

“Giving God What’s Rightfully His”

Matthew 22:15-22

Pentecost 20, Oct 22, 2017

You may have heard about that teenaged boy who was standing in the living room of his home. He had a quarter in his right hand that he would flick high into the air with his right thumb and then catch in the palm of his left hand. He was doing this repeatedly. Finally, his younger sister wanted to see if she could emulate her brother’s antics; his skill his coordination and dexterity.

“Give me the quarter,” his younger sister called out to him rather sharply. “Give me the quarter, I want to see if I can do that too!”

The older brother finally attempted to appease his younger sibling by crying out: **“Sis, I’ll tell you what! I’ll flip the coin one more time--Heads, I win and tails, you lose!**

She consented to her older brother’s proposition without really taking time to consider its fullest ramifications.

It wasn’t until later in the day that she realized she had been dubbed by her older brother and placed in a no-win situation!

So much of life, seems to be about our finding, ourselves, at times in a no-win situation.

Even in the games that we play! Take the game of chess for example. The last words you want to hear from your opponent’s mouth are those dreadful words: “Check,” when they are one move away from capturing your king; or checkmate, announcing that they already have you in a no-holes-barred situation.

Someone has once said that POLITICS MAKES FOR STRANGE BEDFELLOWS...

And certainly...this is something that we can see going on here.

Certainly it is no secret that there were different denominations of Jewish people among the Jewish people in Jesus’ day as there are different denominations within Christianity among those who profess the Christian faith today.

Pharisees, really were on one end of the spectrum and the Herodians were on the other end of the spectrum.

Pharisees held to a very strict interpretation of the Old Testament laws. They certainly believed in the divine inspiration of the Old Testament Hebrew Scriptures... They abhorred the fact that the Roman Empire was now the occupying government ready to pass judgment on everything they wanted to do.

The Herodians on the other hand, are people who believed that the Pharisees took their religion far too seriously! They welcomed Roman rule over their lives because of all of the fringe benefits they thought that the Roman Empire was supplying and would continue to supply to them.

Someone has not only said: “Politics makes for strange bedfellows!” But also said that nothing will unify two groups of people faster than when they share a common enemy.

And the enemy in this case was Jesus and his followers; whom they saw as posing a great threat to their present way of life.

EARLIER THIS SUMMER I HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO VISIT BOSTON FOR THE FIRST TIME AND ONE OF THE SITES I REALLY ENJOYED SEEING WAS THAT OF THE OLD NORTH CHURCH. That’s where two sextons were to be standing high up in the bell tower of the old church, a copy of plans drawn by the great British architect, Christopher Wren, who designed St Paul’s Cathedral in London.

One if by land, two if by sea....to aid Paul Revere in his midnight ride on April 18, 1775.

Another site was Boston Harbor where the great “Boston Tea Party” took place, which was not really so much the celebration of a party, as a protest which the American colonists were lodging against the British!

NO TAXATION WITHOUT REPRESENTATION. What independent Americans would discover within a century is that taxation with representation is not necessarily such a great thing either. Greg Barzan - American comedian.

Sometimes there is a great injustice done to this text...when used by preachers like myself to promote tithing than it is used for anything else.

Yes, the Old Testament did require God’s Old Testament people to tithe. But in the New Testament the primary motivation for giving--should not simply be that of a legalistic requirement...but MOTIVATED BY THE GLORIOUS PROCLAMATION OF WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR THE WHOLE HUMAN RACE IN JESUS CHRIST.

Jesus never said don’t tithe.

SO WHAT DO THEY DO? THEY TRY TO PUT HIM IN A NO WIN SITUATION. THEY ASKED HIM, “LORD IS IT LAWFUL TO PAY TAXES TO CAESAR OR NOT?”

If Jesus said yes, it is lawful to pay taxes...then he could have lost a lot of popular support from the more conservative wings of Judaism that strongly opposed Roman Rule.

But if he said, “No it is not lawful to pay taxes,” he could have run the risk of antagonizing the Roman authorities who very well may have had Jesus arrested.

So what Jesus do? He doesn’t answer that ominous question with an “either, or” kind of answer, he answers that question by posing a question to his opponents of his own once again.

Show me one of your Roman coins, which someone had just pulled out of his pocket, a denarius--and asked whose image is upon the coin.

The “emperor’s” they reply...then render unto Caesar, the Emperor, the things that are Caesars.

Yes, this very coin was minted by Caesar and put out there for circulation.... If the Caesar had authorized the coin then he certainly had the right to call a portion of it back to himself.

The Greek that is translated “Render” is *apostote* which does just mean to pay Caesar the things that are Caesars the way that the King James Version translates this verse. Neither does it just mean to give to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s the way the New International Version translates this verse. Giving back to someone that which is rightfully theirs.

And the same thing is true for every one of us in our relationship to God? What good things are there that we enjoy in this life that have not been first of all given to us by God?

And I yet, I think, there is a good possibility over the years that there have been some well-intentioned preachers like myself who made have does a great disservice to this Biblical text--by only using it among their congregants to promote tithing.

Yes, in the Old Testament era: Tithing was expected of God’s people. 10% percent of their income off the top was to be given back to God!

NUMBERS 18:21 “I give to the Levites all the tithes in Israel as their inheritance in return for the work they do while serving at the tent of meeting.

Proverbs 3:9-10 “Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the first-fruits of all your crops, then your barns will be filled to overflowing and your vats will brim over with new wine.”

Malachi 3:8 “Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. “But you ask, ‘How are we robbing you?’ “In tithes and offerings. **9** You are under a curse—your whole nation—because you are robbing me. **10** Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.

Matthew 23:23 “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.

Matthew 20:28, “Whoever would be great among you must become the servant of all, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many!”

Mark 12:41-48 While people have always had a tendency however to compare what we give in comparison to what other people give; Jesus encourages us to do away with that notion entirely, when he was sitting outside the temple one day...with those two big offering receptacles placed right by the entryway into the temple. Yes, a lot of well-to-do folks were putting in large sums, but Jesus took notice of a widow who came along and dumped in her two mites, her two pennies, if you please, because Jesus said that was the largest gift given there that day!

Every person in every congregation has the potential of becoming the biggest giver in the Church when they give in proportion to what God has first of all given to them.

Whole human race found ourselves in a no win situation--indebted to God--because of all the sins we have committed against him that we could never pay off.

Three analogies made in the New Testament to help us better understand the work Christ and what he has done for us!

DISSOLVED OUR DEBT

Debts are a big part of everyday life. Let's face it, without payment plans there are some things in life we might never afford. Things like cars, though it takes five to six years to pay back the debt. Or college education, despite an average debt of \$27,000 at graduation. Or houses, with a debt that is often spread over three decades. A DEBT WE CAN NEVER REPAY!

No wonder people celebrate when such large debts are paid in full! Most of us eventually pay our debts, but it's also possible to get so far into debt that there's no way out. In fact, that has *already* happened...*you and I owe a debt that we can never pay!*

Our debt is the reason that God's Son, Jesus Christ, came to earth 2000 years ago. Thankfully, He didn't come to make us pay up! Just the opposite: the Bible explains that “God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:17).

Saved from what? The Bible says “as by one man [the first man, Adam] sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Romans 5:12). So, it's not just criminals and evil leaders who are sinners. It's also “normal” people who tell lies to hide the truth, cheat to gain an advantage, and fail to keep their promises. God calls such actions *sins*, and we're *all* guilty of doing them.

His justice demands payment for our offenses against each other and God himself. The Bible warns, “as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27). The bad news is there's nothing

we could bring to that heavenly “courtroom” that would be nearly enough to “pay for” the debt of sins we’ve accumulated during our lifetimes.

Jesus Christ “also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust [us!], that He might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18). He paid the debt of sin *we couldn't pay...a debt he didn't owe!* Did you get that? The *Son of God* willingly took the judgment of your sins and mine to save us from suffering *our sins'* consequences for eternity in hell!

PAID OUR RANSOM I Timothy 2:5-7

For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

MADE VICARIOUS SATISFACTION FOR OUR SINS.

Galatians 4:4, When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law to redeem all of us who were under the law that we might receive adoptions as sons; whereby we cry: Abba Father.

2 Corinthians 5:21 God made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, so that through him we might become the righteousness of God!

Well, I thought I might close the sermon this morning by sharing with you yet again one of those little stories about St Peter and the Pearly Gates, which I always feel a need to preface for you --- by reminding you up front that they all teaching the false doctrine of works righteousness; that there is something we could do to merit God’s salvation... Something that St. Paul says in Romans is totally an impossible task, Paul who says: “By works of the law shall no one be justified in God’s sight, for its through the law that we gain knowledge of sin.”

Apparently three men who all arrived at the Pearly Gates about the same time; men had recently died: The man who was first in line was a school teacher; the man who was second in line was a garbage collector and the man who was third in line was a lawyer.

Peter says before you can enter through the Pearly Gates you must all answer a question for me. What was the name of that gigantic ship that perished on its maiden voyage in the icy waters of the North Atlantic Ocean, making its way from South Hampton to New York City...April 15, 1912. In case you have difficulty remember the name of the ship was the title of a movie back in 1997.

Oh, that’s easy: The answer is the “Titanic.”
So Peter opened the door and allowed this school teacher through the Pearly Gates.

The man next in line was a garbage collector. figuring Heaven didn't REALLY need all the odors that this guy would bring with him, decided to make the question a little harder: "How many people died on the ship?" Fortunately for him, the trash man had just seen the movie and answered, "about 1,500." "That's right! You may enter."

St. Peter then turned to the lawyer. "Name them."

Friends, I don’t know why in those St. Peter and the Pearly Gate stories that lawyers so often end up becoming the brunt of the story! Lawyers fill an important need in our society. Most of the lawyers we know are very reputable people! There are times when we would all be at a loss without the help of a good lawyer.

But when it comes to the last day, and the hour of our death, there is not one thing a lawyer can to help us in that situation at all.

So often those St Peter and the Pearly Gates stories are infiltrated with false doctrine, and yet they can also give us a platform for speaking the Gospel out loud to others. There is nothing that you or I can ever do; there is no way that you and I could ever be apart from what our God has done for us in the gift of his Son our Savior Jesus Christ to redeem us and bring us everlasting life.

In our second distribution hymn today--the words are so beautiful in expressing this truth!

Rock of ages cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee. Let the water and the blood from thy riven side which flowed, be for sin the double cure. Cleanse me from its guilt and power!

Not the labor of my hands can fulfil the law's demands. Could my zeal no respite know, could my tears forever flow. All for sin could not atone! Thou must save and you alone!

While I draw this fleeting breath; when my eyelids close in death, When I soar to worlds unknown. See thee on thy judgment throne! Rock of ages cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee.