

Sermon outline and notes:

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Mark 12:13-34 (read vv.13-15a) “Answers to Life’s Questions”

Intro. As we study this text of Scripture, it is necessary to keep the context in mind. The leaders of the Sanhedrin had bluntly questioned Jesus’ authority. This attack had failed. Jesus had silenced them by means of a counter-question. Not only that, but by means of the parable of The Wicked Tenants He had predicted their doom. So, more than ever they were determined to kill Him. But “they were afraid of the crowd” (12:12).

So a group of Pharisees and Herodians joined forces to attempt to trap Jesus into saying something they could use against Him. This combination of Pharisees and Herodians was a strange coalition between the sanctimonious and the sacrilegious. The Pharisees claimed to be zealous about keeping God’s law, and the Herodians were worldly, and cared little about the divine commandments. And yet they came together to promote a common aim: getting rid of Jesus. Each group had its own reason for wishing to destroy Him. Did not His teaching imply a denunciation of the self-righteousness of the Pharisees and of the worldly mindedness of the Herodians? Besides, the Herodians cannot have been happy with Jesus’ royal entry into Jerusalem, nor the Pharisees with His entry as “the Son of David,” the Messiah. Also, both envy Jesus because, as they see it, His influence over the people is becoming too pronounced.

So in vv.13-15 we have the first of 3 loaded questions that the enemies of Jesus have for Him on this day. They were determined to kill Jesus, and they were looking for some opportunity to have Him killed by the Romans, or get a Jewish mob stirred up against him. You can count on the fact that some unbelievers will try to trip *you* up by focusing on difficulties that appear in the Bible. Well in spite of how they addressed Him in v.14, these spies were insincere. Their purpose, and also that of their sponsors, was to discover some pretext that would enable them to deliver Jesus to the governor. And so these questions were not intended to gain knowledge or guidance, but were intended to trap Jesus. In fact, the last of v.13 says they were sent “to catch Him in His words.” The word translated “catch” (*agreuo*) literally means “to catch or take by hunting or fishing.” They wanted to trap Him like an animal. Often, a fish or animal is caught with bait. It looks so good, but when they go for the bait, they are caught & put to death. Well, they set their trap with the bait of flattery, as we see in v.14. These men tell Jesus that He is truthful and that He truthfully teaches God’s way. Of course, they didn’t believe that, but they hoped to completely disarm Jesus by means of such flattery. You had better watch out when someone changes their tune about you and speaks flattery to your face. Nevertheless, the Lord Jesus answered their questions, and His answers were very informative and useful even for us today. Do you have questions? We are going to see that Jesus has the answers for life’s great questions.

So let’s consider first of three questions that were addressed to Jesus in this text of Scripture. They begin with:

I. A POLITICAL QUESTION

A. The Question Stated – Beginning in the last of v.14 they ask, “Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Shall we pay, or shall we not pay?” This was one of the great and frequently asked questions of the day. Yet it was a subtle trap, for no matter how Jesus replied to their question, it

seemed that He would be in trouble with either the Jews or Herod! The Herodians took the side of the government. They thought it was best to fully cooperate with the Romans in order to enjoy material prosperity. The Pharisees resisted paying taxes to Rome, saying that to do so would be against God.

Based on v.15, the particular tax to which the present passage refers was a capitation or poll tax which, after the deposition of Archelaus (A.D. 6), was collected by the procurator from every adult male in Judea, regardless of income, and was paid directly into the imperial treasury. The denarius was the amount fixed by law for the payment of the poll-tax. That was one day's wage for the average working man. A denarius from the reign of the then ruling Emperor Tiberius pictured on one side the head of that ruler. On the reverse side he was shown seated on a throne, wearing a diadem, symbolic of political authority. Yet the emperors also claimed absolute spiritual authority. For beginning with Caesar Augustus, the Roman emperors assumed the title of Pontifex Maximus, i.e., "Highest Priest". So the image of the emperor showed him clothed as a High Priest. As you can imagine, this tax to such an emperor was distasteful to many a freedom-loving, devout Jew. For example, Judas of Galilee had vehemently proclaimed, "Taxation is no better than downright slavery." He had blasted it as being no less than high treason against God.

The question put to Jesus was therefore a very clever scheme. If He answered affirmatively, he would be alienating many devout, patriotic Jews; but a negative reply would be exposing Him to the charge of rebellion against the Roman government. They thought they had Him in a trap, but they didn't have Him at all. They were dealing with the Son of God! He could see right through their hypocrisy. So let's see:

B. The Question Answered - Beginning in the last of v.15 Jesus said, "'Why do you test Me? Bring Me a denarius that I may see it.' So they brought it. And He said to them, 'Whose image and inscription is this?' They said to Him, 'Caesar's.' And Jesus answered and said to them, 'Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.'" So in answering their question, the first principle in dealing with the government is this:

1. Render to Caesar the Things that Are Caesar's - Honoring God does not mean dishonoring the emperor by refusing to pay for the privileges one enjoys. In fact, the word translated "render" (*apodidomi*) in v.17 means "to pay a debt, to pay back" (Mt. 18:28, etc.). In spite of their distaste for the Roman government, they did provide the Jews many benefits. At this particular time the Roman Empire had brought peace and tranquility to the people under its sway and this to a degree seldom if ever experienced either before or afterward. They also provided good roads all over the Roman Empire, like no other society had known. They established a system of law & order with a judicial system of courts, and an appeal process. They provided for commerce & safe trade within the empire, with a stable currency that even the Jews were using, as is clear from v.16. For much of the Empire they provided a relatively safe & abundant water supply. So paying taxes to the Roman government was in essence the discharge of a debt for benefits received.

He was qualifying his "yes" answer by stating that the emperor should be paid (given back) only what was his due. Hence, the divine honor which the emperor claimed but which is due to God alone must be refused. By drawing a distinction between "what is due to Caesar" and "what is due to God," Jesus was rejecting the very claim of Caesar, a claim made on the coin and otherwise, to the effect that his was not only a physical kingdom but also a spiritual. The emperor, to be sure, should be respected and obeyed whenever his will does not clash with the divine will. But when there is a clash the rule laid down in Acts 5:29 must be followed.

Thus, Romans 13 teaches that Christians should be good citizens, & give to the government what is due. I strongly oppose the direction that our Federal government is taking us as a nation. Nevertheless, we are to pay our taxes, for we benefit much from an orderly society, protection from our enemies, a great transportation system, and many other temporal blessings. Government was indeed established by God (Rom. 13:1), and a flawed government is far better than anarchy. We are to obey all laws that do not clearly conflict with God's law. Furthermore, we are to speak respectfully to & about our government leaders (I Peter 2:17), & we are to pray for them (I Tim. 2:2).

Now notice the second principle:

2. Render to God the Things that Are God's - By adding "and to God what is due to God" Jesus was stressing the fact that all the service, gratitude, worship, glory, etc. due to God should be constantly and gladly accorded to Him. Nothing must be withheld.

Think of what you owe God. He created you. He gives you your life's breath. He provides food for you. Jesus died to save you. You rightly belong to God. You have no right to run your life any way you see fit. Have you given your heart and life to Jesus? We also have a responsibility to His church. We all have our responsibilities, and that is what the Lord is saying.

So the solution is not an either/or but a both/and. So by means of this answer Jesus had discomfited His enemies. We are not surprised to read: "And they were amazed at him." Who could find fault with this answer? Oh, the wisdom of Jesus Christ!

