

**“Render to God What is His” Matthew 22:15-22, Sermon Notes**  
**Pastor Marc Wragg**  
**Saving Grace Bible Church**  
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**Morning Worship Service**

“Then the Pharisees went and plotted together how they might trap Him in what He said. <sup>16</sup> And they sent their disciples to Him, along with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in truth, and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any. <sup>17</sup> “Tell us then, what do You think? Is it lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?” <sup>18</sup> But Jesus perceived their malice, and said, “Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites? <sup>19</sup> “Show Me the coin *used* for the poll-tax.” And they brought Him a denarius. <sup>20</sup> And He said to them, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?” <sup>21</sup> They said to Him, “Caesar's.” Then He said to them, “Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's.” <sup>22</sup> And hearing *this*, they were amazed, and leaving Him, they went away.” (Matt. 22:15-22 NAU)

**Textual Purpose:** The Pharisees send a delegation to try to entrap Christ in a statement that they can use against him

**Sermonic Purpose:** To reveal the wisdom of Christ and the motivations of the religious leaders in their discussion about taxes. The most important issue is to give to God what belongs to God

### **Introduction**

Have you ever been in an argument with someone where you lost sight of what you were arguing about?

- The argument has either been so heated and so many issues have been brought up that the original matter is forgotten
- Or the argument has been going on for so long, days, weeks or months, that you have forgotten what has started the argument
- Or the argument is over a perspective or ideology or even preference which is not clearly articulated or understood

When arguments like this occur, they can get frustrating and lead to a lot of emotional turmoil

- You know when they are happening, because the tensions are getting higher and stronger. They are not being disarmed and put out
- You know something is happening because the parties cannot seem to communicate and tempers are flaring
- You can see it when it is happening because there are feelings of being entrapped, or feels of guilt

*Here is what is often difficult to assess in a conflict. Is this conflict over my own sin, whether I see my sin or not, or is this conflict over someone who is seeking to harm me?*

- Is this argument caused by my sin or sinful desires or is it someone trying to harm me?
- These are not easy matters to ascertain in the midst of the argument
- *We have the tendency to view our motives in the best possible light and the motives of others in the most negative light*

- We also have the tendency to assess a matter from our perspective and it is hard to be objective
- As well it is often hard to distinguish between what are the most important matters in a discussion

*In our text this morning we can learn a lot about conflict and how to respond to it*

The religious leaders having just been confronted by Christ are now on the offensive

- Secretly they have plotted together to kill Christ
- Secretly they have weighed out how to bring about their desires, whether in public or not.
- They know what they want to do, they just do not know how to make it happen, so they are lying in wait

The only problem getting in the way of their murderous desire is Christ publicly teaching and the people are being drawn to Him

- The people see Christ as a man of God, even a prophet
- They give honor and praise to Him
- Some even recognize Him as the Son of David, the Messiah
- The rest are willing to entertain the idea even if they not exactly convinced
- Christ has demonstrated His zeal for God as He cleansed the temple and He demonstrated the works of God as He healed in their midst

*Now Christ has turned up the heat on the religious leaders by confronting their unbelief*

- He exposed their plans to kill Him
- He exposed the reasons for their plan
  - Their unbelief
  - Their desire to rule over the people
- He also revealed their judgment
  - Because they did not do the works of God they were going to stumble over Christ, be shattered, and ultimately crushed
  - They were going to face swift and thorough judgment

*Instead of taking inventory the religious leaders went on the offensive*

- Instead of going in and looking at their own heart before God they put their plan into motion

Let us look at the continued conflict between Christ and the religious leaders and then draw some lessons for ourselves from this text

- We have here a divinely inspired account of the events. We also see here a truly guilty group and a truly innocent party
- From this account we can learn not only what a godly way to respond is but also the wisdom to keep the important matters in front of us

## **Body**

### The Motivation

“Then the Pharisees went and plotted together how they might trap Him in what He said” (Matt. 22:15 NAU)

