

“Giving to God”
by Rev. Frances Savill
Sunday October 22, 2023

Matthew 22:15-22

In these weeks, in our scripture readings, we find Jesus in conflict with religious leaders. These religious power houses don't like what Jesus is teaching, they don't like the threat that He is posing to them and their authority, so they are looking for ways to discredit Jesus, make Him look bad in front of the crowd, or to get Him in trouble with the Roman authorities.

Our scripture opens with the Pharisees plotting – they were so desperate that they joined forces with the Herodians. These two groups were very set against each other. All that could bring them together was their common desire to get rid of Jesus.

With practiced sincerity, they approached Jesus: *“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.”*

Interesting flattery. Jesus was sincere, and they were not. Jesus showed deference to no one, which was one of the things that bothered the Pharisees most about Jesus.

He kept company with sinners and Jesus was constantly criticizing the Pharisees for their desire for position, respect, and desire to be treated with deference.

The question they asked Jesus was simply a trap. It had two answers and both of them would get Jesus in trouble.

If He answered that they should not pay taxes to Caesar, Jesus would be in trouble with Rome and could be arrested.

If He answered saying they should pay taxes to Caesar, He would be in trouble with the crowds.

Consider for a moment, yourself standing in the group of conspiring religious leaders. No matter what Jesus answered, He would be entrapped by his own words.

Can you hear them chuckling to themselves, rubbing their hands together with glee, just waiting for Jesus to condemn or discredit himself.

Jesus answers: "*Show me a coin.*"

Without a moments hesitation they hand him one. That should have been their first clue that they were in trouble. They were able to produce the emperor's hated coins without any problem. They were carrying the money on them. Who had sold themselves out to the emperor? Obviously, they had.

The money had a most offensive inscription on it.

Jews weren't allowed to put images of people on their coins; but Caesar, of course had his image stamped on his. Around the edge of the coin, proclaiming to all the world who he was, Caesar had words that would send a shudder through any loyal or devout Jew: "*Son of God... high priest.*"

"Give to the emperor, the things that are the Emperor's." Jesus said, sidestepping the trap. His answer put the truth in perspective.

The Jews were living in an occupied country. Roman rule was a daily reality. Everyone resents paying taxes, but how much worse it was supporting the empire of their enemy. Having to carry the emperor's coinage with the blasphemous inscription was like rubbing salt in their wounds.

But they had to live. The Israelites had to work and support their families and find a way to be faithful to God in the midst of living with their enemies.

Jesus told them to give to Caesar what was his due. But here's where the tables turned: **give to God what is God's.**

Suddenly it is not Jesus in the trap, but the Pharisees, the Herodians and all of us.

What does Jesus mean? What belongs to God? What bears God's image? How on earth do we give to God what is His?

Let's start with the easiest questions first.

What bears God's image? (*we do*)

What belongs to God? (*all things*)

Years ago, when I did membership classes I would ask people to consider what God had given them and then consider what they gave back to God.

God has given us this day, God has given us so many years of life, already. How are we using the days we've been given, how much of our day do we give to God?

God has given us this earth and all that is in it.

How do we care for it, and how do we steward all the resources we have?

We've been given talents, gifts, health, strength, energy.

How much of that energy do we put to serving God? How do we use our talents and gifts for God's service?

We've got financial resources, goods, money, consider how much we have and how much we give to God?

Now those are all good questions, and I still ask them, but the answer I'm hoping to bring people to, has changed.

What I had in mind was it would be good if people gave some time to God every day – time to pray, to come to worship, time to serve God in some area of ministry.

If everyone gave of their talents, and gifts, and everyone gave 10 % of their money and resources, the church would be well-equipped and well-served.

But Jesus didn't say "give back to God a portion of what is His."

He didn't instruct us to pay a tax or give a tithe of all that God has given us and bears God's image. Rather, Jesus said; **"give to God what is God's."**

C.S. Lewis wrote about trying to give God part of our lives.

It's disastrous. God is never satisfied with (only a) part. As long as we are trying to hold something back from God, we will be miserable.

God wants all our life, God wants to be part of all we do, the whole of our lives. Give to God what is God's.

It seems interesting to me that Jesus didn't have any conflict with Rome during his life, except when he was dragged before Pilate, not on charges from Rome, but on charges by the Priests.

We don't have any accounts of soldiers harassing Jesus or dragging him off for questioning. A Centurion believed Jesus could heal his servant by just speaking a word.

It seemed that Jesus was able to live in the world with Caesar, and yet not lose his soul to him. Jesus was content to give Caesar the little that was due to Caesar, but the kingdom, the power, the glory, was really God's.

God's inscription is on everyone, everything.

There was a respect due to the Emperor, he had a position, an authority, an amount of power. But there was a much greater power and authority to give respect to.

The Pharisees and the Herodians were giving the Emperor much more than his due. They feared Rome's power, they feared losing their own power, their hearts were not bowed before God.

We all live under authority and power – our governments, our bosses; banks, financial institutions hold authority and power. The stock market holds some power if you have any money in the market, or just because of how it affects our economy.

There is a respect that is due to them, and these institutions are significant, but their power is small in comparison to God's power.

Because all the authority and power rests with God.
God's kingdom reigns over all.

All other powers are subject to God. All other kingdoms will fall.
God alone reigns eternally, and all things are under Him and subject to His power.

Give to Caesar what is Caesar's ... but Give to God what is God's.

Let us pray: Loving God we do not know how to give you all that is yours, but this day we ask that you teach us. Here in this time, we bow our hearts before you and acknowledge that you are over all powers and the kingdom and glory are yours now and forever. Amen.