

When we met last time, we looked at the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the denouncement/clearing of the temple, and the first of several conflicts between Jesus and the Sanhedrin. Tonight we will study the continued clashes between Jesus and the temple leaders. Most commentators believe that these confrontations took place in succession, most likely on Tuesday of Passion Week.

**Read Mark 12:13-17, and the parallel passages in Matthew 22:15-22 and Luke 20:22-26.**

1. Verse 13 begins, "And **they** sent to him . . . ." Who "they" refers to is not specified, but the context suggests it is the Sanhedrin. We are told that the Pharisees and some Herodians were sent to Jesus as He is teaching in the temple. Using resources available to you (notes from previous lessons, Bible footnotes, Bible dictionary, online resources, etc.), write down some facts about these two groups, noting the similarities between the two and the differences. (Things to consider: were they religious or political groups, what were their main beliefs, who were the main members of each group, etc.)
2. From our last lesson, we saw that as Jesus was teaching in the temple, the religious leaders approached Him in an authoritarian manner, demanding to know what authority He had to do the things He was doing (Mark 11:27-33). Comment on the manner in which Jesus is now approached by the Pharisees and the Herodians (vv. 13-14), and how it differs from the previous clash with religious leaders.
3. Verse 13 tells us clearly that the Pharisees' and Herodians' motive was to try to entrap Jesus. What question did they pose to Him (v. 14), and how might this be used as a trap?

**STUDY NOTE:** The tax referred to in verse 14 was the Roman imperial poll tax, which, according to the historian Josephus, was instituted in Palestine in A.D. 6 during the reign of Augustus Caesar. It was not levied on Roman citizens, but on the subjects of conquered Roman provinces, and thus was an extremely unpopular tax that often fueled rebellion. The amount required to satisfy the poll tax was a denarius, which was the average daily wage in Palestine in Jesus' day. The denarius was a silver coin bearing the semi-divine bust of Tiberius Caesar (A.D. 14-37) with an abbreviated Latin inscription, *Tiberius Caesar Divi Augusti Filius Augustus* ("Tiberius Caesar Augustus, Son of the Divine Augustus"). The reverse side bore the image of Tiberius's mother Livia and the inscription, *Pontifex Maximus* ("High Priest").

Verse 15 tells us that Jesus knew their hypocrisy and that He clearly understood that they were testing Him. How does their approach put their hypocrisy on display?

4. Jesus responds by asking for a denarius to be brought to Him (v. 15). He probes his questioners further, asking whose image is on the coin, to which they respond, "Caesar's" (v. 16). He then goes on to say in verse 17, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." What is Jesus teaching here?

Read Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:13-17. What is a Christian's role in obeying the government? What is God's explicit will as stated in 1 Peter 2:15 concerning why we are to obey our leaders?

**Read Mark 12:18-27. (See also Matthew 22:23-33 and Luke 20:27-40)**

5. In this next confrontation, Sadducees come to question Jesus. This is the only passage in Mark's Gospel where Jesus has an exclusive encounter with the Sadducees. From verse 18, what doctrine did they **deny**?

**STUDY NOTE:** We talked briefly about the Sadducees when we studied Mark 8:11-13 and its parallel passage in Matthew 16:1-4 (Week 10), but we'll take a closer look at them here. The Sadducees were one of two sects that dominated Jewish life in general, and the Sanhedrin in particular, in first-century Palestine (the other, as we have seen throughout Mark's Gospel, was the Pharisees). The Sadducees' name is believed to be derived from Zadok, David's high priest (2 Samuel 8:17, 1 Chronicles 15:11), who was his appointed officer over the Aaronic priestly line (1 Chronicles 27:17) and whose family line was given the exclusive right to the high priesthood (Ezekiel 40:46, 43:19). Though the Pharisees and the Sadducees both had their origins around the time of the Maccabean revolt (early second century B.C.), the two groups had different beliefs. In contrast to the Pharisees, the Sadducees accepted only the Torah (Genesis through Deuteronomy) as authoritative; they expressly denied the resurrection of the dead, the existence of angels and demons, and they rejected the oral tradition of the elders. The Sadducees comprised a clerical and lay aristocracy associated with the priesthood, and belonged to the highest class of Jewish society. Their close association with the priesthood meant that their influence was particularly focused on the temple and operations associated with it. The priesthood was an important religious and political influence, and thus the Sadducees' close alliance with it thrust them into the political arena. They were receptive to Hellenistic ideas, and, according to the historian Josephus, were collaborators with Roman rule during Jesus' day.

