

Missing the Point? How to Worship God and Never Know Him (Mk 12:13-34)

Sunday Morning – July 28, 2019
[Sleater-Kinney Road Baptist Church, Olympia, WA](#)

INTRODUCTION:

And they sent to him some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians, to trap him in his talk (Mk 12:13).

- Background on context; this is the first salvo in this war – what’s the first thing that happens?
 - o The Sanhedrin (“they”) send two waves of people to Jesus
 - o They want to trap Him
 - o They want Him to say something that will either (1) discredit Him with the people, or (2) get Him in trouble with the Romans, or (3) both
- What I want you to ask yourself is this: **what do they come at Jesus with?**
 - o (1) When the Jewish Council sends these people to trap Jesus – **what do they decide to ask Him?**
 - o (2) When the Pharisees think, “what’s the best way to discredit this man with the people!?” **what do they decide to ask?**
 - o (3) When the Herodians (followers of Antipas) ask themselves the same thing - **what do they decide to ask?**
 - o (4) When the Sadducees ask themselves the same thing - **what do they decide to ask?**
- **What would you ask?**
 - o (1) if you believed a guy was a blasphemer and a con man,
 - o (2) pretending to be a Christian teacher sent from God,
 - o (3) **what is the one “death blow” question that would smoke him out and reveal him to be a fraud?**
- That’s the point:
 - o these two groups each ask their “death blow” question,
 - o what they ask is so foolish and so removed from the Gospel Jesus has been preaching
 - o that it shows us they claim to worship God, **but actually have no idea who He is!**

TEXT:

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Missing the point (12:13-27)

And they came and said to him, “Teacher, we know that you are true and do not care about anyone's opinion. For you are not swayed by appearances, but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?” (Mk 12:13-14).

- Here's the “death blow” question – **do we have to pay taxes to the Romans?**
 - The Jewish people have been taxed by the Romans for about 25 years
 - Herod the Great died in 4 B.C.
 - His son, Archelaus, was incompetent and ruled only until 6 A.D.
 - Roman governors took over from that point on
- **So, why is the tax thing a problem? Why is it the “big question” the Pharisees and Herodians chose to ask?**
 - **(1)** Herodians = the politicians
 - Followers of Herod Antipas (Galilee and Perea)
 - Wanted to retain their power
 - Perhaps wanted to expand their power
 - Jesus is a threat who must be removed
 - This is a political move; they'd ordinarily have nothing to do with the legalistic Pharisees
 - But, “the enemy of my enemy of my friend ...”
 - **(2)** Pharisees = the legalists
 - Jewish revolutionary groups were all over the place in these days (even in the NT), and some of them were separatist nationalists called “Zealots”
 - They, and some of the stricter Pharisees, had problems with the idea of paying taxes to a foreign government and being ruled by a Roman governor, instead of one of their own (i.e. Herod the Great)
 - Paying taxes to a foreign power was a form of “compromise” (fanatics in every age usually don't care about practical realities of life! 😊)

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- And, the coins had the Emperor's image on them, which they saw as idolatry
- So, these self-righteous, arrogant religious teachers and the political intriguers from Galilee form an alliance to finish Jesus off – **and the Jewish Council sends them to do it!**
 - (1) Option #1 (Pharisees' hope): "Jesus is a compromiser"
 - if Jesus really is the coming King,
 - and if he says people should pay taxes to a pagan king,
 - then He'll look ridiculous and lose respect from the people
 - and this will prove He can't be the Messiah,
 - because He's saying people owe allegiance to someone other than Him
 - this is a question about separation – is Jesus a "compromiser?"
 - true piety = exclusivist mindset; minimal association with pagans and compromisers
 - (2) Option #2 (Herodians' hope): "Jesus is a revolutionary"
 - if Jesus says they don't have to pay taxes
 - they can turn Him over to the Romans as a revolutionary
 - and they'll be rid of Him
 - this is a political scheme
 - they don't care what Jesus thinks – they just want Him gone
- Either way, Jesus is going down in flames

But, knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, "Why put me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." And they brought one. And he said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" They said to him, "Caesar's." Jesus said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." And they marveled at him (Mk 12:15-17).

- Jesus escapes this trap pretty easily:
 - they apparently forgot that God is in charge of this world,
 - and ordains everything that happens,

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- so the Roman occupation and taxation system isn't exactly a surprise to Him
- His solution:
 - obey civil authorities
 - obey God, too
 - ultimate irony = they have this "blasphemous" coin, and Jesus doesn't!
- Both of these groups are missing the point:
 - Pharisees = legalistic, nit-picking question about associational "purity"
 - Herodians = political opportunists for whom religion is *pro forma*
 - Jesus message is Mk 1:14-15; **where are the questions about that?**

And Sadducees came to him, who say that there is no resurrection (Mk 12:18).

