

You don't know the Scriptures and the Power of God?

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[0 : 00] Let's pray. Father God, we thank you for your word. We pray that we would not tonight make the mistake of these who confront Jesus, who play loose and fast with the truth, who deny some of the central tenets of what it means to be part of your kingdom.

We pray, Lord, that we would read your word, we would hear your word, we would understand your word and that we would not ignore it. We pray, Father, that in what we're doing tonight that we will not miss you, we pray.

So we pray that we would get a greater glimpse of your glory, your purposes, and the part that we play in that as your people. And so be with us now as we open up your word that we might not just hear it, but that we might experience something of your power.

And we pray it for your sake. Amen. So get your Bibles open to Mark chapter 12. Our recent sermon series on the kingdom of God, I think, is particularly helpful when we're coming to looking at Mark 12 and this little short series that we got here last week, this week, and next week on the clash with ultimate authority.

For anyone out there, remember how we define the kingdom of God in our series, Kingdom of God? God's people in God's place under God's rule.

[1 : 33] Yes, God's people in God's place under God's rule. Fantastic. Straight at the top of the class. Tashi, you should consider a ministry internship at some point. For the people of God in the Old Testament, much of their expectations of the kingdom centered around Israel and Jerusalem and the temple and the rituals in the temple.

And what we saw in our series was that the consistent problem was that they did all the religious practice stuff but they rejected God and they rejected his authority, they rejected his word.

They looked the part but in the actual fact, their hearts were a long way from God. The eventual consequence was exiled from God's place. God stuck them over there in the naughty corner for 70 years in Babylon and to fine tune them a bit.

And during the course of that, God was speaking to his people and prophesying about a future day where there would be a future king, a Christ, a Messiah, who would restore the kingdom of God.

And when this king comes, he will give his people new hearts which would internally be moved to obey Christ or the king, the Messiah.

[2 : 53] And so the opening words of Jesus' ministry right at the beginning of Mark's gospel are very significant for us. So chapter one says this, the time, this is the words of Jesus, the time has come.

The kingdom of God is near. And so Jesus is talking about the fulfillment of all of these promises for the people of God. Jesus then goes on to demonstrate the kingdom's realm, the rule of this king.

And he, as the king of the kingdom of God, by calling disciples to follow him, complete strangers, come, follow me, and they leave their nets and they go and follow Jesus.

He drives out demons, he heals lepers, the blind, the paralytic, he raises the dead, he calms the storm. He demonstrates that there is nothing outside of his control.

As the king of the kingdom, he rules everything. And so the kingdom of God is not restricted to Israel and Jerusalem and the temple. He is the king over everything, all encompassing.

[3 : 58] And then as you move further into Mark's gospel, you get to chapters nine and 10 and we discover the surprising nature of this rule, of this king. He is, in fact, a servant king who has come to serve and not be served.

He has come to give his life as a ransom for many. And the second great surprise is when you move out of chapter 10 and into chapter 11 and you see that the king arrives at his, the city.

He arrives at Jerusalem, Jesus arrives and there's a crowd there. They've got palm trees, you know, and they're waving and they're cheering. The king has arrived. And what you discover is that when the king goes to the temple, he is rejected.

He's rejected. He first of all rejects the temple and the old order of things. He gets a whip and turns over tables and drives people out.

He rejects the old religious system of pomp and corruption and hypocrisy and he replaces that system with himself. He says, you don't come and meet God now through this temple.

[5 : 09] You meet God with me. So three days, I'm going to pull it down and I'm going to rebuild it again. So everything that this temple stood for is now going to be met in me. You meet God through me.

You want to relate to God? It is through me. And what happens then out of there, chapter 11, Jesus curses a fig tree.

It's a symbol of God's rejection of the old order of things. And so that it is completely clear what Jesus is on about, we hear the story of the parable of the tenants that Chris preached on last week.

Sorry, Sam preached on last week here. that the people of Israel have consistently rejected God and rejected the messengers of God and now I'm rejecting you.

I'm rejecting the old order, the old system. And so in the temple courts, the scene of the king's rejection of the old order, if you like, out on the deck, we see the rejection of Israel king by the leaders of Israel.

[6 : 22] Israel. Jesus' credibility and even his life are at stake in these encounters that he has with these religious leaders.

Jesus uses each of these encounters, these clashes, as an opportunity to reveal something striking about the kingdom and what it means to be part of that kingdom.

Last week, we had round one. Chief priests, teachers of the law and the elders confront Jesus and they go away with their tail between the legs. Round two is introduced in verse 13.

Later, they, that's talking about the Sanhedrin, that's the Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin, they send some Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words.

There are two kinds of powers that bind people together. One is love and the other is hatred. Naturally, love is preferred.

