

Sermon preached by Rev Chris Moroney at the Healing Service at St. Andrew's Cathedral,  
Sydney on Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> July 2007. Reading: Mark 12:1-12  
Topic: "Who Is Jesus?"

*Jesus is the answer* - A sign on a church building on the way to Katoomba. But what is the question? If it a claim that Jesus is the answer to all your questions or to all your problems how can that be right. We are all so different. Our problems are so various. Our issues do not all fit into the same box. It may be that we are meant to think that Jesus is the answer to the big questions that we should be asking. What is the meaning of life? What is the purpose of my life? How do I know that I matter to God? Where do I find hope for the future?

For these really important questions, I would want to say that Jesus is the answer. But it all depends on who you think Jesus really is. When our emphasis is on prayer, on believing prayer, on the prayer of faith, it is always on the basis that we are praying "in the name of Jesus" or "trusting the power of the Lord Jesus". How can we pray with confidence and trust through Jesus Christ our Lord?

The answer is that it is only on the basis of our biblical understanding of Jesus. To question or challenge the person of Jesus is not a new sport. It has been going on since the time when Jesus walked the dusty road of Palestine.

## **1 CONFUSING THE OPPOSITION Mark 11:27-32**

- **The opponents of Jesus**

The scene for this encounter is the Temple itself. Jesus was someone that people either loved or hated. He could draw people together, for him or against him. In this case it is the chief priests, the scribes and the elders who are drawn together in the opposition to Jesus.

- **Questioning authority**

They challenged him about his right to speak, his authority. He carried himself with confidence and self-assuredness that was outstanding. He spoke in his own right, on his own behalf. He did not quote the other rabbis.

- **Jesus and John**

In typical rabbinical style Jesus answers their question with another one. He is implying that his authority has the same source as that of John the Baptist. It is not surprising that these religious leaders should reject Jesus when they had also rejected John. But the opponents do not want to answer Jesus, because they know the people valued John's ministry.

- **A prophet's calling**

Jesus is making the point in his discussions with his opponents and in the parable, that it is a prophet's calling to be rejected. God calls upon his prophets to speak to people a word from God to the people of God. More often than not, it is a word of rebuke a corrective, a call for repentance. Sometimes the people took notice. More often than not, they rejected the word of the Lord and the man of God who brought the word.

## **2 REJECT TENANTS Mark 12:1-12**

We all know that it is reasonable to tenants to pay their rent and for landlords to look after the property. The idea that the tenants would try to take over the property and get rid of the landlord is unthinkable. That's the case today. Do you think that it was any different in the time of Jesus?

- **Parable**

In the light of the rejection of Jesus and the rejection of John, by the religious leaders, Jesus tells this story with the sting in the tale about tenants who were rejects and rejected the messengers and the Son and the owner.

- **The big picture**

What Jesus does here is to put the particular group of opponents in the big picture of God's dealings with his people over hundreds of years. Right from the start, from the time that God called Abraham and gave him the promises of nation, land and blessing, God's people have been a handful. It was God alone who set them up, who provided all that they needed to make a living and enjoy the blessings of being God's people in 'God's place under God's rule. There is no question in working out that God is the owner, provider and carer for his people.

- **Prophets and People**

In the parable it is the servants who come from the owner. They are looking for "rent", payment in kind, some of the produce from the vineyard. Instead of being listened to, instead of being given the produce, or the respect and thanks and obedience that God deserves, they were all very badly treated. Some were beaten. Others were killed.

- **Here comes the Son**

Even when the Son is sent things are no better. Even when he is recognized, "this is the heir" there is no remorse, no repentance, no change of attitude. They want to take advantage of the situation for their own advantage. Kill him and we can take over the whole lot. Remember that this is Jesus talking to the people who are currently rejecting him.

- **Then comes the Owner**

In verse 9 in true Rabbi style Jesus asks his audience the question: What will the owner of the vineyard do? It is not hard to imagine. The tenants who have behaved so badly will be rejected and the vineyard will be given to others. It is not just the Jews who are going to be given the love of God. It will go out to Gentiles now. God's judgement will come upon his people the Jews. It came decisively in 70AD when the Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans, including the Temple.

- **God's plan**

Jesus concludes his little story by referring to Psalm 118. He himself is not only the prophet declaring the word of God. He himself is not only the Son who comes to collect the rent and see that God is given his due. He is also the one who is the foundation stone of God's building. This is the new building of God's new people. Jesus is like a foundation stone that some people said did not fit. It was out of alignment. Not the right shape. But in God's eyes and in the eyes of God's chosen people, it is just right, the perfect shape, the ideal cornerstone. When we get that right everything else falls into place.

But how did the people respond to Jesus?

How do you respond to Jesus?

What do you think about his amazing claims?

Do you accept him as the Son of the owner of the world?

Many people are concerned about global warming. But a much bigger concern should be that people's hearts are cold towards God, and they freeze out the Lord Jesus.

In verse 12 we read that the religious leaders picked up enough of the parable to know that they were the bad guys. No repentance and remorse for them. They wanted to get rid of Jesus there and then. But they feared the people. There were many people there who supported Jesus and saw him as at least a prophet from God, if not the Messiah himself.

### **3 CONFUSING QUESTIONS**

- **Entrapment**

We have two discussions on either side of the parable. Both discussions are about Jesus. Who do you think he is? In this second scenario of verbal conflict, the political groups are brought together, the Pharisees and Herodians. Strange bedfellows indeed. They try to trap Jesus into committing political suicide.

- **Forked tongue**

Verse 14 is a classic case of a man speaking with a forked tongue. He says one thing and means the opposite. Don't you hate it when people try to win you over with false praise? If Jesus says

that everyone should not pay taxes, that would be treason. If he says that you should pay taxes that would be given in to the Romans and mean he was not being a true blue Jew.

- **Taxes to Caesar**

Notice how verse 15 points out that nothing gets past Jesus. “Knowing their hypocrisy” The coins had Caesar’s head in place and Ceasar’s claims in writing. If you are going to live in the world, pay you own way, work with the system, whatever it is. One system of government is not necessarily any better than another.

- **Images**

Once he has made that point clear with the use of the coin in his hand, it is almost a throw away line to talk about paying your dues to God. But where is the image of God,? How to you render to God what is due to him? They were looking at Jesus, who is the image of the invisible God.

- **Pay up**

If they were to pay taxes to Caesar as their dues, how would they taxes to God? Through honouring the Son of God in their midst. Three stories and one question: What do you think of Jesus? Is he really the answer to the big questions of the universe? Yes indeed.

Our only access to God is through the forgiveness of our sins, his death in our place. Only his innocent sacrifice will do. He is our best access to the mind of God. He is God’s final revelation. He is complete access to God – in powerful and personal prayer.

“In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen”