

Mark 12:13-17
Politics and Taxes
WRCoB 3.15.20

Politics and taxes

We're smackdab in the middle of both, aren't we?

Not to mention the corona virus.

I told Jude the other day

That we had good news and bad news.

The good news, we were getting \$1500 back from the State.

Woohoo. The bad news?

We owe the Feds \$1500.

April 15th is right around the corner.

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It is also the season for politicking.

The Democrats are trying to find someone

To beat Trump in November.

As of this week

It looks like it might be Biden.

We've already heard a lot of political rhetoric

And we're going to hear a lot more before it's over.

And any good politician

Whether they are Republican or Democrat

Has a way of answering a most pointed question

In the most ambiguous way.

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Some might even accuse Jesus of being political.

In our Scripture Lesson today

Jesus proves you can answer a yes/no question

In a way that satisfies everyone and satisfies no one.

But truly his answer wasn't meant to be vague.

It was meant to be thought-provoking.

And yet, to this day

We wish for a clearer understanding

Of what Jesus actually meant.

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25-years-earlier, there was a man, Judas the Galilean

Who led an insurrection against the Romans in 6 AD.

They revolted due to a tax levy placed on Judea by Rome.

Quirinius, governor of Syria

Decreed the implementation of a yearly head tax

Of one denarius/head/year for all of Judea.

One denarius was approximately one-day's wages.

So, if you were a family of four

That's four days' worth of wages.

The Romans crushed their rebellion.

This particular tax was the issue at hand

In the question posed by the religious leaders.

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They attempted to trap Jesus by the question

It meant to force him to reveal his political views.

For during the time of Jesus

There were five distinct divisions of Jews.

There were the Herodians, Pharisees,

Sadducees, Essenes, and the Zealots.

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The Herodians were Jerusalem's Jewish aristocracy.

King Herod, was himself, a Jew

Designated as king by the Roman Empire.

In truth, he was a puppet to Rome

And his followers, cronies.

They sucked up to the Romans.

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The Pharisees and Sadducees

Were not supportive of the Roman Empire.

They, nevertheless, were law-abiding citizens.

They paid their one denarius tax every year

And hoped for the Messiah to come and liberate them.

The Essenes were altogether a different sort.

They withdrew from society
And settled in the region around the Dead Sea.

The Dead Sea scrolls came from the Essene settlements.

They were similar to the old Brethren
Choosing to be separate from the world
Rather than be in the world.

They did NOT pay the tax.

And neither did the fifth group called the Zealots.

They chose a different strategy.

They were revolutionaries
Attempting to overthrow the Romans.

They wanted to establish a theocracy
A government ruled by religion.

Two of Jesus' disciples were Zealots.

Simon the Zealot, listed in Luke 6:15 and Acts 1:13
And possibly Judas Iscariot as well.

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They first acknowledged Jesus was a great teacher
And a man of integrity.
Wasn't swayed by public opinion
And taught the truth about God.

And then . . . the question.

Mark 12:14b-15a NLT “Now tell us—is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not? ¹⁵ Should we pay them, or shouldn’t we?”

“Yes? Or no?”

All the microphones and cameras loom in
Ready for his answer.

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“Jesus, are you a Republican? Or a Democrat?”

“Which political party do you belong to?”

“Who will you vote for come November?”

By his answer, they will know his politics.

A simple yes or no was what they wanted.

But Jesus knew this was a setup.

If he answered yes, pay your taxes

He would lose many of his followers, the Zealots

Who wanted the Messiah to overthrow Rome.

If he said no, don’t pay the tax

He’d be marked as an insurrectionist.

Jesus didn’t give them a yes or no answer.

In fact, most of us are unsure what his answer meant.

Do we to pay taxes or not?

Actually his answer is brilliant.

Jesus asks to see a denarius.

Please note, he himself didn't actually have one on him.

Maybe, that says something about his politics.

They gave him one and he asked who was on it.

They answered Caesar.

Mark 12:17 KJV Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.

Mark writes they were utterly amazed at him.

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I do not believe Jesus was purposely ambiguous.

I don't think he was playing politics.

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Render to Caesar the things of Caesar's

Render to God the things that are God's.

Does it mean that we are to be good citizens

Under any country, rule, or regime

And pay taxes when asked?

The Boston Tea Party was an act of protest
For taxes levied against the American colonies.

The United States began as an insurrection
Against the occupying British.

Did Jesus mean . . .
Shut up. Pay your taxes. Be good citizens?

I don't think so.

Take the denarius.

On it was inscribed the image of Caesar
And the letters DIVIF.

The letters were an abbreviation for "Son of the Divine."

It was Caesar's claim that HE was the Son of God.

Jesus tells them to give to Caesar the coin
Holding his graven image and claim to divinity.

The NIV says it this way.

**Mark 12:17 NIV "Give BACK to Caesar what is Caesar's .
. . ."**

In the same breath, then, Jesus tells them

**Mark 12:17 NLT . . . and give to God what belongs to
God."**

And what is it that belongs to God? EVERYTHING!

In an extremely subtle way Jesus is saying

Give back to Caesar what is due him, this penny.

Give back to him what he asks of you, your allegiance.

Give back to him his claim to be the Son of God.

Now, give God what is due God . . . everything

Your complete allegiance!

Your all-in-all!

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Jesus reveal his political views by his answer.

Jesus was not a Pharisee, Sadducee

An Essene or a Zealot.

Nor is he a Republican or a Democrat.

Jesus is none of these.

Jesus is all about the kingdom of God.

He said it in his first sermon

Luke 4:18-19 (NRSV)

¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,

because he has anointed me

to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives

and recovery of sight to the blind,

to let the oppressed go free,

¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

In that sense, Jesus was a revolutionary.

His politics were God's kingdom politics.

A kingdom not originating on earth.

A kingdom that shapes and forms the world
The way God intended.

Jesus' politics focused on the well-being of ALL people.

His politics were about building bridges, not walls!

That people were to do to others
What they would want others to do to them.

That peace and justice must include everyone.

This is the politics of Jesus!

Jesus is radical!
Jesus is revolutionary.

But not in the way the religious leaders thought.

For he was to bring in the kingdom of God
Not by violent uprising
Not by the force of power

But through self-sacrifice, unconditional love
And the power that comes through the cross.

It would be interesting to read through all Jesus' comments
On the kingdom of God.

He began so much of his teaching with
The kingdom of God is like . . .

Hoping to instill in us what it would take
To establish the kingdom of God on earth.

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Yes, tis the season of politics
And tis the season of paying taxes.

Let's do what Matt Smethurst
Of the Gospel Coalition suggests

So pay your taxes, choose your candidate, (for politics do matter after all) and cast your vote. But do so as one whose trust is anchored in another world.

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Jesus calls us to another way of living
To strive for peace and justice in our lives
And in the world around us.

Jesus calls us to continue the work Jesus started

In building the kingdom of God
Simply, peacefully, and together.

He showed us the way.

The way of the cross, a selfless, nonresistant confrontation
To the powers that be.

He said render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's
And to God the things that are God's.

We are called to be good citizens.

But we are also called to be involved in politics
To speak truth to the injustices we see.

But our politics are kingdom of God politics.

No nation of earth can compare to the kingdom of God.

Not Israel, not America, nor any other country.

No nation.

They all fall short.

Our ultimate allegiances are to God and his kingdom.

So let us live the politics of Jesus
And continue to build His kingdom on earth.
For the glory of God and our neighbors' good!