

# Questioning Jesus

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] So, we're going to look back this morning at the passage that we read in our ongoing study of Mark's gospel. We begin to see structures and patterns of what Mark, through the Spirit of God, is trying to do as he unpacks and unveils the character and the person of Jesus and applies him and the truth of Jesus to our hearts and our lives today.

And I think that's very, very important recognition as we study Scripture. It's a living, breathing word. There's nothing like it.

And it comes into our hearts and comes into our lives. But I'm going to ask you to consider another statement from Scripture, from the Bible, from God's word, a statement that's made in 2 Corinthians chapter 5, verse 10.

Just as an introduction to make us think a little bit about our attitude to Jesus, okay, our attitude to Jesus Christ. I'm sure, I think it will be a challenge, for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

Now, that's immediately got to spark your interest or make you uncomfortable in your seat or make you wonder about life and where I am in life and what I'm doing, for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

[ 1 : 2 8 ] In many ways, it's a statement that should change the whole of our lives. It should actually change everything about what we're saying and thinking today. And in many ways, a statement like that, what it does for us, it triggers this reality for us that what we do, you know, we're together, but how much thought did I put into coming today and preaching, how much thought did you put into coming to church today?

It's just a routine, it's something that we just go through. But in a sense, it should change your thinking because if that statement is right, then what we're doing here is all or nothing.

Well, if it's right, it's all. If it's wrong, then, well, let's just close up shop just now, because that is an incredible reality, isn't it? It is a kind of all or nothing statement that we need to consider, because Jesus is either who He claims to be and who Mark has spent all this time that we've been looking at revealing Himself, or we should just ditch Him.

Let's just ditch Him altogether if it's not true and if what is being told to us about Jesus is not accurate, because we are called, as believers, we're called this morning to accept by faith.

Yes, by faith, of course, that the Bible is God's revelation of Himself to us. That's what we're called to do, because if it's not that, then it's just a mishmash of religious musings that may have limited value or significance, but is of no real, powerful, life-changing, dynamic relevance to us.

[ 3 : 0 6 ] And it may be that subconsciously we think that, because if we go from here and the word of God itself makes no difference to our day-to-day life as we move out of here, it's maybe highly relevant for this one hour, but if it has no relevance from in our relationships, in our thinking, in our workplace, in our decisions, in our actions, then it may be that we've lost sight of who Jesus is, and that is absolutely easy to do.

So we struggle sometimes, don't we, with the whole idea of God's authority and Jesus Christ's authority. We find it difficult to, well, I find it often difficult to dovetail grace and love, which we speak about a lot, with authority.

We love the idea of love. We all love the idea of love, but we recoil from a love that claims our submission and has its own authority, because these are two tainted words in our society.

They are canceled words. We can't use submission and authority because of the connotations they have with things that we recoil against.

Now, we recognize that authority always has to do with power. And in our minds so often, and in my mind so often, power is either something to be afraid of, something that's abused, or something that we want for ourselves.

[ 4 : 35 ] And submission, on the other hand, is just weakness. So you get power, and you've, sorry, you've got submission and you've got authority. And these two things are dovetailed, both in that claim of Jesus, and we're going to come and look at it in a minute.

I'm getting there. It's a long introduction. We're going to get to this passage. But we find these two things absolutely dovetailed in the life of Jesus Christ. So you get Christ who makes this incredible, significant claim that He's uniquely God and that He holds both perfect love and justice and power together in His infinite being without abuse.

We know all about abuse, power. We know all about it in the church. We hear about it all the time and we know it exists. But here we have Jesus Christ who says He holds perfect power and also love without abuse.

And also that He, secondly, that He claims absolute authority over every living human being, including all of us in here today, as our Creator and as we saw in that verse from Corinthians, our ultimate judge, the one before whom all of us will stand face to face.

Now, this passage is about Jesus meeting with different people who are questioning His authority. And His answers are soaked with significance and wisdom and revelation about Himself.

[ 6 : 04 ] And I hope it triggers some deep responses in your own life and mind about whose authority that you submit to and why or how you regard Jesus and whether He's maybe just a comfort blanket that we can pick up and drop as we need Him.

