

Image Is Everything

(Mark 12:13-17)

(preached 9/6/15; Sunday AM)

Introduction

Take your Bibles and open them to Mark
12:13-17...

We are continuing our journey to the cross with
Jesus...

We are in the final days of his life...

It is Wednesday.

He is to be crucified on Friday.

He is in the temple two days before he goes to the
cross..

Jesus has preached the gospel in the temple that
morning.

His authority has been questioned by the religious
leaders there.

Jesus then told a parable that identified the religious
leaders as men who would eventually murder him...

And though they wanted to kill him on the spot, they feared the people and walked away...

But as soon as they left, they sent reinforcements to Jesus to trap him...

So, let me read these 5 verses, then we will pray and then dig a little deeper into the story...

Mark 12:13-17...

13 Then they *sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Him in order to trap Him in a statement. 14 They *came and *said to Him, "Teacher, we know that You are truthful and [e]defer to no one; for You are not partial to any, but teach the way of God in truth. Is it [f]lawful to pay a poll-tax to Caesar, or not? 15 Shall we pay or shall we not pay?" But He, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, "Why are you testing Me? Bring Me a [g]denarius to look at." 16 They brought one. And He *said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" And they said to Him, "Caesar's." 17 And Jesus said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." And they [h]were amazed at Him.

Let us pray..

A little boy is headed over to eat dinner with friends of his mom and dad.

As they are traveling in the car, the mom looks in the back seat and says,...

“Johnny, do not make a pig out of yourself at dinner. You eat one serving of whatever is on your plate and no more.”

“Do not ask for seconds.”

Well, dinner is served and it is the best macaroni and cheese that Johnny has ever tasted.

He devours the first serving in a matter of minutes.

His mother’s friend notices his love of her macaroni, and asks Johnny if he would like another helping.

Johnny thinks to himself, “I don’t want to upset this lady by refusing seconds.”

But then he thinks of what his mama said in the car...

And he simply answers like this, “Thank you for the offer. The macaroni and cheese is delicious, but my mom has requested that I not ask for seconds, and I always want to obey her.”

Johnny's real name was John Fitzgerald Kennedy, who grew up to become the 35th president of the United States.

The moral of the story...

Great politicians are born not made.

Now, that is a silly story but we identify with little Johnny in a way.

He was under the authority of his mother, but he was also at another lady's house.

In some ways, he had an obligation to both of these ladies..

The same can be said for the Christian who lives in the world..

There is no question that a Christian is an earthly citizen....

And he or she has an obligation to God....

But at the same time, the Christian is also a part of the earthly realm as well.

Now, we are called to be politicians or compromisers in this dual citizenship.

We are called above all to show our allegiance to our true king...

The Bible is very clear about that...

We must obey God and not man when the world tells us to obey...

But it is also true that we need to be good citizens as well..

The Bible teaches obedience to government as a way to for Christians to be a good testimony for the unbelieving world..

Yet, how does our earthly citizen and our heavenly citizenship go together for the Christian?

This is a question that has been answered incorrectly in so many ways...

And we live in a day, -especially in this country, where people are so confused about how to answer this question....

Let me give you the two extremes of how to answer this country...

One extreme would be the view that our citizenships should be completely and totally separate...

People who believe this refuse to take up arms for their country...

They refuse to pay taxes to their government.

They refuse to vote or take part in any of the political processes available to them..

The second extreme is to completely mix the two citizenships...

To try and create heaven upon earth by taking over the government..

And making it a Christian government composed of nothing but Christian principles...

People often say that America is or was a Christian nation.

That isn't true and it hasn't been true for any nation that has ever existed upon this earth.

In fact, Constantine, the emperor of Rome tried to create a Christian nation in 300s AD, but it failed miserably.

However, that didn't stop others from trying.

The history of Europe is filled with the thought of creating a Christian nation...

Yet, the one truth that everyone seems to ignore in their attempts to create a Christian nation is that Christians aren't made by the threat of the sword.

You can't pass enough laws to make someone a Christian, and if you do...

You end creating a system of government that forces people to act a certain way even though their hearts are far from God.

And what is the result of that?

You end up with the same form of religion that Jesus was fighting against in his day..

An external religion of people whose hearts have never been changed...

And so I propose to you that both of those extremes are not the biblical model...

You can't fully separate from one kingdom from the other....

And you can't fully merge both kingdoms into one either...

And I think that the words of Jesus in these verses prove that point...

So, what do we do?