After dealing with a political question, Jesus then dealt with:

II. A DOCTRINAL QUESTION

After the Pharisees & Herodians had attempted to trip up Jesus, the Sadducees stepped up to make their attempt. They were the religious liberals of the day. This was the priestly party, from whose ranks the high priest was selected. The temple was their special domain, the very temple which "only yesterday" Jesus had cleansed! It is not surprising, therefore, that the Sadducees now, in turn, attack Jesus. This time, however, the attack is not an attempt to impale Him on one of the horns of a dilemma, but rather to ridicule His faith in the afterlife. In fact, it must be considered altogether probable that these men intended to strike a double blow. In exposing what they regard as the foolishness of Christ's teaching, would they not at the same time triumph over the Pharisees, who likewise believed in a resurrection from the dead?

A. The Question - The Sadducees thought that they were smart, but Jesus soon revealed their ignorance. Now before we get to their question, notice first of all:

1. The Legal Background - They start off in v.19 referring to the teaching of the law. They said, "Teacher, Moses wrote to us that if a man's brother dies, and leaves his wife behind, and leaves no children, his brother should take his wife and raise up offspring for his brother." They now make Deut. 25:5-6 the springboard of their question. According to this law, if a wife loses her husband before any male child has been born, the brother of that husband, or else the nearest of kin, must marry the widow, so that the first child born of this marriage may be counted as a child of the deceased, and the latter's line may not die out. The law of the kinsman-redeemer is illustrated in the Book of Ruth. To what extent this law was still being obeyed during Christ's sojourn on earth is not clear. Next we see:

2. The Hypothetical Story Applying the Law - In vv.20-22 we read, "Now there were seven brothers. The first took a wife; and dying, he left no offspring. And the second took her,

and he died; nor did he leave any offspring. And the third likewise. So the seven had her and left no offspring. Last of all the woman died also.” Provided that their basic assumption was correct, namely, that married life continues in the hereafter, two husbands would have been sufficient to prove their point. But seven makes the story more interesting and might also make belief in the resurrection seem ever more absurd. This is a most unlikely story. I think that the 3rd or 4th husband should have gotten suspicious about her cooking! This story was dreamed up to make those who believed in the bodily resurrection look silly. That wanted Jesus to look silly as well.

3. The Question Stated – Notice what they ask in v.23, “Therefore, in the resurrection, when they rise, whose wife will she be? For all seven had her as wife.” What the opponents were doing, was setting up a straw man. It was not the doctrine of the resurrection but the assumption from which the Sadducees were proceeding was false. These Sadducees are making light of life and death issues.

You had better be careful about joking around with death and eternity. Hebrews says, “It is appointed unto man once to die, and after this the judgment.” Are you ready to die? Are you at peace with God? Do you know you are going to heaven, or is it possible that you would go to hell?

There are some who do not believe in an afterlife. They do not believe in a resurrection of the body. Yet the question that confronts us is the same question that Job asked long ago, “If a man die, shall he live again?” (Job 14:14). The Sadducees would have said, “No.” But are they right? Have they here cleverly disproved the resurrection? Well let’s consider together:

B. The Answer of Jesus – Notice with me how Jesus answers them. First of all:

1. He Rebukes Them – Jesus said in v.24, “Are you not therefore mistaken, because you do not know the Scriptures nor the power of God?” This is a good description of a liberal. A liberal does not know the power of God or the Word of God. This is the difficulty today with those who are so critical of the Scriptures—they do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. When a person departs from the Scripture he is bound to blunder, to be badly mistaken, to wander. Had they known the Scriptures, they would have known that there is nothing in Deut. 25:5-6 that makes it applicable to the life hereafter, and they would also have known that the Old Testament in various passages teaches the resurrection of the body. Certainly those who try to base their argument on Scripture (Deut. 25:5, 6) should know Scripture! They should be acquainted with Scripture as a whole, not just with one passage, which they then misapply. Even the Old Testament is not lacking in references to the bodily resurrection. Clearest, perhaps, are Psa. 16:9-11 and Dan. 12:2. Worthy of consideration are also Job 19:25-27; Psa. 17:15; 73:24-26; Isa. 26:19; Ezek. 37:1-14; Hos. 6:2, 13:14. And had they recognized the power of God (Rom. 4:17; Heb. 11:19), they would have understood that God is able to raise the dead in such a manner that marriage will not long be needed.

