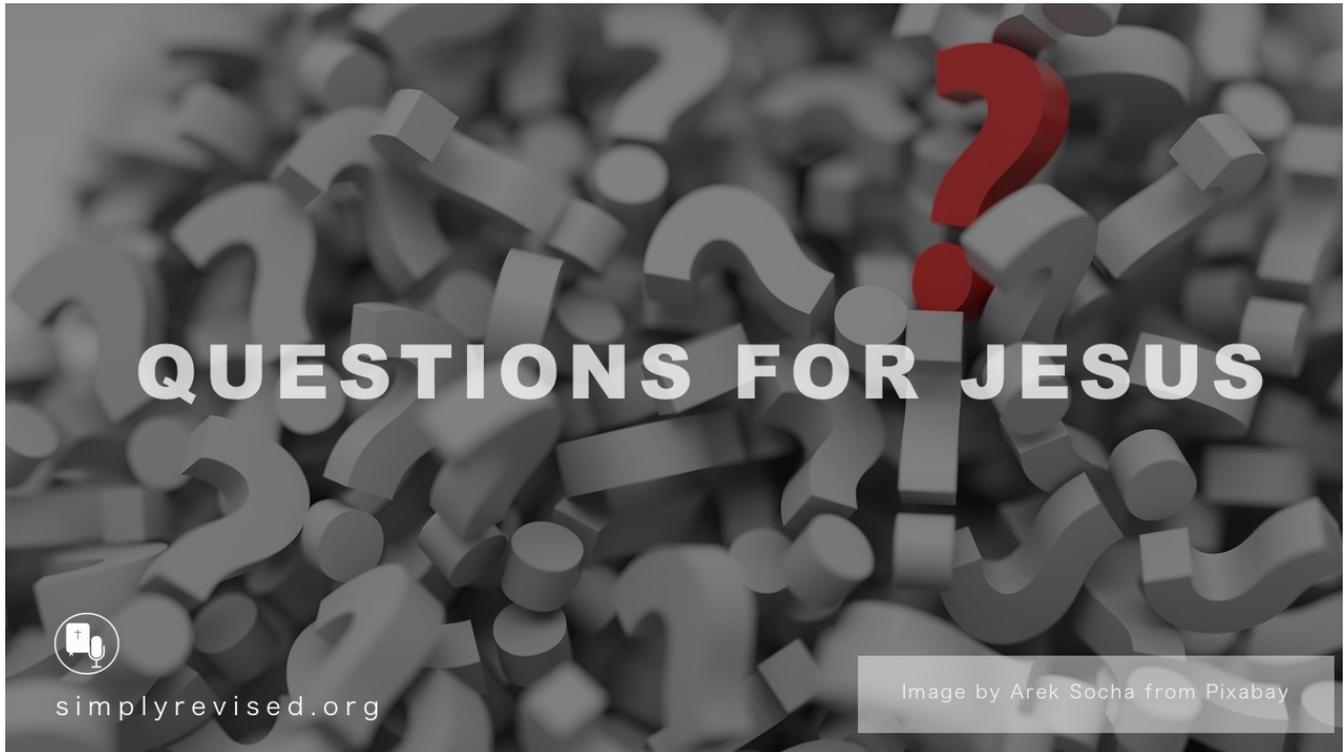


QUESTIONS FOR JESUS

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In (Mark 11), Jesus "cleanses the temple." Jesus is speaking and demonstrating the judgment of God that is coming against Israel and the religious leaders. The religious leaders ask Jesus a pivotal question that will set up much of Mark's narrative through chapter 12.

MARK 11:28 (NKJV)

"And they said to Him, "By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority to do these things?"

Although they question Jesus, Jesus turns this question around, "I also will ask you one question; then answer Me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things: The baptism of John—was it from heaven or from men? Answer Me." (Mk. 11:29, 30).

The religious leaders do not provide an answer to Jesus' question. They are in a bit of a trap. If they were to say John's baptism was from heaven, then the obvious question would be, "Why then did you not believe him?" (ref. Mk. 11:31). If they were to say John's baptism was from man, not from God's authority or heaven, they feared what the people might do because they saw John as a prophet of God. So, they do not answer Jesus' question.

Immediately after this, Jesus speaks in a parable about "the wicked vinedressers." This parable, like the cleansing of the temple, is about God's authority and judgment.

Unable to trap Jesus in his words, the religious leaders seek help and recruit others to see if they can get Jesus caught in a trap (ref. Mk. 12:13; 15). Mark records some of their conversations through chapter 12.

In the conversations Mark records, there are some principles we can learn and apply for ourselves today. How do we approach Jesus?

ON A TECHNICALITY

We notice the first conversation (Mk. 12:13-17), where some Pharisees and Herodians come to catch Jesus in his words. They are trying to trap Jesus on a technicality, and they ask him a question about taxes.

MARK 12:14 (NKJV)

"When they had come, they said to Him, "Teacher, we know that You are true, and care about no one; for You do not regard the person of men, but teach the way of God in truth. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? 15 Shall we pay, or shall we not pay?"

Notice they begin with flattery, "You do not regard the person of men, but teach the way of God in truth."

Later, from the words of Jesus, we know that they are not sincere in their flattery. But what they are trying to do is catch Jesus or trap Jesus in saying that they should not pay taxes to Caesar.

Not paying taxes would have been a direct violation of the Roman government, and they could say that Jesus was stirring up rebellion against the Roman government. The accusation of stirring up a revolution would have brought Jesus before the Roman authorities. Like others, who had rebelled against the Roman government, the punishment would be death.

