

The Judge and Saviour of the World

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[0 : 00] 1017 of the church Bibles. Mark chapter 12, starting at verse 13.

Later, they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words. They came to him and said, Teacher, we know that you're a man of integrity.

You aren't swayed by others because you pay no attention to who they are, but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right to pay the poll tax to Caesar or not?

Should we pay or shouldn't we? But Jesus knew their hypocrisy. Why are you trying to trap me, he asked. Bring me a denarius and let me look at it. They brought the coin and he asked them, Whose image is this and whose inscription?

Caesar's, they replied. Then Jesus said to them, Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's. And they were amazed at him. Then the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question.

[1 : 12] Teacher, they said, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother.

Now there were seven brothers. The first one married and died without leaving any children. The second one married the widow, but he also died, leaving no child.

It was the same with the third. In fact, none of the seven left any children. Last of all, the woman died too. At the resurrection, whose wife will she be since the seven were married to her?

Jesus replied, Are you not in error, because you do not know the scriptures or the power of God? When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage.

They will be like the angels in heaven. Now about the dead rising, have you not read in the book of Moses in the account of the burning bush how God said to him, I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.

[2 : 12] He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken. One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked them, Of all the commandments, which is the most important?

The most important one, answered Jesus, is this, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.

The second is this, Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these. Well said, teacher, the man replied. You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him.

To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding, with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices. When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, You are not far from the kingdom of God.

And from then, no one dared ask him any more questions. While Jesus was teaching in the temple courts, he asked, Why do the teachers of the law say that the Messiah is the son of David?

[3 : 27] David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet. David himself calls him Lord.

How then can he be his son? The large crowd listened to him with delight. As he taught, Jesus said, Watch out for the teachers of the law.

They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers.

These men will be punished most severely. Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people

threw in large amounts, but a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins worth only a few pence.

Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth, but she, out of her poverty, put in everything, all she had to live on.

[4 : 39] This is the word of the Lord. So Mark chapter 12. This is a big passage, both in size and content today.

So let's pray for God's help in seeing Jesus clearly in it. Let's pray together. We thank you, Lord, for your grace and loving kindness towards us.

And we pray now that as we open the scriptures and see Jesus in action, you would please open our eyes to understand him as he really is. We pray for the help of your spirit.

We pray that what we learn would give us great confidence in your son, your great king. And we ask this in his name. Amen. You can hardly be unaware that there's a queen's speech coming up in a few weeks.

The queen will come to parliament at the state opening and announce her government's legislative program for the next session. Of course, it's called the queen's speech, but they're not the queen's words.

[5 : 49] They're written by the government for the queen to say, for the government. But just imagine that this time the queen abandoned the script and used her own words.

Imagine that she started ticking them off. This has all worked pretty well in the past, but you've made such a mess of it that we're never going to do this sort of government ever again.

Just imagine, for once, there would be absolute unity in the chamber. Embarrassment followed by outrage.

What right have you to do that? Do you think there's any news broadcast in the world that wouldn't cover that the same day? It's so not what you expect the queen to do.

Well, if you can imagine that, you've got something like the flavor of the outrage being expressed in Mark chapter 11, verse 28. What right have you to do what you've just done?

[6 : 57] Jesus has come to Jerusalem, proclaimed as king by the crowds, walked into the temple, and declared publicly that the sacrificial system that God put in place is so corrupt that it's being replaced by something new from now.

It's a huge thing to do. They were just as in love with the sacrificial system as we are with parliamentary democracy. And they say, what right have you?

Now that question, what right have you? By what authority? That question dominates the landscape all the way to the end of chapter 12 where we are today. As one group after another from the establishment challenges his right to do what he's done.

The first approach we looked at last week, it's by a cross-party delegation. Chapter 11, verse 27. Chief priests, scribes, elders. What right have you, they say?

And the response was devastating. Well, I'm the one who owns all this. I'm the son and heir of everything that God has made. You, on the other hand, are a bunch of bandits who've been stealing what belongs to God.

[8 : 08] Understandably, that doesn't go down all that well. Chapter 2, verse 12. They long to arrest him, but the people love what he's saying and are watching, so they can't.

What happens next? Well, today's passage is about what happens next. And this passage is a bit like so many football matches. It's a game of two halves. First half, they bring it to him.