- Now, we move from political maneuvering to some real foolishness
 - Sadducees don't believe in the resurrection
 - So, they concoct a deliberately ridiculous situation to try to get Jesus to admit that resurrection isn't taught by the OT Scriptures
- Again, ask yourself:
 - **(1)** why is *this* the ultimate question they decide to ask Jesus?
 - **(2)** out of everything they could have asked, they choose *this*?
 - **(3)** what does this tell you about their warped priorities; about missing the point about salvation and a right relationship with God?

And they asked him a question, saying, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife, but leaves no child, the man must take the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. There were seven brothers; the first took a wife, and when he died left no offspring. And the second took her, and died, leaving no offspring. And the third likewise. And the seven left no offspring. Last of all the woman also died. In the resurrection, when they rise again, whose wife will she be? For the seven had her as wife," (Mk 12:19-23).

- OT law:
 - **(1)** property stays with the man's family
 - **(2)** if the man dies, the wife and kids don't own it

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- (3) if wife remarries, the land goes to new husband's family, and original kids don't inherit anything = disaster
- (4) solution = dead husband's closest single relative can marry wife and keep land in the family = kids inherit and retain property
- (5) Ruth is an example
- Sadducees use this law as a backdrop to attack the idea of resurrection:
 - (1) if she's been married seven times
 - (2) this means she'll be married to seven men *at the same time* after the resurrection
 - (3) this is ridiculous
 - (4) so, this means the resurrection is false
- If you're thinking, "this is a really stupid and meaningless question!"
 - you're right – it is stupid, and it is meaningless
 - that's the point

Jesus said to them, "Is this not the reason you are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God? For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God spoke to him, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not God of the dead, but of the living. You are quite wrong," (Mk 12:24-27).

- Big insults:
 - don't know the Scriptures – they answer your question!
 - don't know God's power – you don't think He can do this?
 - Jesus says this to representatives from the Jewish Council!
- His solution:
 - (1) if Abraham, Isaac and Jacob have been dead for a while by the time Moses was around
 - (2) and God tells Moses He's *still* their God *right now*
 - (3) this means Abraham, Isaac and Jacob *are* still around, somewhere
 - (4) which means resurrection is real
- God's covenant promises are forever, not just in this life
 - if God isn't your God forever,

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- then you have no hope for eternity

Getting the point (12:27 – 34)

- Now, we get someone completely different, who asks an honest question:

And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, “Which commandment is the most important of all?” (Mk 12:28).

- Here, at last, is a good question:
 - (1) what’s the most important commandment?
 - (2) of everything in the Hebrew Scriptures, what’s the most important, most foundational thing I have to know, so I can do it!?
- The other questions were products of three different, very narrow echo-chambers:
 - (1) Pharisees: nit-picky legalistic question about separation (“compromiser?”)
 - (2) Sadducees: a question so foolish even Jesus could barely believe it
 - (3) Herodians: eel-like politicians setting a trap
- But, this scribe finally asks a good, sincere question – **think about it:**
 - (1) If a professing Christian came to you and asked what the most important thing was in the Christian life - **what would you say?**
 - (2) How would you answer that question?
 - (3) How would you answer it right now?
 - (4) How would you distill all the Scriptures down to a single, accurate answer?

Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall 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: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

- Jesus says these two commandments (Deut 6:5; Lev 19:18) summarize everything you need to know about a right relationship with God

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- **On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets (Mt 22:40).**
- These are umbrella concepts:
 - **(1)** Love for God
 - I want to know who He is
 - I want to know what He wants from me
 - I want to do what He wants
 - He's my King
 - I'm His servant
 - Attitude of complete submission
 - **(2)** Love for neighbor
 - Fellow believer
 - Relationship
 - Caring
 - Support
 - Love
 - Evangelism
- Jesus says:
 - **(1)** you love God
 - **(2)** then, because you love Him, you do what He says
 - that means, in its most basic essence, you love your covenant brothers and sisters
- It's always been this way:
 - **(1)** from Adam and Eve
 - **(2)** to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob
 - **(3)** to Moses and Exodus
 - **(4)** through Samuel and the monarchy
 - **(5)** through the divided kingdoms and all the prophets
 - **(6)** to John the Baptist and His message of the Messiah
 - **(7)** to Christ and His ministry
 - **(8)** to the church through to this very moment
- It's always been about those two things:
 - **(1)** worship = the way God wants us to show Him our love and awe
 - **(2)** what our worship looks like has changed
 - **(3)** but, the motivation to worship has always been the same (cp. Gal 3:15-18)

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- (4) you do what God says because you love Him; because you have faith in Him and His promises
- (5) your love is the tree, your actions and worship are the fruit of that tree
- Jesus vs. religion = two different approaches to God

