**The Trap That Didn’t Trap Jesus**



**Mark 11:27-13:34**

Open to Mark chapter 12. I got a text yesterday from an older friend of mine who asked three questions in the text. I'm not great at texting, but he just asked, “Will KiKi be home soon?” “Are you preaching tomorrow?” “Do you want me to bring the Milky Way’s that I've bought you?” I answered, “yes, yes, yes.” This morning, I almost sent him a text because when I finally got everything together, I thought I couldn’t preach this morning. This is one of those passages that, in my mind, don’t preach, but it teaches. If you don’t mind, we’re not going to preach God's Word this morning we’re going to teach God's Word. Our Scripture range will be from verses 13-34. I’m going to try to show you what I believe Mark was doing when he took three separate stories and put them together in the life of Christ that was happening in the temple during the last week of Jesus’ ministry. We’re going to talk about the trap that didn’t trap Jesus.

Have you ever set a trap that didn’t trap what you were trying to trap? I remember being a young married man on the eastside of Calloway County, and we had these little creatures that wanted to be in our house that we didn’t want to be in there; they are called mice. We would set these ancient little traps. There was a little piece of wood with a little steel contraption on it. It would have a place where you put what mice like, cheese. It had a little spring you would set, and then you would put it in the regular route of where you thought the mouse was going. We had one of the most clever mice ever created, I believe. I can't tell you how many mornings we would get up and the mouse trap would still be set but the cheese would be gone. I remember a few times hearing them actually hearing them spring thinking I had my mouse, only to go find a trap that had been sprung, but no mouse and the cheese gone again. I had this thought. I know you're going to think I'm weird, but I thought about staying up late one night to watch this mouse, not to try to catch him, but I just wanted to see how clever he was in getting the cheese off my trap and never get caught in it. I never caught him in the trap.

The trap that didn’t trap Jesus is what we’re going to be thinking about this morning. I have a subtitle to this sermon based on the theme. It is ‘you never know who is listening to you.’ Store that in your mind as we go through these three stories. Mark really wants the church that he was writing to, and us, to see was this man called Jesus, who we are following. I really believe Mark writes so much about discipleship because he wants to make sure we understand as Christians that we are following a person, the God-man. He lived in a body just like ours as one of us. It was amazing how He dealt with people. I think some of these stories have a theological depth, but they also have a practical value. I want you to see Jesus this morning. We’re not going to study these passages for doctrine. There is doctrine in them, but I want you to see what Mark is trying to get us to see, and that’s Jesus. In seeing Jesus, we will see ourselves, and seeing how we deal with others actually influences people that we don’t even know are being influenced. There are many times when there are other people listening to the conversation besides the people we think we are in conflict with. Many times, God allows conflict in our lives, not just for the person we’re having conflict with, but so the others who are watching and listening can see how we handle that person. Many times, how we deal with conflict causes other people to either want to talk to us further, or not want to talk to us. We’re only going to read verses 13-17, but we’re going to speak from the entire passage.

**Scripture**

***“And they sent to him some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians, to trap him in his talk. 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?”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.”***

(Prayer)

Father, thank You, thank You. I am so thankful that Matt recognized and even wished we had more time to just worship You. Father, I had the thought go through my mind that, wow, what will it be like in Heaven when we’re all in glorified bodies and we see You face to face. We believe You are worthy by faith, but one day we are going to see You who ordained Your Son to take the scroll from Your hand and redeem Yours from every tribe, tongue, nation, and people group. Father, You are worthy. Now we pray for You to allow us to teach and study, not for knowledge sake, but to know You, to know the one we follow, and to know how critically important it is for us in this age that is getting more cynical and hostile to Christianity to truly exemplify the qualities of Christ. Father, we praise You now. Anoint us as only You can anoint. Without Your anointing, this will just be a physical exercise of futility, but with Your anointing, with the presence of Your Spirit, with You nudging me on what to say, and the congregation to believe and apply, we’re going to accomplish Your sovereign purposes. Thank You in the precious name of Christ, amen.

Let me remind you of the broader context of these stories we’re going to look at this morning. Jesus is finally where He's been traveling; He's in Jerusalem. He doesn’t go to a cross first; He first goes to the temple. He's been in the temple for several days teaching. It’s His last week before He goes to the cross. Coming into Jerusalem, He saw a fig tree that did not bear figs. It was leafy, no fruit, and He cursed it. He goes into the temple and sees everything about it. He doesn’t cleanse the temple; He clears out the temple. The next morning, His disciples see the fig tree Jesus cursed, and it had withered to its root. It was dead. Mark took two stories, inserted one story, and then the other story for us to understand what He's teaching about the temple. The temple was all appearance, no fruit. It could not bring a person into a right relationship with God. In a few days, Jesus will be talking about the temple’s destruction, but then He will go to a cross. On that cross when He dies and takes His blood into the very presence of God to redeem us, that curtain that separated the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place will actually be torn in two from top to bottom, signifying that what the blood of the bulls and goats could not do, the blood of God’s Son did. That is to bring is into His very presence. The next day, there is a group of people who question Jesus’ authority. Who died and left Him boss, so to speak? On what authority did He have the right to clear out the money traders and those selling animals for sacrifice? In giving His answer, He spoke a parable to them. Basically, in the parable they began to realize that He was talking about them and He shares why He has the authority to clear out God’s temple, why He has the authority to reveal the true condition of the temple. That is because He is God’s beloved Son. He's God’s heir. What is God’s is His. The chief priest, the scribes, and the elders wanted to arrest Jesus, but they were afraid of the people. Because they sense He is speaking about them, they slip out of the temple. That’s our text this morning. Those who questioned His authority, the scribes, the chief priests, and the elders, sent some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians to Him to trap Him in His talk.

Now, you have to get this picture. When they go to Jesus, they flatter Him with this great compliment that He is very neutral, not swayed by appearances, and teaches the way of the Lord, but the Lord saw through their hypocrisy. The word, hypocrisy, means to be two-faced. You’ve got to imagine Jesus looking and seeing Pharisees and Herodians together asking Him a question. Unless we understand the biblical world, we will not fully see this. I couldn’t think of a good illustration for us to capture this, but let me just give you some details here. The Pharisees were those religious people who had set themselves apart to keep all six hundred and thirteen of the laws of Moses. They believed that if at any time they kept all six hundred and thirteen of the laws of Moses, it would usher in the Messianic Kingdom. They wanted the Messianic Kingdom to come because they wanted to rid Israel of the Romans. Then you have the Herodians. The Herodians were moral, but they loved the Roman government. They did not want the Roman government to leave. Because of the secure government that it brought, they were flourishing in their trade and jobs. They were getting wealthy because of their alliance with Rome. Many of them were literally robbing the Jewish people to death. If you can see this…you have one group of people that is anti-Rome, and you have another group who is pro-Rome. You have this one group, the Pharisees, who do not really believe in paying taxes, and it’s not because they don’t believe in government, but they do not want to be under a dictatorship that’s pagan. They want to be under a theocracy, so they want the Messiah to come. They pay their taxes, but they pay them with their teeth clenched, so to speak. They do it grudgingly because they think they're honoring a pagan government. The Herodians are pro-tax. They want more taxes because they believe in big government because big government brings a lot of good things to the people.

Get this picture. You have an anti-tax group and an pro-tax group coming together to ask Jesus a question. Jesus knows they're there to trap Him. He knows they are there to test Him. Here's what they ask Him. “Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar?” Should we pay our taxes, or should we not? Tell me you see what's going on. The Pharisee side knows if He says yes it is lawful to pay taxes, it would discredit Him with Jews. The Herodians know if He says no, it is not lawful to pay taxes and you shouldn’t, it would discredit Him with Rome, and Rome would get rid of Him. Either way, no matter what Jesus answered, He is done; it’s over. They’ve got a trap that’s going to cause Him to be taken out. But Jesus, Son of Man, Son of God, recognizing their motive is wrong, seeing through their hypocrisy, asks for a coin. Evidently, this is a coin that Jesus didn’t have on Him, so someone in the group, probably a Herodian, gave it to Him. Jesus looks at the coin and says, ‘Hey, whose picture is this on the coin?’ They said, ‘Well, that’s Caesar.’ Now, above Caesar’s picture, there was a writing, “Tiberius Caesar, son of divine Augustus, which means ‘Tiberius, son of a god.’ Can you imagine being a Jewish person having to carry around a coin that you had to pay taxes with that actually had the picture of a person who thought he was God? You are in a dilemma. Is it morally ok for you to carry this coin around? Is it morally ok for you to pay taxes to a pagan who believes he is God? So, Jesus is now holding the coin and He says, ‘Who is it? Yeah, that’s Caesar, so then just give to Caesar what is Caesar’s.’ In other words, Jesus had the wisdom to say ‘if this coin has Caesar’s image on it, it belongs to him, so give him what’s due him.’ But He doesn’t stop there. He says, “…render to God what is God’s.” I don't know if you see this, but many times, I use my sanctified imagination. I try to imagine it was there. I try to imagine I'm a Jewish person and I just heard Jesus say to render to Caesar what is Caesar’s because you know what belongs to Caesar because it’s got Caesar’s image stamped on it. If it belongs to Caesar and you have it, give it to Caesar. Then He confronts me with this truth…something belongs to God, and whatever belongs to God, give it to God.

That word, image, is the same word that is used for image in the Greek version of the Old Testament in Genesis chapter 1:26 when it says, “God created man in His image.” What happened with the fall of man? We didn’t lose the image of God, but the image of God was greatly distorted in sinful man. All of a sudden, the New Testament picks of that thought of creation and the image of God being marred in creation. All of a sudden, salvation is being talked about as a new creation and we being in Christ Jesus. What the book of Ephesians and Colossians teaches is when we've been recreated in Christ Jesus we are created in the image of God. We bear the image of God. What I think Jesus is trying to say is if it belongs to Caesar, it’s got his image on it; give it to him, but everything that bears the image of God we give to God. And they marveled. Can I ask this question? Do you bear the image of God? In your walk with God, do you sense, through the Spirit and through His Word, God develop in you the very image of His Son Jesus Christ? Do you realize if that’s true, according to Jesus you need to give to God what is God’s, and that’s you.

Now we have a second story. Some Sadducees appear and Mark tells us quickly that Sadducees do not believe in the resurrection. I researched for weeks, and I cannot find the origin of the Sadducees. We do not know why they're named Sadducees. We know why the Pharisees are called Pharisees because the word, Pharisee, means to set apart. That group of people who were Pharisees was set apart to keep God’s law. We've got this other group called the Sadducees that we meet from time to time, but we don’t know a lot about them. Most everything we know about them is negative, but we have no idea why they're called the Sadducees. We know they don’t believe in a resurrection, we know from Acts 23 that they don’t believe in angels, and we know they don’t believe in spirits. They're a religious group of people who base all of their teachings on the first five books of Moses, the Torah. I just had this thought. It’s kind of an appropriate name, Sadducees, because they don’t believe in a resurrection, so they're sad, you see. If I didn’t believe in a resurrection, I would be sad, you see, too.

Get this picture. In the temple, we've now got a group of people who are Sadducees, they do not believe in a resurrection, and they come to Jesus with a story based on their scriptures, Deuteronomy chapter 25. Can I just pause here and say this, especially for us modern people? We need to be careful sometimes when we pass judgment on people who lived hundreds and thousands of years ago. You do realize that ancient people didn’t have the full insight we have today. So you're going to find this really weird, I think. If you don’t find this weird, you're weird. Under the Jewish Law, if brothers decided to live together under the same roof (that’s the key, brothers living together) and the older brother, who was married, died but the wife hadn’t given him a child yet, it was the responsibility of the younger brother to marry his widow, which was his sister-in-law, and bear a child. But, it is not considered his child; it is considered the child of the brother who died so that his name can live on in perpetuate. Yuck…that’s just weird. Now, the Sadducees who don’t believe in a resurrection come to Jesus and say ‘in the resurrection, a man married, he died before his wife gave him a child, his brother married her, and then he died before she can give him a child, so the next brother married her, died before she could give him a child, then the next brother married her…There were seven brothers who was married to this same lady, and she never bore any of them a child. Our question is in the resurrection, whose wife will she be?’ Man, that’s a good question! Here's what Jesus says; some versions say ‘you're badly mistaken.’ Some translations say ‘you're just wrong.’ I want you to imagine me standing on a base, as in baseball. As long as I'm standing on base, I'm safe. I'm where I'm supposed to be; I'm on base. Now let’s imagine that I'm way over here away from the base. You could say ‘you're way off base.’ Do you remember teaching your kids how to play baseball or softball the first time and you tell them where first base is, and instead of running to first base, they run to the dugout, or run to Grandma, or the outfield fence? Wherever they were, they thought they were safe, but somebody had to say, “Hey, you're way off base!” That’s what Jesus says. The Greek word that Jesus uses when He says you're wrong is a word that literally means you are way off base. He says the reason they're off base is because they neither know the scriptures, nor the power of God.