Second half, he takes it to them. So let's start with the first half of this passage. They bring it to him. Cast your mind back to that delicious thought of the queen ticking off parliament.

And imagine how it would be if as they fired their questions at her, not only was she completely unfazed by them, but she answered so penetratingly that her questioner's motives were laid bare. Well, that's exactly what happens in this passage. As different people from the establishment ask Jesus questions that they think will put him on the back foot and put them back in the driving seat, but in each case, the questions look like good questions, and in each case, the response is absolutely devastating.

[9 : 20] So we're going to look at these three episodes very quickly and in each case, we're going to ask, who's the questioner? What's clever about the question and what's revealed by the answer? First encounter, verse 13.

They sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words. Who are these people? Well, they're two groups that wouldn't normally get on well with one another, but here, they're united in their opposition to Jesus.

Pharisees, a very prominent reforming religious group, nationalist, critical of Jesus all the way through this gospel for not paying attention to religious tradition.

Herodians, a very different group, allies of Herod the king, politically driven, religiously compromised, not at all unhappy to cozy up to Roman rule. What's clever about their question? Well, look at verse 14. It's a kind of slimy, flattering introduction, but they present him with a yes or no question. Should we or shouldn't we pay the tax to Caesar?

[10:26] And whatever way he answers, they think they'll have something against him. If he answers, yes, you should, well, that's not going to go down well with a nationalist crowd who hate the Romans and would just love an independence referendum.

If he answers, no, you shouldn't, well, that has the potential to get him into trouble with the Romans and that's good. What's revealed by the answer?

Well, it's such a clever answer. Anyone here got a coin, he says. Well, of course they've got a coin. And whose head is that on the coin and whose inscription?

Whose system does that coin belong to? And instantly, the coin owners are shown to be people who are totally happy themselves to be financially close to the Romans because they're dealing with Roman currency.

Well, you give the coin to the one whose system we all know you're very comfortable with and by the way, give to God what is God's, which is exactly what you're not doing.

[11:34] Well, that's the first encounter. Second encounter, verse 18. Then the Sadducees come. Who are the Sadducees? Well, they're a very conservative religious group.

Only the law of Moses, the first five books of the Bible, are authoritative for these guys and they take it very seriously indeed and they don't believe in the resurrection. They think that death is the end, which of course is why they're sad, you see.

And the reason they don't believe in the resurrection is that there's not much in the law of Moses about resurrection. And so they come with a question about the law of Moses, which is their area of expertise.

And the law of Moses says that in order to protect a woman's well-being and the family's position in the promised land, if they're married and her husband dies before they've got children, his brother has to have children with her.

There's no welfare state here. It's a good provision. And so they come with a possible but really very unlikely scenario based on that law that makes resurrection, they think, look really silly.

[12:40] What's clever about the question? Well, Jesus has been teaching about resurrection. Perhaps some of that teaching has filtered out to these people. Perhaps they think they can discredit his teaching.

Perhaps they think they can make him look as though he's against the law of Moses and that would be a big blow to strike. What's revealed by the answer?

We'll look at verse 24. Are you not in error because you don't know the scriptures or the power of God? Two things he says.

First, you don't know the scriptures. He takes them, interestingly, right to the bit of the Bible that's supposed to be their bit of expertise. To the very first encounter in the Bible between Moses, their hero, and God.

Where God introduces himself to Moses as the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. And the God who was their God, not the God who was their God, but the God who is their God.

[13:43] They may be dead, but he's still their God. He's the God of the living. And if he's your God, you're alive, full stop. They don't know their scriptures.

Second, they've got a very small view of God. Verse 25, when the dead rise, they'll neither marry nor be given in marriage. They'll be like the angels in heaven.

What's going on here? Why does he say this? I think it's this. Do you really think that everything God has said about marriage and all God has said about his plans for the world has its ultimate fulfillment fulfillment in this phase of the world?

The point being made here is not that marriage is a bad thing, but that the future God has promised is of a whole different order of brilliance from the present age.

They haven't understood how powerful God really is, what he's able to do. He's going to change everything. Think resurrection is going to be a problem for that God.

[14 : 52] What a tiny, teeny God these people have. They don't know the scriptures and they don't know what God is like and of course those two together, if you don't know the scriptures properly, you can't know what God is like.

