

Meet Jesus: As even his enemies marvel at him

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[0 : 00] So if you'd like to open your Bibles at Mark chapter 12, you'll find that on page 848. Mark chapter 12, page 848. We'll read from verse 13 to verse 17.

And they sent to him, that is Jesus, 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 marvelled at him. Charles T. Studd was born in 1862 to a very wealthy family.

[1 : 17] And he became a professional cricketer. He represented England. He was capped for England. Played against Australia. And he scored a century against Australia.

C.T. Studd became a Christian. And then he left everything. He had the world at his feet. But he left it all to be a missionary in China. And then subsequently to Africa, where he spent the rest of his life in poverty.

And you might know one of his quotations. And C.T. Studd said this. He said, If Christ Jesus be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for him.

And friends, I'm wondering what the size of our understanding is with God. How big is our God in our thinking?

You know, are we orientated to his eternal priorities? The Jewish leaders here in this passage, well, they're orientated to the things of this world.

[2 : 29] And we'll look at that first of all. Our first point is the plotting of the Jewish leaders. And here they are. They're ganging up against Jesus in this passage. Page 848 of our Bibles.

And they're everywhere. They're like a pack of wolves. Just look with me. Chapter 11, verse 27. You'll see there's three groups. And they came again to Jerusalem.

And as he was walking in the temple, the chief priests, that's one group, the scribes, two groups, and the elders came to him. So three groups so far. What's their agenda? Just turn back a page.

Chapter 11, verse 18. You'll see their agenda there. Can you see verse 18? And the chief priests and the scribes heard it and were what? Seeking a way to, what?

Destroy him. Kill him. They want Jesus dead, don't they? For they feared him, because all the crowd was astonished at his teaching. And we come to our passage, friends.

[3 : 27] Chapter 12, verse 13. We've got three groups so far. And they sent him some of the Pharisees. That's the fourth group. And some of the Herodians, the fifth group, to trap him in his talk.

So we've got five groups. And then just look at verse 18. Sadducees. That's six groups. Half a dozen clans. It's like the whole of the leadership in Jerusalem is attacking Jesus, isn't it?

Why do they hate him so much? Why do they want him dead? Well, they don't like him, do they? Interfering with their way of doing things.

You know, challenging them. What is it they hate? It's his authority. That's what they don't like. You know, up until Jesus came, they ruled the roost.

Their motto was the opposite, as C.T. stood. If Christ Jesus be God, then let's kill him. Jesus spoke about that in a parable. You'll see that very sentence.

[4 : 28] Chapter 12, verse 7. A parable. You'll remember it. The vineyard and the tenants. So they want him dead, don't they? And it seems, friends, doesn't it, that God's people here, they really don't want the intrusion of God.

They don't like him, do they? Rocking their boat. So what's our view of Jesus? You know, do we allow him to have authority over us?

Or do we think that we've got authority over him? How are we thinking when we come to Jesus? Our second point is about the plan of God.

And our passage is about that tension. Do you feel the tension here in the passage? You know, who's in control? Who's got authority? Is it man or is it God? And the two are interplaying together here in our passage.

Our second point is the plan of God. So the Jewish leaders, well, they're plotting Jesus' death, aren't they? But to Jesus, it's no surprise to him. It's his plan, actually, isn't it?

[5 : 35] Chapter 8, he tells his disciples that he's on the way to the cross. Chapter 9, he says the same thing. Chapter 10, he tells them twice. You remember chapter 10, verse 45.

For the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many. And in that parable again about the vineyards, you know, the vineyard and the tenants.

They're plotting to kill, aren't they? The very heir of the owner. The son of the owner. So that the vineyard will be taken over by themselves. They want Jesus dead.

And so all the time, friends, all the time, God's plan for the rescue of humanity, are you with me, is unfolding. It's all coming together. Everything sliding into place.

It's God, actually, who's in control, isn't it? Perhaps there was a tree being cut down that very hour. Maybe a routine delivery of nails from Rome.

[6 : 36] Someone reading a scroll of Isaiah. He was despised. We esteemed him not. The Ethiopian rolls it up and walks to the till to buy his Isaiah scroll, thinking to himself, well, maybe I'll come across someone one of these days who will explain it all to me.

Everyone's being painted in, aren't they, friends? Here. All the characters on the canvas. And the Jewish leaders, they still think they have authority over Jesus.

Back to chapter 12, friends. We'll go back to chapter 12 here now. And the one obstacle, what's the one obstacle to the Jewish leaders killing Jesus? It's the crowds. The crowds want Jesus enthroned, at least at this stage anyway.

You remember when Jesus comes into Jerusalem. Blessed. You remember, it is the coming kingdom of our father David. They were all singing as he came into Jerusalem. Hosanna! Hosanna! Look at chapter 12, verse 12. And they were seeking to arrest him, but what? Feared the people, for they perceived that he had told a parable against them.

[7 : 42] So, they left him, went away. Where did they go? Well, they went to call the special forces. The chapter 3, verse 6 people who have wanted Jesus dead for some time.

The Pharisees and the Herodians, you'll see it there in verse 13. They went to see them and they sent to him some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians. What's their agenda? To trap him in his talk.

Do you see that? They want to trap Jesus, don't they? In his talk. They want Jesus to condemn himself. Do you see? And first of all, he's a tactic.

They think, oh, we'll butter him up first. Just have a look at this, friends. They'll throw some compliments his way. Look at verse 14. They came to him and said, Teacher, we know that you are true and do not care about anyone's opinion, unlike themselves.

They're afraid, aren't they, friends, of the crowds? For you are not swayed by appearances, but truly teach the way of God. And perhaps they're thinking now that Jesus will lower his guard.

[8 : 47] And here's the ambush. You're looking, friends. Do you see? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Should we pay them or should we not?

The Jews detested paying taxes to Caesar. They detested it. You know, their hard-earned money going to Rome.

I'm just getting my wallet open here. Do you know what I've got in here? If it'll open. I've got a denarius here. They detested it. It sort of symbolised their subjection.

And I suppose the Jewish people might have thought, well, it's just like being in Egypt. This, the feeling in our hearts. So they ask that question, don't they? They ask that question and it's a win-win situation.

Should we pay them or should we not? And it's like Jeremy Paxman, isn't it? Have you heard him on Radio 4 when he's got a politician cornered and there's nowhere to go? And here's why they think it's such a good question.

[9 : 47] They want Jesus dead, don't they? Are you with me? And their problem, do you remember, it's the crowds. So they ask that question, don't they? And they think that whatever Jesus answers, they've got Jesus dead.

If Jesus says, pay taxes to Caesar, then he'll lose the popularity, won't he, of the people. Are you with me? If he says, don't pay, well, the Romans will have him killed straight away.

They wouldn't want someone like him in their empire. So it's checkmates, isn't it? They've got him cornered. It's a masterpiece of macabre plotting. You know, I guess you could have heard a pin drop when they asked that question.

Should we pay or should we not? And everyone knew it was like Jesus had a gun to his head and as soon as his lips moved, it was like pulling the trigger.

And it would be his death. So look at verse 15. It's in two parts. We'll look at the first part first. But knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, why put me to the test?

[10 : 57] Firstly, why put me to the test? Why did Jesus say that? Friends, he can see through our thinking, can't he? He knows exactly what you're thinking this very second.

It's frightening, isn't it, when someone confronts your sin. Am I right? It's the blue flashing light, isn't it, in your mirror. It's Adam and Eve before God, feeling guilty, trying to cover themselves.

It's that lie that's been uncovered in your life. It was me when I was a little boy. I went with my dad one weekend to his factory. And I was walking around and I picked this telephone up.

And there was my dad chatting with somebody. It was sort of through on the line. I could hear him talking. Is it a cross line, you call it? And I was listening. It was quite interesting. My dad was talking about a speedboat.

I thought, oh, that's exciting. I could just imagine myself on the River Trent with the wind in my hair and the spray. And maybe my friends on the shore there just watching me on this speedboat.

[12 : 00] I was just imagining it all in my mind. My dad said, put the phone down, Alec, on the other line, in another office somewhere. Put it down. I nearly dropped it. It was such a shock.

It was as if he could see me listening to him. And Jesus knows everything, doesn't he, friends? We can't hide anything from him.

Not our motives, not our actions. He knows everything, friends. And one day we'll meet him face to face. Revelation chapter 6, it's people who've tried to hide away all the lies from Jesus.

Everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains.

Calling to the mountains and rocks, fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb.

And so, friends, his words here to the Pharisees and the Herodians come to us, don't they, as a warning. Don't put me to the test. Jesus is saying.

[13 : 02] And secondly, in that verse 15, did you notice the second half of verse 15? Bring me a denarius and let me look at it. Bring me a denarius. Here it is.

He's a denarius. I don't know if this is exactly the one that Jesus handled, but it is 2,000 years old nearly. It's made of silver. On the front here, we've got the Emperor Tiberius Caesar Augustus.

And it's circled by these words on the outside. It says, Tiberius Caesar Augustus, son of the divine Augustus. Some of it's worn off here, but you can still see Augustus Caesar on it.

On the back, it says, think about this, Pontiff Maximus. What does that mean? High Priest. Whoa. That's dangerous, isn't it, with Jews?

Just imagine that. Just imagine. It's like it's an explosive there in the middle of this scene that we have before us. So what's going to happen here?

[14 : 06] What will happen? This coin is like the ultimate provocation to the Jewish people. Bring me one, says Jesus. Let me see a denarius. And it was like he was saying to these, Jewish leaders, do you happen to use Caesar's currency yourselves?

That's the sort of thing that's going on here. And they're caught off guard, aren't they? I think the crowd are lapping it up. One of these Jewish leaders comes along, and there he holds out his hand to Jesus.

And there the silver coin is sparkling in his hand. It's there, Caesar looking up from the coin, you see, from his palm. Everyone's eyes look down to Caesar's.

And the one holding it, well, I guess by now, I guess he's realising that his plot's backfired. But I don't think he just quite knows why at the moment.

It feels like he's being caught red-handed as he stands there before Jesus. Whose likeness in inscription is on it? And the crowd are thinking, out with it, come on, spit it out.

[15:16] Verse 16, friends. Do you see the end of verse 16, they said to him, one word, Caesar's. Yes, friends, the coin is obviously owned by Caesar, isn't it?

The emperor. Everyone just uses them, don't they, as common currency. Give it to him, if it's his, says Jesus. Sinclair Ferguson says that Jesus responded with devastating simplicity.

And where are we, friends, in God's unfolding plans and purposes? Well, God's people are no longer sort of a local theocracy. Jesus is sending them out, isn't he?

Sending us out to engage with the world. His kingdom is what? Global. Isn't it? Right around the world. Many different countries. It's not just liberation from Rome.

Be with me. It's liberation from this world, isn't it? From death. It's much bigger than they ever imagined. And in this interim, friends, where we live, we pay our due, don't we?

[16:27] We pay our taxes to maintain government and society. It's part of life. The apostle Paul says, pay the taxman, Romans chapter 13. So it's all backfired on them, hasn't it?

And Jesus looks at his failed plotters. And what does he see? He sees not Caesar's image, but his own, doesn't he, as he looks at them.

All things were created for him, says Paul, and by him. Perhaps remember that day in the garden when he made man.

And here he is. He is man before him. To God the things are to God's. And all that we are, friends, think about it. All that we are, all that we have is his.

Am I right? All that we do should be for him. But you and I, friends, we've failed, haven't we? We've lived for ourselves, for our small view of life.

[17:28] And we don't render to God what is his. And so we owe him. But here's the problem. We've got nothing to draw on, have we?

We've got nothing in the account to give to God. Anything we could give, think about this, is already his due, isn't it? Are you with me?

Anything we could give to God, we already owe it to him. You know? Listen to what John Stott says. Our present obedience and good works cannot make satisfaction for our sins, since these are required of us anyway.

Kicks into touch, doesn't it? All the world's made up. Religions. My words, not John Stott's. So here they are. And, friends, we're bankrupt people, aren't we?

We've got nothing we can actually offer to Jesus to twist his arm. And so we need outside help. And here before us, friends, is the one who's broken into our world with that help.

[18:39] He's got absolute obedience to his account, hasn't he? And so we pray, don't we, forgive us our debts because we can't pay them ourselves. And suddenly, pouring into the void of our lives is God's graciousness.

and love. His righteousness. The one who indeed did, think about this, render everything to God. He also rendered his life, didn't he, friends, to us.

He comes to us in his love and his mercy. My Lord, what love is this that pays so dearly that I, the guilty one, may go free?

Amazing love, oh, what sacrifice the Son of God given for me? My debt he pays and my debt he dies that I might live, that I might live.

And so they asked Jesus a question but it turned out he was asking a question of us. Who, friends, will you render your life to?

[19:45] just have a look with me as we close the last five words of verse 17. Can you see the reaction there? And they marveled at him.

Shall we pray? Dear Heavenly Father, we think of the words of C.T. Stood, if Christ Jesus be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for him.

Dear Father, we thank you for sending your Son into this world for our sakes. And we pray that you would help us through your Spirit to comprehend the magnitude of what it is to belong to you.

We ask that you would continue to reorientate our lives from the priorities of this rat race to the priorities of your eternal kingdom. And we thank you, Father, for the life of C.T. Stood and what an example he is to us of a life rendered to you.

So go with us now, we pray. And as we leave here into our own particular situations, we pray that you'd radiate yourself from us your vessels.

[21 : 00] And to that end, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us now, this day and forevermore. Amen.