

Born to Die
In God We Trust?

11-15-15

Gary Brandenburg

A couple of months ago I was travelling with a group in Israel. After a long day we checked into a hotel late at night. I shuffled into my dimly lit room, put my bags down and when I turned around I came face to face with a large man standing there looking right at me! I froze. My heart raced, chills went up and down my spine...until I realized that I was standing in front of a full length mirror! That was a scary looking man! I did not expect to come face to face with ME when I walked into that room.

It can happen to anyone. In fact, it can happen in church on a Sunday morning. Many of us read the Bible or listen to a sermon as a casual observer of an ancient story about some other people in some other century in some other part of the world. Occasionally, to our great surprise, we encounter ourselves in the story. Today I want you to look closely at Mark 12 and see if you can find yourself in the story somewhere.

Last week we discovered that Jesus came to earth to be not just our Savior, shepherd, provider, and friend. He came to be our Owner. As we examine the rest of the chapter I want you to see three responses to Jesus' authority over our lives.

1. Close to the King but far from the Kingdom - the hard-hearted response.

In vv. 13-27 Jesus is responding to questions posed by those who challenged His authority; the Pharisees, Herodians and the Sautucees. These were the leading Jewish parties who wielded authority over the Jewish people. They actually hated each other but when it came to Jesus, they were united in their blood lust. This is a common occurrence in religion and politics, "The enemy of my enemy is my friend." Herod and Pilate had nothing in common except their cooperation in the trial and punishment of Jesus.

The question posed to Jesus is clearly an attempt to turn the tide of public opinion against Him...v. 14. They put Jesus between the horns of a dilemma. If He says, "Pay your taxes," those who hate the Romans will see Him as a traitor to the Jewish people. On the other hand, if He says, "Don't pay your taxes," He has just admitted that He is an insurrectionist and the Romans will arrest Him. Of course in a war of wits against Jesus these guys were unarmed! Debating Jesus is like Justin Bieber challenging Labron James to a slam dunk contest! So He answers...vv. 15-17.

He knows they are merely trying to trip Him up but He uses the opportunity to teach a valuable truth. The coin rightfully belongs to the one whose likeness is stamped onto it. *(slide of Roman coin)* One side says “Caesar” and the other side, “Pontifex Maximus.” So give it to him. However, Jesus continues, the likeness of God is stamped on every human life. Every human being bears the image and likeness of God so our lives belong to Him. Furthermore Eph. 1:13 teaches that as Christians we are “sealed with the Holy Spirit.” When we accept the authority of Christ, God melts our rebel hearts and presses His character into us like a signet ring into hot wax. His imprint is on your life. Jesus is saying to those who have rejected Him, “You bear the image and likeness of God so you should give your lives completely to Him.” But of course they have other plans.

The next scene involves the Saducees. Their question concerns a controversy over Levirate marriage (Levirate is Latin for brother in law. cf. Dt 25:5-10)...vv. 18-23.

The OT taught that if a man died without an heir, it was the responsibility of the man’s brother to marry his widow. This was not considered polygamy because the goal was not to show how rich and powerful you were or to satisfy your lust. It was a way to insure the protection of the family name along with the property rights of the widow. The family name was (and is) extremely important in Judaism. Since the Saducees rejected the concept of resurrection, the way they conceived of an afterlife was by passing down the family name and remembering their ancestors. So they ask this question to expose the foolishness of Jesus’ teaching about a resurrection.

Jesus’ response is actually quite simple...vv. 24-27. If you think my views on the resurrection are ridiculous, how much more ridiculous would it be for God to claim to be the God of men who no longer exist? God is not the God of those who have ceased to be. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob enjoyed a special covenant relationship with God that continues after their death. God does not make an eternal covenant with non-eternal beings. So if God is the God of the living and claims to be the God of the patriarchs even after their death, then resurrection must be coming! (Boom! Drop the mic!).

