

Christian Morality

by Alan Redpath

Jesus Christ silences his enemies with the principle of love and demonstrates his compassion and concern for the poor and lonely widow.

Duration: 37:53

Scripture: Mark 12:13

Topics: "Morality", "Sacrificial Love", "Christian Morality"

Description

Alan Redpath emphasizes the essence of Christian morality through the lens of Jesus' interactions during Passion Week, particularly focusing on the conflict with religious leaders and the profound lesson from a poor widow's offering. He illustrates how Jesus silenced the questions of unbelief, skepticism, and obligation posed by the Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes, ultimately revealing that true love for God and neighbor is the foundation of morality. The widow's sacrificial gift exemplifies the heart of Christian devotion, contrasting with the empty rituals of the religious elite. Redpath calls the congregation to reflect on their own faith and commitment to Christ, urging them to give their all in love and service.

Transcript

May we just look to God for a moment of prayer together as we turn to his word. Lord Jesus, we can ask for nothing less than a fresh glimpse of thy lovely face and a word from thy heart of love that shall speak to us today and send us out from this place to be different just because we've met with thee. Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.

Speak just now some message to meet my need which thou only dost know. Speak now through thy holy word and make me see some wonderful truth thou hast to show to me. For Jesus' sake.

Amen. Will you please turn in your New Testament this morning to the Gospel of Mark and part of the twelfth chapter, the Gospel of Mark, chapter 12. As I am sure most of you know, the four Gospels present a different aspect of the life and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ and here especially Mark presents him to us as the perfect servant of Jehovah.

It is not my intention or purpose that these studies should be exhaustive but I want to uplift the one of whom Paul writes in his letter to the Philippian church and says in the second chapter concerning the Lord Jesus that he thought it not robbery to be equal with God but made himself of no reputation and took upon him the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men and being found in fashion as a man he

humbled himself and became obedient unto death even the death of the cross. And it is our purpose that we should catch a fresh glimpse of our Lord Jesus in these weeks as we study some aspects of this Gospel record and so in doing discover some new purpose for our lives as his followers. The Gospel of Mark you may recall begins with these words, the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God and almost at its conclusion in the fifteenth chapter and the thirty-ninth verse we have the testimony of the Roman centurion who said that he saw our Lord hanging upon the cross, truly this man was the Son of God.

And in between these two verses there is the key verse to the whole Gospel, the tenth chapter and verse forty-five where Jesus says of himself even the Son of Man is come not to be ministered unto but to minister and to give his life a ransom for many. The Son became the servant that he might be the Saviour. Now because of the season of the year, this time of Lent, I am commencing with four studies from this Gospel taken from records that occurred during the closing week of our Lord's earthly life.

The portion of Scripture which is our study and for our consideration this morning covers events which took place on the Tuesday of Passion Week. Sunday, the Palm Sunday, the events of which are recorded in the previous chapter, Sunday was the day of acclamation. But not everybody who acclaims Christ follows or accepts Christ.

It's always easier to shout than to obey. The Monday was the day of authority, the day when as our Lord passed between Bethany and Jerusalem he saw the fig tree without fruit and condemned it and it withered away. The day when he went into his temple and took a whip and drove out the money changers and overturned the tables of those who were there making gain out of their religion.

Oh the wrath of the Lamb of God. But the Tuesday was the day of conflict, the day when Jesus faced his enemies and a barrage of questions. First of all there was a subtle combination between the Pharisee and the Herodian with their question of unbelief recorded for us in verses 13 to 17 of Mark chapter 12.

Then there came the Sadducees with their question of skepticism recorded for us in verses 18 through 27. And then there's the question of the scribe with his question of obligation recorded for us in verses 28 through 34. And the following all of this you have the statement in the 34th verse, no man after that durst answer him any question.

All his enemies were silenced. And then he turns upon them and asks them a question in verse 35 to which they could give no reply. It was a day of fierce conflict.

It was a day if I read between the lines of intense loneliness. It was a day of keen disappointment. Could it be that this was all that his ministry had accomplished and this was only the success? Ah no.

For though on the one scale he found nothing but rebuke and rejection, on the other he saw the travail of his soul and was satisfied in the life of one poor lonely widow woman who gave all that she had. And with that lovely story told by Mark in his typical straight incisive manner in about 70 words, the chapter concludes. This then is the summary of that which we are about to consider for a few moments.

