

## Living In the Here and Now In the Light of the There and Then

I want to refresh our memory. Jesus has come into Jerusalem and is moving steadily toward the cross. He has come into Jerusalem for the express purpose of going to the cross; He is on His way to pay the price of sin for me and for you; the wages of sin is death; He is on His way to die. This central fact guides our understanding of the Scriptures we have been exploring and will visit this morning.

The Parable of the Vineyard that Matt spoke to you about last Sunday is clearly about the rejection and crucifixion of Jesus, and He is "the stone the builders rejected--the rejected stone destined to be the capstone, the most prominent and most important stone of all.

Mark 12:13-15 say, "Later they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words. They came to him and said, "Teacher, 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. Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Should 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."

In light of where we are in Jesus' journey to the cross, this question about paying taxes is irrelevant. It's irrelevant in the sense that we are way past the point of discovering reasons why Jesus should be crucified. His enemies have already made up their minds and they will have His blood one way or the other. Certainly it would help their cause if Jesus should say something against paying the Roman tax, but they don't need Him to, as we shall soon see.

The question about paying taxes is also irrelevant given the fact that dead men don't pay taxes. Jesus will be completely free from this obligation soon enough. When I stop to take this fact into consideration It makes death seem a bit more friendly--no more taxes! But my point here is that Jesus doesn't have to answer their question about paying taxes; He is in the position to laugh at them and say "Who cares?" "What difference does it make now?"

But Jesus chooses to address the question nonetheless.

2

Mark 12:16-17 say, "They brought the coin, and he asked them, 'Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?' 'Caesar's,' they replied. Then Jesus said to them, 'Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.' And they were amazed at him."

That last phrase: "And they were amazed at him," begs the question: "Why were they amazed?" Were they amazed that He so easily side-stepped the trap they had so carefully laid out for Him? Were they amazed that He gave such a concise and creative answer? Or, were they amazed at something else? I have no proof of it, but I suspect they were amazed by something else--amazed at Jesus' poise, His calmness under fire, His ability to take a question related to the mundane things of the world and give an answer with eternal significance. Yes, I think they were amazed because once again Jesus speaks as One having authority from a higher plane.

For most people taxes are an irritant. For a conquered and oppressed people, being forced to pay exorbitant taxes to a foreign army occupying their land, was a source of humiliation and rage. But Jesus raises the anti. Caesar can have his money and who gets your money is of little consequence. The real question is who gets your heart? Give to Caesar or don't give to Caesar, it matters little, but are you fulfilling your obligation to God? That is the question! That's always the question. We can get all bent out of shape about our worldly circumstances. We can rage against everything that seems so unfair and unjust in our society, but where are our hearts in relationship to God? Are we thinking about Him? Are we obeying Him? Are we allowing the Holy Spirit to transform us more and more into His likeness? Everything else is just temporary stuff, but this is the stuff of eternity. I would submit to you that they were amazed at Jesus because He brought them back to consider eternity.

Are you living your earthly life in light of eternity? Am I living my life in light of eternity? This is the focus of everything we are talking about this morning. Once we understand this, the next passage of Scripture is easy to understand. Notice how Mark 12:18 sets it up for us: "Then the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question."

The Sadducees are sad, you see, because they don't believe in the resurrection. The Sadducees in Jesus' day were of the

3

intellectually elite. They were too smart to believe in anything they could not see or prove with the scientific method. The question they bring to Jesus is very logical. Since you claim to believe in the resurrection of the dead and we don't, here's a question for you:

In Mark 12:19-23, they say, "Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and have children for his brother. Now there were seven brothers. The first one married and died without leaving any children. The second one married the widow, but he also died, leaving no child. It was the same with the third. In fact, none of the seven left any children. Last of all, the woman died too. At the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?" Put that in your pipe and smoke it! We gotcha Jesus!

