

ROME'S CAESAR; OR HEAVEN'S GOD?

Mark 12

I once heard someone say that Bible preaching will ALWAYS affect people in one of two ways – *i.e.* they will either get mad or they will get right!

Now, if you will remember, last time we saw Jesus preaching in the Temple – *i.e.* He gave a parable about a man who had done everything he could to have a fruitful vineyard. But those in charge of caring for the vineyard did not give him the fruit that was rightfully his.

1. He sent his servants – but they were abused/rejected.
2. He sent his son – but he was killed.

Then we saw that, when the sermon was ended, instead of repenting – *i.e.* confessing their sinfulness and getting right with God – those religious leaders ...

Verse 12 “... sought to lay hold on him (*i.e.* to kill Him), but feared the people ... and they left him, and went their way.”

But, even though the religious leaders left Him and went their way, they were certainly NOT backing down or giving up! NOTE: Satan NEVER quits! Therefore, in our text, we are going to see the first in a series of attacks that were designed to accomplish two things:

1. To discredit Jesus before the people who were being drawn to Him.
2. To have a reason to accuse Jesus before the Roman government.

Bottom line: They were out to destroy Jesus and they do not care what they had to do to accomplish their goal.

So with that in mind, let's begin by noticing ...

I. The Jew's attack.

There are three things we should notice here:

- A. The conspirators.

Luke 20:20 “And they watched him, and sent forth spies, which should feign themselves just men ...”

In other words, they chose their most believable hypocrites ...

Verse 13 “And they send unto him certain of the Pharisees and of the Herodians ...”

These two groups were very different from one another.

1. The Pharisees were the fundamentalists/separatists of their day – and this could be seen in two ways:
 - a. In their religion.
 - i. They were legalistic – *i.e.* vigorously kept the law.
 - ii. They were self-righteousness.
 - b. In their politics – *i.e.* they were nationalistic Jews who hated being under Roman rule.
2. The Herodians were actually a political party in Israel – *i.e.* because of the freedom, protection and prosperity that Israel enjoyed under the control of Rome, the Herodians were:
 - a. Against anyone who might upset that balance of power.
 - b. Totally loyal to Herod, the “*puppet king*” of the Roman Caesar.

Bottom line: These two groups were as different as night and day. However, one commentator noted, “*There are two forces that have the power to unite people for either good or evil – love and hate.*”

1. I have seen love unite people for the common good.
2. I have seen hate unite people in a quest to destroy others.

And that is exactly what we find here – even though those two groups were totally different from one another, they were totally united in their hatred for Jesus Christ.

BEWARE: This same thing can be seen at work among God’s people! I hate to say it, but I have observed that Bible believing churches encounter more problems from backslidden/disgruntled Christians – who have united with others just like them, to sow discord and stir up trouble – than from the unsaved world.

That is why the Lord Jesus said in ...

John 13:34-35 “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”

B. The conspiracy.

When the Pharisees and the Herodians joined ranks with one another to come after Jesus, we find the plan of their conspiracy is stated in ...

Verse 13 “... to catch him in his words.”

In other words, if they could ...

1. Get Jesus to offend Rome, they could label Him as an insurrectionist and Rome would take care of their problem for them.
2. Get Jesus to say something that would offend the common people, He would lose His influence there.

Either way, their problem would be solved.

Certainly, if we operate by love – as Jesus commanded – we will never be caught up in watching for opportunities to bring accusations against others. That is why the Apostle Paul said in ...

1 Corinthians 13:5 “... [love] thinketh no evil.”

In other words, love “*takes no worthless inventory*”. Real love does NOT:

1. Choose to remember the injuries of the past.
2. Believe everything it hears about others.
3. Strive to find some fault in others.

But these men – because they loved themselves more than they loved God; and because they loved their religion more than they loved God’s truth – desired to catch Jesus in saying something they could use against Him to destroy Him.

C. The compliments.

Verse 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 ...”

Notice here two things that they complimented:

1. His position – *i.e.* they called Him “*Master*”.
2. His integrity – *i.e.* He spoke God’s truth no matter what others thought.

