

Introduction

1. Our passages this week and next mark the end of Jesus' public ministry, and it begins with a final public confrontation with the religious leaders
2. All of the various groups (Chief Priests, scribes, elders, pharisees and Sadducees) try to discredit Jesus:
 - a. They question His authority
 - b. They try to trap Him politically
 - c. They try to trap Him theologically

A. The chief priests, scribes and elders question Jesus' authority (11:27-12:12)

1. We are now in the final week of Jesus' life and for a third day in a row Jesus is found in the temple where He is confronted by a group of religious leaders (READ 11:27-28)
 - a. The group consists of chief priests, scribes and elders which suggests that this group may have been members of the Grand Sanhedrin (judges that made up the supreme court of Israel—the same ones that tried Jesus)
 - b. They immediately question Jesus' authority asking Him by what authority He was doing **"these things"**:
 - 1) **"These things"** likely refers in a general sense to most of Jesus' ministry but first and foremost in the minds of these rulers is likely the three most recent events: the triumphal entry, the cleansing of the temple, and Jesus teaching in the temple (according to Matthew and Luke Jesus was teaching)
 - 2) Seeing as the Sanhedrin were the official legal body in Israel they came to Jesus flexing their legal muscle and demanding He give an answer
 - 3) The insinuation here is that Jesus had no right to do what He was doing because they hadn't given Him their permission
 - c. Jesus agrees to answer their question as long as they first answer one of His (29-33):
 - 1) He asks them where John the Baptist's authority came from (29): **"And Jesus said to them, 'I will ask you one question, and you answer Me, and then I will tell you by what authority I do these things. Was the baptism of John from heaven, or from men? Answer Me.'**
 - 2) Immediately they recognize the dilemma they face (31-32):
 - a) If they say heaven (e.g. God) then Jesus can accuse them of not listening to one of God's prophet: (31): **"They began reasoning among themselves, saying, 'If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say, 'Then why did you not believe him?'**
 - b) However, if they will lose favor with the people (32): **"But shall we say, 'From men?'" — they were afraid of the people, for everyone considered John to have been a real prophet."**
 - 3) When they refuse to answer Jesus, He likewise refused to answer them (33): **"Answering Jesus, they said, 'We do not know.' And Jesus *said to them, 'Nor will I tell you by what authority I do these things.'"**

- a) We all know what they were really thinking—They didn't believe John the Baptist's ministry was from God because they rejected what he preached
 - b) The reason Jesus refused to answer their question was because it didn't matter—they had rejected John who preached under the authority of God and they would reject Jesus as well regardless of how He answered them
2. Jesus rebukes the leaders for abusing their authority as God's representatives (12:1-12):
- a. READ v. 1: The man who plants the vineyard represents God while the vine growers represent Israel's religious leaders
 - b. READ v. 2-5: The slaves sent by the owner represents God's prophets (OT and John the Baptist)
 - c. READ v. 6-8: The son represents Jesus Christ
 - d. READ v. 9: The destruction of the vine-growers by the owner represents God's judgement against the religious leaders, who would have their authority ripped from their hands, while the others to whom the vineyard is given represents the Church, the followers of Jesus
 - e. READ v. 10-11: the cornerstone represents Jesus
 - f. READ v. 12: The meaning of the parable wasn't lost on the religious leaders which simply further enraged them against Jesus
3. Practical Application:
- a. Do you get the impression here that God cares about the behavior of those who are supposed to lead His people?
 - b. Do you think we ever see something similar in the Church?
 - 1) Leaders who operate under their own authority rather than God's?
 - 2) Pastors and teachers who mislead God's people?
 - 3) READ Acts 20:25-38
 - c. A true leader operates under the authority and purpose of Jesus Christ

<p>B. The Pharisees and Herodians try to trap Jesus politically (12:13-17)</p>

1. This episode begins with a rather unusual alliance (13): **“Then they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Him in order to trap Him in a statement.”**
- a. It's an unlikely pairing because the Pharisees and the Herodians didn't get along because they were diametrically opposed to one another in their political views:
 - 1) The Pharisees wanted independence from Rome and to reestablish the Kingdom of David with a descendent of David as king
 - 2) The Herodians, however, favored submitting to Rome and supported King Herod Antipas who was basically a Roman puppet
 - b. The one thing they could agree on, however, was their opposition to Jesus (the Herodians are only mentioned three times in the Gospel and each time they are paired with the Pharisees in opposition to Jesus)
2. Notice the text says they were **“sent...in order to trap Him in a statement”**:
- a. They were likely sent by the Sanhedrin after their attempt to challenge Jesus' authority failed

