

This chapter describes several questions that were posed to Jesus in an attempt to discredit Him and His teaching and this lesson covers two of them. The first of these concerned the legitimacy of a Roman tax that had been placed on the Jews while the second questioned the role of marriage in the resurrection. Jesus amazed the people with the way He handled these questions with truth and wisdom.

**Verses 1-14:** Jesus is still talking to the Pharisees and He describes the kingdom of heaven in a parable that parallels God's dealings with the Jews. In the parable a king sends his servants to call those who have been invited to the marriage of his son. These people either made excuses for not coming or ignored the invitation. Some even killed the servants as a blatant insult to the king who responded by sending his armies to kill them and burn their cities. The king then sends servants into the hedges and highways to invite as many people as they could off the streets so that the wedding would be filled with guests. The obvious message to the Pharisees (and the other Jewish leadership that rejected Jesus as the Messiah) is that Israel has rejected God's will throughout their history but God will populate His kingdom with the remnant that do respond to Him in faith and repentance.

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15 Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in *his* talk.

The Greek word for "entangle" means "to ensnare or to entrap." The Pharisees could not refute Jesus on the basis of His teachings so they put their heads together to try to figure out a way to cause Jesus to contradict Himself or say something that would get Him in trouble with either the people or the Roman authorities. They wanted to be able to discredit Jesus with the words from His own mouth so that the people would no longer listen to Him.

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16 And they sent out unto him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any *man*: for thou regardest not the person of men. 17 Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?

**"And they sent out unto him their disciples with the Herodians"** – The Pharisees apparently came up with a plan to ask Jesus a question that they believed that He could not answer without falling into their trap. To implement this plan they send "their disciples" (students of the Pharisees) and the Herodians. The Pharisees likely didn't go themselves because they didn't want Jesus to become suspicious if He recognized them and so they sent their disciples. The Herodians were a group of Jews who supported the dynasty of king Herod, who got his power from the Roman government. The Pharisees (and their disciples) hated Roman rule while the Herodians favored it. The Pharisees believed that the question they will ask of Jesus had only two possible answers and they had sent representatives that favored each answer in hopes that Jesus would offend one of them. It is noteworthy that these two groups (Pharisees and Herodians), who normally strongly disagreed with and even hated each other, would team up in their hatred for Jesus to try to discredit Him before the public.

**"saying, Master, we know that thou art true..."** – They preface their question with flattering compliments intended to compel Jesus to answer honestly even if it may offend someone. Their obvious intent was to put Jesus into a situation so that He could not refrain from answering their question after they declared Him to be a teacher that would say the truth of God without regard to what people thought of it. Of course, they were not being honest themselves because they did not believe that Jesus was true and taught the way of God in truth. They hoped to appeal to His pride and compel Him to answer by saying that He "neither carest thou for any *man*: for thou regardest not the person of men."

**"Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?"** - The "tribute" was an annual tax of one denarius per person that was used to finance the occupying Roman army. A denarius was a silver coin that was worth a day's wage for a Roman soldier. The Jews hated this tax passionately because Rome was essentially forcing the Jews to finance the very military force that was keeping them in subjection. However, the Herodians, who favored Rome, believed it was their duty to pay the tax. Both groups wanted Jesus to state whether or not He believed that this tax was a legitimate requirement. In Luke's account it says that they wanted to cause Jesus to fall under the condemnation of the Roman authorities, so they must have expected Jesus to be against the tax (Luke 20:20).

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18 But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?

**"But Jesus perceived their wickedness [evil purposes and desires]"** – Jesus saw through their slick and flattering talk and understood that they were not asking an honest question. He recognized that they did not care about the answer but were only wanting to trap and discredit Him whether He agreed with the tax or not.

**"and said, Why tempt [to test] ye me, ye hypocrites [actor; pretender]?"** – The Greek word for "tempt" means to be put to the test, and when used in a negative sense it usually refers to being tempted to sin, such as in **James 1:13**: "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man." The Greek word for "hypocrites" referred to the actors in Greek plays who pretended to be another person. Jesus calls these people "hypocrites" because they were only acting, pretending to be asking an honest question when the true purpose of the question was to deceive and entrap Jesus. They were being hypocritical also because whether He agreed with the tax or not, He would be condemned by one group or the other.

