

**Mark:
Questions, Questions, Questions**

Mark 12:13-27

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Now turn with me, if you would, to the Gospel of Mark, and again to chapter twelve. We pick up the reading this evening at verse thirteen of Mark, chapter twelve. We have been following...before I say that, let me echo Billy's words and say how wonderful it is to see Skip Copeland back with us tonight. We've missed you, and it's wonderful to see you back with us.

And if you have your Bible (let me encourage you to bring your Bibles with you on Wednesday night. Now that we're meeting in here, we don't have a facility to provide you with Bibles, so bring your "sword" with you on Wednesday nights!), turn with me to Mark 12:13.

We've been following our Lord as He's been making these forays into Jerusalem with His disciples in this, His last week of His earthly life. Each evening, it appears, He goes back with the disciples to Bethany (probably to the house, the family home of Mary and Martha and Lazarus) and each day coming into Jerusalem. We have seen already that there is evil afoot in the city. There is a satanic plot systematically being encountered day by day as the onslaught of various groups of people now come in waves upon waves upon our Lord.

We are still in the Tuesday of the final week. Jesus has just cleansed the temple. We aren't given specific time references now in Mark. It may well be the afternoon of that Tuesday...we can't at all be specific. And three groups now come to Jesus, two of which we will see this evening, and then, God willing, a third one next Wednesday evening. Before we read the passage together, let's come before God in prayer.

Once again, O Lord, we bow in Your presence. We acknowledge that we are unworthy servants, and we thank You for the provision of the Scriptures, for the word of God, for the sword that You have given to us, for the light that lightens our path, for that which is sweeter than honey. And we pray that we might read, mark, learn and inwardly digest and profit. For Jesus' sake, Amen.

This is God's word.

Then they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Him, in order to trap Him in a statement. And they came and said to Him, 'Teacher, we know that You are truthful, and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any, but teach the way of God in truth. Is it lawful to pay a poll-tax to Caesar, or not? Shall we pay, or shall we not pay?' But He, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, 'Why are you testing Me? Bring Me a denarius to look at.' And they brought one. And He said to them, 'Whose likeness and inscription is this?' And they said to Him, 'Caesar's.' And Jesus said to them, 'Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.' And they were amazed at Him.

Some Sadducees (who say that there is no resurrection) came to Jesus and began questioning Him, saying, 'Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves behind a wife, and leaves no child, his brother should marry the wife and raise up children to his brother. There were seven brothers; and the first took a wife and died, leaving no children. The second one married her, and died, leaving behind no children; and the third likewise; and so all seven left no children. Last of all, the woman died, also. In the resurrection, when they rise again, which one's wife will she be? For all seven had married her.' Jesus said to them, 'Is this not the reason you are mistaken, that you do not understand the Scriptures or the power of God? For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. But regarding the fact that the dead rise again, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the burning bush, how God spoke to him, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living; you are greatly mistaken.'

Amen. And may God bless to us the reading of His holy and inerrant word.

Well, as I was saying, we're in a battle scene. The prince of darkness grim is prowling the streets of Jerusalem. It would appear that Satan probably realizes now what's afoot, and he is endeavoring to "bruise the heel" of the Son of promise. The principal groupings within Israel are coming together in what appears to be a systematic attack to embarrass, to compromise the Lord's teaching. It is still Tuesday, the "day of questions", as this day has been called; and there are in fact three episodes that now follow, and we're going to consider two of them. The first concerns our relationship to this world; the second concerns our relationship to the world to come.

The first attack comes from the Pharisees and the Herodians, and concerns our relationship to this world. Already (in verse 27 of chapter 11) we've seen three groups of people: the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders — three divisions or branches of the Sanhedrin council. Now in all likelihood we have three more

groups, probably representing more or less the same groupings, and they are the Pharisees and Herodians in this section, the Sadducees in the next section, and then in verse 28 the scribes, or, as they are sometimes called, the rabbis, the teachers of the law.

