

Reflection on Matthew 22:15-22

Jesus was just causing more and more trouble, and he needed to be dealt with,
so the Pharisees send their disciples and the Herodians to Jesus with a trick question:

¹⁷“... *Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?*”

¹⁸*But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, “Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites?*

¹⁹*Show me the coin used for the tax.”*

So, who knows why this was such a tricky question?

Well, it was a touchy issue.

First of all, it was about paying taxes.

Second, it was about paying taxes to the occupying power.

Third, it was about paying taxes in the occupying power’s currency (remember the money changers?).

And fourth, there was a real problem with that currency,

because on those coins was a graven image of the Emperor Tiberius,

with an inscription calling him the son of the god Augustus.

So here was the dilemma – if you didn’t pay your taxes in Roman coins, you were in trouble with Rome;

but if you did pay your taxes with Roman coins, you’d be breaking the first commandment

which would land you in trouble with God.

So what was a law-abiding faithful Jew to do?

So how does Jesus get out of this trap?

First, by asking for a coin, he turns the trap on them,

because if these religious leaders show him that they have one of these coins,

they are admitting to breaking God’s law.

And second by pointing out that because the coin bears the image of the Emperor, it belongs to the Emperor,

Jesus makes it clear that since human beings bear the image of God,

they belong, not to the Emperor, but to God.

That’s the point. You and I, who bear God’s image, belong to God.

And that’s where I want to ask you all – what does it mean to belong to God?

I mean, it’s a nice concept, but exactly how do we do that?

How do we live that out in our daily lives?

What hints does scripture give us?

What does the church teach us?

And here is the most crucial question of all:

**what makes your life as someone who understands that you are made in God’s image different
from someone who doesn’t believe that – someone who let’s say is an atheist, but a humanist,
who is moral, compassionate, generous, and who works to make the world a better place?**

So let me leave you with an image to take with you this week.

Image you are a coin that has been scratched & marred & covered with dirt so that the image is not clear.

Then imagine that every time you give yourself to God, God begins to work on you,

forgiving your sins, healing your hurts, and lighting your darkness.

God scrubs off the fear and despair and sorrow and anger and conflict and self-centeredness,

and as all of those things are cleansed away,

an image filled with faith and hope and joy and forgiveness and peace and love emerges.

and you begin to shine.

Give to God that which is God’s.

Give yourself to God, and let God work on you until God’s image stamped on you is clear,

and your life begins to shine!

That is my prayer for you and for me. **Amen**