Alas we shall not have time to do more than merely give it a consideration. But I am praying and I hope that every one of us is here today eagerly expecting God to speak and with a heart that is set free from the distractions and cares of the life that we live and of the pressures of these days, even the pressures of Christian work and that our eyes may be turned upon him. Oh that this church might be still and know that

he is God.

Let me ask you to notice then for a few moments, my dear listener, our Lord silencing his enemies. First of all in verses 13 through 17 and I am counting upon you having your Bible with you because I cannot possibly take time to read these verses and I am hoping that those who listen have access to their New Testament. Notice in these verses the attack of the Pharisees.

As a matter of fact it began, it began on this particular day, this Tuesday of Passion Week in the 28th verse of the previous chapter, when they gathered together in the temple and said to him, now on what authority doest thou these things? They had been greatly disturbed by his action in the temple, by his cleansing power and by his boldness in sweeping out all that was discreditable and distasteful. They were afraid to do anything about it themselves because of his popularity at that moment with the crowd. And you recall the counter question of our Lord, which you have recorded in the closing verses of the 11th chapter.

You want to know by what authority I do this? Then let me ask you another question. The baptism of John, was this from heaven or was it from men? And they thought a bit and said, well now if we say it was from heaven, he will say, well why didn't you believe him? If we say it was from men, well we're afraid of the people because they all knew that John was a prophet and so they could answer him nothing. But they weren't content with their silence and now, now you have in these few verses a subtle coalition between the Herodian and the Pharisee.

Perhaps it's hardly necessary for me to remind you that the Pharisees were those who rejected the rule of Rome, resented it. The Herodians were those who had accepted it and these two were bitterly opposed to each other and yet here they find themselves united in an attack upon our Lord. That is not the first time that that has happened, not the last time that that has happened either.

You find it a little later in the story between Herod and Pilate. You find it all through history that people who have had bitter, bitter animosity between each other will line up to attack the cause of Jesus Christ. Will you notice their motive? Verse 13, they sought to catch him with their words.

Will you notice their flattery in verse 14? Master, we know that thou art true and carest for no man. Thou regardest not the person of men but teachest the way of truth in God. The way of God in truth.

Is it lawful, was their question, to give tribute to Caesar or no? Now that's a very cunning question. If the Lord says, yes it is lawful, then immediately this Pharisee acclaimed the fact that he could never be the Messiah of the Jew if he agrees to Roman authority. If he says no, it is not lawful, then the Herodians will arrest him for treason.

So apparently he is caught in the horns of a dilemma. You notice his answer in the 15th verse? He asked for the coin to be given to him. Matthew tells us he asked for the tribute money.

That was, may I say it reverently, a masterstroke of strategy. He didn't ask for a Jewish coin, he asked for a Roman coin. And they gave it to him, these Jewish people.

And they said to him now, he said to them, now whose image and superscription is this? And they said Caesar's. All right, you're using Caesar's coinage. You're having the benefit, though you might not think it, of Caesar's oversight and rule.

Therefore render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's. In other words, as a Christian, you have a duty to the state, no matter who may be in authority. You have a loyalty, but you have a higher obligation to Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

And so Jesus faces these Pharisees and these Herodians, this coalition, this subtle coalition, and by a masterly answer silences them. And Matthew tells us that they went away. They're immediately followed by an attack upon him from the Sadducee, the sceptic, the arrogant, self-sufficient, clever pagan.

And he comes, they come with their sceptical question, which you find recorded in verses 19 through 27, a question that was hardly a delicate one. And they said to him, Master, there's a woman and she's married, and she died. Rather, her husband died.

So she marries his brother, then he dies. And seven men have this woman, and there are no children to any of these marriages. Master, who's she going to belong to in heaven? You know, there's a self-confident, cynical tone to a question like that.

But being wrong in their supposition about heaven, they're wrong in their conclusions. Their real problem was, their real attempt was to trap the Lord Jesus Christ. Again, they didn't believe in the resurrection.

That's why my good friend Sidlow Baxter says, that's why they were sad, you see. They just didn't believe in a resurrection. But their supposed cleverness, you see, is betrayed by our Lord as being absolute ignorance.

And you notice his answer in the 24th verse. Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the scriptures, neither the power of God? You think you're so clever. Don't you know that there will be no sex relationship in heaven? That that will no longer exist? There being no more death, there will be no more need of marriage.

As Paul said in his lovely resurrection chapter, we shall all be changed. And oh my, what a change. And he says, as touching the resurrection from the in verse 26, this was their real problem.

Don't you know that God said, I am the God of Abraham? And he said this to Moses, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. He's not the God of the dead, he's the God of the living. These people are not dead, they're alive.

