

Main Idea: In Mark 12:13-27 we meet the kind of people who have the most trouble with Jesus, *religious* people, two kinds of religious people, as we’ll see, the religious right and left. And these religious people love to use two topics to silence Jesus, politics and religion. By looking at Jesus’ response, we’ll learn not only about these subjects, but more importantly about the supreme worth of Jesus.

I. Jesus faces the religious right (13-17).

A. The Pharisees and Herodians asked a question about taxes (13-15a).

1. Some people sell out to the government.
2. Other people oppose the government.

B. Jesus turned the question into a teachable moment (15b-17).

1. We should give the government what belongs to the government.
2. We should give God what belongs to God.

II. Jesus faces the religious left (18-27).

A. The Sadducees asked a question about the doctrine of the resurrection (18-23).

1. Some people ask questions for truth’s sake.
2. Other people ask questions simply to avoid the truth.

B. Jesus exposed their wrong thinking (24-27).

1. There is a resurrection coming.
2. What will matter in the life to come isn’t marriage, but God Himself.
3. If the reason I want to go to heaven isn’t Christ, I may not be going.

Take Inventory: How am I responding to Jesus?

1. It is not enough to be amazed by Jesus.
2. It is essential to submit your life to Him.

Today we have the privilege of coming together to the Lord’s table, and to prepare ourselves we turn in our Bibles to Mark 12. We’re continuing our Sunday morning series, “*The Servant in Action*.” The Servant, of course, is Jesus, and in today’s text, we’re going to meet the kind of people who have the most trouble with Jesus.

*Religious* people. Two kinds of religious people, as we’ll see. The religious right. And the religious left. And these people (both the right and the left) love to use two topics to silence Jesus. Politics. And religion. By looking at Jesus’ response, we’ll learn not only about these subjects, but more importantly about the supreme worth of Jesus.

*Scripture Reading: Mark 12:12-27*

Relationship leads to religion. Chew on that statement for a moment.

It begins with a *relationship*. We enter the world as sinners cut off from God, but through faith in the person and work of Christ, we enter into a personal relationship with God. We enter His family.

That relationship, if it’s truly real, shows up in a new kind of life. We do things differently. We have new values, priorities, and habits. It’s sometimes said of such a person that he now “has religion.” Relationship leads to *religion*.

Answer this. Can a person have religion without a relationship? Indeed, many do. It’s possible to imitate the lifestyle of the person who truly has a relationship with God. You simply do the religious things he does—like going to church, praying before meals, giving a tithe, having a Bible on one’s coffee table, and so on—and assume you are okay, simply because you’ve “got religion.”

The 19th-century Danish theologian Soren Kierkegaard identified two kinds of religion: Religion A and Religion B. The first is “faith” in name only (2 Tim. 3:5). It’s the practice of attending church without genuine faith in the living Lord.

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<sup>\*\*</sup>Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

<sup>1</sup> For a previous look at this passage, see the Mark series in 2004.

Religion B, on the other hand, is a life-transforming, destiny-changing experience. It's a definite commitment to the crucified and risen Savior, which establishes an ongoing personal relationship between a forgiven sinner and a gracious God.

This difference explains why for many years British author C.S. Lewis had such great difficulty in becoming a Christian. Religion A had blinded him to Religion B. According to his brother Warren, his conversion was "no sudden plunge into a new life, but rather a slow, steady convalescence from a deep-seated spiritual illness - an illness that had its origins in our childhood, in the dry husks of religion offered by the semi-political churchgoing of Ulster, and the similar dull emptiness of compulsory church during our school days."<sup>2</sup>

Jesus had a showdown with "Religion A" kind of people in Mark 12. Quite frankly, "Religion A" folks don't get along well with Jesus. Not today, nor then.

Let's set the context. In Mark 12-13 we see two trials taking place. In the first, religion puts Jesus on trial. That's verses 12 to 34. In the second, Jesus puts religion on trial, in 12:35 through chapter 13. Our focus today is on the first. Religion puts Jesus on trial. It comes first from what we might call "the religious right", the Pharisees and Herodians. Then from "the religious left", the Sadducees. By looking at Jesus' response, we learn not only about those subjects, but more importantly about the supremacy of Christ and what it means to be a true Christian.