The next three questions asked by the religious leaders or their delegations reveal their intent to entrap Christ

- Matthew, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, records for us the intention of the religious leaders
- After Christ had given his judgment parables, they plotted together to trap him

They were looking to find some fault in Him that they could use to discredit him or accuse him of wrongdoing

- They wanted to brand him an insurrectionist so Rome would arrest Him and have Him put to death
- Or they wanted to discredit Him in the eyes of the people by revealing that He taught contrary to the Law of Moses or that He did not properly understand the theology of the resurrection

As they are sending their delegations to engage Christ they are consumed with the desire to bring Him down

- The idea of entrapment here is that they were seeking to snare him in something He said.
- They wanted to use his Words against him

*This is often the source of great conflict. People look to take someone's words and use them against them to condemn them*

Now everyone in prison would say, “yeah I am here because someone was asking questions and used my words against me. If they didn't do that, I would be fine.”

Well there is more to the story than just using someone's words against them. It is not wrong to gather information to establish the facts of a matter. It is not wrong to ask questions and to use their testimony to establish a matter. So what is happening here? There is something particularly wrong taking place here

Notice the instigators. They help shed light what was taking place

The Instigators

Notice what they Pharisees do:

“And they sent their disciples to Him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in truth, and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any.” (Matt. 22:16 NAU)

*They send in a delegation to go find some information on Christ*

- They are already distancing themselves from the direct confrontation of Christ and they send others to do their bidding
- This is one way you know you are in a serious conflict with someone, you are layers removed from the real people who have something against you. The person or people are not coming to you directly. Instead they are sending others to gather their info for them

*First the pharisees send their own disciples and the Herodians*

- This is a strange alliance here. The disciples of the Pharisees would have been those who were trained in the ways of the Pharisees. These would be loyal to the pharisaic views
  - They would have likely been highly trained
  - They would have been zealous
  - And most certainly trusted highly by the religious leaders
- The other group is the strange group and that is the Herodians
  - The Herodians were loyal to Herod and Rome
  - They were not loyal to the Pharisaic Ideology. They were loyal to the system or group that kept them in power
  - Rome gave Herod his power and protection
  - Herod was not a legitimate ruler over Israel. He was given that place by Rome
  - So the Herodians were staunchly loyal to Rome and Herod

It is likely these groups have come together to trap Jesus into their perspectives by each holding Jesus to their ideology

- The disciples of the pharisees would be wanting Jesus to answer the question the way they saw things and Herodians would want Jesus to answer the question according to their perspective

Notice how they begin their interrogation

“And they sent their disciples to Him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in truth, and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any.”  
(Matt. 22:16 NAU)

*They begin with flattery*

- Teacher we know that you are truthful
- We know you speak accurately
- We know you to be a man of God who delivers the truth

And we know that you teach the way of God in truth

- We know you can handle the Word of God
- We know that you know what you are talking about
- We know that you are not going to deceive us
- We know that you know your bible and you speak according to the Word of God

We know you to be impartial

- We know that you do not fear man
- Literally here you do not look into the face of man
- You are not controlled by the facial expressions of others

I mean this is laying it on thick here

- You are a teacher of truth
- You speak accurately

- You speak your mind without the fear of man

So Jesus give us your bold and unashamed response:

- Tell us like it is
- Don't hold back
- Speak truthfully, boldly, and clearly to us
- Don't fear
- Just let us know what is right
- Almost like they are baiting Him to say something controversial

Vs 17 Tell us then, what do You think?

