**Uniquely Jesus**  March 19, 2017

Mark 12:13-34

Since the beginning of his public ministry there had been tension between Jesus and the religious leaders. Over the years this tension had grown into resolve on the part of the religious leaders, to discredit, to embarrass, even to eliminate Jesus. But their efforts never seemed to gain any lasting traction.

On the day, we know as Palm Sunday, large crowds of people welcomed Jesus to Jerusalem. When he finally got to the Temple, it was late in the day, so he “looked around at everything,” and then went back to Bethany where he was staying.

(Bethany is less than 2 miles from Jerusalem – John 11:18)

The next day, Monday, Jesus returned to the Temple and drove out the moneychangers and merchandise sellers. His reason for doing so: “My house will be called a house of prayer.” At the end of the day, he again left the city.

When Jesus returned to the Temple on Tuesday morning, the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders, furious because of what he had done the day before, were waiting, to confront him with a question, whose answer they hoped would lead to his arrest and possibly, even to his death: **by what authority are you doing these things?**

Jesus, as he often did, answered their question with one of his own.

When they refused to answer him, saying, “We don’t know,” Jesus too refused to tell them the source of his authority.

Instead Jesus told three parables – all of which, though subtly, nonetheless, described how the religious leaders of Israel had been unfaithful to God.

Mark 12:12 says, the religious leaders knew the stories were about them.

But because the mood of the crowd was in favor of Jesus, they *“left [Jesus] and went away.”*

They didn’t “go away” for good…in that they gave up. They’d only withdrawn, so as to come up with a new strategy.

We learn from them, that some people when they meet Jesus, rather than becoming receptive, become increasingly resistant towards him.

Coffee/question: why do you think that is???

Mark 12:13.

The last time we read of these two groups, collaborating together was back in Mark 3:6 – after Jesus had healed a man with a shriveled hand on the Sabbath. Remember: these two groups were adversaries; due to the fact that they were on opposite sides of the political spectrum.

gotquestions.org says: *“The Herodians favored submitting to the Herods, and therefore to Rome, for political expediency. But in the minds of the Pharisees, this support of Herod compromised Jewish independence. For this reason, it was difficult for the Herodians and the Pharisees to agree on anything. But one thing did unite them—opposing Jesus.”* https://www.gotquestions.org/Herodians.html

Remember the saying – the enemy of my enemy is my friend.

v.14-15a.

This is more than a simple tax question – as if questions about taxes were ever simple, am I right? ☺

Embedded in this question was a secondary question, though it really was the primary: should we accept; submit to Caesar’s authority?

Ever since the Babylonian invasion more than 500 years earlier, the Jews had been ruled over by other world powers. Rome was just the latest in a long series of oppressors.

If Jesus said not to pay taxes, in addition to celebrating him, the people might have read into his answer, a call to revolt, and this would have brought the wrath of Rome down on Jesus.

If Jesus said to pay taxes to Rome, he would have avoided the anger of Rome, but the Jewish people would have viewed him as a collaborating traitor, and turned away from him.

The Pharisees and Herodians were confident they had Jesus backed into a corner. “Pick your poison” was their attitude.

v.15b-16.

The debate on this particular day had started with an authority question.

And even though the Pharisees’ and Herodians’ question was political, Jesus in his answer, returned to the issue of authority.

**v.17a –** *Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s….*

According to Jesus, Caesar had been given authority.

That’s why he told them “to give to Caesar what is his.”

This answer so surprised Jesus’ opponents that they didn’t press the issue – they didn’t ask why would God let Caesar rule over Israel; or why the exile hadn’t ended when their ancestors had returned to the land?

Jesus always speaks the truth, even if that truth rocks a person’s world.

Why is that?

Because in his own words, “it is only the truth that sets a person free.”

Jesus came to free people - even those who considered themselves his enemies.

Jesus could have stopped there. But he pressed on.

**v.17a-b:** *“Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and give to God what is God’s.”*

Caesar claimed to be god; to be the ultimate authority in the world.

Jesus placed Caesar, not above, but under God.

Even Caesar was accountable to God.

Even Caesar needed to give to God what is God’s.

v.17b – *“And they were amazed to him.”*

**Who was amazed?**

I think those listening in on this debate were amazed.

But I also think the Pharisees and Herodians were amazed.

Jesus’ answer was brilliant in its simplicity!

Jesus has this remarkable ability to take complex issues and make them clear, understandable.

But don’t miss this.

The Pharisees and Herodians might have been amazed, but they remained firmly fixed in their unbelief of Jesus. When they lost the argument, they walked away.

They refused to give to God what is God’s.

Jesus would shortly confirm just what that was.

What Jesus said that day applies universally.

