

## SERMON 11.11.07 - God of the living.

### If you could ask Jesus some questions today, what would they be?

In the passage Luke's gospel, *Luke 20: 27-38*, Jesus is confronted by a seemingly ridiculous question. This passage occurs in Jesus' life at the time when he had already entered Jerusalem on a donkey and the crowds had celebrated his entry with the words of praise, 'Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!' *Luke 19: 38*. What happens while he is in Jerusalem for the few days between this event and his crucifixion is recorded in *Luke chapters 19 – 22*.

During this time, Jesus cleared out the sellers from the temple.  
He taught people in the temple.  
He told them parables and stories.

**His authority is questioned by the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders.** He is engaged with the highest religious leaders. They ask him a series of questions:

- Tell us by what authority you are doing these things? (*Luke 20: 2*)
- Who gave you this authority? (*Luke 20: 2*)
- Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not? (*Luke 20: 22*)

**In these chapters, you will see Jesus engaged with religious leaders in a battle over words, language and understanding.** Not unlike the battle of words and the manipulation of words and ideas that is going on between political parties and leaders in the days leading up to the federal election. The election promises that are being made by all parties are conveyed by words.

Through their words, the religious leaders were trying to trap Jesus. Luke builds up a picture of this innocent man, this good man, this man who had the full authority of God in Him, subjected to a battle of intellect, of spiritual manipulation, of evil in the guise of games people play.

Here is the evidence:

- Every day he was teaching at the temple. But the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the leaders among the people were trying to kill him. Yet they could not find any way to do it, because all the people hung on his words. (*Luke 19: 47-48*)
- The teachers of the law and the chief priests looked for a way to arrest him immediately, because they knew he had spoken this parable against them. But they were afraid of the people. (*Luke 20: 19*)
- Keeping a close watch on him, they sent spies, who pretended to be honest. They hoped to catch Jesus in something he said so that they might hand him over to the power and authority of the governor. Jesus saw through their duplicity. They were unable to trap him in what he said in public. (*Luke 20: 20, 23, 26*)

Do you get the picture? They had more than met their match in Jesus.

**We see a different Jesus here.** Here he does not come across as the compassionate one, the healer, the miracle worker, the beloved friend, the one who poured out his love to the poor, the downtrodden, the weak, the sinful. In these verbal exchanges between the powerful, proud and public leaders of the day, he speaks with such authority and wisdom that the crowds fall silent. This Jesus is revealed here as the one through whom God speaks.

This is the Jesus described by the writer of the book of Hebrews in these words: 'In these last days God has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.' *Hebrews 1: 2-3*

I feel like falling to my knees in humility when I hear those words about Christ.

**What is this passage about?** How does Jesus deal with the question that is posed in the Luke reading? The Sadducees were very unpopular. They were the priestly elite from the rich families. They didn't believe in the resurrection. They accepted only the first five books of the Bible in which the idea of resurrection is absent. They try to make Jesus admit there is no life after death by posing a case in which a woman's husband dies. According to Levitical law, the dead man's brother has a responsibility to marry the widow. In this case the second brother also died and passed the responsibility on to the third, and the pattern repeated itself until the woman had been widowed seven times.

**The question was: If there is life after death, who would she be married to in eternity if she had been the wife of all the seven brothers?**

Jesus deals with this question by shifting the focus from marriage to God, and asserting that in resurrection life, or life in God's presence, neither marriage nor death are primary concerns. For Jesus there is no problem at all. In the future life he sees that people will be in a completely new relationship with God and with each other. Already in this life, Jesus has taught that to be in the Kingdom is to have entered a new relationship with Him and with others. In God's Kingdom people have entered a new family where all – irrespective of their origins – are to be brothers and sisters.

John Newton said that when we get to heaven, there will be three wonders:

1. Who is there
2. Who is not there, and
3. The fact that I'm there!

**Jesus doesn't focus on the details of heaven, except to say that life after death will be different than life before death.** He focuses on the power of God and the love of God who 'is not the God of the dead, but of the living.' *Luke 20: 38* He focuses on the fact that there will be a resurrection from the dead for all who believe in Him. Our destiny as God's wonderful creation is not to end up simply in a grave. The one constant between this earthly life and eternal life is the transformation for the one who believes.

Look back over the last few years of your life – maybe even 10 years. Are you the same person as you were 10 years ago? Is more of your life under the control of the Holy Spirit? Can you see the wonderful, grace-filled work of God in your life, changing you from what you were, transforming you day by day? There will be a day when you come face to face with Jesus and the transformation will be complete.

**How does that affect my life today? What relevance does this passage have today?**

In the words of Abraham Heschel, a Jewish theologian, ‘There is not only a hereafter but also a here now.’ My hope and faith that one day I will stand in the presence of Jesus and see Him must affect the way that I live now. Otherwise, it is an empty and useless faith. As we face issues of worry about our immediate future, concern about loved ones, health worries, relationship difficulties, fear about the state of the world, we must remember the certainty of Jesus that ‘He is not the God of the dead, but of the living.’ *Luke 20: 38*

As you struggle with life's issues are you able to go to Jesus with your questions? That may mean spending time in prayer, or talking over your doubts and fears with someone you trust.

**Ultimately, the question is: Will I allow the God of the living to guide me through my whole life, entering the deep waters with me, carrying me through the disappointments and the failures?** Will I allow the God of the living to be part of my everyday life, so that I see life and people and situations through His eyes?

**What this means for the church is that beyond the sermons, the activities, the songs, and the prayers, ultimately we have a life to share.** This life is God’s free sharing of himself in Jesus Christ. That is the church’s top priority in getting involved in mission. That will make a difference to anyone’s life. It will make a difference to the world.

*Lynette Leach, Minister*