#### I. Jesus faces the religious right (13-17).

The showdown took place during Passion Week. It began on Palm Sunday, when Jesus entered Jerusalem to the cheers of the Jewish crowd. This infuriated the religious establishment. Then on Monday, Jesus went to the temple and cleaned house, overturning tables and driving out money-changers. This, too, incensed the religious elite, and on Tuesday, they told Him so.

That was last week's message. The chief priests, the scribes, and the elders (i.e. the Sanhedrin) came to Him with a question in Mark 11:28, "By what authority are you doing these things?" The Lord silenced them with question of His own (11:29-33), followed by a parable that exposed their hypocrisy (12:1-11). They wanted to arrest Him, but refrained out of fear of what the crowd would do (12:12). They left, but certainly didn't give up.

Notice verse 13 (NIV), "Later [either later on Tuesday, or Wessel suggests the following occurred the next day, on Wednesday] they [the "they" refers to the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders, the ones who just challenged Jesus but failed] sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words."

Note the tag team effort the religious Jews are using to defeat Jesus. The priests, scribes, and elders failed in round one, so they sent some others in round two. It's not surprising that the Pharisees and Herodians are trying to trap Jesus. They've been plotting together to kill Him since Mark 3:6. What is surprising is that these two groups are *together*.

The *Pharisees* were "the separated ones"<sup>3</sup>. From whom did they separate themselves? From the priests? Yes, they interpreted the Law differently. From the Gentiles? Absolutely. In fact, from anyone who compromised with the world system. The Pharisees hated and resisted Rome.

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<sup>2</sup> *Our Daily Bread*, March 15, 1994.

<sup>3</sup> The Pharisees are mentioned 98 times in the New Testament.

But the *Herodians* did not. They were essentially a political action group. They supported and worked for Rome. They were followers of Herod, the half-Jew who sold his soul to Rome to gain control over Israel.

So the Pharisees were the religious separatists, and the Herodians were the religious compromisers. Yet their mutual hatred of Jesus brought them together. Hatred can do that, you know. Hatred can unite people for a time.

Kent Hughes explains, “The Pharisees hated him because he was disrupting their *religious* agenda, the Herodians because he threatened their *political* arrangement. They both wanted him dead.”<sup>4</sup>

Note the approach they took. Verses 14 says, “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?’”

**A. The Pharisees and Herodians asked a question about taxes (13-15a).** Should we pay taxes to Caesar, or not?

A man on vacation was strolling along outside his hotel in Acapulco, enjoying the sunny Mexican weather. Suddenly, he was attracted by the screams of a woman kneeling in front of a child.

The man knew enough Spanish to determine that the child had swallowed a coin. Seizing the child by the heels, the man held him up, gave him a few shakes, and an American quarter dropped to the sidewalk.

"Oh, thank you sir!" cried the woman. "You seemed to know just how to get it out of him. Are you a doctor?"

"No, ma'am," replied the man. "I'm with the United States Internal Revenue Service."<sup>5</sup>

If there's any subject that sure to create controversy in any country, it's taxes. No one likes taxes. No one likes the person who collects the taxes. No one likes the person who speaks well of the person who requires taxes. Jesus' critics know this reality and plan to use it against Jesus.

Luke 20:20 says the questioners were “spies who pretended to be righteous.” They began with flattery. “Teacher, we know you are a man of integrity. You aren’t swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth (NIV).”

Are these men intending to compliment Jesus? No, not sincerely anyway. Yet no higher compliment can be said of a teacher than, as the ESV puts it, “You truly teach the way of God.” Some teachers simply tell people what they *want* to hear, and they get quite a following. But not Jesus. He always spoke the truth.

Their question came in two parts. Part one, is it *right* to pay taxes? Part two, *should* we pay taxes? This was a huge matter for first century Jews. As Barclay explains, the Jews had to pay three kinds of taxes. There was a *ground tax*. This consisted in one-tenth of all the grain and one-fifth of the wine and fruit produced. There was an *income tax* which amounted to one-percent of a man's income. Then there was a *poll tax* which was levied on all men from age 14 to 65 and on all women from 12 to 65. This poll tax was one denarius (the usual pay for a day's work).

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<sup>4</sup> Kent Hughes, p. 101.

<sup>5</sup> *Bits & Pieces*, March 31, 1994, p. 5.

