

Mark 12:13-34 – Four Questions

Again, Jesus was in the temple, teaching. Again, the leaders of Israel were trying to trap him, trying to destroy him. Jesus was asked three different questions – and then he asked one himself. This passage shows us Jesus doing some of the work of the Messiah. The Messiah (Christ) was to be the teacher of God's people, to bring light in the darkness. If we want to walk in light, we must come to Jesus and learn his teaching.

1. A question about paying taxes to Caesar (v13-17)

The Pharisees hated the Romans, and hated having to pay taxes to them. How could God's people in God's land pay a tax to a foreign ruler? The Herodians, though, had compromised with the Romans. If Jesus said that taxes should not be paid, they would treat him as a rebel against the lawful rulers. To trap Jesus, the Pharisees asked him this question together with the Herodians – however Jesus answered, he would be in trouble! But Jesus called them “hypocrites”. The Pharisees were using Caesar's coins, so they should give them back to him in their taxes. A godly believer (e.g. Daniel) can serve in government – but the church itself should never be political. What belongs to God should also be given to God. We are made in God's image – are we giving ourselves to him?

2. A question about the resurrection (v18-27)

The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection. They thought it was impossible. So they asked Jesus a clever question about a woman who, by obeying the law of Moses, had been married seven times. Whose wife would she be? Jesus said that the real problem was that the Sadducees did not believe. They did not believe God's words in the Bible, or in God's power. Do we? Or do we reject all the teachings we find hard? It is easy for God to raise the dead (Acts 26:8). Will we believe God's word, or only what our own brains want to agree with?

3. A question about the greatest commandment (v28-34)

A scribe asked Jesus about the heart of God's law. Some people thought the most important thing was the sacrifices, or circumcision. Jesus told them that the first commandment was to love God with every part of our being. The second is to love other people just as we love ourselves. Outward obedience is not enough – God must have our hearts. If God has our hearts, then we will be happy to give him everything else too. But if God does not have our hearts, then our religion is just a pretence and God is not pleased.

4. A question about the Messiah (v35-37)

Finally, Jesus asked a question about the leaders' teaching about the Messiah. What kind of Messiah did they believe in? The leaders were waiting for someone no more than David, who would defeat their political enemies and bring their country peace and prosperity. They looked for an earthly kingdom. But Jesus showed that even David himself believed in something more than this. He called the Messiah his Lord, not just his Son. Jesus is both human and divine. Jesus' kingdom is not from this world. It is greater and higher. He is now reigning at the right hand of God in heaven. What do you say about Jesus? Have you believed in him?