Once a man is brought to believe, beloved, in the immortality of the soul, he's got no problem about believing in the resurrection of the body. God who long ago created man in his own image, and that man became a living soul dwelling in a mortal body. It is not difficult for a man who accepts the truth of the immortality of the soul to believe in the resurrection of the body, that Jesus our Lord, our God, our Creator, without whom nothing is made that it was made.

He who did it once will do it again, and though it will be a different body, yet it will be fashioned out of this body. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. Ye do greatly err, for ye know not the scripture, nor the power of God.

And so the Pharisee, with his question of unbelief, is silent. And the Sadducee, with his skeptical rationalism, is also silent. And then comes a scribe, in verse 28, and this man comes and asks a question of the Lord, and he says, Master, which is the greatest of the commandments? He's not asking which of the ten, as we knew them and know them, are the greatest.

Oh no. He's asking this, which of the 613 precepts that the Pharisees teach and the scribes teach, which they've read into the Pentateuch, which of these 613 precepts are vital? It seems to me he would be saying it's impossible to keep them all. Which of them has priority? In other words, what's the essential principle in religion? What's the thing that matters most? That's a straightforward, sincere question.

It wasn't asked in animosity, and so the Lord replies, quietly but firmly, and you notice his answer. It's in effect to say to him, just this, the first of all the commandments is here, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord, and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind and with all thy strength. This is the first commandment, and the second is like, namely, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

There is none other commandment greater than these. In other words, he's saying to this man who comes with his honest question, the principle behind every law that ever comes to us from heaven is a principle of love. A principle of love, and every sin is a violation of that principle of love, and all our being, all our personality, not just a bit of it, but all of our being must worship him and love him, and if we fulfill this, then inevitably we will love our neighbour.

And the word that our Lord uses for love here is not the word which, well, it's rather like our English word philanthropy, not that kind of thing. It's a word, agape, which is the word agony, and which is exactly the same word as is used in John 3, 16, that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. And it's the same word in which the apostle Paul says the love of God, the agony of God, Romans 8, is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

Now, says Jesus, that agony, that agape, that passion, that concern, that adoration, that love is to be sent back from our grateful, humble hearts into heaven. It's the same quality of love, and that's the love that he gives us in order that we might love him, and that we might love each other, says the Lord to this scribe, there's nothing greater than this. And I think of the way that Christians pick faults in each other, and I think of the way that we explode in our conversation to each other, and I think of the way we're always looking for the thing that's wrong, and never thanking God for what we see of Jesus Christ.

And I wonder where we stand alongside this scribe today who asked this sincere question, and that scribe answered him intelligently, and he, and Jesus, when he saw that his answer was intelligent, Master, he said, thou hast heard the truth, for there is but one God. To love him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, with all the strength, and to love his neighbor as himself is more than burnt offerings and sacrifices. And then Jesus saw, and he answered discreetly, and he said, thou art not far from the kingdom.

And that man looked right inside, and he went right away. The question of obligation was answered and silent. Now do you notice this, friend? Oh, I want you to get hold of this as we go along this morning.

There's been this, this united, concerted approach and attack upon Jesus from these quarters, first with unbelief, second with skepticism, rationalism, third with a question of obligation. What is my duty? What is my obligation? And he has answered them all, and he hasn't found the answer to them in any of the people who ask them their questions, and he's left alone in the temple. I think they're still in the distance as he turns upon them and asks them a question to which they had no reply.

I think they were still there rebuked, rebuffed, abashed, and as he stood there not having won of them, without a friend alone on this Tuesday of Passion Week, the effect of his ministry merely to silence an

argument, he turns upon them and he says, what's your idea about a Messiah? Whose son is he? And the answer, well of course we know the answer to that one, David's son. Very well, says Jesus, how is it then that David called his son his Lord? You are following me, aren't you? In the reading of these verses, in verses 35 and 36, you notice that Christ is quoting from the 110th Psalm. He says that David wrote it, and he wrote it by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and that Psalm is specifically messianic in its character.

It refers to the Messiah. Modern scholarship denies all of that. Either David was mistaken and Jesus was merely human, either that, or David was inspired as Jesus said he was inspired, and Christ is not only the seed of David according to the flesh, but the eternal Son of God, and that's where I take my stand.

You think of the Messiah, says Jesus, as coming from David's line, but he is also David's Lord. If you can account for that, he would say to them, if you can account for that, all your problems will be solved. You've come to me with this problem of belief.