The typical Jew despised paying taxes to Rome. It wasn't just the money. It was the principle of it all, for they hated the Roman occupation of their land, and many felt to pay taxes to Rome was to acknowledge their right to rule.

We can see the dilemma Jesus faced. If He answered the tax questions *yes*, He would alienate Himself from the Jews. If He answered *no*, He would be in serious trouble with the Romans.

There are a couple of common attitudes towards government represented here, and they're alive and well today as well as then.

1. *Some people sell out to the government.* Like the Herodians did.
2. *Other people oppose the government.* Like the Pharisees did.

Now let me restate something. The reason the Herodians and Pharisees are here working together is because the real issue isn't taxes. The real issue is their mutual desire to silence Jesus. They may hate each other but they hate Jesus more.

Why? Why would anyone want to get rid of Jesus, after all the good He had done for hurting people. And the short answer is, because Jesus told them they needed to repent and believe in Him. Just like He does you and me. And that's something a "good person," especially a good *religious* person, refuses to do. Good people see themselves as good, not as sinners. And religious people see themselves as proving their goodness by their religious actions.

So how did the Master handle the trick question? Masterfully.

**B. Jesus turned the question into a teachable moment (15b-17).** Verse 15 begins, "But knowing their hypocrisy, He said to them..." A hypocrite is a pretender. It's the person who portrays himself to be what in reality he is not. It's acting like you are interested when you aren't really. It's singing songs in church about someone you can't see and don't know in order to impress those you can see and do know. Or worse, to impress yourself with the false notion that you're okay with this person you can't see and don't truly know.

Jesus knew their hypocrisy, and ours if it's present. He confronts it in 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.'"

Notice the Master Teacher at work. When Jesus taught, He established involvement, used visual aids, addressed heart issues, and wasn't afraid to offend or even anger His students if it was in their best interest. Here He exposes their true intent for all to see.

*Why are you trying to trap me?* I know, and you know, that you're not here to learn about taxes. You're trying to avoid the truth that *you need Me*.

Then, having exposed their motive, Jesus addressed their question. "Bring me a denarius," He said. It's significant, my friend, that Jesus asks for a coin. This indicates He has no coin of His own. We see the humility of our Savior, don't we? "Though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, says 2 Corinthians 8:9."

Verse 16 says, "And they brought one. And he said to them, 'Whose likeness and inscription is this?' They said to him, 'Caesar's.'"

The denarius was a small silver coin weighing about 3.8 grams. It was worth a day's wage for a common worker. One side bore the image of Tiberius, the current Roman emperor (all emperors were called Caesar). The inscription read, "Of Tiberius Caesar, the divine Augustus, son of Augustus." And on the opposite side was the title, "pontifex maximus," "the high priest of the Roman nation."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Barclay, p. 286.

This is the coin Jesus requested, and which they brought to Him. He knew what was on that coin, and so did they.

Then came the punchline in verse 17. “Jesus said to them, ‘Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.’<sup>7</sup> And they marveled at him.”

What an amazing statement! With those few words, Jesus not only diffused the volatile situation but teaches us two important lessons regarding politics.

1. *We should give the government what belongs to the government.* “Render it to Caesar. Give him what is his.” And what is Caesar’s? What belongs to the person who rules the country or realm in which we live? What should we render to this person?

This was a huge issue for first century believers, as for us. It’s not surprising that see the New Testament epistles unpacking what it means to render to Caesar. What should we give Caesar?

For starters, *submission*, according to Romans 13:1. “Everyone must submit to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.”<sup>8</sup>

We are to submit, to place ourselves under, Caesar. What else are we to render to Caesar? 1 Peter 2:17 says we are to give Him *honor*. “Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.”

What’s more, 1 Timothy 2:1-3 commands us to *pray* for our rulers. “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, <sup>2</sup> for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. <sup>3</sup> This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior.”

It’s not surprising that when Paul wrote a letter to a church located in the very city where Ceasar lived, Rome itself, that he addressed this question in great detail. He says in Romans 13:7, “Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.” This is what we are to render to Caesar, taxes, revenue, respect, honor.

So there’s what Jesus said. Render to Caesar what is Caesar’s. And there’s what Jesus’ followers understood Him to say, and what they put into practice.

