**Give To Caesar, Give To God**

Mark 12:13-17 (Key verse 17)

Then Jesus said to them, “Give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.” And they were amazed at him.

Today’s passage is about ownership. Who owes what and who owes who. Do we owe our government anything? This is quiet obvious through the many laws and regulations we have in this country. You break a speed limit you get a ticket. You buy food you owe tax in the form of VAT. You earn a salary you owe tax, try and not pay your taxes, SARS will show you flames. However, do we ever wonder if we also actually owe God? Of course now the question becomes, what do we owe God if we do owe God? Through this passage Jesus does establish important truths related our relationship with God and authorities of the land. We see Jesus’ deity in His perfect articulation and proclamation of the truth of God. He spoke the truth regarding everything, everything, the way things were, the way things are, the way things will be. Truth about man, truth about God, the truth about the kingdom of God, the kingdom of men, the forgiveness of sins, salvation, eternal life, all of it. Today Jesus says, “Give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.” May we learn one word of God what this means to us today. Amen!

Look at verse 13, “Later they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words.” The Pharisees and Herodians were two sects that co-existed in the land of Israel with an uneasy kind of relationship. The Pharisees were the most religious, the Herodians the least religious. The Pharisees were the most concerned with the Law of God. The Herodians were most concerned with the Law of Rome. The Pharisees were most devoted to Israel. The Herodians were most devoted to Caesar. The Pharisees were intensely religious. The Herodians were intensely political. And the Pharisees hated the Herodians. The Pharisees despised them.

Now the Pharisees wanted to get rid of Jesus because of His theology. That was not enough for the Romans. The Romans weren’t going to kill Jesus for His theology. The only way the Romans would kill Jesus was for His political views. Thus the Herodians need to be complaisant in this situation because the goal of the Pharisees is to put Jesus in a position where He makes political statements that the Romans will read as an open rebellion. And the Herodians, if Jesus came off as being anti-Roman, anti-Caesar and a threat to the peace of Israel under Roman rule, would then make a straight line to the Romans and report Jesus and the Romans would then have to arrest Him and deal with Him. Yet, when it came to getting rid of Jesus, they were willing to work together. As we will see, they tried to get Jesus to incriminate himself. If Jesus contradicted the law, the Pharisees could charge him as a heretic before the Sanhedrin. If Jesus contradicted Roman policy, the Herodians could charge him with treason before the Roman rulers.

Now, as we come to verses 13 to 17, it is Wednesday of Passion Week. Our Lord is in the temple. It is a unique scene in the temple. They’re afraid to do anything because they fear the people. Verse 12 says they would seize Him if they could but they were afraid of the people because of His massive popularity, at least on Wednesday. They have to turn the people against Him and they have to get the Romans to kill Him. So how are they going to turn the people against Him when they are so favourable toward Him? How are they going to get the Romans to kill Him?

Look at verse 14, “They came to him and said, “Teacher, we know that you are a man of integrity. You aren’t swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?” Sometimes, enemies know a man’s character best because they study it so intensely to look for weaknesses. Indeed, the religious leaders knew something about Jesus’ character. In a word, they recognized Jesus as a man of integrity. In their assessment this meant two things.

**First, Jesus was not swayed by men**. Jesus’ teaching was not influenced by what people wanted to hear; Jesus was not a “people pleaser.” Rather, Jesus taught the truth that was right in the sight of God. Jesus saw people with a shepherd’s heart and wanted to lead them to God who alone could save them. In chapter 3, Jesus healed a man with a shriveled hand on the Sabbath. It was a deliberate revelation of God’s mercy and saving grace. It was meant to liberate people from the legalism of the Pharisees. The Pharisees hated Jesus for doing this. But Jesus ignored their wickedness and gave the man a new life. Again, Jesus told the rich young man to sell everything he had, give to the poor, and follow Jesus. It was the way for him to enter eternal life. But the man went away sad. Surely, Jesus paid no attention to people’s riches or power. Jesus was free to teach God’s word as it was to anyone, anytime, anywhere.

**Second, Jesus taught the way of God in accordance with the truth**. Jesus always taught from God’s point of view and based on his teaching on the truth of God in the Scriptures. When Jesus cleansed the temple, he acted on God’s behalf. He shared the heart of God and demonstrated God’s living presence with his people. People could experience God in Jesus. Standing on God’s side, Jesus drove out the temple businessmen and liberated the temple for God’s use. As he did this he quoted the Scriptures, **“My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations” (Isa 56:7)**. Jesus taught the way of God in accordance with the truth of Scripture. Jesus new that our worth, our reason for existence is because God exists, what mattered most is God and God’s way.

Look at verse 15a, “Should we pay or shouldn’t we?” **But Jesus knew their hypocrisy**. “Why are you trying to trap me?” he asked”. Jesus saw their hypocrisy, hypocrites make awkward alliances and hypocrites use any devious means they can. This is the interesting thing about hypocrites, they will speak the truth for devious ends if they need to. False religion is after trapping people for its own benefits. It is said that false religions are like the clock that doesn’t run. It is right twice a day. If it was never right, there wouldn’t be any deception. So they will say what they need to say to gain the ground they need to gain.

This is what false religion is about, it falsely pursue the truth. They don’t really want the truth out of Jesus, they want to discredit the truth. We see this in verse 14, “They came to Him and they said, ‘You’re truthful, You speak the way of truth.’ that’s all so wonderful, so along that line, let me ask You a question ‘Is it lawful to pay a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?’ Then verse 15, “Should we pay, or shouldn’t we?’” At this moment there are a number of Pharisees there with the Herodians standing by. Since they are asking a rabbi not asking a Roman, Jesus who is teacher of the truth and not a man’s pleaser. Is it lawful by divine law? “Should we pay taxes to invader of God’s holy land? Should we pay taxes to an oppressor of God’s people, or should we not pay?”

There were land taxes, a tenth of the grain, a fifth the oil, a fifth of the wine. There was import tax, when it came into the harbor, when it came across the border, when it came through the city gate. There was tax, tax, tax. I mean our own government wants to raise VAT at by 2% additional tax. Do we pay these taxes? Is it lawful according to God’s law? That’s the assumption when you talk to a rabbi, he’s talking about God’s Law, is it lawful? Some bit of history to how people felt about paying taxes is revealed by a Christian Historian Josephus who records. That in 6 A.D there was a man in Galilee named Judas, not the one who became the betrayer of Christ. Judas led an insurrection, Roman occupation of Israel. And the whole insurrection was the reaction to a census. Judas and his friends revolted because they said the tax was ungodly, it was against God because it was leading to paganism. Well, Judas was killed and all his followers. But it made public the issue and the sentiment didn’t die when Judas died.

The Pharisees then are positive that Jesus is going to say, “No, don’t pay tax to a false religion, to a false God.” Because His popularity was at stake. And if, all of a sudden, He said, “Oh no, go ahead and pay to Rome,” He would begin to lose His popularity. And furthermore, if He said “No, don’t pay tax to Rome,” the Herodians going to see that as another Judas of Galilee starting another insurrection, they are going to have to take Him, arrest Him and kill Him or thy we going to have another revolution on our hands. And so ultimately, they expect a no answer.

Now let us look at how Jesus responded, let us look at how Jesus teach truth, look at verse 15 once more “Should we pay or shouldn’t we?” But Jesus knew their hypocrisy. “**Why are you trying to trap me?” he asked” “Bring me a denarius and let me look at it.**” Jesus said **“Bring Me a denarius to look at.”** That is an important little statement because the Jews didn’t carry that coin. It wasn’t going to be the pocket of a Pharisee, shouldn’t be. It is a Roman coin used between 300 B.C. and 300 A.D., six-hundred-year period, minted in silver by Rome’s emperors. And all such coins minted by the emperor bore the sacred image of the emperor engraved on one side and some other identifying description on the other side. So they wouldn’t have had a denarius, that one-day’s wage coin. The Jews carried shekels and copper coins with no images on them. So they had to find one. They then brought the coin, and he asked them, “Whose image is this? And whose inscription?” “Caesar’s,” they replied.” (16).

Let us all read verse 17, Then Jesus said to them, **“Give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.”** That is a far-reaching statement. Jesus says, “Pay the tax, give it back, you owe it, it’s a debt, it belongs to Caesar.” How did that happen? Because Scripture teaches us that government is an institution of God, right? Government is an institution of God.

Romans 13:1 teaches that, “Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.” Therefore, whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God, and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. 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, you will have praise from the same; for it” authority, government “is a minister of God.” Be in subjection. For because of this, you also pay taxes. Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear and honor to whom honor. Pay your taxes. There’s no such thing as a sacral society. In theocracy, God is the ruler. There was one sacral society however was disintegrated by the judgment of God. There will be in the future another sacral society, where God will be the king and that will be the reign of Jesus Christ, in His millennial kingdom on earth. In between there is no such thing as a sacral society. There is a separation between the people of God, spiritual and the civil authorities.

Civil authority, civil law is a common grace for the well-being of us all, like crops, like water, food, all the common graces. The rain falls on the just and the unjust, that’s the idea of common grace. We should be thankful for government, that’s how you got here today because there’s a government. We drive on the left hand of the street. Civil government has a role to play. That’s why you can live healthy in your home and you’re not sitting in a sea of sewage. That’s a common grace. I don’t expect my government to act in a Christian way. They have nothing to do with the church. There’s no such thing as a Christian government, no such thing as a Christian nation until Christ establishes a worldwide theocratic kingdom. All I expect out of my government is that I can get here, when I want to get here and not get shot in the process, and that the water, electricity comes when I turn the switch on. That’s all part of the common grace.

The role of government to collect taxes for its support, because it is God’s ordained means for man’s protection and well being. You say, “Well what about if the government asks you to do something that God forbids you to do?” Then you do what God wants you to do. That’s Acts 5:29, “Obey God rather than men.” If the government says “Don’t do this,” and God says, “Do it,” **then you do what God says you should do and take the consequences.**

So “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s” but here’s the real important statement “and to God the things that are God’s.” That was the issue with the Pharisees. They were making a big thing about having to give Caesar what Caesar wanted and they were completely disregarding, giving to God what God wanted. You owe God. This is far greater. But the big issue here is not to pay your taxes. **The big issue is to give God what you owe God. What did they owe God?** Jesus had said so many times to them it’s recorded in John “If you honor Me, you honor My Father.” If you don’t honor Me, you don’t honor My Father. The Father had said at His baptism and again, “This is My beloved Son, listen to Him.” Listen with believing ears and a believing heart.

What do you and I owe God? We owe Him the same thing those Pharisees owed Him. You don’t owe Him hypocrisy, you don’t owe Him fake religion. What do we owe God? This, “To love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.” He’s worthy of that and He commands it. We owe Him this, to listen to His Son, to love His Son and to honor His Son and to believe in His Son and to embrace His Son as our only hope and your only Savior, the very Son that He is the one who put on the cross to bear the punishment for our sins. The coin has Caesar’s image, you bear God’s image. Give the coin to Caesar, but you belong to God. You and I do not bear the image of Wits, image of the company we work for, image of our past, even image of our parents or our children. We bear God’s image.

The coin belongs to Caesar, He says. But you, you belong to God. The coin has Caesar’s image, you bear God’s image. Give the coin to Caesar, but you belong to God. Well, their trap collapsed. At the end of verse 17 it says, “And they were amazed at Him.” So simple and yet so profound. Luke says they were silent. Matthew says they marveled and left. Ultimately in Luke 23:1, they brought Jesus to Pilate “And they began to accuse Him,” and said, “We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar.” When flattery did not work they lied. That’s what hatred does. That’s what hypocrisy does. You may say I will never do that. Well, in Matthew 12:30 we read, “Whoever is not with me is against me…” we need to take our side. We live in a world where cannot be lukewarm, there is no such a thing a being neutral. Even silence is an answer.

**In conclusion,** the bottom line for us today is that we owe God everything. As we pay our taxes because the coin bears the image of Caesar. May we give ourselves to God because we bear God’s image. God made man in His own image and we’re obligated to give ourselves to Him. It is my prayer that those who have not given themselves to God, that those who have held back might understand that, they’re either for Jesus or against Jesus. May God’s Holy Spirit open our hearts that those who bear Your image will give You what they owe, and that is their lives. May God open our hearts in this His glory. Amen.