Now folks, it's pretty common to be like them in one way or another. Let me give you a couple of examples. I remember a conversation with a guy a few years ago about how Jesus offered eternal life to everyone who trusted him and his response was, well why would I want to be a Christian who'd want to live forever?

And of course what he was thinking was that the life Jesus holds out to us is just life like the life we're now living which is a tiny little view of God, isn't it?

I mean, is it really possible that Jesus died to bring a life of more of the same but just forever and ever? What would that be like? Or another example, all over the world there's stuff that claims to be Christian that goes on and on about how if you're a real Christian you're going to have the best of all that this world can offer now.

Health and wealth and success and psychological wholeness and great sex and children with no problems and a long life and a peaceful death surrounded by family and friends.

[16 : 15] You're just going to have your best life now if you believe in Jesus. To which one has to say really? Is this present age as good as it can get?

Really what's in the foreground of the Bible's view? It's so easy to think of God's plans in terms of what this world can offer you but just a little bit bigger and better.

But that is a tiny view of God. Says Jesus verse 24 you guys totally ignorant of the scriptures and so you've got an incredibly small view of God and his power and where everything's going in the end. These experts in the law of Moses they don't know the law of Moses and they say they don't know God. Well that's the second encounter. The third encounter verse 28 one of the teachers of the law. Who is this? He's a religious teacher but one with a rather different attitude. He's listening in on the previous conversation and he hears an answer that he likes the sound of.

[17 : 24] What's clever about his question? Well nothing. It's not a tricky question at all. He just wants to know what Jesus thinks. It seems to have been a significant issue of debate in Jesus' day to discuss which of the Old Testament commandments were the most important.

And interestingly here Jesus puts together two commandments that no one else in his day was putting together as the most important. Love God with your whole being and love your neighbor as yourself.

And says Jesus there's nothing more important than those. The proper goal of being human according to Jesus is to live in loving relationship with your creator and in loving relationship with the people he's made.

To which the teacher says verse 32 hmm good answer. To love him with all your heart and with all your understanding and with all your strength and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.

Now notice the last bit of what he says there. it's very important. You see he doesn't just agree that Jesus is right. He says those commands about loving God and neighbor are more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.

[18 : 49] And that takes us straight back into the heart of this section of Mark's gospel. You see the temple system that Jesus has just passed judgment on is a system that is absolutely scrupulous about sacrifices.

about doing the religious things right in order to be safe with God. But here is a man from right within that system who recognizes that what God wants is not a beautifully running religious system but rather people who love him and love other people.

Now there's a world of difference between those isn't there? Between saying we do the religious bit of life really well and that keeps us secure with God and saying because we are secure with God we love him and we love people.

Those are just poles apart aren't they? One treats God as a kind of slot machine almost inanimate. Keep feeding the coins in and that will keep him sweet and us safe.

The other recognizes God as he really is. The generous creator and rescuer our life and forgiveness pours from him so we love him and we love those made in his image.

[20 : 08] They're poles apart and here's a man who knows the difference. And Jesus says about him verse 34 well you're not a million miles away from the kingdom of God are you?

And Mark adds the most extraordinary words possibly most extraordinary words ever written anywhere. From then on no one dared ask him any questions.

Now this is a staggering thing we need to pause and reflect on this for a moment it's one of the most staggering things in this gospel. It's almost unimaginable actually. We've talked about politics already let's just go back to the political realm for a moment.

Just think how relentless and aggressive political interviews are on television or on the radio. Think how uncomfortable and evasive politicians are when faced with those awkward questions.

Think how glad they are when the time for the interview runs out and the questions stop. Has it ever crossed your mind ever that during the course of a political interview the interviewer might run out of aggressive questions halfway through?

[21 : 30] Has it crossed your mind that that might happen? Of course it hasn't because there are so many questions you might ask. People often think of God as a bit like a politician.

He's going to need to be a really smooth talker because boy boy have we got questions to fire at him about how he's running everything. I had a close relative who on his deathbed said if God's there I've got a lot of questions.

He's got a lot to answer for. Well these encounters show that when people actually come face to face with God's king in no time at all they cannot bear to ask him any more questions questions because his answers expose them.

If Jesus were prime minister no one would turn up to prime minister's questions after the first week. It just would stop. Remember the outraged question in the temple at the beginning who gave you authority to come here and judge this?

But they don't say that for long do they? because he just has the authority to do it. They experience it in his answers. He is authority in action.

