

## “Whose Coin Is It Anyway?”

*Good Grace, Good God, part 3*

Matthew 22:15-22

**[64-title slide]** *Welcome, prayer. “God loves you, and there’s nothing you can do to change that.”*

The following story is from Jeffery Smead at sermoncentral.com. Many of his ideas, in fact, are a part of this message.

**[65-Letter to God]** “A Little Boy desperately wanted \$100 to buy some toys, and so he prayed to God for a whole week, but nothing happened. So, he decided to write a letter to God requesting the \$100.

“When the Post Office got the letter addressed to God they forwarded it on to the White House. The President surprisingly received it. He was very impressed, touched and amused, so he instructed his aid to send the boy five dollars. He thought five dollars would be a lot to the little boy.

“And the boy was, indeed, delighted by the money. He sat down and immediately wrote a thank you note, which read: ‘Dear God, Thank you very much for sending the money. However, I noticed that for some reason you had to send it through Washington DC and, as usual, they kept most of it.’”<sup>1</sup>

People in first century A.D. didn’t like paying taxes any more than we do today. But this scripture, and this sermon, is not a debate on sales tax, property tax, or income tax. It’s about what we give to whom, and why.

**[66-verse]** 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 6:10 says, “The love of money is a root of all kinds of evils.” (ESV). This was no less true in Jesus’ time. In fact, the most often discussed moral issue about money in his day was this: Was it right to pay taxes to our oppressors, the Romans?

**[67-Three taxes]** Remember, Palestine was occupied territory in Jesus’ day. The Jewish people, whether they liked it or not, had to submit to Roman rule, and that meant, taxes. There were at least three types of Roman taxes to be paid: the ground tax (10% of your produce, including grain, oil, and wine); income tax (a measly 1% with no deductions); and the poll tax or imperial tax. The last was the main issue. All other taxes were paid by all the people, in any available currency.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Jeffery Smead, “In Whose Image?” <https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/in-whose-image-j-jeffrey-smead-sermon-on-taxes-188570>

The imperial tax, however, was only paid by the oppressed people, in this case, the Jews, and it had to be paid with silver Roman coins, known as denarii. The tax was a flat rate – one denarius, the value of a daily wage for a commoner – paid by every male 14 and older, and every female, 12 and older.

**[68-Herodians and Pharisees]** Jesus’ people had no love of Romans or their taxes. The imperial tax, especially, was a hot-button topic, and an easy one for his accusers to use to trap him. His accusers were an odd mix of Pharisees and Herodians. Now, Herodians were the ruling class. This included King Herod, his family, and all their supporters. They got their power from Rome, so, of course they supported the tax. On the other hand, the Pharisees would rather be free from Rome. Naturally, the Pharisees did not support the imperial tax. What’s more, these coins bore the image of the Emperor, with the inscription "Tiberius Caesar, Son of the divine Augustus." The Pharisees, strictly religious Jews, would have been extremely irate to pay any taxes to Rome, but especially angry for being forced to use a graven image with the face of one who claimed to be a divine son of God.

**[69-Chief priests]** So why did the Herodians and Pharisees work together? Simple: because they both wanted to get rid of Jesus. As the saying goes, “The enemy of my enemy is my friend.”

Have you ever been stuck between two sides of a controversial issue? Then you can identify with Christ in this passage. It looked as if there was no easy way out. If Jesus said yes, pay the tax, they could claim he was a blasphemer, and get the crowd to reject him. If Jesus said no, don’t, then poof! the Romans would arrest him.

**[70-Jesus]** However, Jesus knew something that they didn’t. God makes a way where there seems to be no way. Instead stooping to their level and adding fuel to the argument, Jesus took a third way and turned the tables on both of them.

Jesus knew that Pharisees still paid the tax, even though they hated it. That’s one reason Jesus rightly called them hypocrites. And here’s another: they claimed Jesus had integrity, when their own integrity was suspect.

**[71-Jesus and coin]** Jesus refused to fall for the flattery, but instead asked a simple question. “Show me the coin. Whose face is this? Whose signature?”

Whose coin is it anyway? Notice, the Pharisees had to present one. That means they were actually carrying the coin they claimed to hate so much. But the stark truth is, the coin belonged to the emperor and his government.

**[72-various coins]** I traveled through Europe once, using seven different currencies: Peseta, Franc, Lira, Schilling, Swiss Franc, Mark, and Krone. Each coin had different value, a different shape, and a different inscription, even though I used them to buy the same things, like hotel rooms, food, and tickets. Every coin was marked with the promise from its respective government. A promise of value. A promise of worth. Without that promise, any coin is simply a fancy hunk of metal, nothing more.

