

**RENDER UNTO GOD**  
**Mark 12:13-17**

Our reading here is Mark chapter 12, verses 13 to 17. I will pray before we have our reading. Please join me in prayer.

O Lord our God, as we come now to worship you in the hearing of your word read, in the hearing of your word preached, I pray, O Lord, that you would help me as I preach. I pray, O Lord, you would help us all as we hear. Build up that which is lacking, break down that which ought not to be. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Verses 13 to 17, as I said, of Mark chapter 12:

“<sup>13</sup> And they sent to him some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians, to trap him in his talk. <sup>14</sup> 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?’ <sup>15</sup> But, knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, ‘Why put me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me look at it.’ <sup>16</sup> And they brought one. And he said to them, ‘Whose likeness and inscription is this?’ They said to him, ‘Caesar’s.’ <sup>17</sup> Jesus 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.” Amen.

Well, the situation that we’re in in the gospel of Mark is that Jesus is in Jerusalem, and the tensions, the disputes with those who are based in Jerusalem—with the priests, with the Pharisees, and now with the Herodians as well—are increasing. They seem as a threat; they seem as a problem.

When life is comfortable, you really don’t want someone to come along who’s going to change things. If you’ve got a comfortable arrangement with the powers that be, if things are going just fine for you, if the money’s coming in, if no one’s picking on you in particular, well, you don’t want radical changes to happen.

And Jesus has come into Jerusalem on a donkey, proclaimed as the Messiah by the common people. He’s gone into the temple, He’s turned over the trading tables, He’s cleansed the temple of those who buy and those who sell—those who exchange. He’s caused a ruckus. He’s tipped things on their head.

And if you earn your living from a nice cozy arrangement with Rome, if you earn your living from the corruption that goes in temple trading, if that money is coming into your pocket, you don’t want people to come along and upset the applecart. It’s just not what you want.

And if the one who comes along and upsets the applecart is a prophet, or proclaimed to be a prophet by the common folk, and if the one who comes along and upsets the applecart is the Messiah, or proclaimed to be the Messiah, well, you’ve really got problems.

So what they're about is trying, in some way, to prove that Jesus is not the Messiah. They don't want people to follow Him. They don't want Him to be popular. They don't want Him to take over. That's what they're fearing. Their fear is that this guy is going to take over. The people are going to follow Him, and our comfortable arrangement is going to fall flat on its face.

In verse 28 of chapter 11, they challenged His authority: "By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?" The priests, the scribes, and the elders—representatives of the ruling counsel of the people, the Sanhedrin, challenged His authority. "By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them." When we looked into that passage, if you'll remember, we concluded that mainly, they were asking the question by what authority did He cleanse the temple; by what authority did He attack those trading in the temple. But it could also have been a reference to all that He had done.

And there was ample evidence before them that Jesus was exactly who He said He was—He was the Son of God. He was exactly who the people were proclaiming Him to be—the King, the Holy One of Israel, the Lord, the Messiah. They just wouldn't accept this. They couldn't accept this. It would mean they had to surrender too much, and like the rich young ruler from earlier in the gospel of Mark, they weren't prepared to make that sacrifice. They weren't prepared to let go of the things that they had worked so hard to take hold of. They continued to challenge.

One thing that stands out as we work our way through this passage is that Jesus was wonderful at unifying people. And I say that with a little bit of smile, a little bit of cynicism, because the people that He unified, more than anyone else, were His enemies. He unified those who hated Him: the priests, the Pharisees, the Herodians, the Sadducees, who were mainly the priestly class—when I say the priests, I'm thinking of the Sadducees. The Sadducees, the Pharisees, the Herodians—weren't friends. They didn't have joint meetings. They didn't worship in the same synagogue. They didn't like each other. They saw each other as representatives of error.

The priests, the Pharisees, and the Herodians weren't buddies. They didn't drink at the same table. But Jesus comes to town, and suddenly they're working together; suddenly, they're united; suddenly, we've got the Uniting Church of Jerusalem. They really don't like each other, but more than the fact that they don't like each other, they really don't like Jesus. As I said, He's the one turning their world upside down. The way they see it, if things go this man's way, we're in trouble.

Now they were in trouble, but they just didn't know it. They imagined that because Rome was in this situation on their side, they imagined that because they could manipulate things to work out their way, they imagined that all was going well; that somehow or other they would bring this situation under control. They were already planning to have Jesus killed. We know that. Jesus knew that.

