

ON NOT BACKING DOWN

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Scripture: Matthew 22: 15-22

Then the Pharisees went and plotted together how they might trap Him in what He said. And they sent their disciples to Him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in truth, and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any. Tell us then, what do You think? Is it lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?" But Jesus perceived their malice, and said, "Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites? Show Me the coin used for the poll tax." And they brought Him a denarius. And He said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" They said to Him, "Caesar's." Then He said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's." And hearing this, they were amazed, and leaving Him, they went away.

Lord Jesus, this is about You and the way in which You handled these people who came to trap You. And now Lord, through Your Holy Spirit, show us what it is that we need to glean from this passage and apply in our hearts. We are attentive Master, to Your leading. In Your name we pray. Amen.

If you know a fair bit about these passages, you know that all of this is coming to a head. Till now, Jesus has been moving all around Judea and Samaria. We saw in ch. 21 that He has come into Jerusalem, and we know that He came in riding on the colt of a donkey. Then He walked into the temple and He cleansed the temple. He threw out all the money changers saying, "My house shall be called a house of prayer, and you have made it a den of thieves."

Then soon after that, the Pharisees challenge Him and ask by what authority He is doing all these things? Jesus then counter questions them and says, "I will also tell you one thing; which if you tell me, I will then tell you by what authority I do these things. And then He asks, "From where does the baptism of John come?" And we remember we've looked at that scripture. Then the Pharisees don't want to answer that. But then we see that this authority that they are challenging Him and asking where it comes from, Jesus replies with actually with three parables. He doesn't reply to their particular question, but He goes on to tell them three parables, and we looked at that.

1. The parable of the two sons asked to go work in the vineyard; one says he won't go, but then goes and the other says he will go but then doesn't. Then Jesus draws something from that.
2. The parable of the landowner.
3. The parable of the marriage feast.

By this time, the Pharisees are beginning to understand that all of these parables are about them, and these parables are not talking very well about them. So now we come to this particular encounter with Jesus.

In vs. 15 it says, "Then the Pharisees went and plotted together how they might trap Him in what He said." So now, they are changing a little. Till now, they were trying to catch Him on the things that He was doing – on the Sabbath, etc. Now they are saying, "Let's catch Him on what He is saying." But they also decide that they are not going to be the ones to confront Him. They've had enough of confrontations with Jesus; they've not come out looking very good. So they find their disciples, the disciples of the Pharisees, and they find some of the Herodians to go with them, and they meet with them.

Let me first explain a little about the Herodians: they appear about three times in the Word. But we need to understand that these were people who didn't get along with the Jews. Pastor Scott Harris says this about them: "The Herodians were a political group that was supportive of Herod and Rome. Some may have been Jewish, but many were of the same nationality as Herod – Idumean, descendants of the ancient enemies of the Jews, the Edomites. The Pharisees despised them for they considered them to be irreligious traitors. But now they needed their help. The Herodians were glad to help in this plot for they too hated Jesus simply because Herod Antipas wanted Him dead. Jesus even warned about this in Luke 13:31 that He should leave the region of Perea because Herod Antipas wanted to kill Him."

So, all this to say that the Herodians were ones who owed allegiance to Rome. The Pharisees did not, but you can see their ploy. They are trying to bring to Jesus a question and they brought two people together; two people who cannot stand each other – the disciples of the Pharisees and the Herodians – and they come to Jesus with this question.

And they ask Jesus the question after they flatter Him. How do they flatter Him?

- They call Him teacher;
- They say that they know that He is truthful,
- That He teaches the way of God truthfully,
- That He defers to no one,
- That He is impartial.

Then they pose the question: Is it lawful to give a poll tax to Caesar or not? This is a very, very smart question because if Jesus answers "Yes, it is lawful," He's going to lose the support of the people because they despised this poll tax. What was the poll tax? Let me read a couple of translations of Matthew 22:17, that help us understand it.

- NIV – the imperial tax to Caesar
- ESV – the taxes to Caesar
- KJV – the tribute to Caesar
- NASB – the poll tax to Caesar

It had to be paid by every Jew above the age of 20. So it was called the 'head tax' which was given to Rome. And the Jews hated it. So, if Jesus said 'Yes', He would get the ire of the people. And if He said 'No', He could be called up for being a dissenter by the Herodians. It was a kind of a Catch-22 situation. It's the kind of a question that you pose when you ask somebody – Have you stopped beating your spouse? Either answer, Yes or No, is going to get you into trouble. You say 'Yes' or 'No' and in both cases you are accepting the premise that your spouse was being beaten. And that's the same kind of question that they have placed in front of Jesus.

