

Welcome

Intro

**Thank you to all our veterans and military families. If you served, please don't forget to pick up a gift at the kiosk in the lobby.**

Last week Pastor Sarah talked to us about a story in Matthew 22 when some Sadducees tried to trick Jesus by making up a ridiculous scenario that ended with the very strange question “Whose wife is she?”

It turns out that encounter between Jesus and the Sadducees was the last of a series of confrontations (that is also recorded in the Gospel of Luke) between Jesus and the religious elite who were so frustrated and threatened by Jesus that they were trying to find a way to get rid of Him by any means necessary!

This morning we are going to go backwards through the Bible and look at the story that comes just before the story we looked at last week as we consider what we need to **Give to Caesar** ...If you have your Bibles with you open to Luke chapter 20...

...Let me get you caught up on what is happening in the bigger story. Jesus has made His way to Jerusalem. After a dramatic entrance into the city, Jesus went into the Temple—the religious and spiritual center of the nation—and He angrily chased out the corrupt money changers and vendors who were cheating and abusing the people. In Luke 19 we read this...

*<sup>47</sup>After that, he taught daily in the Temple, but the leading priests, the teachers of religious law, and the other leaders of the people began planning how to kill him. <sup>48</sup>But they could think of nothing, because all the people hung on every word he said. - Luke 19:47-48*

This is the setting for chapters 20 and 21—Jesus is teaching in the Temple and we get a series of confrontations between Jesus and the religious elite who are trying to find a way to get rid of Him. Our text this morning starts at chapter 20 verse 20...

<sup>20</sup> *Watching for their opportunity, the leaders sent spies pretending to be honest men. They tried to get Jesus to say something that could be reported to the Roman governor so he would arrest Jesus.*

<sup>21</sup> *“Teacher,” they said, “we know that you speak and teach what is right and are not influenced by what others think. You teach the way of God truthfully. <sup>22</sup> Now tell us—is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?”* -**Luke 20:20-22**

I. This is **A Trick Question**

- A. It is important to keep in mind here that the religious elite are actively trying to trick and trap Jesus.
  - 1. As the story has unfolded, we see growing tension between Jesus and those in charge of a religious system that kept a very few people in power and in comfort. The relationship has gotten so bad that they literally wanted to kill Jesus.
  - 2. The problem was that they did not have the right to kill Jesus. They had a lot of power, but not that much power. In order to get rid of Jesus they would need to find some way to bring charges against Him with the Roman authorities.
  - 3. So this question was designed as a trap to either discredit Jesus with the people or to indict Him with the Roman authorities.
- B. Here is the trap that they set for Jesus.
  - 1. After buttering Him up with a few complements, they ask their question: “Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?”

2. This was a loaded question if ever there was one! In their minds, there is no way for Jesus to answer this question without getting Himself into some serious trouble...

C. Here is the trap

1. We think that there were 3 main kinds of taxes that the people of Jesus day had to pay.
  - a. They paid something like an income tax—a tax on the produce of their fields. (The Romans collected one-tenth of the grain crops or one-fifth of the fruit.)
  - b. They paid a custom tax on any goods transported through ports or city gates (2 to 5 percent of the value of the goods)
  - c. They paid a census tax: one denarius—one day’s wages—was collected for each adult whenever a census was taken. (Remember the census in the Christmas story?)
  - d. The tax in question here seems to be the last one—the poll/census tax.
2. Imagine if Jesus answered “No! We should not have to pay taxes to Caesar!”
  - a. This would be the best-case scenario for Jesus’ opponents!
  - b. They simply head up to the Roman authorities and report that Jesus—the popular Messiah figure has been spreading rebellious and treasonous teachings—He is telling people to not pay their taxes!
  - c. This would be the smoking gun they need to have Jesus executed!
3. But imagine if Jesus said “Yes, you should all pay your taxes.”
  - a. Remember that Jesus was being held up as the long-awaited Messiah—which He is, (but in a very different way than what everyone expected!)

