

The Parish of Wellow

Searching Issues

The Da Vinci Code: Fact or Fiction?

Passage, Sermon Notes and Questions

Please feel free to take these sermon notes home with you and you may wish to find some time during next week to consider the questions below.

1. Sermon Passage

Matthew 16:13-20

13 When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

14 They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

15 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

17 Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven."

18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

20 Then he warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.

2. Sermon Notes

2.1 The Da Vinci Code

- According to The Daily Telegraph, The Da Vinci Code, published in April 2003, is 'The biggest selling adult hardback fiction book of all time'. It has sold millions of copies, been translated into dozens of languages and is currently being turned into a Hollywood film due out in the next few months.
- The Da Vinci Code is a thriller presented as a historical novel; it is fiction and yet seeks to convince the reader that it is based on fact.
- Through its characters, The Da Vinci Code asserts that 'almost everything our fathers taught us about Christ is false', It claims that:
 - i. Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene.
 - ii. The Holy Grail is not, as commonly believed, the chalice used at the Last Supper but the womb of Mary who bore Jesus' daughter, Sarah.
 - iii. The descendants of Mary Magdalene and Jesus became kings of France.
 - iv. Jesus was not the Son of God but was a prophet and a radical feminist.
 - v. The pagan emperor Constantine proposed a motion to upgrade Jesus to a deity at the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD.
 - vi. Jesus became the Son of God by a narrow vote, but that prior to that, no one believed him to be divine.
- Thus at its heart the Da Vinci Code is really challenging two central truths:
 - i. The reliability of the Bible
 - ii. Is Jesus is the Son of God.

2.2 The reliability of the Bible

- In The Da Vinci Code one of the characters called Teabing says the following: "...everything you need to know about the Bible can be summed up by the great canon doctor Martyn Percy.... 'The Bible did not arrive by fax from heaven.'" "...the Bible is a product of man, my dear. Not of God.... Man created it as a historical record of tumultuous times, and it has evolved through countless translations, additions, and revisions. History has never had a definitive version of the book." (The Da Vinci Code page 231)
- How can we be sure that what the New Testament writers wrote down has not been changed over the years as Teabing and the great canon doctor Martyn Percy assert?
- The answer is that we do know because of the science of textual criticism.
- This science of textual criticism is built on two key pillars:
 - i. The first says that the more surviving copies that we have of a document the more reliable it is.
 - ii. The second pillar of this science asserts that the nearer that the first surviving copy is to events being described again the more reliable the document.
- No classical scholar doubts the authenticity of all the classical works outlined in the table overleaf, in spite of the large time gap and the relatively small number of surviving manuscripts.
- But when we come to the New Testament, as the table shows not only do we have a vast number of surviving copies we also have early copies much nearer the events described.

| WORK | WHEN WRITTEN | EARLIEST COPY | TIME LAPSE | NO OF COPIES |
|----------------------|---------------|-----------------------------------|--------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Herodotus | 488-428 BC | AD 900 | 1,300 years | 8 |
| Thucydides | c.460-100 BC | c.AD 900 | 1,300 years | 8 |
| Tacitus | AD 100 | AD 1100 | 1,000 years | 20 |
| Caesar's Gallic War | 58-50 BC | AD 900 | 950 years | 9-10 |
| Livy's Roman History | 59 BC - AD 17 | AD 900 | 900 years | 20 |
| New Testament | AD 40-100 | Partial - AD 130 Full - AD 350 | 30-310 years | 5,000 Greek 10,000 Latin 9,300 Others |

- We can therefore refute Teabing's and Canon Percy's assertions and by inference Dan Brown's that the Bible is an unreliable document because it has clearly NOT been changed over the years as the science of textual criticism proves.
- Once we accept that the Bible is reliable then we can look more carefully at what the New Testament writers have to say about Jesus. It's in the pages of the New Testament that we can hear directly from Jesus about who he thought he was.

2.3 Is Jesus is the Son of God

2.3.1 The Da Vinci Code's viewpoint

- "At the Council of Nicaea," Teabing said, "many aspects of Christianity were debated and voted up - the date of Easter, the role of the bishops, the administration of the sacraments, and, of course, the divinity of Jesus." "I don't follow. His divinity?" "My dear," Teabing said, "until that moment in history, Jesus was viewed by His followers as a mortal prophet... a great and powerful man, but a man nonetheless. A mortal." "Not the Son of God?" "Right," Teabing said, "Jesus' establishment as 'the Son of God' was officially proposed and voted on by the Council of Nicaea." (The Da Vinci Code page 233)

2.3.2 Jesus' viewpoint

- Jesus said to receive him was to receive God: 'He who receives me receives the one who sent me.' (Matthew 10:40)
- Jesus said to have seen him was to have seen God: Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? (John 14:9)
- Jesus directly states that he is the son of God: But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" "I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." (Mark 14:61)
- The Jewish authorities were stoning Jesus because he is claiming to be the son of God: Jesus said to them, "I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?" "We are not stoning you for any of these," replied the Jews, "but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God." (John 10:33)

2.3.3 Other people's viewpoint

- The disciple Peter claims that Jesus is the son of God: Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matthew 16:16)
- The disciple Thomas believes having seen the evidence: Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28)
- The Roman guard at the foot of the cross claim that Jesus is the son of God: When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!" (Matthew 27:54)

2.3.4 What about our viewpoint? Who do we think Jesus is: a great and powerful man or the son of God?

- We are faced with three choices:
 - i. Jesus was a liar
 - ii. Jesus was mad
 - iii. Jesus is who he says he is.

3. Questions to consider back at home

- 3.1 Should we as Christians take the claims of a book of fiction like 'The Da Vinci Code' seriously?
- 3.2 The Da Vinci Code asserts that: 'almost everything our fathers taught us about Christ is false.' Do you agree?
- 3.3 A good friend of yours says: 'I do not understand why you Christians get so upset by the idea that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene and had a child called Sarah, after all what is wrong in that.' How would you respond?
- 3.4 The Da Vinci Code asserts that: 'Man created the Bible as a historical record of tumultuous times and it has evolved through countless translations, additions, and revisions.' Do you agree with this statement?
- 3.5 The Da Vinci Code asserts that: "until the Council of Nicaea, Jesus was viewed by His followers as a mortal prophet... a great and powerful man, but a man nonetheless. A mortal. Not the Son of God" Do you agree?

If you would like to discuss these questions further please feel free to call me on 01761 432293