Not knowing the Scriptures not only caused the Sadducees to err, but it has caused error down through the ages. The dark ages of Christendom were times when the Bible was kept back from the people. On the other hand, the great revivals & spiritual awakenings have come as people were taught the Word of God, and read it for themselves. The godliest families are Bible-reading families. The holiest men and women are Bible-reading people.

Let us not be ignorant of the Bible, lest we fall into some deadly error. Let us rather read it diligently and make it our rule of faith and practice. Let us labor to spread the Bible over the world. The more the book is known, the better the world will be. Do you know the Scriptures? Have you ever read the whole Bible? Do you attend Bible study on a regular basis? How can you know the answer to life’s big questions if you don’t know the Scriptures? How can you keep from erring

from the truth if you do not know the Word of God? Don't be like the Sadducees. Learn the Word of God, and you will also know of the power of God. And by faith in His power you can see God do great things.

So after giving a rebuke, we see next of all:

2. He Answers Their Question – Notice what Jesus goes on to say in vv.25-27, “For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. But concerning the dead, that they rise, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the burning bush passage, how God spoke to him, saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living. You are therefore greatly mistaken.” Resurrection is not the restoration or resumption of life as we know it; it is the entrance into a new life that is different. He demolishes their false assumption that marriage is resumed at the time of the resurrection. Since there will be no death, the race will not have to reproduce. The saved will be like the angels in this respect; yes, like the angels whose very existence the Sadducees also deny (Acts 23:8). Jesus did not say that we would *become* angels or be like the angels in everything, for God's children are higher than the angels. He said that in our resurrection bodies, we would be sexless like the angels; and therefore marriage would no longer exist. Our relationships with one another will transcend the kind of relationships that we have here on earth. On earth it seems to take an intimate act of marriage to bring two people close together in a loving union, but in heaven, we have a close, loving relationship with everyone. We'll be able to hug each other and maybe even give each other a holy kiss without it leading to lust and a sinful, sexual relationship.

By the way, Jesus & Mohammad are in total disagreement here. Islam teaches that if you die in Jihad, you will enjoy a paradise of endless sex with 72 virgins. How can Jesus & Mohammad both be right? They are not. Mohammad was a false prophet who erred not knowing the clear teaching of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

While He was correcting their bad theology, Jesus decided to give other reasons why the Sadducees were wrong in their beliefs. So beginning in v.26, Jesus refers to another passage of Scripture where God spoke from the burning bush saying, “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Then He says in v.27, “He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living. You are therefore greatly mistaken.” The way God spoke of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, it is fair to imply that they were indeed still alive, though they had been dead for some time. And since they died not fully receiving the promises of God, it would take a resurrection for them to fully inherit the promises. Surely there is life after death! There is coming a day when the dead shall rise from the dead, and those who believe in Christ will have new bodies, like unto the resurrection body of Jesus Christ. Our new bodies will not get sick, suffer pain, or die. We will have new capabilities. We will be super men & women in a wonderful new world.

Now as you consider the question of eternity and eternal life, who are you going to believe? Will you believe the likes of a Carl Sagan? Will you believe some atheist professor in some university? Will you believe some religious guru somewhere? Or will you believe Jesus, who died, and rose again from the dead? He knows what is beyond death, because He has been there. No only that, but He is the eternal Son of God. He knows something about eternity! In every sense Jesus Christ is Himself the cause of His people's resurrection. He said, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live; and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never, never die....” Put your faith in Him, and you shall have eternal life.

Over on the straits of Gibraltar, on the Pillars of Hercules, was inscribed the Latin words “Me plus ultra”, i.e. nothing beyond. But when Columbus discovered America and return, they

scratched out the word “Me” and it then said, “More beyond.” When Jesus died and rose again, He declared to the world, “More beyond.”