Brothers and sisters, of all people, we, the followers of Christ, ought to be the best citizens in whatever country we reside. We respect our leaders. We submit to them. We pray for them. And we do so, not blindly, but knowing they too need what everyone needs, to know Jesus as Savior. So, we’re not surprised when Ceasar, at times, oversteps his God-given purposes. He is a sinner, and we’re not surprised when sinners sin. So when that happens, as it did from time to time for Christ-followers in the book of Acts, we say, as did Peter in Acts 5:29, “We must obey God rather than men.”

So yes, if our government requires us to violate God’s law, we must respectfully disobey. But in all else, we are to give Caesar what is Caesar’s.

Here’s the tension with which we live. Caesar is a sinner, so it’s always easy to criticize Caesar. But he’s also “God’s minister”, indeed, a gift to us from God. In New Testament times, Caesar gave people a road system, and a common language, and peace,

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<sup>7</sup> In the NIV, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.”

<sup>8</sup> Titus 3:1–2 “Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, <sup>2</sup> to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people.”

and the churches used these benefits in order to spread the gospel to the nations. And Caesar also threw them in prison at times, and executed them. This is the tension.

We still feel it. Think of the blessings we experience because of government.<sup>9</sup> We enjoy services such as national defense, and fire and police protection. We have programs for the poor and disabled. We benefit from educational opportunities. We have representatives who make decisions in our behalf in conjunction with representatives from other cities and states. We have all this because, by God's mercy, Caesar exists.<sup>10</sup>

And at times, because Caesar exists and is a sinner, he tells us *not* to do things God commands us to do. And, he insists it's okay to do things that God tells us not to do. This is the world in which we live.

How shall we then live? Jesus tells us. He gives us a simple, memorable, bottom line approach. We should give our government what belongs to our government. And...

2. *We should give God what belongs to God.* What belongs to God? For starters, our ultimate respect and fear (1 Pet. 2:17). But also, our love (Deut. 6:5). Our allegiance (Matt. 6:33). Our obedience to His commands (John 15:10). Our bodies for service (Rom. 12:1-2). Our worship (Heb. 13:15-16). Our treasure, time, and talents (1 Pet. 4:10-11; Luke 12:35-48). What belongs to God? Ultimately, everything.

So, yes, the coin has Caesar's image on it, therefore give it back to him. But give God that which bears His image. That's you and me, beloved. He created us in His image (Gen. 1:27), so we are to give ourselves to Him.

What was the effect of Jesus' object lesson? Mark tells us in verse 17, "And they marveled at him." The NIV says they were "amazed at him." Amazed, yes, but not willing to change, and still intending to kill Him.

This is the tragic reality. There will be people in hell who were amazed by Jesus, people who listened to His Word, who were impressed by what He had to say, who were even impressed by *Him*. Yet to be saved it's not enough to be amazed by Jesus. He calls us to repent and *believe* in Him, and those who do receive eternal life.

So ends the first controversy, the one with the religious right.

## II. Jesus faces the religious left (18-27).

Notice verse 18, "And Sadducees came to him, who say that there is no resurrection. And they asked him a question..."

**A. The Sadducees asked a question about the doctrine of the resurrection (18-23).** If the Pharisees were on the right side of the aisle, the Sadducees were on the left. The Sadducees lived in Jerusalem and controlled the temple. They were a small but powerful party of Jews. The high priest and the temple authorities belonged to the Sadducees (Acts 5:17).

The Sadducees accepted only the Law and rejected not only Jewish oral tradition (which the Pharisees endorsed) but also the Prophets and the Writings. They did not believe in the resurrection, nor in spirits, nor angels (Acts 23:8). Which helps explain why they were *sad, you see?*

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<sup>9</sup> R. Alan Cole concludes, "If we accept the amenities of the state, in law and order, expressed in a guaranteed coinage as in other things, then we have no right to seek to escape the burdens imposed by the state." R. Alan Cole, pp. 262-3.

<sup>10</sup> J. D. Johnson similarly states, "Those who accept the privileges of the State must discharge the just demands of the State." J. D. Johnson, p. 449.