What if He's the sovereign King of kings that He claims to be who is worthy alone of our worship and of our submission to His authority? Now, I recognize that perfect love and perfect justice under His authority is a hard concept to imagine because we don't see it in this world in which we live.

But we accept it by faith and we come to Him recognizing who He is.

And as we recognize that, we do so knowing that there's a great cost to that. It'll be a great cost to you in your workplace, in your home life, among your fellow students, wherever we are, to submit to the authority of Jesus.

It's not something people do. And yet, in our lives, we're slavishly following our instincts so often or slavishly just submitting to our own unpredictable selves or to the volatile crowd around us.

[ 7 : 28 ] So there's three different ways. In this passage, it's neatly broken into three. You can see that with the headings because Mark's introducing us to three different groups of people who are undermining Jesus' authority.

We're going to look at that and then look at Jesus' responses quickly. So first of all, the first section is the section with the leaders, the Herodians and the Pharisees who question Jesus about paying taxes to Caesar.

And they're questioning His impartiality really in many sense. So you've got this unholy alliance, insincere conspirators coming together to try and trip up Jesus Christ.

And they very much together reflect the political situation of the day, which we all know about it mainly, usually if we've been here and heard the story about Rome occupying Palestine and the Jews being under submission and subjugation to the Roman Empire.

And the Pharisees hated the Roman occupation and all that it stood for, especially Caesar who claimed to be a god and whose image on the coin that they were going to share shortly, it was an invitation to recognize Him as a deity.

[ 8 : 40 ] And then the Herodians on the other half, they were a group of people who were kind of political fly by knights. They were people who enjoyed the situation of Roman authority because they were tended to be rich and powerful and they benefited from the ruling classes of the Roman Empire being there.

They were the kind of tax collecting people and others who shared authority, even though it was kind of a puppet authority in the region of Palestine.

So two very different groups coming together with different motives trying to trip up Jesus. And they thought they would find out that He had no authority over their particular group.

He must have some ulterior motive that they could expose by asking them this question, you know, who should we pay this money to? Should we give authority to Caesar or should we give authority to God?

And they thought they could question any kind of rightful authority He had by bringing Him down to a human level and expose that He was only significant for one particular group or one particular idea.

[ 9 : 59 ] Now, it's interesting that that's no real difference in what many people say today, that Jesus can't have ultimate authority over every different kind of group.

There must be a motive behind what He's doing and also people take Him and use Him their own way. So many people will argue that He's just a historical figure who's been hijacked over the centuries by whatever cause benefits from having Jesus as their liberator.

Many people will say He's just a Western Savior, which is kind of ironic, isn't it? Or He's a God of the political right. Or He's a Protestant God, or a Catholic God, or a liberation theological God.

But He can't be everyone's God. He's a free church God, and He's a Baptist God, a God whoever needs Him on their side.

But He's not my God. He's someone else's God. He has no authority over me. He might be the Herodian's God. He might be the Pharisee's God.

[ 11 : 11 ] He might be some God of the poorer classes of Palestine, but He's not my God. He's not my authority. He can't speak on my behalf. And that's what they were trying to expose, that He had no authority over them, which brings us to the second group, the Sadducees in verses 18 to 27, who ask about the resurrection with this rather strange illustration that they bring to Him.

They try to expose His lack of authority by ridiculing His theology, by ridiculing what He believed.

Now, in this interaction, I certainly don't know, and I don't think the commentators know, a great deal about the Sadducees is a group. We don't really understand exactly all that they stood for or who they represented.

But one thing we do know was they didn't believe in the resurrection. We're told that here in this passage as they question Him about the resurrection. They deny the reality of any kind of life after death.

Okay? And so what they did was they took this Old Testament law that was in the law of Moses and from Deuteronomy 25, it's called the Levirate law.

[ 12 : 22 ] And it's a bit of a weird law for us, a bit strange for us. This whole idea of the duty of a brother law for women was married to someone and didn't have children and their husband died then.

The brother of the husband was legally duty bound to come and to marry her. So that there would be children and an inheritance and a future from them.

And then they go on to this ridiculous idea of all seven brothers. Maybe that's where seven brides, where seven brothers came from. But this idea now, whose husband would she be in the resurrection?

