

**Matthew 22:15-22**

The Pharisees went and plotted to entrap Jesus in what he said. So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality.

Tell us, then, what you think. **Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?**” But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, “Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin used for the tax.” And they brought him a denarius. Then he said to them, “Whose head is this, and whose title?” They answered, “The emperor’s.”

Then he said to them, **“Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”** When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

The Gospel of the Lord.

## Sermon

A little boy desperately wanted \$100.00 to buy some toys and prayed to God for a whole week. But nothing happened. So he decided to write a letter to God requesting the \$100.00.

When the post office got the letter addressed to God, they forwarded it to the White House. The president surprisingly received it and was very impressed, touched, and amused, so he instructed his aide to send the boy \$5.00. He thought \$5.00 would be a lot to the little boy.

And the boy was very delighted by the money.

He sat down and immediately wrote a thank you note which read:

Dear God, thank you so much for sending the money. However, I noticed that for some reason you had to send it through Washington and as usual, they kept most of it. As Ben Franklin said, “In this world nothing can be said to be certain except death and taxes.”

### **Personal story**

Seems to me that I’m attending more funerals recently. Perhaps it’s my age but it seems a lot of my peers are passing away. Death is a journey we cannot avoid. Even dying costs money. I am sure at one time or another we ask ourselves: “When am I supposed to start thinking about death?” I’m still young. “Am I supposed to have a funeral plan?” I don’t have one.

“Where am I to be buried?” “How am I supposed to pay for all of this?” We don’t want to have our children pay.

Today’s gospel recalls an encounter between Jesus and some of the Jewish leaders of the day during the final week of Jesus’ life. Jesus and his disciples entered the holy city of Jerusalem on that original Palm Sunday when the city was bustling with festival crowds and excitement.

The Pharisees and the Herodians plan to trap Jesus on a politically charged issue—there is no safe response. If Jesus argues against paying the tax, he can be arrested by Roman authorities. If he says yes, he loses his credibility.

Jesus then asks for a coin and asks who is on the coin? The emperor. Jesus then says give to the emperor what belongs to the emperor, and give to God what belongs to God.

The New Testament says a lot about money. 16 of Jesus's 38 parables deal with how to handle money and possession. In the Gospels, one out of 10 verses, 288 in all focus directly on the subject of money. The Scriptures have a great deal to say about money.

So Jesus says to give what belongs to the emperor, as we pay what belongs to Uncle Sam.

As Christians, we have dual citizenship. We are citizens of the country in which we live and we are the citizens of the kingdom of heaven.

So as citizens of this country, we have a responsibility to the government to be faithful and honest in paying our taxes in return for the privileges the government provides for us. I don't know about you, but I like having paved roads to drive on, walking on sidewalks, my neighborhood protected by the police and fire department, weekly garbage pickup, and public schools!

Give to God the things that are God's.

We have to decide who we are going to give our lives to. Do we combine loyalty to the emperor and loyalty to God in one? That was what the Pharisees and the Herodians were doing. Or do we separate church and state as if one has nothing to do with the other?

When your friends look at you, what do they see?  
Are you a tax payer and citizen of the United States first  
and foremost, or are you a Christian and a citizen of  
God's kingdom?

The kingdoms of this world are all about power,  
oppression, and violence. But Jesus teaches us that his  
kingdom is about peace, justice, mercy, and love.

Do you show love and mercy or do you perpetuate  
the ways of the world? What about life? Jesus came so  
we can have an abundant life. Do you advocate for  
peace in our world? Will we be a voice for the  
voiceless? These are the things that matter.

When we look at each other, or see ourselves in the  
mirror, we see the mark of the world on us.

What do we look like?

What do we have?

What do we wear?

What do we do?

Who are our friends?

But we need to see that underneath all those things is a much deeper mark, the mark of faith, hope, and love that is reflected in our eyes.

How is it with you? Perhaps you give God your mind, but your heart is far from him. Or you may give God your heart, but are unwilling to learn from his Word.

Maybe you give God one or two hours a week, but God wants 100% of your time.

Give to God the things that are God's.

Amen