

Paying Caesar's Tax - Mark 12:13-17

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Please bow your heads with me for prayer.

Lord, we are about to open Your Word. And as we continue our journey through the book of Mark, help us to enter into this story. Open our eyes to see You like we've never seen You before, so that we might love You like we've never loved You before. May we leave here today more committed to You than we ever have been before. I pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

Luke 2:1 begins the Christmas story narrative. Does anyone know who is the first person mentioned in Luke's account? It is Caesar Augustus. Luke chapter 2 begins as follows:

"And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered."

Why did Caesar Augustus take a census? It was in order to implement and/or update a poll tax. The word, "poll" in ancient times meant, "head". The poll tax was based on a head count. It was a per-person tax. It was not based on income or wealth. Everyone paid the same amount of tax. And so we find Joseph and Mary going to Bethlehem to register for this census.

Interestingly, our story found in Mark 12:13-17 also centers around the paying of a poll tax to Caesar Augustus.

Here is a summary of today's story:

Some of the religious leaders came to Jesus in order to use His own words as a means of condemning Him. After confessing Jesus' honorable character, they asked Him whether or not they should pay Caesar's tax. Jesus stated that the coins engraved with Caesar's picture and title rightfully belonged to him, just as what had been made by God belonged to Him. Therefore it was their duty to give both Caesar and God what was required. Jesus' answer completely astounded the people.

III. Experiences

A. Being hunted (Mark 12:13)

1. "some" of the Pharisees (Matt. 22:16 – "their disciples"); not wanting to be recognized
2. "Pharisees" versus "Herodians"
 - a. represented polar ends of political beliefs
 - b. bitter enemies now united in hatred of Christ
3. "catch Him in His words" – word for catching a fish; use His own words as a hook
 - a. (Lk. 20:20) "to deliver Him to the governor" – purpose for presence of Herodians

B. Being praised (Mark 12:14)

1. "Teacher" (Jn. 3:1,2 - Nicodemus) in contrast with Mark 11:28
2. "know" ("have known from seeing") – "We've been watching and are convinced...."
3. "true" ("not hidden") – "You are the real thing. You don't pretend or hide behind a mask."
4. "care about no one" ("it does not matter to you about no one") – "not impressed or swayed."
5. "do not regard ("see") the person ("face") of men" – "You see the face of God."
6. "but ("alla") teach the way..." – "Everything You say is right on. You know what God wants."

C. Being called to take sides (Mark 12:14,15)

1. "lawful" ("permissible") to pay ("give") taxes ("a census"; Roman poll tax) to Caesar"
2. Very controversial, emotional issue to Jews

- a. Pharisees – “No! Don’t pay; fight!”
- b. Herodians – “Pay! If you can’t beat them, join them! Be friends!”
- 3. “Third group” – “What should we do?” (repeat question to narrow answer)
- D. Revealing hidden truth (Mark 12:15-17)
 - 1. (vs. 15) Their motives
 - i. “knowing (“having known”) their hypocrisy (“pretending”)
 - ii. “Why do you test Me?” – takes off their mask
 - 2. (vs. 15,16) Their investment
 - i. “Bring me a denarius (Roman silver coin)....” - Teacher to student
 - ii. Invests with responsibility; starts with what they know/have
 - 3. (vs. 17) God’s perspective (right use of their knowledge)
 - i. “Render (“give away, pay back”) to Caesar...” – (since it belongs to him?)
 - ii. “and to God the things of (“the”) God”
 - the greater responsibility left hidden, forgotten, unmentioned
 - 4. (vs. 17) Their response
 - i. “marveled” (“completely blown away” – imp. tense) – intensive verb only by Mark

IV. Our Example

- A. He was authentic (Mark 12:14)
 - 1. Even His enemies could see this
 - 2. “What would our church be like if we all took off our masks and stopped pretending and hiding?”
 - i. (Acts 4:32-35; 5:1-11) Ananias and Sapphira pretend to give everything; try to look generous while being selfish
 - ii. This hypocrisy would have destroyed the early church, which was a community based on “love without hypocrisy” (Rom. 12:9)
 - iii. Admitting when you’re wrong; not being afraid to say, “I don’t know.”
- B. He lived as one who was in the presence of God (Mark 12:14, 17)
 - 1. Jesus
 - i. “do not see the face of men....teach the way of God in truth.”
 - ii. “and to God the things of (“the”) God.”
 - iii. Broke things open into a whole new dimension
 - 2. What belongs to God?
 - i. If the religious leaders had given to God what was His, Rome would never have come.
 - ii. What if we all bartered? (“to exchange goods or services in return for other goods or services”)
 - let’s say you’re a mechanic and I am a farmer...
 - might not have to pay taxes/government’s currency
 - iii. We would still owe God. Why?

As we close, I invite you to turn with me to Romans 11:36. (Read) Paul pictures here a cycle in life. Everything comes down from God – wisdom, knowledge, wealth, etc. Then it comes to us through Him. And then it all will eventually go back to Him, bringing Him glory.

It’s a lot like the cycle of water on the earth. Water is stored in the atmosphere. It condenses into clouds. It falls to the earth in the form of precipitation or rain. The water then infiltrates the ground, eventually finding its way to the lakes and oceans, where it is stored. As the sun heats the water, it evaporates back into the atmosphere. And so the cycle is repeated over and over. It’s a wonderful design by our Creator.

It is my prayer that you might experience the complete cycle of God's gifts this Christmas. It's so easy to get caught up in a back and forth motion. I work so I can buy you gifts. You work so you can buy me gifts. What a blessing, though, when we experience the complete cycle! We receive from God, give to those we love and those who have needs, and give the praise back to God!

You can't imagine the blessings you receive when you live as one who is in the presence of God. Everything you are and have is a gift from Him. It's a perspective that just might "completely blow you away", just as it did the people in our story today from the book of Mark.