

Sermon for June 14, 2009

Boscobel & Mt. Zion UMCs

Text: Mark 12:13-17

Title: "What Belongs to God?"

Introduction: (Chapters 11 and 12:1-12)

I remember being a little kid growing up in LaFarge and having my older brothers helping their friends with projects. One of their projects was to set and check mink traps (I hope that was legal...). Anyway, I remember having traps sitting around the house and trying to catch rabbits in our back yard.

I never actually caught a rabbit, but it was fun playing with the trap and trying to figure out what to put in there that would get the rabbits attention. I tried carrots without my Mom's permission ... lettuce, etc. Nope. Never caught anything.

As we wrap up our series, "Jesus and the Matrix", let's be reminded that we have spent a few weeks on this topic. We have explored through the Book of Mark, how a religious landscape had been established in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century and how Jesus worked to break that Matrix down. We have approached this by examining Jesus' confrontations with the Pharisees and other church leaders.

I invite you to take the insert out of your program. On one side you will find our scripture for today and on the same side you will see a brief outline with fill-in-the-blanks. I hope this will help you as you listen today and help you to remember what we've learned from the Bible this week. Please fill in the blanks, jot whatever other notes seem interesting or important to you, and take this home and hang it on your refrigerator or put it somewhere so you can see it.

Now, this week, Jesus challenges how the Pharisees think about money as well as their relationship with God. BUT, in order to understand where the confrontation comes from today, we have to back up a little bit. Again, we are catching up with what we have missed in Scripture since last week.

Remember last week, Jesus and his followers had left Galilee for the last time before Jesus' resurrection. Jesus knew where he was headed and why he was headed there. Jesus had to go to Jerusalem and he knew that soon he would be handed over to the authorities and be crucified.

Well, here's what's happened before we pick up our Scripture for today. Jesus is continually sharing with His disciples that his death is coming. I think he is trying to prepare them for what they are about to experience, but they really don't get it. They think they are going to Jerusalem to take over and establish a peaceful kingdom politically. They are arguing about who will get to sit closest to Jesus.

Soon after, Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey and the crowds sing loudly to praise Jesus as the Messiah ... the Son of God. He comes in the next day and clears the temple of all the merchants taking advantage of the location of the Temple. After he does this, the church leaders want to know what right he has to kick people out of the temple.

Jesus answers with a really cool question at the end of Mark 11. At the beginning of chapter 12, Jesus tells the religious leaders a story. First, about the religious leaders: these were not just Pharisees or Sadducees. These were politically and religiously

powerful men. They sat on a committee called the *Sanhedrin*. This was the most powerful Jewish established group in the known world. And Jesus had a story for them...

Again, this is a parable, so the people listening to Jesus are asking themselves: Which one is God? Which one is evil? And which one is me or people like me? He told them about a land owner who planted a vineyard. He hired some men to take care of his vineyard and send him the profit off of the vineyard and moved to another country.

Well, these tenant farmers decided that they were not going to send any of their profit to the landowner. They were just going to keep it for themselves. In those days, tenant farmers could inherit the land that they worked if they could prove that the landowner had not received any profit from it. These tenant farmers intended to keep the landowner from getting any of his money back from his land. When the owner found out, he started sending servants back to his land to get some of the money from the profit.

The tenant farmers had other ideas. Every servant that the landowner sent was beaten or killed. Those farmers wanted the land really bad. So, the landowner decides that if he sends one of his relatives, then the tenant farmers will know that the owner means business. The Landowner sends his son. Instead of welcoming the powerful landowner's son, the farmers take this son out and kill him!

The response of the owner in the story ... go out and kill all of those farmers...

Let me help you all out on this one. The owner and planter of the vineyard is God. The vineyard is Israel. The tenant farmers are the religious leaders of Israel (the Matrix makers). The servants sent by the Landowner were the prophets and priests who stayed faithful to God no matter what people said. And, finally, the Son is Jesus.

The church leaders recognize what Jesus' is saying ... the religious leaders of Israel have pushed away all of the prophets and priests and Godly people and now they are about to kill God's Son. They got it. And they were furious ... the truth hurts sometimes! They were so mad that they were ready to arrest Jesus, but they couldn't because they were afraid of the crowds. The crowds loved Jesus and would try to protect Him.

Now, it is this group of people (Sanhedrin) that sends somebody else to try to trap Jesus.... This is where we pick up our Scripture for today...

### **READ MARK 12:13-17 NOW AND PRAY!**

- I. Who Sent Who? (v.13)
  - A. The first question we need to ask is "Who sent Who?"
    1. The answer is simple ... the Sanhedrin.
    2. They had just heard this story that they were responsible for beating up and killing the attempts of many Godly prophets to bring Israel back to God.
    3. They had just heard Jesus claim to be God's Son (blasphemy), but they couldn't do anything about it because of the crowds.
  - B. Did you notice WHO the Sanhedrin sent? Remember that the Sanhedrin is made up of political and religious leaders...
    1. They sent a group of Pharisees ... nationalists who wanted Rome out of their land.

