

Questions, Confrontations and Challenges

Text: Mark 12:13-40

Introduction:

1. In this section of Mark's Gospel, the religious hierarchy again attack Christ and His claims. There are four questioners that present four different challenges to Christ.
2. Hiebert: "The public teaching in Jerusalem consisted of Jesus' answers to a series of questions asked by His enemies (11:27-12:34), His counterattack on the Jewish leaders (12:41-44), and His commendation of the widow's giving (12:41-44)."
3. Summary: Three challenges are brought to Christ which end in the silencing of His critics (Vs. 34). Christ then issues His own challenge concerning Himself and His claim to Deity (Vs. 35-37). Then, Christ once again exposes the fake façade of the religious leaders (Vs. 38-40) and commends a poor widow whose genuine faith and piety stand in contrast to the corruption of the religious establishment (Vs. 41-44).
4. We will study the narrative under its six natural divisions.

I. THE CHALLENGE ABOUT TAXES (VS. 13-17)

A. The Plot of the Religious Leaders (Vs. 13-14)

1. Verse 13 gives us a window into the hearts of these religious fakes. They were looking for ways to trap and discredit Christ and His ministry.
2. The subject of taxes back then, as it is now, was a hot topic!
3. The trap was a clever one from man's standpoint. If Christ affirmed the necessity of paying taxes, he would alienate the common people. If he denied the necessity of paying taxes, they would have an immediate cause to bring Christ before the governor and accuse him of sedition.

B. The Exposing of the Religious Leaders (Vs. 15-17)

1. Christ knew their hypocrisy (play acting) and immediately exposes it in the words "Why tempt ye me?"
2. A 'penny' was a denarius which was a day's wage for a labouring man (Matt. 20:2)
3. "whose is this image" = the image was that of either Augustus or Tiberius, his successor; coins of both emperors were in circulation at the time (Hiebert).
4. 'superscription' = the superscription on the coin during the reign of Tiberius read "Tiberius Caesar Augustus, the son of the Divine Augustus," and on the reverse said, "Chief Priest." (Hiebert)

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5. Christ revealed that one's attachment to God does not loose him from his duty and obligation to earthly rulers. We are to render to each their due:
 - a. To Caesar the things that are Caesar's – The Christian is to pray for his leaders (1 Tim. 2:1-2), submit to lawful demands (Rom. 13:1-5) and pay his taxes (Rom. 13:6-7).
 - b. To God the things that are God's – this was a challenge to the Caesar's claim to divinity. The right to collect taxes was theirs but not to claim to be divine. So human government must never demand that which should only be rendered to Almighty God.
 - c. Prayer read in Australian Parliament: "Almighty God, we humbly beseech Thee to vouch safe Thy blessing upon this Parliament. Direct and prosper our deliberations to the advancement of Thy glory, and the true welfare of the people of Australia."

II. THE CHALLENGE ABOUT RESURRECTION (VS. 18-27)

A. The Sadducees Argument Presented (Vs. 18-23)

1. Vs. 18: The Sadducees were the theological liberals and rationalists of the day. They denied the truth of the bodily resurrection (Vs. 18) along with other truths such as the immortality of the soul.
2. Vs. 19: They present Christ with the Scriptural basis for their argument. They are referring to the law found in Deuteronomy 25:5-6 – "If brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry without unto a stranger: her husband's brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of an husband's brother unto her. And it shall be, *that* the firstborn which she beareth shall succeed in the name of his brother *which is* dead, that his name be not put out of Israel." William Macdonald explains, "In order to preserve the family name and to keep the property in the family, the Law stipulated that if a man died childless, his brother should marry the widow."
3. Vs. 20-23: They proceed to present their case of the seven brethren who all had the same wife in succession but with no children and then present what they believe is the knockout blow to the doctrine of the resurrection in Vs. 23.

B. The Sadducees Argument Refuted (Vs. 24-27)

1. Vs. 24: In plain language, Christ exposes their lack of understanding (Vs. 24). It wasn't that these men were not familiar with the text of Scripture but rather that they had failed to understand the meaning of the Scriptures. Their denial of the resurrection revealed their lack of understanding of the power of God.

