

Conspiracy with a Coin

Mark 12: 13-17

As we continue through Mark's gospel, I want to offer a reminder of the volatile environment in which Jesus walked at this time. He is in the last few days prior to the crucifixion. Having entered Jerusalem triumphantly, He had returned twice since, entering the Temple and dealing with the hypocrisy and vanity of the scribes and Pharisees. His presence among them, challenging their authority and religious practices had only added to their commitment to get rid of Jesus at any cost. [Mark 11:18 – And the scribes and chief priests heard it, and sought how they might destroy him: for they feared him, because all the people was astonished at his doctrine.](#)

Our text today reveals the first of many calculated attacks that will be carried out against Jesus prior to His arrest and trial. The religious elite of that day have banded together in their commitment to silence Jesus and rid Jerusalem of His teaching and influence.

The encounter before us today may seem of little significance to the casual Bible reader, but it reveals great truth that all need to understand and embrace. Those who are saved by grace have been bought with a price. We now belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, and our loyalty is to be submitted entirely to Him. As we examine the [details](#) within the text, I want to consider the thought: [Conspiracy with a Coin](#).

I. A Planned Attack (13-15a) – In these verses we discover a calculated attack, carried out by those who opposed Jesus. Consider:

A. The Cooperation (13a) – [And they send unto him certain of the Pharisees and of the Herodians, to catch him in his words.](#) We immediately discover the coordinated attack carried out by a strange association of people. Apparently, this attack was orchestrated by the chief priests, those who held authority and influence over the Jews. It is not surprising to find the Pharisees involved in this coordinated attack. We know they were very conservative in their religious practices. They held strictly to the law and additional practices believed to be required for acceptance to God. They were legalists, condemning any who failed to share their commitment to these practices and beliefs. Most Pharisees were very self-righteous and prideful.

- It is interesting to discover the group they chose to cooperate with during this particular assault. The Herodians were a political faction of Jews who were loyal to King Herod, enjoying the benefits associated with the Roman occupation. Herod supported the Roman occupation and sought to advance the influence of Roman culture within Jerusalem.

- Normally these two groups were at odds with each other, choosing to avoid any association that wasn't absolutely necessary. Their values and goals were completely opposite, and yet they have joined together in opposition to Jesus. While they despised each other, their hatred for Jesus served as the unifying factor in their cooperation. (Unfortunately, such an attitude remains today. Particular factions that usually have nothing to do with each other will often come together to oppose the Gospel and its advancement.)

B. The Motivation (13b) – *And they send unto him certain of the Pharisees and of the Herodians, to catch him in his words.* Again, as we have seen many times in past studies, there was no desire to learn of Jesus or receive anything from Him. These had come with the intention of setting a trap for Jesus and hopefully being able to accuse Him further because of His words and views. If He spoke in opposition to Rome, He could be accused as an insurrectionist; if He sided with Rome, He would lose credibility with the people. These thought they had a plan that would serve to hurt Jesus' credibility and provide a rational accusation against Him among the people.

- This is a tactic often encouraged by the enemy and many continue to follow his lead. They will go to great lengths to formulate questions or discussions in such a way that will lend themselves to accusation and condemnation. Such motivations are never pleasing to the Lord or led by the Holy Spirit.

C. The Deception (14a) – *And when they were come, they say unto him, Master, we know that thou art true, and carest for no man: for thou regardest not the person of men, but teachest the way of God in truth.* This manipulative group, usual enemies brought together through hatred, come to Jesus spewing words of flattery and superficial praise. They address Jesus as Master, seeking to portray an acknowledgement of His wisdom and position. They reveal an apparent admiration for His integrity in dealing with particular matters, regardless of the opinions of others. They praise Him for the way He taught the Word and way of God, providing guidance for all who heard Him teach.

- Clearly, this was all a carefully orchestrated ruse. These had not received Jesus as the Christ; in fact, they were repelled by His claims of deity. They cared nothing for His teaching, refusing to hear or heed His words. They certainly did not admire Jesus; they hated Him! This was simply done in an effort to play their devious games, hoping Jesus would believe their lies and fall for their schemes.
- I have learned to be cautious during times like these. That is not to say that people can't be genuine in their efforts to encourage, but at times there is an ulterior motive. Sometimes flattery is used in an effort to disguise true motives.

D. The Question (14b-15a) – *Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not?* ^[15a] *Shall we give, or shall we not give?* After all of the flattery and deceit, they finally get around to asking their well-crafted question – Is it lawful for Jews to pay tribute to Caesar? Should we pay our taxes or not? No doubt they had put much thought into these particular questions. They assumed there was no way Jesus could answer this question without doing harm to His credibility and reputation.

