

## Giving to God what is God's

Matthew 22: 15 – 22

*The Question about Paying Taxes*

<sup>15</sup>Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him in what he said. <sup>16</sup>So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. <sup>17</sup>Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?” <sup>18</sup>But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, “Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? <sup>19</sup>Show me the coin used for the tax.” And they brought him a denarius. <sup>20</sup>Then he said to them, “Whose head is this, and whose title?” <sup>21</sup>They answered, “The emperor’s.” Then he said to them, “Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” <sup>22</sup>When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

Good morning Church! I'm Divya speaking from Eindhoven. I am very grateful for this opportunity to preach at Trinity Church online service this morning and thank pastor Francis for giving me this opportunity. I am a person who likes lots of interaction with the group and like to see the faces of people whom I am speaking with. But, we are living in a strange time where we see each other's faces through virtual windows, forget about eye contact or other cues. I now get a taste of what Francis says about preaching to the camera's green dot. But, I believe that the Lord is with us whether we see each other or not, uniting us all as ONE BODY in CHRIST. His Spirit is present to move and work among us, just as we sang welcoming the Holy Spirit to come breathe new life into our willing souls.

We had two amazing and dramatic passages read out to us today. On occasions like this, it is hard to just pick one to focus on preaching. The Exodus passage is a glorious one showing how God connects with man – A man who intercedes for his people and who would simply not leave unless He was assured by God Himself of His presence. God accepts his plea and honours his longing for Him and does what he asks of him!

Today I'm going to be focusing on the other amazing passage that Riek read from Matthew. I'd like to open up that Matthew passage for us and shall we consider together what God is telling us today?

Being one of the leaders of the pre-teen group 1Tim4Twelve in our church, I'm thinking of ways of keeping our youth members of the congregation who are listening in engaged. So for my 1Tim4Twelve youngsters, and other younger members AND also for those of us who are visually inclined, here is a short clip in drama format of the Matthew passage. Watch closely how Jesus responds in action to the question.

[PLAY VIDEO CLIP]

*Clash of the two Kingdoms from Chapters 21-24*

A little bit of background here might be helpful. We see clashes between the two kingdoms, the Kingdom of God and kingdom of darkness from chapters 21 to 24. Jesus had been contrasting both the kingdoms.. and exposing the Pharisees and their hypocrisy. Jesus was causing quite a stir since his entry into Jerusalem. The Pharisees were not happy.

Last Sunday we heard guest preacher Sunil speaking to us on the preceding passage from Matthew 22: 1-14 exhorting us to be clothed in befitting clothing as we worship God. That was one of the parables Jesus had been using to contrast the two kingdoms. The story moves from the parable teachings to a more dramatic real life scene. And the video we just saw gives us an approximate idea of how the setting could have been that day in Jerusalem.

Verse 15 says, “Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle him in his words. And they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians”. Matthew puts it mildly compared to Luke who also records the same incident in his Gospel, and he gives us more details about their evil intent; “So they watched him and sent spies, who pretended to be sincere, that they might catch him in something he said, so as to deliver him up to the authority and jurisdiction of the governor.” (Luke 20:20). The Pharisees who want to ask the question do not themselves go instead they coach and send their students, as they knew the question was too politically charged.

Now we see an interesting alliance of the questioners here. The Pharisees with their trainees and the Herodians.

The Pharisees -Israel's religious leaders- were devoted to the law, its instructions and traditions of Judaism that was handed to them by their forefathers and keen to preserve and pass them down. The Pharisees held the view of a victorious Messiah would deliver Israel and defeat their pagan oppressors.

While the other group - the Herodians were in the opposite spectrum of the Pharisees politically. They were supporters of King Herod who was only partially Jew. King Herod was a puppet king appointed by the Roman Government, knowing he would be cooperative with the Roman government. So these Herodians were sympathetic with the Roman government and sought to fit in, encouraging people to pay taxes and live agreeably.

What could possibly have brought these two opposite groups together? The Pharisees and Herodians are enemies, one detests the roman rulers while the other supports them, BUT they have a common enemy ... JESUS. So as an enemy's enemy they become friends for this instance, and form an alliance to entangle Jesus.