Then Jesus goes on to tell them ‘in the resurrection,’ which means Jesus believes there is a resurrection, ‘you'll not be given in marriage, not be in marriage, but you'll be like the angels.’ I want to be careful here. Jesus didn’t teach we would be angels. We’re not going to have wings and become angels. Not even little babies are angels; I'm sorry. What is Jesus trying to teach here? The Jewish people in Jesus’ day had this belief that the next life was just a continuation of this life, so if you were married in this life you would be married in the next life. The question was if you had more than one wife in this world, who would be marred to her in the next life. Jesus sets the record straight. In the next life, there will not be marriage. We’ll know, and we’ll be known, but we’ll be like the angels. It doesn’t mean we will be sexless, but it means we will enjoy singleness. Does that make sense?

Then Jesus says ‘now concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read your Bible?’ He quotes Exodus 3:6 where God says ‘I am the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and Jacob.’ Then Jesus goes on to say what that means is that God is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living. Here's what was happening. Here was a group of people who were studying the first five books of the Bible. That’s all they had; they didn’t have sixty-six like we do. They had five and they couldn’t connect the dots. I want to be totally honest with you. Sometimes I read my Bible and I don’t connect the dots either. Do you think it’s possible there are things we’re reading in the Bible that we’re overlooking just like these Sadducees were overlooking? They can't connect the dots, but here's what the connected dots means. If God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, then He's not the God of the dead; He's the God of the living. That means they're alive. Then He just looked at them and said you are way off base.

These two stories are meant, in Mark’s mind, to go together. It’s ok for you to teach on them individually, but be careful if you teach on them individually and don’t see the connection. These two stories set us up for the next story. This is so important because in the next story we don’t have a group of people coming to Jesus; we have one single scribe. He comes to Jesus because he saw the dispute between Jesus and these people. He saw how Jesus answered them, and it drew him to Jesus with the question of all questions. Can I pause here just for a moment? You and I never know who is really listening to us. Here was a guy in the background who wasn’t in the conflict, but he saw the way Jesus handled Himself with people who were trying to trap Him. When He didn’t fall for the trap, it caused him to recognize something different in Jesus, and he was drawn to Jesus with a sincere question. Tell me you connect the dots. Tell me I don’t have to draw if for you. How many times has God allowed conflict in your life and my life, and we so focused in on the people we were having conflict with that we had no clue that God was going to use the way we handled the conflict to influence others? That’s what this was about.

Mark will not get off this discipleship theme. Mark is actually writing to a church living in the Roman Empire that’s struggling being a Christian because it was tough to be a Christian and they were getting ready to pay an horrific price. Who is he putting before them? He's not giving them a class on morality, he's not giving them a class on ethics, but he's presenting to them the man they're following. His name is Jesus. Do you see Him? Do you see how He handles Himself? Yes, there is theological truth in these stories, and Mark is telling us that the theological truth in these stories is there are so many people who have conflict with Jesus that from a human perspective that is why they're going to crucify Him. That’s why they're going to kill Him. That’s why they're wanting to get rid of Him. By the time we get to the death of Christ, you and I are going to see the death of Christ is not being orchestrated by people who oppose Jesus; it’s been orchestrated by the will of God. Why does nearly forty percent of Mark’s gospel deal with the last week of Jesus’ life? Why do we spend day after day, each day in particular, talking about what Jesus went through this last week? It is because God wants you and I to realize there will be conflict. There would will people who disagree. There will be people who try to trap us and it’s really not about the person who is trapping us; it’s about those people who are in the peripheral. It’s about how we handle ourselves.

