, verses 1-12, goes off telling the story of a parable to the Sanhedrin. This is for them. And in fact, one that answers the very question that they were originally asking Jesus, if they could only see it. Now, when you look through this parable at first glance, it seems a bit odd. This seems like the parable of not the tenants, but the parable of the very irresponsible father. I mean, look at this.

Imagine with me. This is the father who first leaves the country, leaves his vineyard, gives his inheritance to some obviously irresponsible tenants. I mean, this father clearly didn't have a good human resources department, right. This father then keeps on sending servant after servant after servant to either get beat up or killed. And then after seeing all of that, then he's like, you know what, this is a good chance to send my son to negotiate terms with this people. And then his son gets killed, and then and only then, after he's lost everything, then he brings judgment?

I think our modern sensibilities would look at this father and think, you know, this guy is not very wise or smart about his approach. He needs to take a Financial Peace Seminar or, you know, read a book about responsible parenting, or something along those lines. I mean, what is the point of the story that Jesus is telling? But see, to understand this story is to understand the irony of rejection in this narrative.

Keep your fingers Mark Chapter 12, but turn or tap with me to Isaiah 5. Isaiah 5. Because Jesus is telling the story for a very specific reason. Isaiah Chapter 5. Keep your finger in Mark 12. Isaiah 5:1-7. Let me read this very quickly for you.

¹Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard:
My beloved had a vineyard
on a very fertile hill.

²He dug it and cleared it of stones,
and planted it with choice vines;
he built a watchtower in the midst of it,
and hewed out a wine vat in it;
and he looked for it to yield grapes,
but it yielded wild grapes.

⁵And now I will tell you
what I'll do to my vineyard.
I will remove its hedge,
and it shall be devoured.
I will break down its wall,
and it shall be trampled down.

⁶I will make it a waste;
it shall be not pruned or hoed,
and briars and thorn shall grow up;
I will also command the clouds
that they rain no rain upon it.

⁷For 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! [ESV]

Turn back to Mark 12 here. You see, this prophecy in Isaiah was very well known to the Sanhedrin. It's this sort of metaphorical imagery of Israel being uprooted and destroyed as the vineyard, because of their rebellion against God. They're producing unfruitful fruit, wild fruit. And so in their rejection of God, Israel was sent into exile. And now they were no longer a vineyard of blessing, but rather they now have become tenants of the message of the vineyard. This would have been very well known to the Sanhedrin.

So what does Jesus start his parable with? Look at Chapter 12. A man planted a vineyard, built a pit, a wine press, and built a tower and left it to the tenants. You see, this is a direct allusion to God the Father and his relationship with Israel. Now, you've got to think about how Israel maintained this message, this vineyard. See, you've got to think about it, right. In the irony of rejection they took what was supposed to be a steward of God's holy message—they were supposed to be stewards of the message.

And instead what they do? They conflate stewardship with ownership. They took that relationship with the father of the vineyard and made it a possession. And in doing so, they rejected the servants of the father that came to them to proclaim a message of repentance from the father.

And I think about the servants that God sent to Israel. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi. All these prophets that were sent as servants. And what did Israel do time in and time out, over and over and over and over again. Some they rejected. Some they didn't listen to. Some they even tried to kill.

And the Sanhedrin are doing exactly the same. Now they see the Son of the Father, and all they can do is think about how they can kill him and make him go away. You see, this parable isn't about an irresponsible, dimwitted father. This is about a forgiving, merciful, gracious Father who gives Israel opportunity after opportunity to help them to see their need for a Savior. God the Father is saying here is another chance to listen. Here is another chance for forgiveness. Here's another servant to help you realize the gravity of your sin. I'll even send my Son, even if that means his death, to help you to see how much I love you, how much I want you to come back.

So that's what our heavenly Father does, doesn't he? He sends his Son into the world fully human, fully God. Born with power, splendor, majesty. He comes in the world to suffer and die to demonstrate the love of the Father; he's given unto us. What does his death accomplish? It releases us from the power of darkness and sin and hell. And we receive the righteousness of God that this relationship could be restored. And this is the stone that was rejected that has become the cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.

The irony of rejection is its beauty. And within it we find redemption of the Savior. We find mercy out of tragedy. We find hope out of despair. And we see this played out over and over again in the Christian life. Out of something tragic like the martyrdom of missionaries come nations who come to see Jesus Christ as Lord. Out of the countless times we pray for those who don't know Christ the Savior, we finally see the fruits of repentance, we finally see people coming to Christ. And this is why—Christians in this room, who are just weighted down with rejection—this is why it should not lead us to despair. But when it comes—when rejection comes, we don't give in to despair. We don't give in to our hopelessness. Rather we are sure that our God is with us, and that validation is coming.