[7 : 22] Love is the glue of the Trinity. It is, love is God's gift to the church and his command for the church but hatred can bring together diverse people.

People is diverse as the Pharisees and the Herodians. There could be hardly, I think, two groups with such opposing views in Israel.

The Pharisees were fierce nationalists. The Herodians, on the other hand, were supporters of Herod, the Roman ruler over Israel.

The Pharisees represented a narrow, conservative Judaism and the Herodians were liberal in their convictions. The Pharisees were right-wingers, the Herodians were left-wingers.

The Pharisees represented resistance to Rome, the Herodians accommodation to Rome. And what cemented them together as a group was their hatred of Jesus.

[8 : 22] They've come together because of their hatred of Jesus and the hope that we can bring this man down. And then once that's done, we'll go back to hating each other. You see, Jesus was causing havoc with the religious agenda of the Pharisees and he was causing havoc with the political agenda of the Herodians.

And so they unite in an attempt to bring him down and that's what it says there in verse 12. Later, they sent some of the Pharisees and the Herodians to catch him in his words.

They want to trap Jesus in his words so that they could charge him with treason or heresy, both of which they can conspire with the death penalty in some way.

First though, they have to pave the way for the question in order to, by throwing Jesus off course if you like. So verse 14, they came to him and said, Teacher, we know that you are a man of integrity.

You aren't swayed by men because you pay no attention to who they are but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. And so their lips are just dripping with insincere flattery as they attempt to appear as innocent inquirers of Jesus in a hope that Jesus will be thrown off course and they can slip their question in, he'll give them a wrong answer and bang, we've got him.

[9 : 50] They're hoping to disarm him. Ironically, their flattery contains at least an element of truth. Jesus isn't influenced by man and he wasn't influenced by their flattery in any sense.

He wasn't going to be intimidated by them, he was walking into their trap with his eyes wide open and the trap is set in verse 14, is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?

Should we pay or shouldn't we? That's a very clever question. It would seem that they have learnt something from the last encounter between Jesus and the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders.

You remember the last encounter from last week when Jesus asked these guys a question? John's baptism, was it from man or from God? And either answer, they get together and huddle and either answer, they know, and so what do they do?

These gutless weasels lied through their tooth and said they don't know. They hang loose with their convictions in order to save their egos and their skin.

[11 : 08] And so the next group have thought that was a good idea, turned Jesus' tactic around and thrown it back in his face. They've hit him with a question where either answer would be enough to secure the death penalty.

A refusal to answer would be disastrous and so would evasion. And so if Jesus says, yes, pay your taxes to Caesar, he's a traitor to Israel.

We can get him up on blasphemy charges. And those with the religious agenda would just have him at that and they just love that. But if he says, no, then he's stirring up a rebellion against Rome and those with a political agenda could have him up on treason charges and we'll get him for that.

And so the tension you can imagine in the air is thick. Pharisees hoping for a yes, the Herodians hoping for a no, but Jesus is one step ahead.

He knows their hypocrisy. It says in verse 15 and he says this, why are you trying to trap me? Bring me a denarius and let me look at it.

[12 : 22] You can just imagine the hush in the crowd as Jesus takes the coin that's been given to him, probably not by Judas, and he holds it up.

He holds it up in front of them and says, so whose portrait's that? Verse 16. Whose portrait's that? Whose inscription is on there? What can they say?

It's pretty obvious. It's the face of Tiberius Caesar was on the inscription. It was the face that was on there and the inscription on it says, Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus.

That was the inscription on it. Whose picture is it? Who made it? What do the people say? Caesar. And so Jesus says to them in verse 17 what some have regarded as the single most influential political statement ever made.

Give to Caesars what is Caesar's and to God what is God's. And they were all amazed at him. And Jesus temporarily saved his life as well as giving the guidelines of a proper relationship with God and Caesar.

[13 : 46] In saying give to Caesar what he seizes, Jesus recognizes there is a place under God even for a Gentile ruler in society. The Apostle Paul writes this in Romans 13 verses 4 to 7 that such a ruler is God's servant to do you good.

But if you do wrong be afraid for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.

Therefore it is necessary to submit to the authorities not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. This is also why you pay taxes for the authorities are God's servants who give their full time to governing.

Give everyone what you owe him. If you owe taxes pay taxes if revenue revenue if respect then respect if honour then honour and Peter says the same has the same idea in 1 Peter 2 13 when he calls for submission for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men.

Every authority instituted among men. And so the New Testament assumes the validity of the secular state and it demands even when the secular state is controlled by a man who thinks he is God it still demands allegiance.

[15 : 23] submission. A poorly run state is better than no state at all.

Of course there are some exceptions but the overall point is that Christians are called to a profound obedience to their government.

