

## PRIORITIES FOR LIFE (Mk. 12:13-17)

Previously we examined the ‘vultures circling their prey’ (v. 1-12). However, they miserably failed to trap Jesus with their first question, **Mk. 11:28** *And say unto him, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority to do these things? ... So, they tried again, Mk. 12:13* *And they [the Sanhedrin] send unto him certain of the Pharisees and of the Herodians, to catch him in his words. 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: Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not? 15* *Shall we give, or shall we not give?*

For three years they have been searching for evidence to charge Jesus but each time their plans have been blocked ... and even in their temple in Jerusalem, they were having difficulty. One of the greatest obstacles to their conniving was the people ... Jesus was simply so popular, so the Jewish leaders, - after having got together *again*, - decided **Mk. 12:13** *to catch him in his words ... 15 ... But he, knowing their hypocrisy ...* This was an official delegation of hypocrites! ‘Hypocrite’ is a Greek word which literally means “an interpreter from underneath”. In ancient Greece the actors wore masks to indicate the character they were playing, and they interpreted the story from underneath their masks ... That is what the religious hypocrites were doing ... and they were two groups, - Pharisees and Herodians, - who normally could not abide each other!

So, they thought they had found a way to entrap Jesus by using the subject of the Romans as bait. The Romans were the pagan invaders who had taken over their country, and even though the Herodians and the Pharisees could not ‘stand’ them, they managed to work alongside them in sufferance ... The Romans weren’t concerned about what Jesus or the Jewish leaders taught, - they had no interest in religious arguments or debate, - but they were watchful for any form of uprising or insurrection ... and that is where the Pharisees and the Herodians, - an awkward alliance, - reckoned they might have an opportunity against Jesus. ... There are the first two marks of a hypocrite, - when it suits their purposes they will side with people they normally would have nothing to do with, and secondly, they will say anything to gain ground.

They approach Jesus with warm words, **14** *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 ... They called Jesus “Rabbi”!* Previously, here is what they called Him, **Mk. 3:22** *And the scribes which came down from Jerusalem said, He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils ... but now they*

were addressing Him as “Rabbi”! Through clenched teeth, these hypocrites were honouring Him with a title it must have sickened them to speak. They hated Him, and yet they had on their ‘masks’ to hide their hypocrisy, ... *we know that thou art true* ... that’s what Nicodemus had *sincerely* said to Jesus, **Jn. 3:2** *Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God* ... but these hypocrites didn’t mean a word of what they were saying to Jesus for they were ‘lying through their teeth’ ... **Mk. 12:14** *Master, we know that thou art true, and ... thou ...teachest the way of God in truth.* ... They did not believe any of that, not even for a milli-second! How did they think they could get away with telling Jesus such a bare-faced lie! ... Actually, they were saying the truth, but for devious reasons ... and Jesus ‘saw through’ them.

So, that’s three marks of a hypocrite, - they will side with people they normally would despise, to suit their purposes ... they will say anything to draw you in ... and they will try to use the truth to catch you. And then they introduced the issue they reckoned might implicate Jesus, **14** *Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not?* **15** *Shall we give, or shall we not give?* ... “We’re just asking for we would like to know how such an exemplary Master Rabbi as You Who teaches the truth would handle the subject of whether or not we should give taxes to Caesar.” ... Surrounded by all those people, they expected Jesus ‘to toe the party line’ and say they *shouldn’t* pay the taxes to Caesar.

They were trying to dupe the wrong Person because Jesus already knew they were a bunch of evil underhanded hypocrites! They asked their question hoping to implicate Him so they could report Him to the Roman authorities and get Him arrested for insurrection. ... Should we be paying taxes to the idol-worshipping Gentiles who have conquered our country? Absolutely not! That is how any decent Jew would have answered. They would not even have had to think about it ... so it was a leading question, should we pay tax to the Romans? ... Back when Jesus was a child, c. 6 AD, Judas of Galilee led a rebellion over the issue of paying taxes to the Romans, - but the Romans crushed his revolt (Acts 5:37), so the Pharisees and the Herodians knew what they were doing, - they were trying to set Jesus up!

Jesus knew what He was doing too though ... and He was better organised than the enemy, and He confronted them, **15** *Why tempt ye me?* They reckoned Jesus would have said, “No, don’t pay any taxes to the Romans” ... and then the Pharisees would have had Him! ... He’s bound to say “No”! ... and that is why the Herodians officials were there. ... **Mt. 22:18** *But Jesus perceived their wickedness* ... **Lk. 20:23** *But he perceived their craftiness* ... **Mk. 12:15** *But he, knowing their hypocrisy* ... They weren’t looking for answers for they were not

interested in the truth. Their religion was totally incompatible with the truth, and there wasn't an honest 'bone in their body'! They simply wanted to trap Jesus ... but He knew what they were at!

Very cleverly, He said to them, <sup>15</sup> *bring me a penny, that I may see it.* ... He disrupted their flow of thought for what does He need a penny for?! ... It was very clever because no self-respecting Jewish patriot would carry a Roman coin with the Emperor's face on one side and a reference to a Roman idol on the other, - the Jews would not carry such a coin, and Jesus was telling them to go and find one and bring it to Him. ... By the way, the Jews carried their own currency, - the shekels, and copper coins with no images on them.

