

## Discredit Jesus? I Don't Think So! (Mark 12:13-40)

In anticipation of Resurrection Sunday, we've been taking a look at what Jesus did and what Jesus said during what we call "Passion Week". He and his disciples were spending their nights in Bethany with friends. During the day, they visited the Temple, where Jesus taught the crowds and contended with His enemies.

As He entered Jerusalem on what we call Palm Sunday, there was great excitement and fanfare. The crowds thought that He was their promised Messiah, the coming King who would lead a rebellion against Rome and establish Israel at the head of the nations. But instead of attacking Rome, He attacked the religious establishment. The cursed fig tree was a condemnation of an apostate nation that had failed to produce the fruit of righteousness. And by driving out the moneychangers from the Temple, he condemned an apostate religious system.

Now, there is some disagreement about which day all these things took place, but please do not let these differences of opinion tip you over. The important thing is that Jesus did enter Jerusalem triumphantly in perfect accordance with prophecy. The people were excited, and tens of thousands were hailing Him as their Messiah.

That did not make the religious establishment happy. They met together, numerous times, trying to figure out how to get rid of Jesus. They knew they had a serious problem: Jesus was incredibly popular. The people were hanging on His every word. And He was teaching in parables that attacked the very foundation of their power structure. He said things like:

*"Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED HAS BECOME THE CHIEF CORNERSTONE. THIS WAS THE LORD'S DOING, AND IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES'? "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. (Matthew 21:42-43)*

The religious rulers knew He was indicting them, indicting their doctrine and indicting their behavior.

So here we are in Mark 12, beginning with verse 12:

*And they sought to lay hands on Him, but feared the multitude, for they knew He had spoken the parable against them. So they left Him and went away. (Mark 12:12)*

Oh, they wanted to arrest Him right then in the worst way. But with His incredible popularity, how were they going to get away with it? They knew that they would somehow have to discredit Him in front of the crowds before they could carry out their murderous plot. Somehow they were going to have to convince the crowds that he was a real and present danger to their society. They wanted to demonstrate that He was an imposter, not the promised Messiah.

They came up with a plan. First, they would try to discredit Him politically. Then, they would try to discredit Him logically. Finally, they would attempt to discredit Him doctrinally.

You know, sin and hate often make really strange bedfellows. These conspirators were composed of four groups that really didn't like each other very much. You had the Pharisees, who were the religious conservatives of their day. They believed in the full cannon of Jewish scripture. They also relied on years of Rabbinic commentary, the

Talmud and the Mishnah. They believed in miracles. They believed in resurrection and life after death. They believed in the existence of angels.

The Sadducees, on the other hand, didn't believe in any of that. They considered only the writings of Moses to be inspired – the Pentateuch, that is the first five books of the Bible. They were the learned, liberal intellectuals of their day and they considered the Pharisees to be overtaken by foolish superstition. They were annihilationists in that they didn't believe in any sort of afterlife at all. When you die, that's it, so of course they didn't believe in resurrection. (Lazarus must have really sent them into a tizzy, a man was raised from the dead after four days. No wonder they wanted to kill him!) The Sadducees didn't believe in miracles. They didn't believe in angels. But they controlled the priesthood and so they had the real power in Jerusalem.

And then you had the Herodians. The Herodians were essentially Hellenists. They were lovers of pagan art, architecture, athletics, and so forth. They were completely immersed in Greek culture and were only Jews in a very nominal sense. Why would these guys have anything to do with the fiercely religious Pharisees? Well, they were both interested in maintaining the status quo. So, yet another unholy alliance.

Finally, you had the scribes. Now, most of these were also Pharisees, so I guess they fit into more than one group. But fundamentally, they were the lawyers, the experts on Levitical Law. They interpreted the Law and told people what was permissible, what was not, and how transgressions were to be punished.

All four of these groups would be involved in attempting to discredit Jesus. Well good luck with that! If you're going to try to contend with the Son of God, it really isn't going to be a fair fight.

