

LAYING TRAP FOR JESUS

Do not try to test God; It will only backfire

Is 45:1.4-6

Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut

For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me.

I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me.

I am the Lord, and there is none else.



Have you ever met someone who seems to be sweet as honey and yet his aim was to destroy you? Have you ever heard about two enemies coming together in a coalition in order to destroy a common enemy?

“His speech was smooth as butter, yet war was in his heart; his words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords” (Ps 55:21). In the Gospel, we meet such people.

The Pharisees and Herodians

The Pharisees and the Herodians were two parties which could not see each other. The first was that of the religionists and the second one of the politicians. One wanted to see all Jewish people standing for God only, the other wanted all Jews to support the royal claims of Herod's family. They would cut each other's throats but today they come together to plot against Jesus. It is not the first time, though. The Gospel of Mark tells us that when Jesus cured a

I Thess 1:1-5b

Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers;

Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father; Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.



22:19), He requested. He did not have one, but they had. Their hypocrisy was exposed. Pretending to be pious Jews, they were caught having a coin of Caesar, who claimed to be “divine and the son of god”.

Caesar and God

We were often told that this fragment of the Gospel supports payment of taxes to our respective governments and the separation of church and state. That is not the point of the story. Jesus’ life was at stake there. Jesus’ skilful way of escaping the trap shows his wit and

man with a withered hand on the Sabbath, “the Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him” (Mk 3:6). Today, they come again, with speech smooth as butter, yet with war in their hearts. “Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone's opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances” (Matt 22:16).

Denarius

There were two types of currency in Jesus’ time. One was the temple currency and another the Roman currency. The Roman currency had an image of the reigning Emperor on it and the inscription that he was “divine and the son of god”. No pious Jew would carry such a coin in his pocket. No pious Jew would allow himself to be found with such a coin inside the Holy Temple. Having such a coin would have betrayed one as a hypocrite and a collaborator.

The purpose of the question, “is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?” (Matt 22:17) was not to know Jesus’ opinion on that matter but to discredit Him in front of the crowds who adored Him. If he answered, “yes”, he would lose them, but if he answered, “no”, he could be reported to the Roman authority. “Head” tax levied on all adult Jewish men was a sign of reigning over the Jewish land. It was a sign of control and oppression. To all pious Jews, it symbolised the lack of sovereignty and freedom.

Jesus did not answer the question. They laid a trap for Him, He did the same. “Show me the coin for tax” (Matt

Matt 22:15-22

Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk. And they sent out unto him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men. Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not? But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites? Shew me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's. When they had heard these words, they marvelled, and left him, and went their way.

courage. "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matt 22:21).

If you pause for a while and think about Jesus' answer you will be surprised by its hidden meaning. What does belong to caesar? Nothing. Everything belongs to God, including caesar who claims to be divine. "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein" (Ps 24:1). Isaiah tells Cyrus, the Persian king who did not know the Israel's God:

"I am the Lord, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you (Cyrus), though you do not know me, that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the Lord, and there is no other" (Is 45:5-6).

God makes leaders for service. They are called to serve God's people by implementing justice and righteousness. If a leader elevates himself to a divine status forgetting that he is a mortal being and wants to be worshiped, give him back the "coin" he made for himself and you go, and serve God.

Conclusion

It is laughable to try to ensnare God. He will see through your tricky device and you will get caught in your own scheme. Remember the wise saying of the Psalmist: "To the faithful you show yourself faithful, to the blameless you show yourself blameless, to the pure you show yourself pure, but to the devious you show yourself shrewd" (Ps 18:25-26).

Do not try to outmanoeuvre God. You will only get embarrassed. I am sure you do not want to be called a hypocrite. Never forget that everything belongs to God, you included. Your life is His gift. Live it for His glory. That is the main and only mission of your life.

May God bless all who remember us in prayer and support our ministry.

New Life Asia Team