Having celebrated Valentine's Day, so recently, and being the romantic sort of guy that I am, I need to tell you that I have never particularly liked what Jesus has to say here. It goes against every fiber of my sentimental being. I know I carved it in the bark of a tree somewhere: "Jon & BJ forever." Randy Travis sings, "I promise to love you forever and ever amen." We like to think that the best things we have had on earth will be given back to us, bigger and better in heaven. But that is not what Jesus promises us. Heaven will not simply be a perfected earth. Rather, life in eternity will be totally new. In Revelation 21:2, Jesus says, "Behold I am making everything new."

This is essentially what Jesus tells the Sadducees. Mark 12:24-25 say, "Jesus replied, 'Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God? When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven.'" We notice in Jesus' reply that He does not say that we will be angels; rather, we will be like the angels. That likeness will extend to the need for marriage. There won't be any need for it in heaven. Marriage is an earthly blessing, an earthly privilege, an earthly institution and an earthly restriction. When we get to heaven the only marriage in effect is the church's marriage to Jesus. We will all be part of the bride of Christ. Our relationship with Him will supercede all others, and the joy we will receive from Him will be so gratifying we will need no other. I know we can't even imagine that now, but that's how it's going to be, and when we are changed and enter into that dimension, we will have no regrets. Paul says in I Corinthians

2:9-10, “. . .No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him." **We cannot imagine what it will be but what it will be will be good, very, very good.**

Verses 26 and 27 are funny because Jesus stumps the Sadducees with their own method of argument. Jesus says, "Now about the dead rising--have you not read in the book of Moses, in the account of the bush, how God said to him, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!" In other words, if there is no resurrection of the dead, no eternal life, then God's claim to be the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob makes no sense. We notice that God does not say "I was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; but, rather, "I am." If we skip down in the passage to Mark 12:35-37, we find that Jesus employs this same sort of argument there also. Mark tells us, "While Jesus was teaching in the temple courts, he asked, 'How is it that the teachers of the law say that the Christ is the son of David? David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared: 'The Lord said to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.' David himself calls him 'Lord.' How then can he be his son?' The large crowd listened to him with delight." These verses tell us that as long as God lives those who are alive in Him will continue to live also and the restrictions of time as we know it in this present dimension no longer apply.

The Final part of our Scripture passage this morning is no doubt the most familiar. Mark 12:28-34 say, "One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." "Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And from then on no one dared ask him any more

questions."

Remember that Jesus is not far from the cross and as this season of lent reminds us, neither are we. When our lives on earth are soon said and done, what matters? Let's cut to the chase, find the bottom line, get down to the nitty gritty where the tire meets the road--what's important? What will be important when we see God face to face? Another way of viewing this is to ask about the life and ministry of Jesus: After 3 1/2 years of ministry what message does He wish to get across? What can we distill from His life, from His example?

It seems to me that when the dust clears, two things are important, love for God and love for neighbor that flows out of one's love for God. These are the two cardinal facets of living well and dying with hope and meaning. Showing my love for God by believing in Him, honoring, and pleasing Him is job #1. Loving the people around me in His name is job #2. Pretty much everything else doesn't matter or is destined to rust, rot, melt, fade, blow, or wash away.

The question this asks of us now is: Where are our priorities? Is God first in our lives or are we trying to make Him play second fiddle? Do we love other people because His love lives in us and flows from us? Or, do we in fact worship ourselves, glory in our possessions, and see neighbors as competitors, aggravations, or threats? What do these challenges of Jesus reveal about us? Are we children of light or the children of darkness? Are we all about this present world or do we live our lives in the light of eternity?

I don't know what answer you may have to give to these questions. I know in my own case that I am still too much about this world and not enough about His kingdom. Nevertheless, I am on a journey of transformation; I'm not there yet but someday I'm going to be just like Jesus. That is my goal and that is His promise to me when He said that He would finish the good work He has begun within me. I aim to cooperate with His work within me. I want to live my life in the here and now in the light of the there and then. I pray that this is your aim too.

## **The Fourth Street Church of God**

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### **Living In the Here and Now In the Light of the There and Then**

**Mark 12:13-37**

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