

Render to God, that which is God's
Mark 12:13-18

Proverbs 27:1-27

Mark 12:1-12

Responsive. Ephesians 2:1-10

I figured that since Clay had so much fun reading the text for the morning last week I wouldn't have him do that again, so instead, I thought he could just read the text leading up to our text this week. And as you will notice as we read the next set of verses here in chapter 12, that really is still all part of the same discourse, it starts with Then, tying it back to the previous 12 verses in fact it really ties back to chapter 11. So let us read our text this morning, starting in verse 13 and reading to verse 18.

So as we see, that the religious leaders here in Jerusalem are going to try again. Thought out Jesus ministry men would pop up and try to stir up doubt and unbelief among the multitudes, often by engaging Jesus in discourse, asking questions trying to cause him to stumble in an attempt to disprove that which he has been teaching. For if they could catch him in inconsistencies, or breaking the Mosaic law then in their minds that would discredit him as being the messiah sent from God. Back in chapter 11 verse 27 we see that the chief priests and the scribes from the temple confront him over having caused a ruckus in the temple by throwing out the merchants and money changers. And they begin to question his authority, who does he think that he is that he can walk into the temple and do what he did.

But instead of answering them he returns with a question asking about the baptism of John catching them in a spot with no good answer, so they don't answer, and Jesus says, "Then neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things." I find Jesus not answering their question here interesting, there is a lot being said in his non answer. He could have plainly told them that it was by the authority given to him by the Father, by God but they would not have accepted that answer and called him a blasphemer, and if he tried to claim his own authority, then they would have rejected that as well and labeled him a lunatic, and heretic. So, Jesus turns the tables putting his answer contingent on theirs and asks them a similar question that they could not answer without betraying themselves and their true motivation.

Then, starting in verse 1 of chapter 12, we see the word then again, trying all of this together for it is dealing with the same issue, the Authority of Jesus, and the religious leaders seeking to trap him and turn the crowds against him. So what does Jesus do? He begins to teach them in parables, which is the passage that Clay read this morning. And the interesting thing about this parable, is that It was clearly understood by these chief priests, and scribes. Usually Jesus taught in parables so only those given to understanding would understand. We know that this was Jesus motivation for using parables because of his own words in Chapter 4. He did not use parables to make his teaching more understandable and approachable, but rather to obscure, so that only those given the ears to hear will hear. Chapter 4, vs 9-12. "And he said to them, He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" He had just finished giving the parable of the sower and the seed. And he implores, those who are able to hear, let them hear!. Verse 10. "But when he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parable. And he said to them, to you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God but to those who are outside, all things come in parables." Why? "So that, seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand lest they should turn, and their sins be forgiven them."

Wait a minute what? Did you catch it? The mysteries of God's kingdom is hidden in parables so that only those who have been given the ability to hear can hear. And all those who have not been enabled, or given ears to hear, and eyes to see, the message is hidden....verse 12. "Lest they should turn, and their sins be forgiven them." Sounds like double predestination. That God has chosen some to hear, and he has chosen some to not hear. Many preachers today who hate such an idea that God has absolute sovereignty to do as he wills with his own creating see the problem with parables that they are not conducive to the seeker sensitive church. So they say things, such as, Jesus taught in parables, using examples of the society and life around him to make his message more understanding, more appealing to those he was talking to." But that is not what the bible says is it? Right from Jesus himself, and we know that because the letters are written in red. :) For anyone who may be listening to this, that's a joke. We do not need red letters to know that it was Jesus who said, I teach this way so that these who it has not been given the ability from God to understand, will not understand and it is specifically so they do not repent, do not turn, and do not believe.

This isn't some obscure text, or the first time that God has revealed his absolute sovereignty in such things. Someone did the work for us, as we can see in the little column in the middle of our bible under verse 12, is a reference to Isaiah 6: 9-10. which is the vision of Isaiah had of the Lord when he sent Isaiah to prophesy to Isreal, but look what he tells him about his mission, about the message that he is to bring. "Go, and tell this people; Keep on hearing, but do not understand, keep on seeing but do not perceive. Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, why? Lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and return and be healed.

These moments that we see of God, in judgement, are not very encouraging are they? This is God! The sovereign creator of all, can he not do whatever he wills with that which he has created? If God does not have this sovereign control and design over his creation, then he is not God. If you are not believing in this God, who by his own will, for his own purpose, as Roman's 8 puts it, in times past, before the foundation of the world predestined, chose, elected specific, individual people to be conformed to the image of Christ. If you are not believing in this God, then you are not believing in God but of something else, the God of your own making, the God of your own mind. But we must remember when we talk of such things the duality of the subject. As we see here in Isaiah, and when Jesus quotes this passage in Mark, we get a glimpse into God's awesome sovereignty and its frankly quite frightening. But we must remember as well, that there is the level on which we live, we do not know, nor can we know God's plan in our lives but we take heart, we take hope in knowing that he knows, and nothing will derail his plan, nothing will undermine his will.

