

What Will You Yield To God?

Mark 12:12-17

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¹³ And they sent to him some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians, to trap him in his talk. ¹⁴ And they came and said to him, “Teacher, we know that you are true and do not care about anyone’s opinion. For you are not swayed by appearances, but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?” ¹⁵ But, knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, “*Why put me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me look at it.*” ¹⁶ And they brought one. And he said to them, “*Whose likeness and inscription is this?*” They said to him, “Caesar’s.” ¹⁷ Jesus said to them, “*Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.*” And they marveled at him.

Last week, we saw that Jesus spoke to the leaders of the temple – the chief priests, the scribes and the elders using a parable. In verse 12, when they realized Jesus taught this parable against them, they wanted to arrest him because they wanted him gone. They wanted to destroy him. But they feared the people. They feared a riot. So, they left him alone. Only to come back with another devious, conniving, and deceitful plan to attempt to trap Jesus.

Verse 13.

¹³ And they sent to him some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians, to trap him in his talk.

The chief priests, the scribes and the elders could not answer Jesus’ question about the baptism of John. Instead, they hear an indictment from Jesus through a parable. They left him and now they send a delegation of Pharisees and Herodians.

These leaders were so blind in their sin to the identity of Jesus that they keep trying and trying to find some flaw, some misstep, some misjudgment, some slip of the tongue from Jesus’ mouth so that could use all of that to destroy his character and kill him.

This is a terrible way to live. To have a critical and a censorious spirit. A spirit that constantly declares yourself innocent and others guilty. Jesus told the Pharisees they were like those who “strain a gnat and swallow a camel” Matthew 23:24

But how do you trap someone who is sinless, guiltless and knows everything before you say it?

- If you recall in Mark 2, before Jesus had healed a paralytic, Jesus had forgiven the

man of his sins. But the Pharisees were murmuring in their hearts, because they thought only God can forgive sins and what Jesus did was tantamount to blasphemy. But Jesus *knew* their thoughts and tells them “*Why do you question these things in your hearts?*” (Mark 2:8). Jesus tells them He has authority to forgive sin.

- Or, in Mark 3, when Jesus was in a synagogue, the Pharisees were watching to see if he would heal on a Sabbath. Jesus *knew* their hearts were hardened and was grieved and asks them, “*Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?*” Mark 3:4. Jesus heals the man. Jesus does one good work and what do they do? The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him. Mark 3:6.
- Or, when the woman with the issue of blood had only touched the hem of his garment, Jesus immediately *knew* who touched his robe. (Mark 5:30).
- Or, when the disciples were reasoning in their hearts who was the greatest, Jesus immediately *knew* and taught them about discipleship.
- In John 2:24-25, the Gospel writer says that Jesus himself *knew* what was in the heart of man.

So even after all the proofs that Jesus had given them that he was more than just a mere man, their hardened hearts won’t let up.

They send a delegation with a devious plan.

Matthew’s Gospel tells us that “the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle him in his words” Matthew 22:15

Luke’s Gospel tells us that “they watched him and sent spies, who pretended to be sincere, that they might catch him in something he said, so as to deliver him up to the authority and jurisdiction of the governor” Luke 20:20

What was the plan? Flattery.

Verse 14.

¹⁴ And they came and said to him, “Teacher, we know that you are true and do not care about anyone’s opinion. For you are not swayed by appearances, but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?”

You can say all the right things about Jesus, and yet not embrace him as Lord and Savior. These Pharisees know how to address Jesus as “Teacher”. And they say he is true. Yes, Jesus is the way the truth and the life. There is no untruth in him. There is no sin in him. Jesus is impartial. Jesus is not swayed or influenced by people’s opinions. That is true. And, Jesus teaches the way of God.

But all this was just flattery, empty compliment or hollow praise.

Why? Because their hearts were motivated by hypocrisy, craftiness and malice.

Flattery or empty praise is contrary to Christian virtue. One early church father from 300 A.D viewed flattery as a form of vanity and deception. Flattery undermines the integrity of both giver and receiver.

