

Title: The Book of Mark: Part 36, Heavenly Minded People
Speaker: Kevin Norcross
Passage: Mark 12:13-17
Big idea: To thrive on this earth, we must be heavenly minded.



We will be looking at Mark 12:13-17 as we continue on in our Mark series.

The passage here takes place back in this battle arena. 2 weeks ago, I talked about Jesus arguing back-and-forth and battling with the religious rulers and just how amazing and witty he was.

Here we are back in the arena again where we will see Jesus speak amazing truth. In this argument Jesus talks very clearly about the earthly kingdom and heavenly kingdom. These religious rulers were talking in earthly terms in Jesus is talking in heavenly terms.

That is the reality that we live in today. We come here on a weekly basis, and we sing heavenly minded songs, we learn heavenly kingdom truths, in our day-to-day study we learn the Bible and strive to live according to it but yet we live on this earth. This reality of living on this earth but yet being focused on heavenly things is a fine balance that we all face, and we all battle with, and we all struggle with. The fight between good and evil, sin and holiness, right and wrong, earthly responsibilities and heavenly focus. In Jesus' argument with the religious leaders, he gives us great insight into how we can live properly and biblically as we all wrestle with that ourselves.

So, what we are going to do is look at the scripture, and study it for what it is and see how Jesus responded to the religious rulers of his day, and then in the background we are going to be looking at what we can take from it and apply in our current lives today.

BIG IDEA

**To thrive on this earth we must be
heavenly minded.**



¹³Later they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words. ¹⁴They came to him and said, "Teacher, we know that you are a man of integrity. You aren't swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not? ¹⁵Should we pay or shouldn't we?" But Jesus knew their hypocrisy. "Why are you trying to trap me?" he asked. "Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." ¹⁶They brought the coin, and he asked them, "Whose image is this? And whose inscription?" "Caesar's," they replied. ¹⁷Then Jesus said to them, "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." And they were amazed at him.

Mark 12:13-17

We are going to look at four things that heavenly minded people do. This is not an exhaustive list, but it was four things that stood out to me that Jesus teaches about in these few verses. In order to be heavenly minded and to be successful on this earth we must do many things, but today we are going to look at four. So, let's go through verse by verse and see what Jesus teaches the people about this reality and what he's teaching us today and how we should live.

Mark 12:13, "Later they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words."

Again, Jesus enters into conflict with the religious leaders. Mark doesn't record exactly where this encounter takes place, but it is the following day from the last encounter that Jesus had with them in the temple. So, it most likely would have been in one of the courts in the Temple.

They were trying to catch Jesus with something that they could arrest Him for. They were seeing that Jesus was gaining momentum and gaining much support from the people. If they could get Jesus to say the wrong thing, then this would give them the opportunity to pounce on Him and arrest Him. They thought they could out wit Him, out smart Him, and trick Him, but they did not know who they were messing with, and they kept picking a fight with the wrong guy!

Mark lists two specific groups of people that come after Jesus this time, the Pharisees and the Herodians. These two groups were not best friends, and they were on opposite ends of the spectrum politically. But they united their wickedness and evil against Jesus because they wanted to arrest Him. Both were struggling to know what to do in order to defeat Jesus!

So, they come up with their attack and again they think they're so smart and they come at Jesus by saying the following:

Mark 12:14-15, "They came to him and said, 'Teacher, we know that you are a man of integrity. You aren't swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not? Should we pay or shouldn't we?'"

They try and sweet talk Jesus.

My kids have never done this, but I have seen it in the movies and tv shows. Let me paint the picture ...

- The daughter comes in to talk to the dad usually sitting on the couch and says something nice about his shirt, or hair cut, and the dad looks at her, rolls his eyes, and says, "how much do you want?"
- A kid makes cookies, or cleans their room, or washes the dishes, to try and butter up the parents to do what they want them to do.
- A husband comes home with flowers, and the wife is wondering if he is just being nice, or if he did something wrong.

This is what this group is trying to do. They are trying to flatter Jesus and butter him up. They say, "Teacher, we know that you are a man of integrity. You aren't swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are".