And the same goes in our ministry as well, while we get these glimpses of God saying that he will not allow them to hear, or to see, Roman's 9 is another place that comes to mind verse 13. "as it is written Jacob I have loved, and Esau I have hated. What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For he says to Moses, I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion" Now I ask again, Why? Why is it this way? Verse 16," So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy." Salvation is of the Lord, we do not decide unless we are first given the ability to see and hear, and our decision as it were is not really a decision because when faced with life in this world, or a life that transends this world, the choice is obvious. It's like being offered a bowl of brussle sprouts, or a bowl of icecream, the choice is obvious...unless you are Christina...I don't know what that says about her!

So all of that to say, we must understand the difference between God's view, and our view, while God has predestined his children before the world was, we don't know who God has chosen, we don't know who he has given the new birth to, who God has opened their eyes so that they may see the kingdom of heaven, and opened their ears so that they may understand the mysteries of the kingdom of God turn and repent. So from our perspective, from our point of view, every single person has that chance, because we do not know who God has called or who he will call. Therefore we are to teach, and preach to every nation, tribe, tongue, to all peoples so that those given to hear, will hear, and turn, and repent.

So this sovereignty of God, and his authority over all things is exactly what we are seeing here in Mark chapter 12. Even to the point that he with holds his answer in chapter 11 because it is not given that they should know, lest they return, and repent. And in the first part of chapter 12, this parable against these religious leaders is obvious, unlike all other parables which have been deliberately designed to obscure Jesus teaching to those who it is not given to understand, this parable is plainly understood by these religious leaders and as we see they were furious for verse 12, They sought to lay hands on him, they wanted to take him down, but they feared the multitude..again. That was the same reason they did not answer the question Jesus posed in the end of chapter 11, for they feared the people.

So one might ask, is this not Israel? Is this not God's chosen people? So why does he speak against them so harshly, why does he obscure his message so they do not hear? Well, the answer to that is simple, and once again found in Roman's chapter 9 where we see that Paul is actually beside himself in grief over his people, over Israel.

Verse 1. "I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh." Paul's grief for these unbelieving Jews, his countrymen, who deny Christ brings him so much grief and sorrow that he says he would dare even trade places with them so that they maybe brought to Christ....how many of us can say that? That is a challenging statement of ministry, that frankly we all fall short of. Verse 3, "I wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelite's, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promise whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God Amen. " they have been given ever advantage, even Christ whom they deny comes through them, through Abraham's seed, yet they still deny that Jesus Christ is the Messiah. And here it is, verse 6, the answer as to why Israel does not believe, the answer to why the religious leaders in Jesus day denied him and sought to destroy him, why they could not hear, and could not see the truth that was standing right before them. " But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham, but in Isaac your seed shall be called." That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.

So there it is again, God's sovereign will, he will have compassion on whom he will, and on whom he will, he hardens. These leaders in Jerusalem, have been hardened, their desire is for power, and control and they see Jesus as a threat to that power. They have corrupted the temple worship, they have misunderstood, misused, and abused the law and traditions that were given to point them to Christ. But it is not as thought this did not happen outside of God's will, for it is through this very

hardening of their hearts, and blinding of their eyes that God's will was fulfilled in the death of his Son as a propitiating sacrifice for the sins of the true Israel, the children of the promise.

And again, as we read through our passage this morning starting in verse 13 and going to verse 17 we see the same sort of structure as before, Men come from the temple to question Jesus, to trap him but being the Messiah, already knows their intention and reacts and answers in wisdom that only he could. So let us read 5 verses. We must remember as we read these verses, and the little test that they are trying to set up and trap Jesus in stems largely from the Israelite's hatred of Rome. Rome was the invader, and they were operating under the idea that the Messiah will come and rescue them from Rome and will reestablish his kingdom in Jerusalem. Understanding that is key to their line of questioning and Jesus answer to them. In this issue of paying taxes to Caesar we can actually equate a lot of that to today can't we. There are those who think that we should not be paying taxes to our government, saying that our government is corrupt, immoral, and ungodly and by paying taxes we are supporting it. It was much the same idea for the Jews at that time as well. Hence the question, is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar. They were not asking about civil law, because of course we know by civil law it is lawful, in fact required to pay. But they were referring to their mosaic law, their traditions and beliefs. Paying taxes to Caesar, is supporting the tyrannical government that is controlling them. The pharisee's think that they have Jesus caught in a cunundrum, for in their cleverly devised question they sought to trap Jesus, for if he answers that it is lawful and taxes should be paid then it is likely the Israelites there would disagree and he would lose influence with the people and that they would turn against him. But if he said that no, they should not be paying taxes, then the Roman government would come against him.