The first group, then: the Pharisees and the Herodians. They represent two quite different factions within the Judaism of Jesus' time, and you could, I suppose, represent them as the conservatives and the liberals. The Pharisees — they arose in the second century B.C. They were part of the so-called Maccabean revolt, rebellion against the Seleucid occupation. They were eager to prevent Judaism from slipping into Hellenism. They were trying to prevent the cultural slide of Israel because of this Greco-Roman occupation of the land. It was a lay movement. Josephus tells us that in Jesus' time there were perhaps something in the region of 6,000 Pharisees, a great concentration of them of course being in Jerusalem. They were, if you like, a conservative force, a force for traditional ways. They weren't as conservative as the Sadducees, as you'll see in a minute, but they had a strict interpretation of the Law, and by Jesus' time had added to their interpretations of the Law certain oral traditions, which in some cases was regarded as more important than the written Law itself. Jesus has many clashes in His ministry with the Pharisees.

And then there are the Herodians (if you like, the liberals). They are on the other side, and they were accommodating to the Roman occupation, as their name suggests. They were supporters of Herod the Great. This is the man who died probably within a year or two of Jesus' birth. And they were supportive, then, of Herod, who of course was a puppet figure of Rome itself. Herod was of course Jewish, or half Jewish, but Rome trusted him to do their bidding. They never were particularly keen on getting involved in the nitty-gritty of Jewish affairs. It's a classic case of two people who otherwise are on opposite sides of the fence, but come together in unity against what they see as a common enemy. They are sent...verse 13 suggests that they are sent to Jesus, probably by the Sanhedrin.

And in these chapters that are before us, we see, then, this systematic attempt by otherwise enemies coming together now to bring Jesus down. They begin with words of flattery ("Beware when your enemies speak well of you."): "Teacher, we know that You are truthful and defer to no one. You are not partial, but teach the way of God in truth." They speak with forked tongue, you understand.

Mark employs a verb in verse 19 to suggest that they have come to trap Jesus. Their entire (verse 13) mission is to trap Him, and Mark uses a verb that he has employed in the account of Satan's attempt in the wilderness to tempt our Lord. Satan is coming here in the guise of these Herodians and Pharisees. Satan is prowling about, seeking to devour the Christ.

Here's the question that they bring: "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar?"

Now, both the Pharisees and the Herodians of course believed that it was right to pay taxes, but common people did not. The common people resented paying taxes. Nobody likes paying taxes — not now, and not then. And Jesus will now appear, depending on how He answers this question, to be either an insurrectionist or a supporter of Rome. Taxes were a constant reminder to the people that they were a subjugated nation; that they were under the domination, the jackboot of Rome. They had relative freedoms in Israel, but they were not free. They had been taken over, and large sums of money were being taken from them — at least in the mindset of the common people — to support the ever-expanding Roman Empire.

The Romans, of course, were clever enough. They didn't collect taxes themselves in Israel; they gave it to people like Matthew, one of the disciples; and so long as they received what they were entitled to received, folk like Matthew could ask whatever they wanted and cream off from the top, so tax collectors were deeply resented. It's a euphemism in the Scriptures: "tax collectors and sinners", and they go together. And worse than that, the coinage bore the image of the emperor, who sometimes claimed divine qualities. You have the case in Acts 5 of a man who is called Judas the Galilean, who led an insurrection in not paying taxes to Caesar.

So you've got a "have you stopped beating your wife?" kind of question. You're damned if you say yes, and you're damned if you say no! Is it lawful to pay taxes? If Jesus says yes, He's seen as a puppet of Rome and will lose the respect of the common people who heard Jesus gladly; and if He says no, He'll be seen as an insurrectionist by the Roman authorities.

And so He asks for a coin, a denarius. The denarius was just a coin that every adult male and female would have to pay, like a poll tax, in order to survive within the Roman Empire. And on one side of the coin there was the inscription *Tiberius Caesar Augustus, Son of the Divine Augustus* (in Latin, of course); and on the reverse side was the image of Tiberius's mother, Olivia, and the words *Pontifex Maximus* — the chief priest, if you like, of the Roman state cult, or the religion of Rome. (The pope, of course, to this day calls himself Pontifex Maximus.) It was, in the eyes of some, and particularly the Jews, idolatry. Here was the image of one who claimed to be God. It was a violation of the commandment about representing God in an image. It was inherently idolatrous, so there was a point to the question. Jesus' answer is masterful: "Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's, and unto God what is God's."