- You give us your opinion, your perspective

*That is the Instigators and their provocation. Now notice their question*

The Question

"Tell us then, what do You think? Is it lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?" (Matt. 22:17 NAU)

Now this is their big question

- *Asked a different way, do the godly pay taxes?*

*This sounds like an innocent enough question except that you need to know the back story to understand what is happening here*

- The pharisees had believed and taught that to use coins with graven images on them was idolatrous
- They went so far as to create their own currency of copper coins which were used to pay the temple tax
- *These copper coins would be exchanged for a Roman currency at a money changers table and then used to pay the Jewish taxes*

You see the coin used in this Poll Tax was a Denarius

- The Denarius likely had the image of Caesar Tiberius, with a crown of bay leaves.
- There is also an inscription on the coin

Its translation is something like this

- "Tiberius Caesar Augustus son of the divine Augustus."
- On the other side was a picture of a seated woman (symbolizing Peace, the Pax Romana) perhaps the Emperor's wife, Livia
- There the inscription read Pontif Maxim (that is, Pontifex Maximus), which means "High Priest," or Divus et Pontifex Maximus, "God and High Priest." Pg 638 Kent Hughes

*You see in the eyes of the Jews these coins were blasphemous*

- *These coins may at best confuse the role of High Priest and at worse call the Emperor God and High Priest*

These religious leaders acted like an Atheist picking up our currency and saying I will not use that because it has the inscription "In God we Trust" on it

The Pharisees see this blasphemy and thus they oppose the tax on religious grounds

- You can just hear the arguments today. I oppose paying this tax on the basis of my religious liberties and rights
- This violates my religion so I cannot pay this tax
- It dishonors God with the currency used to pay it therefore it is wrong

On the other hand, the Herodians would not share the same opinion. They, being strong Roman loyalists, would have had no problem with this tax

- Rome is after all the source of their power and they are not going to get in the way of Rome's will not even for God
- They would be listening to Jesus's reply with particular interest to see if he says anything to condemn himself

If he opposed this tax they could have him arrested on the spot and testify against him for being an insurrectionist

Rome did not take too kindly to those who opposed paying the tax

"In Judea in AD 6 or 7 the Roman Poll tax (The tax in question here) was introduced and enforced. Not surprisingly, it was met with opposition, some of which was violent. A man by the name of Judas of Galilee (A popular name back then and a perfect name for a politicalized zealot- named after Judas Maccabeus) led a revolt against Rome. He wanted his people to have their land back. He acknowledged only Yahweh as God and king. Thus he refused to pay the tax. And how did he and his insurrection friends fare? They were mercilessly massacred. As a warning to all the Jews, Rome crucified these men. They lined the countryside with crosses. The sign was clear: "Pay this small tax or you will pay with a big price."

*I would add here, it was an act so as to say, "pay with Caesar's head or your own."*

So that is the background to their question. Should we pay this tax with idolatrous money or not?

- If Jesus said yes then he would be considered a religious hypocrite who was idolatrous and thus condemned before the people and by the people
- If He said no then he would be an insurrectionist and turned over to the Roman armies to let them deal with Him

The Rebuke

"But Jesus perceived their malice, and said, "Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites?" (Matt. 22:18 NAU)

"Show Me the coin *used* for the poll-tax." And they brought Him a denarius. (Matt. 22:19 NAU)

And He said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" (Matt. 22:20 NAU)

First Jesus calls them out for what they were doing in verse 18

- They were not asking questions to establish a matter

- *They were seeking a reason to condemn him*
- This is why the text reads that Jesus perceived their malice or evil.
- They had evil intentions in their hearts

You see they were not seeking to determine what His actions were. They wanted to condemn Him for His perspective.

- Their question was a setup to trap Christ in communicating a perspective that they could condemn.

This is why Jesus calls them out for their Malice

- They were not seeking to know and understand
- They were not seeking to establish a record of truth
- They were seeking to get him to say something they could righteously jump on and attack.

This is why Jesus is condemning them as hypocrites.

Also think about this. The real matter was not being addressed. They wanted to know if the tax as just. But even if they thought it unjust they still paid it. So they were seeking to condemn Him for something they clearly practiced.

