

# LIVING UNMASKED

We all put on masks in very subtle ways. Tonight we're going to be looking at how Jesus provides a way out of hiding. We can come to him as we are, which frees us up to live authentically toward others.

**I**t's no secret that everyone at some time or another will be inconsistent in their life. We all fall short of whatever bar we use to measure ourselves. In some ways, this is all a part of being human.

But it really gets under our skin when someone who's in a place of authority is found living a false life. Whether it's the CEO who's funnelling other people's money into their account, the role-model athlete who ends up being less than exemplary, or the pastor who calls people to repentance while being unfaithful to his family—we don't tend to cut them much slack. And perhaps rightly so.

But how do you view your life with God? Do we praise God with our lips while keeping our hearts far from him? More importantly, do we think it's possible to come before God just as we are? Or do we tend to mask ourselves in front of God and others by pretending everything's okay when it's not?



*What sort of feelings does the word 'hypocrisy' conjure up?*

*What has been your experience with someone who's been two-faced with you?*

*Why do you think we feel the need to put on a mask and project a false image of ourselves?*

Read Mark 11:12-25

## 1. KNOWING IT

*Take some time to discuss what you think Jesus was attempting to do when he cleared the temple. It might help to read the bits of the Old Testament that he quotes in v. 17 (Isa 56 and Jer 7).*

*What do you make of Jesus' response in verse 22 to 'have faith in God'? Is that a suitable answer to make up for his actions regarding the fig tree and temple? Why or why not?*

## 2. APPLYING IT

*When looking at Bartimaeus' response to Jesus in 10:50-52, how do his actions differ from that of the Pharisees (see 11:18)? What's the outcome for either of them?*

*When you sin, do you find it easier to run toward God or away from him? What tends to be your natural response?*

*If we believe that our sins are forgiven only by grace through faith (which we do), why do you think Jesus tells us to forgive others 'so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins' (v. 25)? What's going on here?*

## 3. DOING IT

*Confessing our sins to one another is incredibly scary. Being vulnerable does not come easily. How can we (practically) foster a community that's open and honest with where we're at in life? How can we create a safe place where people can come as they are?*

*What does living authentically look like to you?*

## 4. SHARING IT

*At face-value, it's easy to think that the story of Jesus cursing an innocent tree and flipping over tables needs a bit of PR work. We don't tend to think these are his best moments. But how does the context of our passage push us toward good news for those who don't yet know Jesus (see especially v. 17)?*

*Churches, particularly their leaders, have had a bad reputation for saying one thing and doing another. How might we explain to those outside the church what God thinks of such actions? For those who refuse to have anything to do with Christianity because of the hypocrisy they see, what encouragement might we give them as a way forward?*

Pray for the people you're wanting to share the gospel with this year. Pray that they would come to see God as a loving God – a God who has made provision for them in Christ so that they can come as they are. Pray that we too would be quick to run toward God when we sin, and that we would bear one another's burdens by confessing to and forgiving our brothers and sisters in Christ.

