

**Mark 12:13-34**  
**Lynchburg, Virginia**  
**August 22, 2010**

**EXHORDIUM**

This is another of the great passages of Scripture that has multiple things going on at various levels. It would be wise for us to look at the theology of the matter but we also ought not to lose the main point.

In this story, three men come to ask Jesus questions. It appears that all of the men have ulterior motives but at least one of them receives some commendation from Jesus. Jesus says to him, “Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God.” But we should keep in mind, that being near the Kingdom of God is not good enough. We do not want to be near the Kingdom. We must be in it.

Jesus has just told two parables about the Kingdom of God, how those who do not produce fruit will be judged. This is not simply a judgment against individuals but against a nation and a religious system, even God’s nation and God’s system! The fig tree withered and the Lord came in judgment against the wicked tenants of His vineyard.

Now, we have representatives of Israel come to Jesus to ask questions and they reveal why God is coming against them in judgment. They are not the godly, humble leaders that one would expect in Israel. They are crafty manipulators, seeking to advance their own agenda and not God’s.

This is the main point of the passage. The Pharisees and the Herodians are trying to catch Jesus in His Words. Trying to catch someone in their words is not the same thing as listening to and hearing the word of God.

**EXEGESIS**

**Three Questions**

**13 And they send unto him certain of the Pharisees and of the Herodians, to catch him in his words.**

These men are not honest. You cannot hope to find answers to your questions unless they are real questions. These Pharisees are neither honest nor humble men. Therefore, they should not expect Jesus to answer their deceitful questions. But He is so wise that He does so without damaging

Himself. At the same time, He exposes their hypocrisy. In both of these questions from the Pharisees and the Sadducees, we can see their immediate dishonesty. Jesus masterfully answers their question and turns their dishonesty back on them.

### **First Question**

**14 And when they were come, they say unto him, Master, we know that thou art true, and carest for no man: for thou regardest not the person of men, but teachest the way of God in truth:**

They, on the other hand,

- 1) Are not true, they are false.
- 2) They do care about the opinions of man before declaring the Word of God.
- 3) They do regard the person of men, giving honor to those in the chief seats, to the rich over the poor and to those of great means.

They are everything opposite of this flattery that they heap on Jesus. Jesus is not taken in by their flattery, even though it was all true. He sees through to their hypocrisy.

**Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not? 15 Shall we give, or shall we not give?**

The Pharisees held the position that one ought to evade taxes. However, they did so because it was a popular position. For Jesus to simply say, “Yes, we should pay taxes,” would have been risky. He does say that we should pay taxes but He puts in perspective.

We live as citizens of both a political power as well as a spiritual power. Jesus gives more of an answer than they had hoped for.

If he had said simply yes, they would have accused him before the people of being in compliance with the Romans. If he had simply said no then they would have accused him of stirring up sedition. Instead, He answers them with an irrefutable argument.

**But he, knowing their hypocrisy, said unto them, Why tempt ye me? bring me a penny, that I may see it. 16 And they brought it. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? And they said**

**unto him, Caesar's. 17 And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. And they marvelled at him.**

The state makes the coins and owns them. This fact shows that we are already subservient to the state. We reap benefits from the state so it should not surprise us of the state requires our labor, paid in coins, to continue to advance their agenda.

Jesus is also showing them that they had their king, and it was not God. This is an ancient sin in Israel and those of Jesus day were following a time honored tradition. At this time, there was unrest welling up and Israel would eventually revolt against authority of Rome.

If we live in the commonwealth, we should not be surprised when they want their money. But to give them money is not the same thing as giving them yourself. Jesus makes the implication that the Pharisees have not given to God the things that are God's.

The government can take our money but we must retain our souls for the Lord. We should put this in perspective with our times. The government can force us to pay taxes. To some degree, we do not have a problem with this. We receive benefits and therefore we ought to pay for those benefits. But we do not sell our souls for the benefits. We are currently going down this path. Because Caesar runs the schools, Caesar gets to decide what happens in those schools. Caesar believes in praying only at the pantheon, so the children may not pray and especially not to Jesus. That can make us pay for the schools but they ought not make us pay to sacrifice our children there.