Remember in the parable of the tenants, Jesus said that they killed the beloved Son. Now the parable of the tenants was a parable, a made-up story, but the made-up story reflected the truth. Jesus knew. He knew from the moment that He set His face for Jerusalem that He was going to die. They're in more trouble than they knew.

Let's have a look at our passage, starting at verse 13. "And they sent to him some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians, to trap him in his talk"—As I said, the Uniting Church of Jerusalem. The Pharisees and the Herodians didn't like each other. The Pharisees considered themselves to be the pure and set-apart people.

Though it's hard to work out exactly who the Herodians are, it's considered that their name actually gives away their character. The Herodians were those who had made a comfortable arrangement with the Herods, who were the subjugated kings under Rome; the Herods, who collected the tax money for Rome. So the Herodians were those who were in favor of working with Roman government and making the most out of it that they could. The Herodians, if you like, were the worldly ones. The Herodians were the compromisers. They were happy to work with the government. They were happy to work with Rome, while the Pharisees, seeing themselves as the pure, holy, and set-apart ones, under normal circumstances saw the Herodians as the worldly, evil, compromisers.

And yet, here they come together—the Uniting Church of Jerusalem—to trap Him. Here the word "trap", *agruo*, is the only use that it gets in the New Testament. *Agruo* means to trap, to snare, to single out something that is lame or crippled—to trap, to snare, to get something on a hook. They came to hook Him. They came to hook Him up with His own words. They've come to Him to try and get Him to say something controversial. They want to turn His words to their own advantage. And they come to Him.

Verse 14: "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...'" How nice. How lovely. Pour on the sugar, or pour on the butter, they're pouring on something. How nice. How lovely. "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." If they believed that He truly taught the way of God, why were they trying to trap Him? They're liars; they're hypocrites; they're pretenders.

"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?" Well that's a loaded question. What's going on here, or what's behind this question? Well, the tax is specifically referred to as a poll tax, or a head tax—one denarius per man, per household—and it had to be paid in Roman money. And the Jews particularly hated this tax. It was the equivalent to a day's wages. One of the reasons they particularly hated this tax was that they had to pay it in Roman money, and they considered the Roman coins to be idols.

There were two images on a coin—you know, you've got your head, your tails—or your front, your back. On the front was Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus. It's a claim to divinity. It's saying that Tiberius Caesar is a demi-god. On the rear, or the other side of the coin, the flip side, was an image of his mother, Lydia, and underneath it says, Pontifex Maximus—the high priest. What high priest? It's saying the high priest of all priests, the high priest of all gods. That coin is saying that the high priest in Jerusalem is not the high priest to the living God. It's saying that Caesar is the high priest.

And so they hated even handling this coin. They hated even touching this coin. And here they are required by Rome to pay a coin, one of these coins per man, per household, in tax every year. They hated the tax. When the tax was first introduced in 6 A.D., there was an attempted rebellion. It was put down and failed miserably, but there had been an attempted rebellion. The people hated it so much that they attempted to rebel against Rome rather than pay it. And the trouble that it had brewed up had been simmering ever since.

So now can you see something of the dilemma that they think they've placed Jesus into? If He says, "Pay the tax," they turn around to the people and say, "You see—He's working with Rome. That idolatrous coin He wants us to pay Rome." If He says, "Don't pay the tax," the Herodians run back to Herod and say, "You see—this guy who's claiming the Messiah, He's mounting an open rebellion and He's recommending that we do not pay tax."

One way or the other, they want to get Jesus into trouble; they want to get Him dead. And if you can't kill someone lawfully yourself, perhaps you can find a way to get someone else to do it. Get the Romans to kill Him, or get the people to turn against Him and then we'll get the Romans to kill Him. One way or the other, they think they've put Him in a dilemma. They think they've made it tough for Him.

The narrative follows a similar pattern to the earlier narrative when the authority of Jesus was challenged. Some people came to Jesus representing authority, and asked Him a question. And Jesus turned their question on its head. Remember in that situation, back in chapter 11, verse 29, He asked them a question. "Jesus said to them, 'I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things.'<sup>30</sup> Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man? Answer me.'"

Interestingly, the question was about authority and where does He get the authority, and He posed the question with authority: "Answer me"—twice repeated, "Answer me." And when they wouldn't give Jesus an honest answer, Jesus said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things." And that's the last we hear of that delegation.