The Pharisees team up with the Herodians and carefully craft their words, first they begin with some great buildup and insincere flattery of Jesus saying good and true words about Him – His integrity – His dependable teachings – and His fearless lack of concern for the opinion of others. And then they go on to pose their question: verse 17, “Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?”. This was their carefully crafted question, that allows only for a yes-or-no answer. They simply wanted to limit Jesus' options so that He has no choice but to compromise.... or so they thought. The weight of any answer Jesus would give lies in this: If He answers yes, then he would be perceived as in alignment with the Roman occupation and supporting its oppression of God's people - the Jews, which would cause the people to

rise against him. That would become easy to blame him saying he was willing to morally compromise to save his own skin. If he answers no, then the Herodians would waste no time in handing him over to the Roman officials for rebellion and sedition. Their problem is gone and they don't have to bother about Jesus anymore. Either way Jesus would still lose, they thought.

I want to quickly digress a little here and to glean out a couple of apologetics tips, for those of us who have an ear for questions and actively find ourselves in conversations of faith with folks around us.

Apologetics Tip number 1: ***Know your question*** (that come to you).

Knowing the nature of questions can really help you to respond appropriately. Usually, asking questions is a good thing. Questions make people think. Right questions hold the keys to discovery. Asking questions, forces people to open up their assumptions, expose faulty logic, clarify the issue, exposes people's motives and ensures a conversation. I have often heard lecturers in their attempt to encourage students to ask questions and keep up the spirit of inquiry, say "There are no wrong questions". This is particularly true in classroom settings and we at 1Tim4Twelve also encourage our youngsters to ask questions. But not all questions are answerable. Not all questions are good and right questions. In this instance, Jesus was asked a trap question which was a combination of what's called a faulty dilemma and a cultural assumption. I'll just explain faulty dilemma here. Faulty dilemma is when your choices are restricted and sets itself up as a trap. Here is another example of this type of question: Does your mother know that you are stupid. If the responder says yes, it means they are stupid and their mother knows, if they say no, it means they are stupid but their mother doesn't know. And even if they say, they don't know, it means they are so stupid they don't even understand the question. Whatever answer one gives to this question they are always wrong.

Not every answer needs to be a yes or no. And not every answer needs to be answered in the frame it was asked. Sometimes unpacking of assumptions is required. And from

reading the Scripture, Jesus rarely gives a yes-no answer. He often answers a question with a question. He asked more questions than he answered. His questions leaves his listeners in wonder, reflection, discovery or in discomfort. So, the tip is knowing the nature of the question can help us in responding appropriately. OK Let's get back on track to see how Jesus responds to this tricky question.

The question Jesus was asked was very charged. Jesus knows that and does not answer the question in the frame it is posted. He unpacks it to get to its root and expose it. Jesus knew the malice in their hearts and quickly responds back with a sharp question: "Why put me to the test, you hypocrites?" Why hypocrites, because they were posing a question as though they wanted an answer in order to learn and draw on the wisdom of Jesus but in reality they were only trying to entangle Jesus and their hearts were malicious. He asks 'Why', and forces them back to their motives.

Then he follows with some action which would expose them further. What does he do? He asks for the coin that is used to pay the tax. Clearly Jesus did not carry coins on him. They were quick to pull out a denarius. The denarius of the first century Jerusalem would have looked like this.

[Rajesh, please bring up the next slide showing the coin ]



It is important to look at this carefully. It had a graven image of emperor Tiberius Caesar on the front side with the inscription "TI CAESAR DIVI AVG F AVGVSTVS," which is "Tiberius Caesar, Son of the Divine Augustus, Augustus." And "'Pontifex Maximus" (high priest)" on the other side.

This was the poll tax or tribute money which goes directly to the emperor's vaults. Although this tax was not too high it was still not an insignificant amount. A denarius is a day's wage for an ordinary worker. The denarius was in common circulation and the Pharisees and the common Jewish people did pay their taxes to the Roman government. The fact that they comfortably carried it on themselves, quickly revealed their position.

By asking, "*Whose likeness and inscription is this?*" Jesus drew their attention to this image and forced them to acknowledge it as Caesar's. There are subtle but not so subtle things going on here. Those directly concerned would have now known where this was headed. It is hard to ignore the idolatrous nature of the coin which calls Caesar divine. He was exposing the idolatry and their hypocrisy.

