

**MARK: Jesus' Final Week**  
***Tuesday***  
**Mark 12:1-34 and 13:32-37**  
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Can anyone tell me what happened on Tuesday of Holy Week? I admit I couldn't have answered that question prior to preparing for this sermon series. Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, and Good Friday we're very familiar with. Some of us might even have been able to figure out that Jesus' clearing of the temple happened on Monday, but most of us have no idea what happened on Tuesday of Holy Week. Mark's gospel gives two entire chapters to Holy Tuesday, but we tend to gloss over it because it's mostly dialogue with little physical movement or activity.

In his book, "Fight Like Jesus," Jason Porterfield, who incidentally is a Messiah University graduate, makes the case that we dismiss Tuesday of Holy Week—at least in part—because we're in such a hurry to get to the cross. Porterfield writes, "In our passion to lift up the cross, we've accidentally uprooted it from its context and severed it from the life of the one who gives it meaning." Porterfield sees value in exploring each day during Holy Week, because it helps prepare us for and better understand what Jesus accomplished by dying on the cross.

Tuesday of Holy Week begins with Jesus returning to the temple where, on Monday, He had created quite a scene by flipping tables and driving the animals and money changers out of the temple courts. In many ways, this outburst was the final nail in Jesus' coffin. The chief priests and the teachers of the law began actively looking for a way to arrest and kill Jesus. Returning to the temple might seem like an odd move for Jesus after his disturbance on Monday, but in spite of the hatred of the Jewish religious leaders, Jesus had a lot of supporters at the temple, making it difficult for Him to be arrested there without a riot ensuing. As we look more closely at Tuesday, we can divide what took place into three categories.

1. The religious leaders asked Jesus a series of questions, hoping to trap Him so they can arrest Him.
2. Jesus' diatribe against the religious leaders—in Mark's Gospel, Jesus' criticism is very concise, but Matthew devotes all of chapter 23 to "Seven Woe Statements" that Jesus directs at the teachers of the law and the Pharisees.
3. Lastly, the disciples ask Jesus when all the things associated with the end times will come.

This morning, I'm going to focus on Jesus' back-and-forth dialogue with the religious leaders and then wrap up by looking at Jesus' words to his disciples at the end of chapter 13. As we explore Jesus' give and take with the religious leaders, we'll see that He is emphasizing the nature of the kingdom of God in a series of important conversations. Follow along as I begin reading at Mark 12:1.

Jesus then began to speak to them in parables: "A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the winepress and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. <sup>2</sup>At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. <sup>3</sup>But they seized him, beat him and sent him away empty-handed. <sup>4</sup>Then he sent another servant to them; they struck this man on the head and treated him shamefully. <sup>5</sup>He sent still another, and that one they killed. He sent many others; some of them they beat, others they killed.

<sup>6</sup>"He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, 'They will respect my son.'

<sup>7</sup>"But the tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.'<sup>8</sup> So they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard.

<sup>9</sup>"What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others. <sup>10</sup>Haven't you read this passage of Scripture:

"The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone;  
<sup>11</sup>the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?"

<sup>12</sup>Then the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders looked for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken the parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd; so they left him and went away. (Mark 12:1–12)

Jesus doesn't let up on his criticism of the religious leaders, which Mark has highlighted throughout his gospel. He foreshadows their killing of Him by telling a parable, and then He quotes a passage from Psalm 111, where He identifies with the one who was rejected. The religious leaders were well aware Jesus was talking about them, so they looked for a way to arrest Him. Mark tells us they weren't able to arrest Jesus because they feared the response of the crowd, so they allowed Him to walk away, but the religious leaders were persistent. They came back to Jesus and attempted to trick Him into saying something blasphemous so they would have justification for arresting Him. I'll pick up reading at verse 13.

<sup>13</sup> Later they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words.  
<sup>14</sup> They came to him and said, “Teacher, we know that you are a man of integrity. You aren’t swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not? <sup>15</sup> Should we pay or shouldn’t we?”

But Jesus knew their hypocrisy. “Why are you trying to trap me?” he asked. “Bring me a denarius and let me look at it.” <sup>16</sup> They brought the coin, and he asked them, “Whose image is this? And whose inscription?”

