

Good morning, its good to see you...

Over these past few months we've been looking at the gospel of Matthew and today we come to chapter 13, where Jesus returns to his home town.

All through these last few chapters God has essentially been asking a single question –  
'are you with me or are you separated from me'.  
'are you with me or will you distance yourself from me'.

The parable of the fish, that David preached on last week, (are you in or are you out?)  
The parable of the treasure in the field (are you found or are you lost?)  
The parable of the wheat (are you wheat or are you weed?)  
and so on...

All the way through, the same question: 'are you with me or are you separated from me'.

For if you 'are with me' then be encouraged  
'Yes', life may be tough,  
'yes', we live in a broken world, and  
'yes', you will feel at times that that brokenness is the only thing you experience,  
but I am with you and you are eternally loved and secure.  
so if you 'are with me', be encouraged

But if you 'are separate from me, avoiding me' then be challenged  
for you have nothing to protect you from the darkness,  
you have no answers in death and  
you are missing the point of your existence!  
So if you are separated from me (if you know you're keeping your distance), then be challenged.

And Jesus has been telling parable after parable to get this question across.

And when he had finished teaching –  
he asks one final question in v51  
'Have you understood all these things?'  
Do you get it?  
Do you understand what I am saying?  
This is the most important question in your life, do you get it?  
And they say "yes" and **then** he moves on.

In Chapter 13v53 Matthew says  
*When Jesus had **finished** these parables, he moved on from there and came to his hometown,*  
Job done.

Jesus moves on and comes to his home-town  
to the people who have watched him grow and change  
to his family, his brothers, his sisters, his child-hood friends, his neighbours  
to people who have hung around 'the whole Jesus thing' all their life  
and when he gets there his teaching poses exactly the same question,  
What do you make of me?  
Are you with me or separated from me?  
Are you with me or will you distance yourself from me?

So this morning I want to ask the same question.  
to see how this passage both encourages and challenges us

And I want to look at three things

The Reality of this question for all of us?  
The Reason for this question, and  
The Response to this question

The Reality, the Reason and the Response to the question that Jesus asks  
'are you with me or will you separate yourself from me?'

And It would help me if you were able to turn with me to Matthew chapter 13, p980.

So let's look at

### **1. The Reality of this question in our lives.**

*Jesus began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed.*

*"Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?" they asked.*

*"Isn't this the carpenter's son?"*

*Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren't all his sisters with us?"*

*Where then did this man get all these things?"*

*And they took offense at him.*

Whenever people encounter the claims of Jesus there is division.

This is how it was at Christmas

For Joseph's relations who lived in Bethlehem they wouldn't welcome **him** or his pregnant fiancée Mary

For the Inn Keeper there was "No room" for Jesus

For Herod, he would kill him if could lay his hands on him

Joseph's relations, the Inn Keeper, Herod – they didn't want Jesus

There was

No room in their thinking

No room in their busy life

No room in the political system

No room in their personal prejudices

They didn't want Jesus – that was their reaction.

But the Magi, the Shepherds, the Angels?

They left their country, their sheep, the courts of heaven to be with Jesus

For them this was the one they had been waiting for,

the one who would fulfil the promise of their lives

the one for whom all creation existed

and they would leave everything for him... and that was their reaction.

Whenever people encounter the claims of Jesus there is division

At the cross Jesus was worshipped and crucified at the same time!

At every different point of his life when Jesus poses the question

'are you with me or will you distance yourself from me?'

he causes a division

It was this way in our passage.

I have no doubt that the people of Jesus' home-town had heard the rumours about him

And **then** they met him:

they came face to face with him

and his teaching was outstanding,  
his life was faultless and  
his signs were miraculous

But they still took offense at him  
They took offense because of who he was and what he said about himself:

Jesus would have said something like:

“I am the light of the world”

“I am the way, the truth, the life”

“I am the great shepherd”

“I am before Abraham was”

*And this is where all the wheels fell off their wagon.*

You see Jesus consistently claims  
that **we need** salvation and that **HE is** the Saviour  
and that’s pretty hard to swallow.

His teaching wasn’t simply  
some wonderful moral principles for them to think about,  
some philosophy that they could pick and choose from  
His teaching was up-front and personal and challenging  
‘You need Salvation and I am your Saviour’.  
*And ‘up with this, they would not put’*

because in v55 they say  
*“Isn't this the carpenter's son?  
Isn't his mother's name Mary,  
Aren't his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas?  
Aren't all his sisters with us?  
And they took offense at him.*

The word is Skandalon – They were scandalised!

They were scandalised by the audacity of Jesus’ claims  
*“who are you to tell me that I need Salvation and that **you** are the Saviour?”*  
*we know everything about you*  
*you’re the kid that used to live around the corner!*  
and they distanced themselves from him...

The reality is that anyone who ever encounters Jesus faces this question  
what do you make of me and my claims?  
‘are you with me – or will you distance yourself from me’?