Now, I know that the law itself seems a bit weird to us, but in the ancient Near East, the passing on of the family name and the inheritance was hugely significant within that tribal reality.

Very important in lots of different ways, in economic ways, in social ways and religious ways. Important for the widow as well as for the family. But they used this Old Testament practice to mock the whole idea of the afterlife and give us a sense of who's who of the afterlife?

[ 13 : 34 ] Who's going to be married in this context in the afterlife? I wonder if that's any different again from today, you know?

The whole idea of mocking the theology, the teaching of Jesus, the teaching of God's word to make it seem ridiculous and to make it seem unbelievable.

And it may, how many people will mock the idea of the resurrection itself if we take this particular example? You know, what is it going to be like if all these things are going to happen?

How can it be that there will be a resurrection and they mock Jesus' authority to teach such things? And it's, I don't think it's very different today.

An uncreated God. Ah, who created God? Surely you must have an answer to that. God coming in the flesh, the virgin birth, miracles, a crucified physical resurrection, this confined within a loving marriage, the sanctity of the unborn, heaven and hell, all of these things are used by many people just to mock the teaching and mock the authority of Jesus.

[ 14 : 46 ] Seriously, seriously, you're asking me to submit to the author of these fantasies and his authoritative claims in our life?

It's ridiculous. It's mockery, which is what the Sadducees were doing to deny the authority of Jesus over them. And then lastly, we come to an interesting interaction between this religious leader, one of the scribes, who had heard Jesus' responses and who asked him about the greatest commandment.

And Jesus gave this remarkable answer about love being the loving of God and the loving of one another, which is truly remarkable, remarkably beautiful answer to the one question about the one command, the two are fused in together, loving God and loving one another.

And now, we may differ on this, and I'm probably coming to a slightly different conclusion, but I wonder whether this scribe was, Jesus says he's nearly in the kingdom, okay?

So it's a wise answer. He responds to the wise answer of Jesus in a good way. But I wonder whether also with him, because he's not yet in the kingdom, Jesus says, whether there's a sense in which he's at this point still patronizing Jesus a little bit as simply being a good moral teacher and not the divine son.

[ 16 : 19 ] It's quite interesting, isn't it, this section? He's called in verse 34, not yet a follower. There is a degree of insight, but we're not told that he gets up and follows Jesus.

We're not giving an indication yet that Jesus is the King of kings, that he would follow. He may have gone on to do so, we hope and pray.

But he liked the moral teaching of Jesus and the wisdom of Christ. But it almost comes across in this little section that it still seemed to be on his own terms.

He asks Jesus the question and Jesus give the answer and he says, yeah, you're right. Perhaps, yes, you've got it right. It's almost as if he's saying, Jesus agrees with me.

Now, that might be a bit harsh and that might just come from my harsh, unforgiving spirit. But we don't know exactly what was in his heart, but it does seem to be that he's going to Jesus and is measuring Jesus' answer against his own standard.

[ 17 : 24 ] And maybe that comes a little bit more into our own context rather than the other two, which are more overtly antagonistic towards Jesus. Maybe in a church context, this is more common that people are sympathetic with the moral teaching of Jesus.

They like everything about the Christian faith. There's a sympathy there. They may find that they live more or less by much of the moral code and conduct that Jesus espouses.

But within their own framework, it's almost like they take bits of Jesus. And if it matches their own framework for living, then that's great.

And they can say, yeah, that's great when Jesus teaches about that. That fits in with my thinking. And admire his wisdom, but to follow him, to submit to his authority.

Well, that's just going a bit too far. That's maybe just fanatical. I'll just be a Christian from a distance. I don't need his people.

[ 18 : 29 ] I don't need to be under his authority. I love some of the things that he talks about. But there's not that submission to his lordship and to his authority and to his salvation and to his right to our lives as the one before whom we will all stand one day.

So there's these three interesting situations. Now briefly, let's look at Jesus' three responses and apply them into our own hearts and situations.

As he is challenged about his authority in different ways, Jesus answers beautifully in these passages. With regard to the first situation paying taxes to Caesar, there's an implicit teaching that he gently pushes out towards them.