I can imagine Jesus' inside voice must have been saying "are you kidding me? You actually expect me to believe you?". Maybe He wanted to roll his eyes and even laugh because he saw right through their motives. Just like the eye roll of a dad when his daughter is buttering him up with compliments because she wants some money. Jesus sees right through the façade of their human efforts to try and trick Him.

Heavenly minded people recognize that...

**We walk in the Spirit
not in the flesh**

It is amazing to watch the wisdom and discernment that Jesus exhibits in these encounters. I think this is something that we should be praying for ourselves. It is an amazing blessing as a Christ follower that we can depend on the guidance of the Holy Spirit to help us navigate through these tricky discussions about the Bible and about our faith. As we discuss these things with people, we should be sensitive to the leading of the Spirit in terms of discernment and wisdom so that we are not entirely dependent on our own intellect. There are times when we are having spiritual conversations with a believer, or a non-believer and God can drop things into our hearts that they need to hear.

We need to walk in the Spirit and not in the flesh.

Just like the Israelites walking around in the wilderness being led by the cloud in the day and the pillar of fire at night. Not being distracted by the things of this world but focusing on the things of God. Not giving into the temptations of sin that appeal to our flesh but living according to Scripture and walking in the Spirit.

Each and every day I encourage you to set aside time where you can talk to God, set your mind on Him, read Scripture, and ground yourself in the things of God. By doing this it will help you walk in the Spirit according to God's plan and purpose for your life and not get wrapped up in the things of the flesh.

So, this group of people try to butter Jesus up and give him a totally insincere compliment. Then they lay the trap hoping that Jesus will fall into it. They try to trick Him into disrespecting Caesar. This would give them the chance to arrest Him.

Here is a bit of background into what was happening during that time and why this was a good plot in their frail human minds. The Jews were required to pay tribute money into the emperor's treasury. Judea became a Roman province in A.D. 6. A census was taken, and the Romans levied a tax against the Jews. This led to a revolt from the Jews because it basically put God's land at the service of other foreigners.

The enforcement of this tax put the Jewish people in a position of making a statement of where their loyalty lies. On the one hand, if they acknowledge that they must give tax to Caesar they are acknowledging his power and earthly authority and are they discounting the fact that this is God's land. On the other hand, if they don't pay taxes to Caesar they will be punished and put in jail or put into slavery.

The big question the Jews were wrestling with was "can anyone pay tax to Caesar and still give allegiance to the God of Israel?" In other words, were the people being traitors to God if they paid tax to Caesar?

This is what the Jewish people were wrestling with and many of them were unsure of what to do. Some Jews refused to pay the tax. The Pharisees disliked paying it, but they did not actively oppose it. The Herodian's had no objection to paying it.

So, their intention in asking this question was the force Jesus to give a direct answer identifying him as being with one side or the other. If Jesus answered either way, he would have chosen a side.

If Jesus sides with the Jewish people, he would be labeled as a rebel who is in revolt against Caesar, and they would have cause to arrest him. If Jesus sided with the Herodians, he would undermine those who are taking a stand against paying the tax and discredit them or dishonour them. This would cause Jesus to lose the favour of the crowd.

And they ask Him a yes or no question. “Should we or shouldn’t we pay tax?”

They want Him to fall into their trap with no way out.



Remember, these are people who do not want to know the truth. They are people who want to trick Jesus and they want to trip him up and trap him. You will encounter people like this who will challenge your faith and challenge what you believe in. They will try and trip you up and they will try to trick you and put you on the spot.

Don’t ever feel trapped but know that God can help you in those moments. These evil people thought they had Jesus backed into a corner and they thought they had him trapped and they thought they had outwitted him, and they thought they were smarter than him, but they weren’t!

I ran a painting company for many years before I went into ministry, and it helped me get through college. I remember one time I was painting a deck. As I was finishing the deck, I realized that if I continued painting the way I was, I was actually going to paint myself into a corner. I would have been stuck in the corner of this deck with no way to get out until the paint dried.