*Then they sent to Him some of the Pharisees and the Herodians, to catch Him in His words. When they had come, they said to Him, "Teacher, we know that You are true, and care about no one; for You do not regard the person of men, but teach the way of God in truth. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? (Mark 12:13-14)*

The Herodians would have close contact with the secular government so they were useful in springing this political trap. If Jesus demonstrated that He was an insurrectionist, that He was guilty of sedition, they would be the ones to spread the word.

Of course, they bait the trap with flattery. It's a common strategy of Satan. But then comes the trigger: "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar?" If Jesus answers "Yes", it would discredit Him among the people, who were hoping for a political Messiah. If Jesus answers "No", then it would brand Him as a rebel, and the Romans would then take care of Him.

*Shall we pay, or shall we not pay?" But He, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, "Why do you test Me? Bring Me a denarius that I may see it." (Mark 12:15)*

A denarius was a small silver coin that represented one day's wages for the average laborer. I wonder if He asked his opponents for a coin to demonstrate the reality that they were benefitting from the use of government currency. It is really popular right now to be anti-government. But as inefficient and corrupt as any government might be, we still derive benefit from the authority structure in place. Roads, fire protection, defense, currency, a legal structure, all these things are benefits we get from our government.

Human government is ordained by God to keep our depravity in check. We can see in the world today what happens when government breaks down. (Would you rather be in Syria or Liberia?)

*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." And they marveled at Him. (Mark 12:16-17)*

Jesus was not evading the question at all. Essentially, He was saying “Yes, pay the tax.” Honoring God does not mean dishonoring human government by refusing to pay for the privileges—a relatively orderly society, police protection, good roads, courts, and so forth—one enjoys. But He qualified the answer by limiting the honor human government is due. Whenever a government demands honor due only to God, we must render only to God. Whenever a king makes himself out to be God, it is our duty refuse to bow down. That is where we draw the line in the sand. Render those things due God only to God.

But folks, pay your taxes!

*Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. (Romans 13:1)*

*And they marveled at Him.* The word “marveled” is *thaumazō* (θαυμάζω) in the Greek. The implication is that they wondered and admired His answer. The trap failed and it failed miserably. Jesus spoke divine truth, and everyone knew it.

So the Pharisees failed, and left with their tail between their legs. Now it was the Sadducees’ turn and being the intellectuals that they were, they decided to trap Jesus with logic. Remember, these guys didn’t believe in the supernatural at all. The thought of a resurrection was absolute foolishness to them so they decided to present this ridiculous scenario.

By the way, they were well-practiced in this sort of thing. The Pharisees were always trying to prove them wrong, prove that there was indeed life after death, a resurrection. But since Sadducees only accepted the first 5 books of the Jewish canon – our Old Testament – they had trouble doing so.

*Then some Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Him; and they asked Him, saying: "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. 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. Therefore, in the resurrection, when they rise, whose wife will she be? For all seven had her as wife." (Mark 12:18-23)*

What they are referring to is the law of Levirate marriage. In order to make sure that one’s line of inheritance didn’t die out, if a man died, it was the duty of his brother to take her as his wife in order to produce children to his brother’s line. But in this ridiculous scenario, the Sadducees were trying to demonstrate a logical flaw in resurrection doctrine. “Okay, so all these folks get raised from the dead and now you’ve got a woman with seven husbands. How’s that going to work?”

*Jesus answered and said to them, "Are you not therefore mistaken, because you do not know the Scriptures nor the power of God?" (Mark 12:24)*

Oh wow ... burn! This is a serious dig. These guys prided themselves on being the intellectual elite. Yet Jesus tells them "You don't even know your own scriptures and you certainly don't know God and His power."

*For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. (Mark 12:25)*

Now, I've known people who are very troubled by this. "But I love my wife; I love my husband. I don't want to give them up in the world to come." Don't worry about it; You will know your mate in the world to come.

Jesus is talking about the issue of procreation. There will be no need to procreate because nobody is going to die.

