

READ Mark 12:12

Jesus's Final Week

Sunday: Acclaim (11:1-11)

Thursday: Anticipation (14:12-72)

Monday: Authority (11:12-19)

Friday: Atonement (15:1-47)

Tuesday: Argument (11:20-13:37)

Saturday: Absence

Wednesday: Appraisal (14:1-11)

Sunday: Awakening (16)

If you recall from our last study in Mark's Gospel, we find ourselves on the Tuesday prior to Jesus's crucifixion, and this day can easily be summed up as a day of argumentation. The previous day, Jesus displayed a strong showing of His authority by cleansing the temple of improprieties that were taking place within her, and in doing so He pronounced a strong message of judgment against the temple, Jerusalem, and the Jewish religious system as a whole. This prompted the Jewish leaders to approach Jesus and begin interrogating Him concerning why He had done what He had done the day prior.

This interaction with the chief priest, scribes, and the elders allowed for Jesus to continue to pronounce strong words of rebuke and judgment against them as the wicked tenant farmers and the ones who had rejected God's chosen stone. Lest we think Jesus was sugar coating or veiling the meaning of His parable and reference from the Psalms, those who were gathered clearly understood what Jesus was saying to the point that they wanted to arrest Him. The only reason they didn't in this moment is because they feared the crowd. They go away for a time, but it isn't long until they've sent a new party to see what they can do with this rogue rabbi who has gotten a little too big for His britches. While Jesus has answered questions and challenges from time to time, we haven't seen a scene quite like this up to this point where people are coming at Jesus one after another after another. Let's recognize that this is the case because Jesus just hasn't spent a whole like of time in the religious center of Jerusalem where these leaders took up residence. He has spent much of His time north of Jerusalem in Galilee teaching, preaching and ministering, and yet He now finds Himself in Jerusalem because the end is near and there is much work to do before this week comes to an end.

Our section of Mark for today's study is a continuation of the arguments that are brought to Jesus throughout this Tuesday. Three different questions are asked of Jesus, but His responses are consistent in that all three point those asking and listening back to God, who He is, and our responsibilities to Him. As we go through these three questions, I want us pay close attention to who is asking what questions, the motivations behind the questions, and the masterful job Jesus does in answering these questions in such a way that those asking cannot give a contrary answer in return.

Mark 12:13-34

A. The Pharisees and Herodians try to trap Jesus concerning paying taxes. (12:13-17)

1. We need to first recognize just how much a problem Jesus is in the eyes of those who dislike Him and stand opposed to Him. He is such a thorn in the side of the Jewish leaders in particular that they are willing to team up with those who were their own natural enemies (the Herodians) in order to trap Jesus. The team of the Pharisees and Herodians was so odd at this time because their loyalties were in two completely opposite directions. The Pharisees were completely loyal to Israel and all of her interests. They believed that Herod was a fraudulent king as an Edomite sitting on David's throne. They vehemently opposed the rule of the Romans over them. On the other hand, the Herodians were supportive of Roman rule and the authority that had been given to the family of Herod. These two opposing sides are represented in this moment because they want to trap Jesus concerning the issue of taxes.