**[73-Render to Caesar...]** By Jesus’ question, the Pharisees and the Herodians were cleverly forced to remember that the coin belonged to the one who made it. So Jesus simply said, “Render to Caesar what is Caesar’s.” That word, render, really means, “give it back.” Give him back what is already his. Give him back his scrap of metal. “Give Caesar back his nothing.”<sup>2</sup>

Jesus could have stopped with that first comment. The Pharisees, at any rate, would have been happy. Maybe not so much the Herodians, but at least no one would have had any grounds to arrest Jesus.

**[74-and give to God]** Ever notice, though, that Jesus was never content with just “good enough”? Jesus took it up a notch. He finished by saying, “and give to God what is God’s.”

**[75-US Dollar]** Follow me here: Coinage has an image stamped on it. That’s how we know whose it is. Take out any paper money, and you will see pictures, inscriptions, even signatures on it. You could call **Lynn Malerba**, the current United States Treasurer, and **Janet Yellen**, the Secretary of Treasury (in 2021). Tell them you found a piece of paper with their signatures on it. Ask if they want it back. You could do that. Whose money is it, anyway?

**[76-humans]** Yet Jesus also said, “Give to God what is God’s.” So what really is God’s? Better, what, or who, has God’s signature on them? The answer is in Genesis 1:27: “So God created humans in His own image; in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them.”

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<sup>2</sup> Jack Seymour, Garrett Seminary, ca. 2007.

Who has God’s image stamped on their heart, on their life? We do. Further, anyone who claims to be Christian literally uses the name of Jesus Christ as their identity. So, Jesus asks, do you give to God what already belongs to God?

**[77-cross]** Now we see that this lesson is about much more than money and taxes. Friends, you are the coin. You bear God’s image. If we are instructed by Jesus to “give to God the things that are God’s,” then we must conclude that there is no limit to what we should give to God. Think of the things God has given you: Not just your wealth; your whole being, your life. God’s fingerprints are all over you. God’s thoughts are constantly towards you. You are his beloved creation, worth more than the rarest coin in the world. What do you give to God?

Some might use this passage to say, “Oh, well, Jesus is talking about the separation of church and state. There are two kingdoms, two economies. Each is separate. Money has nothing to do with God.”

**[78-UMBOD quote]** In response, I offer you this sentence from our own United Methodist Book of Discipline: “We claim all economic systems to be under judgment of God no less than other facets of the created order.”<sup>3</sup> All things ultimately are God’s. The fact is there is only one kingdom that matters: the kingdom of God. And we are called to be ambassadors of Christ to this world. We are made in God’s image. Jesus calls us to give everything to God.

**[79-kneel at cross]** So I ask you today, directly from Jesus’ words: Do you give to God what is God’s? In what ways are you giving to God? And in what ways are you bearing God’s image? Where is the evidence of his signature on your life?

**[80-verses]** In the Bible, Jesus told his disciples how to bear God’s image: “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 22:37-40)

We bear the image of God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, who resides in our very hearts. We need to give to God like we are returning what was his in the first place. We need to use our wealth to support God’s kingdom. We

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<sup>3</sup> UMBOD 2016, p.131

need to live as Christ commanded, loving our enemies, trusting him at all times, and bearing fruit for the kingdom of heaven.

There is grace in giving. There is peace. There is satisfaction that what you return to God goes to a great cause: the gospel!

**[81-Faith Promise card]** *(Direct the band to return to the stage)* Today each one of us has an opportunity to fill out a Faith Promise card. This represents our promise to give to God what is his by choosing to support the ministries of this church. It's not a bill. It's not a tax. If you want a church tax, move to Germany. The church tax there is 12%, and they take it right out of your paycheck. Here, our giving is freewill.

You may feel like you don't have that much to give. However, you don't make this gift alone. What you give is combined in the strength and hope of the whole congregation. We do this together. We need each and every person, all gifts, large and small.

I want you to notice, these cards are not just about giving money, but they ask you to give your prayers, your time, and your talents. We ask you to pray for our church and community. We ask you to attend worship and invite others. We ask you to be open to serving. And finally, we ask you to promise a portion of your God-given wealth back to God here at Grace UMC, so that we can continue to shine God's light in this community.

**[82-verse]** 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 9:7 says "everyone should give what they have decided in their heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." I pray that you will be a cheerful giver, because you know and understand that you bear God's image – his inscription is on your very being – and God only asks for what is rightfully his in the first place.

At this time the band is going to play the song "Offering" by Third Day. During this song, I invite you to come forward to present your Faith Promise Cards to the Lord at the prayer rail.

**[song lyrics]** *(after song, dedicate the cards)* Let us pray.

Memory Verse: Matthew 22:21 - "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."

### Reflection Questions

1. When have you reluctantly paid a bill or tax? Why did you pay it?
2. Why do you think the Pharisees were trying to trap Jesus? Do people also try to trap Christians by their words today?
3. What are some things we “render to Caesar” today? What are things that are God’s?
4. What would it mean for your life if you gave everything to God that was rightfully his? What would that look like?
5. What is the most difficult thing for you to give to God? Would you pray for the strength to let it go?