- They all paid this tax. They had to pay this tax it was not optional.
- The Herodians certainly did because they were loyal to Rome.
- But also the Pharisees or they would lose their lives. The Pharisees paid them even if begrudgingly or in religious protest

It is like the Atheist buying gas at the store, they may dislike the idea that the currency in their wallet says "In God We Trust" but they use it anyway because the empty gas tank is worse.

- IF the question was did you pay your taxes then all would be solved
- These men Paid their taxes or they would not be there.

But these men filled with hypocrisy sought to condemn Him with His own words. Even though by their own actions they would agree with a view that supported the payment of the tax.

It is possible that vs 19 was used to expose their hypocrisy

"Show Me the coin *used* for the poll-tax." And they brought Him a denarius. (Matt. 22:19 NAU)

- They were able to come up with a coin on the spot to demonstrate what was used to pay the tax
- The fact that they could pull together this coin could very well demonstrate their own hypocrisy.
- The coin was available to be considered

But I don't see this as Matthew's point because he does not tell us who had the coin, or how long it took for them to find such a coin. So, it is hard to say that these men dug into their own pockets and pulled out the coin necessary.

- This act may have exposed their hypocrisy but we cannot say for certain

But this exchange does tells us a couple of things.

- *First* the coin was a denarius
- Which was 1 day's wage
- The Poll Tax was for all the services that Rome provided
  - It covered the aqueducts
  - The Roads
  - The Roman Security
  - Etc
- There were a lot of services supplied for one day's wages
- I can tell you I pay more in my taxes than one day's wage – so this was a fair tax

Clearly such an amount would be harder for some to pay than others but nonetheless it was not over the top.

Secondly, the coin acted as an object lesson to prove a point to these men.

And He said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" (Matt. 22:20 NAU)

*Whose image is on this coin?*

- Caesar's of course

Asking for the physical coin allowed Christ to draw their attention to a basic principle of authority.

- A government has the right to establish currency and demand payment in the form of taxation.
- Governments control currencies, they set values.
- Governments can weaken their currency or strengthen it.

I have no right to create my own currency. I can't decide that I want to be paid in carrot sticks and expect everyone to start using carrots as the new standard.

- When governments are failing few step in and try to create their own standard of currency
- If I were persuasive enough and if people were gullible enough we could create an environment were we try our own currency but we will never grow beyond ourselves until other authorities recognize our currency.

This is why every cryptocurrency is trying to be recognized.

- BIT Coin and other standards are trying to be recognized as legitimate currency

The establishing of a legitimate cryptocurrency is likely why Mark Zuckerberg, the founder of FaceBook, is meeting with congress.

- And let me tell you that would make a one world currency easy to manage.

Now all our end times people are going crazy and this point about cryptocurrency will be all you remember.

*But listen – the point is that the government creates currency, supports currency, and manages it. Without the authority of Government and the backing of the government the currency is useless*

To prove my point go pay for gas with carrot sticks and see what kind of looks you get

Of course there is a bit of an over simplification here because a currency must also have a backing to support its value. We can discuss the economics later but here let us affirm the foundational building block, a governing authority creates and establishes a currency

- Sometimes like the EU a group of authorities get together to create a more universal standard

So They pull out this coin and Jesus asks whose image is on this coin

The Lesson

They said to Him, "Caesar's."

They were right.

- They recognized the proper coin as Roman
- And they recognized the image on the coin
- They acknowledge the Rule they were under

Then He said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's." (Matt. 22:21 NAU)

Here Christ turns and gives them the timeless lesson

*Honor Authority*

*Really this is at the heart of all of their warring with Christ. They did not honor authority*

- They did not see Christ as being from God so they did not honor his authority
- They question Christ about what authority he had to teach what he was teaching
- They did not want to lose their authority so they sought to kill Christ before he rose up against Rome and Rome come in and take away their land
- They did not think that Christ had any authority

And now here when Christ shows them a coin, He shows them the authority of Rome. He shows them the image of their Political Leader. He shows them what they must honor