# UNMASKING WOLVES

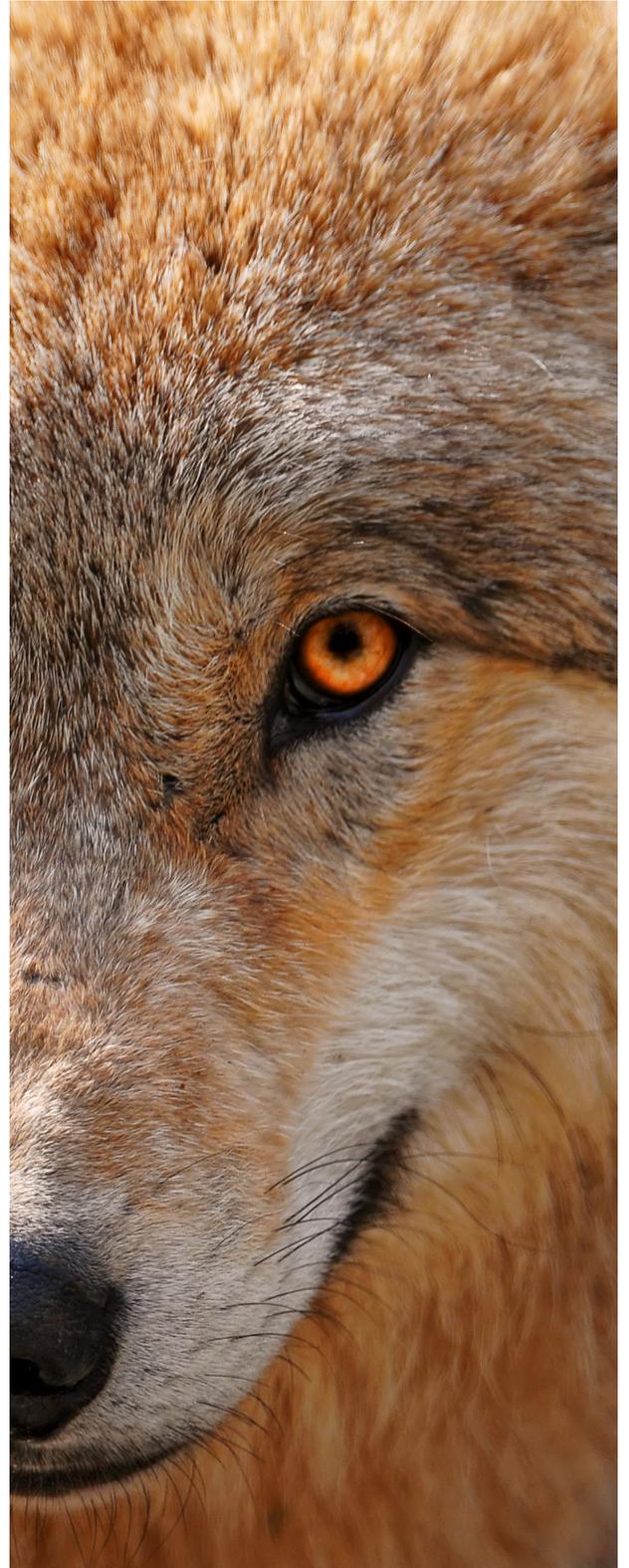
When Jesus is asked to prove his authority, he simply replies by telling the people a parable. But this parable has two sides to it. The good news is, the kingdom of God is going to be open to all people. The bad news is, your response to the heir will determine whether you're in or out.

**T**he longer Jesus is in Jerusalem, the more conflict he has with the religious leaders. Last week we saw him clear the temple, and give the clearest indication yet (the fig tree) that the kingdom was about to be taken away from the religious leaders and given to someone else.

This week we're going to see Jesus sharpening his critique. They talk about God, but their history is littered with examples of them killing God's messengers. And the same thing, but in a much more serious way, is about to happen. And it's all because they're more interested in holding on to their own authority than they are in bowing to God's.

*If you had to locate in our society where truth and authority were derived from, where would you say it is?*

*How do individuals decide where authority lies?*



Read Mark 11:27-12:12.

## 1. KNOWING IT

*So having just gone postal in the temple, Jesus is challenged about why he thinks he's allowed to behave this way. What does his response reveal (11:27-32)?*

*There's a lot of imagery going on in this parable. Read Isaiah 5:1-7. What background does this provide to the imagery Jesus uses?*

*Discuss the imagery in Jesus' parable. Who's who, what's what?*

## 3. DOING IT

If Jesus is going to be more than an advisory figure to us, then we need to be convinced that he is the capstone at the centre of God's plans for the world.

*What is it that convinces you (or not) that Jesus' relevance - that he is the capstone - is greater than Israel?*

*How do you assess how you see Jesus and the role he plays in your life?*

*Can you identify areas of your own life where you'd prefer to keep Jesus at arms' length? What's the motivation? What's the cure?*

## 2. APPLYING IT

One of the things this section of Mark does is expose so clearly the motives of the religious leaders – it gets to the heart of what drove them to do something which they must have known was so wrong, and so clearly against their Old Testament law.

