

“The Irrefutable Christ”

**Mark 12:13-34**

December 7, 2014

Explain Christmas series

Intro: Ordination Council

As we come to Mark 12 we encounter the growing opposition against Jesus by those who are seeking to trap Him and bring Him to ruin. They are trying to wrangle Him into a corner, trying to trick Him and expose some kind of weakness that will lead to His downfall, but they cannot. What we are going to see is the irrefutable Christ demonstrating His authority over every sect of Jewish leadership that opposes Him.

At a more personal level, we need to wrestle with the tendency of our human hearts to test God. This is so important that Hebrews 3 gives us this warning **[Heb 3:7-13]**. So the essence of my message is this: *we must turn from testing God to submissive love for God through Christ*.

Mark 12:13-34 contains 3 failed attempts to trap Jesus. The first comes from the Pharisees along with the Herodians, the second from the Sadducees, and the third from the scribes who together make up the Sanhedrin which was the ruling body among the Jews. What we are about to see is not a series of impromptu debates but a strategic plan to ruthlessly destroy Jesus.

**1. Taxes—the political trap [Mark 12:13-17]**

Take note that the Pharisees’ description of Jesus in vs. 14 is exactly true—He is truthful and defers to no one; He’s not partial and teaches the way of God in truth. Yet they are spoken as the venom of snakes; trying to set Jesus up with flattery and appear to be sincerely inquiring wisdom of Jesus when their true intent is to trap Him.

This question about the poll-tax is a cunning one. The Jews are under the rule of the Romans who required a poll-tax to be paid to Caesar with coins that were imprinted with the emperor’s image and an inscription that attributed to him divine status. Most of the Jews

viewed this as idolatrous and therefore offensive to the true God they worshiped.

So if Jesus says yes (pay taxes to Caesar), they can accuse Him of religious compromise and discredit Him before the people, but if He says no (don’t pay this tax to Caesar on religious grounds), then they can accuse Him of treason and bring the Romans down on Him.

But Jesus answers them by saying, “render to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s.” (vs. 17). There is a two-fold implication in what Jesus is saying here. First, He establishes that civil government has a legitimate place and its right to pay taxes (even when the government fails to honor God)—so they can’t accuse Him of rebellion (see Romans 13; Acts 4). Second, Jesus limits the parameters of the state as not sovereign but distinct from and subject to God—and so they cannot accuse Him of rendering divine tribute to Caesar because He is making a distinction between God and Caesar.

The NT principle on this matter is that we are to honor governing authority but our highest allegiance is to God. So we are to do everything in our power to honor civil authority but when submitting to governing authorities would cause us to sin directly, we submit to God’s higher authority.<sup>1</sup> Yet this is only a secondary issue in Mark 12. The main thing for us to see is that Jesus could not be trapped because He represents truth as God sees it and no examination, regardless of how rigorous, will find Him lacking.

**2. Resurrection—the doctrinal trap [Mark 12:18-27]**

This question is posed by the Sadducees who, unlike the Pharisees, did not believe in the idea of resurrection. This is because the

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<sup>1</sup> Note that NT texts calling us to honor governing authority were written to those under godless governments. Therefore we cannot categorically reject governing authority that fails to recognize God’s proper place but will also necessarily position us at times to have to say, “we must obey God rather than men” (see Acts 4:19-20; cf. Rom 13).

Sadducees only regarded the books of Moses (torah) as authoritative which did not give any direct teaching about the resurrection.<sup>2</sup>

And so the Sadducee's who don't believe in resurrection are apparently aware that Jesus has spoken of His own future resurrection, and they seek to trap Him with a hypothetical situation that will demonstrate how foolish and faulty His doctrine is. They base their scenario on Deut 25:5-6 which said that when a man died and left no son, his brother was to marry his wife and provide children for her so that she would not have to marry outside of the family to a stranger and fail to keep the property in the family name. By the way, this commandment was not intended to allow for multiple wives but to guard against intermarriage with Gentiles or "strangers."<sup>3</sup>

So the Sadducees bring this commandment to Jesus and apply it to a scenario in which the oldest of 7 brothers marries a wife and dies before bearing children. All of the brothers follow through on this commandment of marrying the widow but die before bearing children. Then they ask the question, whose husband will she be in the resurrection? Their point of course, is not to get an answer but to make Jesus out to be a fool for believing and teaching the resurrection.

But Jesus pulls the rug out from underneath them. [vs 24] Then Jesus does two things:

- Vs. 25—He clarifies that relationships in heaven are different than relationships on earth. In heaven we will be like the angels who don't marry. The implication here based on the broader teaching of Scripture, is that we the Bride will be so satisfied in Christ, that our joy will far exceed what marriage has ever known on this earth.

- Vs. 26—Jesus demonstrates from the writings of Moses that if there is no resurrection, their whole theology falls apart. He says, remember what God said to Moses at the burning bush? "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." Where are these men at the time of Moses? They have already passed away. But if they are truly dead, and there's no resurrection, then God's covenant with them is obsolete and it is a mockery to suggest that God is worthy of their hope and trust as their deliver and Savior. If there's no resurrection, then it's absurd for them to think of God as the keeper of promises that outlive those to whom the promises were given. But in reality He is still the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob because He is not the God of the dead but of the living.

So Jesus pulls the doctrinal rug out from under them and exposes their ignorance of the Scriptures and the power of God.