Peter writes in 2 Peter 2:1 “So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander”

Internally, the Jews hated the Romans for their occupation. They had good reason to. They wanted to be free from Roman occupation if they could. They were taxed by the Romans. In return they were granted safety and protection and freedom of temple worship. Over time, the temple system had become so corrupt and a domineering system. These leaders, in order to protect themselves became sycophants of Caesar.

When you look at the trial of Jesus in Luke’s Gospel, these leaders falsely accuse Jesus “And they began to accuse him, saying, “We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king.” Luke 23:2

In the Gospel of John, you’ll see that the leaders even guilt-trip Pilate to not release Jesus. “If you release this man, you are not Caesar’s friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar” John 19:12

But Jesus did not forbid paying taxes (tribute) to Caesar. What does Jesus say? Verse 15 through 17.

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Notice what Jesus knew. He knew their hypocrisy.

- Matthew’s Gospel tells us that Jesus knew their *malice* and called out their hypocrisy. “*But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, “Why put me to the test, you hypocrites?”* Matthew 22:18
- Luke says “he perceived their *craftiness*” Luke 20:23.
- In the book of Genesis, we see the serpent was very crafty.

How should we understand Jesus’ answer?

First, in their craftiness, the Pharisees and Herodians somehow want to force Jesus' hand to admit that Jesus should oppose all human governments. In their twisted malicious hearts, they would like Jesus to denounce paying taxes to the Romans.

Jesus' demonstration and answer is brilliant. He asks for a coin. A denarius. A denarius was worth a day's wage of labor. It was used to pay the toll tax.

The Pharisees and Herodians acknowledge that they are under Caesars' rule. How? They were able to produce a denarius without hesitation. By producing a denarius, they are out themselves.

On the coin was an image of Caesar. Jesus tells them - You see this coin, and you benefit from Caesar. Give to him what is due to him.

At least two disciples of Jesus, Matthew and Zacchaeus were tax collectors.

Governments are instituted by God. You obey the government to the extent that does not violate God's explicit command.

"Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed."
Romans 13:7

"Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor³ as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good" 1 Peter 2:13-14

Give to government what is due to them and to God what is due to God. Paying taxes to government and giving to God need not be opposed to each other. Ultimately, everything belongs to God.

What do we owe to God?

Everything!

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" Romans 12:1

When king Nebuchadnezzar made an image of himself and demanded people worship him, you know what Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego said?

"..be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up" Daniel 3:18.

"What shall I render to the LORD for all his benefits to me? I will lift up the cup of

salvation” Psalm 116:12-13

The Pharisees, instead of falling down and worshipping Jesus, want to trap Jesus. But Jesus won’t be trapped on their timing.

He will allow himself to be trapped, tried, crucified, and even killed so that those who are trapped in sin can be freed by his death and resurrection. Even those who had killed Jesus could be forgiven when they repent.

Even Jesus came to yield his spirit for the sake of those who will turn and trust in his saving work.

“And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.” Matthew 27:50

Because Jesus yielded his life for us, we too can yield our lives to him. Not to save anyone but to give thanks to him and praise him.

In conclusion, see what Isaac Watts wrote in the song “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross.”

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
that were a present far too small.
Love so amazing, so divine,
demands my soul, my life, my all.

----- Discipleship Questions -----

MESSAGE SUMMARY: What Will You Yield To God. Mark 12:13-17

HEAD: These questions help you examine the truth of God's Word.

1. What motivated the Pharisees and Herodians to ask Jesus a question about taxes?
What were the Pharisees not doing that they ought to have done?
2. HEART: These questions help you wrestle with what you believe.
 - Examine Romans 13:1-17, 1 Peter 2:13-17 and 1 Timothy 2:1-6. How does being subject to civil government help in promoting good order and eventually the Gospel?
 - What is God convicting you of and to believe in light of this message?

HANDS/HABITS: These questions help you bring the truth into your everyday life and develop behaviors that change your habits.

3. HEART For personal reflection: Are there are areas in your life that have not been yielded to God yet? What will you do about it?