By what authority do you these things? Account for David's son being David's Lord. Account from the one in the midst of you being the Christ of God. That'll scatter your unbelief.

It'll deal with your skepticism too about eternity, about hereafter, about the resurrection, and it'll deal with your obligation and your sense of what is right and what is wrong, for here standing in your very midst is the eternal Son of God to whom you owe everything. All your problems will be silenced if you get right in your attitude and outlook toward me, says Jesus. I would just underline that principle, beloved listener, this morning.

Your problems of unbelief, your problems of skepticism, your problems of obligation will all be shattered and settled finally when your heart is right toward the eternal Son of God. And they were silent to his question, and he leaves them with a final devastating word of warning, which you read in verses 38 to 40, against the hypocrisy of the scribe. Their love, notice, notice it, their love of popularity, their love of prominence, their love of priority, their love of possessions, their pretended piety.

And he gives that warning against them and then leaves them, Jesus Christ silencing his enemy. But I come more to grips with this in terms of life today when I ask you to notice Jesus Christ seeking for his friend. I scarcely like to suggest it, but do you know I am sure that our Lord was desperately lonely at that moment.

Dare we try to enter into his mind what had been the result of his ministry? He didn't come to judge the world, it was to save he came. He wasn't interested in winning an argument, in silencing the intellectual, in causing these people to withdraw without an answer, that wasn't why he came. And he sat down in the precincts of that temple and lingered and longed for some fruit, something that would satisfy his heart.

And you notice that he sat down over against the treasury, where there were 13 chests, copper chests, called trumpets because of their shape. Nine of them were for gifts, which might be given instead of offerings, four of them for the freewill offerings of the people. And Mark tells us that he watched how the people cast their money in.

And many that were there were casting in not much in terms of quantity, but many coins. And he watched not the amount, but the devotion. He knew that where your heart is, there will your treasure go.

I know that's not a correct quotation, but it's the implication of it. I repeat it, you know the correct quotation. Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also, but I'm suggesting that the implication is, where your

heart is, there goes your treasure.

And suddenly his attention is drawn to a poor, lonely widow. And she drops her offering into the chest and goes her way. Nobody speaks to her.

She speaks to nobody else. If there had been a subscription list published of the gifts of that day, hers would have been among a whole host of them, under five dollars, if we might use such American currency in such a setting. Donations that are anonymous.

But I want you to listen to what the Lord Jesus said in verses 43 to 44. She has given more than all. They have given out of their superfluity.

She has given from her destitution. She has given her whole livelihood. And Jesus saw that moment, in that day of loneliness, in that woman, the travail of his soul.

Have you ever thought to yourself how intimately connected this choice little story is, with all that has preceded? Listen. The Lord has faced the question of unbelief in the Pharisee, and there comes into the temple this poor, lonely woman, and gives a gift of faith, the token of her loyalty to God. She gave all her living.

In amidst all her poverty, amidst all the loneliness of her life, it might be said of her, as we read in the 11th of Hebrews concerning others, she endured as seeing those who are him who is invisible. Hers was a gift of faith. She gave like that.

He faced the question of skepticism of the Sadducee, the question of the rich, the rationalism of these people who didn't believe in the afterlife. But there came into that place a woman who gave everything. Why? Why? What made that poor soul wend her way into that temple and give all that she had? Vision, that's all, vision, vision of eternity.

What a mighty argument against the philosophy of life, which is content to live for material things. This poor soul has responded, has responded completely to the vision of things that are not seen, and she's given everything. He has faced the question of obligation from the scribe.

What is my chief, the chief commandment? What is my obligation? Thou should love the Lord with all thy heart, thy neighbor as thyself. Here's the gift of love, and she's the poorest of the poor, but she's given all she's got, and she's expressed her love to God and to her neighbor. Do you see this, that on the one scale on that lonely Tuesday, on the one scale you have all the hostility of the Pharisee and the Sadducee and the scribe, all massed against the Lord in these few days before his crucifixion, all this overwhelming him, and over against that on the other scale the simple devotion of one poor lonely widow woman in whose life all the requirements of the law of God have been fulfilled, for she has faith, and she has vision, and she has love, and she's given everything.

The Lord Jesus seeks his friend, and I have just a closing word in the last two minutes to say that the same Lord Jesus searches today for you. That same Christ who stood alone in that temple stands in Moody church today by his spirit and confronts your life and mine. Tell me, how are you facing him today? Do you face him with the question of unbelief? By what authority doest thou these things? Do you challenge his authority? Do you face him with the question of unbelief? Do you face him with the question of skepticism? I'm not sure about the afterlife.