Remember that we are sheep among wolves and the enemy will try and get you backed into a corner and attack you. We are sheep among wolves, but the great shepherd protects us. Isn’t that a great truth?

We must also be aware of the fact that the enemy wants to get us. I spoke about this two weeks ago. I was talking about my friend who was going through a similar situation being attacked for doing the right thing and his advice he got from his counsellor was, “don’t bleed in front of sharks”.

Matthew 10 talks about this as Jesus is sending out the disciples with instructions. Verse 16 says “I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore, be as shrewd as snakes and innocent as doves.”

Yes, we need to be loving, kind, gentle, caring but always know that the enemy is out there wanting to pounce on you and trap you and back you into a corner.

Each and every day I encourage you to set aside time where you can talk to God, set your mind on Him, read Scripture and ground yourself in the things of God. By doing this it will help you remember that yes you are sheep and yes there are wolves, but the great Shepherd will protect you.

Mark 12:15-16, “But Jesus knew their hypocrisy. ‘Why are you trying to trap me?’ he asked. ‘Bring me a denarius and let me look at it.’ They brought the coin, and he asked them, ‘Whose image is this? And whose inscription?’ ‘Caesar’s,’ they replied.”

Of course, there is no way that Jesus is going to fall into their trap. He recognized the question as pure hypocrisy. After he calls them out for being hypocrites, he asks them for a coin.

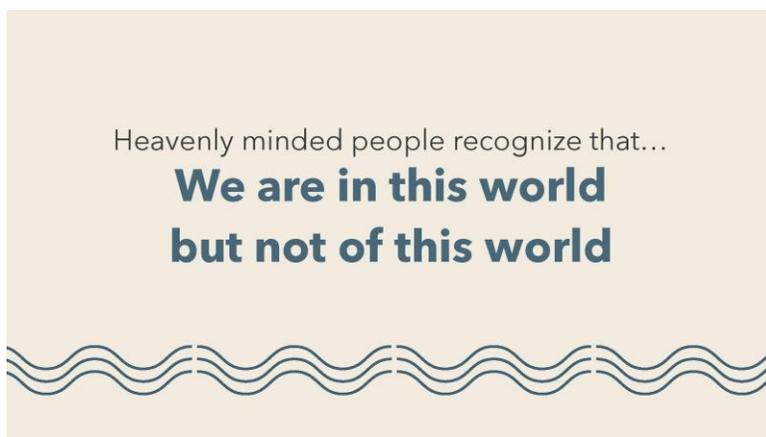
First of all, he asks for a coin. This would've thrown them off because they all would've carried around coins, but Jesus didn't have one. That coin would've had a picture of the Roman emperor on it. This picture of Caesar was propaganda and reminded the people of who the emperor was, and who they needed to pay loyalty to.

The inscription on the coin read "Tiberius Caesar Augustus, Son of the divine Augustus" The other side of the coin was Caesar's mother Livia written "High Priest". It was propaganda, it was like a portable idol. Worship and idolize Caesar the Roman ruler.

So, they produce a coin, and Jesus asked them to tell him who's picture is on it. They answer Caesars.

The fact that they are carrying around the coins shows that they have no problem doing business with Caesars money so he knew he could tell them that they had better pay tax to Cesar. Jesus is exposing that they have no problem bringing an image of idolatry into God's temple. The deeper meaning is that their hearts already pay a degree of tax and commitment to Cesar by possessing his coin. So, he was not just talking about money but about the condition of their hard hearts.

What he is pointing out is that there is an earthly kingdom and a Heavenly Kingdom. We live by heavenly rules and not by earthly rules. Remember as the disciples are in the background watching all this, they are still confused about what kind of kingdom Jesus is coming to set up. They thought he was coming to set up an earthly kingdom, but we know he was coming to set up this new Heavenly Kingdom.



We must constantly work at reminding ourselves that we are in this world but not of this world. It is so easy to get caught up with the things that are in our pocket and the things that are going on around us. For those guys they had coins in their pocket, and it represented the earthly kingdom, the rules and pressures and expectations that they lived in.

