

# The DAILY JESUS NEWS #256

Tuesday of Passion Week... Day of Testing and Teaching

## The Pharisees and Herodians Question Jesus About Paying Imperial Tribute to Caesar MT 22.15-22 (Parallel Texts: MK 12.13-17; LK 20.20-26)

15 Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. 16 <sup>L</sup>Keeping a close watch on him, they sent spies who pretended to be honest. They hoped to catch Jesus in something he said so they might hand him over to the power and the authority of the governor. <sup>MT</sup>They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians.

“Teacher,” they said, “we know that you are a man of integrity and that you <sup>L</sup>speak and teach what is right; <sup>MT</sup>the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren’t swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are.

17 “Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not? <sup>M</sup>Should we pay or should’t we?”

18 <sup>L</sup>But Jesus saw through their duplicity <sup>M</sup>and hypocrisy. <sup>MT</sup>Knowing their evil intent, he said,

*“You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? 19 Show me the coin used for paying the tax. <sup>M</sup>Bring me a denarius and let me look at it.”*

<sup>MT</sup>They brought him a denarius, 20 and he asked them, *“Whose image is this? And whose inscription?”*

21 “Caesar’s,” they replied.

Then he said to them, *“So I command you to give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”*

22 When they heard this they were amazed <sup>M</sup>at him. <sup>L</sup>They were unable to trap him in what he had said there in public. And astonished at his answer, they became silent. <sup>MT</sup>So they left him and went away.

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NOTE: We use superscript identification of the source gospel in "blended texts" as follows: Matthew = <sup>MT</sup>, Mark = <sup>M</sup>, Luke = <sup>L</sup>, John = <sup>J</sup>, Acts = <sup>A</sup>. This “superscript ID” is inserted at the beginning of the quoted text, identifying that Bible book until a different superscript appears. In addition, *red italics identify the words of Jesus*. Old Testament quotations are CAPITALIZED.

	CONTEXT DIGEST
Location	The Temple Courts in Jerusalem
Timeline	Early April (Month 39)
Jesus’ Life Context	Stage VIII: Passion Week
	C. Tuesday: Day of Testing and Teaching
Title	6. Jesus is Questioned About Paying the Imperial Tax to Caesar

### COMMENT:

Today's reading begins a series of three more questions for Jesus from different groups within the Jewish leadership of the Sanhedrin. One would have thought that Jesus' refusal to answer their first question that

## The DAILY JESUS NEWS #256

morning, followed by his three powerful parables would have taught them to hold their peace and leave him alone. They were too blinded by envy, jealousy, and hatred to let that happen.

It would not be long before they would regret their puny attempts to trap Jesus, and they would fall silent once again in sheer amazement at his wisdom.

The three questions were posed by their finest minds, after much preparation and careful consideration. Jesus, on the other hand was under the pressure of making each response with his very life hanging in the balance, and he had no time to prepare. The power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit that was given to him in the moments he needed them were more than enough for him. He was calm, composed, and fearless as his enemies encircled him as hungry vultures.

The common desire to catch Jesus in a mis-spoken word that could be used as a pretext to kill him brought together avowed religious and spiritual enemies as co-conspirators against Jesus. This first question brought the Pharisees and Herodians together like bosom buddies. This was like a deadly virus and an antibiotic working together to fight disease. The two groups were mutually incompatible. Their cooperation shows us how much they shared a common hatred of Jesus.

The question was brilliant. If Jesus answered in support of paying the imperial tribute to Caesar—a personal payment intended to acknowledge that Caesar was LORD of the world—the Pharisees and Herodians could accuse him of spiritual adultery against God, and treason against their own people. On the other hand, if he spoke against the imperial tribute, they could accuse him of inciting rebellion against Caesar and Jesus would be crucified by the Romans for treason. It appeared Jesus was doomed either way he answered.

Jesus' wise reply sparkles with the power and freedom of the truth. It borders on an omniscient answer. For this writer, it is one of the most amazing things Jesus ever said. Yet it was effortless for the LORD of Glory to speak like this. It was his signature, for he is the Living Word of God.

Jesus' answer made the point that the image of God is stamped on every person—even Caesar! Out of all the coins in the world, only a small percentage had Caesar's image stamped on them. Everybody has been created in the image of God. Therefore, every person, including Caesar, has a spiritual and moral responsibility before God, to love and serve him with all their soul, heart, mind and strength.

In addition, it was the authority of God that had established the infinitely lesser authority of Caesar, who had power only because God had given it to him. During his trial before Pilate on Friday, Jesus would say: "You would have no authority over me unless it were given to you from above." (JN 19.11A)

Caesar could stamp his image on a coin because God made it so. To give Caesar the tribute he demanded was in fact to acknowledge that God was sovereign over Caesar in giving him that authority.

Jesus' timeless answer, "give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's," was literally the perfect answer to an impossible question. Jesus affirmed the authority of God, and the responsibility of people created in God's image to honor HIS authority by honoring the human institutions and authorities that God has established. It was a brilliant, simple, elegant solution to an intractable problem.

### APPLICATION:

Jesus had said to the Twelve a year earlier, before sending them out to proclaim the gospel in his name on his third tour of Galilee:

*16 "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. 17 Be on your guard; you will be handed over to the local councils and be flogged in the synagogues. 18 On my account you*

## The DAILY JESUS NEWS #256

*will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. 19 But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, 20 for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you." (MT 10.16-20, NIV)*

Jesus demonstrated this truth, and attitude when he answered the questions of his enemies on Tuesday of Passion Week. We can be sure that he will also do what he promised us in these verses, too.

*How do you need to rely on Jesus for the wisdom and guidance of the Holy Spirit in your witnessing?*

*How will you do that in new ways as you follow the example of Jesus in today's reading?*