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2. Vs. 25: Christ deals with the issue of marriage and the afterlife, refuting the case they had presented. In heaven there is no marriage. The Sadducees had wrongly assumed that life in heaven would follow the same pattern as that of life on earth.
3. Vs. 26-27: Christ deals with the issue of the truth of the resurrection. The quotation is taken from Exodus 3:6. When God spoke to Moses out of the burning bush, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were dead. But the fact that God said “**I AM** THE GOD” of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob revealed that their physical death did not mean they had ceased to exist. Christ clearly affirms the truth of the immortality of the soul and the future resurrection. Christ begins and ends his answer to them with a bold, abrupt statement of their error – “Do ye not therefore err” (Vs. 24), “ye therefore do greatly err” (Vs. 27).

III. THE CHALLENGE ABOUT COMMANDMENTS (VS. 28-34)

A. The Inquirer’s Question (Vs. 28)

1. Matthew identifies this man as “a lawyer”, an expert in the interpretation of the law.
2. Unlike the other questioners, this man was sincere as Vs. 34 indicates. He was genuinely interested in Christ’s perspective on which commandment in the law was first in rank and importance. This topic was one of much discussion amongst the religious leaders of the day.
3. Christ offers no rebuke to this man as He did with the Pharisees and Sadducees as this man did not have a hidden motive in asking the question. His inquiry was one of sincerity.

B. The Lord’s Reply (Vs. 29-31)

1. The first commandment (Vs. 30) – to love God supremely. God is to have first place in our affections. We are to love God with all of our being. No other love can be allowed to rival our love for God. This command is impossible in our natural, sinful state but through salvation we can begin to love God as we ought. “Love to God must possess the whole heart, the seat of personality, the whole soul, the self-conscious life, the whole mind, the rational faculties, and the whole strength, the entire active powers of man.” (Hiebert)
2. The second commandment (Vs. 31) – to love mankind equally. This is an exact quotation of Lev. 19:18. We are to exercise a love equal to that which we have for ourselves towards our neighbour.
3. Note: The first commandment summarizes the first table of the ten commandments that relate to our duties to God and the second the second table dealing with our duties to our fellow man.

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4. All of the law hangs on these two commandments. Matthew 22:40
“On **these two** commandments hang **all the law** and the prophets.”
5. Macdonald: “We are to love God more than ourselves, and our neighbour as ourselves. The life that really counts is concerned first with God, then with others.”

C. The Inquirer’s Response (Vs. 32-34)

1. Vs. 32-33 – The scribe’s affirmation of Christ’s words.
2. Vs. 34 – Christ declares that the man is not far from the kingdom of God. His openness to the truth as presented to Christ meant that his heart was in a favourable disposition to salvation.

IV. THE CHALLENGE ABOUT CHRIST (VS. 35-37)

Christ now goes on the offensive and asks His own challenging question of His listeners. The question goes to the heart of who Christ is. Christ was constantly bringing men to a point of decision concerning Himself and His claims.

A. The Question (Vs. 35)

1. The scribes taught that the Messiah (Christ, anointed one), would come of the lineage of David. That Christ would come of the line of David was clearly taught in the Old Testament Scriptures (2 Sam. 7:8-29; Ps. 89:3-4; 132:11; Is. 9:2-7; 11:1; Jer. 23:5-6; Ez. 34:23-24; 37:24). Only two days prior, the crowd had acclaimed Christ as “the son of David” (Mt. 21:9; Lk. 19:38).
2. The problem was that the scribes didn’t go far enough. Whilst they recognized the lineage of Messiah as far as His humanity was concerned, they failed to recognize His Divinity. That Christ was the Son of David according to the flesh it was true, but He was also the Son of God. Christ is the “root and the offspring” of David (Rev. 22:16). Christ preceded David in eternity as Son of God and then came as Son of man in the line of David in time.

B. The Quotation (Vs. 36)

1. “David himself said by the Holy Ghost” = David’s own words confirmed the truth of Christ’s Divinity. **David’s Son is David’s Lord.**
2. The quotation is from Psalm 110:1 and is quote directly five times in the New Testament (Acts 2:34-35; Heb. 1:13; 5:16; 7:17, 21). Take Acts 2:34-36 as an example – “For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, **both Lord and Christ.**”
3. “The LORD” = Hebrew YHWH, Jehovah.
4. “my Lord” = Hebrew Adonai, “my Lord” or “my master”.