Look,  
Everyone agrees that Jesus’ moral teaching is unparalleled (there has never been anything like it)  
Everyone agrees that his life-style is beyond reproach – wonderful compassion / beautiful integrity  
Everyone who has ever met him – or has seen the difference he has made in people’s lives - can point to  
miraculous changes

No one really disputes his teaching, his life-style, his impact  
The issue is about his claims:  
When he says “you need salvation and I am your saviour”.

Without me – you are distant from God

Without me – the reason why you were made is undiscovered  
Without me – eternity is hell  
That's going to make you sit up and listen

Without me – you would not even have been created  
Without me – you have no way of finding God  
Without me – you will miss your eternal purpose forever  
And that is going to divide people

The question that Scandalises some and Saves others is  
'are you with me – or will you separate / distance yourself from my total call in your life?'

You cannot sit on the fence with Jesus –  
because when you meet him, he'll push you off  
You cannot be comfortable "doing your own thing" with Jesus,  
because he'll call you to do "his"  
So the Question is real  
For everyone who gets close  
They confront his challenge  
"Are you with me, or are you distant from me?"

And the reality is that for every one of us in this room  
we fall on one side or the other to that question.  
In fact we already know the answer in our own heart

We know whether we are with him – or whether 'he is still distant'

So the question is real.  
So now why did he ask it (Secondly)

## **2. What is the Reason for this Question?**

What is the reason for Jesus to go back home to his friends and family and neighbours to confront them with this challenge?

The reason is simple:  
to sort out his relationship with them.  
to get them into a **right** relationship with him  
to provoke them to relate rightly to him.

All things have an appropriate and right relationship with each other.  
If we get that relationship **wrong**, then it can be a disaster  
*If I ever met the Queen and I decided to give her an affectionate slap on the backside– (can you imagine it?!?!)*  
*I would be risking treason, my job, divorce – you name it*  
*because the Queen and I don't have that sort of relationship!*

*If I wrote to Barak Obama and asked him to make me a cup of tea – he'd just ignore me – because we don't have that sort of relationship (indeed we don't have **any** sort of relationship!)*

*If I greeted every visitor here with an enormous hug and a kiss –we'd never see them again!*  
Why? because all things have appropriate relationships with each other  
And to get it wrong can be a disaster!

The relationship of Jesus to the people at Nazareth was  
God to mankind  
Creator to Created  
Omnipotent, boundless, eternal; to finite.

Without Jesus and the people of Nazareth being in this type of relationship  
they would never really know him  
they would never find salvation  
they would never understand their worth.

So Jesus goes back to them , to those he would call family and friends  
so that they may relate to him RIGHTLY!

He goes back to them to lay before them his teaching, his life-style, the testimony of his miracles,  
because he needs them to get into the right relationship that  
He is Saviour and they need Salvation.

But for them to accept this, they need to look beyond their prejudices  
they need to look beyond Jesus being merely a piece of their town's history (*oh yeah, I remember Jesus  
when he was a boy and fell and scuffed his knee, I remember Jesus all right*)  
they need to look beyond the fact that his family was nothing special – *his brothers and sisters were flawed  
human beings just like them,  
they weren't perfect by any means, and as for Mary – well you know the rumours about her being pregnant  
before she was married?!*) –  
they need to look beyond their desire to personally inspect every miracle and cross examine every witness  
until they have no other alternative explanations left.

They needed to lay aside their prejudices  
because **if it's true** that Jesus is God  
then its obvious that he is more than his history, and his family's behaviour is irrelevant, and the miracles are  
real  
that's obvious!

But IF they can't look beyond that –  
if they allow those things to get in the way  
then they will **never** ever find the real Jesus  
because their relationship with him be wrong.

In this church this morning, there are people who Jesus would long to call friends and family, to call  
Brothers and Sisters

He comes to you because he wants you to know him,  
to have a living relationship with him, and a hope that is forever

but the only way that is possible,  
is if you seek a relationship with him that is right.  
He is God to your humanity  
He is Creator to your Created  
He is all-powerful, boundless, eternal; to your finite  
If you think of him anyway else you will never find him or know him.

You cannot find Jesus if you cannot get past the fact that he more than just an historical figure.  
You cannot find him if you cannot get past the fact that the people in his family (the church) are just a bunch  
of screwed up, mixed up ordinary people,  
You cannot find him if you always approach him  
as if you're the scientist and he is your subject matter  
as if you're the judge and he is the defendant  
as if you're doing God the favour by deciding to follow him.

That is arrogance, it is presumptuous, it is an insult and it's a completely ineffective way of relating to God!

You need to lay these barriers aside  
because **if it's true** that Jesus is God and you need salvation and he is Saviour  
then its obvious that he is more than history, **and** his church family's behaviour is irrelevant, **and** the  
miracles are real  
that's obvious!  
but if you can't look beyond them, if you can't get beyond that – then you will never ever find him because  
you are relating to him wrongly.

So  
The reason he asks the question,  
'do you accept me as Lord and Saviour' or 'will you keep your distance from me'  
The reason why I am preaching this, this morning  
is because you will not find God unless you are willing to relate to him in the right way: He is God in your  
life And you are not.