*And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; **there shall be no more death**, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." (Revelation 21:4)*

In this world, we need our mates to complete us, one flesh, a team. And as husband and wife, we produce children. The family as we know it is critically important. But in the next world, we will be transformed. We will be perfect and we will love our mates perfectly, just as we're going to love everyone, perfectly.

*But as it is written: "EYE HAS NOT SEEN, NOR EAR HEARD, NOR HAVE ENTERED INTO THE HEART OF MAN THE THINGS WHICH GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM." (1 Corinthians 2:9)*

I don't understand exactly what it is going to look like, but trust me, our relationships in the coming world will be infinitely better, infinitely more satisfying than anything you enjoy with your spouse now.

The question was answered, but Jesus wasn't done with these Sadducees. They were going to get a little bonus burn:

*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." (Mark 12:26-27)*

Jesus took them to the book of Exodus, one of the five books they considered divinely inspired. And He showed them how God Himself referred to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the present tense at a time when all three had passed from the scene.

Life does not end, folks! That body you're lugging around will poop out on you, but you are all eternal creatures. Everyone who draws breath is going to live forever. The question is simply where is your forever going to be? There are only two kinds of people in the world: the saints and the ain'ts. Which one are you?

There's one more test coming.

*Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, "Which is the first commandment of all?" (Mark 12:28)*

Now if we look at Matthew's account, we get just a little more information.

*But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. (Matthew 22:34)*

- i. Another meeting took place.
- ii. *Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" (Matthew 22:35-36)*

This was sort of a last-ditch effort. They failed to trap Him politically, they failed to trap Him logically, so they would try to trap Him doctrinally. They knew Jesus had been presenting Himself as God incarnate. They believed Jesus was presumptuous enough to place Himself above the authority of Scripture and they were right, because Jesus is the authority of Scripture. He is *Ho Logos*, the very Word of God. But despite what they were hoping, He would never and He will never contradict Scripture.

*"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. (Matthew 5:17)*

Everything in Scripture is God's perfect truth, and everything in Scripture ultimately points to Jesus.

*Jesus answered him, "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." (Mark 12:29-31)*

Jesus begins His answer by reciting the *Shema*. It's a prayer every devout Jew would recite at least twice a day: *Sh'ma Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu Adonai Ehad*. I suspect that came as a bit of a surprise. And this Scribe, this lawyer, at least had a bit of integrity.

*So the scribe said to Him, "Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." (Mark 12:32-33)*

I think this was an aha moment for this Jewish religious leader. Besides being a scribe, he was most likely a Pharisee, and as a Pharisee, he would have been absolutely fastidious about keeping the letter of the Law. But after hearing Jesus, he realized that loving God and loving people is far more important than any religious ritual.

Jesus commended him for that realization:

*Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." (Mark 12:34)*

That's a good thing, but it's not good enough because it is completely possible to know all the right doctrine, but not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. That's what it takes.

It is important to accept the truth of the Gospel. You have to believe the Gospel is true. But you have to go beyond intellectual assent. You have to turn from your sin and turn to Christ. It's called repentance.

There are only two kinds of people in the world. There are those who love God, and there are those who hate God. You might think you are somewhere in the middle, but there is no middle ground. You're either a saint or an ain't.

Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God entered the world He created. He lived a perfect, sinless human life, and He sacrificed His life on the cross to make it possible for you to be a saint. On the third day, he rose from the dead so you can have a personal, living relationship with Him. All you have to do is step down from the throne of your life and pledge your allegiance to the Lamb of God. By faith, confess Jesus as Lord and believe God has raised Him from the dead and you will be saved.

Have you committed your life to Jesus? Do you love Him because He first loved you? If you can say yes, you are not close to the kingdom of God; you are in the kingdom of God ... forever. And you can rejoice in the fact that nobody will ever discredit Jesus. Those who try will go away humiliated.

*But after that no one dared question Him. (Mark 12:34)*

He is the way, the truth and the life. He's the only way to the Father. He is our victory over all the armies of Satan. Partake in that victory, won't you? Lay your burdens down at the foot of the cross. Trust completely in Jesus.