

ORCHARD ROAD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Small Group Bible Study

The Gospel According to Mark (Part 4)

SERIES INTRODUCTION

In the first quarter of 2015, we will continue with where we left off in the first quarter of 2013 when we focused on various titles for Jesus e.g. Son of God, Lord of the Sabbath, The Holy One of God, etc., leading to the questions, “Who Do You Say I Am?” and “Good Teacher, What Must I Do?” by which time we would have seen enough of Jesus as Lord to make a commitment or re-commitment to him.

Mark’s Gospel is the shortest Gospel which deals with the events in Jesus’ ministry chronologically. Knowing who Jesus is and what he has come to do must surely draw responses from us. In those days, Jesus drew lots of attention and even violent reactions from the religious and governing authorities. They were not sure what to do with him and how to deal with him. They felt threatened by his presence and his teachings.

How do we also respond to Jesus and his teachings? Do we seek to size him up and box him in? Or do we let him size us up that we might know our failings and needs, and truly seek him to be our Saviour and Lord?

11 Jan

By What Authority?

Mark 11:27 – 12:12

18 Jan

Give Caesar What Is Caesar’s

Mark 12:13-17

25 Jan

Resurrection Riddle

Mark 12:18-27

By What Authority?

MARK 11:27 – 12:12

GENERAL SURVEY

TOPIC

KEY VERSE

MAIN PERSON/S

KEY IDEAS & QUESTIONS

Introduction

As Jesus walked the temple (presumably teaching the people present around him), he was challenged by the chief priests and the scribes on what authority that he taught. The world today is constantly challenging us with a similar question, “By what authority are you preaching Christ as the only true God?” Our understanding and take on the answer to this question has eternal consequences for everyone. It is our privilege to know the truth and our responsibility to go and tell it to others. Do you know? Will you tell?

For Study and Discussion

1. The “authorities” challenged Jesus (11:27-33)
 - a. Why did the religious authorities [i.e. the Sanhedrin] challenge Jesus? (v28) Consider what happened the day before in the Temple (vv12-19) and what people were already saying about Jesus (Mk 8:27-28)

 - b. Instead of answering them, Jesus chose to ask them questions. If you were there amongst the worshippers, what would you think of Jesus’ response?

 - c. The religious authorities were stuck! They had no answer to such a simple question about John the Baptist. “I do not know” was their best reply. Again, if you were there amongst the worshippers – what would be your opinion of the “authorities”?

2. What is authority?
 - a. Why is the question of “authority [to teach]” important? Contrast the way Jesus taught with the way the religious “authorities” taught (vv31-32). What was significantly different?

 - b. On what authority is our faith based on? Why is this important? Discuss.

3. Now the Son is here! (12:1-12)
 - a. Why do you think Jesus spoke in parable?

- b. It seems the “authorities” understood that the parable was said against them (v12). What were their reactions?
- c. It seems that Jesus’ parable can also be applied to anyone who rejects Him. Who else could the “tenants” refer to?
- d. Which figure in the parable do you identify with? Why?

Discipleship Pointers

- People today still challenge the authority of Christ and our authority as Christians to proclaim Christ. What kinds of comments have you heard that are fundamentally challenging the claims of the Christian faith in order to undermine Christ’s authority as God?
- All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus by the Father. He taught out of his divine authority. How then should we receive and treat Christ’s teachings in the Scripture?
- The way the religious teachers and priests responded to Jesus’ question shows that they were more concerned about political correctness and public opinions about them and their standing than truth from God. What might cause us to do the same like the religious leaders when we are challenged in our faith?
- We share the Gospel by the authority of Christ’s own commission to us as his disciples. If we are questioned today, are we able to give a clear and succinct explanation?

Family/Group Moments

- If you have not sharpened the defense of your faith – it might be a good time to practice. Research and write down a “short summary” of what you believe and why you believe. You might wish to read books like “Know What You Believe” and “Know Why You Believe” by Paul E. Little, IVP.
- Write down your personal Christian testimony and incorporate your “short summary” above. Practice it and find “openings” to use it.

Give Caesar What Is Caesar's

MARK 12:13-17

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Introduction

The exchange between Jesus and some of his opponents is interesting. They set out "to catch him in his words". Feigning reverence, they began with some rather condescending flattery about his character and principled teaching. It was a cleverly crafted tactics. They thought they had him this time with their cleverly worded question that would cause him to publicly discredit himself... In the end, they were amazed at him. What happened?

For Study and Discussion

1. Their Motives (Mark 2:13-15; Matthew 22:15-16)
 - a. Who were the masterminds behind the seemingly reasonable question?

 - b. What do you think are the real motives underlying the facade of reverence and flattery that beset their question?

 - c. How might such a question pose a dangerous trap to Jesus, one way or the other?

2. Their Question & Jesus' Answer (Mark 12:14-17; Matthew 22:17-22)
 - a. Is Jesus' answer to the controversial question driven by mere diplomacy or truth? Discuss.

 - b. What do you think belongs to "Caesar"? Which of these are you withholding?

 - c. What do you think belongs to God? How are you giving to God what belongs to Him?

 - d. What principle for Christian living can you take away from this passage?