- b. Remember that when Jesus entered the city, the people threw a parade for Him—they celebrated His arrival as a conquering and liberating King! (You can read that story just one chapter earlier in Luke 19)
- c. But conquering and liberating kings do not instruct you to continue to pay taxes to the old occupying forces!
- d. If Jesus supported the Roman authorities, He undercut His own position with the people.
  - i. (I think that it is important to note that this does not seem to be a concern for Jesus, just a perceived concern from His opponents. Jesus had nothing to prove!)

So, how did Jesus answer their question?

#### **D. A brilliant answer!**

<sup>23</sup> He saw through their trickery and said, <sup>24</sup> “Show me a Roman coin. Whose picture and title are stamped on it?”

“Caesar’s,” they replied.

<sup>25</sup> “Well then,” he said, “give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God.”

<sup>26</sup> So they failed to trap him by what he said in front of the people. Instead, they were amazed by his answer, and they became silent. **-Luke 20:23-26**

1. Jesus knew this was a trap, so He did not give either answer. Instead Jesus asked to see a coin. (In Mathews account of this story, Jesus asked specifically for the “Coin used for paying the tax”)
  - a. The coin that they gave Jesus was almost certainly this coin **(Picture)**—a Denarius

- b. The picture is of Tiberius Caesar and the inscription reads “Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine [Augustus], [Himself now] Augustus.”
- c. There are all kinds of problems with this coin from a first century Jewish standpoint.
  - i. There is the claim to divinity that Caesar makes.
  - ii. There is the fact that it is the image of a person. (See the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment)
  - iii. There is the simple fact that it is a Roman coin being brought into the Temple.
  - iv. And there is the whole “tax” thing.
2. When the coin was produced, Jesus asked His own question. “Whose picture and title are stamped on it?”
  - a. His opponents must admit that it is Caesar’s image and inscription.
  - b. And finally we get Jesus’ answer to their question: “Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar...” but He wasn’t done there...He added: “and give to God what belongs to God.”
3. Essentially, Jesus says “Since you benefit from Caesar’s coins (and his roads and security and government) you should pay Caesar his due.”
4. And more importantly, you should also remember to pay God His due.
5. So now it is Jesus’ opponents who are left speechless.
  - a. They have been caught holding the bag. They clearly benefit from Caesar’s coins—they had them in their possession. Jesus leaves them with the unasked question—“Why wouldn’t you pay taxes to Caesar when you obviously use Caesar’s coin?”
  - b. So the religious leaders are unable to trap Jesus and all the people are amazed at His wisdom!

## II. Unanswered Questions.

A. This story leaves us with 2 important unanswered questions: What do we owe Caesar and what do we owe God?

**B. What do we owe Caesar?**

1. When it comes to Caesar, we have to **Pay**

- a. It is not too far a stretch to apply this answer directly to us today.
- b. When we ask “Is it right to pay taxes?” Jesus still answers “Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar.”
- c. Pay your taxes. You still benefit from roads and schools and security and the freedom that was secured by brave men and women who served this country and this government. There are a lot of great advantages that you have simply from living in this great nation, and as a follower of Jesus, you should willingly do your part to support those in government authority.
- d. You may say “Well, I don’t support all the things that the government does with our tax money!” Well, I don’t think the IRS really cares, so pay your taxes anyway. If it helps, imagine that all of your tax money goes to pay teachers and firefighters!
- e. As a Christian, you have an obligation to be honest and direct when it comes to paying your taxes!
  - i. **Romans 13:7** *Give to everyone what you owe them: Pay your taxes and government fees to those who collect them, and give respect and honor to those who are in authority.*
  - ii. It doesn’t really get much clearer than that—“Pay your taxes”

Not only do we need to “Pay”, but we also need to ...

2. **Obey** (I was going to say “Play along” to keep the alliteration going, but it really was too much of a stretch.)
- a. There is more to that passage we just read from Romans 13
  - b. *<sup>1</sup>Everyone must submit to governing authorities. For all authority comes from God, and those in positions of authority have been placed there by God. <sup>2</sup> So anyone who rebels against authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and they will be punished. <sup>4</sup> ...They are God’s servants, sent for the very purpose of punishing those who do what is wrong. <sup>5</sup> So you must submit to them, not only to avoid punishment, but also to keep a clear conscience. <sup>6</sup> Pay your taxes, too, for these same reasons. For government workers need to be paid. They are serving God in what they do. <sup>7</sup> Give to everyone what you owe them: Pay your taxes and government fees to those who collect them, and give respect and honor to those who are in authority.* - **Romans 13:1-6**
  - c. You may not agree with those in government, but that does not give you the right to ignore or disobey them!
  - d. Here the Bible tells us that all authority comes from God and it is God who has set up those in government. If we rebel against them, we rebel against God!
    - i. Obviously, we are instructed to put God and His commands first, so if a government ordered something that was contrary to God’s laws, we would honor and obey God first. [See the Old Testament book of Daniel—especially chapters 3 and 6—for stories about this kind of Holy Resistance.]
  - e. So, not only do we need to pay our taxes, we also need to obey the laws of the land.

3. Finally, **Pray**

- a. We should pray for those in authority.

- b. **1 Timothy 2:1-4** <sup>1</sup>I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them. <sup>2</sup>Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity. <sup>3</sup>This is good and pleases God our Savior, <sup>4</sup> who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth.
  - c. In this time of political division and conflict, I challenge you to pray for America and the leaders of this country. Every time there is a news story about some candidate or leader, I encourage you to pray. (You may already do that, but I'm hoping for something a little more substantial than "Dear God, don't let him or her be our next president!")
  - d. Each time you see a bumper sticker or yard sign, say a prayer for those who are tasked with the responsibility of leading the country and the state and the city and the district that you live in.
4. Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar—pay, obey and pray!

That leaves us with one vital question to consider this morning...

C. **What do we owe to God?**

- 1. Jesus argued that the Denarius belonged to Caesar because had his image stamped on it—it bore his image...but **Genesis 1:26** tells us "**So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.**"
- 2. We bear the image of God! That means that we belong to God!
  - a. Just like the coin went out into the world to declare "Caesar is King (and this is what he looks like)"...my life goes out into the world and declares "Jesus is the King (and this is what He looks like)!"
  - b. So, when Jesus tells us "Give to God what belongs to God", we must realize that Jesus is telling us that we owe everything to God!

3. It may be easier to ask “What don’t we owe to God?”

- a. If you believe what the Bible says, than you believe that God created you...that God sustains you...that He watches over you...that He has a plan for you...He guides you, provides for you, helps you, protects you, blesses you and rescues you form sin and death! What don’t you owe to God?!

## CONCLUSION (Band)

- Rather than trying to list off the things that we might owe God, I think we are better served by just making space for God to speak to us today. We are going to close by singing a song together, and I want to invite the Holy Spirit to help us each answer the question, **“Is there anything that I am holding on to that really belongs to God?”**
- What does it look like in your life to “Give to God what belongs to God”?
  - Have you surrendered your life to Jesus as your King? If not, why not do it today?
  - Does God get the time that He deserves from you? Are you spending time with Him?
  - Does God have access to your money and your stuff? Are you willing to give to God when He asks you to invest in His Kingdom?
  - Does God have the final say in your relationships and in your choices and in your thoughts?
- Jesus said “Give to God what belongs to God”. We quickly realize that WE belong to God!
  - We bear His image...He created us...He rescued us...He gave us our freedom and life!
  - So, this morning, the challenges of Jesus still apply to us...
    - Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar—Pay, Obey, Pray!
    - And give to God what belongs to God...invite Him to search you and show you if there are any places in your life that are not completely surrendered to Him.

**PRAY**

**There is nothing you could ever do...**