How are Christians supposed to live in light of their dual citizenship in both heaven and earth?

In other words, how are we to be in the world but not of the world?

What should guide us as we think through how we are to act?

So, from Mark 12:13-17, let me offer 3 principles that should guide us as both heavenly citizens and earthly citizens...

I. See that the World is Evil (13-15)

II. Submit Yourselves to Government (16-17a)

III. Subject Yourselves to God (17b)

Let's begin with the 1st principle...

I. See that the World is Evil (13-15)

Look back at verse 13...

The Pharisees and the Herodians approach Jesus in the temple...

As I said before, this is a busy Wednesday in the temple for our Lord.

He has been teaching and defending and attacking...

And now, it is time for another attack on Jesus....

The point of all these attacks is to find a way to destroy Jesus.

The religious leaders have been after him for nearly 3 years in his ministry...

Hunting him down and trying to silence Him and discredit Him...

Jesus has attacked their false religion.

The day before on Tuesday, Jesus exposed their greed of selling "temple approved sacrifices" and exchanging money for outrageous fees...

Yet that has not been their only error...

Jesus has exposed and condemned their man made laws that make them look good on the outside...

But never make them good in God's sight...

And so, the religious leaders have launched attack after attack on Jesus.

It is time for him to go.

Yet, Jesus never falls for their traps...

He always escapes and this time with the Herodians and Pharisees will be no different..

However, these tow groups of men think they have the perfect question to trap him...

Now, you must know the background of the these two groups...

Pharisees are part of the religious elite of Israel.

They are very nationalistic and patriotic toward Israel.

They see themselves as defenders of God.

The Herodians are just the opposite...

Though they are Jews, their loyalty is to the Roman appointed governor Herod.

In the Pharisees eyes, they are the opposite of patriotic...

In fact, the Pharisees saw them as traitors...

Yet, here they join forces against a common enemy in Jesus.

The enemy of my enemy is my friend, and in this case the Pharisees and Herodians hated Jesus more than they hated each other.

So they came to him in verse 14 with flattering words...

“Teacher, we know that You are truthful and [e]defer to no one; for You are not partial to any, but teach the way of God in truth.”

The strange truth is that they don't believe one word of what they just said...

And how do we know?

They refuse to obey Jesus!

IF they really believed that he told the truth, then they would be on their knees in repentance before him...

The Herodians would have turned their backs on Rome and Herod and followed Jesus.

The Pharisees would have turned their backs on their false religion and believed that Jesus was truly God's Son.

Yet, these men are full of lies in order to get what they want..

Now, it needs to be said that though these men are being deceitful here, the words that they use to describe Jesus are completely true...

He is truthful.

He doesn't defer to anyone; he is the authority on all things.

He isn't partial because he doesn't play favorites as sinful people do.

HE teaches the way of God because He is God..

And that is really the danger of false religion, they are like the broken clock...

They are right twice a day...

And they are exactly right in what they say about Jesus here.

Yet in their heart, they don't believe it.

They are only saying it to get what they need and lead Jesus in a trap..

How many of you in here today would fall into the category of the Herodians and Pharisees?

You say true things about Jesus, but none of those truths have ever penetrated your own life...

You only say those things about Jesus to get what you want, while living a life that shows you don't even believe what you say about Christ.

That was certainly the case with these two groups of men in verse 14...

So, they bring forth their deceitful, hypocritical question in verse 14 and 15...

***“Is it [f]lawful to pay a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?
15 Shall we pay or shall we not pay?”***

There is it....

The trap is laid for Jesus.

They think that they have him right where they want him now...

This is a no-win situation for Jesus in their minds...

If he says don't pay the tax, the Herodians won't be able to run out of the temple fast enough to tell the Romans that Jesus is in rebellion against Rome..

And the thought is that Rome would come to capture Jesus and kill him as an insurrectionist..

Who was stirring up the Jews to rebel against Rome by teaching them to not pay taxes..

And if there was one thing that Rome protected at all costs, it was the idea of peace in the empire...

Any rebellion against Rome was dealt with quickly and severely...

On the other hand, if Jesus said to pay the tax, the Pharisees would call him an enemy of God.

You see the coin that was required to pay the tax was a Roman denarius that had a picture of the Roman emperor Tiberius or Augustus on it...

For the Pharisees, this was totally unacceptable..

The Roman emperor was an unbelieving pagan..

He was as far from Jewish as you could get in their minds..

To use the money, in their minds, was a violation of the second commandment which prohibited Jews from worshipping idols...

