

10-18-20

Sermon- Why Do You Test Jesus?

Scriptures- Matthew 22: 15-22, CTW- PS 99

Hymns- 65, 445, 537

Theme- The religious leaders of the time were trying to trap Jesus by cornering him with a play on words. Jesus avoided this trap by showing that we have dual citizenship (1 Peter 2:17). Our citizenship in the nation requires that we pay taxes to government authority for the services we receive. Our citizenship in the kingdom of heaven requires that we pledge to God our ultimate obedience and commitment. Has this fact caused conflict for you?

How many times have you heard someone say something like, "I only have to do two things, pay taxes and die"? Now they even have a new tax added on which is called by some a "death tax" which means that they tax the estate that is on by a will to the heirs. There is a lot of talk, debate and obstruction about cutting taxes in the last few days in current political affairs.

I. Introduction: Today's text is not about taxes but how we put things in their proper perspective. The Pharisees want to trap Jesus with a trick question about taxes that will make him side with their law or Caesar's tax code. Jesus blows them away when He takes a coin with Caesar's image on it and tells them, "Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and give to God what belongs to God" (Matthew 6:21).

Not to give God what belongs to God is to rob God according to Malachi 3:8 – 9. The Pharisees were astonished which seems to mean speechless as they departed (Matthew 22:22).

Why were the Pharisees wanting to try to trick Jesus? The reason why they wanted to try and trick Jesus was because Jesus's authority rivaled their own! In trying to force Jesus to choose a side, they hoped to get Jesus to incriminate Himself.

Did they have a thrifty devotion? What do our own decisions say about us?

II. ARE WE THRIFTY WITH OUR DEVOTION?

A. How is it possible to have a devotion to God that falls short? The Pharisees had motives that were not pure. Their motives were not religious but political. Jesus sees through their plan and turns the tables by emphasizing that the proper thing is to give to both God and Caesar what belongs to them.

Is it possible that Jesus was calling the devotion of the Pharisees a **thrifty devotion**? Although the notion of thrifty devotion is not mentioned directly in this passage of scripture, it seems to be implied. There are times when we might approach our spiritual lives the same way we do our bargain shopping.

B. Jesus calls us all to totally committed devotion: Anything that is not whole-hearted devotion falls short of what we are called to do, and amounts to us testing Jesus to see if we have "done enough."

So, how is our devotion? Are there times when our bargain shopping echoes our devotion in our spiritual lives? Does God skimp when He offers us His grace?

For instance, there are two extremes of how we spend money: (1) We either stockpile it, hoarding it because we are thrifty; or (2) We might be extravagant because we get careless spend more than we should have.

Illustration: "In 1626, Peter Minuit, the director-general of Dutch West India Company's settlement in North America, made what he thought was a very good deal. He bought Manhattan Island from native Indian chiefs for \$24. Unfortunately for him, company headquarters didn't think it was such a bargain and charged him a fine for his "extravagance." Mr. Minuit's extravagance would not purchase a square inch of Manhattan Island today. The moral of this story is "What we see as extravagant today may someday be seen as cheap".

C. Does God think of us as cheap in our devotion to Him?

God does not think of us as cheap, because Jesus bought us with a price (**I Corinthians 6:20**). We are made in God's image! Just as God does not think we are cheap, God does not want us be thrifty in our potential for serving Him! If we do that, it amounts to us testing the strength of His love for us! Do you really want to do that?

God's grace is free to us but it was extremely costly to Jesus Christ who paid the price that we could not have paid. **Matthew 22:37** reminds us that ... "You shall love the Lord your God with **all** your heart and with **all** your soul and with **all** your mind" (ESV). We are not ever to hold anything back!

III. WHAT DO OUR DECISIONS SAY ABOUT US?

A. For the religious leaders in this story, was their question a masquerade for a seemingly genuine curiosity? What is odd about the group that asked Jesus this question was that these people were normally polarized. The group that was asking Jesus this question was not a likely group.

Herodians and Pharisees were both politically and religiously at odds with each other. Was it a law of opposites attracting? The Herodians would have been in favor of taxes whereas the Pharisees opposed taxation.

The Pharisees disliked Roman oppression but would play the game so long as the Romans did not interfere in their religion. They were known for being fake and insincere for holding these kinds of positions...is that what we want to be known for?

There were Roman emperors who declared themselves a god to be worshipped. They wanted their subjects to say "Caesar is Lord!"

In the church at Pergamum (**look it up in Revelation 2:12-17**) people were required to call Caesar "**Lord**" which meant that refusing to do so would more than likely cause persecution. By doing so, however, they were testing God.

There are some in our world today who want to make our government the answer for every problem. Our government can

solve some problems but it can never give us the gift of eternal life!

"We worship God not government!" I have heard that said as part of a political campaign, but as Christians we must hold this as a core belief and witness it to others in what we actually do.

To do less than that is to test the Lordship of Jesus Christ!

B. What would happen to our success if we did not give to God what is His? How well would we succeed without God? Or we even succeed at all? What does Jesus say about success and being connected with God? Apart from God, we lose our place and our purpose.

Consider what Jesus said in **John 15:4 – 5:** 4 "Remain in me, and I in you. As the branch can't bear fruit by itself, unless it remains in the vine, so neither can you, unless you remain in me. 5 I am the vine. You are the branches. He who remains in me, and I in him, the same bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."

John 15:4,5 is just one of the places that Jesus reminds us that he gives us our place and our purpose. Money can give us things but it cannot give us our place in eternity.

C. What is our duty as Christians in the world? What would Jesus say the answer is? Probably all of us would mention a list something like the following just to name a few...check it against your own list: Humility, honesty, compassion, loving, reconciliation, forgiveness, prayer, diligence, welcoming, evangelizing, self-denial, using our talents.

Our duty as Christians should serve to help us understand our purpose in the world. It should help us understand who we are and why we are here...Think about it!

IV. So, What is it that Jesus wants us to do with our lives to get real and to make Him real to others?

A. Jesus wants us to be like Him in denying ourselves and taking up our crosses as we follow Him. It has been said that there is no integrity in being a cross-wearer if you cannot be a cross bearer. (Michael Duduit. ed. The Abingdon Preaching

Annual 1999.) Jesus wants us to give to Him our best because He gave to us His best. Jesus wants us to give to God what is God's by giving our best in all that we do.

Illustration: Most everyone will remember the era of the Susan B. Anthony dollar. It lasted merely three years, for a very good reason. The coins looked too much like quarters, and people didn't like the confusion. In the public's mind a dollar needed to look like it was worth four quarters, not just twenty-five cents.

The coin seemed insignificant so it fell out of circulation and became a memory.

Christians can learn an important lesson from the U.S.

Treasury's error. The world expects believers to look like Christ, and act like Him, not be a cheap imitation. People outside of the church see too many professing Christians who look more like "fake imitations" than the real thing. Live in such a way that others will easily recognize a significant difference!

God wants us to look and live like Christians. So the questions for the day are:

1. By constantly testing Jesus by being less than we ought to be, are we giving God our best in all that we do? and;

2. Does our church do all that we can in our world and in our community through our prayers, presence, gifts and services? Yes, even in the face of a Pandemic...especially in the face of a Pandemic!"

B. Hopefully you remember the illustration of the pig and the chicken: A pig said to a chicken, "what shall we have for breakfast?" The chicken suggested "Let's have ham and eggs." The pig said, "Oh no, not ham! The chicken replied, "Why not? I'll furnish the eggs and you the ham." "The pig said, "For you it's involvement; but for me it's total commitment."

Which would God prefer from us "involvement or total commitment?"

Do we not rob God if we give Him anything less than our total commitment in our giving, in our living and in our loving service in His Name?

Is God satisfied with our thrifty devotion? Did Jesus skimp on His love, sacrifice and commitment for us while He was on the cross?

Ezekiel 18:4 says "Behold, all souls are Mine. As the soul of the father, also the soul of the son, they are Mine. The soul that sins, **IT** shall die" (KJV).

We owe God our praise because without God, life is incomplete and without our belief in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior eternal life is impossible!

Amen? Let Us Pray...