Cheating on taxes is completely ruled out. there ought to be respect and submission to those in authority and must pray for those who rule over us. More often than not though the reason we obey is for fear of punishment not because of the Lord's sake right.

Not because it's right but because we fear to be punished. Such as driving along the M7 on the way to Katoomba and all of a sudden the traffic is all slow.

We're way below the speed limit and why are we way below the speed limit? Because a policeman has pulled up someone on the side of the road and we just all assume automatically that we are guilty.

[16 : 35] We fear punishment. Not because we think it's right to stick on 100 kilometres an hour. We just fear to be caught. And when we say we fear to be caught we're worried about the cost it's going to be.

\$200 or whatever it is for, I don't know what the speed and fine is, but whatever it is, depends on how fast you're going. We submit for the Lord's sake but Jesus brilliance really comes to the fore in the second half of the answer.

Give to God what is God's. Because it's the second half of the statement, it is the emphasis of the statement.

See what I'm saying there? Give to Caesar what ceases, give to God what is God means that that second half of the statement usurps it. that's the primary point.

The kingdom of Jesus that Jesus is talking about isn't primarily about you pay your taxes, it's about giving God what is due to God. Our submission to God's authority will be evidence in our submission to God by obedience to what he commands.

[17 : 53] In other words, you can't say Christ is my ruler, I submit to Christ as my king and then ignore what he commands, such as submission to governing authorities or being generous or to meet together as a church or to turn the other cheek or to reject anger or to not judge or to let no unwholesome talk come out of your mouth.

You can't say he is my king and then reject what he commands. In saying give to God what is God's, Jesus is recognizing that there is only one God which subtly puts Caesar in his place.

but it doesn't just put Caesar in his place, he puts us in our place as well. You see, the essence of sin is to rebel against God.

It's an attempt to remove God and his authority over my life so that I am king. It is to be the determinants of our own life and our own destiny and direction.

And yet what this passage is saying is that whether you realize it or not, even those in positions of authority, we are all people under orders.

[19 : 07] We are all under orders. Jesus subtly states God's ownership of everything, giving to God what is God's is exactly what the Pharisees have not been doing.

They have been playing religious games. It's a very clear warning for us here to check our allegiances. Jesus. And so the Pharisees and the Rodians, they have played their ace card and they've been trumped.

Two groups have now confronted Jesus seeking a reason to arrest him. Both have walked away with their tail between their legs. And now it's time for the Sadducees to have a shot. Not with a political question but with a theologically loaded question.

And again, lips just dripping with insincerity. There's a bit of scoffing and a bit of ridicule thrown in amongst it all. The Sadducees were a powerful Jewish faction.

Mark tells us in verse 18 that the distinctive doctrine of the Sadducees is they don't believe in the resurrection. Which is why they were sad, you see.

[20 : 19] They some of them are just getting it now. It's an old one, I know, but every time Sadducees are there, you've got to give it. Anyway, they basically denied the spiritual life.

The Sadducees were the most conservative group in Israel. They accepted only the Old Testament law, that is the Torah, the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. They only accepted those first five books as the word of God.

They rejected everything else. They rejected the rest of the writings of the prophets from the Old Testament. And they were legalists, that is, they were legalistic about the obedience to those laws as they saw fit.

But they were legal liberals, which means they obeyed the bits that they believed, but the bits that they don't believe, they basically read the Bible with a pair of scissors. They cut out the bits they don't like. And so they were a pretty nasty bunch of people.

people. In fact, Josephus, who was a historian around that time, who himself was a Sadducee, said that the Sadducees were rude, harsh, and callous.

[21 : 34] And that was just amongst themselves, with their own kind. Forget about anyone else, they just hated everyone else. So they had a pretty bad reputation of being not nice people.

They weren't well regarded in the community at all. And they reckon that the Old Testament law doesn't say anything about life after death. And they come to Jesus with a hypothetical theological situation, a ridiculous situation.

It's an attempt to make resurrection look ridiculous, and in the end make Jesus look stupid. Just suppose, they say, there are seven brothers, and the first brother is married, he dies, and leaves a wife with no kids.

Now Moses says, back in Deuteronomy, that this brother, one of his other brothers is meant to take over and marry the widow. So the second brother marries her, but he dies too.

And it's the same thing for the third, the fourth, the fifth, the sixth, the seventh brother. Kind of like seven brides for seven brothers except the other way around, sort of. And last of all, say the Sadducees, the woman finally dies, exhausted from seven marriages and having to put up with seven husbands.

[22 : 48] So here's the question. You reckon there's going to be life after death, whose wife's she going to be in heaven? What they're trying to do is they're trying to take a central theological truth and make it look so stupid.

And Jesus, the foundation of Jesus' answer is in verse 24. Are you not in error? Because you do not know the scriptures or the power of God. You see, their problem had two sources, ignorance of God's word and ignorance of God's power.