I don't know about the resurrection. Do you face him like the Sadducee did? Do you face him like the scribe? And as Jesus said of him, thou art not far from the kingdom, almost persuaded, but lost. Looking right into the kingdom, but withdrawing.

Has Jesus something to say to you and to me, as he said to those people about our love of popularity, and our love of prominence, and our love of possessions, and our love of pretended piety, all of which keep us outside the kingdom, for they're all false love. God gave his only son. What have you given him? Oh, we sing in Francis Ridley Hathagill's hymn, isn't there a verse which, talking about giving our money, says, not a mite would I withhold, and how true it is.

Many of us look round our purses for the mites and fling them all in. We don't hold them, but we keep a lot more. We give our little, and we keep our much.

I pray that as you've listened today to this simple exposition of this portion of scripture, has the Lord silenced the question of unbelief? Render unto Caesar the things that are unto Caesar's, but remember your higher loyalty to God, the things that are God's, and your silence. Has he silenced your question of scepticism, your supposed cleverness, and his saying to you, thou dost greatly err, for thou knowest not the scriptures, and thou knowest not the power of God? And has he silenced the question of obligation, and says to you, thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, all thy strength, all thy soul, all thy mind, and thy neighbour in thyself? And I wonder if in Moody Church today, our dear Lord, looking down upon some heart this morning, perhaps some lonely life, perhaps somebody who's crept in here quite inconspicuous today, nobody knows much about you, you're alone, just come in to church, people don't know you too well, just come in and out, and you steal in quietly, and want to get out quietly. I wonder if Jesus has seen in you today, my beloved friend, the travail of his soul, and he's satisfied because he has got from you today faith, and vision, and love, which has brought you to lay all your life at his feet.

Shall we bow together in prayer? Take my love, my Lord I pour, at thy feet its treasure store. Take myself, and I will be ever, only, all for thee. May we spend one moment in quiet prayer, before we sing our closing hymn.

Just a moment's silence. Jesus stands in our midst, not to silence our arguments, but to win our love. Has he done it? Does he get from us today faith, vision, love? O Lord, today, may we not be like the scribe who was not far from the kingdom, but may we be like that dear widow woman who gave her all.

And Lord Jesus, we would think of this not primarily in terms of our money, but primarily in terms of a life and a heart that's laid at thy feet for thy use. We ask it for thy name and glory's sake. Amen.

Our closing hymn today is number 208. 208. I want you to think about this hymn.

It's not a hymn we often sing. It somehow has rather a doleful end to it, but it need not be so. Almost persuaded now to believe, almost persuaded Christ to believe, to receive, seems now some soul today to say, Go thy way.

Some more convenient day on thee I'll call. Oh, may that not be your answer to the Lord. We're going to sing the hymn.

I trust we will sing it thoughtfully, prayerfully in the light of what God has been saying to us. And I want to give the opportunity for our visiting friends, or indeed for regular worshipers of the congregation to whom God has been speaking this morning to confess their faith in Jesus Christ. In these tremendous days in

which we live, we cannot be secret disciples.

We must acknowledge him as our Lord and Savior. We never, we never seek to embarrass anybody in Moody Church, but we do seek to be faithful to the proclamation of the word. And I may be speaking to some today who are almost convinced.

Jesus has been silencing your arguments, but he wants more than that. He wants to win your heart. So I'm going to ask as we stand to sing this hymn, if that's true of you, arguments, silence, your heart utterly his, your life at his disposal.

If that's the outcome of this morning worship, I wonder if as we sing this hymn, would you mind us coming and standing in the front of the church? And then I will lead in a prayer of dedication prior to the benediction. That will be all. You will not be approached by anybody.

Nobody will speak to you unless you desire for us so to do. But I love to think that Jesus on that day of Passion Week saw something of the travail of his soul and was satisfied. And I love to think that even today Christ in our midst can see just the same here at Moody Church.

God grant that it may be so. We will sing this hymn together. We'll stand to sing it.

Mr. Carbaugh will lead us. And I'll be at the lower platform, and I would like to welcome with the right hand of fellowship those of you who are dedicating your lives to the Lord Jesus Christ this morning. All the opposition and antagonism to him has been crushed.

And today, faith, vision, love are yours. God grant it for Jesus' sake. Just push your way past any friend who may be next to you or bring the friend with you and just come and stand for a public act of witness and dedication at the conclusion of our service.

Hymn number 208.

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