It's not surprising to see the subject with which they tried to trip Jesus, in verses 19–23, “Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies and leaves a wife, but leaves no child, the man must take the widow and raise up offspring for his brother.<sup>20</sup> There were seven brothers; the first took a wife, and when he died left no offspring.<sup>21</sup> And the second took her, and died, leaving no offspring. And the third likewise.<sup>22</sup> And the seven left no offspring. Last of all the woman also died.<sup>23</sup> In the resurrection, when they rise again, whose wife will she be? For the seven had her as wife.”

Now there is a hypothetical situation! What are the odds of one woman outliving seven brothers? This is obviously a loaded question. They begin with Moses. That's fine, for the Sadducees affirm the teachings of Moses. But after walking through this string of seven brothers dying, they end up asking whose wife this woman will be in the resurrection. But wait. They don't believe in the resurrection. Why are they asking this question?

Here's why. To put it simply, some people ask questions *for truth's sake*. Other people ask questions simply to *avoid the truth*.

As a pastor, I've heard all kinds of questions over the years, as I've interacted with people in the community. *What do you think about the NIV? Does a woman need to wear a dress at church? Can a man wear a hat? Do you think we're living in the end times? What do you think about Bill Clinton (or Donald Trump)? Could he be the anti-Christ?*

I've learned that sometimes people ask questions because they really want to know the truth. But quite often, it's simply to *avoid the truth*. They use the Bible like a sparring partner.

This is what the Sadducees are doing. They ask a complex, multi-layered question, to stir up the dust, so to speak. Why? Because they don't want to face the truth, about themselves, about their self-deception, and about the supreme worth of the One whom they are seeking to discredit.

So how did Jesus respond to the question? He didn't mince words. He says in verse 24, “Is this not the reason *you are wrong*, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God?” Then He says it again in verse 27, “You are quite wrong.”

You are wrong! Jesus always speaks the truth. But He always speaks the truth *in love*. Notice His incredible patience and grace. He takes time to answer their question, because He loves sinners, including religious sinners.

**B. Jesus exposed their wrong thinking (24-27).** Listen to His words in verses 24–27, “For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.<sup>26</sup> And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God spoke to him, saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? <sup>27</sup> He is not God of the dead, but of the living. You are quite wrong.”

Jesus reveals their wrong thinking and He uses the very part of the Bible the Sadducees said they believed in, the Book of Moses, the Torah! Here's your problem, He tells them. You don't know the Scriptures, nor the power of God. So I'll use the Book you think you know to show you what you don't know. Three realities.

1. *There is a resurrection coming.* Death isn't the end. Everyone will live forever somewhere. To prove the point, Jesus uses the story of the burning bush.

He reminds them of their hero, Moses. Moses lived over five hundred years *after* Abraham. But He reminds them that when God spoke to Moses at the burning bush, He said, “I AM the God of Abraham.” Not *I was*, but *I am*. God's words indicate that Abraham, though no longer on earth, was still living hundreds of years after He died. So was Isaac. So was Jacob.

I *am* their God, said God to Moses. It wouldn't make sense for God to say He was the God of people who no longer existed, would it? No. There is a resurrection coming. Everyone will live forever somewhere.

This is the message of the Bible, from cover to cover. Eternal life is eternal. Those who repent and put their faith in the Messiah and in His cross work, will receive a glorified body fit for unending life in the new heaven and earth. Those who don't will receive a body fit for eternal torment in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14-15).

2. *What will matter in the life to come isn't marriage, but God Himself.* Listen again to Jesus in verse 25 (NIV), "When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven."

Marriage won't exist in the post resurrection world. Why not? For a very simple reason. There will be no death there, and no more need for procreation, as there is in this life. There will be a marriage there, however, just one, with one groom and one bride. Christ will be the groom. We who have accepted His sacrificial offer of love in this life will be His bride.

Jesus says we will be like the angels. He didn't say we would become angels, for angels are a different type of created being from humans. We will be *like* them. What will matter to us then will be what matters to the angels now, pleasing, serving, worshipping, honoring, and enjoying God alone.

This doesn't mean we won't know each other in heaven. Again, even hundreds of years after his death, Abraham was still Abraham, Isaac was still Isaac, and Jacob was still Jacob. Though there will be great differences between our present bodies and our glorified bodies, there will be similarities, too.