He then answers with the now famous words: "*Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.*"

I believe there are at least two things Jesus was NOT intending here when he said those words. While Jesus was absolutely smart, sharp, wise and perceived their craftiness, Jesus did not answer them with just to awe them (and us) with his cleverness, and presence of mind and escape from the trap set before him. Be smart like Jesus, Be diplomatic! ..?? NO. And neither was he giving wise counsel that God and government are to be separated, which is how many people seem to interpret it. He was not simply teaching a compromise that divides human loyalties between God and the emperor. It was simply not something of a political nature. His questioners were not looking for wisdom and advice.

There is something deeper going on here.

If he had stopped at that first clause *-render to Caesar what is Caesar's-* it would have been incomplete and only half as spectacular. But he goes on to say *-and to God the things that are God's-*. It is no longer a question of to whom you will pay your taxes,

but to whom you will render worship. He shows how far their hearts are away from God. If they had given to God what first belonged to God, they would not only render to Caesar what was Caesar's, but they would have also bowed down before the Lord Jesus Christ and pledged their first allegiance to Him. At this they marveled – not only had their perfect trap misfired, it turned it back making them look at their own hypocrisy. Jesus turns the tables again.


Time for another quick Apologetics tip no.2: **Know your questioner**

Many times our answers can be disconnected from the question and even more so disconnected from the questioner. It is not important to merely answer the question but to understand the heart of the questioner in the process. Sometimes it so happens in the process of answering the question we lose the questioner. Behind every question is a questioner. People are not simply seeking plain answers to their questions, intellectual or philosophical, they speak out of their worldview and usually deep questions and struggles of their heart. It is vital to make the connection between the mind and heart. Most questioners and conversations are not as malicious in their intent as what Jesus faced. Jesus was so good at getting to the heart of the questioner every single time. He knew who he was speaking to, and addressed or exposed the heart. For Jesus, it was a matter of the heart most of the times Jesus, rather than giving well framed easy answers to his questioners. When we speak to people, getting to the heart can sometimes be uncomfortable and challenging. I have gone both ways, as a young Christian all too eager to defend the faith, that I'm intellectually reasoning and talking but I had failed to connect to the person. As I have matured in my walk, it gets easier to listen to HS and there have been many times God has enabled me to have such heart conversations, straight to the issue. And such conversations have led to clarity and sometimes breakthroughs. We need the Holy Spirit's help for wisdom and discernment, and personally I have always been helped by the Spirit in such circumstances.

### **Application**

How might this story impact our own contexts and lives today?

- Jesus reveals people's hearts. Nothing is hidden before Christ. God has the power to open our hearts and lay its contents bare for us. When he looks within what does He see? Something to ponder.
- What belongs to God? Or rather what does not belong to God?  
Psalm 24:1 says: The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.

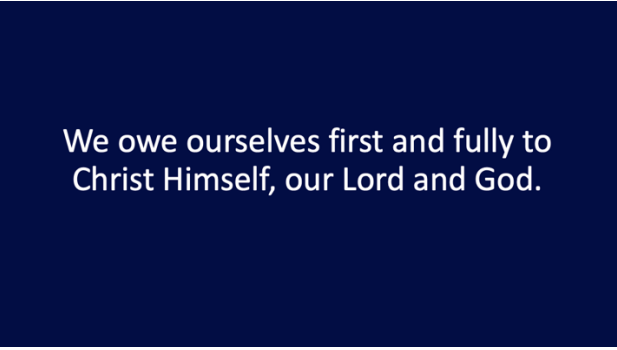


Whose image do you bear and revere?

- Caesar's image was on the coin. He had authority over and claims to it. Where is God's image on? To be precise, on whom?

Genesis 1, 26,27 says: "God said: let us make man in our own image". So God created man in His own image, in the image of God he created Him; male and female he created them.

- God's claim on you and me is total. We belong to God entirely.



We owe ourselves first and fully to Christ Himself, our Lord and God.

- We owe ourselves firstly and fully to Christ Himself.  
What would be a suitable response or tribute to Him?
- We respond to God with our **rightful worship of Him**. To render or give ourselves 100% completely to him in true and rightful worship of Him. We cannot worship God and something else.



The key is this: **Worship God with all we are and have.**

- How do you respond to God in true worship?
- What would that involve?

What would that entail?

Think about our time, possessions, career, kids, relationships, our mouths, mind, heart and body. Everything.

The English missionary to China Hudson Taylor said this and I quote: Many there are who fail to see that there can be but one lord, and that those who do not make GOD Lord of all do not make Him Lord at all. **Our call is to render our whole selves in worship to this God whom we owe everything.**