

Attempts to discredit Jesus publicly

Question 1. Concerning God and Caesar

The last Tuesday of Jesus' life was a day of questions. The Jewish leaders wanted to discredit the teaching and authority of Jesus so they publicly asked the kind of questions that would get Jesus into trouble.

1. First there was the question **concerning God and Caesar**¹. It was designed to trap Him. According to the Mosaic law the king of Israel should be a Jew. If Jesus said taxes should be paid to Caesar He might seem to be opposing the Mosaic law. If Jesus said taxes should not be paid to Caesar He was inviting trouble from the Romans.

¹ 12:13-17

Jesus did something that had never been done before. He separated loyalty to 'Caesar' and loyalty to 'God' and treated them as **two** realms. He held out the possibility of being loyal to Caesar and yet not being loyal to Caesar's religion. It was the first time in the history of thinking that anyone had spoken of religion and state as **two** realms. The general idea before was that Caesar was entitled to say what God should be worshipped (see Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 3:1-30).

Question 2. Concerning resurrection

2. Next comes a question concerning **resurrection**¹. The Sadducees were the 'sceptics' among the various religious groups of Jesus' day. They did not believe in the miraculous and were sceptical about the resurrection. Jesus' answer

¹ 12:18-27

- (i) bluntly affirms that they are wrong,
- (ii) traces their error to ignorance of the Scriptures, and
- (iii) to their ignorance of God's power,
- (iv) corrects their view of the nature of the after-life, and
- (v) attributes the certainty of resurrection to God's faithfulness to His people.

• *God's faithfulness is a guarantee of the resurrection*

God said: '*I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob*'. If the Sadducees were right Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were annihilated at the time of their death. But God refers to Himself as still in relationship with them. To believe in resurrection is a very bold and daring thing to believe. The Sadducees were governed by their scepticism but Jesus has a higher and greater view. The hope of life after death is rooted in God's faithfulness. God is faithful, and His relationship to His people continues after death. It is His faithfulness that guarantees He will reverse the dissolving that takes place and restore His people to life – and for Jesus this means life in a new body.

• *The fulfilment of God's promises to Abraham*

Many of the promises given to Abraham – such as that he should enjoy earthly territory and would have international fame – were never fulfilled in Abraham's lifetime. If God is to be faithful to Abraham and truly fulfil His promises to Him, Abraham – and Isaac and Jacob – will have to be raised from the dead. Anyone with a real grasp of the promises to Abraham and faith in God's power will be able to see it that way. Abraham will have to be 'living' in a resurrection body for God to be completely faithful to him.

Question 3. Concerning the greatest command

3. Next there comes a question concerning **the greatest command**¹. A question is asked about the 'first and great commandment'. The question assumes that the commands of the Mosaic law are not all on the same level and that some are more important than others. Jesus accepts that assumption, and answers with the passage in Deuteronomy 6:4-5 which is known as the 'Shema' (its first Hebrew word).

¹ 12:28-34

• *Love God and love people*

The greatest command is the twofold command to love God and to love people. This is an obligation which is more important than commands concerning ritual.

• *Experiencing the Kingdom*

When the questioner approves of Jesus' reply Jesus encourages him: he is 'not far from the kingdom...'. This does not mean 'not far from becoming a believer'. Salvation does not initially come through love; it comes through faith in Jesus. Experiencing the kingdom, as we have seen before, rather means

coming into the experience of God's royal power at work in our lives. What brings down the flowing blessings of God's kingly authority is attention to the love-command. When it is taken seriously it introduces the person concerned into the experience of God's being at work in his life.

- Questioners silenced

Jesus' question about the prediction concerning David's Son

The Jewish leaders are finding that putting Jesus under interrogation only gives Him scope to give skilful and wise answers. They show up rather badly in comparison with Him; soon they dare ask Him no more questions.

4. But then Jesus Himself has a question about **the prediction concerning David's Son**¹. The Messiah of Psalm 110 is a descendant of David, yet David himself submits to the Lordship of the coming King. How can this be?

¹ 12:35-40

Their questions have been attempts to trap Jesus. Jesus' question to them is an attempt to get them to face who He Himself is. They have been seeking to get Jesus into trouble with Roman authorities, seeking to ridicule the supernatural, seeking to ask questions about law. But when Jesus gets an opportunity to put a question, His question gets them to think about Scripture and about Himself as the fulfilment of Scripture.

- A challenge to re-think "Messiah"

If they were to follow the lead of His question it would cause them to see that their expectation of the Messiah as a politician and as a soldier is inadequate. The Messiah is one whom David worshipped! Jesus gives them an opportunity to come to a better mind, but they are not interested.

The widow's offering

5. The incident of the widow's offering comes in at precisely this point¹. After all their questions the Jewish leaders are nowhere near arriving at true spirituality. Jesus has shown them the way by pointing to Himself. Alongside this picture of the devious, malicious, manipulative and insincere religion of the Jewish leaders, an incident takes place which is a very striking contrast. Wealthy worshippers are putting large sums of money into the chests of the temple, which were placed around the walls inside the temple. A poor widow puts in two 'lepta', which has (as Mark explains for his Gentile readers) the value of one quadrans, which was less than 1% of a labourers' daily wage. The important point is that the woman's last remaining money happened to be in two coins. She could have given one of them to the treasury but kept one for herself.

¹ 12:41-44

- A striking contrast

- Sacrificial giving

Jesus calls His disciples to Him and uses the occasion to teach them something. It is easy to give out of abundance. Sometimes even Pharisees and insincere people do it for their own reasons. But the widow gave sacrificially. Jesus was enabled by the Father to know more of the woman's circumstances. After the gift she had nothing left.

- Clever questioning v. true devotion

The Pharisees and Sadducees were clever and learned in Israel's religion, and could ask clever questions, but true devotion was found in the woman who was willing to give her everything to God.



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