It’s applicable in every culture, and in every time.

You and I are to give to government what government is due and to give to God what God is due.

**Give to the government what is the government’s**

Romans 13:1-7 adds detail regarding what we owe government.

- our **submission** in those areas where God has entrusted them with authority

- our **obedience** in doing what is right

- any **taxes** that are owed

- our **respect and honor** as an authority established by God, who acts on God’s behalf, even if they don’t recognize God.

There is also good counsel found in **Jeremiah 29:4-7.**

While this passage applied to a specific group of Jewish people who had been carried into exile, I believe there are enduring principles found in this passage.

- put down roots – build a house; plant a garden; have children and grandchildren

- seek the peace and prosperity of your city; invest yourself in the place you live;

pray for your city; for as your city prospers, so will your life.

As followers of Jesus we are to cooperate with those who govern in our city, doing all within our means to make it a good place to live – even though… we know everything in this world has an expiry date on it.

We do this because of the surprising statement made by the Spirit of God in Revelation 14:13: *“Their deeds will follow them.”*

What we do here on this earth – building, planting, raising, has a “carry forward” component. We are not told how this will happen, just that it will.

**Give to God what is God’s.**

Matthew 6:24 – our devotion; our loyalty; our service.

Romans 12:1 – our worship as we offer our bodies to him as a living sacrifice

It’s not either/or.

We give to both the temporal government what it is owed and we are to give to God what he is owed.

As the Pharisees and the Herodians tagged out; the Sadducees tagged in.

**Who were the Sadducees?**

“During the time of Christ and the New Testament era, the Sadducees were aristocrats. They tended to be wealthy. Even though they held the majority of the 70 seats of the ruling council called the Sanhedrin, much of the time they had to go along with the ideas of the Pharisees, who though in the minority, were popular with the masses.

Religiously, the Sadducees were more conservative than the Pharisees in one main area of doctrine. The Pharisees gave oral tradition equal authority with the written Word of God, while the Sadducees considered only the written Word to be from God, especially the books of Moses (Genesis through Deuteronomy).

That said, many of the Sadducees others beliefs contradicted Scripture:

1. The Sadducees denied God's involvement in everyday life – they were deists\*

\* de·ism, *noun*. Belief in the existence of a supreme being, specifically of a creator who does not intervene in the universe. The term is used chiefly of an intellectual movement of the 17th and 18th centuries that accepted the existence of a creator on the basis of reason but rejected belief in a supernatural deity who interacts with humankind.

2. The Sadducees believed the human soul perished at death. They denied any resurrection of the dead – v.18.

3. The Sadducees denied the existence of angels and demons ([Acts 23:8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2023.8)).

Because the Sadducees were more concerned with politics than religion, they were unconcerned with Jesus until they became afraid He might bring unwanted Roman attention. It was at this point that the Sadducees and Pharisees united and conspired to put Christ to death.”

https://www.gotquestions.org/Sadducees-Pharisees.html

v.18-23.

The Sadducees case study is from Deuteronomy 25:5-6 – which detailed the obligation of a living brother to ensure the name of his dead brother carried on.

The Deuteronomy example didn’t involve seven brothers.

The Sadducees added this flair on their own.

v.24a-b – *“Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures…”*

The Sadducees prided themselves in revering the written word of God; and Jesus told them they didn’t know it!!!

But did their reverence of Scripture persuade them to re-evaluate their beliefs?

There’s more. v.24 - *“Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God?”*

According to Jesus, what is the source of every error?

The Scriptures

2 Timothy 3:16: *All Scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.*

The Creator God has communicated verbally.

God has also created us with a capacity to receive, to hear and to understand his communication.

This (hold up the Bible) is his message to humankind.

There are things which the Scriptures reveal that you and I do not instinctively know; there is knowledge here that is not contained in any other source.

The power of God

Psalm 62:11: *One thing God has spoken, two things have I heard; that you, O God, are strong, and that you, O Lord, are loving.*

God has power to make things from nothing.

Hebrews 11:3: *…the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.*

Jesus said the Sadducees were in error because they refused to believe that God had the power to raise the dead; to change what is mortal into what is immortal.

v.25a – *When the dead rise…*

Jesus didn’t say “if” the dead rise…he said “when” they rise…

What does resurrection mean?

v.25.

Resurrection does not mean resuscitation.

Resurrection means only one thing - it is the reversal of death.

A resurrected person lives again after being dead.

Luke 20:36 – *“…they will never die again...”*

One major implication of the resurrection was identified by Jesus.

Jesus said: when the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage, but will be like the angels.

The passage is not saying, resurrected humans will become angels.

Jesus said, when the dead rise, like the angels, they will not marry or procreate.

v.26-27.

