

Pentecost Study 21

Matthew 22:12-23 Paying Taxes to Caesar

15 Then the Pharisees met together to plot how to trap Jesus into saying something for which he could be arrested. 16 They sent some of their disciples, along with the supporters of Herod, to meet with him. "Teacher," they said, "we know how honest you are. You teach the way of God truthfully. You are impartial and don't play favourites. 17 Now tell us what you think about this: Is it right to pay poll-tax to Caesar or not?"

18 But Jesus knew their evil motives. "You hypocrites!" he said. "Why are you trying to trap me? 19 Here, show me the coin used for the tax." When they handed him a Roman coin,^[a] 20 he asked, "Whose image and title are stamped on it?" 21 "Caesar's," they replied. "Well, then," he said, "give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give back to God what belongs to God." 22 His reply amazed them, and they went away.

Q.1. Who were the Pharisees? What was their agenda for the people of Israel?

Q.2. Why did they want to get Jesus arrested?

Q.3. Who were the 'supporters of Herod'? What was their agenda for the people of Israel?

Q.4. What would bring the Pharisees & the Herodians together?

Q.5. Why did they flatter Jesus in v.16?

Q.6. They ask Jesus, 'Is it right to pay poll-tax to Caesar or not?' Why is this a tricky question?

Q.7. What was a 'poll-tax'? How was it paid?

Q.8. How would the crowd have reacted if Jesus had simply said 'pay Caesar'? Why?

Q.9. Why did Jesus accuse them of hypocrisy v.18?

Q.10. What was stamped on the Roman coin (a denari)?

Q.11. Why was it particularly objectionable to the Jews to have a denari (Roman coin) in the Temple?

Q.12. Holding up the Roman coin Jesus answers their question of v.17, "give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give back to God what belongs to God."v.21. Why does this amaze the Pharisees & Herodians v.22?

Q.13. What do you think Jesus meant, v.21 "give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give back to God what belongs to God."?

Application: for reflection, prayer and action

Q.14. Under what circumstance shouldn't you pay taxes? See Rom 13:1-7.

Q.15. In your life what should you be 'giving back to Caesar' and what should you be 'giving back to God'?

Matt 20:1-16 (my suggested answers)

NB. Please answer the questions yourself. We all have different ways of answering; God may give you greater insights than mine. Put '*John thinks*' ... before each answer.

A.1. The Pharisees were self-appointed religious leaders, intent of renewing Israel through strict Law (Torah) observing and obeying their traditions (Sabbath, Dietary, Handwashing, Rituals, Tithing etc).

A.2. They wanted Jesus arrested because he was popular, taught ideas contrary to theirs and had healed on the Sabbath.

A.3. The supporters of Herod were the wealthy aristocrats who held onto power and wealth through the patronage of Herod-Antipas. Their agenda was to keep the status quo in Israel – let Herod rule for the Romans.

A.4. 'My enemy's enemy is my friend' – they came together to oppose Jesus and his kingdom movement. Jesus is the common enemy of both.

A.5. The 'flattered' Jesus hope to get him off guard and thus expose himself to a charge of rebellion against Rome ('no' answer) or be a disappointment to the crowds and his followers ('yes' answer).

A.6. This is a tricky question that has no simple 'yes' or 'no' answer. If Jesus answered 'Yes' the crowds & his supporters (who hated the Romans and a poll-tax) may abandon him. If he answered 'no' the Herodians & Pharisees would have quickly reported his to the Romans for sedition.

A.7. A poll-tax was a tax on every person of a 'danari', a day's wage. It was paid directly to Caesar.

A.8. See answer 6 above

A.9. Jesus accused them of 'hypocrisy' because they were play-acting in v.16 by flattering him – their motive was to trap him.

A.10. The coin in question had an image of Caesar and the inscription 'son of God, High Priest'

A.11. The denari (with it's image & inscription of Caesar) broke the 1st Commandment (one God, no images allowed) and the Temple was the holy place to meet the one true God (Yahweh not a puppet king like Caesar)

A.12. Jesus' answer amazes the authorities because it is anti-Roman (give back to Caesar what is his) yet also invites a love and commitment to God (give him your life, it belongs to him anyway)

A.13. Jesus means that we are to get rid of worldly attachments (give them back) and give God our best (ourselves)

A.14. We should pay taxes always – till the authorities stop being God's servants (for good) and become demonic (evil) – then prayerfully we should seek to stop paying tax.

A.15. Your answer.