He says render to Caesar things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's and they marvel that. Now there's a definite play on words and on what he's trying to get across here.

There's a play in the word image because we're told that when he's given the coin about paying taxes to Caesar, he says, bring me a denarius, bring me a coin.

[ 19 : 47 ] And he says whose inscription is on it, whose likeness and inscription. Now in Greek, these are the words that are used in Genesis of us being made in the image of God.

Then he goes on to say render to God what is due to God. And in a sense, Jesus is saying, well, look, the Pharisees hated Rome and they hated paying taxes.

But it's interesting, I think, as a little aside that Jesus doesn't have a coin himself. We don't know why necessarily. That was the case except that he didn't really have any money, it seems to be.

But the Jews actually obviously did. And so they thought it was good enough to have the coins, but yet they despised everything that Rome stood for. But anyway, the image of Caesar was on this coin.

And Jesus, in a sense, pushing the authority and the leadership of Rome into its rightful place, he says, well, if it's his coin, and he's paying taxes, then pay to Caesar what is due to Caesar.

[ 20 : 51 ] But this image, he says, it's only an image on a coin. It's fading, the coin will be thrown away, it'll be handled and mishandled by sweaty grubby hands, but he says, give to God the honor that is due to him because we are made in his image.

And that is an image that can never be wiped away. He's worthy of our allegiance because he made us and we are made in his image. He's our only God, he's our only Creator.

We're made for him and by him and to be with him. And as our Creator, we owe him our life, every single one of us owe him the breath that allows us to be here today.

And we will stand before him on that great day, as will Caesar, whose image as an idol was on these coins.

And here is Jesus Christ, who's taken on that image, standing in the flesh, in perfection because we have seen our image before God and our relationship with God broken and marred, needing restoration.

[ 22 : 09 ] True of every living soul, and he has taken on our flesh in order to be a redeemer, in order to make that day a great day.

Consider why Jesus took on flesh and consider that Jesus at this point, shortly before his death, had his mind on a greater debt that he was about to pay on our behalf as they talked about money and taxes.

He was thinking in his flesh of a greater debt that he was about to face. So you are an image bearer, is why Jesus Christ is the authority over us today because we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

But the second response is brilliant when he speaks to the Sadducees. Mark finishes with it. It's very dramatic and it's very stripped back.

He just says, you are quite wrong. You're just quite wrong. That's the response that he gives. On the resurrection specifically, he says, you're badly mistaken.

[ 23 : 20 ] You could be translated, you have greatly gone astray. So in this question about the resurrection, he appeals to the Bible itself, the authority of the Bible's revelation, the power of God, the nature of heaven, but it becomes his own, doesn't it?

Read that again, read that section again. Jesus is speaking with incredible confidence about heaven, where he's come from, and about the resurrection.

These before his own resurrection, he could say, when the dead rise, this is what will happen. Not only is he in fleshed as he is bearing our image, the brokenness on our behalf, but he is about to die on the cross and know that in his power and in the glory of his strength and in the depth of his love, he's going to defeat death and on the third day rise.

Before we've looked at that recently, three different references to the resurrection that he gave to the disciples, and they didn't understand that they didn't know what he's talking about.

And his anticipation, sorry, his resurrection anticipates and seals your resurrection and mine if we trust in him. And it's just such an incredible reminder of the authority of Jesus over death and over truth that he claims with confidence and that he says is going to be the reality shortly as he defeats the power of evil and grief and death on our behalf, as he becomes forsaken so that we aren't forsaken.

[ 24 : 58 ] That's the reality and that's the beauty of what he is revealing by his authority. And it's a, maybe it's a wake up call sometimes to us about the complacency of with which we treat the authority of his love, which is incomprehensible and the glory of his justice, which is inscrutable.

But here he speaks with authority about who he is, about his relevance to every living being, every living human being because we are made in his image, and authority because he is power over death in the resurrection.

And lastly, we come to the greatest commandment that this scribe asks him about. And in responding to this, again, Jesus is basically saying, I'm the king, you're not.

I'm the king. But isn't it interesting in his response to the guy gives a pretty good answer? Well, he agrees with Jesus' good answer and he responds himself with a good answer.