So here is a scribe who is coming to Jesus, and imagine this, you're a scribe, you're a guy who is studies the Law, you have the rabbi teaching you that there are six hundred and thirteen laws, three hundred and sixty five of them are negative, there is a prohibition of what you can't do. There are two hundred and forty eight that are positive. If you take the three hundred and sixty five and the two hundred and forty eight and put them together, there are six hundred and thirteen laws specific laws, not ten. They are divided into heavy laws and light laws, meaning if you do these, there will be a terrible consequence going to happen to you and if you do the others, it is not as bad. That’s why Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, said ‘if you break the least of these…’ He's referring to what Judaism believed, which were there were some not as commanding as the others. Now this guy comes to Jesus and he just wants to know that of all the commandments, if we could summarize and set our attention on one, and do that one and all the rest of them would fall into place, what is that one? Jesus gives that classic answer. He goes to Deuteronomy chapter 6, the Shema, the passage that every Jewish family taught daily, morning and night, to their children, “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one. You shall love the Lord God with all your heart, all your soul…all your strength,” but Jesus added a fourth, “and all your mind.” This word, with, is the Greek preposition, *ek*, which means ‘out of.’ It’s not talking about just loving the Lord with you heart; it’s talking about loving the Lord out of your heart. Let the origin of your love be from your heart that’s for God! Let it come out of your mind! Let it come out of your strength! Let it come out of your soul/spirit! He doesn’t stop there. He says, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Listen to the scribes answer. He says ‘Teacher; you're right. Man, you nailed it! No one can ever say it any better than You just said it, for the Lord is one, and we ought to love Him with our heart, soul, and our strength. To love our neighbor as ourselves, that’s worth far more than whole sacrifices and burnt offerings.’

Watch this. You’ve got to see what Mark is doing here. A few days earlier, Mark has told us the temple is not what we think it is. It’s not fruitful; it’s fruitless. It can't bring a man into a right relationship with God. He's going to tell us a day or so later that it’s going to be wiped out, the curtain is going to be torn when Jesus dies. Now this scribe who was in the peripheral comes to Jesus and says you're right to love God and your neighbor is worth far more than any sacrifice you might could bring to God and put on the altar and believe a priest is going to take it into the presence of God and it atone for your sin! Tell me you see this. What Mark is trying to say in discipleship is all of us who have repented of sin and put our faith in Christ have been made right with God, know we’re saved by grace through faith, been into the waters of biblical baptism saying the old man is dead and we’re a brand new person, what is going to be the evidence coming out of our lives that really reveals who we are? Here is the evidence; you're going to love God, not with part of you, but with all of you. This is why Paul said, “For we know that all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose.” If you’ve been called according to God’s purpose, you're going to love God. It’s a love that consumes you! You won't just love Him; you'll love your neighbor. To the Jew, your neighbor was a Jew. He was just like you, lived in your subdivision, on your road, and went to the same school you went to, had the same friends you had. You love those people. Jesus turned that thing upside down. For Christians, do you know who are neighbors are? They are anyone in need. We’re supposed to love them. How? Like we love ourselves.

I want to give a little sidebar here. The reason most of us can't love our neighbor like we are supposed to is because we don’t really love ourselves like we’re supposed to love ourselves. Unhealthy people hurt people, and many of us are unhealthy. We’re unhealthy in how we view ourselves and we constantly lash out, constantly hurt others. Jesus gives the standard of loving your neighbor. He didn’t say love your neighbor, but not yourself. He didn’t say love your neighbor more than yourself. He said love your neighbor *as* yourself.

So what happens here? According to Mark, in true discipleship, we get right with God, and when we get right with God, we get right with others. That’s what discipleship is about. Then Jesus looked at the guy and said ‘you're not far from the Kingdom of God.’ This guy wasn’t way off base. This guy was so close to the Kingdom of God, but he still wasn’t in. He wasn’t a follower. He wasn’t a disciple. We don’t know if he ever got in or not, but we do know he came to Jesus because of what he saw in Jesus and how Jesus dealt with others. I pray that is your desire; that others would come to you because of how they see you deal with others, and in coming to you, you point them to Jesus.

The last sentence says, “And no one dared ask Him a question after this.” It was the last question that ever questioned the authority of Jesus. Mark is trying to tell us He has the right to go into the very presence of God with the blood of Himself to do what couldn’t be done in the temple, and that’s bring you and I into a right relationship with God. Because we’re truly in a right relationship with God based on the blood of Jesus Christ, we can live with others in a right relationship. We don’t just let God deal with our sin at the cross; we let God deal with other people’s sin at the cross. Are you a disciple? Does your life say to others you are following the man named Jesus? Are you in the Kingdom? Any other answer is that you're not safe or secure. The only place is to be in the Kingdom, and that comes through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. That starts a walk, a life of growing as a disciple who will start making disciples.