Jesus	Religion
I love God, therefore I obey	I obey, therefore God must now love me

- This is called missing the point
 - you think you're worshipping God,
 - **but you don't even know who He is**
- The problem is that most of the people in Israel have missed the point:
 - (1) The high priestly family was interested in power and money (the bazaar in the temple), so God will take them out
 - (2) The people missed the point (the crowd vanishes), so God will switch His focus to the church
 - (3) The Pharisees come to Him with echo-chamber legalism; about whether He's "pure and pious enough" to refuse to pay taxes to the Romans
 - (4) The Herodians come to Him with political games; trying to force Him to say something incriminating (e.g. Mueller hearing)
 - (5) The Sadducees come to Him with echo-chamber nit-picking; a stupid question the Scriptures already answered for them
- **Where's the all-consuming love for God?**
- **Where's the love for their covenant brothers and sisters?**
- The Bible is full of warnings so people won't miss the point, but they still do:
 - (1) **Proverbs 21:2-4:**
 - *Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the heart. **To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.** Haughty eyes and a proud heart, the lamp of the wicked, are sin.*
 - Inward love should come before outward actions
 - Otherwise, you're wasting your time
 - e.g. Mk 7:14-23

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- **Today:** *To do righteousness and justice is more important to the Lord than going to church. Haughty eyes and a proud heart, the lamp of the wicked, are sin.*
- **(2) Isaiah 1:1-17:**
 - *Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom! Give ear to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah! **“What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? Says the Lord. I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats (Isa 1:10-11).***
 - God knows if you’re faking
 - You can’t buy Him off with mindless obedience
 - If you love God, you should want to do what He says
 - Then, He’ll accept your worship
 - **Today:** *What to God is the multitude of your church attendance? says the Lord. I have had enough of your tithe checks and your Bible reading plans ... instead, wash yourselves, remove the evil of your deeds before my eyes!*
- **(3) Isaiah 58:1-5:**
 - **Read Isa 58:1-5**
 - God won’t answer hypocrites
 - **Today:** *They ask of me righteous judgments; they delight to draw near to God. Why have we prayed the sinner’s prayer, and you see it not? Why do we pray to you, and you take no knowledge of it?*
- **(4) Hosea 6:4-6:**
 - *What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? **Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes early away.** Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth, and my judgment goes forth as the light. For **I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.***
 - Their worship never touched their heart
 - You can go through all the motions you want, but if you don’t serve God because you love Him, then you’re wasting your time and missing the point

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- **Today:** *I desire steadfast love and not prayers of fake repentance; the knowledge of God more than church activities*

And the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him. And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices,” (Mk 12:28-33).

- This scribe gets it
- He understands what the Pharisees, Herodians, and Sadducees don't

CONCLUSION

And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And after that no one dared to ask him any more questions (Mk 12:34).

- The scribe isn't missing the point; **he gets the point:**
 - (1) he doesn't think His relationship with God stands or falls on nit-picky minutiae about paying taxes to the Romans
 - (2) he doesn't get wrapped around the axle about silly questions the Bible already answers
 - (3) he doesn't use the Bible as a political tool for his own ends, like conservative politicians do every four years with evangelical Christians
- The scribe:
 - (1) loves God
 - (2) and, because he loves God, he wants to do what he says
 - (3) and Jesus says He's not far from the kingdom
- How many people throughout human history have missed this point?
- How many people have you personally known who have missed that point?
- How many people in this congregation are still missing that point?
- If you're not part of God's family, the way you love God **is to obey His Son's message:**

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- (1) He “gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,” (Gal 1:3)
- (2) we’re each born outside His family, in the cold
- (3) we’re alienated from Him, because of the unholy things we think about and do
- (4) nothing we do can please Him; “[t]hose who are in the flesh [i.e. who have no spiritual life in them] cannot please God,” (Rom 8:8).
- (5) but, if you tell Him you’re sorry for your lifetime of crime against Him,
- (6) and if you believe in Jesus identity, perfect life, sacrificial death, and miraculous resurrection
- (7) and trust that He’s already done everything to rescue you
- (8) then He promises to be a perfect and merciful Savior, and He’ll welcome you into His family with open arms
- If you’re already part of God’s family, and your relationship with God has gone stale:
 - (1) it’s your fault, not His
 - (2) confess and forsake (i.e. repent) your rote and lifeless worship
 - (3) read Psalm 119, one section at a time, and ask God to make the psalmist’s prayer your own
 - (4) turn off Netflix and Amazon Prime
 - (5) make a decision to resist the seductive glow of your phone
 - (6) pray to God every morning and every night
 - (7) read Psalm 119 and pray, and see if the Lord doesn’t warm up your stale heart, and bring joy flowing back into your soul