

A Call to Give Everything to God

Matthew 22:15-22 (October 18, 2020)

Matthew 22:15-22

¹⁵Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him in what he said. ¹⁶So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, “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. ¹⁷Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?” ¹⁸But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, “Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? ¹⁹Show me the coin used for the tax.” And they brought him a denarius. ²⁰Then he said to them, “Whose head is this, and whose title?” ²¹They answered, “The emperor’s.” Then he said to them, “Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” ²²When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

Historical Context

Two groups that normally wanted little to do with each other – the Herodians derived their power from the Roman occupiers, while the Pharisees aligned more closely with the occupied and oppressed commoners – declare a temporary truce. They decide to work together to set a trap for Jesus, hoping he will answer their questions improperly. The question they pose is whether it was lawful to pay the poll or imperial tax that funded Roman occupation. Should Jesus answer in the affirmative, the adoration of the crowds would likely not simply evaporate, but rather be turned into opposition. Should he answer negatively, however, then he will have positioned himself over and against the Romans, never a wise thing to do.

Theme: A Call to Give Everything to God

“Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”

This phrase has become ubiquitous in our times, and western culture as a whole. It seems, at face value, a support for the separation of “church and state,” and a framework for understanding that we each have civic responsibility and religious responsibility—and that those are separate endeavors. We have duty to the state, and duty to our God.

However, that isn’t even *close* to what Jesus is talking about here. In the ancient world there was no concept of a separation of civic and religious life. For Caesar wasn’t just the secular head of state there...he was proclaimed (certainly self-proclaimed) to be a god.

Jesus raises the question: what then belongs to the Caesar, and what belongs to God? If we reframe the question just a bit, the clear answer emerges. If we gave to Zeus the things that belonged to Zeus, and to God the things that are God’s...what would WE end up giving to Zeus? Hopefully nothing. He is a sham. A non-existent entity, with no more divine power than the average tsetse fly.

And, what belongs to God, then? Everything. This then isn’t a call for separation of state and religion. This isn’t the establishment of a dual responsibility to God and country.

This is a call to give all that we have and all that we are to God.