

Sermon for October 22, 2017
"Unto God the Things That are God's"

Matthew 22:15-22

It's **not** about the money. You see, the Pharisees knew that Jesus had their number. Jesus had been teaching his disciple to beware the leaven of the Pharisees. Their brand of religion was like bacteria that would invade and consume, or perhaps in the southern idiom, "Like kudzu!" They were blind guides that led others astray. Instead of serving God, they served themselves. Instead of helping the needy, they fed off orphans and widows. And if Jesus' teachings were not enough, there was the whole cleansing of the temple thing. Jesus clearly had no respect for the religious authorities!

So, the Pharisees decided to make a preemptive strike on Jesus. They came to him and pretended to be asking a sincere question of faith. "Should we pay taxes to the Romans?" The question was a legitimate one. After all the Romans were unjust and their government enslaved people all over the world. Should God's people support such a government?

Of course, Jesus saw right through their question. It was a trap - a catch 22. No matter what he did they would get him. If he said they should not pay the taxes, then they would go to the Romans and have him arrested for treason. If on the other hand, he said they should pay taxes, they could use that against him. They could say that he did not have enough faith in God, or that he was little more than a tax collector in religious clothing.

Jesus turned the question back on the questioners. "Show me the coin used to pay the tax." It was a Roman coin with the name and image of the emperor on it. So, Jesus said, "Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's," or "If it has his name on it, give it to him." He could have stopped there because he had answered the question. But he went on to say, "and render unto God the things that are God's"

That is the point of this passage. Everyone repeat after me: "Render unto God - the things that are God's." You see that is what these religious leaders were **not** doing. They were not giving God what God was due. They were serving themselves and not the Almighty.

The question then is "what is due to God?" Now this is supposed to be a "stewardship sermon." So, at this point I am supposed to say that God is due one tenth of your income. In other words that you should tithe or regularly give 1/10th of the money you make to the church. That tenth or tithe belongs to God. Render unto God the tithe that is God's!

The first time I decided to preach on this passage that is what I thought I would say. I thought "Give unto God the things that are God's" that means "Give God the tithe." Then I got thinking. Did you know that the Pharisees tithed? In fact, they were probably the best tithers among God's people. Jesus said that they even tithed mint and dill and cumin. (Matthew 23:23). Does anyone here have an herb garden? Then why don't you give a tenth of what you grow in it to the church? What about your vegetable gardens? I love fresh corn and tomatoes! I may be from Pennsylvania but I love fried okra!

My point is the Pharisees were really good tithers, and yet Jesus told them they still needed to render unto God the things that are God's. So, Jesus was **not** talking about tithing.

Don't get me wrong. You should tithe, but ultimately this passage is not about something as meaningless as money. Coins and taxes are involved in the story, but in the end Jesus is talking about much more than mere money or governmental revenue. If we are to render unto God the things that are God's, we would give everything to God. Again, I am not talking about money! I am talking about giving our entire lives to God.

Let me illustrate what I mean. Everybody take a deep breath with me: In --- and out. God gave you that breath. Every single breath you take is a gift from God. So, every breath we take is due to God. We should use every breath to serve God.

How many of you woke up this morning? Assuming I didn't put you to sleep you should all have your hand raised. God gave you this day. So, if we render unto God the things that are God's, then this day should be dedicated to serving him. And tomorrow, when you wake up, that day will be a gift from God and it should be dedicated to God.

Jesus says we should render unto God the things that are God's. That means that everything we do should be done for God. Our entire lives should be dedicated to God. Every breath and every waking moment should be rendered unto God. This is not about giving a tenth of your income to God. It is about giving you entire life to God!

You see this **is** a stewardship sermon after all. Stewardship is ultimately not about money. It is about giving your life to Christ. Ultimately how much you pledge to the church or give to the church next year will not change your standing before God. I don't care if everybody in the church pledges to tithe or not. It would be nice though. What would really make me happy is if everyone in this church vowed to render unto God every day and every breath to serve the Almighty. And I assume that if we all did give ourselves totally to God, it would have an effect on many things, including our offerings.

Christian stewardship is about recognizing that everything we have is from God. And as Christians we are called to seek to use everything we have and everything we are to serve God. That means our time, our talents - everything. We will be asking you to turn in an estimate of the money you will give to the church and we will use those figures to construct a budget for next year. But ultimately that doesn't matter - that is just an administrative necessity. Ultimately what's important is not how much money you give, but who you serve each day.

Jesus said, "render unto God the things that are God's." To do that we have to give ourselves to God. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "The only man who has the right to say that he is justified by grace alone is the man who has left all to follow Christ." Have you given your life to Christ? Have you pledged to live your life by Jesus' example and with God's help? If you haven't, then forget about pledging or tithing or any of that stuff. That is not important - for you. If you haven't dedicated your life to following Christ, to living by his example and with his help, then do that today! And if you have given your life to Christ, then dedicate everything you have - every moment of every day to His service.