Well this is the next delegation, and they come representing authority, and they come with a question: Do we pay taxes to Caesar or not? It's a similar pattern. Jesus gives an answer, and the delegation goes into reverse, backing out of the scene. They're gone. You'll notice if you look ahead, the next question comes from the Sadducees. Another group comes to Him representing an authority, asking a question. We'll look next Sunday morning, Lord willing, at that passage and we'll look at that question.

So they come asking a question, verse 15: "But, knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, 'Why put me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me look at it.'" The word "test" is pretty interesting—*Peiratēs*—it's Greek. The only other place, obviously, where Mark uses it is in Mark chapter 1, verse 13, speaking of Satan himself. Jesus went into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil. It's in that word family, same word family. So what Mark is trying to tell us when he picks that word is that Jesus is under attack. He's trying to tell us that this is an assault. It's an assault from Satan. "<sup>15</sup>But, knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, 'Why put me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me look at it.'"

Another little point to think about: Jesus wasn't carrying the denarius. He wasn't carrying that coin with the image that they hated so much, but they were carrying one. Hypocrisy. They hate the image, but they can't live without it. They're carrying it. "Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." <sup>16</sup> And they brought one. And he said to them, 'Whose likeness and inscription is this?' They said to him, 'Caesar's.'" Well we've already talked a little bit about that coin, haven't we? Caesar's—son of the divine Augustus. Caesar—the divine one. And as I've said, on the other side, Pontifex Maximus—the high priest.

"Whose likeness and inscription is this?' They said to him, 'Caesar's.'" <sup>17</sup> Jesus 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." "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.' And they marveled at him." Well, we really get to the meat of the passage in verse 17. Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. And there's a fair bit that I want to bring out from this verse.

"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." First question, Did Jesus just say that there were two separate authorities operating here—two separate ones? Two separate kingdoms, perhaps? Answer: No. No, Scripture teaches that all authority is ordained by God, even corrupt Roman government was ordained by God.

All authority is ordained by God, even our government. And I, like many, are fairly annoyed by the change in government we've had in the last few weeks without an election. But I have to accept that this was ordained by God. It doesn't give me the right to rebel. It doesn't give me the right to disobey.

Government was ordained by God, and therefore, to render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's is to actually obey God. It's actually to live in submission to God, in submission to God's authority through God's providence. When Jesus submitted to crucifixion, He was both rendering to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and rendering to God the things that are God's. Rome had the authority to crucify. God put Rome in place. Pilate had authority, given by God.

John chapter 19, verse 10, Jesus said to Pilate, "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above." You would not have this authority unless it was given to you from above. What had Pilate just said? "You don't answer me? Don't you understand that I have the power to kill you? I have the authority to put you to death?" And Jesus answered, "Yes, you have that authority; it's been given to you from above." He submitted to Caesar, and in submitting to Caesar, was submitting to God. He was rendering to Caesar the things that were Caesar's *and* rendering to God the things that were God's.

Scripture makes it plain that the only reason that we are to disobey rightfully appointed government is if government orders us to disobey God. If a law were passed that made it illegal to preach the gospel, we're to break that law. If a law were passed that made it illegal to worship the living God, we're to break that law. Why? Because those laws are set directly against the purposes of God. But we're expected to live in obedience to all other laws of government that

are not set directly against the purposes of God. God has the ultimate authority, and we must obey Him. And in obeying Him, we must obey government.

The next question that arises in verse 17, if we haven't thought of it is how Jesus works out who held the denarius, or who had the authority with regards to money. He said, Whose image is on it? And whoever's image was on the coin was the one who had claim to the coin. Render to God the things that are God's.

It's been said many a time, if those who asked the question were honest, they would have immediately asked Jesus, Well, what things belong to God? Because Jesus would then have replied, Whose image do you bear? Whose image do *you* bear? Whose image were *you* made in? The coin bears Caesar's image, but you bear God's image. We bear God's image. If we bear God's image, who owns humanity? God. That's the way it works.

And what's the purpose of an image? Well, if we trace the idea out through the Old Testament (and I've got a plan to do that), if we bear God's image, the purpose of the image is that the image is used in worship. Idolatry is the worship of God through a false image. The true image of God is Jesus Christ Himself, and we're being re-formed in that image, and we've been granted to bear that image. And we are to worship God.

