

**Texts: Psalm 115:1-11 and Acts 2:22-36**

**Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2019**

**Brightons Parish Church**

**Like with our young people, we each have particular labels, and words, and ideas that describe God, that define His character and His ways. And we take those words and we take those ideas and we construct a box for God.**

**In reality, putting God in a box suits us - we quite like the idea of knowing we have the lid on God, that we know the boundaries to His character and ways. We generally prefer not having many surprises with God – we like knowing where the edges and corners to God are, we like knowing His colours and so His temperament. We like the assurance that we understand God and that God will behave according to the way we understand Him.**

**We also like the sense of control we have over God by Him being in the box because being in a box makes God a bit more manageable.**

**We all have a box for God – I have a box for God. People of every age, of every culture have had a box for God. **And the same was true 2000 years ago** when the Holy Spirit came upon the early Church for the first time. In that moment, something happened – something totally unexpected and new, something outside of everyone’s box. Certain people felt it went too far and they sneered and mocked the disciples, because these accusers had God in a box – a small, tight, clearly defined box.**

**But Peter stood up and He countered their allegations, explaining that something new had happened, that what they had heard and seen and experienced was nothing less than God and His kingdom breaking into our world and blowing open their boxes.**

**Friends, Jesus is always seeking to change, expand, or even blow apart, the box that we all have Him in so that by His Spirit He brings us all into a deeper understanding of Himself, and into a life of faith that is lived to the full.**

**But that raises the question: who is the Jesus that we each know and follow? Which of these names would you use? How would you describe His character and ways?**

**Maybe more importantly, would you still hold that perspective when life gets tough? When the difficulties of life come along, they confront us with some searching questions, and **we might echo the words of the psalm:** “where is God?” Who is this God that I’m called to trust in? What can I be sure of?**

**Any number of things could force each of us to ask these questions. It could be the death of a loved one; or the loss of health, work or a relationship; or it could be change – maybe changes in family or society, even changes in church.**

**All those experiences, all these questions, I can resonate with because there have been two times, at least, in my relatively short life when I’ve been left holding the pieces, holding the pieces of my life, of my faith, and wondering, where are You God? Who are You God? What can I be sure of?**

**It's in the hard times** that you really come down to focus on the essentials, because the hard times remind us that much of life and of faith is mystery, that there are questions we cannot answer, and may never get an answer.

But there are some questions that can be answered, and in their answer, we find hope for the difficult times and something to cling to when we're holding our broken pieces and asking: where are you God?

One such answer is given in our passage today: in response to the question, "who is Jesus?", Peter reminds us, encourages us, **with these words:** 'Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.' (v36)

I like how the **NRSV puts this verse**: ‘Therefore...know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.’ - - - Know with certainty...be assured – of what? That Jesus is both Lord and Messiah.

But why is that hope for the difficult times? How is that anything to cling to 2000 years after the fact?

Let’s take a moment to think about each of these titles of Jesus and **I’ll start with Jesus being Messiah.**

Messiah is that Hebrew title from which we get the English title Christ. It literally means, “the anointed one” or “chosen one”...

**In biblical times, anointing someone with oil was a sign that God was setting apart that person for a particular role. Thus, an “anointed one” was someone with a special, God-ordained purpose, usually a prophet, priest or king. But the Old Testament predicted that a Deliverer would come – someone who would be chosen and anointed by God to set Israel free, and this Deliverer was called the Messiah.**

**Is Jesus the Messiah? Well Peter argues He is: that Jesus was ‘a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him’ (v22) – and the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John in the Bible give us eye witness accounts of what Jesus did – He was no ordinary man.**

**Peter also argues that the death of Jesus confirms Him to be the Messiah for **He died on the cross** because of ‘God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge’ (v23). Peter wants us to understand here that the death of Jesus was not the unfortunate defeat of a good man who had no power to save Himself. To see Jesus that way is to miss the point entirely – for even though it might look that way, it was in fact brought about because of the foreknowledge, decision and plan of God. This was no ordinary death of a common criminal or failed religious leader.**

**And to clinch his argument, Peter concludes with one final claim - - - that Jesus being raised to life fulfils the prophetic words of David, who wrote: ‘you will not let your holy one see decay’ (v27). These words are about the Messiah and were written 1000 years before Jesus, So in resurrecting His Son, God the Father...**

**vindicates the death of Jesus and confirms that it was not some failed moral revolution, but instead a triumph over the agonising power of death and sin.**

**So in His life**, in His death and in His resurrection, Jesus is confirmed as the Messiah, the Promised One, our Saviour, our Deliverer, one who is mighty to save, conqueror of sin and death.