2. The question posed to Jesus is concerning taxes, and this would have put Him in a sticky position considering who is asking the question. Again, as Roman sympathizers, the Herodians would have had no issues with the taxes imposed by Rome over the Jewish people. Conversely, the Pharisees were strongly opposed to the taxes levied against Israel. Therefore, we have a situation where Jesus's answer is bound to put Him at odds with one of these sides. Yet, those who are asking Him these questions don't want the potential problems to be all too evident. In fact, these two usual enemies but current allies approach Jesus with some very flattering words. *"Teacher, we know You are truthful and don't care what anyone think, nor do You show partiality but teach the way of God truthfully."* What ironic flattery, especially considering the Pharisees are a part of asking these questions when they are the very opposite of what they say about Jesus. Nonetheless, they ask Jesus what ought to be done concerning taxes. *"Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Should we pay or shouldn't we?"*
3. Again, this is a tough question for the average Joe because an answer in the affirmative means being at odds with the Jewish people because the vast majority of them sided with the Pharisees in not liking being under Roman rule. On the other hand, an answer in the negative could get Jesus in trouble with the Herodians who very well could run and tell the Romans authorities that there is a rebel in Jerusalem who has accrued quite a following. Yet, we find Jesus being the Master Teacher once again in perfectly answering the question in a way that gets His point across while also causing those asking to be utterly amazed.
4. Let's first notice that Jesus sees right through the ruse and sees their hypocrisy. He even calls them on their testing of Him, but He does indeed answer their question. He does so by asking for a denarius to be brought to Him. He takes the coin and asks whose image and inscription can be found on the coin. The answer would have been that of Tiberius Caesar, and the inscription would have spoken to his supposed divinity. Upon hearing this reply, Jesus tells the crowd that which belongs to Caesar needs to be given to Caesar. The point is pretty clear. They were using money that was authorized by Caesar. He made the coins and valued was given to them based upon his authorization, so they needed to make sure to pay what was owed him based upon them using that which was made possible by Caesar. They were indebted to Caesar in a sense because of the use of coins bearing His image, so they needed to pay that debt in the form of taxes.
5. But then He takes it a step further by make His real point, *"and [give] to God the things that are God's."* It should not surprise us one bit that Jesus again focuses on admonishing the people to faithfulness toward God. Let's remember that Jesus just finished admonishing the Jewish leaders for not producing fruit in God's vineyard of Israel. Here He makes a very similar point, but this time He does so through using this "tricky" question against them as they ask it. They want to get Jesus in trouble with the Romans or the people, but He tells them they were actually already in trouble with God because they were not properly submitting to God as those who bear His image. The fact that Jesus uses the coin and the image on it as an object lesson could not be any more purposeful in this moment. Clearly Jesus is focusing on the parallel between the coin bearing the image of Caesar and the fact that all men and women bear the image of God within themselves (**Genesis 1:26,17**). The same truths concerning the coin, the image, and responsibilities toward Caesar are amplified when we think about mankind, God's image, and our responsibilities toward God. This is Jesus's point in this scene. They are wanting to pit Jesus against Caesar, but Jesus reveals they ought to be more concerned with the debt they owed God by being able to live and exist as those who bear His image within themselves.

B. The Sadducees question Jesus about the resurrection. (12:18-27)

1. After the Pharisees and Herodians leave Jesus amazed, the Sadducees (seen in Mark on in this section) step up to put Jesus in His place with a question that surely had no clear answer. Their question is concerning the resurrection and whose wife a woman would belong to after she had been married to seven brothers in this life based upon the levirate marriage law of **Deuteronomy 25:5-10**. This question was surely one they were proud of because it was an extreme hypothetical that they thought couldn't be answered and showed the ridiculousness of the concept of the resurrection. This was something important in the minds of the Sadducees because, as Mark informs us, they did not believe in the concept of the resurrection, the spirit world, or supernatural beings. They only gave credence to the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures. They were very conservative when it came to doctrinal beliefs, but their real concern was mostly for their status as the religious aristocrats of their day. They were known as being very prideful and snooty toward those outside of their group. With this in mind, we can see them coming to Jesus with their noses in the air and saying without saying, *"If you think you're so smart and clever Jesus, then how would you answer this scenario concerning the resurrection?"*
2. Again, we don't see Jesus pulling any punches at all as He simply states, *"Isn't this the reason why you're mistaken; you don't know the Scriptures or the power of God?"* This beginning to His response was surely a shot at the pride and arrogance that was stored up in the hearts of the Sadducees. They came to Jesus thinking they had a real stumper, but He responds by saying they're ignorant of the Scriptures and the power of God. He first speaks to the fact that God is plenty powerful enough to make sure that those resurrected to life are perfectly equipped to handle eternity. He states that there won't be any marriage in eternity for those raised will be like angels in that regard. We will be transformed and exist in such a way that there won't be a need for marriage as there is in this life.
3. Further, Jesus uses the very Scriptures they boast in having so much confidence in to show that they should understand the presence of life after this life. *"Haven't you read in the book of Moses...?"* Jesus appeals to Exodus 3 where God is speaking to Moses by means of the burning bush, and God refers to Himself as, *"I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob."* They should have recognized this statement as an affirmation of these men continuing to exist past the grave as God continues to be their God! These men came to Jesus thinking of themselves as being the crème de la crème of religious people, but Jesus exposes their minds to the true realities of God, His power, and His Word.

C. A scribe asks Jesus about which is the most important commandment. (12:28-34)

1. After seeing Jesus masterfully deal with the Pharisees, Herodians, and Sadducees, we see a scribe approach Jesus and ask Him, *"Which command is the most important of them all?"* Again, knowing who this man is gives us some insight into this particular question. As a scribe, it would have been no rarity for this man to be involved in numerous conversations where the subject of discussion would be which of the 613 (365 negative & 248 positive) laws were the most important of them all. He has seen Jesus answer these others well, and surely this scribe is thinking that He might also be able to answer this much asked question well.
2. Just as He has done numerous times in Mark when asked a religious question, Jesus responds by quoting and considering Scripture (**2:25; 10:19; 12:10, 26**). This time, Jesus quotes from the famous *Shema* of **Deuteronomy 6:4,5**. This well known and often recited section of Deuteronomy is an all-important reminder to the Jewish people of the uniqueness of their God and what He expects of them in return...which is everything. But then Jesus quickly follows up by expressing the nearly equal importance of following **Leviticus 19:18** which

speaks to the need of loving our neighbor as ourselves. Jesus identifies these two commands as being the greatest of them all because they do well in summing up the law as a whole.

