



Consider What Is God's

Matthew 22:15–22

Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?" But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? Show me the coin used for paying the tax." They brought him a denarius, and he asked them, "Whose image is this? And whose inscription?" "Caesar's," they replied. Then he said to them, "So give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."

October 19, 2014

Thought For The Week

Scriptures: Isaiah 41 1, 4-6 • 1Thessalonians 1:1-5b • Matthew 22: 15-21

I am quite sure that if many church-going folks would read and listen to the above captioned gospels for this Sunday, they would recall the old, well-rehearsed, phrase: "The more things change the more they seem to remain the same." What they would obviously be thinking about would be politics and taxes. Of all the human activities that bring frustration to people's lives, these two must stand near first place. Regarding taxes in particular, most law-abiding citizens do not object to them as such. It is rather their conviction that the taxes are sometimes assessed unfairly and often bring little return to their own communities. All that may be partly fact and partly fiction. Nonetheless, citizens are reluctant to say that taxes, even though necessary are a complete blessing. Most folks bear them reluctantly.

In reading the gospel we find that the situation was little different in the Palestine of Jesus' day; the manner in which the tax was assessed and enforced was doubtless more cruel than the process is today. A recent commentary on the passage we are considering points out that the "tax in question was imposed on every adult man, woman and slave in Judea and was to be paid in the Roman coin (the Denarius.)" The Denarius amounted to one-day's wages.

Many Israeli Nationalists resisted the tax to the point of armed rebellions, the last of which brought on the destruction of the temple by the Roman armies.

The commentary goes on to point out that the Denarius was particularly offensive to Jewish people because it had inscribed upon it an image of the Roman emperor that called him the Son of God. We can well imagine therefore the reluctance of Jewish people even to carry the Denarius in the pockets of their robes.

It is at this point in the gospel passage that the issue of paying the tax comes into focus. The patriotic scribes and Pharisees came to Jesus with a question: "Is it appropriate for Jewish people to pay the tax or not?" If Jesus responded "yes," he would incur the wrath of many loyal Jewish citizens. If said, "no, don't pay it," he could be reported to the Roman authorities and be jailed. Hence, they thought they had Jesus in a bind. All this was an effort to bring Jesus and his message into ill repute.

They really did not care which way Jesus responded; they just wanted to embarrass him in public.

Of course, most Christians know from reading the gospels that Jesus was a shrewd debater. So, he responded by asking them to show him a Denarius. Where was the coin found? Not on the street in front of them but in their very pockets. "Got'cha," Jesus said. "If you believe in God, as all religious Jews do, how come you are carrying that hated coin around in your pocket?" No answer. So, Jesus delivered the fatal blow: "Give to God what belongs to God and to Caesar what belongs to Caesar." In other words, when Jesus' attackers had to admit that they were carrying around an image of Caesar, he told them to return the coin to the one to whom it obviously belonged.

End of conversation, well, yes for the moment, but yet the question has been tossed around for centuries: What actually belongs to Caesar (government) and what belongs to God?

One would think that this question might have been settled long ago, but it still occasionally pops up in cocktail conversations around our dear country around April 15, tax day.

An intelligent, devoted Christian and a loyal citizen, of course, should not imagine that choosing one or the other option will put him/her in a corner. We do not live in two separate worlds, secular and sacred. We live in one world, God's world, where both faith and the dollar play a rightful place in our lives. We cannot live without depending on both for a complete civil and religious life.

Fortunately most Christians have no problem carrying around a five dollar bill with the image of Abraham Lincoln thereupon, nor the American dime with president Franklin Roosevelt's' image thereupon. In fact, both of those pieces of money often find their way into the collection basket on Sunday. The implication here is that our fidelity is not to one or the other but to the God who has created all things and keeps them in good order.

Now, I do not know whether any of what I have said will bring any pleasure to our dear friends and citizens, when, on April 15th they must write a check in favor of our country's welfare but it may well make the burden more bearable. Interestingly, I say this as a person who must make that decision myself every year. Oh well!

Prayer For The Week

We praise you, God of all nations, for your mercy is vast, and your greatness beyond our comprehension. In peace we pray to you, and ask your blessing for all children in their daily life; for their families, friends, neighbors, and mentors. May they see new ways to bring peace in this age.

We remember and ask for a blessing on the children who suffer needlessly from sorrow, fear, or have special needs. Divine Creator, give us guidance to fill the needs around us, and help us share your perfect love; which casts out fear and binds us together in unity.

May we follow your example and minister in your stead. Grant your wisdom as we teach peace to our children. We confess our shortcomings. Forgive us, we pray. May we go from here strengthened in body and mind for the task before us.

We remember the concerns and needs of those gathered here. Lord, hear our prayers, and send the Holy Spirit to be with us as we seek to do your will. In the name of Jesus, the Prince of Peace we pray. Amen.

Stewardship Thought For The Week

Though asserting that God would take care of him, the apostle Paul "rejoiced greatly" for the generosity and concern of the Philippian congregation for him. He cited a new opportunity as the reason they could express again their long-lasting concern for him.

A Christian lady shared her regret that she once had an opportunity to give to the Lord much more than she presently could, but she let the opportunity pass. Now she planned to use her present opportunity to give all she could. "I love Him too much to do less."

Opportunity missed often brings regret. Opportunity taken brings relief. What opportunities are available to you to express your Christian concern? What opportunities to give generously do you have to provide ministries to others? Maybe the best opportunity you will ever have to give is now. Seizing your opportunity will enable others to rejoice greatly and provide you with a sense of having the wisdom and the insight to see the opportunity God has given you.