

Introduction: from the last message, we saw that Jesus spoke and prophesied specifically against the leadership of Israel as the vineyard workers who would be destroyed, and the responsibility of God's work given to others. In v.19 it is clear that they understood that Jesus was speaking specifically against them. They have already set themselves to destroy Him (20:47), and yet find themselves unable to simply take Him into custody because of His popularity among the people.

- Their plan is to try to make Him publicly stumble, to answer a devised question in such a way so as to turn the tide of His popularity, and get the people to return to following the "official" leaders and away from this self-proclaimed Messiah.
- Luke records as their first attempt a questioning of His authority, to which Jesus responds with a question about John the Baptist's ministry that puts them between the horns of the dilemma that they sought to create for him, and they are silenced.
- Now Luke tells us of a second attempt, this time a question which is rooted in the political realm. If they can get him to answer incorrectly here, then perhaps they will have Him and they can take Him to trial and eventually to death.

EXPOSITION

I. THE ATTACK PLANNED – v.20

- The leaders were watching (Gk. paratayreo = watch closely and with diligence, keep under constant observation with negative connotation). Perhaps because they were so obvious (considering their "religious" garb), they sent spies. This work (Gk. egkothetos) is a derivative of a word meaning "to lie in a crouched position." It carries the idea of secrecy, hiding, attempting get information that otherwise would not be available. No one is supposed to know that these men have been employed by the leadership, merely to blend in among the people.
- Not only were they spies, but they "pretended to be righteous." The word used here is (Gk. hupocrinomai) is connected to the very term used by Jesus to describe the Pharisees several times, "hypocrite." This term was used in the Greek/Roman theater for actors, those who pretended to be something they weren't. So these men were posers, pretending to be interested in Jesus discourse and discussions, but were only wearing the mask of hypocrisy.
- Their essential character is not righteous, and the question they will ask is not out of a sincere desire to know (though Jesus will give a true answer). From the parallel accounts, it appears that they sent some of their disciples (students) who would not have been as well known. They, like their teachers, were hypocrites.
- We are told the purpose of their approaching Him this way was single: "that they might seize on His words." The word "seize" (Gk. epilambanomai) means to trap or capture. They hoped that by the answer He gave they might give some opportunity to trap Him, that He will say something that will be His undoing.
- Their hopeful outcome is "in order to deliver Him to the power and the authority of the governor." The leaders wanted, at least in part, to use the Roman governing authorities to destroy Jesus. They understood the people were for Him at this point, and if they could get the governor of Jerusalem, Pontius Pilate, to turn against Him, that would take some of the heat off of them (i.e. the Scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees). Not only that, but it would fuel the "anti-government" rebellion among the people.

II. THE QUESTION ASKED – vv.21-22

- They begin their questioning with a bit of flattery. They will carry their pretensions quite far, and hope that by their flattery they may disarm Him and open Him up. Two things that they say: first, "we know that You say and teach rightly." They first affirm that they believe Him to be a speaker of truth. They express that they believe He has authority, and if what He says is true, then the answer to this question will also be true.
- The second thing they say is "You do not show personal favoritism, but teach the way of God in truth." In other words, they are saying that Jesus doesn't fear man, that what He says is without regard to what people think, and ultimately fears God more than people.
- Notice two things about these statements. First, these men don't mean a word of it. If they believed it, they would repent. If they believed it, they would be following Him and not cooperating with the wicked plot to destroy Him.
- Let us never underestimate the ability of fallen man to lie and deceive with all earnestness. Here are men looking in the face of the very Son of God and baldly and boldly lying.
- The second thing we notice is that these wicked hypocrites are speaking glorious and truthful things. They are absolutely right. Jesus was exactly what they said He was, though they didn't believe it.
- He does speak and teach rightly. He does not show favoritism to any man, but fears God above all. Even such wicked men as this can speak truth.
- What is amazing to me is that at that moment, in the midst of that flattery, they aren't destroyed in God's wrath. Not only that, Jesus (though knowing their heart and their intentions) answers their question.
- Now to the question they ask: "Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" Caesar was the general title used for the Roman Emperor since the time of Julius Caesar. The particular Caesar of this time was Tiberius.
- The word used here does not mean tax in general, nor does it refer to the taxes charged on the buying and selling of goods. Rather, it refers to that which was required of all adult males under the rule of Rome as a "tribute" to the Roman ruler.

- This really is, in a certain sense, an ingenious question. It is a question crafted in such a way that either the simple answer of "yes" or "no" could be used against Him.
- If He said simply "yes", they hoped this would fuel the people's rejection of Him and turn them against Him. At this point they are expecting a Messiah King who would help release them from Roman oppression, and lead a victorious rebellion to the reestablishment of the independence of Israel. Surely no such leader would actually encourage them to pay taxes to such a wicked government He intended to overthrow, but rather tell them to stop paying taxes.
- If He answered simply "no", then they can tell Pilate (with many witnesses) that this teacher teaches the people not to pay taxes, which itself would cause Him great trouble. This could be charged to Him as a rebel and insurrectionist, enough to put Him to death. What is also deviously ingenious is that (according to both Matthew and Mark) with the disciples of the Pharisees are a group of men known as "Herodians." These men were those who had a view different than the Pharisees and many of the people, that they should indeed have a compromising position and work with and under the rule of Rome. If Jesus said no, these men would be those ready to "tattle" on Jesus and be witness that He is really an insurrectionist, and was again the government.

III. THE RESPONSE GIVEN – vv.23-25

- Again I emphasize the mercy of God in even responding to them. Such arrogance, deception, and wicked intention surely deserved the immediate judgement of God, but in longsuffering He answers, and in the wisdom of the ages confounds them.
- We are told "He perceived their craftiness." The word used here can either mean to know by observation or to thoroughly understand. I don't think that Luke is telling us merely that He looked at them and notice their feet shuffling, the eyes looking nervous, or some physical indication that they were being crafty. Rather, it seems He is stating that Jesus had a thorough knowledge of them. He saw right through their pretensions, and knew their heart.
- This is important for us to understand. We may be able to fool other people, but the Lord Jesus is the one who knows our hearts and our minds. When we deceive, flatter, speak words that are not true, play the game of spiritual hypocrisy, others may be fooled, but the Lord is not.
- The question we have here (in the NKJV) is what is known as a textual variant. This means that in the 1,000s of manuscripts there is a discrepancy as to whether Luke originally wrote this or it was a later addition by one who copied the Scriptures. What we do know is that it is found in the parallel passage in Mark without variant, so what might have happened is that the Scribe (in sincerity) included it because of His familiarity with Mark's Gospel. The question is probing and appropriate: "Why do you test Me?"
- When people ask questions to the followers of Christ about how to live in God's way, one can ask "why do you ask?" Is it merely to trap, to make look ridiculous or ridicule, or to genuinely want to know what God's Word says?
- Jesus says to them, "Show Me a denarius." The denarius Jesus refers to was a coin minted and supported by the Roman government. During this time in history, the Roman Empire was in control of that part of the world. As they gained victory and dominion over the different peoples and their lands, they were forced to submit to not only the government, but also to some degree their financial system. Though the Jews still minted their own coins to be used in places like Jerusalem (which because of Exodus 20 generally had an adversity to images of people or animals), many of the things they did required for them to have Roman coinage. The coin Jesus refers to was worth an ordinary worker's wage for one day of labor.