Now, we are in danger of the master telling us what doctors we can go to and what procedures we can have done. Shall we pay for this? Well, who's picture is on the money? Washington and Lincoln. But being forced to pay for these things does not mean that we must worship the slave masters. We ought to retain our integrity, our children and our souls.

What was it that the Scribes, Pharisees, Herodians and leaders in Israel must give to God? How about mercy and justice and to walk humbly with the Lord? We see at the end of this chapter that the Pharisees devour widows houses and for a pretence make long prayers. Their religion had

become a show to earn, gain and keep favor and power with the powers that be. The integrity of speaking the truth in love was gone.

Think about the religious left in this country. Have they not completely made peace with Caesar, bowing down to him at every turn. They bow down in education. They bow down in moral issues, abortion, homosexuality, and many various debauched forms of living. They embrace the welfare state, which makes people slaves of the state, rather than citizens of God's kingdom. They compromise the Word of God in churches, presbyteries and synods. They are afraid to embrace the entire Bible because of what master culture might think of them. They seem to give no concern as to what God might think.

Think about the modern evangelical church. In the past, this was the political right. However, they are now the next liberals. This is happening because they have compromised the Word of God. They are afraid to call sin sin. They do not provide the God's answer to the problem of sin. Man is merely sick and needs healed. But the Bible teaches that man is dead in sin and needs new life. They, too, render their children to Caesar, hoping for their children to be lights in the dark place, only to have their lamps greatly dimmed. The Christian right tends to be conservative, hawkish on war, pro-big business. There are many warnings in the New Testament about loving and supporting the rich because they are the very ones that bring you before the courts. There is nothing wrong with working hard and retaining your earnings. There is nothing wrong with corporate business making a buck. But we should all be aware that the radical left and the corporate right are all lobbying hard in Washington to get laws passed to their financial benefit. There are bribes enough to go around to every corner of the room.

God calls us to live by a different standard. We are to call sin sin wherever it rears its ugly head. Is it an insatiable demand for corporate profits which leads to exploitation? So be it. Is it an endless supply of handouts that create an enslaved non-working class? Then so be that. We Christians ought not to sell our souls to the left or to the right in order to get a seat at their table. We are seated at the table of the Lord and will therefore only worship God.

## **Second Question**

**18 Then come unto him the Sadducees, which say there is no resurrection; and they asked him, saying, 19 Master, Moses wrote unto us, If a man's brother die, and leave his wife behind him, and leave no children, that his brother should take his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. 20 Now there were seven brethren: and the first took a wife, and dying left no seed. 21 And the second took her, and died, neither left he any seed: and the third likewise. 22 And the seven had her, and left no seed: last of all the woman died also. 23 In the resurrection therefore, when they shall rise, whose wife shall she be of them? for the seven had her to wife.**

The Sadducees do not even believe in the Resurrection, so why are they asking a question about the Resurrection? They are doing this because they believe that they have already figured out how silly the answer is going to sound. If marriage is meant to be permanent and in the Resurrection we live forever, what is going to happen when all the widowed and divorced people are resurrected? How are you going to match up the correct spouses?

The Sadducees only believed in the five books of Moses as Scripture. Jesus tells them that they do not even know the five books that they attest to know. Jesus answers them from the five books of Moses, leaving them without excuse.

The Pharisees believed that the wife would belong to her first husband.

**24 And Jesus answering said unto them, Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the scriptures, neither the power of God? 25 For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels which are in heaven.**

Jesus seems to take a jab at them here for not knowing the Scriptures, perhaps implying their rejection of much of the Scriptures. However, He then goes on to answer them from those texts that they considered Scripture.

Sadducees did not believe in Angels. So, Jesus puts them straight on that issue as well. But He seems to have also disagreed with the Pharisees that the woman would belong to her first husband.

One explanation for this comment from Jesus is that there is no longer a need for marriage in the Resurrection. The purposes of marriage are godly offspring, a hedge against temptation and faithful companionship. In the Resurrection, the Earth will be full of saints and it appears there will be no more propagation. Also, sin and death will end so there will be no temptation and no loss of members of the kingdom. Companionship will not be in short order as we will be intensely close to the Lord, to our own family and to all members of the kingdom. There will be no lonely members in God's kingdom.