You take an image, you put it in a temple. If you're an idolater, your image will be in the best part of the temple, the part that attracts the most attention, and that's where you worship. Well, the temple of the living God is the church, and the image of the living God is to be found in the church. And we are called into the church to bear the image of the living God and to worship the living God in and through the person of Jesus Christ. We bear the image.

Turn if you will to Psalm 115. What I want you to look at and think about here is that there's a principle in Scripture that people become like what they worship. People become like the thing that they worship. We'll read the first eight verses of Psalm 115:

“<sup>1</sup>Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness! <sup>2</sup>Why should the nations say, ‘Where is their God?’ <sup>3</sup>Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases. <sup>4</sup>Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. <sup>5</sup>They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. <sup>6</sup>They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. <sup>7</sup>They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat. <sup>8</sup>Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them.”

“Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them.” What's he saying? He's saying that the worshipers of idols become like the idols that they worship. The idols are dumb and useless. They say nothing, they do nothing, they have no power, they have no life. They're dead. And the worshipers of idols have nothing useful to say, nothing useful to do, they have no power. What did Paul say in Ephesians chapter 2, when he was speaking to the Ephesians who were idolaters before their conversion? “You were dead in your sins and trespasses.” People become like that which they worship.

Turn forward to Psalm 135. Just look at verses 15 to 18. It's a similar thought expressed again: "15 The idols of the nations are silver and gold, the work of human hands. 16 They have mouths, but do not speak; they have eyes, but do not see; 17 they have ears, but do not hear, nor is there any breath in their mouths. 18 Those who make them become like them, so do all who trust in them." Those who make them become like them, so do all who trust in them—the deadness of false worship, the deadness of human idolatry, the deadness of the heart of one who will not worship God.

Turn to Isaiah chapter 6. Isaiah has had his vision of the Lord. It changed his life. He's seeing the Lord being worshiped in heaven. "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." Pick it up at verse 5: "And I said: 'Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!' 6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. 7 And he touched my mouth and said: 'Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.'

"8 And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' Then I said, 'Here I am! Send me.' 9 And he said, 'Go, and say to this people'"—now I want you to think about what we've just heard about idols and hear what God says to a hard-hearted people: "Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive." What does it say about idols? They have mouths but do not speak, they have eyes but do not see, they have ears but do not hear. "Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive." "10 Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed."

So what's the Lord saying to Isaiah? He is saying, I am sending you out to an idolatrous nation, and they are like their idols, and your preaching is actually going to send them further down the road. You're not going to open their eyes, you're going to blind their eyes. You're not going to open their ears, you're going to render them spiritually deaf. You're not going to soften their hearts, I'm going to use your word to harden their hearts. They are going to be like idols—deaf, dumb, blind, useless, dead.

Turn forward in Isaiah to chapter 44. We'll start reading at verse 6: "6 Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: 'I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god. 7 Who is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and set it before me, since I appointed an ancient people. Let them declare what is to come, and what will happen. 8 Fear not, nor be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? And you are my witnesses! Is there a God besides me? There is no Rock; I know not any.'"

Now look at verse 9: "All who fashion idols are nothing, and the things they delight in do not profit. Their witnesses neither see nor know, that they may be put to shame. 10 Who fashions a god or casts an idol that is profitable for nothing? 11 Behold, all his companions shall be put to shame, and the craftsmen are only human. Let them all assemble, let them stand forth. They shall be terrified; they shall be put to shame together."

Now just jump to verse 18: “They know not, nor do they discern, for he has shut their eyes, so that they cannot see, and their hearts, so that they cannot understand. <sup>19</sup> No one considers, nor is there knowledge or discernment to say, ‘Half of it I burned in the fire; I also baked bread on its coals; I roasted meat and have eaten. And shall I make the rest of it an abomination? Shall I fall down before a block of wood?’ <sup>20</sup> He feeds on ashes; a deluded heart has led him astray, and he cannot deliver himself or say, ‘Is there not a lie in my right hand?’”

So what’s the result of the idolaters? I’m looking at verse 18: “They know not, nor do they discern, for he has shut their eyes, so that they cannot see, and their hearts, so that they cannot understand.” Those who worship idols become like the idols they worship. Those who worship God the living God through His Son the Lord Jesus Christ, become like the Christ whom they worship.

Turn to Romans chapter 8. Start at verse 28: “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. <sup>29</sup> For those whom he foreknew he also predestined”—to what purpose, I ask you? Here is the answer—“to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.” To be conformed to the image of His Son.

