

'What do you think about Christ? Whose Son is He?'
Matthew 22. 34-46. Bethesda Coffee Morning. 4 November 2009.

You may remember that last week Ivor spoke about the question 'Who is this?', a question posed by the inhabitants of Jerusalem during our Lord's so-called Triumphant Entry on Palm Sunday, the first event in a week which, as Ivor said, changed the history of the world.

And they were certainly seven very full days for the Saviour. One of those days He spent in debate with the Jewish authorities and leaders, in the course of which He avoided the many traps they laid for Him ... ranging through the subjects of the payment of tribute to Caesar (by means of which they hoped to get Him into trouble with the civil authorities) – of the doctrine of the Resurrection (which doctrine some of them sought to belittle) – and of the Greatest Commandment.

And, finally, He silenced His opponents with a question of His own – the context of which provides us with our set reading for today.

While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, 'What do you think about Christ? Whose Son is He?' They said to Him, 'The Son of David'.

He said to them, 'How then does David in the Spirit call Him "Lord", saying: "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool?' If David then calls Him "Lord" how is He his Son?'

And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore.

Ivor's passage for last week included the announcement, 'Behold your King is coming'. And on this day of debates, *they* (His foes) had chosen to make the first move against the King – which He successfully blocked. They then made their second and third moves – both of which He also successfully blocked. And then He made His move – following which, as we read, 'no one was able to answer Him a word, *nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore*'.

I suppose we could say that they were checkmated by the King!

For our Lord's last question 'If David then calls Him "Lord" how is He his Son?' certainly had them stumped. For they knew nothing of what we call 'the incarnation' ... of that which many especially remember at Christmas, when He who was God – and as such very much David's 'Lord' – became man – and, because as such He was descended of David's line, was known as David's Son.

But the question I have been given for this morning is not the last but the first question which Jesus put to the Jewish leaders: 'What do you think about Christ?'

It is now well over three years¹ since I had the privilege of speaking briefly at the funeral of an ex-member of Coffee Morning – a true Christian gentleman, no doubt still remembered by many here – Mr John Pedwell.

John was in his fifties when he became a Christian. And I shouldn't like to guess how many times he told Linda and me about his conversion late one night following a gospel message he heard in Harrogate on that very question, 'What do you think about Christ?'

Not long before John's death, I visited John in the nursing home where he was then staying. We talked together about the question and agreed that to both of us the answer was the same – that the Lord Jesus was *altogether unique* – was unlike any other person who has ever lived.

That He was altogether unique in His conception – for when He was born, His mother was still a virgin.

*That He was altogether unique in His life – in His *teachings* – in His *miracles* – and in His *character* – for He alone among men was without sin.*

That He was altogether unique in His death. John and I recognised that sooner or later death would likely come to us both – because, to some extent or other, in God's sight, we had sinned – but we knew that *Jesus* – the *sinless* One – had died that by His death He might secure forgiveness and eternal *life* for us.

And finally, *that the Lord Jesus was altogether unique in His resurrection – for, though John and I could point to several other cases in the Bible of people being brought back to life, we knew that the resurrection of Jesus was altogether different ... that, unlike in those other cases, He rose as the *conqueror* of death – never to die again.*

John often used to quote a verse written by John Newton, a former slave-ship captain of the 18th century – a verse which, as it happens, Ivor referred to when speaking here this past Sunday morning –

What think you of Christ? is the test
To try both your state and your scheme;
You cannot be right in the rest,
Unless you think rightly of him.

Only this week I read of an incident which took place very late in John Newton's life. By that stage, he needed an assistant to stand with him in the pulpit when he preached. And one Lord's Day, while delivering his message, he repeated the sentence, 'Jesus Christ is precious'. His helper was heard to whisper to him, 'You've already said that twice'. Mr Newton, who was almost blind at the time and who had, until then, been speaking in little more than a whisper himself, responded quite loudly, 'Yes, I've said it twice, and I'm going to say it again'. The story runs that the stones in the old church fairly shook when the great old preacher declared yet again, 'Jesus Christ is precious'. No-one was left in any doubt that day about what he thought about the Lord Jesus!

You may wonder why I have these packets of Fruit Pastilles with me this morning. Well, these are Rowntree's Fruit Pastilles – and today – November 4th – happens to be the 150th anniversary of the death of Joseph Rowntree,² the father of the man – also named Joseph, after his father – who took over the running of the original Rowntree's company, famous in particular for its confectionary ... its Chocolate Drops, Fruit Gums, Jelly Babies, and – of course – its Fruit Pastilles.³

I was interested to read of Joseph Rowntree Junior's faith in our Lord Jesus and was struck in particular by two statements he made during his last illness.⁴ The one concerned God's promises in scripture, of which Mr Rowntree said, 'I have nothing else to rest upon', adding, 'it has long been my faith ...that the only way of salvation is by Jesus Christ — by Jesus of Nazareth crucified for me!'

And the other, not long before he died, '... I die in the faith of the Son of God who gave Himself for me, resting solely on His atonement'.

As it happens, November 4th is also the date on which the German composer and musical conductor Felix Mendelssohn died. Mendelssohn once wrote, 'a sacrifice had to be made to God for the sins of the world, and Christ took our misdeeds upon Himself ... that we might have peace, and died for our salvation. Thus he reconciled us with God'.⁵

'What do you think about Christ?' is today's question. 'Altogether unique' said John Pedwell. 'Precious' said John Newton. 'The only way of salvation' said Joseph Rowntree and Felix Mendelssohn.

But the big question for each of us is ... 'What do you think about Christ?' ... for, as John Newton's verse says, 'You cannot be right in the rest, unless you think rightly of Him'.

Footnotes

¹ On 26 June 2006.

² Joseph Rowntree Snr. was born on 10 June 1801 and died on 4 November 1859.

³ He started working in his father's grocery business as an apprentice the following year, and after his father's death in 1859 he took over the running, jointly managing the business with his brother John Stephenson Rowntree.

In 1869 he joined his brother, Henry Isaac Rowntree, who owned a chocolate factory in York. When Henry died in 1883, Joseph became the owner of the company. The company, Rowntree's, grew from 30 to over 4,000 employees by the end of the 19th century making it Britain's eightieth largest manufacturing employer. It merged with John Mackintosh and Co. in 1969 and was taken over by Nestlé in 1988.

⁴http://209.85.229.132/search?q=cache:1r9isQGayogJ:www.archive.org/stream/annualmonitororo00inalex/annualmonitororo00inalex_djvu.txt+Joseph+Rowntree+samuel+tuke+faith+Christ&cd=6&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=uk... pages 225-228. 'On one occasion, when walking thoughtfully in the dining-room, he said, "I know not how those persons find any thing to rest their hopes upon, who do not acknowledge the essential divinity of Jesus of Nazareth"'.
⁵ http://www.codamts.com/kcoviak/Mendelssohn_Anti-Semitism.doc