This is not to say that we will not somehow live in family units and communities. It seems obvious that we would do so but the sexual relationships between men and women, it seems, will be subsumed into a greater communion with God and His people.

**Are as the angels, which are in heaven.** This was said to Sadducees who do not believe in angels. Jesus was putting them straight on that issue. Angels are all around us. They appear to Elijah and his servant. They show up at various places. But here we are told that they are in heaven. These two things are not incompatible. Heaven is not a place far away. Heaven is near us and hidden. It shall be revealed.

Angels are not married and do not reproduce.

**26 And as touching the dead, that they rise: have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? 27 He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living: ye therefore do greatly err.**

The Sadducees wanted to make Jesus look ridiculous. He makes them look ridiculous instead. God is not the God of the dead but the God of the living. If Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had ceased to exist by the time Moses was on the scene, then how can God say that He is still their God? They must currently be alive and with God. He doesn't just tell them the story. He makes a point to tell them that they are way wrong on this one.

### **Third Question**

**28 And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all?**

This man could be taken as an honest seeker but given the context, it seems he is another in the line of those who were seeking to catch Jesus in His words. Jesus gives a simple and orthodox answer to the man's question. The man adds a bit to what Jesus has said. Jesus does not take him to task at all for his response but commends him for it. The man added to Jesus's answer and then Jesus adds to the man's answer. Jesus's addition calls the man up short and confronts him with the issue that Mark has been pushing in the last couple of chapters. That issue is who is Jesus and what will He find in Israel when He comes? Will He find faithfulness and belief? Will His people embrace Him as King? Will they recognize the visitation of God in the Son of David?

**29 And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: 30 And thou shalt love the Lord thy God**

**with all thy heart**, center of our being, place of emotions

**and with all thy soul**, sentient being, all of our aliveness.

**and with all thy mind**, ability to think, reason, contemplate, meditate.

**and with all thy strength**: physical ability, doing the will of God, working for God.

**this is the first commandment.**

**Deut. 6:4-5**, This is the Shema, the great confession of Israel's belief in one God and the need to love Him completely.

**31 And the second is like, namely this,**

**Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.** Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. This is love. This is loving others as you love yourself.

**There is none other commandment greater than these.** Jesus slam dunks the answer.

**32 And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he: 33 And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.** Obedience to the Lord is more important than the going through the ceremonial aspect of the Law. This does mean that we neglect or negate the ceremonies. They are important, too. But if we only do the ceremonies while keeping our love and hearts far from the Lord, then we miss everything.

To obey is better than sacrifice.

**34 And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him,**

**Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.**

The man was apparently humbled by Jesus's answer and was thoughtful in his response to Jesus. This expressed some level of love for God. Jesus tells him that he is not far from the kingdom. But being near the kingdom is not close enough.

**And no man after that durst ask him any question.**

Jesus puts an end to their questions but not their desire to catch Him. If anything, being silenced by Jesus added to their hatred instead of diminishing it.

## **EXHORTATION**

### **Jesus's Question, The Exclusivity of the Gospel**

What are you going to do with Jesus. Are you near the Kingdom or *IN* it?

**35 And Jesus answered and said, while he taught in the temple, How say the scribes that Christ is the Son of David? 36 For David himself said by the Holy Ghost, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool. 37 David therefore himself calleth him Lord; and whence is he then his son?**

The Messiah is Lord. He is King of Israel and King of all Creation. David, himself, calls him Lord, making him greater than King David, the greatest of all ancient kings. So, Christ is a man but more than a man.

**And the common people heard him gladly.**

Are you the common people or the important ones? The important people did not hear Jesus gladly. The lordly people had reason to mistrust Jesus, find His claims threatening and seek to oppose Him. But the common people looked for salvation from a redeemer. They were not threatened by Jesus's answers but were glad to have the Word of God explained more accurately to them. They heard Jesus gladly and easily embraced His views. How are you doing? Do you hear Jesus gladly? Even when hearing Him means you have to change what you think? Or have your views or doctrines corrected. Is this gladness to you because you desire to love God with your whole being? Or is it troubling to you because your views are threatened, or your pride is rubbed the wrong way?

The common people heard Jesus gladly. We tend to want to be important or special but the Kingdom of God is hard for such people. I would rather be common and hear Jesus gladly. How about you?