In less that two months from now, Jesus' disciples will draw the implication of what Jesus is saying here: that there are times when it is appropriate to obey the state, and when the state is demanding of you something which God prohibits, then you must obey God and not men. And we'll see in a couple of month's time from now, when we turn to The Acts of the Apostles after Pentecost, how Peter and John...they're imprisoned, and the Sanhedrin council are forbidding them to

preach in the name of Jesus, and they will say, "It is time for us to obey God, and not men."

Now, don't make the mistake of concluding that Jesus is putting these two on the same level - the obedience to the state and the obedience to God, as though Jesus is suggesting that these are two equally ultimate powers. He's actually asking the question, what's really important to you? Because if you're a Christian, if you're a believer, the demands of God are far more weighty and far more significant than the demands of the secular. Jesus isn't just dividing 'this is my religious life and this is my secular life, and never the twain shall meet.' That's not what Jesus is suggesting here.

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, just about a year before he died in 1979, preached what was to be one of his very final sermons, and it was on this text. And he drew three conclusions from it, the first of which was this: The image that is in you is God's image, not the state's image. You owe God your fundamental allegiance. You must give yourself to the Lord — "In full and glad surrender I give myself to Thee, Thine totally and only, and evermore to be", to quote Francis Riddley Havergal in that marvelous hymn. The image that is in you is God's image.

The second conclusion that he drew was this: What is the worst thing that Caesar can do? He can take away your life, but God is almighty, and He can cast your soul into hell, where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched. And dear friends, do you and I as Christians, do we contemplate as we ought the power of the everlasting and eternal God? "Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's, but render unto God what is God's."

And the third conclusion he drew was this: That paying taxes will bring you good things. It will bring you good roads (though perhaps not in Mississippi!); it will bring you a fire service; it will bring you a police force...but God can give you eternal life. God can give you eternal life. "Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's, and unto God what is God's."

So that's the first encounter.

Then comes the second, and this time it comes from the Sadducees, and you see it there in verses 18-27. The Sadducees and Pharisees were the two prominent factions in Israel in Jesus' day. They, too, had arisen about the same time as the Pharisees in the second century B.C. But they were different from the Pharisees: these Sadducees only accepted the authority of the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament. They did not believe in angels or demons; and they adamantly did not believe in a resurrection, so they brought a question about marriage. It comes from the Torah; it comes from Deuteronomy 25. It's the so-called Levirate law of marriage.

You and I know it well from the Book of Ruth. It's one of the issues, it's one of the

principal themes in the Book of Ruth. A widow dies childless, and the husband's brother is then under obligation to marry that widow and raise up a seed in his name. The first-born of that marriage will be regarded as the offspring of the deceased brother. Well, here's the conundrum. There are seven brothers — and you know what happens. Each one successively dies, and leaving after seven of them are dead, finally the woman was still childless. After seven husbands, she herself dies, and here's the great conundrum: Which husband will she have in heaven? It's sort of one of those *reductio ad absurdum* arguments. It's a ridiculous question. It's the kind of question that unbelievers love to ask. "Who did Cain marry?" That's the question that's going to bring Christianity crashing down at its heels! "Who did Cain marry?"

Well, whose wife will she be in the resurrection? This question is of course coming from people who don't believe in the resurrection. It's a loaded question. It's the kind of question that's meant to bring disrepute to Jesus and to Christianity, and Jesus' reply is fascinating.

The first thing He tells them is that they are wrong. They're wrong. Is this not the reason you are wrong? There is gentle Jesus, meek and mild, and He's telling these Sadducees that they are plain wrong! That they are in error! They do not know, nor do they understand, nor do they rightly interpret the word of God, the Scriptures. He quotes from the incident — and isn't it interesting how Mark alludes to it in a sort of off-hand, not a particular text verse kind of fashion, but in that passage about the bush — the kind of thing that you and I do when we don't have a Bible in our hands. "You remember that passage," we say, "in the bush." And God refers — He's speaking to Moses — but He refers to this. And He says "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And it's in the present tense; it's not "I was the God of Abraham, and I was the God of Isaac, I was the God of Jacob", but "I am the God of Abraham, and I am the God of Isaac, and I am the God of Jacob." And Abraham and Isaac and Jacob are dead! They've been buried! Their physical bodies are rotting in the ground, but He is still their God. He still has a fellowship with Abraham, and with Isaac, and with Jacob. Here's a marvelous way in which Jesus, as it were, pulls the rug from underneath their feet, because these are people who claim to believe the Torah, and yet they don't understand the Torah. And Jesus is saying in this unprepossessing statement is the doctrine of the resurrection of the believer, that there is a sense in which Abraham and Isaac and Jacob are still alive, and still in fellowship with God in heaven. Well, that's the first thing: that they're wrong.

