

**THE REAL JESUS**  
**A Series on the Book of Mark**  
**“Sword vs. Cross”**  
**Mark 12:13-17**  
**New City Church of LA**  
**Speaker: Kevin Haah**

**I. Introduction**

Politics is always controversial. Add religion to the mix. And you really get a hot potato.

What was the politics of Jesus? I’ve heard of a group of white pastor arguing that Jesus would have been a Republican and if you are follower of Jesus, you have to vote Republican. In fact, right before the last election, they said that to their congregations and created controversy about their tax exempt status. And then, I also heard another pastor, this time an African American, and he was arguing that Jesus would have been a Democrat. He couldn’t see any other way. Would Jesus have been a Republican or a Democrat? What was the politics of Jesus?

What is the role of the church in politics? Some people say that the church needs to fight for laws supporting Christian values. Of course, there are varying definitions of Christian values. Some focus on sexual ethnics and abortion. Other focus on poverty and social injustice. In fact, many people invoke the name of Jesus in their politics. Others say that religion is a private matter—that it’s about a relationship with God and the church should not engage in the public square. We should keep religion out of the public square. Should we?

Let’s see what Jesus said about the relationship between the Kingdom of God (church) and the Kingdom of the world (government).

Read Mark 12:13-17

The passage tells us: (1) on the one hand, not to fuse the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world; and (2) but on the other hand, to bring the Kingdom of God to the Kingdom of this world.

**II. First, this Passage Tells Us Not to Fuse the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of this World—Not to Have Either the Kingdom of God take over the**

**Kingdom of this World or Have the Kingdom of this World take over the Kingdom of God.**

When Jesus said, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s,” the first thing Jesus is saying is that we are not to fuse the Kingdom of this world (Caesar’s) and the Kingdom of God. Most people assumed that when the Kingdom of God comes, the Messiah will free them from the Roman occupation. They assumed that the Kingdom of God will replace the Kingdom of this world immediately. They assume that it will be fused.

So, the assumption was that the Kingdom of God will overpower the Kingdom of this world.

But, Jesus said, no. He said in John 18:36 when he was conversing with Pilate: *Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.”* The kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world are different, and Jesus did not focus on overthrowing the kingdom of this world; as corrupt as it was, he did not focus on changing and reforming the kingdom of this world. He said: give to Caesar what is Caesar’s.

There is a fundamental difference between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of this world.

<b>Kingdom of the World</b>	<b>Kingdom of God</b>
Sword	Cross
Power-Over -law and order -justice -external behavior control	Power-Under -sacrificial service -agape love -grace
Changed by external power: -threat/judgment/shame/social pressure	Transformed by internal transformation: -Influential but non-coercive power sacrificial love as the Holy Spirit works in people’s heart
Trust in the power of the sword	Trust in the power of the cross
Purpose is to control behavior	Purpose is to transform life from the heart

I am not saying that the Kingdom of this world is bad. We need the Kingdom of this world. We need our police, courts, laws, and military. They serve a vital function. However, we must make that distinction that Jesus came to establish the Kingdom of God, and not a Kingdom of this world.

But, what happens when the church, the visible presence of the Kingdom of God on earth, tries to take over the Kingdom of this world or to fuse the kingdom of this world with the kingdom of God? What happens when the church gains power and takes over the Kingdom of this world? Can't we make good laws, uphold family values, and legislate God's will in this world? Obviously, Jesus would oppose a violent revolution for the church to take over the government; but, how about a political movement where the church seeks to gain power and legislate its agenda? What happens when we do that? Can't we use the power of the government, the power of the Kingdom of this world, the power of the sword for the purposes of God?

No!

Every time we have done that, we have created a huge mess. In the first few centuries, the church was known for sacrificial love even when persecuted. They were praying for forgiveness of those who were killing them. They were willing to suffer and die for their faith. The power of the Kingdom of God was working and the church grew rapidly and was pure. Then, in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, when Constantine came into power, the Kingdom of the World became fused with the Kingdom of God. The church and state eventually became one. And the church started to wield the power of the sword. And we spent hundreds of years in the dark ages, where in the name of God, wars were fought, people were slaughtered, tortured and burned at stakes.

Christianity has a bad history because it started to wield the power of the sword, the power of the kingdom of this world.

You see, we have to be very careful when the church starts to make winning political battles and gaining political power its focus. We still hear people talking about Taking America Back for God, meaning make America a Christian nation where Christian values are legislated, where family values are legislated. If we do get the power to force our values on people, we will have damaged our primary mission to the gospel.

Why do you think the church has such a bad name right now? I think the voice of the church has become so moralistic that the gospel has been drawn out. When people think about the church, they don't think about the cross, self-sacrificial love, unconditional love, or God's grace. They think about how we are trying to use the power of the government, the power of the sword, to enforce our values. They disagree with our values and they don't want us to take over; so, they see us as enemy; and we see them as enemy of God. We fight them in the political arena. We may win sometimes and we may lose other times; but, we lost the war because we have now focused on the wrong thing. They are not going to understand the gospel and receive it because they think Christianity is about moralism and therefore either hypocritical or judgmental.

We have to come to the realization that the primary mission of the church is not to take over the powers of this world and control society's moral behavior. It is to declare the good news of our failure and give them the hope we have in Jesus Christ.