Which leads to my last point here: **The Irony of Validation**. Let's look at verse 12. Verse 12 in Mark Chapter 12 here. This verse always makes me laugh a little bit. Verse 12. "And they were seeking to arrest him but feared the people, for they perceived that he had told the parable against them." No kidding. "So they left him and went away."

This whole encounter was started up by the Sanhedrin. They started the fight. Jesus finished it. They challenged his authority. They wanted to establish themselves as the one that runs Jerusalem. They wanted to. . . And what's happening here, they're leaving with their tails tucked behind them. They left with the fear of man gripping them and

realizing that their power was no power at all. They realized they didn't own the vineyard. Jesus isn't going to be someone who lays down to their demands. So they had to regroup.

Jesus is validated in some small way here, but this isn't the fullness of his validation, is it. In fact, the irony of Jesus's validation comes in the way that Christ was vindicated. I mean, think about it. For Jesus' ministry to be validated, it almost seems like the Sanhedrin and the Pharisees would have had their way on the cross with him, right. I mean, he was publicly mocked. He was brutally, brutally tortured. The Sanhedrin at a certain point would have felt like they were the ones that won the fight. And they would be wrong.

Jesus goes through the cross. He goes to this tragic, beautiful irony. Not because he was somehow surprised by the Sanhedrin or coerced by the Pharisees to go to the cross, but because he subjected himself to the curse of death to prove who he really was. It was only in his death where we could really see him clearly. Out of the greatest tragedy of his life becomes a validation of his ministry. Out of his life and death do we see life. Our sins forgiven, our destinies confirmed. For those of us in this room that profess Jesus Christ as Lord, we have an eternal fellowship that comes out of this irony.

So let me close with this. Back to the story at the beginning of this message. It's near the ending of Vincent's life, Vincent Van Gogh's life. And he writes a letter to Theo. There are over, like, thousands of letters that correspond between Theo and his brother Vincent. And Vincent writes this letter. And he's praising his brother for all that he's done for him and his fledgling art career. And he wrote this to his brother Theo. He says. . . He's trying to thank him, and he's trying to explain his work to Theo. He says this: "My dear brother, there is this that I have always told you, and I repeat it once more with all the earnestness that can be imparted by the effort of a mind diligently fixed on trying to do as well as one can. I tell you again that I shall always consider that you are something other than a simple art dealer, that through my meditation you have your part in the production of my canvases, and that I have risked my life for my work."

Vincent would pass away very shortly after. And Theo's grief, as he was contemplating his brother's letters and as he was thinking about his life, this would propel Theo to suddenly become a zealot for the artwork of Vincent van Gogh. He set up exhibits all over Paris. And as he was setting up all these exhibits, renowned artists would come in and look at Vincent's work and they suddenly saw what no one else could see. It would validate Vincent's fear that he was never going to make. It would validate all the rejection that Vincent had faced throughout his life. And in that six month period after Vincent's death, Theo validated his brother's life and his work. Theo, out of the great grief and love for his brother, died six months later after Vincent. You can actually see their gravestones next to each other, if you ever visit. But he died finally understanding the treasure that he had in his possession, in his brother's works. Theo finally understood at the very end of his life who he was dealing with.

So for those of you who don't know Christ here in this room today, let me ask you. Do you know this God? Do you know who you're dealing with? This is a God who loves you. This is a God who wants to enter into relationship with you as he is in relationship with

himself: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is a God who would enter into the story out of his grace and mercy, and send his Son for you. And if you want to know more about him, we love to talk to you about him. Find a pastor, find an elder. We would love to talk to you about him.

And for those of you in this room that do confess Christ as Lord, again I want to ask you: Do you know who you're dealing with? This is a Savior that takes all of our fears, the pain of rejection, the worry about the assurance of validation. And every week that we gather here together we're reminded again and again that he is alive, he is victorious, he is seated on the throne. He is near to us, and he is with us, and he has proven the Father's love for us. Do you know who you're dealing with? I'll leave you with that question as we pray together.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for your word given to us. We thank you that you are a merciful, loving Father who is patient with us, even though you send us time and time again servants and people to remind us of your love. Father, help us to remove ourselves from the fear of men and Lord, put our trust in an almighty, loving God. Thank you for your work today. Thank you for this message. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.