*Jesus sits right at the centre of this dispute. He says so in 12:10-11. But what threat did Jesus pose to the religious leaders and what did they hope to gain by off'ing him (See v.6-8)?*

*Do you think there's a view in our culture that in removing God we remove an obstacle? If so, an obstacle to what?*

*Do you think Jesus poses the same threat to people today as he did to the religious leaders? How or how not?*

## 4. SHARING IT

The authority of Jesus only extends as far as we believe he has relevance. If his relevance was just to the Jews, then we can probably stop reading and worrying. But if he's the centre of all that God is doing in the world, then we need to consider how we call other "tenants" in God's world to respond to his heir.

*What are people's objections to acknowledging Jesus' authority over them?*

*Can you empathise with their struggles? How do we address them?*

*How do we hold to the authority, uniqueness, and truth of Jesus in a pluralistic society?*

Christians aren't calling people to be more spiritual, or just to feel closer to God. They're calling people to do what they've done - acknowledge God's heir, Jesus, and to hand over their life to him and to trust him with their standing before God. In a society where God has been (and is being) pushed out of the picture, we need to pray that we constantly, consistently and deliberately put before people the person God is calling the world to acknowledge and bend the knee to, Jesus. Pray that we'd do it in our own lives, as well as encouraging those around us to.

# NO NEED FOR A MASK

Sometimes we can hear something so often that it loses its meaning. Sadly, the same can happen when we talk about Jesus dying on a cross for our sins. But what exactly is going on when Jesus goes to the cross for us? The Lord's Supper – and its background in the Exodus – interprets Jesus' actions in shedding his blood.



God rescuing Israel out of slavery in Egypt was the most significant event to ever happen in the history of the Jewish people. In many ways, it was the birth of their nation. They called this event the Exodus, and it's what defined them as a nation: they were God's special people.

But it seems something went wrong. As Jesus travels from town to town, we see that Israel isn't in a good place. The country's being oppressed by a foreign power, the spiritual leaders are full of hypocrisy, and people's hearts seem far from God. It's clear Israel still needs God's rescue—they need a new, spiritual Exodus.

*Can you look back to a particular moment in life where everything changed for you as a Christian? If so, take a minute to share about this experience.*



Read Mark 14:12-26.

## 1. KNOWING IT

The passage starts with Jesus' disciples getting ready to eat the Passover.

*Look back at Exodus 12:1-12 and discuss what the first passover was.*

*What parallels are there between what happened in the original Passover and what Jesus did on the Cross?*

*In Mark 14:24, Jesus says he's establishing a new covenant. What's this covenant based on? How does that help Israel, and also us?*

## 2. APPLYING IT

The Exodus of Israel was a glorious event in the history of the Jewish people. Like the Israelites, Christians also experience an Exodus: Jesus leads us out of captivity to sin. He sets us free from fear of God's judgment. And, like the Israelites, this Exodus defines us as a people.

*Are there other ways you sometimes try to earn God's favour? If so, how does this usually pan out for you?*

*Do you sometimes get so used to hearing what Jesus did for us that it starts to lose its meaning?*

*How can we remind each other of the new reality we now live in Jesus?*

## 3. DOING IT

*Are there things you do in your week to try to impress other people or God?*

*How does this passage speak to that?*

*Are there changes you feel you need to make? What might they be?*

## 4. SHARING IT

*Does this passage help us talk to our friends and family who don't yet know Jesus about the hope we have? If so, how?*

*Do you think you might have opportunities to engage with people about Jesus this week because Easter is coming up? What are some helpful ways you might be able to encourage those curious about Christianity?*

Spend some time together thanking God that the blood of Jesus allows his judgment to "pass over" us. Thank God that we have a new identity in Jesus, and that we'd live as people who belong to him in every facet of our lives. Ask God that the truth of his Gospel will keep on sinking into our hearts more deeply. Pray for each other's weeks.