So, they brought a Roman coin, <sup>16</sup> *And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? And they said unto him, Caesar's* ... That was a dirty word, - 'Caesar' ... you could imagine how they would have spoken it. Caesar considered himself to be a god, and one of his titles was 'Pontifex Maximus', a pagan name which means the 'chief priest' of all the gods. ... So, these coins with the Caesar's head on them signified the worship of idols ... of Caesars. And the Jews would not use them, instead they would pay the Roman tax in the equivalent of their Hebrew money.

Undoubtedly, Jesus shared the same conviction for, of course, the Romans *were* idolaters and blasphemers. Their culture was pagan and ungodly. They cared nothing for Jehovah and the Law of Moses. They encouraged religions to co-habit alongside each other, - multifaith, - but Judaism would play no part.

Well, Jesus took the Jewish leaders by surprise when He said, <sup>17</sup> *Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's* ... You could have heard a pin drop! What was He saying?! *Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's* ... Pay the tax you owe for it is a legitimate debt and it belongs to Caesar. ... It doesn't matter where He comes from, you have to pay him what you owe! ... *Shock horror!*

Let's translate that into our own setting? ... Do you know where every penny of your taxes and National Insurance goes? It goes to many places which are for our good, - health, education, security, and many legitimate organisations which we benefit from. Sometimes, though, it goes to organisations and destinations we don't agree with ... and we shall never agree with ... but we still have a duty to pay to the state. That is what Jesus is saying here ... and Paul also taught governments, - whether they accept it or not, - are put in place to be servants of God for the sake of order and structure within our society, **Rom. 13:1** *Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but*

of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. <sup>2</sup> Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God ... <sup>3</sup> For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. ... <sup>4</sup> For he is the minister [*διάκονος*] of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. <sup>5</sup> Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. <sup>6</sup> For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers [*λειτουργός, ministers of the state*], attending continually upon this very thing. <sup>7</sup> Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due ... And even Peter, who had drawn his sword and cut off an ear of one of the officials, came to understand, **1 Peter 2:13** Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; <sup>14</sup> Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. <sup>15</sup> For so is the will of God.

That is not to say we live in a religious country, with rules straight out of the Bible for sadly that is *not* the case ... society is becoming more vain and rebellious against God and His ways. Nevertheless, He has set in place the order of law through the governments, and He has a purpose for every one of them, even if they don't believe it. That is what Jesus was teaching these Jews.

He also said, <sup>17</sup> *Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.* We should be thankful for government because they produce many laws and regulations which improve our lives. If there was no law, you could drive on whatever side of the street you wanted. If there was no law, stealing wouldn't be a crime, or rape ... If there was no law, you could do whatever you like and there would be no consequences ... but law is an institution of God to keep order.

... What should we do, though, when man's law contradicts God's law? Does man's law take precedence? No, for *render ... to God the things that are God's.* That is the Christian's priority. For instance, they can try to redefine marriage, they can introduce fanciful terms to describe whether you think you are male, female or whatever else ... they can call the murder of children by any fancy name they like, and other such abhorrent abominations ... but when the law of man contradicts the law of God, God's people have a responsibility first and foremost to be obedient to God.

But, even Caesar did some good in Israel, - he built bridges, he constructed aqueducts to bring in water, he provided military protection ... God has put them in place, and we legitimately owe them taxes, - and that is what Jesus was saying, - but when it comes to who we serve, it is a choice, inevitably, between God and man. As a Christian, your priority is to serve God and show

obedience to Him ... and He'll bless you for it. In some countries today, the Christians' choice to stand for Him sometimes brings opposition and persecution ... we even see it in our own country, for example, when Christian teachers or judges or bed and breakfast owners put Christ first.

So, <sup>17</sup> Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. ... That is how Jesus explained it, And they marvelled at him. They did not like what He said for, once again, they had failed to trap Him. Luke says, **Lk. 20:26** they could not take hold of his words before the people: and they marvelled at his answer, and held their peace. ... The coin belongs to Caesar, but Caesar is not the final authority, - no government is, - ... only God is, and the Jewish leaders knew it for read on down to v.30 where one of them said, <sup>30</sup> And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. ... Hypocritical rascals though they were, they knew the difference between right and wrong.

There is a final part to this story, and it is when the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the scribes, the whole Sanhedrin and council of elders brought Jesus before Pontius Pilate, **Lk. 23:1** And the whole multitude of them arose, and led him unto Pilate. <sup>2</sup> And they began to accuse him, saying, We found this fellow perverting the nation, and *forbidding to give tribute to Caesar*, saying that he himself is Christ a King. ... An absolute lie from the pit of Hell! ... To stop your influence for Christ, the enemy will side with people they normally would despise, ... they will say anything to draw you in ... they will try to use the truth to catch you ... and when all that fails, they will use lies and fabrications for if they did it against our Saviour, they will do it against His people.

It has been a different kind of a study, and yet it is one the Gospel account includes at this important time in Jesus' life, leading to His arrest and crucifixion. It is an encouragement to be steadfast for Him, as Paul wrote, **Eph. 6:12** we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. <sup>13</sup> Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. ... Someone has rightly said, "I would rather stand with God and be judged by the world, than stand with the world and be judged by God". I trust that is true ... May God bless our study of His Word today. Amen.