**III. Second, this passage doesn't mean that the church should withdraw from engaging with the Kingdom of this world. No, it calls us to bring the Kingdom of God to this world.**

Jesus didn't say we should just be complacent towards the evil of the Kingdom of this world or the needs of the Kingdom of this world. He asked whose image (icon) was on the denarius coin? They said Caesar's. And Jesus said give to Caesar what is his and give to God what is his? The denarius is Caesar's because it has his image on it. What has God's image on it? Us. We are created in the image of God. We are God's. We are to give ourselves to God. He is our number one allegiance. Jesus is not saying that we should split our allegiance. He's not saying, in secular matters, your allegiance is to this world, and in spiritual matters, your allegiance is to God. He is saying: Our first and sole allegiance is to God.

As we live for God, God calls us to bring the Kingdom of God down here. We are carriers of the Kingdom of God to earth. We are to bring his reign and dominion to earth.

In fact, that's one of our purposes: to extend the Kingdom of God. I talk about that all the time. Thy Kingdom come and thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

How?

Separating the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of this world does not mean we don't care about what happens in this world. It does not mean we should not try to influence the kingdom of this world. It does not mean that the church's role is only about "spiritual things" NO.

Jesus brought the kingdom ethics down to earth. He was a revolutionary on social issues, so his followers are to be revolutionaries on social issues.

- Jesus entered into solidarity with the poor, so his followers are to enter into solidarity with the poor.
- Jesus revolted against racism by the countercultural way he treated and spoke about non-Jews, so his followers are to revolt against all forms of racism.
- Jesus revolted against classism by the way he embraced social and religious "rejects," so his followers are to revolt against classism.
- Jesus revolted against sexism by the counter-cultural way he treated women — even women of ill-repute — so his followers are to revolt against sexism.
- Jesus revolted against legalistic religion that oppressed people, so his followers are to revolt against legalistic religion that oppresses people.

Jesus was a radical social activist, so his followers must be the same. But, his focus was not on taking over the Kingdom of this world and wielding the power of the sword to get people to change. The way we do it is by the power of the cross—the power of self-sacrificial love—not the power of the sword. We're to trust the power of Calvary, not Caesar. And this is why I believe those who spend their time and energy trying to control the political arena "in Jesus' name" often miss the point. Our job is to love, serve and sacrifice for sinners – not argue about passing laws against them. For we are to know that, whatever sin we see in others, our sin is much worse (Mt. 7:1-3).

This does not mean that you should withdraw from the political arena. We live in a democratic society and our participation is important. There are things we can do to reduce suffering in this world. There are things we can do to better distribute resources in this world. There are things we can do to help reduce systemic evil. There are things we can do to help the poor. There are things we can do to create a better future for tomorrow through our political process. But, we have to be weary of fusing the power of

the sword and the church. I saw this video (which I think was presented at a Christian conference) where they showed the cross and then an American flag and then the cross and fighter planes flying over the cross-- and people shouted in excitement. It made my stomach turn. This is not right. How did we go from being followers of Jesus who love our enemies and willing to die for them to shouting for machines that kill people fused with the symbol of the cross?

Our ultimate hope is not in government and the power of the sword. It is in the power of the cross to change people's hearts, and therefore, our behavior and our community. Political arena is an important arena to engage in; it is important dig into the systemic evil in the political arena; however, beware of the thinking that the best way to change the world is through gaining power over people in the kingdom of this world.

**Remember, the Kingdom of God is radically different than the world. It is completely upside down. When you see the power of this upside down kingdom, you will be empowered to by the power of this upside down kingdom.**

Here's how the world works

The way of the world is power, success, recognition and comfort. When Jesus said in Luke 6, blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God, blessed are you who hunger now etc? Then he repeats it by saying, woe to you who are rich etc. He was saying our approach to power, success, recognition, and comfort is the dividing line between the Kingdom of God and the world.

In the kingdom of this world, (1) you are desperate for them; (2) you make all your decisions in life so that you can get them; and (3) we despise people who do not have them. Ultimately when things go well in the Kingdom of this world—when you get power, success, recognition, and comfort, we don't really change anything. Even if you get it for one group of people, you don't change much. You are just playing musical chair. The group that you are fighting for may be in power but someone else is displaced. It's just rearranging the furniture.

Jesus is saying, let me show you a real revolution: the Kingdom of God. I am a king who left all of the success, power, recognition, and comfort of heaven, and am without any money, power, recognition, or comfort. And I spent time with the

marginalized, I loved the poor, I fed the hungry, I loved the sinners. And I was rejected and killed on the cross, the ultimate shame. On the cross, I took your insignificance, I took anonymity, I took your failures, I took your discomfort, I took your powerlessness, I took your pain AND I exchanged them for my righteousness. I clothed you with success, significance, comfort and power. So, you don't need to be desperate for them. You already have them. You don't need to make all of your decision to get them. You already have them. You don't need to be controlled by them. You will not despise people who don't have them. Because you never got them out of your own effort. It came to you as a gift from Jesus.

Only when we have this confidence, only when we have the power over these things broken, only when they are not the main thing anymore, that we can go out into the world and do good, do social justice, help others.