[22 : 54] People cannot call him to account. He calls them to account because he has the right to and the power to and he is king of the world. So they bring it to him but not for long and then he takes it to them.

It's all gone quiet. They've stopped questioning and then he speaks about them. First a correction and second a warning. Let's look at the correction first.

Verse 35. Why do the teachers of the law say that the Messiah is the son of David? David himself speaking by the Holy Spirit declared the Lord said to my Lord sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.

David calls him Lord. How then can he be his son? I think the correction here is that the teachers of the law have been teaching wrongly about God's king.

That word Messiah, it's a Hebrew word, it just means anointed and it refers to God's anointed king, God's chosen rescuing king. And there are all sorts of promises in Israel's history before this about how God was going to send a king to rule over the unruly world and sort it out in the end completely.

[24 : 19] And here Jesus quotes from Psalm 110. This is a song written by David, the greatest of God's chosen kings in the Old Testament, about a thousand years before this date.

And in the psalm, David, this best of kings, a great rescuer and ruler of his people, looks forward to another king.

He pictures God talking to this greater king, a king that David refers to as my lord.

Look at that verse again. The lord, he's talking about God, said to my lord, the king who's coming, you sit at my right hand, which is of course the place of authority until I put your enemies under your feet.

Verse 37, David calls him lord. How then can he be his son? And I think the point that's being made here is that just as they had read the scriptures wrong and come away with a small view of God, so they have been taught the scriptures wrong and come away with a small view of God's promised king.

[25 : 36] They expect a king who will be just like the best of the kings they've had before. Yes, a son of David, a descendant of David, but pretty much like David, in the same mold, a national rescuer, someone to give them their independence from Rome at last, and that's what the crowd cheered for when Jesus came into Jerusalem.

You see, their view of God's king does not include judging the temple and judging themselves and judging the world, but God has promised a king of a different order entirely, and the king in Psalm 110 is just amazingly described.

Now, we don't really have time to go to Psalm 110, but this afternoon or bedtime reading, have a look at Psalm 110, and you'll find a king that's described in the most extraordinary terms.

He's the supreme authority. Well, here he is in the temple, in Jerusalem, that Psalm 110 king, judging the temple and judging them as he will judge the whole world, because he really is in the place of authority.

authority. So that's the correction. You've been taught wrong about the king. And then there's a warning, verse 38. As he taught, Jesus said, watch out for the teachers of the law.

[27 : 16] They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted with respect in the market places, and have the most important seats in the synagogues, and the places of honor at banquets. they devour widows' houses, and for a show, they make lengthy prayers.

These men will be punished most severely. What's the greatest commandment? Love God with all your being, and love people who are made in his image.

What do these people love? Well, several things are mentioned, and they're just as characteristic of human religion now as they were of human religion back then.

I'm going to mention four things. Number one, they love dressing up in grand clothes. They love to be noticed. All over the world, political leaders wear smart clothes when they go out to do their business in public, but the clothes that political leaders wear cannot compare with the clothes that religious leaders wear.

They love dressing up. Two, attention. attention. They love to be honored. They love their status, the position gives them.

[28 : 31] They love it that when they walk into the room, people want to shake their hand. They love going to dinner with the dignitaries. They love being seen to be important. They talk about God, but really they want to be the center of attention.

Three, they love money, verse 40. They devour widows' homes. homes. They don't mind taking money from people who can't really afford to give it.

I remember talking to a Christian leader from a country I won't name. He said, in our country, the way to get rich is not to enter politics, it's to be a pastor. That's where the money is.

And fourth, they love to appear pious. For show, they make lengthy prayers. Dressing up, being the center of attention, getting rich, appearing pious all over the world, all over the world.

That's the shape of human religion. It looks like it's about God. It talks about love for people. In fact, it's all about the people in charge.

[29 : 38] And the people are there to benefit those in charge. Now, folks, can I say it's a great thing to be willing to take on responsibility for leading people.

It's a great responsibility. And we do need good leaders. We need good political leaders, and we need good leaders of churches. But leadership brings with it great temptations.

Watch out, says Jesus, to the people in the temple. Your leaders, they've taught you wrongly about God's king. The king that they've sold to you is just the king you wanted to hear about.

A king who'd give you the freedom you desire, make you a great nation again. But the king God has promised is a king of a different order altogether. And your leaders, watch out for them.