So let's see what He says. Jesus however, perceives their malice and says that they were hypocrites and asked them why they were testing Him. And of course, we read that He asked them for a coin used to pay the tax. They bring Him a denarius. He asked them whose likeness and inscription is on the coin. They say it is Caesar's. So He says to them, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's." And then He adds, "And to God the things that are God's." The Bible tells us that they are amazed at His answer, and left Him and went away. So once again, their ploy, their trap to try and discredit Him, failed.

But let's look at this passage and ask ourselves what we need to learn from this particular passage.

POLL TAX

it was about the poll tax that they posed the question. But the poll tax doesn't concern us. It is specific to the poll tax at that time.

WHAT BELONGS TO GOD?

However, the second part of that answer is and must be worthy of our consideration. What is it? Render unto God the things that are of God. Which then begs the question: What belongs to God? They were supposed to give what was Caesar's to Caesar, and to God what was God's.

What is it for us, leaving that story aside, that we can ask the question: What must I give to God that belongs to Him? Well, for Caesar, he asked for a tax. But for God – what does He ask for? He asks for our lives. So we offer ourselves to God as the tax for being part of God's kingdom. In a sense, we are an offering that we give to God. God requires of citizens of His kingdom that they offer unto Him their lives. so in the revenue of the kingdom with God's image on every transaction (everything that we do has God's image on it), what is our offering to the Lord to look like?

Ephesians 6:7 says, "Do everything as unto the Lord." So, everything that we do as citizens of God's kingdom must have God's image upon it. That is what is required of God from His children; or if I can add here, from citizens of God's kingdom – everything that we do.

Well, that's a very broad statement. So let me try and break it up into maybe three or four areas. What does everything mean?

1. Our Attitudes:

What attitudes do we display that rightly reflect the image of the King? I am reminded of scripture that we just looked at, in Philippians that says: Have this attitude in you which was of Christ Jesus; one of being submissive, one who took the will of God and kept it in the forefront of everything that He did. And whatever it meant, He accepted it saying that the will of God had to be paramount.

I remember many years ago, about 1989, I had just gone into bible college. And that year, the denomination there decided to close this particular institution. And I remember the president of the institution at that time went to the board and made a presentation to them as to why it shouldn't be closed. The whole college was praying. Then we got the news that it hadn't worked and that they were going to dismantle this college, and the task of dismantling the college was placed on the president.

I remember watching him every day, because I was working there in the summer and helping with the dismantling. That meant taking down everything in the dorms – sending the books from the library to other institutions, cleaning up the entire place. I was part of the team that was working to close down this place, and I would look at him and think that there must be some rancor, some sarcastic comment, some cynicism (I'm going to do this only because they told me). But I have never forgotten the way in which he did the work that was given to him. He reflected Jesus in everything that he did. No rancor! This was a job given to him by the denomination, and he fulfilled it completely. And he did it with a great attitude. That just changed me. I still recall this man and what I learned from him. I never took a class from him, but I learned from him more than I would have got in a class. His name was Dr. Ragsdale, and he's still a wonderful saint of the Lord.

I also met another person. Sheila and I had the privilege of knowing Dr. J.T. Seamands when we were there. We had a male quartet that we used to sing in. And I remember going with JT, as everybody called him, to a Missions conference. I think it was sometime in January and it was very cold and

snowing. We finished the conference and were coming back in the car, and JT turned to me and he said, "You don't have a coat, do you?" I had a jacket, but he was talking about a long coat that you use when it's really blustery, needed for these kind of winter days. I said, "No JT, but I'm quite warm in the one that I have." We reached home, he was dropping me to my place, and I got out of the car. He too got out and came behind, opened the trunk of his car and pulled out the coat that he was using. He put it on my shoulders and he said, "You use it. You need it more than I do." I have never forgotten that incident. The humility, the compassion, the love of the saint of God. And as I thought about attitudes, these two wonderful men came to mind. This is the kind of attitude that we need to have with brothers and sisters all around us.

2. Our Thoughts:

Beyond attitudes, we need to also have to think about our thoughts. What thoughts are we thinking or dwelling upon that reflect the image of the King? Again, we come to Paul's eight-point grid, that whatever we are thinking about, we need to pass through that grip. If it doesn't line up with any one of them, then we need to dismiss that.

Philippians 4:8 "Whatever is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, of good repute, excellent, worthy of praise – dwell on these things." That's the eight-point grid we need to be thinking about those things – godly things.

3. Our Actions:

What things do we do that rightly reflect the image of the king?

James 2:26 says, "Faith without works is dead."

