

THE LESSON FOR SUNDAY

Jesus Defines to Enemies the Christian Standard of Civilization.

ANTAGONISTS SEEK TO ENSNARE HIM

Pharisees, Sadducees and Herodians Send Representatives to Embarrass Him—Once Again He Lays Down the Law for All Mankind by Which Salvation May Be Obtained.

My Friends: The lesson that we shall proceed to study for the coming Sunday follows very closely upon the lesson of two weeks ago. In fact, it occurred shortly after, to be exact, on Tuesday, before the death of Jesus on the following Friday. Jesus, you recall, in our lesson of two weeks ago had overturned the tables of the money-changers and had run out of his Father's house those people who made a profitable thing out of selling doves at a high price to those who had come therein to make sacrifice.

Those people were exceedingly mad with Jesus because of his action, and they immediately got in touch with the Pharisees, the Herodians and the Sadducees for the purpose of plotting how to destroy him. Let us read the Scripture lesson for Sunday, as found in the Gospels according to Matthew, 22:15-22, 34-40, and then we will proceed with further discussion of the lesson:

The Scripture Lesson.

15. Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk.

16. 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.

17. Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not?

18. But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?

19. Show me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny.

20. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription?

21. They said 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.

22. When they had heard these words, they marvelled, and left him, and went their way.

34. But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together.

35. Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying,

36. Master, which is the greatest commandment in the law?

37. Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

38. This is the first and great commandment.

39. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

40. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

Three Great Parties.

At the time that Jesus lived as a man on earth, my friends, there were three great parties among the Jews. These parties were the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Herodians. The Pharisees were the most orthodox of the Jews, holding to the strictest religious ceremonies and traditions. They always held the fiercest opposition to the rule of Rome and they were very popular because of their stern nationalism.

The Sadducees were distinguished from the Pharisees largely by reason of the fact that they were far less conservative in theology and welcomed foreign thought. Practically all of the chief priests were Sadducees, while most of the scribes were Pharisees.

According to Hastings' Bible Dictionary, "The Herodians were apparently a political party, and desired the restoration of the national kingdom under one or other of the sons of Herod. Their alliance with the Pharisees in opposition to our Lord was not due to religious or political sympathy, but to the recognition by both parties that Jesus was their greatest common foe."

The Reason for Hatred.

The reason for all the hatred and envy and malice displayed by the Jews of all three parties, my friends, toward Jesus, is explained in that last sentence in the quotation from Hastings. The three parties were rotten to the core. All was ceremony and outward religious form with no real religion. Civic and religious affairs throughout Palestine and the world when Jesus came were in a chaotic condition.

Jesus came preaching his doctrine of peace on earth and good will toward men. He came healing as well as teaching. His friends and associates were among the "common herd," so to speak. As he went over the land his popularity and power increased. His name was on every tongue. The multitudes everywhere talked of the Great Teacher. His was a logic and teaching that was not to be confounded. There was no comeback. Jealousy and envy filled the hearts of the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Herodians. They saw their power waning. They saw their future hopes and ambitions blighted. This Prophet—this great teacher bid fair to become not only the most powerful man in all Palestine, but in all the world. They had a right to be afraid, looking at it from their point of view.

They had little in common—these three parties. They were constantly quarreling and bickering—one constantly seeking supremacy and mastery above the others. But they were up against a new situation. Here was a man greater and more powerful than all. Going on the old principle or belief that "self preservation is the first law of man," they began to realize the need of getting their heads together and to devise ways and means of eliminating this powerful Factor, looming up on the horizon.

Oh, there were some smooth and crafty politicians among those Pharisees and Sadducees and Herodians. They knew thoroughly the game. Present day politicians have nothing on them. Then occurred the incident in the temple when Jesus caused a house cleaning. They were quick to sympathize with those who had been driven out. Poison words were placed in the ears of the money changers and the tradesmen who had been despoiled.

They Sought to Entrap Him.

Then their theologians were sent to interview and question Jesus as we note in the lesson for Sunday. They laid their plans to frame a charge of treason against him in the hope that he would incur the displeasure of the Roman government and be crucified by that government.

They asked him about taxes—to whom those taxes should be paid. It was a crafty question. What wiser answer could have been given than his answer—"Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's."

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