2. They sent a group of Herodians ... Jews who wanted the Roman line of Herod to have control in their country again. They felt that they were treated well and allowed to continue to be Jewish under Herod's rule. Pilate presently ruled that area.
  - C. These two groups could only agree on this because they had a common enemy. Otherwise, these two groups did not get along at all. They wanted opposite things ... Jewish rule vs. Roman rule.
  - D. It says here that representatives from these two groups of people were sent to Jesus for a purpose: to trap him.
    1. Translation from the Greek here is essentially, to trap, as in a trapping of an animal.
    2. They wanted in the worst way, to get rid of Jesus.
- II. The Trap is Set (vs.14-15)
- A. How many of you have ever been "sweet-talked"? Do you know what I mean?
    1. Someone has come to you and started laying it on thick about how great you are, etc.
    2. Your question = What does this person want?
  - B. This is what happens to Jesus by these representatives... "We know ..."
    1. "How honest you are..."
    2. "You are impartial..."
    3. "You don't play favorites..."
    4. "You teach the way of God truthfully..."
  - C. Now that we've buttered you up, "...tell us—is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Should we pay them, or shouldn't we?"
    1. Please understand how loaded this question is ... it's a great TRAP question.
    2. If Jesus says, "Yes, pay your taxes", he will have the people mad at him ... they don't like being under Roman rule.
    3. If Jesus says, "No, don't bother to pay taxes to Rome", he can be arrested by the Roman powers for encouraging resistance to their rule.
  - D. Jesus response = Your Hypocrisy is showing! "Why are you trying to TRAP ME?"
    1. Jesus did not fall for it for a second.
    2. Their sweet talk fell on deaf ears. Jesus saw right past what they were trying to do and stayed focused on what God wanted.
    3. What a great lesson! Don't get caught up in the nice talk about you or the mean talk about you ... both is going on, by the way ... instead, just stay focused on what God's purpose is!

III. Image is Everything (v.16)

- A. Jesus says, "I'll answer your question if you have a Roman Coin."  
 1. Of course they have one and give it over to Jesus.  
 2. Why did Jesus do this? Why did he ask for a coin and not just talk about the coin?  
 3. Right! Object lesson, but there is a little bit more here...
- B. The Jewish coins of the 1<sup>st</sup> century were copper and had no image of any person on them. They were not going to make a god out of anyone but God.
- C. The Roman coins were made of silver (Denarius) and had the image of Tiberius Caesar on them. In order to pay the Roman tax, you had to use Roman coins.  
 1. By producing one of these coins, the Pharisees and/or Herodians acknowledged Caesar's authority.  
 2. The Pharisees were hypocrites themselves either producing the coin themselves or working with a group of people who acknowledged Caesar's authority.
- D. Jesus asked for a coin with Tiberius Caesar on it ... and they HAD ONE!
- E. So, Jesus says, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's".  
 1. How many of you like paying taxes?  
 2. Are the taxes we pay a gift to our government?  
 3. No. It's a debt paid for services rendered... police and fire protection, mail service, government assistance, stimulus packages...  
 4. Jesus says that they are to pay the debt owed to the Roman Empire for protection and government service and how God will use the Roman Empire later in history...

IV. What Belongs to God? (v.17)

- A. But, Jesus does not stop there ... "and give to God what belongs to God."
- B. First question here needs to be, "What belongs to God?"  
 1. Remember that Jesus showed them the Roman Coin (denarius) and asked, "Whose image is on the coin?"  
 2. Let me ask you this ... "Whose image is on US?"  
 3. We are created in God's image ...
- C. What is God's?  
 1. Us ... all of us!  
 2. We are created in God's image ... we are God's 'coinage'.
- D. On the coin was the image of the emperor. We are created in God's image.  
 1. To the emperor goes the coin with his image on it.  
 2. To God goes those made in God's image (our whole lives).
- E. God wants, not a ritual or a tradition or a requirement (paying taxes), God wants a *relationship!*

- F. Jesus just said it again to the Pharisees ... God does not agree with your Matrix of traditions and rituals. God wants to be in a relationship with you.
  - G. What does that mean? That means giving our whole lives to God and being in touch with God every day wherever we are...
    - 1. Sometimes we like to give our allegiance to God on Sundays when the right people are around. Not on other days ... that's ritual and tradition!
    - 2. God wants us every day of the week, no matter who is around!
  - H. Sometimes we like to leave God at the church or leave God at home, because you certainly would not take God to work.
    - 1. Husbands, why don't you try this with your wives.
    - 2. "Honey, I've decided to be in relationship with you while I'm at home, but once I leave here, we are not in relationship anymore."
    - 3. When I go to work, I'm going to take my ring off and not even act like we are in a relationship, okay pumpkin?!?
    - 4. When I go out fishing or playing ball with my buddies, our marriage does not exist, but when I get home, I will expect you to act like we are married again!
    - 5. Men, how do you suppose that's going to go? Get it?!?
  - I. God wants us in a relationship ... NOT a Sunday morning ritual! Bad Matrix!
- V. The End
- A. In the end, let's pray about being in a real relationship with our God!
  - B. Let's Pray!