Jesus says, yeah, but you're not far from the kingdom. Now, only the king can say that. Only the king.

[ 26 : 19 ] Only the king can make that authoritative statement about the heart of this guy. I can't. We don't really know his heart. We can surmise whether he was sympathetic or whether he was just cat-catch me.

But Jesus could say, you're not far from the kingdom. Great, gentle, yet powerful words. And he's responding to this question about the command with this great recognition that there's only one entry point to eternal life, only one entry point to the kingdom.

And it's Jesus himself. Because Jesus himself, as he stands here, is the only one who loves God with all his heart, soul, strength and mind and loves his neighbour as himself.

He is the living answer to this question that he gives. He is this expression of love that none of us can reach up to and none of us can meet. But he does it in our place so that we can come to him and be forgiven because of him taking the cost in our place, the substitute.

We get his righteousness he receives and takes our guilt upon himself. He is this love. He is this perfect love that's worked out through his death and resurrection.

[ 27 : 37 ] Is that a great verse of that greater love as no man in this? And you lay down his life with his friends? That's what gives him authority.

Even before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ, because he's the authority because of his deep and powerful and substitutionary love in our place.

He is the one who alone loves in this way but who gives that love to us so that we might be saved. There is no other name. There's no other name.

Can you name one? Given among men by which we could be saved. Is there? Is there anyone else? He is the king of kings and he speaks as the king of kings here about his lordship and about the significance of love, a loving God and loving one another.

It's a remarkable passage and following all of this, nobody asked him any more questions because his answers were so authoritative and they marveled at him.

[ 28 : 51 ] And that's the challenge that we find in a passage like this. It's all about the authority of Jesus, not the authority of the church, not the authority of an individual, not our own authority, but the authority and the claims of Jesus Christ.

Go back to the opening verse that we read from 2 Corinthians 5, 10, for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. Before the judgment seat of popular thinking or of the latest zeitgeist of the day or even our own standard of judgment, we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

And he unpacks his authority for that in these passages as we are made in his image, as he alone has defeated the power of death and he's the one who only can live the love of God that enables him to be our redeemer and therefore the King of Kings.

And as we take Christ for ourselves in life, then that judgment seat of Christ will hold no fear for us whatsoever as our Lord and Savior because when we meet Him on that day, He will smile at us.

And He will just say, welcome home, which is a remarkable truth and it's nothing to do with our own goodness or our own efforts. It's as the fruit of His resurrection and His salvation.

[ 30 : 19 ] He will welcome us home, He will smile. And the opposite is fearful.

And so we must consider His authority and His love and His claims over our lives. Let's pray. Father God, help us to understand You better.

May time not dissolve the significance of Jesus. Help us to understand the time and place in which Jesus lived and the reality of that life and the uniqueness of His claims and of His death and of His resurrection.

And deep in our faith, we pray, strengthen us when we struggle to submit to Your authority. Help us to see clearly that if we don't submit to Your authority, we're always still submitting or to someone or something, often just ourselves and our own wisdom, but often the fear of man, the desire to be part of something bigger than's human, desire to think in ways that other people think and be submissive to their thinking or their ideology.

Remind us of that Lord, of an open arise to see where even as Christians, maybe as specialists Christians, we wrongly submit to authority that is not Yours, especially when it's just ourselves, when we think we know better than Jesus.

[ 32 : 03 ] How often is it, even in our prayers, by what we're asking for, we're thinking, Lord, if only You would give us what we think is right, because we think we know better and because our authority is actually in ourselves rather than in You.

So give us faith, especially in the things we don't understand and the things that are not revealed. Give us faith to trust, even in the many circumstances we find ourselves in in this world.

Give us faith to believe that You're good, that You're just, that You're loving uniquely, infinitely, and that one day it will all make sense to us.

So remind us of that and remind us as time passes so quickly of the reality of being accountable to our Creator, to our Maker, to the One who has reached down to redeem us, which we will remember in these next few weeks as we come towards the end of the year, the Advent season.

Remind us of all these things we pray and make Jesus very real to us through the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives, in our worship, in our hearts. And I thank You for the word, we pray to You individuals and moved thread as we went