2. Close to the King but not far from the Kingdom - the half-hearted response. The next guy up had been listening in on the previous conversations and recognized the genius of Jesus so he asked an honest question, “Which commandment is the most important of all?” (v. 28). Jesus

combines Dt. 6:4 and Lev. 18:11 - the Great Commandment (vv. 29-31). This was the first time a rabbi fused these two verses together driving home the point that love for God and love for man cannot be divided.

The response of the scribe is a pleasant surprise...vv. 32-34. He recognizes that to love God with all of your heart and your neighbor as yourself is more important than any external religious rituals at the temple. He did not confuse form and function. The temple rituals were merely forms by which we demonstrate our love for God. He was way ahead of most of the other religious leaders who had allowed religion to hijack their relationship with God. So Jesus acknowledged that this man was “not far from the Kingdom of God.”

The third response to Jesus is found in vv. 38-44 who is...

3. Close to the King and a citizen of His Kingdom - the whole-hearted response. Jesus moves to a part of the temple where there were 13 brass treasure chests shaped like trumpets placed around the Court of the Women to be used as offering boxes. In fact they were called “shopharoth” because they resembled a shophar. Because giving was done openly, people often made quite a show of their generosity. (Mt. 6:1-2). Wealthy people may have had servants carry all the cash and then as the coins were poured into the container they made a loud crashing sound. Jesus notices a woman whose distinctive clothing signals that she is a widow. She is obviously poor and she takes out two coins called a “lepta.” Each coin is only a fraction of a penny. (*slide of widow’s mite*) Jesus calls His disciples over and tells them to take notice of this woman who doesn’t care to be noticed. She has so little to give but she gives it all. She didn’t even keep one penny for herself. She is living out the Great Commandment by loving God with all her heart.

Nothing reveals the true condition of our hearts like money. You can’t fake stewardship. You can fake Bible study and prayer and worship but your bank statement reveals the condition of your heart toward your Owner. This story is not intended as an indictment against the wealthy but a demonstration of God’s favor toward those who yield everything they have to the authority of their Owner. This poor widow is an example of what it means to love the Lord with all you have. She gave it all just as Jesus was about to do for us. The God who is in control and who has authority even over life and death offers Himself to us the same way the widow offered her

coins to the Lord. He is completely and unreservedly committed to your well-being.

The coin story demonstrates God's authority over all who bear His image and likeness. The resurrection story tells us that God's authority is from everlasting to everlasting. The affirmation of the Great Commandment reminds us of that God's authority will not allow us to separate our love for God from the love of man. And the actions of a poor widow give us a picture of what it means to surrender everything to God. Nestled within these stories is a final public declaration of the authority of Jesus Christ.

Jesus quotes Ps. 110:1. His question is, "How can the Messiah be both the Son of David and David's Lord at the same time if he is merely a human being?" David is speaking and says, "The LORD (Yahweh) says to my Lord, 'sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool.'" This is a picture of Jesus (David's Lord) reigning over all the earth from the place of authority at the right hand of Yahweh. Jesus is saying that God's authority is mediated through the Son of God...vv. 35-37.

Jesus is a descendant of David but He is also David's lord. Jesus is not only David's Son He is David's Sovereign. Romans 1 captures this two-fold designation, "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, ² which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, ³ concerning his Son, who was **descended from David according to the flesh ⁴ and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection** from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord." Ro. 1:1-4

So now that you know who He claims to be, where are you in the story? Are you close to the King but far from the Kingdom still resisting the authority of Jesus over your life? Are you close to the King and close to the Kingdom? You know Jesus is Lord but your heart is still divided. Are you close to the King and a citizen of His Kingdom? God has given us life. He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing. Jesus has given all He could give that we would be with Him in an eternal paradise. Now, what will you give? As we approach the holidays you will be asked to give and give and give. As a steward you have a lot of latitude in how and where you give. But let's never forget that spending is a spiritual act. What we do with what God has given us reveals our heart condition. How does your life reflect the authority of Jesus Christ? He is, after all, your Owner.