- e. In what way does every Christian have a dual citizenship? (Philippians 3:20). In situations where the duties of these two citizenships conflict, to whom should your allegiance be given, first and foremost? [Note: The English Presbytery Express, October 2014 Issue on "A Christian's Response to Public Issue" is worth reading.]
3. Your Attitude & Actions towards your Government & God (Romans 13:1-7)
- a. Why should we pay taxes? What do you think tax collections are used for?
 - b. Are you paying your taxes, fully and completely? With what attitude do you do so?
 - c. What are Christians called to do with respect to the governing authorities?
 - d. Describe your attitude towards your government. What are your expectations about them? In what ways are some people expecting a perfect government?
 - e. How will you respond when you hear criticisms from those who make "tearing down the government" a favourite past time? What can you share with them from your Christian worldview?
 - f. What can you specifically thank God for your government?
 - g. What do you owe to God? How are you going to pay that? If earthly taxes have a deadline before penalty kicks in, what deadline do you think applies for "heavenly taxes"?

Discipleship Pointers

- Jesus confounds the hypocritical Pharisees and Herodians by telling them to pay the government what is owed to them and give to God what is God's.
- Every Christian has a duty to his country and to God. In the instance where these two clash, what belongs to God must be given utmost priority, even at the cost of one's life.
- Christians are called to be subject to the governing authorities, "For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment." Romans 13:1-2
- Christians are to regard their leaders with respect and honour, as God's servants and ministers for the common good.

Family/Group Moment

- Share with one another services which you can/are rendering in your duty towards your country.
- What are you giving to God in serving Christ, to whom you owe your life?

Resurrection Riddle

MARK 12:18-27

GENERAL SURVEY

TOPIC

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Introduction

After the chief priests, the scribes and the elders (11:27), the Pharisees and the Herodians (12:13), the Sadducees are the next group to challenge Jesus with an important theological question – the resurrection of the dead. In Jesus' reply we learn more than just a good answer to disarm His opponents, but also catch a glimpse of the key reality centred in Him – a reality which the God of the eternal covenant will one day bring about for His people.

For Study and Discussion

1. The Sadducees' Challenge

Historical Note: The Sadducees belong to a wealthy, aristocratic Jewish party that exerted a powerful influence in the priesthood and the Jewish council (the Sanhedrin). They held only the five books of Moses (the Pentateuch) as authoritative and denied resurrection, angels and spirits (Acts 23:8). These beliefs put them in opposition to the Pharisees and common Jews.

a. Read Deuteronomy 25:5-10 for the background on the levirate law (Latin levir means "brother-in-law"). What was the intent of this law?

b. By citing the case of the woman successively with seven husbands but without children (hypothetical and exaggerated), what did they hope to prove about belief in resurrection?

c. What do you think they hope to achieve by putting this challenge to Jesus?

2. Jesus' Correction

Jesus addressed both aspects of their challenge – marriage, and the real issue in question, the resurrection of the dead - and exposed the errors of their beliefs.

a. Why is the marriage institution no longer operative in the resurrection age? (v25; cf. Lk 20:36a)

b. In thinking of human relationships (e.g. marriage here), what flawed assumptions did the Sadducees make in trying to relate the present earthly age with the future heavenly age?

c. Referring to God's self-introduction in Exodus 3:6 ("I am the God of Abraham..."), how did Jesus conclude that He is the God of the living and not the dead? Consider Ex 3:15.

d. In light of Jesus' answers above, in what ways were the Sadducees ignorant of the Scriptures and the power of God?

3. The Cross, the Covenant and the Children of the Resurrection

a. In view of Jesus' imminent execution, the issue of the resurrection became very pertinent. What would happen to God's salvation program for humanity if Jesus died, but was not raised? What would happen to our faith if there is no resurrection? (1 Cor 15:13-19)

b. What do we share with Jesus upon entering the new covenant through faith in Him? (Jn 11:25-26; 14:19; 1 Cor 15:22-23)

c. As children of the resurrection - those who bear God's image (Lk 20:36), what does Scripture urge us to do in the present earthly age? (Mk 12:17; 1 Cor 15:58)

Discipleship Pointers

Jesus' answers reveal some truths concerning the resurrection:

- It's certainty: Established by the covenant that the living God made with His people; predicted by Jesus (Mk 8:31; 9:31; 10:34); fulfilled when He rose from the dead (16:6).
- It's grandeur: It will be of a transformed and superior order compared to human existence and relationships in this present age.

Because the Sadducees critique the resurrection by their erroneous knowledge, they ended denying the resurrection altogether. They failed to grasp the reality of resurrection as revealed by the Word of God and guaranteed by the power of God and His faithfulness.

1. If the God of life enters into a faithful covenant relationship with people, then it cannot be that they remain dead forever. Instead they will be made alive with the life of God.
2. As surely as Jesus calls us to pick up the cross in self-denial and to follow Him, He also guarantees a glorious resurrection life shared with Him, beyond what we can imagine. Jesus, as the firstborn from the dead (Colossians 1:18), gives us hope.
3. As children of the resurrection, destined for a new world order, we live for God, with an eternal perspective, by faith and not by sight (Hebrews 10:38).
 - Whatever the adversity and wrongs in this fallen world, we are not to lose heart, but to wait patiently and hopefully for God's promise to be fulfilled (Romans 8:23-25).
 - Whatever the prosperity and comforts in this life, they are not to anchor us in the love of this world and extinguish our desire for the Lord's coming.

Family/Group Moment

1. Give thanks to God that we share in the resurrection life of Jesus because of His gracious mission to save us. Pray for one another to wait patiently, serve joyfully and to stay focus on God while we await His timing for the eventual redemption of our bodies.
2. The Bible does not give a whole lot of details on life in the new age. Is this ignorance a bliss or a cause for more anxiety or speculation? Why?
3. If marriage – a key part of our earthly human experience – is no longer necessary in the new age, will the experience of human love and faithful commitment be in some way compromised or diminished? Discuss.