

“Unwavering Loyalty”

Message by Stephen Whipple
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October 19, 2014

The gospel lesson for today is taken from the book of Matthew, chapter 22, verses 15 through 22. I'll be reading from the New American Standard version. Then the Pharisees went and plotted together how they might trap Him in what He said. 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. Tell us then, what do You think? Is it lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?” But Jesus perceived their malice, and said, “Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites? Show Me the coin used for the poll-tax.”

And they brought Him a denarius. And He said to them, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?” 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.” And hearing this, they were amazed, and leaving Him, they went away. This is God’s word for God’s people. Thanks be to God.

At this period of time Jesus enters into the city of Jerusalem after being greeted as the promised Messiah. He brings joy and hope to all those who have waited for this moment. But that’s not all he brings with his entry, he also brings turmoil to the Pharisees, a religious group residing within the city. They’ve heard the rumors about him and they feel threatened because he is now not only a thorn in their side but a threat to their religious and political order. The Pharisees decide to band together with the Herodians, two opposing religious and political groups, to bring down Jesus.

The Pharisees were the leading religious group of Jerusalem who believed that the law of the Old Testament was the only law to be followed. They believed that the Roman ideas were blasphemy against God. The Herodians on the other hand believed that everything ordered by the Roman emperor was to be followed and any act of resistance was of the highest crime.

They sent their disciples to go meet Jesus in the temple and to trap him with a question he couldn't get out of. They asked Him, "Should we pay our taxes to Caesar or not?" They really put Jesus into a corner, either he said yes and committed blasphemy against God or He said no and committed an act of treason against Caesar. But Jesus knowing their true intentions asked them a question in return, "Whose face is on this coin?" When the Pharisees and Herodians replied, "Caesar's" Jesus told them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."

What Jesus does here is not only avoid their trap but also explains their authority. He acknowledges Caesar's authority but also where he gets his authority from, God. He also insists giving to people what is theirs but more importantly giving back to God what is God's.

We all know we have to pay taxes, there is always a certain amount that we must pay or we deal with the consequences. Even I have to pay taxes. More than most of the time we reluctantly pay our taxes knowing it does help pay for new roads and school, but wouldn't we all rather have that money to ourselves?

On the other hand with God there is no set amount on what we *need* to pay back, but we still set limits on ourselves as to how much we are willing to give back. More than most times we do this because we're afraid of the unknown. We know the benefit of paying our taxes; we see the results even before they happen. But because we do not know for sure God's ways or God's plans some of the time

we're frightened because we don't know what is going to happen. We fear that our money is not doing any good, that it is just being wasted. So we pay our taxes first, buy our new items and then we can feel assured about the unknown because we had enough money to do what we wanted *first*. Sometimes we say to ourselves, "Next Paycheck I'll put \$50 into my tithe." Then when the time comes around we make more excuses to why we couldn't and put it off for another time.

If you think about it we're just like the Pharisees and Herodians in this passage. Sometimes we give God the leftovers of our time and money and sometimes we give to God first. Despite what we say to ourselves for all the times we don't give to God first we are still guilty of giving God the leftovers many times in our lives. I know I am.

I am failing to read the Bible like I used to, three times a day. Some reasons are I work more hours each week, about 40. I work late so I am tired and don't feel like doing anything. I hang out with friends for long periods of time which gives me less time to focus on God. If I am lucky and decide to make the time for it I can get one devotion in every other day because I feel ashamed for not talking to God often. Then after I do that one devotion I don't do another one until a couple days after that.

I also don't give any of my money to God and instead use it first to buy what I want then if I have any leftover give a couple dollars here and there. Honestly, more than most of the time I feel like how much money I give is acceptable because I give a lot with my time and service. I do feel that I could give more of my money and set goals to achieve throughout the years. I feel that not only my time and service should be given but also my money because that can help financially support the church and any mission events.

Jesus not only models the life of giving everything to God, he makes it possible for us to do the same. With prayer and trust in God we have the power to live as Jesus did, to walk in God's way. Like Jesus, we can freely give to God ourselves, our time, and our possessions for use in the world that God loves and cares for. We will be able to give abundantly without having any worries or fears if we'll have enough money to pay taxes and to buy what we need for ourselves.