6. The scenario and question the Sadducees present to Jesus is somewhat long and complicated (vv. 18-23). Briefly summarize it below.

This scenario reflects the law of levirate marriage outlined in Deuteronomy 25: 5-10. What was the purpose of levirate marriage?

Given the Sadducees' doctrinal views, how does this scenario/question reveal their hypocrisy?

Why would they choose this particular scenario to try and trap Jesus?

7. Jesus replies brilliantly to His interrogators, addressing several of their key errors.

- What reason does Jesus give for why the Sadducees are wrong? (v. 24)

How does Jesus' statement strike at the heart of their belief about the Scriptures?

- What three facts does Jesus give in verse 25 that refute the Sadducees' doctrines?
- From verses 26 and 27, explain how Jesus proves (a) the fact of the resurrection, and (b) the importance of it in regard to the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

**Read Mark 12:28-34.**

8. Mark tells us in verse 28 that while Jesus was involved with the Sadducees, a scribe approaches. Matthew's parallel passage (Matthew 22:34-40) tells us that this scribe (lawyer), who was a Pharisee, was sent by the larger group of Pharisees with a question to test Jesus again. In what manner does the scribe approach Jesus, and what does he ask?

**STUDY NOTE:** Scribes had a long and illustrious history in ancient Israel. The office of the scribe appears early in the Davidic monarchy (2 Samuel 8:16-17, 20:24-25; 1 Kings 4:3), and the role was one of general secretary and recorder/keeper of written documents. They were among the highest ranking civil servants. In post exilic Judaism, the office of scribe had evolved such that they were considered experts in the Torah (both in its content and in its interpretation), with Ezra being the first and one of the most notable in the OT (Ezra 7:6, 11). By Jesus' day, they were not only professors of the Torah, but they also taught in synagogues and functioned as civil lawyers. They were regarded with great prestige in Jewish society -- commoners deferred to scribes as they walked in the streets; seats of honor were reserved for them in the synagogues, and people rose to their feet when a scribe entered a room.

The scribe in our current account was also a Pharisee. And as you may recall, the Pharisees were very meticulous about the law. The rabbinic tradition recorded over 600 commandments in the Torah, and rabbis differentiated between "heavy" or "weighty" commandments (which were concerned with the uncompromising essentials of life) and "light" commandments (which made less demands on one's will or possessions). Renowned teachers were commonly asked to weigh in their opinion of the most important commandment; this was in essence a request to summarize the Torah in a nutshell. Some of the answers that have been recorded in rabbinic writings include, "What you would not want done to you, do not do to your neighbor" (Rabbi Hillel, approximately 20 years before Jesus' ministry); "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:8, Rabbi Akiba A.D. 135); "In all your ways acknowledge God, and he will make your paths straight" (Proverbs 3:6, from a rabbi in the early third century A.D.); "The righteous shall live by his faith" (Habakkuk 2:4, Rabbi Simlai A.D. 260).

9. Consider the manner in which Jesus responds to the scribe. How does it differ than how He responded to the Pharisees/Herodians and to the Sadducees? Why does He respond differently to the scribe than He does to the others?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
10. Consider the content of Jesus' response. The scribe really only asks for one commandment, but Jesus goes the extra mile to give him a second because the two are interrelated. His response is in the form of two OT quotations. Write the two commandments in order of importance and the two OT passages where they are found.

What does Jesus mean when He says we are to "love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" (v. 30)? How do we learn to love God in this way?

What is the significance of Jesus' answer as you consider the law recorded in the Ten Commandments? (Exodus 20:1-17, Deuteronomy 5:1-21)



"The LORD said to my Lord . . . ." Psalm 110 was originally a coronation hymn that would have been sung, chanted, or recited at the inauguration of the kings of Judah and Israel. The opening line in Hebrew reads "The LORD (*Yahweh*) said to my lord (*adonai*)."