### 3. Greatest commandment—the religious trap [Mark 12:28-34]

It's important to note that this 3<sup>rd</sup> round of testing comes from a scribe who seems to be much less hostile to Jesus than the Pharisees and Sadducees. The scribes were trained to interpret the OT law. They carried the authority of rendering judgment on individual cases based on their professional interpretation of the law. One of their favorite debates was about determining which commandments carried the greatest weight. They wanted to find a single command that would help them grasp the sense or the heart of the entire law (613 commandments). And so this scribe asks Jesus which commandment was superior to everything else. [vs. 29-31]

In essence Jesus says, there is only one God and you are to live as through He is the only God by loving with all your heart and secondly, loving your neighbor as yourself. Notice that Jesus never seems to separate these two things. You don't truly love God without loving those created in His image and you can't truly love those who bear His image without loving God. Our love for God will be

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<sup>2</sup>The Pharisee's got their concept of resurrection from the later prophets who only spoke of it in somewhat vague terms.

<sup>3</sup> It's assumed that the brother of the deceased is unmarried because Leviticus (16:18; 20:21) forbids adultery with a brother's wife. See MacArthur Study Bible on Deut. 25:5-10.

demonstrated in our love for people and our love for people authenticates our love for God.

The scribe answered Jesus and said, “You’re right. There is one God and to love Him with all your being and to love your neighbor is far greater than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices.” In other words, there is no religious practice that can match the need for a heart that loves God. Everything you do in terms of religious activity, is vain, empty, and even works against you, if your heart has not been reborn with a love for God.

This scribe understands that the law is ultimately about God becoming the supreme treasure of the heart. And the one way to verify if the heart truly treasures God is by how we respond to the people God has put in our lives. Ironically, this is precisely the test that the Pharisees and Sadducees have failed in their attempt to destroy Jesus.

The conversation ends by Jesus saying to the scribe, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” Notice 2 things:

- 1) This scribe who was trained to interpret the law and then render judgment finds Himself under the higher authority of Jesus who renders judgment over him.
- 2) This scribe has answered correctly but he is not yet in the kingdom of God—He’s close, but not in. Jesus’ response sounds positive and yet it is devastating.

There is profound application here for us. You may appear to have tremendous insight and understanding about the most important religious things, but without Jesus Himself, you are lost, outside the kingdom of God.

Illus: It reminds me of a story I heard from my dad about one of the snow storms in the old days where many people died trying to walk home but got disoriented and died in the storm. One woman, in particular, was later found just outside the door of her house. She came so close but died just outside. Jesus is the door

to the kingdom and apart from Him you cannot get in to safety and be saved. You may be 12 inches from the door but you will die in your sin if you don’t go through Jesus.

Don’t miss the last sentence of vs. 34: “*After that, no one would venture to ask Him any more questions.*” Why? Because He is the irrefutable Christ. It’s too much risk. Every time they ask Jesus a question in order to trap Him, the trap springs on them.

- The Pharisees try to catch him in a political trap, but Jesus turns it around and exposes their hypocrisy—they are the ones carrying Caesar’s coins around in their pockets.
- The Sadducees try to catch Jesus on doctrinal grounds, but when the trap springs, they are the ones caught in their ignorance of God’s word and power.
- When the scribe comes to test Jesus on grounds of religious piety, it’s himself, not Jesus, that is found lacking in what is needed most.

These religious leaders think themselves to be teachers, yet they find themselves coming up against the One who Himself is truth and therefore bears the highest authority. His wisdom is the wisdom of God. His mind is the mind of God. His authority is God’s authority. Jesus has no opinions; only irrefutable truth.

You may argue with Jesus, but you can’t win. You must either submit to Him in love or you must war against Him. But you cannot win. The last resort for the Sanhedrin is to take Jesus by force—to kill Him. But even in His crucifixion, they do not subdue Him. For it is through His death and resurrection that Jesus Himself is positioned to be the Judge of the living and the dead.

And yet the human heart rages on, even today, seeking to put Jesus to the test. Some try to discredit Jesus as irrelevant on the basis of cultural and ethical arguments in this age of sexual revolution and personal freedom without restraint. Some try to strangle Him on the basis of doctrinal and philosophical arguments that pose the problem of evil and suffering or attempt to diminish the sovereignty of God. Still others seek to destroy Christ

by denying the existence of God with “scientific” arguments. Yet, the final outcome will be the same.

Don’t try to be the prosecution that puts Jesus on the stand—it didn’t work for Job in the OT; it didn’t work for the Sanhedrin in NT; it won’t work for you now.

Like a young child trying to argue with a good father—you won’t win. But if you will humble yourself, confess your wrong, and seek repentance, you can experience the loving embrace of being reconciled to your Father. That’s why Christmas is a reason to rejoice. Jesus came in all of His authority to rescue us from the damnation of our sin. He wasn’t ultimately taken by force. He laid His life down, so that those who yield to Him will receive His triumph over sin, death, and hell.

Prayer: for heart converted to love God above all else.

Communion: John 1:1-5

***Bread (John 1:1-3):*** Logos; Creator; Irrefutable mind (the source behind) biology, chemistry, physics, mathematics, calculus, law and civil order, philosophy, social sciences, ethics, theology → humbled Himself to redeem His creation which bears His image.

***Cup (John 1:4-5):*** “*The Light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it*” (John 1:5, ESV)