

**“Choices for Giving” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Pentecost 21
October 22, 2023**

- I. **Matthew 22:21** – Jesus said, “Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”
- II. **How many of you are thinking ahead to Christmas gift giving?**
 - a. I know, I know, it’s only October, but my sister and I were chatting the other day, and she asked, “What do you want for Christmas this year? I’m trying to think ahead.”
 - i. I was a little surprised thinking about December, but I suppose it’s not that far off... so I just left it with an, “I’ll get back to you on that one...”
 - ii. I really don’t know what I need or want, which makes it hard to give my family members the opportunity to bless me with gifts.
 - b. Sometimes gift giving is easy because the person has many activities or hobbies that they need supplies and equipment... or they might they have lots of needs that are easy to fill, for example young families or new homeowners.
 - c. Other times, gift giving is super hard... like when the person has everything, or they really don’t need anything.
 - i. My dad is like that – he’s pretty content with most everything, and it takes some creative ideas to give him something that he would enjoy.
 - ii. One year I gave him some specialty cheese... another year I donated a farm animal to an African family in need in his name... and last year I bought him some filberts or hazelnuts.
 - iii. The truth is, he really doesn’t need any of these things, but would appreciate a nice card or phone call just as much.
 - d. So, let’s just pretend you are on the phone with God, and you realize that His birthday is coming up on Christmas Day... and you ask Him, “God, what can I get You for Christmas this year? I’m trying to think ahead...”
 - i. What is His response to you?
 - ii. This is an important answer – so keep your answer in mind as we consider our Gospel lesson today.
- III. **Jesus is confronted with a no-win situation in our Gospel reading.**
 - a. As I mentioned last week, the Pharisees were now on a mission to discredit Him, oppose Him... and eventually murder Him.
 - b. They were the focus of His parables... as He condemns them for rejecting God’s prophets who were sent to share God’s plans... but also that God was rejecting them for their pride-filled hearts.
 - c. Now it was time for Jesus to be rejected as they came up with their plan to trap Him in His words.
 - d. The Pharisees chose some of their followers to act all innocent and ask Him a question that would give them a way to accuse Jesus... either with the crowds... or with the Roman authorities.

- e. They start by buttering Him up a little – saying how wonderful He is for speaking the truth and not allowing the people around Him to influence what He teaches.
- f. Then the no-win question: “Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?” (v17)
 - i. As simple as that question sounds, it was all about getting Him to admit on the record what He thought.
 - 1. Either He believed that Rome should receive its due, making Him no better than a tax collector and traitor to the Jewish people...
 - 2. Or... He believed that Rome should not be supported by taxes, which would make Him an insurrectionist.
 - ii. Depending upon His answer, the Pharisees could tell the crowds who loved Him so much that He supported Rome... or they could run to the Roman authorities and accuse Jesus of trying to start a rebellion and that He doesn't respect the authority of the emperor.
- g. So, Jesus sees through their act and calls them hypocrites... then asks them to produce some Roman currency.
- h. Whose picture is on the coin and what does it say? (v 20)
 - i. A denarius was well-known by all, and the picture was of Caesar and the inscription would read something about His reign and the Roman Empire.
 - ii. They respond – “Caesar's” – which has now officially turned the tables on them, because Jesus doesn't fall for their plan to trap Him, but shows that something bigger is at play...
- i. “Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.” (v 21)
 - i. Give the government it's due.
 - ii. Give to God His things.
- j. No arguments or accusations from the friends of the Pharisees at that point, just amazement that Jesus is absolutely right.

IV. **Reflecting on Jesus' statement, what do we give to God?**

- a. Of course, we realize that God created all things and there is nothing we could give to God that He couldn't accomplish by His own power.
- b. Since the point of the question posed to Jesus was about taxes, He answered with the money used to pay them... but is Jesus telling us to pay God with the money He is due?
- c. What are God's things that He wants us to give Him?
 - i. You might be surprised to hear that God isn't after your things to become His things... because everything you have is already His!
 - ii. He gave us the wonderful gift of all we have so that we can manage it for Him – that's our stewardship of His gifts.
 - iii. Here is what God wants for all people:

1. To repent of their sins and have faith that Jesus is their Lord and Savior – to believe that God has sent His Son to rescue us, rather than trust in our own way.
- d. We are so quick to knock the Pharisees and their rejection of Jesus, but how many times do we fail to put our trust in God alone?
 - i. The point Jesus makes is that we give everything to God ... our hearts, our minds, our lives, and all we have.
 - ii. Isn't there just a little part of us that wants to keep some things for ourselves?
 1. Our money is an easy target, as most people rarely give more than a small portion of their overall income.
 2. Our time is also God's, but we guard it so we can have some for our relaxation and things we enjoy.
 3. Our talents are a gift God gave to each of us individually, but we bury them instead of bringing glory to God with the things that are His.
 - iii. Again, God wants us to repent and trust in Him above all things, and these failures on our part are issues of trust – and especially that we have choices for giving – either to our selfish side, or to God.

V. **Jesus could never be accused of being selfish.**

- a. All His life was spent in obedience to the Father, living the perfect life under the law, and becoming the only perfect person to ever live.
 - i. He always gave to the Father what was His – glory, honor, blessing, and praise – all that Jesus did was pleasing to His Father – which is what made Him the perfect sacrifice.
 - ii. Never worrying about what He would do or how He would pay for things, Jesus simply walked the way of trust...
- b. Now, our only hope for getting out from under the curse of sin and death... along with our own selfish, sinful nature... was Jesus facing the cross in our place.
- c. Without question, Jesus gave everything, even His very life, for us.
 - i. All the choices He had were filtered through the will of His Father, which was for Him to suffer and die.
- d. In this most wonderful gift, the death of Jesus was counted as our forgiveness and our righteousness before God.

VI. **God had so many choices for giving** – but He chose to give us forgiveness.

- a. In response to that love, it's so much easier for us to love Him and live for Him.
- b. God doesn't need our things... but He desires our faith and trust in Him, which oftentimes means we do give of our time, talents, and treasures.
- c. As God has loved us with His all, we are able to love Him and love our neighbors with all that have and are.

d. Nothing could be better than giving to God what is His, because it means we repent of our sins and trust in Him alone to save us by His grace. Amen.