

Sermon delivered on Oct. 19, 2014 by Pastor Sherry Keiper

Scriptures: Ps. 99; Matthew 22:15-22

Psalm 99

The Lord reigns, let the nations tremble; he sits enthroned between the cherubim, let the earth shake.

Great is the Lord in Zion; he is exalted over all the nations. Let them praise your great and awesome name—he is holy.

The King is might, he loves justice – you have established equity; in Jacob you have done what is just and right. Exalt the Lord our God and worship at his footstool; he is holy. Moses and Aaron were among his priests, Samuel was among those who called on his name; they called on the Lord and he answered them. He spoke to them from the pillar of cloud; they kept his statutes and the decrees he gave them.

Lord our God, you answered them; you were to Israel a forgiving God, though you punished their misdeeds. Exalt the Lord our God and worship at his holy mountain, for the Lord our God is holy.

Matthew 22:15-22

Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. “Teacher,” they said, “we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren’t swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are. Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?”

But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, “You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? Show me the coin used for paying the tax.” They brought him a denarius, and he asked them, “Whose image is this? And whose inscription?”

“Caesar’s,” they replied. Then he said to them, “So give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”

When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.

INTRO: This text seems so simple to us who have heard it often. Pay your taxes to the government and your tithe (10%) to God. But of the four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John--the books that tell of Jesus’ life here on earth, this passage is also found in Mark 12:13-17 and Luke 20:20-26. Why would the gospel writers have felt it was so important that they mentioned it in 3 of the 4 gospels? There is probably more than appears on the surface.

So this morning, I'd like to look further and see what we can find.

Background for our text:

ENEMIES

Pharisees – ardent nationalists, opposed to Roman rule

Opposed tax: did not want to submit to a Gentile power

Caesar was revered as a god

They had better uses for their money than to give it to Rome

Herodians, supported the Roman rule of the Herods.

Supported tax: Herod's authority was given to him by Caesar

Herod needed Rome's support to stay in power

Palestine, at this time, was an occupied nation

Jews had no love for their conquerors

Another tax they had to pay reminded them they were not free

They joined together to trap Jesus. They chose the tax to use as the bait.

If Jesus opposed the tax, he would be in trouble with Rome.

If he supported the tax, He would be in trouble with the Jews.

Either way would cause problems for him and his ministry.

They used flattery to put him off guard, but he saw through them. He knew they didn't really want an answer to their question, just to trap him. He could have refused to answer them, but he knew the people around him would not understand. Here was an opportunity to silence his enemies and at the same time teach the people an important spiritual truth.

Denarius: common Roman coin of the day. The coins themselves had an image (portrait) of Emperor Tiberius stamped into the coin's surface, along with the inscription in Latin: "Tiberius Caesar Augustus, son of the divine Augustus," a claim to divinity. There was a prohibition against images in the Ten Commandments. In distinguishing clearly between Caesar and God, Jesus also protested against the false and idolatrous claims made on the coins.

They were issued by Tiberius and was used for paying taxes to him. It belonged to him (Caesar).

Imperial tax – a special tax levied on subject peoples, not on Roman citizens.

His opponents possess and display such an object within the Temple grounds.

Coin – stamped out by human hands for human purposes, with the image of Caesar imprinted on it.

Demonstration: Pull out of your pocket or purse a coin.

How often have you really looked at our government’s money? What does our coinage look like? What does it represent?

The first thing we probably notice is it has **Images of people** – dead people

Ask for response: Penny – President Lincoln, Lincoln Memorial

Nickel – Thomas Jefferson, Monticello

Dime – Franklin D. Roosevelt, olive branch, torch and oak branch (liberty, peace and strength)

Quarter – George Washington, Eagle

It is now law that only dead people can be put on a coin. Initially, the founders of our nation were anti-royalty, and many of them put their images on coins. Caesar’s audacity to place his image on coins sparked the revolution that killed Julius Caesar.

Now, I’m going to give a brief history lesson, but I believe it is relevant to the Scriptures we are studying this morning.

The images on **our** coins represent **our** government and show that the coins belong to the United States of America.

In God we Trust—

The phrase is first believed to be penned during the War of 1812, in “The Star-Spangled Banner”. It was added on coins in 1864, in part to declare that God was on the Union side of the Civil War.

It disappeared from the five cent coin in 1883 and reappeared in 1938. In 1908, Congress made the words mandatory on all coins that had it previously, due to a public outcry following the release of a \$20 coin without the words (so the threat of removal of “In God We Trust” on our coins is not new).

It was adopted as the official motto of the United States in 1956, during the Cold War, said to distinguish us from “state atheism”, and was put on paper currency in 1957.

E Pluribus Unum, adopted when the Great Seal of the United States was created in 1782. It means “out of many, one”, when we formed a cohesive single nation as the result of the 13 small colonies joining together.

Our paper currency has even more information.

It is signed by Treasurer of the United States

Secretary of the Treasury

And is numbered with a Serial number

Our coins have much to distinguish them and are symbolic of our beliefs.

Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s.