And if you won't accept that – you will never find him  
That is the reason for the question (so thirdly).

### **3. What's the Response?**

Well,

*They took offense at him.*

*Isn't this Jesus – I changed his nappies, I wiped his nose, I beat him at marbles*

*Isn't this Jesus? We know him...*

*'who is HE to tell US we need salvation!'*

*And Jesus said to them,*

*"Only in his hometown is a prophet without honour."*

*And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith.*

Their familiarity gave rise to contempt

It is no coincidence that because  
THEY WOULD NOT accept **THE MIRACLE**  
(JESUS – the Son of God)  
they could see *any* miracle.  
**They COULD not see, because they WOULD not see.**

They would have witnessed some amazing things  
Jesus has taught them,  
he has lived among them,  
others would have spoken about what he has done in their lives  
But they discount them all  
They look for alternative explanations  
*feeding of the 5,000? – everybody got inspired to share their sandwiches*  
*walking on water? – Jesus was standing on a sand-bank*  
*demon possession? – psychological persuasion!*

*They say there are none so blind as those who will not see*  
And because they **would not** see –they **could** not see.  
And **therefore** there were no miracles in their life.

*Did you see the BBC Nativity this Christmas?*  
*It was really well done!*

*It was produced by a man called Tony Jordan*

*who also produced Eastenders.*

*In a recent interview in the Telegraph, he said*

*I don't come from a religious background, and I don't think I'm anybody's fool. I was expelled from school at 14. I've been in trouble, and people from my sort of background have always discounted the story of the nativity and I certainly didn't believe it when I started on it three years ago.*

*The BBC wanted me to make it a farce,*

*And so I read history books and I consulted theologians*

*And they told me that it couldn't have happened.*

Did you hear that? the so-called experts told him it couldn't have happened

*But then I sensed the power behind the story **and I believed it.***

*The only thing I know for sure is that the words I read from Jesus are the most truthful things I have ever heard.*

*As a blueprint for mankind, it is so smart that it **couldn't** even have come from a clever philosopher.*

*He said "If you accept that Jesus is the Son of God,*

*then why would you not believe that Mary was a virgin?*

*and that God had some hand in the impregnation?"*

### **There you have it !**

(Now, I could have shown him text books and academic theologians who are completely comfortable with the historicity of the Nativity)

But Jordan consulted secular theologians who didn't believe, who **wouldn't** believe and therefore who couldn't believe.

They could never see past Jesus as ONLY an historic figure

They would have want to re-run the healing of the Leper under 27 different test conditions and still they would not have been convinced.

They were so proud of their academic status that they would only ever conclude that "Jesus was just a great teacher"

But Jordan saw beyond that, he put his faith in Jesus and he says the miracle happened in his life.

### **If you are not a Christian here this morning**

Or, if you think that Jesus is at a distance,

If you sense you are not with him

There comes a point where you can believe the evidence one way or the other.

If you want to believe, then its all totally credible

If you don't want to believe, then you'll always have a few more questions.

There comes a point in everyone's life where you can believe the evidence - one way or the other.

But listen, God will never prove himself to you – for then you will have no choice (you'll have lost your free will).

And no-one will even **disprove** God to you either – for the same reason

### **You choose what you want to believe.**

If every time you encounter God you

continually put him under the microscope,

continually demand proof,

continually looks for alternative explanations

**You will never encounter Jesus.**

The miracle won't happen.

If you have heard it all before, then please do not let familiarity breed a contemptuous casualness in your life towards Jesus.

For the miracle will never happen!

Jesus comes in many ordinary ways – and can be ignored forever.

in answers to prayer – they can be coincidence!

in ordinary people (like your friends and family) – well they've always been a bit strange!

in creation – which could be blind evolution!

But if you want the miracle to happen in your life, then,

like Tony Jordan, like everybody who has **ever** met the real Jesus

“believing is seeing” – NOT “seeing is believing”

You choose what you want to believe.

If you want God as God in your life, to know why you are here, to know his presence and his unconditional love

then you need to lay down the microscope through which you wrongly think you can find proof; and

then lay down your life

to find him.

You need to know that God will never submit to you.

He is God – what are you thinking of!

But **if you do** submit and lay down your life

You will suddenly realise that he does indeed submit to you!

His name is Jesus and he put aside his glory and his power and his majesty to submit himself to the ridicule of those he loves – he has already submitted himself to you.

He has already laid down his life for you – long before you ever thought of laying down your's for him

He has laid it down, he has allowed himself to be trampled in the dust for you.

And when you see that, then you will discover the miracle in your life – His Presence, his love, his forgiveness.

Then

the ordinary will become full of miracles

the handiwork of God will be everywhere you look

his power will be in every answered prayer

his love will flow out of broken bread and wine outpoured

As you trust more, you see more,

as you see more so you trust more.

And then there is no telling what God can do in the Ordinary You in the life of others who would see Jesus.