

- ✚ The leaders are engaging in a life-or-death game of chess with Jesus. He's more than a chess master, He's the master of the universe. They are playing chess with the "One," and while they think they've caught Him, He is the "One" holding all the atoms and molecules together in an infinite order and detail. They are engaged with the "One," who knows the name and location of every star, every atom, and knows the count of every hair on their heads. They think they can trap Him and have Him killed.
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1. Jesus has to go.

- ✓ Very early on, they are seeking to kill Him: this has been going on for several years, **Mark 3:6**. This is an alliance of all the factions of the day: the Pharisees and Herodians were the most unlikely bedfellows since the Pharisees were completely against Roman rule, and Herodians supported the Herod's who were the proxies of the Emperor of Rome. "The enemy of my enemy is my friend."
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2. Their ploy is to get Jesus to say something incriminating.

- ✓ They had the perfect chess move in the question they asked: if Jesus says, "Pay your taxes," He loses credibility with the masses, who hate the tax system. If He loses the people's support, the Pharisees have the leverage to get rid of Him. Without the people's support, though, they can do nothing because they fear the people. We shouldn't read that strictly as: "they feared the people would lynch them," not to say that there wasn't some of that. There was something the Pharisees feared worse than death. They feared losing the support of the people. One of their biggest problems with Jesus was that before He came along, they were the rock stars of their civilization. Their pride fed off of the people's approval: all their honor, esteem, position, and prominence came from the people, not from the original intended source, God. They despised the average Jew; they looked down on them and used them for their own purposes. They lived for their praise to feed their self-righteous egos.
 - ✓ Another earmark of false teachers is that they need the people and will do anything and change anything to keep their many praises rolling in, but in the end, they will always destroy the very people they were supposed to serve.
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- ✓ On the other hand, if He said that they should not pay their taxes, that would have been treasonous, and the Herodians would have seen to it that He got arrested. The word tax here refers to a poll tax or census tax; the same tax that sent Jesus' parents to Bethlehem to be counted so that they could be taxed. It cost them one denarius every year, which was one day's wages. Wouldn't it be awesome if, in our day, the IRS would only require one day's wages from each of us each year!? It wasn't the amount so much, but what that denarius stood for that was reprehensible to them. It said, "We are owned by Caesar." It was a critical method of psychological control enacted by the Romans, "We are your masters; we own you." It made every single person bow down to the emperor. It was a test of loyalty; the Romans were big on loyalty, and they absolutely crushed disloyalty. The Romans were smart: insurrection begins in the heart, and an uprising cannot begin until sometime after the attitudes of the people have been changed. Those attitudes were tested each year with this census tax, and any resistance to paying this tax was met by the best-trained killers on the planet. They would just go in and make an example out of you if you rebelled.
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- ✓ The individuals who fomented insurrection either by refusing to pay the tax or by speaking out against Rome or saying that people should follow them and throw off Roman tyranny were dealt with publicly. You've probably never heard of the method that the Romans perfected to enforce complicity. It's a little torture technique they call crucifixion. Any occupied nations were held down by the specter of crucifixion. The worst torture and execution technique that has ever been invented. They exposed you, tortured you, and hung you up so that everyone could watch you die slowly, and they left your lifeless body on display for days or weeks so that they could drive their point home. Any non-Roman who broke Roman law was crucified because breaking Roman law was the same as insurrection. They had a law against theft, any thief was crucified (as were the two who hung next to Jesus); they had a law against murder (Barabbas was being held for crucifixion); and they had a law against speaking your mind. Can you imagine the scene here in the United States if the Romans came and crucified every thief, and murdered every person who spoke out against the government? Therefore, do not think of crucifixion as a rare thing at that time. Everywhere you went, you saw crosses. The cross was a statement from Rome: "We don't put up with rebellion." Any hint of "I'm against taxation" was the same as "I'm against Rome." You can be sure Rome was watching Jesus: He was drawing enormous crowds, spoken of by everybody. They were watching Him closely. But Jesus doesn't pander to anyone, so, don't see His response as protecting Himself at all, He's telling them how things work (including taxes and how you relate to an evil government).
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3. Their seemingly perfect move was met with true perfection.

- ✓ Remember, they are playing chess with the God who created the universe. They underestimated His infinite mind: so do you, and so do I. There is not a single person here who rightly esteems Jesus, His thinking, and His power, **Isaiah 55:8-9**.

They didn't know who they were dealing with, and, on some level, neither do we. When it seems, there is no way out, it only seems that way. When it seems like there is no answer, it only seems that way.
