

Title: Paying Your Taxes

Text: Mark 12:13-17

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Place: Decatur Church of God

Theme: Journey With Jesus

Today's the day! April 15<sup>th</sup>! Actually, because the 15<sup>th</sup> is a Sunday taxes will be due tomorrow. That means that for some of us, preparation will not begin until tomorrow.

I do not look forward to tax day but in truth see it as my duty as a citizen of the United States of America. It is sometimes a burden but it is a privilege to live here and I should be willing to pay for that privilege.

I am willing to do my fair share. I just don't want to have to do your share too.

Listen to what Jesus has to say about it...

### **Mark 12:13-17**

*Later they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words. <sup>14</sup>They came to him and said, "Teacher, we know you are a man of integrity. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not? <sup>15</sup>Should we pay or shouldn't we?"*

*But Jesus knew their hypocrisy. "Why are you trying to trap me?" he asked. "Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." <sup>16</sup>They brought the coin, and he asked them, "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?"*

*"Caesar's," they replied.*

*<sup>17</sup>Then Jesus said to them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's."*

*And they were amazed at him.*

\* Ever work at a job where you felt like somebody was always out to get you? You know what I mean, like somebody is watching your every move to catch you goofing up. It's that "Big Brother" concept for the novel "1984".

With the growth of technology we find ourselves at the mercy of our government and other authoritative groups. Our phone calls, emails, texts can all be reviewed by others per the Patriot Act. What we do and say is all potentially audio or video recorded.

Now that I have you all nervous about everyday life let me add to your paranoia by throwing in the religion card. Once you have publicly stated your intent to life for Christ we notice that others begin to watch us and look for opportunities to confront our shortcomings and errors.

## **I. Somebody is always trying to trip up Christians.**

A. For Jesus...

1. Rabbis dealt with questions concerning legal, moral and exegetical issues as well as mocking questions posed by opponents.
2. In this account the Pharisees and the Herodians confront Jesus.

\* Pharisees tended to be nationalistic, whereas Herodians were clients of Herod, the Roman vassal; thus they worked together only in extraordinary situations. Pharisees would be concerned about Jewish legal requirements to have ready witnesses for a charge against Jesus and they would be ready to investigate charges concerning Jesus' disloyalty to the law. That they would try to test his teaching here is not surprising.

The Herodians, who hoped for a restoration of Herodian rule (Someone from the line of Herod to serve as king) in Judea (which Pilate currently governed), were naturally disturbed by messianic figures that challenged their

plan and might cause Rome to tighten its direct control over the land.

- C. Their question about taxes was an opportunity to pit the obligations of peace with Rome against the nationalistic, messianic fervor that they assume Jesus has generated.

\* A disastrous tax revolt two decades earlier had shown where such fervor could lead. If Jesus publicly takes the view characterized by those later called Zealots (no king but God), he can be arrested; if he rejects that view (which he does), he may compromise his following.

Obviously the question was designed to place Jesus in a religious and political dilemma. A yes answer would antagonize the people and discredit Him as God's Spokesman. No messianic claimant could sanction willing submission to pagan rulers. A no answer would invite retaliation from Rome.

B. What do you think? Do people ever try to trip you up or seek for some reason to discredit the cause of Christ?

## II. It always begins with false praise.

A. *“Teacher, we know you are a man of integrity. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth.”*

- a. It was true: Jesus was a man of integrity, not swayed by men, and teaching the way of God according to truth.
- b. They were not seeking his wisdom.

B. Don't let sweet words fool you.

*Rev. 10:10*

*I took the little scroll from the angel's hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour.*

\* There are some things that will make us sick.

### **III. Taxes, a sore spot for most people.**

- A. Taxes were not an issue for Jesus.
  - a. At another point in the story, Jesus pays his tax from money in a fish's mouth.
  - b. Jesus was not talking about political leverage.
  
- B. Our problem with taxes can be political but not usually.
  - a. We just don't like to pay so much money.
  - b. It shouldn't be us that have to pay the bill.
  - c. Somebody with more money should be responsible.
  - d. And now is not the best time...maybe later.

\* The bottom line here is not about paying taxes. It is not about citizenship. The issue here is the evil that dwells inside the hearts of men and women.

### **IV. Jesus is well aware of any trap that people attempt.**

\* While growing up, have any of you ever experienced a trap set for us by our parents or by some other authority figure? Let me explain myself.

During my freshman year in college I was involved in a massive dorm-wide water fight. I'm not only talking about water guns and water balloons. Imagine full garbage cans of water leaned against a dorm room door that when opened emptied into the room (on the second floor).

Water flowed like the Saint Mary's following a couple weeks of rain.

Our dorm parents, who by the way later served as missionaries to Brazil, were Bill and Betty Mottinger. Bill happened to be out of town at the time of the water war. Betty was trying to settle down the participants. She started up the outside stairs to our second floor cubicle when a water balloon went over the railing exploding against the wood wall and showering her with water.

Of course we all ran to our rooms to act as if we were non-participants.

Betty, slightly wet, came to our door. I can still hear her words.

"I'm not going to tell Bill but I expect you to tell him what you did."

This had "TRAP" written all over it.

When Bill returned at a later a date and came by one evening for dorm check. My roommate and I informed Bill that we were involved in the water fight. Later we found out that we were the only ones to confess.

Now you may think that we were stupid for admitting our duplicity. Oh, how wrong you would be. For the rest of the year, Bill allowed Henry and I to get away with murder. We were his "honest" boys.

- A. Jesus knew that they were trying to trap him.
  - a. He knew their hypocrisy.
  - b. He turned it around on them.
  
- B. What should we do to avoid the traps set for us?
  - a. Seek the wisdom of God.
  - b. Speak less and listen more.
  - c. Recognize that Satan is around us like a roaring lion.
  - d. Draw close to God.

**1 Peter 5:8**

*Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*

**V. What are we to learn?**

1. Don't be naïve; there are people out there that seek to hurt us?

Be self-controlled and alert.

2. Don't be fooled by the praise of others?

Seek to live our faith in the spirit of humility.

3. Don't ignore our Christian responsibility to pay our taxes?

There are legal ways for us to challenge inequities and inappropriate governmental usage. Let's pursue that and in the meantime fulfill our civic duty.

4. Avoid the snares of Satan and his servants.

The absolute best way is to stay close to God and the people of God.

(Use the example of keeping Satan at arms length)

When people see God at work within us and around us, they will be amazed. It is there that we will find our opportunities to be a witness and testimony for Jesus Christ.