The first Lord refers to God and the second to the king; that is, at his coronation the king of Israel was inducted as God's viceregent and seated symbolically at God's right hand. The right hand signified honor and closeness to God, and legitimacy to rule with dominion and justice. The Psalm thus originally referred to God and the king of Israel. With the destruction of the monarchy in 586 B.C., Psalm 110 was reappropriated, with the rights of the king being transferred to the Messiah, whose kingdom would not fail as had the Davidic monarchy. It was this subsequent interpretation that is reflected in Jesus' quotation of Ps 110:1 and question in v. 36, where the first Lord refers to God and the second to the Messiah." Edwards goes on to note that by Jesus' day, "the true and ultimate meaning of Psalm 110 was understood with reference to God and the Messiah, of whom the earthly Israelite monarchy had been a shadow or preparation. Thus, to return to the implication of the Psalm in Jesus' question, if David, who was believed to be the author of the Psalm, said "The LORD [=God] said to my Lord [=Messiah]: Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet," then the Messiah is obviously superior to David, and not merely a descendant, as Judaism popularly held . . . The Messiah will indeed be a recognized descendant of David, but he will surpass David's lineage. "Son of David" may assert certain truths about the Messiah, but it falls short in essential ways of capturing his identity. The quotation from Psalm 110 is used here, as it was later used throughout Christian writings, ultimately not as a description of Jesus' purpose and work, but as a description of his transcendent status, sitting at God's honored and authoritative right. That is signaled in Jesus' final cinching question, "How can then he [Messiah] be his [David's] son?" . . . The answer, of course, is that the Messiah is not simply David's son; he is God's son." -- James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, (Eerdmans 2002) pp. 376-377.

It is important to note that Jesus had often been referred to publicly as "Son of David" (Matthew 15:22, 21:9; Mark 10:48; Luke 18:38-39) and He did not object to it. The religious leaders knew this.

**Read Mark 12:38-40, along with the parallel passage in Matthew 23:1-36.**

14. Mark 12:38-40 is in essence a summary of Jesus' more lengthy condemnation of the scribes and Pharisees that we see in Matthew 23. Though Jesus' words should not be taken and applied to every individual scribe or Pharisee (as we know from Scripture that there were religious leaders who truly followed Christ, cf. Joseph of Arimathea and quite possibly Nicodemus, John 19:38-39, performing the duties of disciples toward their deceased

master), they are certainly an accurate description of the general attitude and activity of these groups as a whole. List the six specific actions that characterized the religious leaders in Jesus' day, and what these things indicate about their attitude and character.

15. What does Jesus say will happen to them (v. 49b)? How does He describe their true spiritual condition (Matthew 23:27-28)?

**Read Mark 12:41-44.**

16. In this account Jesus is observing people in the temple bringing their monetary offerings, one of whom is described only as "a poor widow". The amount that worshipers gave was not a particular secret (see study note below). What does the widow offer, and how does it compare (monetarily) with what others have offered?

**STUDY NOTE:** The temple treasury was located in the Court of the Women (see temple diagram from last lesson). The Mishnah records that there were thirteen Shofar-chests located in the temple, each dedicated for a specific offering. As the name suggests, these chests were shaped like the Shofar (ram's horn) and were situated with the narrow end facing upward to prevent theft. The sound of coins as they were dropped into the

receptacle was a clue as to the amount of the offering -- large sums of coins would make more noise, whereas a small sum such as the widow made would tumble down in relative silence. Additionally, if the offering was being made for priestly service, the attending priest would examine the currency for genuineness, inquire as to the purpose of the gift and verify that the amount corresponded to the prescribed sacrifice, and then direct the worshiper to the appropriate receptacle. All of this was spoken aloud and would have been audible to bystanders.

17. What is Jesus' assessment of her offering? What does her act of devotion say about her inner attitude?

Mark's contrast of this poor widow and the religious elite is striking. How does she differ from them?

18. What practical lesson(s) about giving can we learn from this passage?