

# Jesus Came to Expose Empty Religion, and demand a whole life response

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 05 April 2017

Preacher: Josh Johnston

[ 0 : 00 ] Good afternoon and welcome to our lunchtime Bible talk. Now we're continuing to look at some of the things that Jesus came to do as Mark wants us to see them. So perhaps you could turn in your Bibles with me to Mark chapter 12. We'll read some of that after I pray. You'll find it on page 848.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you that we can gather together here confident that you still speak through your living and active words. So help us today to hear and to respond to you with all of our hearts and lives that we might love you more and be delighted to love and serve those around us. For we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to read verses 18 through to 44. Four episodes that hold together. Mark 12, 18. And Sadducees came to him who say that there is no resurrection. And they asked him a question saying, Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but leaves no child, the man must take the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. There were seven brothers. The first took a wife and when he died left no offspring. And the second took her and died leaving no offspring. And the third likewise. And the seven left no offspring.

Last of all, the woman also died. In the resurrection, when they rise again, whose wife will she be? For the seven had her as wife. Jesus said to them, Is this not the reason you're wrong? Because you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God. For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the passage about the bush, how God spoke to him saying, I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. He is not God of the dead, but of the living. You are quite wrong. And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, which commandment is the most important of all? Jesus answered, the most important is, hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall 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, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these. And the scribe said to him, you're right, teacher. You have truly said that he is one and there is no other besides him. And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength and to love one's neighbor as oneself is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, you are not far from the kingdom of God. And after that, no one dared to ask him any more questions. And as Jesus taught in the temple, he said, how can the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David? David himself in 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. So how is he his son? And the great throng heard him gladly, and in his teaching, he said, beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long rooms and like greetings in the marketplaces and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts who devour widows houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive greater condemnation. And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums and a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. And he called his disciples to him and said, truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box for they all contributed out of their abundance. But she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.

[ 5 : 01 ] When it comes to anything to do with technology in my house, there is one of us that knows what is going on and one of us who very clearly has no idea. A conversation can start that's supposed to be about how some device works or what the network's doing, all these sorts of things. And very quickly, it becomes clear that one person has no idea what's being talked about. The conversation reveals that one of us is out of our depth. The conversation reveals that one of us doesn't really know what's going on. So it can sound like we're talking about the same thing, but we're not at all. The conversation exposes that one of us knows what the technology does and how it works, and the other very much doesn't.

In this section of Mark, there are four episodes that reveal something similar. Various teachers of the law, religious leaders, are found to have no idea what the Old Testament is about. Mark juxtaposes two groups who clearly do not know God with two people who seem to get what Jesus was teaching and what the scriptures have always taught. Jesus is in Jerusalem at this point, and we're in the middle of him dealing with the temple. In chapter 11, he's cleansed the temple, and Mark is wanting his readers to see increasingly that there's a wicked root in Israel. The root is false, hollow religion. There are people who think that they belong to God because they were born into Israel, but they don't follow God with any real faith.

Jesus is exposing that there are those who descend from Abraham who are not real Israel because their mere religious observance is a misunderstanding, a skewing of what God always intended for his people.

The religious leaders who represent this false Israel are like fig trees that have leaves but no fruit. They're like tenants of a vineyard who do not produce fruit for their master, but abuse his messengers and kill his son.

They have mistreated the prophets, and they will kill God's own son. This is empty religion, a veneer that looks religious but rejects God.

[ 7 : 31 ] For all their apparent law-keeping, for all of their appearances of righteousness, and the regular practicing of rituals, they're proved to hate God. And Jesus continues in this passage to expose what exactly is at the heart of all this mess.

So four episodes today. Episode 1, in verses 18 to 27, the backfiring trap with a serious jag in the tail.

Jesus has posed a question, however, it is merely a trap. The Sadducees attempted to catch Jesus out, to undermine him. But the trap that they set is rather like a bear trap, or a mouse trap that we set, and as we're about to leave, it slams shut on our foot or on our finger.

The trap backfires spectacularly. Verse 18, they come with a question, but Mark wants us to know it's not a genuine question. They come to ask about the resurrection, but we're told they don't even believe in it.

They take Jesus to a law about marriage that we find in Deuteronomy. Levirate marriage said that, verse 19, a widow with no child will be taken as a wife by her brother-in-law.

[ 8 : 47 ] So they put it to Jesus that a family of seven all die, and she had been married to each of them. And the trap is verse 23. In the resurrection, which they don't even believe in, whose wife will she be?

Their question to Jesus is, which one's correct, the law or the resurrection? Does the resurrection contradict the law?

Verse 24, Jesus doesn't even start by saying that they're wrong. He jumps straight to the reason they're wrong. It's so obvious that they've gotten this wrong that Jesus begins straight away by saying, is not this the reason you're wrong?

You know neither the scriptures nor the power of God. These supposed religious leaders who know neither the scriptures that they're meant to be masters of, nor the power of God that they claim to follow.

An utterly scathing response, because Jesus has come to expose empty religion. If they knew the scriptures, they would surely know the power of God. They're inseparable, but they know neither.

[ 9 : 59 ] We see here why Jesus had compassion on shepherdless sheep last week. The supposed leaders of God's people haven't got a clue.

So Jesus responds with two answers. The first in verse 25. There won't be marriage at the resurrection. The only marriage at the resurrection will be with Christ and his church.

The Sadducees have missed the point of this law that they're quoting. The law was to give provision that a family name would be protected. But Jesus is saying that won't matter at the resurrection. All they're doing is proving that they don't know the scriptures or the power of God. Second, verse 26. God is God of the living.

Think back to the burning bush, Jesus says. God revealed himself saying, I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He speaks in the present tense.

[11:02] He is still the God of the patriarchs. Even to this day, God is the God of the living. They were looking forward to the promises of God, and they will receive what they hoped for, and it will come at the resurrection, because God is the God of the living.

Verse 27. Jesus' last words to them here, you are quite wrong. Jesus has come to point people back to the law because it isn't the problem, but rather the Sadducees do not know the scriptures. As we move through these episodes, this becomes increasingly important. Jesus hasn't come to ask for a new response to a new faith. He has come to expose the wrong response and point people to the response that has always been demanded, which we begin to see in episode 2.

Verses 28 to 34. A ray of light from one of the leaders of darkness. One scribe, a solitary scribe, approaches Jesus in verse 28.

Normally they come in groups, trying to trick and catch Jesus, scheming together to trick him. So when one comes on his own, it's a change in the pattern.

[12:24] And sure enough, his question is genuine. Here is a religious leader that brings a ray of light. Verse 28. He sees that Jesus answered well, so he asks, which is the most important command of all?

And Jesus responds by quoting two verses from the Old Testament law. Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one, and you shall love him with all of your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.

And second, love your neighbor as yourself. Love God and love others. That is the sum of the Old Testament law. He doesn't mention rituals.

He doesn't mention religious observance. He says, let your love show that you know the one true God. That's Jesus' answer. And the ray of light here is that, verse 32, this scribe says, you're right. Yes, that's right. No trap, no deception. You're right. And what's more, verse 33, the heart of the Old Testament law. Jesus hasn't come to bring a new faith.

[13:31] He hasn't come to call people to anything that hadn't already been spilt out. To love him with all of our lives is much more than any burnt offering or sacrifice.

That's what the scribe says. Going to the temple with sacrifices and offerings to receive forgiveness means nothing if there isn't, first, a genuine love for God and, second, love for those around you. Offer all the sacrifices you want. Tick all the boxes you want in the religious tick list. Tithe all the spices you want.

But if you don't truly love God and love others, then all that you do is hollow. Going to church seven times a week, praying four times a day, ticking the religious boxes of what lines you can cross and which ones you can't are nothing without a genuine love for God, which is exemplified in how we treat others.

Here is a religious leader that offers hope amongst the mire and verse 34, Jesus says, you're very close to the kingdom of God. This man gets that the heart is much more important than looking religious.

[14:50] The heart is much more important than a tick box righteousness. The heart is much more important than a tick box righteousness that wants us to do the minimum possible and still be okay with God.

The first step to being embraced into the kingdom of God is to recognize that the heart is the priority over any rules because a heart that is truly responding to God will delight to do his will.

Knowing the scriptures, knowing the power of God, begins by seeing that any response must be with all of ourselves. It must be a whole life response to him.

Verse 30, all heart, all soul, all mind, all strength. Verse 33, all heart, all understanding, all strength. And so episode 3, verses 35 to 40, false worship will be greatly condemned.

False worship will be greatly condemned. This time Jesus takes aim at the scribes unprovoked. As he was teaching, he again questions their reading of the scriptures. Verses 35 to 37, he picks apart their understanding that the Christ is in some way inferior subject to David.

[16:12] He points them again to the Old Testament and David himself saying that Christ is Lord. Christ is his Lord. Yet again, Jesus is proving that the religious leaders, false Israel, those who have the empty veneer of religion, do not know the scriptures and so do not know the power of God.

So Jesus warns against the scribes. They exemplify the life that does not know God's word or God's power. They like the trappings of religion. They love the rubes.

They love the respect of being greeted in the marketplace. They love getting good seats at the synagogue. They like to be honored at feasts. But, verse 40, it's all a pretense.

They make long prayers to be seen. Their prayers are empty, dead religion. And they do not love their neighbors for they devour widows' houses.

Jesus has come to expose empty religion as worthless, harmless, and worthy of judgment. Some people will love religion because it gives them significance.