Jesus asks them to bring a denarius to him. It seems a simple request, but understand this denarius would have been highly offensive to Jews. This coin violated the commandment of God. The denarius bore the image of Caesar on one side, and on the other, it imaged Caesar sitting on a throne with an inscription of deity. Any such coin or image would have been highly offensive to the Jews. It was opposed to the Law as given by God (ref. Ex. 20:4).

Jesus' response in verse 17, I think, in some ways has been misunderstood, notice what He says:

MARK 12:17 (NKJV)

"And Jesus answered and 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."

Why is it that they "marveled" at his answer? More in his response, I believe we have the question of "Whose authority will you serve?" Beginning with the cleansing of the temple, Jesus has been demonstrating God's kingdom. We have seen this tension or

conflict of the kingdom's in the narrative of Mark's gospel. This conversation seems to be a conversation about God's kingdom and God's authority, not so much about paying taxes.

Paying taxes was the question they asked. However, all authority, even the power of governments, is given by God. Jesus knows and understands this. His answer becomes a question of "Who's kingdom you will follow?"

Jesus' answer does not mean that we do not pay taxes or follow the laws as established by our governments as Christians. Again, this is not what Jesus is addressing. We understand governments as given by God. Christians are to follow the laws of our governments as much as they do not violate the Law of Christ.

Jesus is asking, Who has the ultimate authority over our lives?

This is why they "marveled" at his answer. Jesus had not given them anything to take back to the Roman authorities. Again, Jesus' answer has challenged their authority and, ultimately, their allegiance.

The Pharisees and Herodians approached Jesus, trying to catch him on a technicality. Do we do the same?" Did Jesus really say...?" or "Jesus did not specifically say not to; did he?" These are the questions often asked, and I would say they are the wrong questions. They are questions that try to catch Jesus on a technicality. As kingdom people, we should not be concerned with what we can get away with. Or how close we can get to sin without actually sinning. As Christians, our concern should be to love the Lord with all our heart, with all of our soul, all of our strength, and all of our mind.

IN A BOX

Do we place God in a Box? Do we have God all figured out so that He fits our understanding?

The next conversation we read about is of some Sadducees who come to Jesus with a question about the resurrection (Mk. 12:18-27). Interestingly, the Sadducees do not believe in the resurrection of the body (ref. Acts 23:8). They think they have God all figured out.

The Sadducees come to Jesus with a question about a woman who was married to seven different men. Their question seems based on the instruction given by Moses in Deuteronomy 25:5.

With this being the case, a woman has been married seven different times, in the resurrection "whose wife will she be?" Notice Jesus' response (Mk. 12:24) "Are you not therefore mistaken, because you do not know the Scriptures nor the power of God?"

In this conversation, Jesus addresses their lack of understanding and lack of understanding concerning God's power. They believe God is what they experience, and he can only operate within their experience. We don't see people raised from the

dead. Therefore, God cannot do this. Their understanding of God is based on their experience.

Jesus talks about the reality of God's kingdom. His kingdom is not like the present experience. Resurrected bodies are not like what we now have. The apostle Paul speaks about this as well in (1 Corinthians 15). Jesus continues in (Mk. 12:26) "But concerning the dead, that they rise, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the burning bush passage, how God spoke to him, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'?"

At times we can tend to read this as a genealogy. What does Jesus mean here? More to the point of the conversation, Jesus is speaking about the ability of God's power to bring life.

Abraham, in his old age, with his wife Sarah, who was well up in her years and was barren, comes an entire nation through the power of God. God in His power can do more than we can imagine. Our experience does not limit him. Abraham and Sarah, unable to have children due to their age, God births a nation through them.

Do we approach God by putting Him in a box? Do we come to Him thinking we have everything figured out? Are we approaching God, wanting Him to validate what we already believe?

KNOWLEDGE ALONE

In the next conversation, Jesus is approached by a scribe (Mark 12:28-34). This person sees how Jesus has answered questions. He seems to appreciate Jesus' answers genuinely. Seeing an opportunity, he asks Jesus a question, "Which is the first commandment of all?" (Mk. 12:28). In Matthew's gospel, Matthew portrays this question as another test (ref. Matt. 22:34ff.). Mark seems to leave it a little vague. Either way, Jesus brings the conversation back to kingdom priorities as he quotes from the Torah.

MARK 12:29-31 (NKJV)

"Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. 31 And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

The scribe knows this and even repeats it back to Jesus. He understands and knows that God's mercy is even higher than burnt offerings and sacrifices. However, Jesus responds, "Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." (Mk. 12:34). Jesus did not say, follow me. Jesus did not say you are now part of God's kingdom. What Jesus said was that he was "You are not far from the kingdom of God."

The scribe knew God's Word, and he is considerate of God's Word. It would seem as though this did not connect with his heart.

We can have the knowledge and an understanding of God's Word, but are we living and practicing His word? Are we loving the Lord and loving our neighbors? Is His word connected to more than just a knowledge we possess?

WHAT CAN WE LEARN?

What can we learn from these conversations? We can approach Jesus in many different ways.

- We can approach Jesus looking for a technicality.
- We can approach Jesus thinking we have God all figured out and placing him in our box.
- We can approach Jesus with knowledge alone.

All of these are ways we can approach Jesus. However, followers of Jesus will connect their lives to His words. It's not just looking for and offering excuses. It does not think we have God all figured out. There is so much more to know about our Creator. It's not just a knowledge of Him or His word. It's allowing the Spirit to transform our lives.

When we approach Jesus in humility, seeking answers to our questions, we seek Him with an honest and sincere heart.

BLESSINGS!

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