We become like the things that we worship, and to those who are called into the church, to those to whom it is granted life, the very act of worshiping Christ is conforming us into the likeness of Christ. Jesus, in His human nature; Jesus, when He walked this earth as a man, was totally, completely surrendered to God the Father; totally and utterly surrendered and submissive to the will of God. Jesus served and loved the Lord His God with all His heart, soul, mind, and strength. He’s the one who did it.

And we, as worshipers of God through Jesus Christ, we who have been granted by the power of the Holy Spirit to be conformed to His image, are becoming like Jesus Christ. We are on the way to becoming truly godly—having eyes that see. When God talks about seeing, hearing, understanding, He’s not talking about physical things. He’s talking about spiritual things: Seeing—perceiving the things of God; hearing—hearing the word of God and recognizing it as God’s word; hearts—softened, hearts understanding, hearts responsive to the word of God, hearts alive to God.

John read to us earlier from Ezekiel: “I will take out of you the heart of stone. I will put within you the heart of flesh.” You can make an idol out of stone, but a heart of flesh—who can mold flesh? Only God, the living God. Who can take that which lives and mold it into an image? Only God, the living God. It is the living image of His living Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

When Jesus said, “Render to God that which is God’s,” it’s loaded. It carries a ton of theology. Those words carry a ton of doctrine and theology. What is God’s? Everything. Our very lives. Everything about us. We’ve been called to worship God. Turn back to Mark chapter 12. “‘Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.’ And they marveled at him.” If they actually understood what He had just said to them, they would have come under a weight of conviction. They would have been convicted of the hardness and the wickedness of their own hearts.



When Jesus looked at these people who refused to accept Him for who He is, who refused to accept His authority, who refused to submit to His teaching, and He said to them, “Render to God the things that are God’s,” if they had received those words with hearts of flesh, with living hearts, with hearts that had been granted life, they would have come under a weight of conviction and accepted Him as the Messiah.

The way to render to God the things that are God’s is to fall on your knees before Jesus Christ, seeking reconciliation with God, seeking forgiveness of sins, seeking a new life, repenting of sin, turning, changing the way you live. That’s how we render to God the things that are God’s. We give Him our lives, acknowledging that they’re worth nothing—destroyed, broken, dirtied by sin, unworthy, dead—begging for life.

If they had received the words that Jesus had given, they would have fallen to the ground and worshiped Him. Render to God the things that are God’s. But they would not. Their heart was given over to idolatry. They were becoming like that which they worshiped. What did they worship? The temple, the laws. The Pharisees worshiped their own sub-laws, their own legality, man-made rules and regulations, which they thought made them better than everyone around them. They claimed that they were worshipers of God, but they were really worshipers of self—dead hearts, blind eyes, deaf ears.

The call from this passage is to surrender our lives to God, full stop. Render unto God the things that are God’s. We bear His image. Those of us who are in Christ are being conformed to the image of His Son Jesus Christ. We bear that image, and this Christian life must be surrendered to Jesus Christ. It’s all for Him. Our life must be entirely for Him. Render to God the things that are God’s. He owns us. The hairs on our head are numbered. The cells on our skin are numbered. He owns us totally, completely, and utterly.

One sentence, one answer: Render to Caesar the things that are Caesars, and to God the things that are God’s. The Son of God, Jesus Christ. I’ve asked it before, Do you think He was good at communicating? It’s just taken me 40 minutes or more to explain what He said in about ten words. Ten words. It’s pretty amazing. Do you think He could communicate? Do you think He could talk?

As I’ve said, He’s called the Word of God, the Living Word. John knew something, didn’t he, when he said that? Inspired by the Holy Spirit as he was, he knew something. He understood something. “In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.” And this Word could use words like no other.

Remember that line, “Never a man spoke like he spoke,” said by the soldiers who were sent to arrest Jesus? Never a man spoke like He spoke. Never a man—in one sentence. Never a man, in one sentence, could lay such a weight, could disclose such good news, could summarize so wonderfully Scripture, could summarize so wonderfully teaching. Jesus Christ, God the Son of God, the true image, the perfect image, the bearer of the image of the living God, the one whom we’re called to worship. Let’s close in prayer.

Father in heaven, I pray, O Lord, that you would let these words do their work in our hearts. May they weigh heavily upon us. We are to render to you the things that are yours. We acknowledge, O Lord, that all things are yours, and that life in Jesus Christ is yours. Our life is yours. May we be true worshipers in spirit and in truth. May we render to you all that we ought. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.