[17:22] It's a way to become important, respected. Make sure you call me rabbi. Or make sure you call me reverend. Make sure you honor me. Make sure you don't sit in my seat because I've been here for 20 years longer than you.

Don't try and change my thing. I'm the king of this little kingdom. Keep out. Some love religion because it gives them belonging. They're included. They have a community.

They get invited to the good feasts. Will we get invited to the in-people house for Sunday lunch? Some people love religion because it can exalt them in their self-righteousness.

They can put others down, point out others in discretions, flaws, and feelings. They can validate themselves as being something special. But all of this is external.

All of it's a veneer. And at the heart of it all, it's immoral. They put others down in order to build oneself up. They elevate man.

[18:29] And Jesus has come to expose those who would abuse his law. He came to expose those who were religious to serve their own ends. Those who live to do all that they want, no matter how it affects neighbors.

Those who will do whatever they can to have power, but still be on the right side of God. these attitudes, the want to be okay with God, whilst doing all that we want, exposes that we do not know the scriptures nor the power of God.

Jesus doesn't want a fraction of you. He doesn't want a fraction of your week as a swap deal that in the end you'll be okay. God's law is not evil.

It has not been left behind now that we have Jesus. It is still the pattern of life for those who belong to Jesus. Knowing that and living it shows that one knows both the scriptures and the power of God. Jesus didn't come to replace the law as if it had failed. In all three of these episodes Jesus is pointing us back to the law, to the Old Testament scriptures, and showing us what's at the heart of it.

[19:46] It's a failure to grasp that that leaves Jesus saying to people they do not know God's power. It's a failure to grasp the heart of God's good law that leaves Jesus saying you are quite wrong.

It's a failure to grasp the scriptures as God's own personal word to his people, his acting and relationship with his people that means verse 40, we will receive great condemnation. and so episode four, the gospel, the costliest gift ever received. The gospel, the costliest gift ever received, verses 41 to 44.

A picture paints a thousand words and so Mark finishes this section with a picture to nail whom what the true people of God do to respond to him. He offers an illustration of whole life response. He gives us an exemplary of Old Testament faith and one that rings true to this day and that picture is a widow, the very people that describes the war and hurt and scorn, verse 40.

[21:00] It's a widow that's used to show that they are frauds. Jesus is observing people giving their various monies to the offering box. Some put in large sums, but Jesus is most interested in the poor widow.

She puts in a penny. That's it. But, verse 43, this poor widow has put in more than all the others. Why?

Because a whole life given to God is what he has always demanded. The whole life of a poor widow that is worth nothing in the eyes of the world is infinitely more valuable than half, three quarters, 99% of a Bill Gates.

The sum of the Old Testament law is love for God with all of your life. God demanded from Israel his firstborn that he rescued from slavery.

He demanded their whole lives. And Jesus demands the same thing today. No amount of goodness counts for anything if your whole life is not given to him.

[ 22 : 12 ] He doesn't just want your money. He doesn't just want your Sunday mornings or your Wednesday lunchtimes. He doesn't want you to keep up appearances in public whilst in private you only prove that you hate him.

Jesus demands your life. Yes, your money that we give until it hurts. Yes, our time so that we sacrifice doing all that we would want to do.

Yes, our gifts being used to build his kingdom and not merely being used for our own good. Yes, our lives if required so that maybe we might have to bear our own cross.

The gospel is the gift that costs you your life. It is the greatest gift in the world. Jesus' arrival and all that he accomplishes is epoch changing.

The resurrection is upon us. His death, his resurrection have brought to his people a better experience of all of his wonderful promises that he'd given since the beginning.

[ 23 : 15 ] He has been raised. He is a down payment that his people will also be raised imperishable. He has defeated death. He has dealt with sin.

He has offered reconciliation with God. He has died in our place. And so he demands that you give him your life. Your whole life.

He demands that nothing is too costly in following him. Hobbies can be given up. Material possessions can be sacrificed and joyously given. Free time can be thrown into his service.

Your life can be lost for following him and it will be worth it. He demands your whole life. He demands our whole hearts as a response to him.

And even if you only have a little to give, even if seemingly in this world you're insignificant, unloved and poor, your whole life given to Jesus is worth more, far more than a life lived only for yourself now.

[ 24 : 22 ] No matter who you are, your whole life surrendered to him to live for him, to serve him is a beautiful thing. Jesus wants your life.

He demands it. And to those who do so belong the kingdom of God. They will share in his very real resurrection.

He is the God of the living and he offers you life. Amen. Amen. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you for all of the wonderful gospel promises that we have in the Lord Jesus. And we ask that you would help us give our lives to you for your service, to love others, to truly love you, and help us to look forward with great gladness, all that we will inherit because of the resurrection.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.