And they certainly felt that a coin with a man's image was certainly an idol...

On top of the fact that an image of the Roman emperor was on both sides...

The writing on the coin was even worse...

On the side where the emperor was seated, it read....

Pontifus Maximus, which simply means High Priest...

But the front was the most offensive to the Jews...

“Tiberius Caesar Divinus Filius Augustus,” which translates to Tiberius, Son of Divine Caesar Augustus...

And since the Romans considered Caesar to be god, the Tiberius denarius simply said, “Tiberius, Son of God.”

There was also one more issue that the Pharisees had with the tax, and that was its use..

Though most went to pay the Roman soldiers who were stationed in Israel, which certainly angered the Jews...

Other portions of the tax went to who knows what..

And the thought that Jewish money may have went to pay for ungodly activities was more than they could stand.

Maybe the emperor used it for unholy purposes like his pagan parties...

Maybe the Romans used it to worship their false gods..

So, the Pharisees hated the tax, and the Jewish people hated the tax...

And they are all gathered around Jesus to hear his answer to their question...

If a “yes” comes out of his mouth to pay the tax, the crowd will moan and the Pharisees will begin the process of capturing Jesus to kill him..

If a “no” comes out his mouth, the Herodians will snap their fingers to summon the Roman soldiers, who will capture and kill Jesus as a rebel against Rome.

So the stage is set, and the spotlight is squarely on Jesus...

Jesus knows the hearts of the Herodians and the Pharisees around him...

He knows they have falsely flattered him with compliments.

He knows that they don't believe a single word that they said about him earlier...

He knows their evil intentions...

They are hypocrites who say one thing but do another.

They are trying to trap Jesus....

And before we look at his perfect response...

We need to let a very important principle soak into our hearts as believers when we consider how we are to relate to the world in which we currently live.

And it is this...

See that the world is evil.

It is broken ever since sin entered it in the garden.

People are broken.

And they will remain broken until the King sets them right, and then comes to set the world right..

Often times, we try to fix problems in our world that will never be fixed until we have a perfect government led by Christ Himself.

That simply means that we do what we can in the meantime...

We stand for righteousness as we are able.

We offer Christian influence as the Lord allows.

We support laws that encourage righteousness.

We pray for our government officials.

Vote.

Participate in the political process if you so desire..

Yet, all the while we keep your trust in the Lord to make things right and not the governments of this world

The anchor for our soul is not who wins the next election but Who rules the world.

That is so important to remember as we make our way through the world, but it is so easy to get out of balance here...

And let the government become our focus and not the gospel...

The world is evil and broken, and God has given us government to keep evil in check...

And though some governments are better than others, all are a common grace of God to punish evil doers and reward those who do well...

But all are also broken and will never be fixed until Jesus comes to establish the greatest government the world has ever known or will know...

And we need that keep that in mind just to keep us balanced as members of both a heavenly kingdom and an earthly kingdom.

So, Jesus recognizes the evil all around him on this day, and then delivers the perfect answer to their question in verses 16 and 17...

And in his answer, we find the second principle to help guide us citizens of both heaven and earth...

And it is this...

II. Submit Yourselves to Government (16-17a)

Now, I want you to consider Jesus' answer in terms of our own country...

Jesus had just asked the crowd to bring him a hundred dollar bill.

And if it were today, let's say that \$100 bill had Obama's picture on it and over the picture was written, Obama, Son of God.

I know that sounds absurd but that it very similar to what was happening in this scene.

How would your feel about that?

And how would you expect Jesus to answer your question if you asked him what you should do with a \$100 bill with Obama's pic and the claim that he was the Son of God...

I think his answer would surprise you because it would be the same answer that he gave to the people in verse 17..

Render to Caesar what is Caesars...

And the principle for all of us is that we should be subject to the government that God has placed over us...

Romans 13 is so very clear, yet so many Christians seem to forget what it says...

Here is the clear command given to all believers in regard to our relationship to earthly governments...

13 Every [a]person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except [b]from God, and those which exist are established by God. 2 Therefore [c]whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. 3 For rulers are not a cause of fear for [d]good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; 4 for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. 5 Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. 6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. 7 Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.

I want you to notice all the very strong wording in that instruction...

Every person, no authority except from God, whoever resists, render to all...

Do you see those words? Every, all, no authority, whoever...

This is an optional command for believers...

The argument against these verses is always the same..

Well, Paul didn't know how corrupt government would become...