They talk about God, but they're only really interested in themselves. It's only a few sentences, isn't it? But it's a devastating critique. Imagine hearing those words spoken in public if you'd been there.

[30 : 43] And what's more, it's not just devastating, it's true. Look at the little episode at the end. Right at the end of the chapter, verse 41.

The scene at the temple treasury. Jesus notices what nobody else can see. What everyone else sees are the big financial gestures.

What he sees is both wonderful and horrible at the same time. The wonderful, a poor woman, whose devotion, though looking small, is actually much bigger than anybody else's.

Isn't it magnificent that he can see that? Isn't it? Sometimes the things we do and the things that are done in the world are so very small looking, but he sees just how big they are.

But there's also the horrible. You see, this is a corrupt system that preys on the devotion of people like this. What did he say about the teachers of the law?

[31 : 55] They devour widows' homes. Well, the end of verse 40 reads literally, she's put in everything, her whole life.

her whole life went into the collection box. She was expressing devotion, which is a wonderful thing, but the system she's in neither recognizes her devotion, nor is unhappy to take everything she has to give.

See how penetrating and true and good that analysis is. It's wonderful, isn't it? It's wonderful, isn't it, that somebody can see through all of that.

At a glance, he sees both the devotion and the corruption that no one else can see, and he sees them for what they really are. It's a wonderful thing that there's someone in the world who can do that, isn't it?

Our world is so full of pretense and corruption and unrecognized goodness, but this person sees everything. By what authority?

[33 : 12] Well, what's the answer to that question? The answer to that question is by his own authority. He just has it.

He doesn't have to, notice Jesus doesn't have to argue for his authority here or prove it, he just does it. It's who he is. He's the one with authority. He has the power to know everything about everyone and to judge truly about everyone, and that's both, isn't it, wonderful and terrifying at the same time.

We call this series The King We Might Not Want But Really Need, and there is something terrifying about this person, isn't there? He sees everything effortlessly.

He cannot be resisted. He walks in the door and sees everything. He comes to Jerusalem and judges the temple and its leaders. He is the one with authority.

It's just what he does. He can do it. Folks, if this were the end of the story in Mark's gospel, it would indeed be terrifying. But of course, wonderfully, it isn't the end of the story.

[34 : 22] Cast your mind back to Psalm 110. We mentioned it earlier on. In Psalm 110, we meet this extraordinary person, a king who smashes everything evil in the world.

But he's also described as a great priest, which means that he's a person who brings people into relation with God. And in the Psalm, far from being terrified of him, his people absolutely adore him because he's so magnificent.

You see, this is not the end of the story in Mark's gospel. For Jesus has come to Jerusalem to judge the temple, but he's also in Jerusalem to die.

To offer as priest his own magnificent self for the sins of people whose corruption he knows through and through.

He's such an amazing person. It would be terrifying to stand before him in the end unforgiven.

[35 : 34] But that's not why he came. He came so that when people stand before him at the end, they might be received with joy. In a moment we will sing a song in which will sing these words.

Before the throne of God above I have a strong, a perfect plea, a great high priest whose name is love, who ever lives and pleads for me.

My name is written on his hands. My name is hidden in his heart. I know that while in heaven he stands, no power can force me to depart.

It's an extraordinary thing, isn't it? That it can be true that a person who sees everything like this can do that for people, give them forgiveness and confidence and hope.

He's the king we might not want, he's not comfortable, but boy is he the king we need. And if we're people who've received his forgiveness, we can live confident that the world is in the hands of one who will absolutely judge everything perfectly in the end.

[36 : 59] And if we're not yet received his forgiveness, today would be a great day to do that, for it's precisely what he came to give. Let's pray together. Just a moment to reflect in the quiet on what God has said to us today, and then I'll lead us in prayer.

The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet. We thank you, Heavenly Father, for the truth about Jesus, the person who's revealed to us in these passages, for this extraordinary person, the one with supreme authority, the one who sees everything exactly as it is, and judges it truly and justly, and will in the end judge everything truly and justly.

And we thank you so much that this is also a great high priest, one who loves corrupt people, one who laid down his life, so that corrupt people might be cleansed and forgiven and safe forever.

If we've not yet asked him for forgiveness, help us to do that today. If we have, help us to live confidently that he is in control and that in the end he will set everything right. We ask these things in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.