

**ST PAUL'S CHURCH (RONDEBOSCH)**  
**SUNDAY 18 OCTOBER 2020**  
**TWENTEETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (YEAR A)**  
**READINGS: EXODUS 33:12-23 //PSALM 99//**  
**1 THESSALONIANS 1:1-10// MATTHEW 22:15:22**

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*God of wisdom and love,  
source of all good,  
send your Spirit to teach us your truth  
and guide our actions  
in your way of peace.  
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ,*

The well-known phrase, in our Gospel text Matthew 22 v21 reads: “***Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s***” was Jesus’ answer to a trick question posed to him by Jerusalem’s religious leaders, who desperately looked for a way to counteract his growing popularity: “***Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar , or not?***”

**We ask the same question today “is it lawful to pay taxes to a government where there is so much corruption in the abuse and wasteful spending of state vehicles, equipment, time and funds and where ministers and government official misuse tax payers’ money.**

**Allow me to read some news headlines**  
*And I quote*

*“Hefty jail sentence for Cape tax fraudsters as SARS tightens the screws”*

*“Two Cape Town businesspeople have been sentenced to 16 and 17 years direct imprisonment for 487 counts of tax fraud, racketeering, money laundering and corruption, SARS said on Friday.”*

*“South African taxpayers have grown weary in recent years of a near constant stream of corruption scandals. From the office of the President down to local government and into the private sector almost every segment of business and government has seen growing levels of graft come to light”*

“The **tax money** is **used** to fund necessary services that people need. These include health care, safety and security, housing, roads, railways, harbours and communications. It also includes social grants like child-care and disability grants.” (*westerncapegov.za*)

**But these money are often being misused by those in power and the poor suffer**

*Let us turn to our Gospel text and reflect and unpack why they asked Jesus the question “Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?”*

Today’s passage in the Gospel of Matthew is the section that tells the story of Jesus' confrontation with the rulers and religious leaders of Jerusalem in the temple—just a few days before He went to the cross. This past three weeks we had seen how our Lord rebuked these leaders for their unbelief through a series of three parables. And Matthew 21:45-46 tells us their attitude throughout the hearing of these parables:

*When the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they looked for a way to arrest him but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet (Matthew 21:45-46).*

And it's in this frame of mind that we find them taking action against Jesus in this morning text.

The Pharisees and the Herodian’s plot together to formulate tricky questions to confront Jesus —all with the intention of trapping Him in His words.

Normally, these two groups had nothing to do with one another. They were polar opposites. They hated one another.

The Pharisees were obsessed with their religious traditions, while the Herodians had little religion at all. They were politicians only intent on keeping a grip on their power in the nation. The Pharisees believed that religion was superior to the state. The Herodians believed that the state was superior to religion.

Yet their shared disdain for Jesus brought the two ideologically and politically opposed groups together. (*Sounds familiar – with certain political parties in our own country*)

They wanted to outsmart Jesus and get Him to say something that would get Him in trouble with either the Roman authorities or the common people.

In v 17 they asked Jesus *“Tell us then what your opinion is? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not”*

Jews in first century Palestine, paid numerous taxes: Temple taxes, land taxes, and customs taxes etc. This particular tax in question was the Imperial tax paid

as tribute to Rome to support the Roman occupation of Israel. Just think about it first-century Jews were required to pay their oppressors a denarius a year to support their own oppression.

The Herodians, who supported the Roman “governance” of Israel were in favour of these taxes, because they liked all the benefits they have received from Rome. Those opposed to Roman government which represent most of the crowd, found the tax offensive as it was a constant reminder of their humiliation. And for the religious Pharisees, this was offensive because they had to pay the tax with a coin engraved with a picture of Caesar Tiberius and a proclamation of his divinity, forcing them to break the first two Commandments.

So what was Jesus to say in answer to this question? If he said, “Yes; pay your taxes to Rome,” He would remind them they weren’t a free people. They were under a tyrant’s yoke, and then the Pharisees could accuse Him before the people, and say that He was not the conquering Messiah that they had expected who had promised that he would break oppression and set the prisoners free. Then his influence with the people would have been destroyed. He would be regarded as a traitor and a coward.

But if he had said, “No don’t pay the taxes” then the Herodians would have reported him for stirring a revolution and he would have been arrested as a freedom fighter and be accused of treason. His enemies made it a yes or no situation. This seemed a hopeless, dangerous, a no win situation for Christ.

But then Jesus said to them show me the coin and they brought him a denarius and he asked them, *‘Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?’ They answered, ‘Caesar’s.’ Then he said to them, ‘Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s*

In this statement, Jesus recognizes the legitimacy of the state that we also read in **Romans 13:1-7**. We have an obligation to honour the authority of the state. God determines who our earthly rulers will be, and we have a responsibility to obey them.

***Jesus' answer is simply an affirmation of Christian submission to governing authorities***

However Giving to Caesar does not mean:

- If Caesar (the government) asks us to violate a command of God, it does not mean we must be obedient.
- If Caesar (government) asks us to do an illegal or immoral act// or go against our conscience – it does not mean we must be obedient -- We may hold high office in medical service, or in the government services, or working for the

police, or in education or even as a priest and we are asked as Christians to compromise our convictions then we have to refuse.

**We still have a responsibility to speak out against injustices, corruption, gender- based violence, misuse and abuse of power, poor service delivery racism, oppression, killings and murders**

But there is a second part of Jesus answer and sometimes we miss the most important part of this text *and give to God what is God's.*'

*What does this mean?*

*Firstly*, it means that we give to God that which belongs to God's: that is, we give ourselves. In Genesis 1:26-27 we read that we are made in the image of God We bear God's image, and so it is appropriate to give ourselves back to God—all that we have and all that we are—because God created us and we are an integral part of God's realm. Giving ourselves means emptying ourselves and allow God to take control of our lives—It means God comes first in our lives. It means confessing our sins and give our burdens to Him. It means believe and trust in Jesus alone for our salvation. It means spending time with God through worship, personal prayer, devotion, reflection, meditation and Bible study.

*Secondly*, it means that because we belong to God, we belong to the people of God, the body of Christ. We are baptized into this fellowship. Therefore we must give ourselves to each other. We need to reach out to each other, with care, love and compassion.

**As you go from here today I want to challenge you to think about the things in your life that God wants you to give back to him.**