- The accepted views of these opposing factions were used to serve their deceptive agenda. The Herodians held the government, the Roman state, in high regard. They believed the demands of the state took precedent over loyalty to the Lord. *The Herodians held that government was dominant over religion. They would agree that taxes must be paid to Caesar rather than to God.* ⁱ *The Herodians not only subjected religion to the state, but they were worldly-minded and denied much of the supernatural, including life after death and the spiritual world or dimension of being.* ⁱⁱ The Pharisees were fiercely loyal to Jewish independence and sovereignty. They held their religious practices and views in higher regard than any demand or law of the state. *The Pharisees held that religion was dominant over government. They despised Roman authority and taxation.* ⁱⁱⁱ
- These thought they had crafted the perfect question through which they could condemn Jesus. If He refuted the taxation of Caesar, they would have accused Him of insurrection against Rome, and would have valid accusation with the Roman authorities. If He embraced the taxation, He would have been viewed as a sympathizer with Rome and lost credibility with the common people, particularly after revealing Himself as the Messiah.

II. A Prudent Answer (15b-17) – In response to their coordinated attack, Jesus offered a wise and compelling answer. Notice:

A. His Wisdom (15b) – *But he, knowing their hypocrisy, said unto them, Why tempt ye me? bring me a penny, that I may see it.* We must remember that this isn't the first time Jesus had dealt with the accusation and attempts of those who opposed Him to discredit His ministry in an effort to minimize His influence. After all, He is the Son of God – God robed in flesh. He possessed omniscience, fully aware of their attitudes and motivation. He was not surprised nor caught off guard by their tactics. Jesus knew their hypocrisy.

- This is very comforting, and also quite challenging. We hide nothing from the Lord. He is fully aware of the desires and intents of our heart. He knows what motivates our actions and the attitude we possess. The Lord knows whether our behavior is genuine and sincere in an effort to serve Him and advance the kingdom, or if there are other motives behind our words and deeds.

B. His Witness (16-17a) – *And they brought it. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? And they said unto him, Caesar's.* ^[17a] *And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.* Rather than falling victim to their hypocritical scheme, Jesus responded publicly in great wisdom. He called for a Roman denarius and asked His accusers whose image the penny bore? They admitted the penny had the inscription of Caesar on it. The Lord then challenged them to pay that which belonged to Caesar unto the state and to pay that which belonged to God unto the Temple offering. They were under Roman authority, receiving benefits from the Roman state, and thus were obligated to render the taxes levied by the state. Jesus taught them to submit to the rule of law and honor the government which held authority over them.

- We must understand that Jesus did not release them from obligation unto the Lord either. Their loyalty was not reserved for government alone. They must also submit to the authority of God and honor Him with a tithe and offering.
- These principles remain for the church today. I know we don't agree with how the government spends a lot of our tax dollars, but we are obligated to abide by the laws of the state. God ordained human government, and He expects us to abide by the laws and pay what is required of us. *Rom.13:7 – Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.* On the other hand, we are also expected to give God that which belongs to Him. I am convinced we are obligated to give unto the Lord a ten percent tithe of our earnings, along with a free-will offering above that. However, if there is a situation where government asks us to behave contrary to the ordinances of God, we must abide faithful to the Lord. He is our supreme authority always!

C. Their Wonder (17b) – *And they marveled at him.* These were literally amazed at the wisdom of Jesus. They were speechless regarding His response. They had come to trap Him with a well-crafted question, but He did not fall victim to their scheme. What they hoped would tarnish His reputation became an encounter that revealed undeniable wisdom.

- One cannot encounter the living Christ and fail to be in awe of His presence. All do not respond, much like those who challenged Him that day, but His wisdom and power are undeniable. He is the source of all wisdom and guidance. He is the sovereign of the universe and the living Word. He provided salvation and eternal life for all who come to Him by faith. When we pause to consider the greatness of Christ, we stand in awe and wonder of Him!

Conclusion: This passage remains relevant for our day, causing us to check our motives and attitudes. Are we sincere in our devotion and commitment to Christ, or are we secretly trying to

advance a personal agenda? Are we committed to dealing honestly and fairly with all men, or do we seek to be manipulative in order to get our way? Do we faithfully render unto Caesar the things that are his and give unto the Lord that which He commands, or do seek ways to avoid our responsibilities? These rejected Christ, and yet He loved them. He desires that all come to Him in faith and honor Him with their lives. If there are needs, come to Jesus!

ⁱ Preacher's Outline and Sermon Bible - Commentary - The Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible – Mark.

ⁱⁱ Ibid

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid