

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Mark 12: 13-17

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the Bible again. We'll continue to read Mark chapter 12, verses 13 to 17.

The Gospel of Mark portrays Jesus Christ as the Son of God who came to earth to serve humanity as a servant. Chapter 12 records Jesus' final week of service on earth and His dialogues in the temple. This also serves as a reminder to the saints willing to serve in the church to pay attention to. Yesterday, we read about Jesus using a parable to point out the errors of the leaders in Jewish society at the time, including the chief priests, scribes, and elders. These errors actually serve as reminders for today's church leaders to recognize three things: first, the sovereignty of the church belongs to Christ, and church leaders are only temporary stewards serving the saints in the church, so they cannot exercise arbitrary authority over them, and one day they must all give an account to Christ because the church belongs to Christ. Second, the church should bear fruit, producing the fruits of the Holy Spirit, satisfying God. Third, we must treat God's servants well, especially those serving in different churches. We cannot attack or slander them arbitrarily just because of differences in understanding of truth or practices in the church; they are also servants of God. And the passage we are going to read today is actually very practical; it deals with how the church should address political issues.

Verse 13: "Then they sent to Him some of the Pharisees and the Herodians, to catch Him in His words."

In the Gospel of Mark's account, this is during the final week of Jesus' time, the third time He enters the temple in Jerusalem, and the last. He faces waves of tests from Jewish leaders who seek to find faults in His words as leverage to attack Him. Yesterday's passage involved Jewish leaders challenging Jesus about His authority

and its source, but Jesus used a parable to point out that they were usurping God's authority.

And what about today's passage? It begins with the Pharisees and the Herodians. The two groups originally had completely opposite political stances, but now they unite to test Jesus. The Pharisees had a strong attachment to their ancestral heritage, with a deep sense of national identity and pride as Jews. They opposed Roman rule over Jewish society. In contrast, the Herodians were the opposite. Herod himself was an Edomite who gained the trust of the Roman authorities and became the ruler of Judea. The Herodians advocated for Jewish cooperation with King Herod, advocating submission to Roman rule to maintain stability and prosperity in Jewish society. These two factions were originally at odds, but they came together to persecute Jesus, seeking to find leverage against Him in political matters to trap Him. This provides a model for today's church on how to handle political issues.

Verse 14: "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?'"

They approached Jesus and began with flattering words. In reality, this is typical political language, praising before attacking. When you face political figures and they speak well of you, you must be cautious because the higher they praise you, the heavier the blow that follows. Similarly, when political groups extend goodwill towards the church today, the principle remains the same. Once the church accepts political benefits, the future harm it brings will undoubtedly be greater.

They came before Jesus, praising Him for being truthful, impartial, and for not showing favoritism but faithfully teaching the ways of God. Their comments about Jesus were accurate, reflecting the good reputation He had earned during His three and a half years of ministry. However, these commendations did not move those who sought to persecute Him; instead, they became the groundwork for their persecution. This also teaches us that while it's important for the church to have a

good reputation in society, it's only a necessary condition. What truly attracts people to the Lord is not just external praise but the spiritual atmosphere within the church. Especially the subjective experiences and testimonies of believers about God are what truly move and draw people to Jesus, serving as the ultimate catalyst for their conversion.

After they finished speaking praises, they revealed their true intentions, which was whether it was lawful to pay taxes to Caesar. At that time, in the Roman jurisdiction, every adult had to pay a poll tax, acknowledging Roman authority over them. Many Jews, particularly those zealous for Jewish nationalism, opposed paying this tax, including most of the Pharisees, while members of the Herodian party advocated for paying the tax to maintain harmony and good relations with the Roman government. Remarkably, on this issue, the two opposing factions united to test Jesus. If Jesus said yes, the Pharisees would accuse Him of disloyalty to the Jews, of flattering the Romans, thus undermining His influence among the Jewish people. If Jesus said no, the Herodians would report Him to the Roman authorities as a rebel, seeking to overthrow Roman rule. Their intention was to trap Jesus in a dilemma.

Verse 15: "'Shall we pay, or shall we not pay?' But He, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, 'Why do you test Me? Bring Me a denarius that I may see it.'"

Their continued questioning of Jesus, whether it was lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not, revealed their underlying motives. It was indeed peculiar that these two groups came together to pose this question. Jesus, seeing through their deceit, asked them why they were testing Him and requested to see a denarii. This coin was minted by the Romans and was the currency used for paying taxes. In Jewish society at the time, the common currency was the Jewish shekel. Jesus Himself did not carry Roman coins, hence His request for them to bring Him a denarii to examine.

Verse 16: "So they brought it. And He said to them, 'Whose image and inscription is this?' They said to Him, 'Caesar's.'"