Some of you carry coins in your pocket but I imagine that most of you don't. Others of you carry a wallet in your pocket but some of you don't anymore. Most of you do carry around your phone in your pocket. Phones are great tools and super helpful and can help you grow in your faith, and they are super practical with keeping your credit cards on there and taking pictures and using it for work and for home life, but this also represents the world that we live in. For those back in Jesus day it was the coin, but for us it could be our phone.

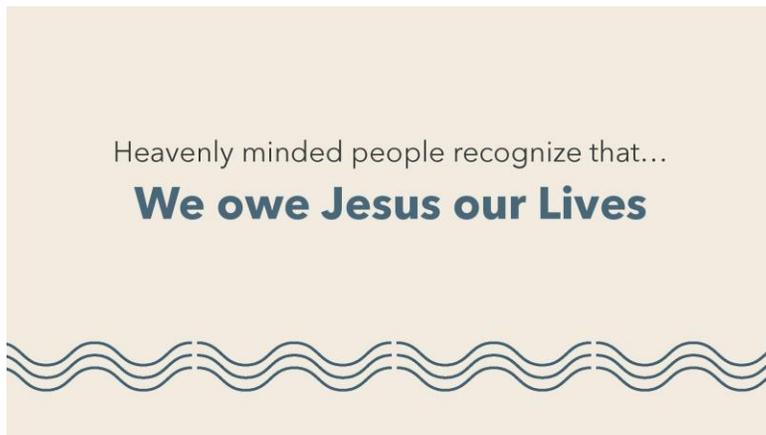
Just as these guys are being challenged by what was in their pocket, I believe that we need to be challenged about what is in our pocket. Be careful to not to get too wrapped up in the things of this world, like our phones. It is a connection to the world and the way society thinks and acts and behaves and it represents connection to the world that is totally opposite to the things of God. In this moment Jesus is challenging this group who did not really want to know Jesus but again there are people around listening and he was directing a message to that crowd and he is directing a message to you and me today, reminding us that we don't belong to this earthly kingdom and its rules and expectations but we belong to Jesus and we need to live according to His rules and Kingdom structures and values.

This is why it is so important to set aside time where you can talk to God, set your mind on Him, read Scripture, and ground yourself in the things of God. By doing this it will help you not become distracted by the things of this world but remain focused on the things of God.

Mark 12:17, “Then Jesus said to them, ‘Give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.’ And they were amazed at him.”

Jesus’ answer avoids their trap and teaches a huge lesson.

- “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s”: a person owes Caesar what has his image and name on it.
- “Give to God what is God’s”: a person owes God what has his image and name on it, us.



Owing Caesar taxes is a small thing compared to what we owe God. We owe God our heart, soul, mind and strength. Since we were created in the image of God and we bear his name as children of God we owe him our whole selves!

In answering these teachers of the law, Jesus also giving us a reminder of the cost of being a follower of Christ and what we owe Him and the cost of discipleship.

The coin has Caesars name on it, so you owe taxes to Caesar. We have God’s name on us (Children of God) and we don’t just owe taxes, but we owe Him everything.

So, in the background we see this profound teaching to those who are really listening about what it means to be a follower of Christ. Jesus is using this opportunity to not only put the religious leaders in their place, but to teach the people listening about what it means to follow Christ.

Yes, Caesar has power, but God has more. Jesus was saying that yes Cesar has the right to ask you for this tax and it is your obligation to pay it. But it does not supersede your commitments to God, because in fact all that belongs to Caesar belongs to God.

Psalms 24:1 “The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.”

We have obligations on this earth, and we need to meet those obligations and expectations, but we should always remember that the rulers of this earth and the expectations of people on this earth do not supersede our commitments to God and His Word and His Heavenly Kingdom. A coin that bears Caesars image belongs to Caesar, but you, child of God, bear God’s image and thus belong to God!

We owe Jesus our lives. Since we were created in the image of God, and we bear his name as children of God we owe him our whole selves! This is a great reminder to us today of the balance between our responsibilities here on earth and our ultimate commitment to the things of God and His reign and His rule.

2 Corinthians 4:18, “So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”