George MacDonald offers these reflections, "The new body must be like the old. Not only that, it must be the same body...with all that was distinctive of each from his fellows more visible than ever before. The accidental, the nonessential, the unrevealing, the incomplete will have vanished. That which made the body what it was in the eyes of those who loved us will be tenfold there. Will not this be the resurrection of the body?"<sup>11</sup>

You say, "Well, if marriage won't exist in heaven, will we know our spouses and other loved ones?" Indeed, we certainly will.

J. D. Jones offers a helpful explanation, "Husband and wife shall be as dear to one another in the world to come as they are down here. Only the relationship between them shall be sublimed of every suggestion of the earthly; it shall not be 'marriage' any more. It will be love, without a touch of earth about it—love, holy, sacred, perfect. 'They shall not marry,' no, but we shall know each other and love each other, and contribute to each other's gladness there as here."<sup>12</sup>

Then Jones offers this hope-giving thought, "We shall miss nothing in heaven that is really worth having."<sup>13</sup> And this, "We do not know everything about the world to come. But we know this: we lose nothing that is worth keeping."<sup>14</sup>

Kent Hughes offers this perspective, "To be sure, there will be no marriage in Heaven and no concern about past husbands or wives, but that does not suggest in the slightest a reduction in love. We will be ourselves at our ultimate best, and we will be more lovable and more capable of loving than ever before."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Taken from Kent Hughes, p. 111.

<sup>12</sup> J. D. Jones, p. 456.

<sup>13</sup> J. D. Jones, p. 457.

<sup>14</sup> J. D. Jones, p. 458.

<sup>15</sup> Kent Hughes, p. 112.



Beloved, if you know Christ, the best is yet to come! However, if you don't know Christ, you need to repent and ask Him to save you today! The resurrection is coming!

Kent Hughes writes about a friend named Susan who contracted rheumatoid arthritis at the age of two, lived a painful life in a twisted body, and died at the age of 35, immobilized in bed, not even able to turn over. He shares this:

“When I see Susan again, or you see a friend who has gone ahead of you into Heaven, it will be the same body in which they died. We will recognize them at once. Everything that was theirs will be perfected. Their bodies will be glorious, grown to their eternal potential. Their personalities will be at their fullest—their wit, their charm, their tenacity, their love. They will be noble, beautiful, regal—they will be like Jesus!”<sup>16</sup>

Now, a vital word of caution. For many people, heaven is special for deficient reasons. Ask them why they're looking forward to heaven and you'll hear things like, “No more suffering. Peace and joy. Seeing loved ones.” And so on.

There's something deficient about those reasons. There's no mention of Christ.

3. *If the reason I want to go to heaven isn't Christ, I may not be going.* Paul said, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain (Phil 1:21; see also Phil. 3:7-11).”

A true Christian knows the only reason he will be in heaven is because of Christ. It's because Christ suffered and died in his place, because Christ conquered the grave and gave him the free and undeserved gift of eternal life. That's what the true Christian wants most out of heaven, and everything else pales in comparison (even seeing loved ones). He wants to see his Savior, and be with Him, and praise and worship Him forever.

In his book, *God Is The Gospel*, John Piper puts it this way, “Christ did not die to forgive sinners who go on treasuring anything above seeing and savoring God. And people who would be happy in heaven if Christ were not there, will not be there. The gospel is not a way to get people to heaven; it is a way to get people to God. It's a way of overcoming every obstacle to everlasting joy in God. If we don't want God above all things, we have not been converted by the gospel.”<sup>17</sup>

And this reality is something that religious people need to consider carefully, on the right and on the left. So let's all take inventory.

#### Take Inventory: How am I responding to Jesus?

1. *It is not enough to be amazed by Jesus.* As we've just seen, the religious leaders in Jesus' day were amazed by Him, but that's as far as it went. Maybe you've been amazed by Him, by His Word, by the wonders of His goodness. But something's missing, my friend, something vital.

2. *It is essential to submit my life to Him.* “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ [He is the Lord, there's none greater] and you will be saved (Rom. 10:9).”

**Closing Song:** #204 “*Rock of Ages*” (all four verses)

#### **Communion**

**Benediction of the month:** Revelation 11:15b (NIV84) “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever.”

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<sup>16</sup> Kent Hughes, p. 112.

<sup>17</sup> John Piper, *God Is The Gospel*, p. 47.