

Sermon preached by Rev Chris Moroney at the Healing Service at St. Andrew's Cathedral,
Sydney on Wednesday 8th August 2007. Reading: Mark 12:18-34
Topic: "Jesus in the Spotlight"

What do you and I really think about Jesus? This same Jesus who is being questioned in this passage is the same one about whom Paul speaks in Acts 17:31

"God has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

The importance of knowing who Jesus really is relates to knowing ourselves, knowing where we fit into this world and into God's plans for us.

JESUS AND THE SADDUCEES

The Sadducees are just one more group who want to challenge Jesus to a fight. Here in Mark 12:18 "they asked him a question." But we know right from the start that it is a riddle, that is meant to make things hard for Jesus.

A Ridiculous Riddle

The Sadducees were a religious and political group of families that only believed in the first five books of the Bible. In Acts 23:8 we have this description of them. *For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.* We have no doubt that they think it shows how silly the idea that there is a resurrection because this woman would have no idea who she should link up with in heaven.

A Reasonable Answer

The marriage bonds that are so important on earth will not be that important in the heavenly reality. v24 "They will be like the angels." Sexual interaction and procreation are not part of the heavenly programme. We will be given glorious wonderful new physical bodies. (1 Corinthians 15) We will be able to relate to one another perfectly and in magnificent harmony, as we behold the Lord Jesus face to face. Jesus is saying that their riddle misses the point altogether.

Know the Scriptures

In fact he berates them for not knowing the scriptures! What he is telling them should not be news to them. They should know that resurrection is God's plan for his people. It is the eternal nature of God that enables him to be the one who can relate to people of different generations and to relate to people even after they have died and been resurrected.

Know the Power of God

So Jesus quotes from Exodus 3. This is where Moses see the burning bush and God introduces himself as "I am" Mark 12:26-27 He is straight forward. There is a resurrection of the dead. It is in the Bible. It is part of the power of God. It must be part of our thinking about ourselves and God.

Here at the Healing Service our emphasis is on praying to God for healing. We believe that God is able and to heal our ailments – whether they are in our bodies, in our minds or in our relationships. We bring all our problems to the Lord, because he cares for us and loves us. We rejoice greatly tonight in the news about Kinny, lady in America for whom we prayed because she was suffering from cancer. We have received news that the latest tests show no cancer whatsoever. Praise the Lord.

But tonight this passage is a reminder that each healing touch is somewhat temporary. We will not live forever in these healed bodies. One day, death will come to all of us. We must also keep in our minds that knowledge that Jesus could come back at any moment, without any more warning. We should all make sure that we have made our peace with God, before the time of our death. For only those who have made peace with God will be raised to new life in heaven with Jesus. It is in the second passage where Jesus is under the spotlight that we learn more about how we can do that.

The more we learn about God from the Bible, the more we will know and understand the power of God. And the more we will see the power of God in our lives, making us aware of the sins and failures that we have undertaken, giving us fresh insights into the things we should do in our service of God and of others, and giving us new enthusiasm for believing prayer.

The scribe seems more genuine in his inquiry. This “scribe” may be just like some people who come along to the Healing Ministry. You may have a question, or a need, or an illness that has made you to come along looking for answers.

JESUS AND THE SCRIBE

This scribe is something like a lawyer, studying the law in the Bible especially. It is very like our modern question: What is the meaning of life?

A Reasonable Question Mark 12:28

There are lots and lots of laws. If we put them on a priority list, which one would be at the top? Where should the emphasis fall?

Answer Number One Mark 12:29-30

Here it is, straight from Deuteronomy 6. Put God first, personally, emotionally, intellectually, physically. There is no area of your life that should be outside your relationship with God. When we put God first in our lives, everything else not only takes second place, it finds its right place. Notice too that it is not just obey God, or follow the rules or live the Christian ethic. It is all about being in a love relationship with God, wanting to please him in all that we do. Not just being other person Centred, but being God centred.

This is an ideal that we all fail to keep. This call to devotion is meant to show us up. It is meant to inspire and encourage us to be heading in the right direction. *In effect, our sense of failure and futility in living up to this high ideal should send us to our knees and to the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Answer Number Two Mark 12:31

This one comes from Leviticus 19:18. Jesus is reinforcing the ongoing relevance of the Old Testament. There is the God-ward dimension of our obligations and then the man-ward dimension, our obligations to one another. When someone asked Jesus about who is my neighbour, he talked about the story of Good Samaritan. Your neighbour is the person in need, no matter what their creed. And yet that is God’s call to each of his people. And we can only fulfill his calling in the power that he gives us.

An Encouraging Reply Mark 12:32-33

This seeker for the truth finds Jesus’ reply quite good. This scribe even adds to Jesus’ reply “*more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices*” They may well be in the shadow of the Temple as he says this. It poses an interesting question: What will get you into heaven? Who will be raised to life eternal with God? Who will qualify? The one who is able to keep the two important commandments?

Or the one who fulfills all the sacrifices and rituals at the Temple? Well it is a trick question. Neither will do.

Law and Grace

The call to love God and love our neighbour, show us the way that we should go and show up the fact that none of us do that well. We are all spiritual failures before God. The Temple system kept reminding the people of the failure and made them look to God for his grace again and again. The system sacrifice pointed forward to the coming of the Messiah, the Anointed King who would bring in God’s Kingdom, through his sacrificial death for the sins of the world.

Only Jesus can wash away our sin. Only the death of Jesus is full payment for all our sin. Only he was able to take the punishment that we deserve. *It is only through his death and resurrection that any one of us can be reconciled to God our Creator and Heavenly Father. No-one else can grant us the grace of forgiveness.*

No-one else can provide us with peace with God now and forever. Jesus opens the way for us to

pray for God's power to be at work in our lives. Jesus provides the access we need to healing in our spirit, our mind and our body, if that is God's will for our lives. Jesus provides his Holy Spirit to produce the fruit of the Spirit in our lives, one of which is patience, even in our sufferings.

If we miss out on Jesus, if we let him pass us by, if we do not listen to his answers, if we do not allow him to be the answer to our questions we have little hope in this world and no hope in the world to come.

The Kingdom of God

Jesus came to establish the Kingdom of God, the rule of God. Jesus came to be the king, to be the ruler of the world. He invites us to be in his kingdom, now and for ever. Whose side will you be on? When we come to pray, how will you pray?