

Matthew 22:15-21

What Shall I render to the Lord

October 17 and 18, 2020

Our Gospel lesson reports an attempt by the Pharisees to discredit Jesus. This was only one of several attempts. Each attempt failed. Jesus always managed to turn their deception into an opportunity to share God's truth with the people

In this attempt the Pharisees must have thought they really had Jesus up against a wall. They asked him a yes or no question which regardless of the answer would turn the crowds against him. If he said no, don't pay taxes, the Herodians in the crowd would have had him arrested for treason. If he said yes, do pay taxes, the Jews in the crowd would have turned against him for being on the side of their enemy.

Jesus couldn't win with this question, and yet he did. He answered in such a way that all were amazed. "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's"

The Pharisees hadn't trapped Jesus. He had tricked them. He had seen through their hypocrisy. He had used their trap as an opportunity to set down an important truth. The Pharisees were amazed by this, but what about our reaction?

We are taught at least four important truths from God with this Gospel account. Each truth is caught up in the meaning of one word found in the text. The word is "to render."

The first meaning of the word "to render" is "to pay." Jesus managed in this short answer to the Pharisee's question to touch on two unpopular subjects, taxes and church giving. He coupled these together in such a way as it appears to say we must pay taxes and we must pay the church.

This is not a popular notion. It was not popular with the crowd Jesus was addressing in his day. And it is not popular with the crowd Jesus addresses today as we read his word. We always want to pay the least amount of tax possible and we want to give to the church the least we can get away with and still look and feel respectable.

To make matters worse we must also understand that Jesus was referring to more than mere money in this text. We can imagine that as he spoke these words that we was looking at a Roman coin. On seeing the image of Caesar on the coin he said this has Caesar's image on it, so give it to him. On looking at the people he said, you are made in the image of God so, you belong to God. Not only do we owe him our church contributions but we owe him our whole selves. And not just an hour or two on Sunday morning. We owe Him ourselves 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, regardless of what we are doing.

When we begin to realize how far we fall short of what God expects we may fear what his reaction will be. And perhaps we should fear his reaction. **The 2nd meaning** of the word "to render" is "to pay back", in the sense of revenge. God certainly could and should pay us back with eternal damnation for our sinfulness.

But instead he has decided to "buy us back", **the 3rd meaning** of the word "to render." He sent Jesus into our world not to pay us back with damnation, but to buy us back with salvation. The Pharisees in their deception stated a very true fact when they stated that God showed no partiality. Jesus certainly doesn't regard the position of humankind. He doesn't look at our sinfulness. He has on the cross died for us and bought us back from sin, death and damnation. He no longer sees us as sinners, but by the blood of Jesus, he sees us as saints of God.

Now we can render to God the things that are God's in the **4th meaning of the word**, the way Jesus intended for it to be

understood. “To render” in the passage means “to give back.” WE don’t pay God and he doesn’t pay us back. He has bought us back so that we can now give back to him all he has already given to us.

We can give back time because he has given us eternity. We can give back our talents because he has so richly gifted us with talents. We can give back money to him because he has given us jobs and has taken care of our bodily needs. He doesn’t ask us to give what we don’t have or what he hasn’t first given. He merely asks us to give back a portion of what he has given, to help us remember from whom all things have come.

The Pharisees were stunned by the simplicity of God’s truth. We may be stunned also by how easy it is for us to render to God the things that are God’s.

The world would have us believe that giving to the church is a sacrifice. We are even given a tax break for doing so. But the truth is that giving to the Lord is a privilege. Giving to the Lord is a response to how greatly he has first given to us. Giving to the Lord reminds us how gracious God has given to us.

Give to God the things that are God’s.

Amen.