I really find this passage interesting, and I think important in our political environment today, because many of the people today who are anti-tax and that whole movement comes from the very people who claim to follow God, yet Jesus himself tells these pharisee's and Herodians to pay their taxes. Render unto Caesar that which is Caesars. Can be said exactly the same today, Render under the US Government that which is the US governments. And I think that the biggest point in this passage is in the end of verse 17. Just as we were talking about the dichotomy in the understanding of salvation, there is God's view, and there is our view it is the same here. Notice that Jesus puts forth two groups in his answer, give to Caesars that which is his, and give to God that which is his. This can be summed up famously in Martin Luther's understanding and teaching of the 2 kingdoms. There is God's kingdom, and there is the kingdom of the world. There is God's sovereign plan and design that spans the entire existence across all of creation, and there is what we see play out before us day to day. This truth of God's sovereignty over all things grants his people hope just as we talked about last week. Everything can look bleak, hopeless, and lost in our finite little day to day view, but to God it has already been established, tomorrow is not a mystery he knows the challenges, the struggles, and the joys that it will bring. And it is in that which we rest and put our faith, the sovereign almighty God.

In this statement that Jesus makes here, he acknowledges the legitimacy of the Roman empire, and in doing so legitimizes the idea of human government. This distances Jesus from any idea of political anarchy, that he has come to overthrow the government, or that it is mission of Christians today to do the same. There is no biblical support for such a thing, and this is something that I have been thinking about lately with all the turmoil going on in China. There have been a few pastors who have been arrested that are allegedly outspoken and tied to the uprising in Hong Cong. Over the years the Chinese Government has allowed the Christian faith to be established, allowing for churches, which of course must be approved, but none the less there was at least an idea and an acceptance of the Christian faith.

But that is changing, and it is changing fast. I was reading this week that they have put greater restrictions upon these established, licensees, government approved churches no longer allowing any witnessing, and no one under the age of 18 is allowed to attend. Facial recognition camera's have been installed inside the churches to identify each and every attendee, and the pastor's message must be previously reviewed and approved by a government official. And just recently the Chinese government ordered the demolition of a church, a rather large church with the capacity of upwards to 3000 people. But not only did the order its demolition, they did so during services while the church was filled with people. Now I did not read of any injuries or casualties from this, but the fact is that it was done and there is now greater persecution in China and it is likely only going to continue to get worse. I saw all of this for this very reason that we are talking about this morning. Pastor's who are associated with the Christian faith in China have been outspoken, dissenters of the Chinese government. And here is the problem, while they may not be wrong on one sense, look at the outcome of those actions. I am a firm believer that it is not the place of religious leaders, of Christians to be anti-government champions.

Jesus did not come to overthrow the Roman government, Paul and the apostles did not rise up the churches to overthrow Nero. No, they were focused on the ministry of the word, the preaching of the gospel and reaching lost souls, not overthrowing a tyrannical government. Does that mean we should not be involved in our political system? I will answer like Paul does after a rhetorical question, certainly not. We should be involved, if you feel so inclined and convicted by all means go out and vote, use the legal means that have been established. But that does not give you authority, or right to seek to overthrow, and undermine the government, especially in the name of God. WE must remember, that God is control even over the governments, they have been established by him. He brings up leaders, and takes them down for his will, purpose, and glory.

Turn with me to Roman's 13. I want to read this because I think this is something that we need to keep in mind and it is becoming more and more important in our current political climate, and even in what we see going on in China. "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God." Remember that, Rome's control over Israel...appointed by God, The Chinese Government, appointed by God. Our government appointed by God...so what is the implications to that? Verse 2. "Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves." Sounds like these pastor's who have been outspoken against the Chinese government does it not? Now please, do not mistake me, my heart goes out to those people who are under this persecution but I also think that we, as Christians in this country can learn a very valuable lesson here. Verse 3. "For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same." Pay your taxes, obey the laws, unless they require you to give up your faith and bow to false God's.

I am going to get myself into some trouble here, but this stands as a good example. Hypothetically, lets say guns become outlawed, they are illegal to own, and to use. There are so many who claim to follow Christ who would go to war over this issue, literal war. They are threatening to kill anyone who would seek to take away their guns, for they believe it as their God given right. No, it is not your God given right, it is your government given right, and if the government takes away that right, it is your God given right to comply. "Do you want to be unafraid of the authorities? Do what is good, obey them, and you will have praise from the same." What ultimately is important here, your right to have a gun, or your ministry for God? Your actions, your rhetoric, your political activism reflects upon all others who stand in God's name and what better way to bring persecution then to use your belief as an excuse for political dissension."

Continuing on here in Romans 13. “ Do what is good and you will have praise from the same, For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid for he does not bear this sword in vain for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore all their due, taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor. “ And lets finish out this chapter, meditate upon these words when you think upon the examples I have given today, “owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments you shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness, you shall not covet, and if there is any other commandment are all summed up in this saying, namely, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no harm to a neighbor, therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.”

And in closing, notice the last half of verse 17 in Mark. Render unto God's that which is God's. As Christian's, as God's children that is our goal, that is our aim and focus. As much as we are given freedom in our government to vote, to have logical, peaceable discourse we should do so, but remembering that such is secondary to that which is God's, which is our witness, and in fact our conduct in our political discourse should reflect and be a witness of God. Not one of dissension, and anger filled rhetoric, but one that reflects God and his love and concern for the hearts and souls of the lost, and the provision of those who are in need. Render under Caesar that which is Caesar's and render unto God that which is God's. Repay no one evil for evil, have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.