Government – taxes and respect

Work arena – Do you focus and give your best efforts to your employer during your allotted work hours?

Christians must honor and obey rulers. We have a dual citizenship, in heaven and on earth. We must respect our earthly rulers (or elected leaders), obey the law, pay taxes, and pray for all who are in authority.

BUT, Christians must also honor and obey God.

Give to God what is God’s. I always thought this referred to the “tithes”. In the Old Testament, God required 10% of their increase as a financial obligation to the Lord. As New Testament Christians, we believe we are to be more generous in our lives than required, not less.

But this passage implies more than just our finances.

As the coins in our pockets are stamped with the image of the government, we are stamped with the image of God. Whether we accept him or not, doesn’t matter. Even if we reject him, we are still his. We find in Genesis the first time God stamped out a human being: “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness” (Genesis 1:26).

God’s image is stamped on us. We are the “coins” He uses for His purposes. He has the right to command our lives as citizens in His kingdom.

What does it mean to have God’s image stamped on us?

We are doing a study Sunday morning and Wednesday evenings called “Pursued by God’s Love”. It is a study of Genesis. In our first lesson last week, we learned a new image of the “Fall”, when man sinned in the Garden of Eden and disobeyed God. The image is “God rising”. Out of the chaos man created,

God was at work in redeeming the story. He named the woman “Eve”, **after** she disobeyed. He cared for her and his creation. She would become the mother of all the living.

Even after sin, God redeems us if we allow him. We often dwell on our mistakes and shortcomings. If only we would’ve, could’ve, should’ve, but we can’t change what is. Don’t wallow in your past. Ask for God’s forgiveness, accept His love, and forgive yourself.

It doesn’t matter how far you’ve fallen or where you’ve been, God can and will redeem you. You are stamped with His image. You are God’s.

He has again given us access to the “Tree of Life”. We were created for life with Him eternally, not just in here on earth. We have a hope that transcends this life.

Picture the image of “God rising” out of your ashes and disappointment. **YOU ARE REDEEMED** through Jesus Christ.

CAESAR vs GOD

1. **Image of authority** - The coin is an image of Caesar’s authority. We are an image of God’s authority. We are stamped with Christ’s image. Everything we do is seen by those around us as a reflection of God.
2. **In God We Trust** – do you really trust God? What about when your prayers don’t get answered, when God seems silent, when circumstances of life don’t turn out as expected? Does your faith still stand on His Word?
3. **E Pluribus Unum** – out of the many, one. We are all individuals, yet as we come together we have a common purpose or goal—to worship Christ, to serve Him with our different talents and interests – to build God’s Kingdom.
4. As our currency has the signature of an “official” of the government, Christ has written his signature on us by his death on the cross, giving us the privilege to become His children and receiving forgiveness for the sins we have committed, as well as our arrogance, pride, and neglect of those things we should be doing.

BUT, for all the similarities between coins and ourselves, there is one HUGE difference. It is our authority. Caesar was arrogant, and ruthless. There have been leaders in both the Old and New Testament who were sinful and wicked, as well as down throughout the centuries and into today. Leaders who do not care for their people, but exploit them and only for themselves. People often follow them because they have to. Some leaders are just “out of touch” with the common person and do not do what is in our or our country’s best interest.

OUR authority is God. A God that loves us and wants our best. A love that is almost incomprehensible. Again, referring to our Adult study, God redeemed us from the fall. He made a way for us to be reconciled and have fellowship with him. He does not “force” us. We were not created as automatons, but we must accept Him into our lives. He’s already there, just waiting for our invitation.

As a mother, and now grandmother, I cannot imagine losing a child. As a parent, I believe it is one of our greatest fears.

And yet, when God created us, He knew what would happen. He knew we would sin. He knew that in order to “fix” it, there would have to be a sacrifice. He knew Jesus, the Son, would willingly lay down his life in order to pay our ransom. Yet, he created us anyway!!

Knowing what we would do, how many times he would have to call his people back from their wanderings, forgiving us time and again when we fall or neglect him, always ready for us to return and engage in fellowship with Him. He longs to spend time with us. What tremendous LOVE he has for us.

It is not what we do for Christ. He has already performed the work. He already owns us. His image is already stamped on us.

Will you accept Him? Are you willing to “give back to God what is God’s?”

As those who have already accepted him, how can you put your faith into action? Don’t hide your “light” under a bushel or stay enclosed in our Christian community. Spread yourselves around. Coinage was spent and travels all over. Demonstrate your faith and beliefs.

Jesus turns our attention from the mundane things of life that seem to consume us, such as taxes, to the deeper things –our spiritual attitudes, growth and commitment, whom we serve, whom we trust.

God wants us to embrace Him as Lord. Salvation means a new transformed life. He wants us to have joy on the journey! This is joy *that you see visibly in the body of believers...*

Where people would say, ‘Wow, what’s going on here?’” We want others to be attracted to the Gospel.

We are “in” this world, but not “of” it. We must give our government what is due, but we owe ourselves to God.

Go forth – joyfully - redeemed and bearing the image of God, giving back to Him!