

## When Your Priorities Are Challenged

Mark 12:13-17; 28-34

### I. Genuine Citizenship Mark 12:13-17

#### A QUESTION OF OWNERSHIP

**Intro:** Things are heating up in Jerusalem. Jesus has offended the religious powers and they are out to get Him, **Mark 11:18**. They want Him dead, so they come to Him in an effort to lay a trap for Him. They want Jesus to make a verbal misstep that they can use to their advantage.

The text before us today is the first in a series of attacks launched by the enemies of the Lord Jesus. Their goal in all of these attacks is to either discredit Him with the people or to have a reason to accuse Him before the state. They are out to get Jesus and they do not care how they accomplish their goal.

In this text, they come to Jesus with **A Question Of Ownership**. This challenge from these evil men has something to say to our hearts today. I just want to share two *thoughts* with you today. I want you to see **The Jews And Their Attack** and I want you to see **The Lord And His Answer**.

The teaching found in this text gets right to the heart of Who's we are and of Who we serve. The Lord has something to say to His people and to those who do not know Him. He has a word for your heart today. God wants you to know that He has a claim on your life. He wants you to know that you have an obligation to serve Him. He wants you to know Who you belong to! So, let's move through this text together as I try to preach about **A Question Of Ownership**.

#### I. v. 13-15a THE JEWS AND THEIR ATTACK

A. v. 13a **The Conspirators** – This verse tells us that the men who approached Jesus came from two very different groups that held opposing beliefs. The Pharisees were the religious conservatives of the day. They were very legalistic in that they tried to keep the very letter of the Law of God perfectly. The very name "**Pharisee**" means "**the separatists**". Still, they were marked by pride and self-righteousness. They were often rebuked by Jesus because their religious activities were merely external in nature. They had no real faith relationship with God. Yet, the Pharisees were very nationalistic in their political views. They hated being under Roman rule and wanted to be free from it.

The church, and church people, should be united by the bond of love. When we are controlled by love, we will seek good and not evil. May love be our calling card as we travel through this world, **Mark 12:28-31; John 13:35; 1 Cor. 13:1-8.**)

B. v. 13b **The Conspiracy** – These men came together in an effort to "**catch Him in His words**". The word "**catch**" has the idea of "**hunting, or of setting a trap to catch one's prey**".

They wanted to outsmart Jesus and get Him to say something that would get Him in trouble with either the Roman authorities or the common people. If they could get Jesus to offend Rome, they could label Him as an insurrectionist and Rome would take care of their problem for them. If they could discredit Jesus with the common people, He would lose His influence there. Either way, their problem would be solved.

(III. It is a tragedy when people seek to trap others so they can attack them. But, this happens far too often in our world. When a person listens to the words and watches the actions of another in an effort to find fault with them, that person has a serious spiritual problem. That is not the way of love. **1 Cor. 13:5**, "**...thinketh no evil.**" Literally, this phrase means "**takes no worthless inventory**".

Real love does not: 1.) Remember injury 2.) Believe all it hears about another 3.) Look for fault in others! If this attitude were practiced in the church, it would solve about 90% of any church's troubles.

The problem with the Pharisees and Herodians was that they were lost men who operated in the power of the flesh. They had religion, but they did not have salvation. That makes them the most dangerous people of all! I have seen more trouble caused in church by religious, lost Baptists than I have ever seen caused by the lost!

- C. v. 14a **The Compliments** – These men come to Jesus and they try to use a psychological trick. They come to Him with flattery. People will do that, won't they? They will try to butter you up before they drop the hammer on your head. That's what these men are doing.

They come to Jesus and they call Him "**Master**". That word means "**teacher**". Then they begin to share their compliments with Jesus. Here is what they are saying. "**Teacher, we know that you are a man of integrity, and that you do not care about anyone's opinion. For you are not the kind of man Who can be manipulated, but you truly teach the way of God.**"

Everything they said about Jesus was true, but they didn't believe a word of it. This is nothing more than insincere flattery designed to cause Jesus to drop His guard and say something stupid. Given the way these men have treated Jesus in the past, you can almost hear the sarcasm in their voices.

This trick might have worked with an ordinary man, but not with the Lord Jesus. He knew their motives and He could see the condition of their hearts, **v. 15**.

(III. You would do well to watch out for those people who are always trying to flatter you. An ancient Greek Philosopher by the name of Antisthenes said, "**It is better to fall among crows than flatters; for those devour only the dead -- these the living.**" How true that is!

There are people all around us who try to get us on their side through flattery. They try to ingratiate themselves to others through the use of excessive compliments. Beware of those who try to flatter you. They are dangerous and ultimately they will turn on you.

The real danger with flattery was summed up well by Dale Carnegie. He said, "**Flattery is telling the other person precisely what he thinks about himself.**" Jesus could have believed everything good they said about Him because it was all true. We would do well to ignore the good things that are said about us. There is a danger that we might just come to believe them. As Adlai Stevenson said, "**Flattery is all right so long as you don't inhale.**"

- D. v. 14b-15 **The Challenge** – With their sarcastic flattery out of the way, they get to the real reason for their visit. They ask Jesus about paying "**tribute to Caesar**". The "**tribute**" was a poll tax that every Roman subject was required to pay each year. The poll tax was a "**penny**" or "**a denarius**", which was a day's pay for the common worker.

For both of these groups this was a matter of the separation of church and state. The Pharisees believed that religion was superior to the state. The Herodians believed that the state was superior to religion. The Herodians probably did not mind paying the tax, because they liked all the benefits they received from Rome. "The Herodians held that government was dominant over religion. They would agree that taxes must be paid to Caesar rather than to God." (III. When it comes to the Christian and government, there are four basic attitudes. Let me share them all and tell you which one I think is biblical.

1. **God alone is our authority** – There have been people who would totally separate themselves from all worldly associations and go off to live apart from the world, from sinners and from human government. The monks in the ancient monastic systems come to mind here.
2. **The state alone is our authority** – This is the view of secularism. In this view that state is the sole authority in a person's life. This is the most dangerous of the four.
3. **God and the state are both authorities, but the state is dominant** – People who hold this view pay God lip service, but believe the word of the state has more authority than the Word of God.
4. **God and state are both authorities, but God is dominant** – This is the biblical view. This was the view articulated by Jesus in these verses. Those who hold this view obey the state as long and the demands of the state do not violate the clear teachings of God. When God and the state are in opposition, God is the final authority. When the state stands in opposition to the Word of God, (i.e. When we are commanded to perform an immoral act; go against our conscience; stand against the clear Word of God, etc.) - we have a clear duty to oppose the state and obey the Lord, regardless of the personal costs.

## II. Genuine Love Mark 12:28-34

### I. V. 29-31 THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GREAT COMMANDMENTS

A. V. 29-30 **The Supreme Commandment** - In these verses, Jesus tells man that he has the responsibility to love God ahead of everything else in this world and that he is to love the Lord with every faculty of his being. Jesus begins by quoting what is called the "Shema." This is a quotation of Deut. 6:4-5, this passage was quoted by every Jew every day during his prayer time. In doing so, he was reminding himself that there is no other God but Jehovah and that anything that occupied first place in his life ahead of God was, in essence, an idol, or a false god.

(III. This is still true today. Like the Jews of old, we must be certain that God occupies the first place in our lives, ahead of every other love or allegiance, Col. 1:18! III. We say He is first, then we place other things ahead of Him and His will for our lives! Our actions speak louder than our words! In these words of Jesus, we can see that He intends for us to place the Lord God ahead of everything else in life. Notice areas in which we are to love the Lord supremely.

1. **All Our Heart** - Sometimes the word heart is used to refer to the seat of our emotions, but that is not the intention here. What Jesus is saying is that we are to love the Lord without pretense. We are to be genuine or our love for Him and not to just say we love that Lord and then live as if He didn't exist. We are to be genuine in our love and not be hypocrites.

(III. "Cross my heart and hope to die")

2. **All Our Soul** - This involves the idea of our emotions. We are not to love God with some kind of dry, antiseptic love, but we are to be emotional in our love for Him. That is, our love for God should touch us at our most intimate levels. We are to love the Lord with all our emotional self.

3. **All Our Mind** - That is, we are to involve the intellect in our love for the Lord. This love is not mindless and empty-headed, but we are to love the Lord because we have considered Him, meditated on Him and therefore make a conscious decision to love the Lord. In other words, you shouldn't love God just because the preachers says so, but you should love Him because of who He is and what He has done for you.

4. **All Our Strength** - This implies that our love for the Lord is not to be a thing that is done in word alone, but should also see expression in our physical bodies. If we love the Lord, then the body is His as well. We have no right to divorce the physical from the spiritual. True love for Jesus is always carried out by the physical man, as well as the spiritual.

(III. If all of these things are taken together, it becomes clear that the Lord is telling us to love God with perfect sincerity, the utmost of fervency, with the fullest exercise of an enlightened reason and with the entire energy of our being. This is the spirit of the greatest commandment!) (III. True love for Jesus manifests itself in every area of life. Do you love His people, His Word, His House, His Work, His world, His commandments, His worship, etc as you should?)

(III. Following a great victory, King Cyrus of Persia took as prisoners a noble prince, his wife, and their children. When they were brought into the leader's tent to stand before him, Cyrus said to the prince, "What will you give me if I set you free?" He replied, "I will give you half of all that I possess." "And what will you give me if I release your children?" continued Cyrus. "Your majesty, I will give you all that I possess." The king questioned him further, "But what will you give me if I set your wife at liberty?" Looking at the one he loved so dearly, the prince replied without hesitation, "If you will restore my wife to freedom, I will give you my life." Cyrus was so moved by his devotion that he released the entire family without asking recompense. That evening the prince said to his wife, "Did you not think Cyrus a very handsome man?" "I did not notice him," she answered, "Why, my dear, where were your eyes?" exclaimed her husband. She replied, "I had eyes only for the one who said he would lay down his life for me.")

(III. Max Lucado tells one of the fascinating tales of the Taj Mahal: "The favorite wife of the Mogul emperor Shah Jahan died. Devastated, he resolved to honor her by constructing a temple that would serve as her tomb. Her coffin was placed in the center of a large parcel of land, and construction the temple began around it. No expense would be spared to make her final resting place magnificent.

"But as the weeks turned into months, the Shah's grief was eclipsed by his passion for the project. He no longer mourned her absence. The construction consumed him. One day, while walking from one side of the construction site

to the other, his leg bumped against a wooden box. The prince brushed the dust off his leg and ordered the worker to throw the box out.

"Shah Jahan didn't know he had ordered the disposal of the coffin--now forgotten--hidden beneath layers of dust and time. The one the temple was intended to honor was forgotten, but the temple was erected anyway. Could someone build a temple and forget why? Could someone construct a palace, yet forget the king?"

"The next time you enter an assembly of worship, position yourself where you can see the people. Then decide. You can tell ones who remember the slain one. They're wide-eyed and expectant. They're children watching the unwrapping of a gift. They're servants standing still as a king passes. You don't doze in the presence of royalty. And you don't yawn while receiving a gift, especially when the giver is the king himself!

"You can also tell the ones who see only the temple. Their eyes wander. Their feet shuffle. Their hands doodle, and their mouths open--not to sing, but to yawn. For not matter how hard they try to stay amazed, their eyes start to glaze over. All temples, even the Taj Mahal, lose their luster after a while.

"The temple gazers don't mean to be bored. They love the church. They don't mean to grow stale. They put on hats and hose and coats and ties and come every week. But still, something is missing. The One they once planned to honor hasn't been seen in a while.

"But those who have seen Him can't seem to forget Him. They find Him, often in spite of the temple rather than because of it. They brush the dust away and stand ever impressed before His tomb--His empty tomb."

(III. V. 30 - "**Thy**" - It impossible for men to properly love the Lord until he personally knows the Lord! 1 John 4:19 makes this abundantly clear to us. We do not have the capacity to love Him until He first calls us into a relationship with Himself. After salvation, then it is possible to love the Lord.)

B. V. 31 **The Secondary Commandment** - (III. To call it secondary is misleading, because both of these are so closely intertwined. In fact, it is absolutely impossible to do either one without the other!)

(III. In giving us what He called the second great commandment, Jesus quoted from Leviticus 19:18.) Jesus is simply telling us that we are to love others with the same love which we bestow upon ourselves. That is, we are to place others in such a position that we are constantly looking out for their best interests, their welfare and their best good, Phil. 2:3; Rom. 12:10. The whole idea here is that we are to love others with the same type of compassion and obligation that we feel toward ourselves. (III. If we were all honest, we think pretty highly of old self! Therefore, we are to show this same regard for those around us! III. How this love manifests itself - Forgiveness, peace, unity, compassion, witnessing, etc.) (III. In English, we speak in what is know as "person." If I am referring to my self, I will say, "I am." That is known as the "first person." If I were speaking to you, I might say, "You are." That is the "second person." Then, if I were speaking of another, I might say, "He is." That is know as the "third person." In English, we always have self first. However, in Hebrew, it is just the opposite. First Person says, "He is"; Second Person says, "You are"; Third Person says, "I am". Therein is contained the formula for joy in this life. If we will learn to place God in the first person, others in the second person and if we will be willing to take the third person, then we will have our lives in order.)

(III. The true formula for joy is:

J - Jesus

O - Others

Y - Yourself)

(III. Genuine love is sacrificial - In sixteenth century England, Oliver Cromwell ordered that a soldier be shot for his crimes at the ringing of the evening bell. But that night at the fateful hour, no sound came from the belfry. The girl who was to be married to the condemned man had climbed up into the tower and had clung to the great clapper of the bell to prevent it from striking. Brought before Cromwell to give an account of her actions, she only wept and showed him her bruised and bleeding hands. Cromwell was greatly impressed, and he said, "Your lover is alive because of your sacrifice. He will not be shot!" )