**In Jesus then, we can find hope, hope for today and hope for tomorrow, indeed hope for all eternity, because in Jesus we see the embodiment of God's love and faithfulness, in Jesus we see the extent that God was willing to go for us: that He loved you and me with a suffering love, and He has loved us with that love from all eternity...**

because He made a deliberate plan to send Jesus as our deliverer, as our Messiah. **In fact, God** was so meticulous and deliberate about this plan that He gave 60 prophecies in the Old Testament about the coming Messiah. Do you want to guess the odds of Jesus fulfilling just 8 of those prophecies? **It is 1 in a hundred million billion** – basically impossible without divine intervention! But the incredible news is that Jesus didn't just fulfil 8 prophecies, He fulfilled all 60, showing that He truly is the Messiah.

**So, when hard times come,** and we feel in the grip of darkness, will we remember that Jesus is Messiah? When changes come, and we feel unsettled and fearful, will we remember that Jesus is Messiah? When an opportunity comes to take a step of faith, and we're tempted to play it safe, will we remember that Jesus is Messiah?

Years after the events of Acts 2, Peter will write in his first epistle these words: 'set your hope on...Jesus Christ' (1 Peter 1:13), Jesus the Messiah. So can I ask? Is your hope set on Jesus, Jesus the Messiah? It is a choice – you choose where to set your hope. In the dark times, in the times of asking, “where are you God?”, will you choose to set your hope on Jesus? There's nowhere better, nowhere surer, no one else has conquered sin and death, no one else offers life in all its fullness and life eternal. So, my friends, set your hope on Jesus, on Jesus the Messiah.

In addition to all that, Peter says that Jesus is also Lord.

Peter is convinced of it so, he now introduces a key Old

Testament quotation:

“The Lord said to my Lord:

‘Sit at my right hand

**until I make your enemies  
a footstool for your feet.” (v34-35)**

**To our ears it is a strange argument but it is a quote from Psalm 110, a psalm that was believed to refer to the Messiah – this chosen one, this anointed one. The Jews understood that the Messiah would be a direct descendant of King David, because that is what God had promised, and so the Messiah would be a man, a real human being.**

**But David, here, refers to this coming Messiah as “my Lord”, ‘Adonai’, giving to the Messiah a title that is reserved for God alone and the Jews didn’t really have an answer for this conundrum. **So, Peter now makes it clear** – this Messiah is a man but He is also God –**

and His name is Jesus. And this very Jesus now sits at the right hand of the Father, ruling in a position of all authority, including over salvation and its blessings, and so it is from Jesus, by Jesus, through Jesus that we receive the grace of God: it is as we call on the name of Jesus that we receive salvation.

**And the impact of this is huge!** If Jesus is not only Messiah, but **Lord and God**, then in Jesus we see the reign of God – **we see that God is not distant**, He came close as a real human being; **we see that God is not uncaring**, He died for love of you and me. What's more, **we see that God** is not a figment of imagination or superstition, rather He is risen and alive, a true person you can know; and finally, **God is not just any god** or every god, He is Jesus, the Jesus of the Bible, and no other but He is truly God.

**In the hard times, in changing times, is that the Jesus you turn to? Or is your picture of Jesus simply of a man, or a good teacher? If that's the case my friends, hear this: your picture of Jesus falls so far short, you have been short-changed, because you are missing out on knowing the true Jesus, the Jesus who is Lord.**

**Maybe that doesn't sound much to you.** You may even conclude that if Jesus is God, then He is doing a pretty poor job. And you know, the people of Peter's day would probably have thought the same thing – for Peter to claim that Jesus was Lord was startling news, ridiculous news, even laughable news, because this Jesus had been crucified, and everyone knew that if you were crucified, hung from a tree, you were under the curse of God...

**How could any such person be Lord? How could any such person be Messiah?**

**But appearances can be deceiving, for despite appearances, God was working His purposes out in Jesus - - - death did not have the final say, that cross, which by all accounts should have been the end of Jesus, was His finest moment.**

**Friends, in the hard times, in changing times, we can be asking: “where is God?” Who is this God that I’m called to trust in? What can I be sure of?**

**Despite all appearances, despite all other claims, the testimony across the generations is that only Jesus is Messiah, only Jesus is Lord –**

**it is in Him that we can find true hope for the dark times, and someone to cling to when we're left holding the pieces. It is Him I have run to when my life has fallen apart; it is Him who has been my rock when all else is unsteady and unsure.**

**Friends, who is Your Jesus? Is He Messiah and Lord? Is He your Messiah and Lord? Have you chosen to put your hope in Him? Have you called on His name for salvation? Do you daily turn to Him in prayer and in His Word to find the refuge and strength and guidance we each need every day? My encouragement to you this morning, is allow your box to be expanded and come afresh to Jesus, even now, and set your hope on Him, our Messiah and Lord. Let us pray.**