

The Responsibility Demanded by Resurrection Based on Mark 12:18-27, David Jahnke, 9/20/15

In this chapter of Mark, we see how complex the political situation in Israel was. The Pharisees were mostly common people who believed that God was demanding a greater righteousness and would honor that righteousness by freeing his people from the oppressions of Rome and corrupt leaders. Many of them did not like Jesus because he did not strictly follow the traditions of the elders which they believed would bring liberation.

The Herodians were loyalists to King Herod and therefore submitted to Rome. They disliked Jesus because of his growing social and, therefore, political power, and perhaps because of his connection to John the Baptist who had called Herod to task. They had little in common with the Pharisees other than their opposition to Jesus.

The Sadducees were another group in the aristocratic class who had strong disagreements with Jesus and the Pharisees, mostly related to scripture and resurrection and the possibility of revolution which the Pharisees might join in the right circumstances and which the Sadducees opposed. Jesus was all about revolution; just not a violent one.

I watched a Monty Python video pointing to some of this. I really wish I could show the video but it has some swear words in it and I got scolded for that once down in Texas.

The movie is set in Jesus' day and the People's Front of Judea are having a secret meeting during a Gladiator match. A Jewish concessionaire is walking through the stands shouting out his Gentile snacks, "Get your Otters' Noses! Badgers' spleens here! Wren's livers!"

He walks by the People's Front of Judea and they look at him with scorn and ask him why he does not sell proper food. They eventually give in and get some otters' noses. The concessionaire asks them, "Are you the Judean People's Front?"

"Bugger off. Judean People's Front>?!@-- splitters! We are the People's Front of Judea!"

The salesman asks, "Can I join your group?"
"No way!!"
"Why not? I only sell this stuff because I need a

job! I hate the Romans as much as anyone!”

“Listen up,” the leader says,

“If you wanted to join the PFJ, you’d have to really hate the Romans.” “I do!”

“All right, you’re in. But the only people we hate more than the Romans are the Judean People’s Front!” “Yeah...” the others chime in.

“And the Judean Popular People’s Front!” Yeah—splitters...!!

“And the People’s Front of Judea!” “Yeah!!” Wait... We’re the People’s Front of Judea.

They hate the Romans but enjoy the Gladiator match and the Gentile snacks. They hate the Romans but they will work with and for them. And there is plenty of leftover hatred for their fellow Jews who do not quite see eye to eye with them.

And still today there is plenty of hatred and back-stabbing and maligning and manipulating among and even within religious groups. And Jesus refuses to have anything to do with this.

So when the Pharisees and Herodians ask Jesus if we should pay taxes to Caesar, they only want to get him into trouble. Either he will say yes and lose popular appeal with the commoners who hate Rome. Or he will say that they should not pay taxes which would allow the authorities to bring charges of sedition to the Romans.

Jesus will not play political games and he responds brilliantly. He asks them to give him a Roman coin and tell him what is on it. A picture of Emperor Caesar along with the title, Son of God. That they possess this coin is, both an act of idolatry and a sign that they are tied to what Caesar represents. Jesus is saying, “The things you so readily condemn in others are in you as well. Of course Caesar is evil but never forget that only God is good.”

Self-righteous judgment— whether it be of the powerful or of the poor; whether it be of someone outside our group or inside it— leads to more evil. This week, I watched some extremely disturbing footage of the Black Lives Matter movement. Let me begin by saying that there are grave injustices rooted in racism that need to be corrected. Statistics regarding the number of young blacks murdered or in prison point out that something is gravely wrong. And a basic reminder that the lives of those young blacks matter is a great starting point.

The same was true for common Israelites who were overtaxed and often mistreated by their Roman rulers and who did not feel as if their leaders heard or represented or cared for them. But they were always in danger of letting their frustrations lead to hatred, violence or calls for violence.

And that is exactly what I saw in these videos-- leaders of the Black Lives Matter movement chanting terrible things about police officers and even great black leaders and calling for violent responses to injustice. My friend who shared the videos and his concerns spoke of this sort of language filtering down into the language of the blue-collar friends he works with as well.

As followers of Jesus, we can never let being wronged by those in power and/or those near to us which is obviously much more common, lead to violent thoughts, words or deeds. Because not only is sin and idolatry in us as well, God's reign of love and mercy is over those who wrong us. So if we are upset with powerful people, we can be critical but not condemnatory. And if we are upset with those around us, we remember that God has put them in our lives to share life gracefully; and we deal with our concerns directly and calmly with them.

Now it is easy to call for non-violence when violence and poverty do not pervade your home or your neighborhood. This is where Karl Marx' criticism of religion comes into play—that it is the opiate of the people, keeping them from rising up against injustice.

I believe the religion of the Sadducees was meant to be a kind of opiate. They only believed in the Law of God— the first five books of the Bible-- not the prophets or wisdom or apocalyptic literature or resurrection, all of which have a more revolutionary tendency.

The prophets were often critical of political and religious leaders. Wisdom literature pointed out how the wicked can actually prosper on earth and the righteous suffer. Because of that, apocalyptic literature developed to make clear that judgment would come to all, including the powerful, and that God's justice would win out in the end.

All of this reached a climax in the development of the doctrine of resurrection which never said, “You will be fine in some other world after you suffer through this one. So endure the injustices of this life.” Resurrection said and still says today, “The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob may demand obedience to the Law. But the God of Amos, Isaiah and Jeremiah demands justice and compassion and fairness. And they are alive in Him now. So you had better hear their call from heaven to heed these matters, especially if you have been blessed with power.”

Christ’s resurrection is the exclamation point on that! His risen body and descended Spirit is calling everyone to revolution—a revolution away from and against evil and toward the Son of God who is alive and calling everyone back to His Way. And more than anyone, leaders are called to the revolution of God.

I started to watch a documentary on Winston Churchill. After Churchill was reluctantly chosen by his party to be prime minister at the height of World War II, he was quiet on his way home. His body guard decided to break the silence by congratulating him and saying, “I only wish this position had come your way in better times. For you have an enormous task ahead of you.” “God alone knows how great it is,” said Churchill. “I hope it is not too late. We can only do our best.”

Later that night, his mood changed, and he wrote about it in his diary, “I was conscious of a profound sense of relief. I felt as if I was walking with destiny; as if all my past life had been but nothing but a preparation for this hour, for this trial. I was sure I would not fail.”

Churchill was not a man of great faith, but he believed that God or Destiny had brought him into this position of great power. He was humble about himself and yet bold in trusting that because God and Destiny had brought him into this position, he could not fail. He proceeded to lead with tremendous strength against the evil he was facing in Hitler, doing all that he could for the Jews in Europe with whom Churchill always had close ties.

Churchill was initially afraid of the task before him until a sense of providence overcame him. And we who have our important positions in life get afraid too. But all our fears can be overcome by faith in the victory of God. Faith that nothing, not even death can separate us from Jesus Christ; faith that God has brought us into positions of spiritual, economic and political power with a purpose - to do everything in our God-given power to battle the forces of sin, evil and death; and do everything in our power to build up life, health and peace.

If that sounds too general, it is because I do not know the particular evil you must face or the particular good you must embark upon. You probably do...temptations and opportunities abound in our global world. Corporately, we know that tens of thousands are fleeing war and persecution. What can the American Church do to help?

You are leaders of God's reign of love. May we not neglect the great responsibility God lays before us. To the one who can do far more abundantly in us than all we can ask or imagine, to God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus, now and forevermore...