This was nothing more than flattery designed to cause Jesus to drop His guard and to say something stupid.

The Greek philosopher, Antisthenes (*p. An-tis-tha-knees*) – born 444 BC – was right when he said, “*It is better to fall among crows than flatters ...*” And that is true because crows only devour the dead – flatters devour the living!

Such a trick would have probably worked with an ordinary man, but not with the Lord Jesus Christ – because He knew exactly what was in their hearts; and He knew exactly what they were trying to do.

D. The challenge.

After trying to butter Him up, they finally got around to what they were really hoping to accomplish – notice it in ...

Verses 14-15 “... Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not? Shall we give, or shall we not give? ...”

The “*tribute*” was a poll tax that every Roman subject was required to pay each year – it equaled one “*penny*” or a “*denarius*”, which was one day’s pay for the common worker.

1. The Herodians believed government was dominant over religion – *i.e.* they believed that taxes to Caesar took precedence over any religious service.
2. The Pharisees believed government was to be subject to the rule of their religion. Therefore, they believed that paying taxes to Rome was actually a sin against God.

So they came to Jesus and asked if paying this tax was “*lawful*” – *i.e.* was it something allowed by God. In other words, they were trying to force Jesus into a corner by asking a question for which they thought there were only two possible answers – *i.e.* a “*Yes*” or a “*No*”.

II. The Lord’s answer.

A. His exposure.

They had just called Him “*Master*” and professed their conviction that His words were the true words of God. But ...

Matthew 22:18 “... Jesus perceived their wickedness ...”

Verse 15 “... he, knowing their hypocrisy, said unto them, Why tempt ye me? ...”

With that one, simple question, Jesus exposed their wicked hearts – He exposed:

1. The hypocrisy of their proud hearts.
2. The insincerity of their flattering lips.

You see, if those men had really believed what they had just said, they would not have asked Him such a question.

B. His example.

Verse 15 “... bring me a penny (*i.e.* the Roman ‘denarius’ that I mentioned a moment ago – a days’ wage for a common worker), that I may see it.”



1. The question.

Verse 16 “And they brought it. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? ...”

I think one of the most interesting points here was not the coin. Rather, it is that Jesus – the Creator of all things in Heaven and Earth – did not even have a days’ wages in His pocket!

He had to borrow a penny to give His example.

2. The answer.

Verse 16 “... And they said unto him, Caesar’s.”

C. His declaration.

1. Concerning government.

Verse 17 “And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s ...”

In those days, coins that bore the image of a ruler were considered to be the property of that ruler. Therefore, Jesus was saying, “*This coin belongs to Caesar, if he should ask it of you, give it back to him.*”

Here Jesus was simply declaring that the Jewish people ought to pay the taxes that were required to provide the freedoms, the services, the benefits that were provided for them by Rome.

But then Jesus turned to the other side and made a declaration ...

2. Concerning God.

Verse 17 “... Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s ...”

Now if you look at both of these points you find a beautiful truth: Men were to pay taxes to Rome because the image of Caesar was on the coin; but when it comes to our lives, we give God first place for the same reason. Notice it in ...

Genesis 1:27 “... God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.”

Because God’s image is on us ...

Acts 5:29 “... We ought to obey God rather than men.”

Conclusion

Verse 17 “... And they marvelled at him.”

Literally, they stood there with their chins on the chests! They had come to trap Him, but He had turned the tables on them and He had trapped them. They could not argue with what He had said to them. Therefore, we find over in ...

Matthew 22:22 “... and left him, and went their way.”

Now I want you to understand that there are serious consequences if we fail to obey God!

1. There is Hell for the unbeliever.
2. There is chastisement for the believer.

I do not want you to simply walk away today – rather, I want you to examine your heart and see where you stand with the Lord.

- a. Have you trusted in Him for the salvation of your eternal soul?
- b. Have you yielded your life to His absolute control?

If not, I pray that today you will give to God those things that are God’s!