

Sermon Matthew 22 15 22 23rd S of Trinity 1 Year Series

Sermon: 23rd Sunday after Trinity – Thanksgiving Sunday

Text: Matthew 22:15-22 (v.21)

Theme: What do we owe to God?

Goal: To improve our thanksgiving, serving the neighbor (the state) and God (the church) willingly

Dear Friends,

Introduction: Do you like to pay taxes? Wouldn't it be better to retain that money for ourselves? What is the government doing with our money? Or: Is it really our money? *The last date on which you can submit your tax return through the South African Revenue Service's electronic system (eFiling) is 24 November, Friday* (Discovery e-mail). What does this matter have to do with our Thanksgiving Service?

I – The background

First of all, we have to understand the background of our text. The land of Israel, where Jesus was living, was not independent. The Romans had conquered it and were ruling with a very harsh hand. Even Jesus experienced the hard law of the Romans when He was put to death on a cross.

Moreover: The Caesar of Rome had appointed an Edomite King to rule over the Jews: Herod the Great. The Edomites were descendants of Esau, brother of Jacob, the father of the Israelites. And we know the story that the twin brothers were fighting already in the womb of their mother (Genesis 25:22). And Herod and his sons used very brutal methods to rule over the Jews. Caesar was not concerned about Herod's brutality because Herod was paying good taxes to Rome.

The matter of taxes was a very serious issue. It was really a very smart trap that the Pharisees, seconded by the Herodians, prepared for Jesus, asking Him: “What is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?”

The Pharisees were ardent nationalists, opposed to Roman rule, while the hated Herodians, as their name indicates, supported the Roman rule of the Herods. Now, however, the Pharisee enlisted the help of the Herodians to trap Jesus in His words... If He said: "No", the Herodians would report Him to the Roman governor and He would be executed for treason. If He said "Yes", the Pharisees would denounce Him to the people as disloyal to His nation (CSSB, footnotes).

II – To give to Caesar

The Apostle Paul wrote: "Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God...Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience...This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor" (Romans 13:1,5-7).

I know that there are lots of complains about what the government does or doesn't do with our money. Corruption issues are in the daily news. But this is a matter between the government and God. They will have to give account to God about the responsibilities of the administration they got from God.

On the other hand, we see road works and improvements, the litter of our houses is collected regularly, public schools are available, and so on. Without taxes, the government would not be able to complete any work. Whether we like it or not, it is not just a duty for the Christian, but also a privilege to cooperate with God's plan to preserve and maintain the world and the society. So, "give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar."

III – To give to God

Jesus' answer was according to God's will. We Christians are citizens of two kingdoms, both instituted by God: The kingdom of this earth, and the Kingdom of Heaven. We have the privilege to serve God in two ways: as citizens of our country for the good of the society and of our neighbor; and as members of the church for the growth of God's kingdom and of the welfare of all, especially of the needy. Therefore, Jesus added to His answer: "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."

The Pharisees hadn't asked if they had to pay taxes to God as well. But intentionally Jesus added this "Give to God what belongs to God" to teach us also what the correct management of our money is in the two kingdoms we live.

We don't pay "taxes" to God. Although some churches and countries have a "tax system" for the Christians, this is not the correct way to give to God what belongs to God. Our offerings, tithes and donations cannot be seen as "taxes". They are free willing thanksgiving offerings according to what each of us have. The Apostle Paul wrote: "On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up..." (1 Corinthians 16:2) – (if I come to the church or not.) - For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according he does not have... Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work (2 Corinthians 8:12; 9:6-8).

Therefore, the offerings are part of our Service. It doesn't matter if we bring our offerings to the church or if we do a bank wire. God knows our heart and how much we have in our valet or on our bank account. He knows what we are able to give or not. He doesn't ask us for more

than we can give; but He expects that we will not give less than we are able to.

God's church has several challenges, duties and opportunities. The cost of running the church depends on the donations, offerings and tithes of the members. We should work not only to cover our budget; if we have more, we can do more!

Conclusion: The Thanksgiving Service has to do with all of this. We are not missing our daily bread on our table. This Service is a special opportunity to think about the uncountable blessings God gives us as citizens of our country and as members of the church, responding with thanksgiving to these many blessings. *When I pay my taxes, buy my groceries, mow my lawn, or weed my flowers, I can say that all those things also belong to God. By being a good citizen, a good father, a good husband, and neighbor, I am also serving God. He has bought the whole package, not just the good parts, not just the moments in prayer, not the Sunday mornings, but the whole week, the whole person, the whole of me* (Phil Brandt, p. 37).

The trap that the Pharisees had prepared to Jesus was a very smart one, as I have already said. But Jesus' reply was even smarter and shut the mouths of His enemies. On the other hand, in this short sentence: "Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God" (NLT), Jesus is giving a sharp guideline to Christians how to live in this double world we are living: We are in the world, but we are not of this world (John 17: 16). While we are still here, we have to submit ourselves to the conditions we face, sometimes good, sometimes bad. "But in keeping with His promise, we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness" (2 Peter 3:13). Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle, 19 November 2017