And I want to say that they're both, in fact, connected. In their reading of the Bible, even their bit of the Bible, they've missed God.

And in missing God, they've missed his character, they've missed his power, they've missed everything that God can do. You see, a thorough knowledge of the word of God is the only way to safeguard us from error.

And yet, these guys knew it. At least the bit they accepted. Their problem was a lack of submission to the word of God. They won't attack the Bible with a pair of scissors. Anything they like, get rid of.

[24 : 03] And Jesus addresses the problem of their ignorance of God's word by diving right into the very heart of the Old Testament law. which they claim resurrection can't be found.

And so Jesus takes them to Exodus 3, one of the most famous passages in the Old Testament, where God speaks to Moses the burning bush, and God says to Moses, I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob.

Now you see, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were dead hundreds of years when God said that to Moses the burning bush. And notice he doesn't say, I was, he doesn't say, I used to be, he says, I am, I am, I still am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

I am still very much their God because they are with me. He's not the God of the dead, he's the God of the living. And in one way when he says that, he's a bit of an uppercut to these Sadducees, I'm the God of the living, not the dead, which is why you're not accepting me as your God because you're dead.

Sort of a bit like that, he's having a crack at them as well. So Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob enjoyed a special covenant relationship with God which was so dynamic and so profound that it demanded a continued living relationship with God after death.

[25 : 20] So Hebrews 11, verse 10 tells us that the patriarchs, which are Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, knew that the covenant promises extended beyond life in this world.

It says, Abraham was looking forward to the city with foundations whose architect and builder is God. They were all still living by faith when they died.

They did not receive the things promised. They only saw them and welcomed them from a distance and they admitted that they themselves were aliens and strangers in the world. And verse 16 of Hebrews 11 says this, Instead, they were longing for a better country, a heavenly one.

Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God for he has prepared a city for them. And that's when Jesus comes in with his concluding thrust. He's not the God of the dead but the living.

Take that, you Sadducees. It's right out of book two of the five books that you accept as the word of God. And that's just one example. He could have used at least half a dozen different examples.

[26 : 28] What it seems to me is that their whole reading of these five books of the Bible, their whole law, what they accept as the word of God, in all their reading of it, it appears that they've missed God.

Completely missed God. Who is the whole point? They had read the Bible and they had judged it, they had evaluated it and they believed it based on what they thought their minds were reasonable.

What their minds thought was reasonable. What they had had is they gained a whole heap of rules in order to govern their life. They had pursued some kind of moralism.

But they missed God. They missed God's agenda. They missed his purpose. They missed his character. They missed his miracle working power to resurrect the dead.

And in missing God, they missed life. That is why I think our core value of Christ-centered Bible saturation is crucial for us as a church.

[27 : 34] It's not just Bible saturation. It's not just know your Bible. It's know the Christ of the Bible. Because he's the point. God is the main thing.

We go to the scriptures to see God and his glory, his purposes, his character, so that we would be aligned with him. And so giving to God what he's God's is a call to total allegiance that would flow over into every aspect of your life.

Clearly it didn't for the Pharisees, for the Herodians, or for the Sadducees. They had sort of packaged their life life, so they had all these rules and it didn't seem to impact anything relationally.

Total allegiance with God flows over into all areas of life. If you have a problem with the submission to authority, let me tell you, it flows up to your submission to Christ.

It is a reflection of your submission to Christ. They're not disconnected. And why is this allegiance to Christ so essential?

[29 : 04] Because eternal life, resurrected life, is not a destination, it's a person. John 17, Jesus says this, now this is eternal life, that they may know you, this is Jesus speaking, that they may know you, God, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

You miss Jesus, you reject Jesus, you ignore Jesus, and you reject life. life. To know Jesus is to know the power of God's gift of a resurrected life.

And that is the problem with the Sadducees. They have read the Bible, missed God, and missed life. What is implicit in these encounters, which will become explicit next week, in Jesus' last encounter, is that the allegiance God requires is not a mere obedience to a set of rules, it's not an impressive religious practices, but a heart that loves God, that treasures Jesus, treasures the Lord Jesus.

And in the very temple precincts, at the very center of the religious practices of the people of God, Jesus has encounters with the leaders of the religious practices of the people of God.

The leaders of the people of God. And they have their pomp, and they have their ceremony, and they can quote the scriptures, and they can pray impressively, and yet they reject their king.

[31 : 02] Right in the very temple precincts, they reject their king. The very place where you would think that people would be waiting for the fulfillment of all the promises of God, waiting for the Messiah to come, longing for him, and he gets rejected there.

So, I want to ask you, what if these encounters that Jesus had happened on our deck, straight after five o'clock congregation?

Would Jesus find hearts and lives that treasure him? Amen.