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19 Shew me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny. 20 And he saith unto them, Whose *is* this image and superscription?

**"Shew me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny [denarius]"** – The denarius was a silver coin minted by the Roman government worth a day's wages for a Roman soldier. This was the currency typically used to pay the tax.

**"And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription?"** - On the front the denarius had the image of the face of the current Roman emperor (Tiberius Caesar) with an inscription reading "Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus." On the back of the coin was an image of the emperor sitting on his throne wearing priestly robes, which the Jews found offensive to their belief in God.

21 They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's. 22 When they had heard *these words*, they marvelled, and left him, and went their way.

The people acknowledge that it was Caesar's image on the coin. The coin had been minted under his authority because he was the currently governing ruler. The Bible teaches that governments are set up under God's authority:

**Romans 13:1-7** *"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour."*

Thus, to obey human government is to obey God. So Jesus tells the people to give to Caesar that which he is due as a governmental power, but not to give to Caesar that which belongs to God alone (worship and ultimate allegiance). These disciples of the Pharisees and the Herodians are amazed that Jesus was able to answer their question without falling into their trap. They are unable to respond with the condemnation as they had hoped and so they give up and leave.

23 The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection, and asked him, 24 Saying, Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother.

**"The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection"** – The Sadducees rejected anything supernatural and so they did not believe in things such as the resurrection or the existence of angels. They also considered that only the Pentateuch (the first five books of the OT) were authoritative and put no confidence in the remainder of the OT. Since they believed that all scriptures that specifically referred to the resurrection were outside the Pentateuch, they concluded that the resurrection was only a superstitious belief. Since they know that Jesus does believe in the resurrection, they are coming to Him with an hypothetical question that they are confident will prove that the idea of a resurrection is impractical and false.

**"and asked him, Saying, Master, Moses said..."** – They start by citing the Mosaic Law that God had given in order to ensure that family lines were kept intact and widows were cared for by requiring a man to raise children in the name of his childless dead brother.

25 Now there were with us seven brethren: and the first, when he had married a wife, deceased, and, having no issue, left his wife unto his brother: 26 Likewise the second also, and the third, unto the seventh. 27 And last of all the woman died also. 28 Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her.

The Sadducees now depict what is likely an hypothetical and improbable scenario in which seven brothers each have a turn being married to a certain woman because the previous brother had not fathered any children before he died. They finish with what they believe is a question that is impossible for proponents of the resurrection to answer without disproving the it.

29 Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. 30 For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.

**"Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God"** – Jesus immediately points out that their question is flawed because it proceeds from errors in their understanding of the scriptures and of the power of God. Criticisms against Biblical Christianity typically also stem from such a lack of understanding of the scriptures and/or the power of God.

**"For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven"** – The Sadducees had assumed that if the resurrection were true then life after the resurrection would operate the same as life before it. Thus they ignored the power of God to resurrect His people with new bodies with different needs and desires. Jesus informs them that resurrected saints will have no need of marriage but will be like the angels of God in that respect. Notice that Jesus did not say that they will be angels but will be as (or like) the angels because angels do not marry.

31 But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, 32 I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.

**"But as touching the resurrection of the dead"** – Knowing that the Sadducees had posed the question to discredit belief in the resurrection, Jesus now goes beyond the original question and addresses their position that there could be no resurrection.

**"have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?"** – The Sadducees had great respect for the Pentateuch (the first five books of the OT) and Jesus quotes from Ex. 3:6 (where God was speaking to Moses) to demonstrate the error of their position on the resurrection.

**"God is not the God of the dead, but of the living"** – In Ex. 3:6, God says "I am" and not "I was" the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The present tense of the verb indicated that God still considered Himself to be the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob even though they had died centuries before this was spoken to Moses. If there were no resurrection then God would have ceased to be the God of Abraham the moment he died. However, He was still their God because Abraham and the other patriarchs were still alive.

33 And when the multitude heard *this*, they were astonished at his doctrine.

The multitude was amazed that Jesus not only answered the Sadducees' seemingly unanswerable question but He also proved them wrong on the topic of the resurrection using the very scriptures that they believed supported their position.