

PROTECT YOUR COMMUNITY PRESENCE

Apr 22: **Pay Your Taxes** (Render to Caesar); Mark 12:13-17

Intro: We have a tremendous opportunity as followers of Jesus to represent him in our world and to do his work. This is also a great responsibility. Few things are more important to we who know Christ than being faithful in our walk in this world. That is what this series is all about—protecting your community presence.

Many Christians are tripped up in their public witness by foolish political and financial attitudes and actions. They rant and rave about questionable matters, cheat on their taxes, are delinquent on their debts but think they remain faithful as followers of Jesus. Jesus is definitely providing a general principle for us in our relationship with government when he responds to those who are trying to trap him. He is also saying to the Jews who hate Roman rule and taxation: “Pay your taxes.”

I. WATCH YOUR STEP: *They sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words (v13).*

A. Jesus has a growing, impressive ministry. His influence has spread far and wide in Israel. He is being followed by thousands of people who attend his preaching and healing campaigns.

1. Any time you have success you become a target. Your success threatens somebody.

2. This is true even of spiritual success where people are looking up to you and respecting you and listening to you.

B. Don't be naïve. Evil is aggressive, not passive, in your life. It is after you. The devil goes about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). People at work at school will bait you because you are a believer in Jesus just as these people baited Jesus. They want to see you fall just as the enemies of Jesus wanted to see him fall. They will seek to trap you just as they sought to trap him. I wish this were not true, but you know how many insistent invitations you get to come back into the world and shed your Christian values and priorities.

C. They send not only the Pharisees on this mission. They also send the Herodians. The Herodians are mentioned by name only three times in Scripture. They are members of the Herod Party, people who supported and worked with Herod the Great and his dynasty. Some think the Herodians sincerely believed that the best way for Israel to achieve independence from Rome was to support Herod and his monarchy.

The Herodians are mentioned first when Jesus healed the man with the withered hand in a synagogue in Galilee on the Sabbath. Here Jesus is in Jerusalem, and the Herod Party is present again with an antagonistic attitude toward him.

D. These people who question Jesus are on a mission, and they are intent upon it. They want to trip him up. They want to bring him down. They want to destroy him. They have been sent from the religious leaders with this very purpose and intent. We call this “entrapment,” and that is what it is. The word refers to hunting—“to take by hunting.” The question is like bait to a wild animal, a feeder to a deer or seed spread for doves. The hunters are nearby waiting for the moment to strike.

II. WATCH YOUR LANGUAGE: *They sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words (v13).*

A. The enemies of Jesus want to “catch him in his words” (v13).

1. The person who resents your faith, your integrity, will pitch the question to you that is most likely to illicit an intemperate remark. In our day it may be the question about politics, the president, race or sexual orientation. They want to get you ranting and raving, twisted off with an anger that may be seething in your heart.

2. We are all vulnerable at the point of our words. If you could tame your tongue, you could control your entire body.

3. The Enemies of Christ Are Crafty. They know that words from a public figure are a common avenue of failure both morally and intellectually.

B. True Intent: folly in his WORDS. These people are not going to change their behavior as a result of what Jesus says one way or the other. They are not looking for instruction from him. They are seeking to get a rise out of him. The WHOLE QUESTION in their minds has only to do with the words he speaks.

C. Probable Weakness: Ordinary people in Jesus' day were simply overwrought about the political situation. The enemies of Jesus suspect that if they throw the political question to him, he will hang himself with his answer.

1. Consider what is at stake here. The very integrity and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth is on the line as these people throw him this question and wait to pounce.

2. Jesus could express an intemperate or inflammatory opinion about the politics of the day that would literally pull down everything he has built through is preaching.

3. Jesus is addressing not only the specific question but the balance of priorities between his message about the Heavenly Father and the earthly politics in which he is embroiled.

4. Too many of his followers are willing to compromise the gospel of Christ rather than hold their tongue.

D. Discontent with politics can produce anger, resentment, jealousy, fear, and even hatred.

1. These attitudes do not confine themselves to the political sphere. Once they are unleashed in your life they poison every relationship that you have. You can become intolerable to your friends and even your family. When you get ticked off, when a question triggers you, everyone wants to leave or hide.

2. Jesus is aware that his answer on this question could produce a storm of response. He is also aware that he has bigger fish to fry than what he thinks of the reigning Caesar.

3. Jesus is going to give a temperate, reasoned response that is truly amazing to his enemies. It is full of wisdom, not bitterness or anger or hatred or resentment. Listen, if you think you labor under a oppressive government, think of Jesus and his friends. Think of the Early Church. Think of our Baptist forefathers.

III. WATCH YOUR HEART: *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 (v14).*

A. This long preface of his enemies appeals to any pride, self-dependence, or arrogance that might be in Jesus. They are hypocrites, and they bait him with flattery:

1. The enemies of Jesus will conclude that he is a deceiver, an imposter, a liar. Already they are convinced of his lack of integrity. So they are lying to Jesus about their real attitudes toward him.

2. Remember the proverb: *Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful (Prov. 27:6).* Recently I used this very proverb to give counsel to someone who was receiving unwise advice from someone who was not looking out for their best interest—an enemy rather than a friend.

3. You should note the demeanor and response of Jesus in this situation, for you will soon be in it if you are not already.

B. Jesus is a man of integrity. His life is unified. He behaves the same and speaks the same message whether he is before peasants or kings. His life displays consistency of thought and action.

C. His enemies are hypocrites. If they refuse to pay taxes they would go to jail. If they cheat on taxes they are liars and thieves.

IV. WATCH YOUR WALLET: *Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's (v17).*

A. Jesus says, "Show me the money!" Jesus may not have a single coin on him. Maybe Judas has all the coins, and he is somewhere else.

B. Caesar's image is on the coin. ***Get out your wallet and look at your money. Is it a peso, a Euro, or a Yen? No. It's U.S. currency because that is the civil jurisdiction you live under. You cannot escape civil authority on this planet. The tax belongs to Caesar. You are the beneficiary of the social order. You use the roads and bridges. You enjoy the security of law enforcement and courts. You use the educational system, the transportation system, the communication system, the medical system, and the economic system that is in part sustained by these taxes.

C. Put taxes in perspective. Jesus' answer does not indicate that attitudes toward government are the primary issue for us as his followers. He is not flippant, but he is firm. Even in regard to government, we have bigger fish to fry. We have been entrusted with the gospel, and nothing trumps that, not even taxes.

These people **MUST PAY TAXES**. It is not optional. But it is not the central question of their faithfulness to God.

D. Give to God the things that are God's. The answer is not just about paying taxes. It is also about giving to God what you owe him. And the tithe, the Bible says, belongs to the Lord. Part of your income belongs to him. You are a tenant on this planet. Everything is his. Your giving should reflect your gratitude for eyes to see, ears to hear, and hands to work.

Conclusion: We intend to be the hands and feet and voice of Jesus--salt and light. Some things belong to Caesar and some to God. And faithful stewards will be responsible to both.