So there are things we must do because of our faith that will honor our faith and make our faith stand out or stand for something. And so, James is saying that it's not good enough that we say that we have a good belief system. That belief system should work itself out into good actions. What are the things that you and I do that people look and say, "My goodness! What a reflection of the God that he or she believes in"?

4. Our Behavior:

When people view our behavior, do they see reflections of the King of kings? When people view the way we behave, what do they see? I would say, if people are looking at us, beloved, the things that they may see ought to be the fruit of the Spirit of God. They need to see love, joy, peace, kindness, patience, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. All of these things must be part of our behavior.

Now we've looked at this particular incident, and we've moved away from the poll tax saying that it doesn't apply to us specifically. But the words of Jesus do; at least, His answer to them does – to give to God. What do we give to God? Everything. Who we are. And then we said that who we are can be broken up into these four areas of attitudes, thoughts, actions and behavior.

But I want us to press a little further because I think that there is something else that we can learn from this passage. Jesus used this example as an example to the direct question that they asked. But their idea was not to get an answer as in the terms of someone who is a genuine seeker – Lord, what must I do to inherit eternal life? The question they brought was one of entrapment. How can we derail Him? How can we catch Him by what He says? So I thought let's step back a little and look at this passage and say: What were they trying to do to Jesus that possibly could be done to us followers of Jesus? So let's look at it through that lens.

WHAT WERE THEY TRYING TO DO TO JESUS?

1. They were trying to discredit Jesus. I'm sure there are some of you sitting there, who perk up and say: My goodness! I'm facing that in my office space, in my work, from colleagues or from a friend trying to discredit me.
2. They were persistent. They kept coming to Jesus. Maybe there are others of you who are saying: My goodness! The things that are coming against me don't seem to let up; they are so persistent.
3. They were creative. First trying to catch Him on what He was doing. Remember they asked by what authority are You doing all these things? But now they are saying – we've gone past that stage. Let's trap Him by the things that He is saying. So they see how they might trap Him in what He said (Matthew 22:15). They were getting creative.
4. They were willing to make an ideologically inconsistent alliance with the Herodians. The Herodians and the Pharisees didn't see eye to eye. But 'your enemy's enemy is my friend' is the way they looked at it. You are an enemy of Jesus; we are an enemy of Jesus. We don't get along, but we have a common enemy. And so we become friends. Maybe that's happening to you as well – that there are people who are against each other but seem to be aligning against you.
5. They came with flattery. That's what they used to try and get to Jesus.

Now, if these were the things that happened to Jesus, I want us, in closing, to just look at this passage again and say: What can I learn from this passage? And I think that there are four points that we can take away from this passage.

- When you are doing the will of the Father, there will be opposition. Jesus was doing the explicit will of His Father, and He was being completely opposed every step of the way. You and I, beloved, are also called to do the will of our Father in heaven, and there will be opposition to that will. What do we do? If that's what you are doing and you're facing opposition, accept it. It's par for the course. That is just going to be a constant in everything that you do.

Why? Because Satan's agenda is constantly against God's agenda. So God's will for us, will make it Satan's will to oppose us. Satan wants us to do diametrically opposite of everything that God wants us to do. So there will be opposition. Don't get too taken up by it. Accept it and say: God has said that He will never leave me. So I'm going to bank on that and just move ahead.

- The attack might be on what you do or what you say. The attack might be on the things you are doing or on the words that you speak. Maybe, you are doing something – there's action involved. You're going out, you're doing this in His name, you're maybe giving something to somebody, paying for someone's education. Or maybe you're preaching the Word. Whatever, it can come from the things that you do or the things that you speak.

What do we do with that? will, God will give you the wisdom to deal with it. Just as He gave wisdom to Jesus to answer that question. So don't back down. Don't stop doing the things that you are doing or saying the things that you are saying, just because there is opposition. When you are confronted with a question, God will give you the wisdom to answer.

- The means to trap you might come in the guise of flattery. So what do you do? Don't let it go to your head. Remember, flattery is excessive and insincere praise, and is used for the other's self-interest. So when you hear flattering words, don't accept it as praise and let it go to your head, and then lose what's actually happening to you at that point.
- This opposition didn't deter Jesus. He just continued to do the Father's will and we should also do the same. Don't back away from doing the will of the Father. Jesus didn't do it in spite of all the opposition that came His way and we too shouldn't back down.

Four things we said when you are doing the will of the Father, there will be opposition, the attack might be on what you do or say, the means of trap you might come in the guise of flattery, and the opposition didn't deter Jesus. So whatever comes your way, know that God is with you and will give you the words to speak, will help you discern what is coming your way and will give you the strength and the ability to go forward. Jesus didn't back down. Neither should you. Amen.