- The coin has Caesar's image so honor him with what is his

Now some turn to this passage and say but give to God what is God's means that we give our money to God

- We give to the government and to God
- So they make this about taxes and offering

I am not convinced that is the point here. *I think the point is greater than contributions to an offering plate*

- If this were about money to God and money to Government then the object lesson breaks down as God has no currency

So I think the lesson is more profound

- Give the coin made in the Image to Caesar for he has the authority to ask for it

- And you, made in the image of God, give to God for He has the authority to ask for it

*Honor Caesar with his money and Honor God with your life. This is the timeless lesson here*

Render to God what is God's

- Your life and my life belong to God
- We are created in the image of God
- We owe Him what is ours because what we have is from Him

*Here these men were fighting over whether or not they could use idolatrous coins to pay a tax and they missed the whole point.*

- Yet they thought that they were right.
- They thought they were going to trap Christ in a question that would condemn Him.

Instead he turns and cuts to the real issue.

- The issue was not about paying taxes
- The issue was not about the medium used to pay taxes.
- These were not matters that concerned God

The real issue was about honoring authority

- The Authority of the government was acknowledged by Christ
- This is why Paul in Romans 13:1-7

Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.<sup>2</sup> Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.<sup>3</sup> For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same;<sup>4</sup> for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.<sup>5</sup> Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake.<sup>6</sup> For because of this you also pay taxes, for *rulers* are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing.<sup>7</sup> Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax *is due*; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor. (Rom. 13:1-7 NAU)

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority,<sup>14</sup> or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.<sup>15</sup> For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.<sup>16</sup> *Act* as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but *use it* as bondslaves of God.<sup>17</sup> Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king. (1 Pet. 2:13-17 NAU)

And they should be honoring God with what was His

- These men were walking in evil and dishonoring God
- They were keeping from authority what was properly due
- They became their own authority and despised God and the Authority He created

- When they do such, they find themselves in inevitable conflict with no way of escape

What is surprising is that they are blind to their error and they suppose they could even trap the Son of God

- This is how sinners operate
- They reject God and His authority
- Establish their own rule and perspective or preference
- Bind others to their views and condemn others to wallow in their own snare

Christ rises above that here and reveals the matters that are true

And the Response:

“And hearing *this*, they were amazed, and leaving Him, they went away.” (Matt. 22:22 NAU)

they could say nothing

- They were exposed by what was right
- Their foolishness was exposed for what it was

Conclusion

So, the first lesson is this: honor authority. Honor the authority you are under and guard against trying to create a conflict that does not exist.

The religious leaders fought against this authority and thus they were filled with conflict.

Second Lesson, conflict comes as we pull away from God and His purposes.

- Righteousness brings peace while unrighteousness brings disharmony.
- Heb 12:11; Gal 5:22-24

Third Lesson, is that conflict is stirred up when we are filled with godlessness.

- They were filled with Malice and were seeking to harm Christ
- They wanted him to do or say something that they could use against him.
- They were filled with Hypocrisy because they were practicing what He would support.

Therefore by their own godless behavior they were creating a contentious environment.

What should we do to make sure our conflict is God glorifying?

- Make sure we are asking questions to gather information and gain understanding not make a point.
- Make sure your goal is to honor God
  - Must know His ways
  - Must seek His good
  - Must act according to His revealed will
  - Must honor His authority

The religious leaders had constructed a situation where they believed they would be practicing idolatry to pay taxes to the Roman government. The whole situation would have been easier if God's purposes were sought and His wisdom followed.

- They had so disguised their wants in the best religious light that to disagree with them meant the other person had to be in sin.
- They did not have God's interest in mind but their own.
- This is often what happens in our conflict. The religious leaders had taken their wants and desires and given a biblical argument to them and disguised their agenda with the truth.
- This is what they used to entrap Christ.

May we learn from this account how to stay away from ungodly conflict and practice righteousness

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