3. The scribe, to his credit, does not argue with Jesus. Instead, he affirms the validity of what Jesus has said and even goes so far as to add on that these two commandments carry even more weight and importance *“than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices.”* This was an especially bold statement from this scribe considering they were currently located within the temple court where burnt offerings and sacrifices were surely taking place! Yet, when Jesus hears this man say these words, He does something that we don’t often see Him during in situations such as these...He compliments the man! He even says of the man, *“You are not far from the Kingdom of God.”* What could this mean? Let me suggest this means that this man was different from those who had come before him and who would after Him questioning Jesus because he actually had an honest heart! He, out of all of those who had and would ask Jesus questions, seems to have truly wanted to know the answer to this question, he considered the answer, and he came to the honest answer that Jesus answered about as well as the question could be answered. What a welcome breath of fresh air this man must have been to Jesus during this day when so many people were out to get Him to see how they might trip Him up or give Him a question they thought he couldn’t possibly answer.

Application Questions

A. Do we approach God & His Word hoping to find a reason to dismiss Him & His Word?

1. It is obvious from this text that only once out of the three times did people come to Jesus with open and honest hearts. We just saw the scribe go about his questions of Jesus the correct and appropriate way, but that could not be said of the first two groups of people. Sadly, I think things haven’t changed much today. There are and continues to be a growing number of people who want to approach God and the Bible hoping to find something within it that will allow them the ability to dismiss it all together. Are we among these type of people?
2. Some approach the Bible hoping to find some teaching within it that goes against modern value or teachings so they can label the Bible as simply be antiquated. Others are combing the pages for supposed contradictions or claims that can’t possibly hold up to scrutiny. These type of people are beginning an investigation with their minds already made up, and the reality is that a person of this nature with a heart dead-set against God and His Word will be able to find something to latch onto that will confirm their predisposed biases.
3. Would we consider ourselves as part of such a group? Have we become dissatisfied with simply faith in God and the Bible and now were bound and determined to find some reason to invalidate what we’ve always believed in order to be “set free”? If our hearts are in that condition then don’t be surprised when we find exactly what we’re looking for. If we want to invalidate God and His Word then we’ll twist something to accomplish that goal. This is why it is so important to be open and honest and truly evaluate the data before us in order to come to the appropriate conclusion... not simply the one we want that will allow us to do as we please in this life.

B. Are we cheating God what is due Him?

1. Lastly, we find Jesus bookending this section with strong words of the need for God to receive from us what is due Him. Are we doing that? Are we giving God everything of ourselves or are we cheating and robbing Him within our lives? Again, it is so obvious to me how purposeful Jesus’s words and illustrations are in this text. He is without a doubt playing on the image of God being upon us, and if we have been made by God, then we owe Him our very existence! If we have been sustained by God, then we owe Him our very lives! If we have been bought back by Him through the blood of His Son, then we owe Him our salvation!

2. If He has given all of us to us through His gracious mercy and provisions, then we must recognize our need to give of ourselves entirely and wholly. If we are willing to love Him and give Him all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength then there truly is nothing else to offer. That is all of ourselves and that is what He deserves. He is our God, He is our Creator, and He is our Sustainer. He has given us His Son to redeem us from our sins even though we have rebelled against Him as His image bearers. His mercy is greater and His love is stronger. How could we ever cheat Him by not giving Him all of ourselves? This is a question we need to be constantly asking ourselves. Am I cheating God when He has only every given me everything I need to live and thrive?

Main Point/Conclusion: *As those made in the image of the all-powerful God, we are indebted to give Him everything of ourselves.*

This text almost makes it seem as if there is this huge line of people just itching to get their turn at trying to stump Jesus, and instead of Him shrinking away, we find our Lord standing in there and answering question after question. He didn't do so because He wanted to show just how smart He was. No, He did so out of His love and desire for people to become aware of their shortcomings so they might turn to God and be prepared for the incredible sacrificial love put on display by His Son as He would shortly give His life on the cross for the sins of mankind. Yet, even in that moment, the Son is pointing toward the Father and inviting all people to turn to Him and receiving the undeserved gift of forgiveness and reconciliation. Jesus was trying to point the people toward God in this moment, and He continues to do so even still today.