Last of all, Jesus answers:

III. A SPIRITUAL QUESTION

Now one of the scribes came to ask Jesus a question. The scribes were the experts in the law of the Old Testament. Now notice with me:

A. The Question Stated – In the last of v.28 a scribe asked Jesus, “Which is the first commandment of all?” Among the scribes, this was one of the most common questions among the scribes. The rabbis, devoted to hairsplitting legalism, carried on lengthy debates about the commandments, arguing whether a particular one was great or small, heavy or light. So they debated the question, “Which of the 613 commandments, is foremost of all?”

Understanding the right priorities has a place in our relationship with God. If that is not done, it easily degenerates into majoring on minors. In Matt. 23:23 Jesus very concisely contrasts the good way with the bad: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you tithe mint, dill, cummin, but have neglected the more important requirements of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness.” Elsewhere, He said that they were “blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!” (Matthew 23:24). So let’s see:

B. The Answer – Notice the answer of Jesus in vv.29-31, “The first of all the commandments is: ‘Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” Jesus made love the most important thing in life, because “love is the fulfilling of the Law” (Rom. 13:8-10). Furthermore, the Bible declares that God is love (1 Jn. 4:8). Naturally, He would expect His children to practice love as well. The apostle Paul said in Eph. 5:2 that we are to “walk in love, as Christ also has loved us....” Notice the two-fold requirements of love.

1. We Must Love God - This love must be directed first of all toward God with every aspect of our being. The heart, soul, mind, and strength must cooperate in loving God. The heart is the hub of the wheel of man’s existence, the mainspring of all his thoughts, words, and deeds (Prov. 4:23). The soul is here probably the seat of man’s emotional activity; the mind is not only the seat and center of his purely intellectual life but also of his dispositions and attitudes. What is meant in all these passages is that man should love God with all the “faculties” with which God has endowed him.

Moreover, man must use all these powers to the full. Note fourfold “all.” The point is that God’s wholehearted love must not be answered in a halfhearted manner. When God loves, he loves the *world*; when He gives, He even gives His own Son. Greater love, more marvelous self-giving, is impossible.

Do you love God with *all* your heart and mind and soul? If not, then you are breaking His commandment and you need a Savior. There are too many people, even in the church, who love the world, or love their career, or love other persons or things more than God.

2. We Must Love Others - This love must be directed not only toward God (Deut. 6:5) but also toward man (Lev. 19:18). Notice it says love your neighbor “as yourself.” Man has

been created with love for himself. That love for self should be the measure whereby he decides how to love his neighbor. This is a very practical precept, a rule of thumb. And that “neighbor,” moreover, is anyone who has been providentially placed in his path for sympathy and help.

You can't really obey the second commandment until you obey the first. To say that we love the Lord is one thing, but we must show that we love Him by our actions. If you love the Lord, you will have a greater capacity to love others.

In v.32 we see that this scribe accepted the answer given by Jesus with delighted, unqualified approval. It is clear that the words of Jesus had made a very deep impression upon this man, and that he is honest enough to admit it, even though many of his fellow scribes were opposed to Jesus. The man also adds something in v.33, namely, that such love as here described “means far more than all burnt-offerings and sacrifices.” It would seem that this man was rather thoroughly at home in the Scriptures.

Conclusion: So we see that once again, Jesus had great wisdom in answering the questions of life. If you want answers, look to Jesus. Look to His Word.

Thus, Jesus said to the man, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” This man was just a step away from eternal life. If this scribe would now, by God's grace and power, take one more step, and actually believe in Jesus as his Savior and Lord, he would have advanced from a position of being “not far from” to one of being “inside” the kingdom of God.

There may be some here today that are just a step away from salvation. While most people are far from God's kingdom, you are in church today. You have listened today. Why don't you take the next step, and enter the Kingdom of God. Just believe in Jesus as your Savior & Lord.

Sources: William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); J.C. Ryle (1816-1900), *Mark: Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993); Jerry Vines (notes from sermons tape of 4/1/84); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Diligent: Mark* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1987). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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