

# No turning Back- Living the surrendered life

## Lesson 15

“When the Kingdom comes, What Will Happen to Caesar?”

A Mormon acquaintance once pushed Mark Twain into an argument on the issue of polygamy. After long and tedious expositions justifying the practice, the Mormon demanded that Twain cite any passage of scripture expressly forbidding polygamy.

"Nothing easier," Twain replied. "No man can serve two masters."

Scripture reading- Mark 12:1-17

**Read- Matthew 6:24** "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

**Exodus 34:14** "Do not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God."

This week I was thinking about the passage I want us to look at today. You know, this is a hard one to preach. It's a hard one to hear. Oh yeah, I almost forgot. The bad news is that if you don't like the passage, it'll still be in the bible for you to peek back at later on.

Here's the problem. We are face-to-face with one of the more misunderstood passages in the Bible. The scheming of the Pharisees and the Herodians intrigues me. This looks like it would make a good thriller--will they trap Jesus, or will Jesus get away! Also you can't ignore the fact that this text is political. Caesar is mentioned along with the question of loyalty. But we also have religion in this text as well. God is in this too, in the midst of this question of loyalty.

That right there is enough to make us nervous at a dinner party isn't it. Politics and religion. But Mark doesn't make it any easier--he had to go and throw economics in here too. Taxes! I bet Passover that year was close to April 15. Politics. Religion. Economics. It's all right here. We can't ignore it. They're all related, even if we aren't sure just how they're related.

Our temptation is to compartmentalize these things. It's like we put on different hat for each area--sort of like the way we have a different hat to wear in the different spheres of our lives. You know-- a hat for my parenting, my job, my marriage, my leisure life etc.

We might have this black hat for politics-- I cast my vote for the lesser of two not-so-great politicians, but I've done my duty.

We might have this green hat for economics- I pay my taxes, spend my money to

encourage free enterprise, and aspire to upward mobility. Sort of like the Jeffersons – “we’re ever movin’ on up.”

And finally we might have this golden hat for religion– we attend worship, say our prayers privately, fulfill our religious obligations.

Politics. Religion. Economics. Three spheres of life that many hope never meet. For many of us modern Christians, we’re content to live a divided life. Perhaps this is why this passage is so misunderstood or abused.

For Jesus, there is no division, no compartmentalizing. And that can scare us. But we’re not alone. The Pharisees were scared. The Herodians were scared.

Don’t forget what happened in chapter 11? Jesus entered Jerusalem triumphantly--like a conquering hero--with a mass of people. He’s enacted the prophecy from Zechariah, by riding in on a donkey. Make no mistake, this made the religious authorities nervous. This is another one of those messianic situations. This is revolutionary stuff. But that’s not all that happens--Jesus got angry and makes a scene right in the middle of the temple. He drives out the moneychangers and the dove sellers, and flips over the tables. Why? Because they were exploiting people for their money. They were using the things of God while securing their futures at the expense of others’. (And I can imagine that many of “those others” were the poor). In Jesus’ mind, the Temple, if it was to be about anything, it was to be a house of prayer for all nations. But through a lot of compromises the Temple establishment had made God’s dwelling into a den of robbers!

Remember that this kind of messianic stuff has happened before--and the authorities knew what to do about it.

**Acts 5:37-** About 25 years earlier another would-be messianic revolutionary from Galilee named Judas had entered the scene, (Josephus the historian says) talking about the kingdom of God and refusing to pay taxes to Caesar because he believed the only debt the Jews owed was to God alone. He was executed like all would-be messiahs.

And so... “Here we go again. Politics, economics, and religion. They’re right there in the cleansing of the temple. They just won’t go away. What do we make of Jesus’ response – give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, give to God what is God’s?

Let’s read **Mark 12:13-17** Later they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words. **14**They came to him and said, "Teacher, we know you are a man of integrity. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not? **15**Should we pay or shouldn't we?"

But Jesus knew their hypocrisy. "Why are you trying to trap me?" he asked. "Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." **16**They brought the coin, and he asked them, "Whose

portrait is this? And whose inscription?"

"Caesar's," they replied.

**17**Then Jesus said to them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." And they were amazed at him.

Jesus has just told a parable directed against the elders and chief priests and scribes. It's about a landowner –economics again! – Who takes a vacation and rents his vineyard to some tenants who turn out to be pretty nasty people. The landowner sends servants to collect his due, but the tenants beat them up. Finally, he sends his son, thinking they will respect him, but the son is also mistreated and killed.

The chief priests aren't stupid--They get it. They realize that Jesus has just predicted that God will hold them accountable for not rendering to God that which was owed to God! Since Jesus has continued to avoid their snares, these religious authorities try a different tactic in order to trap Jesus.

So they send in the Pharisees and the Herodians, who try to catch Jesus off guard with some flattery:

"Teacher, we know you are a man of integrity. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth.

Their hope is to trap Him with His own words. If they can get him for sedition, they can simply hand Him over to the Roman officials.

Hence comes there loaded question: **vv. 14,15 is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not? 15Should we pay or shouldn't we?"**

It's a good question if you're sneaky. It's one that most would-be messiah's would find themselves condemned in. They probably expect Jesus to say no, it's not lawful. In their minds that would be the messianic thing to say. To pay taxes to Caesar would be viewed as collaboration with a ruler other than God--and how could that be right?

However, Jesus can see their hypocrisy and knows they are trying to trap Him. So he asks for a denarius. Already Jesus is in full control of this situation. They give him a denarius--and He asks, "who's image is on the coin and whose inscription is on it?" GREAT QUESTION JESUS!!! Can you see what He's doing?

To any Jew worth his weight, a denarius was like a graven image. It even had an inscription to Tiberius, son of the Divine Augustus. You know... that's blasphemy!--there is no god but Yahweh.

Here's a question to consider... who has the coin? Jesus' accusers.

Looks to me like Jesus is saying give it back! Don't hear Jesus saying here that we need to be good citizens and pay our taxes and support the Pax Romana (the peace of Rome).

- Caesar's peace was a false peace
- Caesar's order was a parody of God's.
- Caesar's religion was self-glorifying.
- Caesar's economy benefited himself and Rome, not God's chosen people.

If Jesus had stopped there, they would have had him right where they wanted him. But He doesn't stop here--He added, "Give to God that which is God's." He's saying **give back to God the place that Caesar has taken!**

Look at what Jesus does--not only does he side step their trap with words-- more importantly he's thrown this hypothetical question right back in their faces!

These religious leaders know they are not rendering to God what is God's. Jesus' reply begs another question: **just what really is Caesar's, and just what is God's?**

I told you this wasn't an easy passage.

- It's easier to let Caesar have his rightful place and leave another place for God.

But according to Jesus--Politics, religion and economy--they all go together.

When the kingdom of God comes into our lives, everything changes.

- When we think about our politics, the question is more--where does your loyalty lie? (Ideology or God?)

Who does this (\$\$\$) really belong too? If the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, then what about Caesar's claims to be lord of the earth? Simply put, in the Kingdom of God, Caesar is dethroned, cast down by a very different Son of God.

The question for you and for me is this: to whom do we owe allegiance - God or Caesar? As we think about that question this week, remember what Jesus said: **"no one can serve two masters."** And remember what God said... **"I am a Jealous God."**

**May this be your prayer today-**

Father, help me to see with your eyes. Show me this week those things that get in the way of making you first in my life. Remind me that Caesar has been dethroned. Give me the heart to know that you are worthy of all that I have and all that I am.

Father I give my life to You. Amen.

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