- Jesus then asks "Whose image and inscription does it have?" Their answer is simply "Caesar's." One of the most common images on Roman coins was the reigning Caesar or emperor of that day. At that time it was Tiberius Caesar. Without going into the details of his life, there are two things that can be seen about him on the coin itself.
- On the "heads" side of the coin was an impression of his head (in the common left facing pose). The inscription, translated into English, was "Tiberius Caesar Augustus, Son of the Divine Augustus." In other words, it was a claim to be the son of a god. On the "tails" side is another image, this one of a person sitting on a throne. Though there is some question who it is for sure, one view (that seems very reasonable) is that it is another image of Tiberius. The inscription Pontif Maxim, or "Highest Priest". If this is him, then on the same coin there is a claim of rule in the political (Caesar or emperor), a claim of deity, and a claim of religious supremacy.
- Here these men, pretending to have some scruples about paying a tribute tax, show by the possession of the coin itself to already be partaking of that system. They had not resisted to the point of independence, but by their having those coins demonstrated that they were participating with their world and culture to some degree.
- Jesus then says "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."
- The first part of this statement means this: You yourselves demonstrate by the coins in your pocket that you are participating in what is going on. This includes what the Roman empire did for good, which included such things as

law enforcement through judicial system, protection from invading armies by the Roman army, and the building of roads which made trade and travel much easier and more prosperous. Since you are a part of that world and benefiting from what Caesar has done, then pay what is right to Caesar. But even in saying this, they are only to pay what is really do, not over and beyond. In His response, He marvelously turns the tables on them.

- [It is interesting at this point that Jesus does not outright condemn what they are doing, or the fact that they have coins with images on them.]
- After this, however, He gets to the real heart of the issue. They are not only to give to the government what is due them for the benefits you receive, but you are also to give God what is His due.
- Though not immediately evident, it may be that Jesus is doing something very profound here. If it isn't His main point in His answer, it is certainly true biblically. While Caesar makes this false claim on the coin of being king of the world, a divine son, and high priest, Jesus makes claims which are absolutely true. Here stands the King of kings, the Son of God, the great high priest. And while these men are willing to pay tribute to Caesar (who is a false reflection of these things), they are unwilling to pay tribute to the One who truly is those things.
- There may also be another allusion here. One of the most fundamental truths of Scripture regarding us as human beings is that we, by creation, bear the image of God. The image of Caesar on that coin demonstrated His ownership of that coin, and the image of God pressed into our souls demonstrates God's ownership of us.
- The fact that we can reason, that we live with purpose, that we have creative capacities, that we are moral beings all demonstrate that we are more than animals, and are uniquely created by and are God's.
- That being so, we owe Him everything. Even if you aren't a Christian, you are created in His image and owe Him all you are because His image is pressed into you, and you cannot erase it.
- No matter how hard you eventually try, no matter what you become some day (Atheist, Buddhist, Materialist, Hedonist) you will always live inconsistently with your worldview. You will continue to live as creatures made in his image, giving and wanting love, living as if there is a purpose in life, being creative in some way, believing that there are still things that are good and evil, none of which can be supported by these other philosophies of life.

IV. THE OUTCOME DESCRIBED – v.26

- Though they tried, and the scheme seemed full proof, they "could not catch Him in His words in the presence of the people." They had set a trap, and their prey had escaped. In the end there was nothing they could say, and the people did not witness His demise, but only His genius.
- Not only this, but the men themselves sent as spies "marveled at His answer and kept silent." Jesus could not be outsmarted or outwitted. He is in control of the situation, and His wisdom was so far superior to theirs that they only way He would eventually be caught and destroyed is if His placed Himself willingly into their hands.

APPLICATION

Let us worship and adore the Lord Jesus Christ.

- Never a man spoke like this. Truly He was the One who taught the way of God in truth, who showed favoritism to no man, feared no man, and was able to answer in wisdom all those who sought to confound Him
- He is the one who willingly laid down His life, the just for the unjust like us, as the perfect sacrifice for sin so that we could be reconciled to God.
- He is the one who truly is the King, the Son of God, the great High Priest of our faith.

Let us render to others what is their due.

- Romans 13:7. Let us be exceedingly thankful for the benefits we have in our country, and live as righteous citizens displaying what it is to live as children of God in our generation.

Let us render to God what is His due.

- There is no contradiction here. We both render to others, as well as to God what is His. Part of rendering to God what is His is doing just what Romans 13:7, but there is more.
- WE are His, and therefore let us give ourselves to Him. Our thoughts, our words, our deeds, our gifts, our families, our service, everything we have and everything we are.