Jesus did not have a denarii on Him, but they did, so they brought it forth. It's important to note that the Pharisees were reluctant to pay Roman taxes, yet they had Roman coins on them, which is why Jesus referred to them as hypocrites. Jesus looked at the coin they presented and asked them, "Whose image and inscription is this?" Because Roman denarii bore the image of Caesar on one side and the Latin inscription of his name on the other, they naturally replied, "Caesar's."

Verse 17: "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."

Jesus, upon examining the coin in their hands, offered a remarkably succinct conclusion with just two sentences: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." His response left them marveling. When we read this passage today, we also marvel at the heavenly wisdom of Jesus, who effortlessly resolves a complex issue with two simple statements. Moreover, these two sentences provide a principle that the church should adhere to when dealing with political matters, emphasizing the clear distinction between the affairs of the church and those of the world.

Render to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's. These two are not inherently contradictory, but on the other hand, they should not be combined. Each of us has a dual identity: on one hand, we are citizens of earthly kingdoms, so we should fulfill the duties of earthly citizenship, such as paying taxes; but on the other hand, we are also citizens of the heavenly kingdom, and we must fulfill the obligations of heavenly citizenship, such as giving offerings. Both of these should be done, and they do not contradict each other. However, on the other hand, these two must also be clearly distinguished, and they should not cross boundaries. Once they do, difficulties arise.

Today, let's take some time to carefully consider how to avoid crossing boundaries; this is truly a very practical example. Because in today's church, when facing the political authorities of the world, how to appropriately handle the relationship between the church and earthly powers, we should carefully examine the principles that Jesus presented.

The first is "render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's," and we all have things that belong to Caesar. Regarding Caesar's possessions, there are three possible scenarios: First, if you do not render to Caesar, meaning you do not pay taxes and fulfill your earthly obligations, you are breaking the earthly laws, committing a crime, and should be punished. Therefore, Christians should pay taxes and not break the law. The second way of dealing with it is what Jesus said: "render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's," meaning we should abide by the laws of the earthly authorities and pay what we owe. The third scenario is to render Caesar's things to God. Dealing with this issue requires great wisdom. Generally speaking, those who want to render Caesar's things to God initially have good intentions, but in the end, they will bring great trouble to the house of God.

The most obvious example is Emperor Constantine. Before him, Christians were persecuted, and many of them were martyred. During that time, although Christians suffered, their faith was very pure. Even the Roman Caesar lamented, "How is it that Christians multiply the more they are killed?" Later, God raised up Emperor Constantine, who began to treat Christians kindly and even converted to Christianity himself. Afterwards, he encouraged Romans to come to the church and used various rewards to attract people. As a result, many unbelievers came to the church because of the king's influence and the rewards given. The most basic requirement of the church is to believe in Jesus Christ and receive His salvation. If a bunch of unbelievers come to the church and call themselves believers, it will lead to the corruption of the church.

Similarly, today there are many churches that are willing to attract people to come to church using various worldly methods. I'm not here to condemn the use of these methods, but to say that you must be very wise. Even if you attract people, you still need to genuinely lead them to understand salvation, so that they can truly become

part of God's family. Because the church is the body of Christ, without the life of God, it cannot become the body of Christ. If too much of Caesar's things come into the church, it will make the church worldly and lose its original spiritual influence.

Let's look at the other side, which is the things of God. Similarly, there are three situations here as well: Firstly, if the things of God are not given to God, the church will suffer losses, it will fall into poverty, and it will not be able to fulfill the trust that God has given to the church. Secondly, as Jesus said, "Render to God the things that are God's." Of course, in the Old Testament, there were tithing regulations, and in the New Testament church, concerning giving, Paul says in 2 Corinthians 9:7-8, "So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work." So, the things of God should be given to God. And the third situation is to give the things of God to Caesar, that is, to bring some of the things belonging to the house of God into the world. Similarly, in this regard, we also need to be very wise, as God has ordained us to live in the world but not of the world.

Regarding the world, we should be the light of the world and the salt of the earth, letting people see the good testimony in us and be attracted to come to the church. This is achieved through personal testimony, bringing people into the house of God, rather than using God's word to regulate the world. Some groups like to use political means to Christianize cities, imposing Christian values and norms on the cities they are in, and those who do not comply will be punished, making them modern Pharisees.

The principle that Jesus gives us, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's," is very clear and precise, hoping that God gives us wisdom in its implementation.

Let's pray: Lord, you have called us to live in the world but not of the world. We acknowledge that in our daily lives, many details are not so easy to handle. How to distinguish between what belongs to Caesar and what belongs to God is sometimes not so clear. Lord, grant us wisdom, especially in leading the church, to help us

grasp this principle: to render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. When we are unsure of these boundaries, we come to you for guidance, asking for clear direction. We acknowledge that there is too much mixture in today's churches and too many people in the world's political systems claiming to be Christians but doing things that are not in line with the Bible. We are willing to bring all of these before you and ask for Your personal guidance. Bless my church and the leaders, who are willing to humbly seek Your guidance, helping my church become a pure church, separate from the world, and pleasing to You. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.