- b. The trap was political in nature and involved whether or not Jews should pay the poll-tax to Rome (14-15a): **“They came and said to Him, ‘Teacher, we know that You are truthful and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any, but teach the way of God in truth. Is it lawful to pay a poll-tax to Caesar, or not? Shall we pay or shall we not pay?’”**
- 1) The tax to which they referred was the tribute tax instituted by Rome in the Judean province in A.D. 6
 - a. Some groups, like the Zealots, refused to pay the tax because they felt it acknowledged Rome’s dominion over Israel
 - b. Many common Jews resented paying the tax because they believe it violated God’s commandments against idolatry:
 - The Roman denarius was the only coin they could use to pay the tax
 - However, it bore the image of the Roman emperor as the semi-divine son of the god Augustus and the goddess Livia, along with the inscription “Tiberius Caesar Augustus, Son of the Divine Augustus”
 - This was not only considered blasphemous by most Jews, but using the coin was viewed as a form of idolatry
 - c. The Pharisees resented the tax because of the humiliation of recognizing Roman rule over Israel, but they justified paying it
 - d. The Herodians obviously supported paying the tax because of their commitment to Rome
 - 2) Their question begins with flattery, but ultimately revolves around whether or not paying the tax was permitted by Old Testament Law and if they should pay it:
 - a) Their question was a trap because they expected either a “yes” or a “no”, both of which would have put Jesus out of favor with someone
 - b) A yes answer would have put Him at odds with those who resented the tax
 - c) A no answer would have put Him at odds with the Roman authorities
3. But, Jesus sees through their hypocrisy and insincerity and responds in a rather remarkable way (READ 15b-17):
- a. Rather than responding with a simple “yes” or “no”, He responds by telling them to give to Caesar what belongs to him and to God what belongs to Him
 - 1) What belongs to Caesar in this context is clearly the poll-tax
 - 2) However, what belongs to God is a bit more ambiguous or open ended:
 - a) Jesus might have been referring to divine privilege and honor—this is something Roman citizens extended to their emperors, but it was something that should be reserved for God
 - b) He might have even been referring to their tithes, offerings and the temple tax
 - b. Such an answer amazed the pharisees and Herodians, probably because they didn’t expect such a profound answer.
4. Practical application
- a. Obviously, one take away from this is that no matter how much we hate paying taxes, or feel that they are unjust (and they are), Jesus expects us to pay our taxes
 - b. In case there’s any objections, Paul makes this clear in Romans 13:6-7

- c. However, a bigger take away is that we are to give to God all that belongs to Him—glory, honor, service, worship, our offerings, etc.

C. The Sadducees try to trap Jesus theologically (12:18-27)

1. With the efforts of the first two groups failing to confront and accuse Jesus, the Sadducees now give it a try (Read 18-23):
 - a. The text tells us that the Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection (1)
 - b. They obviously knew that Jesus did because they come up with what they think is a clever way to disprove Him:
 - 1) A woman ultimately marries seven brothers because each one dies before she's able to bear children
 - 2) So, they ask Jesus what will happen in the resurrection since she's had seven husbands—who's wife will she be
2. Jesus immediately calls them out on their false teaching (READ 24-27):
 - a. They were "**mistaken**" because they "**did not understand the Scriptures or the power of God**"
 - 1) They were ignorant of God's Word
 - 2) They did not understand God's power to raise the dead
 - b. He then corrects them by pointing out FROM THE SCRIPTURES that resurrection is a reality—the proof is that God referred to Himself in the present as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (all who were **physically** dead) when speaking to Moses
3. Practical Application:
 - a. Like the Sadducees in Israel, the "church" is filled with false teachers who deceive and mislead
 - b. And also like the Sadducees, these teachers are ignorant when it comes to understanding God's Word and His power

Conclusion

1. So, what do these three episodes have in common?
2. Each involves a group of religious leaders who challenge Jesus
 - a. They first challenge His authority with their own authority
 - b. Then they try to pit Him against others with their hypocrisy and deceit
 - c. Finally they reject the truths He taught with their false wisdom and human reasoning
3. Ultimately, each of these is a rejection of the Messiah
4. A parallel today is what we see happening in the church by many so-called religious leaders who ultimately reject the Gospel by their false teachings:
 - a. Attacks on the authority and historicity of Genesis 1-11 which destroys the need for the Gospel
 - b. Proponents of spiritual formation which replaces the Gospel with mystic, man-made religious practices

- c. Social justice and the redeeming of culture and society which mis-represents the Gospel
- d. Acceptance of LGBTQ lifestyles which perverts the Gospel