The second thing He tells them, in verse 25, is that there is no marriage in heaven. "When they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels in heaven." He doesn't say that they will be angels in heaven — that's a very popular belief now in post-modern spirituality, but that's not what the Bible is saying. We're not going to be angels; we're not going to sprout wings in heaven. That's not what Jesus is saying. But we will be like the angels in heaven, in the sense that, just like the angels, there will be no

need to propagate the species in heaven.

When John Penrie, 400 years ago, sat in his dungeon in the Tower of London the day before his execution, he wrote a letter to his wife and his four little children. He left the four girls a Bible each, and he then gave his love to his wife, and he signed the letter, "From her husband for a season, and her eternal brother." From your husband for a season, and your eternal brother...I won't be a grandson, and a great-grandfather, and an uncle, and a cousin, and a nephew and a great-grandson forever, a woman won't be someone's third wife forever and ever, but brothers and sisters in communion with Jesus Christ. That's what Jesus is saying.

He doesn't answer all of our questions. He's not saying, as Augustine made so very clear in *The City of God*, that there is here any sense at all that there'll be no gender in heaven. There'll be maleness in heaven, and femaleness in heaven. C.S. Lewis argued the same, I think, in *Miracles*. That's not what Jesus is suggesting here at all. There's no answer in this, too: "What happens to little infants when they die and go to heaven? Are they going to be infants forever?" There's no answer here to that question. What happens to people who die in their nineties or a hundred? Will they look ninety or a hundred in the age to come?

Fascinating questions — I think about them often. I have no idea. I have absolutely no idea. My own personal thoughts, but it's not for the pulpit. This isn't the place to give those opinions, and I can't tell you with any authority. I can tell you what I think — probably what I'd like to think! — but one thing is absolutely clear here. Jesus is affirming resurrection. There will be a resurrection. Brothers and sisters who love the Lord Jesus Christ, who have been regenerated by the Spirit, who've been brought into union with Christ, who've received the spirit of adoption — when they die, their souls will go immediately into the presence of Christ, and at the Day of Resurrection their bodies will rise to be reunited with their souls. Yes! Bodies from the grave and bodies from the sea, and bodies that have been burned in fire! And in some way, I can't tell you how, but in some way there'll be a physical resurrection body with elements of continuity, so that personality will be distinguishable and recognition will be possible; and, elements of discontinuity, because there'll be no need to propagate the species in heaven.

Do you see what's common about both of these stories? This systematic attempt on the part of Satan, who thinks he's so clever. The world thinks it's so clever, with all of its arguments against Christianity, and Jesus dismisses them in a moment for the triviality that they are, because the Christian gospel is built upon solid foundations of iron and steel, like the structure of this sanctuary that we're all agog waiting to go up, and we want to see those solid iron girders going into the ground. And Jesus is giving to us here as we read this gospel the sense of confidence that no matter what arguments are thrown against Christianity and the gospel, there are perfectly reasonable answers to them.

These men, Pharisees and Herodians and Sadducees, before the end of this week will hand Jesus over to the authorities, and He will be killed. And they will lock Him up in a tomb, but you can't keep a good man down, and He will rise again on that third day in resurrection victory and triumph, giving the seal of approval to the very words that He's spoken here on this Tuesday before His death.

As He rises, my friends, He is the first fruits of those that sleep, and it's our great hope and assurance tonight. You know, we're not going to be here forever. We're not going to be here forever, and our hope and assurance is not being here forever, but being in the presence of God in the new Jerusalem, in the new heavens and the new earth in which righteousness will grow.

Well, may God bless His word to us. Let's pray together.

Father, we thank You once again for Your word and for the triumph of Christ over His enemies, as we see it again in this week of betrayal. We ask that You would bless this word to us; hide it within our hearts. Give us confidence, and grace, and assurance to live our lives as unto You. To render unto Caesar what is Caesar's, but to render unto You what is Yours. Have our very all, we pray, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Please stand and receive the Lord's benediction.

Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

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