Oh, yes he did.

He lived during the reign of Nero, the Roman emperor who killed Christians for sport and then set their bodies on fire to use as lanterns for his parties.

He wrote these very words under the inspiration of God to Christians who were living under one the most evil governments that the world has ever known.

And if the words applied then, they certainly apply to believers today who live under a less hostile government...

And the command is clear...

Submit to God's ordained government.

Subject yourself to the rulers under which you live.

Honor your rulers. Pray for your leaders.

Pay your taxes and obey the laws of the land.

That is a clear principle of how to live as a heavenly citizen in an earthly world.

And the point of this is to keep your conscience clear and to preserve your testimony in the world.

Now, there is one exception to this command and it is when a government causes you to sin.

In that case, you are to obey God rather than man.

However, in every other instance God calls us to obey the government that he has set over us...

And Jesus affirms that in the first part of verse 17....

Give to Caesar what is Caesars...

Since Caesar's image was on the coin, that was evidence that he had the right to levy and collect taxes..

The money belonged to him and the taxes belonged to him...

And the duty of a believer in that situation was to pay the taxes that were due to Caesar...

If Caesar image is on it, give it back to Caesar if he demands it.

And there is the second principle of being a good earthly citizen while also being a good heavenly citizen.

Submit and subject yourselves to the God-given government that is over you...

By following the laws as long they don't require you to sin.

By paying your taxes.

By honoring your leaders over you.

By praying for them.

And so there are two principles of being a good heavenly citizen while being a good earthly citizen...

#1) Know that the world is evil

#2) Submit yourselves to government..

And then there is one final principle also in verse 17...

III. Subject Yourselves to God (17b)

So far, Jesus has answered with a yes to pay your taxes to Caesar, but right alongside that, he is going to add...

Pay your taxes to God as well..

After they heard Jesus say that you should pay your taxes to Caesar, the Herodians were grinning from ear to ear...

Jesus was on their side...

See he just said to pay your taxes....

Take that Pharisees!

But as soon as he said “Pay Rome. He also said Pay God.”

And with that the Herodians smile would be replaced with a scowl, and the Pharisees scowl would be replaced with a smile...

They pictured themselves as fierce defenders of God’s name, though their hearts were far from God.

But neither group left satisfied with Jesus’ answer.

And with his answer, he has cut to all of their hearts.

The final principle of being a good earthly citizen while being a good heavenly citizen...

Is to simply give to God what he is due..

And what is God due?

Well, you owe him your life!

Do you remember whose image was on the money?

It was Caesar's.

But guess whose image in on you?

According to Genesis 1:27...

27 God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

The final principle of being a good heavenly citizen and a good earthly citizen is to live in such a way that gives back to God the life that he gave you.

Just like Caesar created a coin, allows it to come to you and then calls for it back...

God created you, allowed you to be born, and then calls you to give that life back to him..

A good earthly citizen pays back his taxes to whom they are due

A good heavenly citizen gives back his life to whom it is due.

Now, the sad reality of this picture is that both groups were paying Caesar their taxes....

Even the Pharisees who hated to do it, gave Caesar what was his..

But neither group was paying their lives to God.

In one simple answer, Jesus had avoided their attack and their carefully laid trap..

And once again, we read that the religious leaders walked away without a word..

But don't worry, they won't be gone too long...

So, what do we conclude from this passage?

1) Jesus is exactly like he is described here, -truth teacher, authority holder, plays no favorites.

2) Give government what is due them, -honor, prayer, taxes, and submission.

3) Give God what is due to Him, -your repentance, your faith, your submission, and your life.

In 2007, Walter Anderson stood before a judge in Washington DC and was found guilty of not paying 365 million in taxes owed to the US government.

At the time, it was the largest amount of tax evasion ever recorded in the United States.

So, Anderson stood before that judge, and he was sentenced to 9 years in federal prison and order to pay 142 million in back taxes.

Though that may seem like a light sentence, it was the longest sentence ever handed down for someone who failed to render to Caesar what is due to Caesar.

But I assure you 9 years is a walk in the park compared to sentence that the Supreme Judge will and to all of those who fail to render to God what is due to Him..

And please hear me, that is not a threat.

It is simply the truth of the incredible price that everyone will pay who doesn't submit his or her life to the authority of God.

And it is a sentence that can be avoided today...

Turn from your sins today and believe upon Christ.

You may have done the crime, but the grace of God is that you don't have to do the time...

Be right with the Judge today.

Let us pray.