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5. Hiebert: “The Psalm shows that the reference is to one who is more than a mere man. It is clear that both names refer to Persons of the Godhead.”

C. The Conclusion (Vs. 37)

1. The scribes view that Messiah was simply a descendent of David and a conquering king for the nation did not go far enough. If the Messiah is David’s Lord, He must be greater than David and more than just a man. Christ was pointing to the Divine-human nature of the Messiah.
2. That the religious leaders understood Christ’s claim is evidenced in Mark 14:61-64.

V. THE CHALLENGE ABOUT CORRUPT RELIGION (VS. 38-40)

Christ then issues a warning to the people about the corrupt religious establishment. Christ warned about false teachers and so must we. It is Christlike to warn!

A. They were Self-promoting (Vs. 38-39)

1. They loved the praise of men (Vs. 38)
 - a. They loved walking around in long clothing which to them was a mark of their spirituality and scholarship.
 - b. They loved the recognition of men in the marketplace.
2. They loved the positions of men (Vs. 39)
 - a. The “chief seats” in the synagogue were at the front of the synagogue before the ark or chest where the sacred scrolls were kept (Hiebert). It was reserved for leaders and people of notoriety.
 - b. The “uppermost rooms” were reserved for the honoured guests at a meal.

B. They were Self-serving (Vs. 40)

1. They took advantage of the venerable under a cloak of fake religiosity. The word ‘devour’ reveals their true character.
Illustration: 50 Years in the Church of Rome
2. The word ‘pretence’ means a show, “A holding out or offering to others something false or feigned; a presenting to others, either in words or actions, a false or hypocritical appearance, usually with a view to conceal what is real, and thus to deceive.” (Webster) Their “long prayers” were a false front to hide their true motives.
3. Because of their misuse of their positions of power, they would receive a heavier sentence at the judgment – “greater damnation.”
4. Macdonald: “In short, they loved peculiarity (long robes); popularity (greetings); prominence (best seats); priority (best places); possessions (widow’s houses) and mock piety (long prayers).”

VI. THE CHALLENGE ABOUT GIVING (VS. 41-44)

This beautiful narrative forms a bright contrast to the greed of the scribes just described.

A. Christ's Observation of the Giving (Vs. 41-42)

1. Christ sits and watches the givers come and give their offerings in the temple.
2. The 'treasury' was a setup with 13 trumpet shaped chests to receive temple offerings. Each one bore an inscription indicating what the money would be used for. Six of these were labelled "Freewill Offerings."
3. Christ saw two types of givers:
 - a. Rich men with poor gifts. Their offerings were large from a human standpoint but poor from Christ's perspective.
 - b. A poor woman with a rich gift. Her offering was poor from man's point of view but precious in God's sight. A mite was a Greek copper coin, and the smallest coin in use. Her gift had the value of one sixty-fourth of a common daily wage (Matt. 20:2).
 - c. Challenge: Christ takes an interest in our giving.

B. Christ's Instruction on Giving (Vs. 43-44)

Christ uses the poor widow as a living illustration, an object lesson to teach His disciples about what constituted true giving in His eyes. The principles are as follows:

1. True giving in Christ's eyes is more about the **heart** and **motive** of the giver than the size of the gift.
2. True giving in Christ's eyes involves **sacrifice**. The gifts of the rich were large but did not involve sacrifice as their lifestyle would remain unchanged by the abundance they had held in reserve.
3. True giving in the eyes of Christ is evaluated not by the amount that is given but by the amount that is **held back**.
4. True giving in the spirit of the New Testament therefore goes **beyond** the tithe.
5. True giving is proportionate giving – 1 Cor. 16:2 "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come."

Conclusion: In summary we can learn the following lessons from these encounters with Christ.

1. The believer has God-given duties to both God and government.
2. The believer can be assured of eternal life and the resurrection.
3. The believer is to love God supremely and his neighbour equally.
4. The believer can be assured of the truth of Christ's Divinity.
5. The believer is to beware of false teachers and warn against them.
6. The believer is to give from the heart sacrificially to the Lord.