It is easy to miss this. But it speaks volumes to who Jesus is.

The Sadducees believed that the first five books of the OT Scriptures were the most authoritative. So, guess where Jesus quoted from? Exodus 3:6.

If Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had ceased to exist, then how could God speak of being in relationship with them?

And further…when God spoke of them, please take note - he did not do so in the past tense, but in the present.

The human soul is immortal.

But Jesus is not just saying, God is the God of disembodied spirits.

Rather, God is the God of the living.

1 Corinthians 15:50-54. (NLT)

*What I am saying, dear brothers and sisters, is that our physical bodies cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. These dying bodies cannot inherit what will last forever.* ***51****But let me reveal to you a wonderful secret. We will not all die, but we will all be transformed!****52****It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we who are living will also be transformed.****53****For our dying bodies must be transformed into bodies that will never die; our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies.* ***54****Then, when our dying bodies have been transformed into bodies that will never die, this Scripture will be fulfilled: “Death is swallowed up in victory.*

**Implications of the teaching given by Jesus in this debate.**

\* Without a moral foundation, truth in our culture is becoming increasingly fluid.

If we are not to be swept along, tossed back and forth, blown here and there, by the latest thing that comes long, then according to Jesus, we must know the Scriptures and the power of God.

This book is the plumb line that evaluates; that measures; that distinguishes, that teaches us what is good and what is evil, according to the Creator who made us.

Jesus said you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.

If you and I, if people in our culture are to experience this freedom which Jesus promised, then we must know this book, and the God who spoke verbally to us.

This is where we engage with people – regardless of their receptivity.

\* The Creator God will recreate.

Jesus said in Matthew 19:28 that there will be a renewal of all things.

This is the source of our hope…and our courage.

N.T. Wright: *“People who believe that God is going to recreate the whole world, including their own dead bodies, are much more likely to do daring and risky things.”* Mark for Everyone, p.167.

This is why we as a community of believers in Jesus are taking the steps we are taking in ministry this year – in life groups; in kids’ ministry; in hiring an additional staff person; in building “Grace Gardens.” We believe our deeds will follow us.

The majority of Jesus’ opponents remained such, even after dialoguing with him.

But one, v.28, a teacher of the law, somehow got past his pride, and saw the truth which Jesus spoke of.

Jesus said to him, v.34, *“You are not far from the kingdom of God.”*

This teacher had begun to grasp, that the greatest commandment was to love God with all of one’s heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love one’s neighbor as themselves.

This is what all are to give to God.

This teacher was so close. I think his story was purposefully left hanging.

He believed. But did he receive Jesus?

Our culture is becoming increasingly post-Christian.

But this is not the only time in history where a culture has been where ours is.

Jesus is not threatened by Canada’s secularism and skepticism.

Jesus is still very much at work in the world.

He still encounters people and makes himself known to them.

Jesus continues to change the lives of those who come to him.

**The Blessing**

Hebrews 12:28: ….[we are receiving] a kingdom that cannot be shaken.

Life Group Discussion Questions

Mark 12:13-34

1. How do we encourage and help people who don’t believe the Bible, to know the Scriptures, and in the turn the power of the God who spoke them?
2. Is the hope of the renewal of all things, Matthew 19:28, a hope just for Christians? Explain.
3. What were questions you asked about Jesus or the Christian faith that were insincere, or merely smokescreens that allowed you to continue believing, thinking, and living life without God? Why did you ask those questions?
4. If the greatest commandment is to love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself, what must naturally be the greatest sin? What do you think of that?
5. Read 1 John 4:20-21. What do these verses teach about the relationship between love for God and love for people?
6. What does it mean to love our neighbor as ourselves? How do we do that?
7. Read Mark 12:34. What do you think Jesus meant when he told the teacher of the law, “You are not far from the kingdom of God?”

Was this an encouragement? a warning?

1. How can someone be near the kingdom and yet, not in the kingdom?
2. Read John 3:5. How does one enter the kingdom of God?

It is the heart which perceives God and not the reason. That is what faith is: God perceived by the heart, not by the reason. [**Blaise Pascal**](http://www.azquotes.com/author/11361-Blaise_Pascal)

[Lord, help me to do great things as though they were little, since I do them with your power; And little things as though they were great, since I do them in your name!](http://www.azquotes.com/quote/859943) [**Blaise Pascal**](http://www.azquotes.com/author/11361-Blaise_Pascal)

Belief is a wise wager. Granted that faith cannot be proved, what harm will come to you if you gamble on its truth and it proves false? If you gain, you gain all; if you lose, you lose nothing. Wager, then, without hesitation, that He exists. [**Blaise Pascal**](http://www.azquotes.com/author/11361-Blaise_Pascal)