“Caesar’s,” they replied.

<sup>17</sup> Then Jesus said to them, “Give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.”  
(Mark 12:13-17)

As I read Jason Porterfield’s explanation of Jesus’ response, I realized that in reading and studying this passage in the past, I failed to fully grasp what was happening in this exchange. I’m going to attempt to explain the gist of Porterfield’s argument without diving into the weeds too deeply. The Pharisees and Herodians schemed to put Jesus in the impossible position of having to choose between two options, either of which could get Him in serious trouble with certain people. Jesus had to choose between supporting Caesar and the Roman government by claiming that taxes should be paid to Caesar (this is what the Herodians believed) or claiming that truly devout Jews would never pay taxes to Caesar (this was the position of the Pharisees). Instead of allowing Himself to be trapped by his response, Jesus maneuvered brilliantly.

When Jesus asked them for a denarius, the religious leaders quickly supplied one for him. Porterfield points out that some devout Jews refused to carry the denarius, because it had a picture of Caesar on it, which they interpreted as a violation of the commandment regarding graven images. Knowing this, the Romans made special provisions for the Jews to use currency that didn’t have the faces of Roman rulers on it. (As I noted several weeks ago when we explored Palm Sunday, some of those coins had the image of palm branches on them.) When the religious leaders quickly supplied a coin to Jesus, they demonstrated they weren’t strictly holding to the law as some interpreted it. Upon receiving the coin, Jesus asked, “Whose image is this and whose inscription?” In choosing the word “image” rather than “face” or “picture,” Jesus reminded the religious leaders that all humans are made in God’s image. Jesus’ instruction to “Give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s” wasn’t a call to pay taxes to Caesar because he was the emperor and to give worship to God because it’s

rightfully His. Since all are created in God's image, Jesus was pointing out that everything belonged to God.

Then the Sadducees—another prominent Jewish religious group—came to Jesus to try and trick Him. I'll begin reading at verse 18 of Mark chapter 12.

<sup>18</sup>Then the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. <sup>19</sup>"Teacher," they said, "Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. <sup>20</sup>Now there were seven brothers. The first one married and died without leaving any children. <sup>21</sup>The second one married the widow, but he also died, leaving no child. It was the same with the third. <sup>22</sup>In fact, none of the seven left any children. Last of all, the woman died too. <sup>23</sup>At the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?"

<sup>24</sup>Jesus replied, "Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God? <sup>25</sup>When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. <sup>26</sup>Now about the dead rising—have you not read in the Book of Moses, in the account of the burning bush, how God said to him, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? <sup>27</sup>He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!" (Mark 12:18–27)

In support of the Jewish commitment to having family lineage continue, it was their practice that if a married man died before his wife could produce offspring to carry on his family line, his closest relative—beginning with his oldest brother—would conceive an heir with the deceased man's wife. In this wild scenario, the Pharisees asked Jesus what would happen if six brothers each married their deceased brother's wife to try and produce an heir and all of them died before a child was conceived. Who would be married to the woman for eternity? Interestingly, Mark points out that the question was asked by the Sadducees, a religious sect that didn't even believe in the resurrection. Their question was purely hypothetical, designed to confuse Jesus and trip Him up by forcing him to choose sides. Jesus quickly deflected the question by pointing out that their problem wasn't trying to figure out quandaries like this one; their problem was that they didn't understand the Scriptures. If they understood God's Word, they'd recognize God's power and would believe in the resurrection.

First, the Pharisees and Herodians ganged up to try and trick Jesus with a question about taxes. Then the Sadducees came with a question about the resurrection. Finally, the teachers of the law came with a question about the greatest commandment in the law. I'll read verses 28-34:

One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

<sup>29</sup> "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. <sup>30</sup> Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' <sup>31</sup> The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

<sup>32</sup> "Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. <sup>33</sup> To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."

<sup>34</sup> When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions. (Mark 12:28–34)

Every good Jew knew the 10 Commandments, which God had given his people through Moses, from the time they were a young child. While 10 seems like a short list to cover something so important, the commandments were very thorough, addressing important aspects of worshiping God and treating people well. In identifying any one commandment as most important, Jesus would open Himself up to criticism from anyone who believed one of the other nine were more important. And so Jesus didn't take the bait of choosing one and leaving out nine others. Instead, Jesus brilliantly summarized all of the commandments into two: "Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself." Who could argue with that?

Jesus succinctly summarizes the 10 Commandments and all the Jewish Law and the writings of the prophets with two commands: Love God and love others. I don't think it's a coincidence that in the last recorded statement Jesus makes to the religious leaders before his arrest, He reinforces for them (and us) the crux of the Scriptures. He distills thousands of Jewish laws, hundreds of pages of Holy Scriptures, and centuries of teaching by priests, prophets and kings into two basic commands: "Love God with everything you have and love your neighbor as yourself."

In these three exchanges with the religious leaders on Tuesday, as Mark records in chapter 12 of his gospel, Jesus consistently emphasizes core aspects of the faith. When the Pharisees and Herodians tried to trick him about the practice of paying taxes, He pointed to the priority of worshiping God. When the Sadducees focused on an obscure scenario related to a man and his six brothers who all died early, Jesus emphasized the power of God in resurrection. And when the teachers of the law tried to trick Him

by asking what the greatest commandment was, Jesus simplified all the law and the writings of the prophets into “love God with all your being and love your neighbor as yourself.”

Now I want us to jump ahead to the end of chapter 13. The conversations Jesus had on Tuesday with the religious leaders took place in the temple area. As Jesus left the temple area and the religious leaders, his disciples began to question Him about the end: when it would come and how they’d recognize it. He talked with them about the destruction of the temple, the fact that deceivers would come claiming to be the Messiah, and some of the phenomena that would surround Jesus’ return: wars and rumors of wars, famines and earthquakes. And then at the end of chapter 13 Jesus spoke these words:

“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. <sup>33</sup> Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. <sup>34</sup> It’s like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.

<sup>35</sup> “Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. <sup>36</sup> If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. <sup>37</sup> What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’” (Mark 13:32-37)

Jesus’ words in Mark chapter 13 have similarities to some of the vision the Apostle John received in the Book of Revelation, and like Revelation, it’s difficult for us to know what to do with these words. Ever since the time of Jesus, his followers have had a fascination with the end times. *When will Jesus return? What will happen to the earth? Will Jesus’ followers be raptured up to heaven or will they remain on the earth and experience tribulation? Who is the antichrist?* And those questions only scratch the surface. There are multitudes of books you can read and a myriad of conferences and seminars you can attend where people are eager to tell you exactly what will happen and when, but the books have been written and the conferences have been held for decades, and we don’t know more today than we did then—other than the fact that those who made specific predictions about when and how Jesus would return were wrong.

I struggle to understand how people can claim knowledge about the times and dates and circumstances surrounding Jesus’ return when Mark 13:32 clearly says, “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but one the Father.” We don’t know the day or

the hour or the circumstances surrounding Jesus' return for his church, but we are given clear instructions: "Be on guard! Be alert! Watch!"

Near the end of his letter to the Ephesians in chapter 5, the Apostle Paul writes these words that restate Jesus' words at the end of Mark chapter 13, and it's a message that's reiterated throughout the New Testament:

Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise,<sup>16</sup> making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 5:15-20)

How are you and I to live as we await Jesus' return for his church? Jesus told his disciples, "Be on guard! Be alert! Watch!" And the Apostle Paul unpacks that even more for us with these instructions. Be careful how you live. Make the most of every opportunity. Understand what the Lord's will is. Be filled with the Spirit. Encourage and lift up your brothers and sisters in Christ. Always give thanks and praise to God the Father in the name of Jesus.

We tend to make complex what Jesus and the authors of the New Testament make very simple. And this is where I want to return to Jesus' answer to the last tricky question the religious leaders asked Him: "What's the greatest commandment?" In other words, "Out of all that the Scriptures said and all that we've been taught, what should we most focus on?" Jesus' simple answer was, "Love God with all your being, and love your neighbor as yourself." That's what you and I are called to above all else.