

- *Read through the text of this passage several times to check that you know it. If the Lord convicts you of something you need to address in your own life, then use the lifestyle challenge guide on this website to help you follow this through.*
- *Fast and pray for the country in which you live, and pray for just taxes and government. Ask the Lord to bless your country with godly leaders who will affect change appropriate to the growth of the Kingdom of God.*

## Final Prayer

Lord God, survey this world we have created with its extraordinary richness and appalling poverty. Come again amongst the poor, speak to us more of Dives and Lazarus, and remind us of Your message of liberation for all in real need. Then, may we know the power of the Gospel again in our midst. AMEN

## Prayer

Lord God, Almighty Father and Great Creator:  
 We give You glory for all that is beautiful, for You made it:  
 We honour You for Your power to defeat evil and make good:  
 We praise You for the hope of glory You have placed in our hearts:  
 Lord God, Almighty Father and Great Creator:  
 We are Yours, for we love You: AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Faithfulness

*Pray for the security of your country, and for that trust between people and their leaders which makes for good government. Pray about the moral value of faithfulness in politics.*

### On-going prayers

- *Pray for your national leaders at this time of economic instability*
- *Pray for people who do menial but important work for low pay*
- *Give thanks to God for the Sabbath and the importance of rest*

## Meditation

Don't stand back:

Don't let others try to do for you  
 what God would have you do;  
 And then you will grow in confidence  
 as His loved and trusted servant.

Don't let your heart be quickly swayed,  
 put your hand in the Saviour's hand;  
 And then you will find His powerful love  
 which offers strength and guidance.

Don't let the enemy catch you unawares  
 keep alert, stay on constant watch,  
 And then you will control the tempter's power  
 which afflicts your soul with sin.

Don't let the world become your idol  
 don't serve its wants and needs  
 And then you will be free to choose the truth  
 And live by the Word of God.

## Bible Study - Matthew 22:15-22

<sup>15</sup> *Then the Pharisees went away to contrive to trap him in his words.* <sup>16</sup> *So they sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians, who said, 'Teacher, we know that you are someone of integrity and you teach the way of God truthfully; neither do you worry about what people think, for you pay no attention to status.* <sup>17</sup> *Give us your opinion then: is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?'*

<sup>18</sup> But Jesus, aware of their deviousness, said, 'You hypocrites! Why are you trying to trap me?' <sup>19</sup> Show me the coin used for the tax.' They handed him a coin, <sup>20</sup> and Jesus said to them, 'Whose portrait and inscription is this?' <sup>21</sup> They replied, 'Caesar's.' Then he said to them, 'Therefore, give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.' <sup>22</sup> When they heard it, they were amazed, and they left him alone and went away.

## Review

This famous incident occurred immediately after Jesus told three parables against the chief priests and religious authorities in Jerusalem, who were attempting to pin a charge of blasphemy against Jesus. In the next phase of His dispute with the authorities, Jesus had three verbal altercations with them, concerning giving to Caesar (22:15-22), the resurrection (22:23-33), and the greatest commandment of God (22:34-40). All of these incidents are fascinating and reveal Jesus' extraordinary insight in stressful circumstances.

Jesus' teaching in our passage today is remarkable, clever and powerfully astute, but we miss its point if we read it simply as an isolated, though extraordinary, incident. Ultimately, this is all about Jesus' own person and authority as Messiah, to whom we owe our total allegiance. It is not Caesar's authority which is upheld, but God's.

**The question about Roman state taxes** The religious authorities hit upon what seemed like a good plan. They would send a delegation to Jesus with a question for which the answer would force him to declare his allegiance to God or to the state. They knew that if he chose God, then they could present Him to the Romans as a subversive, and if He said the state, then the people would desert Him; they were not prepared to face Jesus directly for fear of further humiliation from Him! They chose as their subject the payment of the one denarius 'tributum Soli' poll tax required of all people's in the Roman Empire and based upon the regular census. To confront Jesus, they sent a challenging combination of Pharisees (to uphold God's authority) and Herodians (to uphold the authority of the state), two groups normally at odds with each other, but each had a vested interest in Jesus answering one way or the other. It was an act of extraordinary hypocrisy!

Firstly, they praised Jesus as if to goad Him to saying more than He intended (22:16); 'Teacher, we know that you are someone of integrity ...'. This was pure flattery of course, but it also happened to be the truth about Jesus! If they really did believe what they said about Jesus, then they would not be trying to trap Him! Jesus, however, was not about to curry favour with any religious or secular party.

**The coin, the portrait and the inscription** Jesus went straight to the heart of the matter and cuttingly dismissed his accusers 'You hypocrites!' They were only trying to trap Jesus, and He did not need to rise to the challenge they presented. Yet what happened next has become one of the most memorable incidents of Jesus' teaching.

The denarius 'poll tax' was collected by Herod's ruling dynasty on behalf of the Romans. The coin itself was silver and had on one side a picture of the Emperor Tiberius, and an inscription of his name and his divinity as Emperor. On the other side there was a picture of a seated lady called 'pax' (peace) and the inscription 'PONTIF MAXIM' meaning 'supreme authority' (as discovered in a cache of coins on Mount Carmel dating from Jesus' day). Jews had a problem not just with the tax, but the coin. It was an image of what purported to be a god and was contrary to Jewish Law. Because of Jewish sensitivities, alternative copper/bronze denarii were minted without the Emperor's head or inscription, but with the image of 'pax' and the claim of Roman supreme authority, and these were in general use in Palestine, though both were available.

When Jesus asked for the coin (22:19), there may well have been a twinkle in his eye, for the Pharisees should not have had one on principle, and the Herodians may have been

embarrassed to admit having a silver one in public, such was the furore that surrounded the issue in Jesus' day. Nevertheless, one was found, and Jesus' question 'whose portrait and inscription is this?' went to the heart of the public debate about the use of the coin, including the claim of authority and divinity by the Emperor Tiberius. His final answer 'give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's' cut the ground from under both questioning parties.

**State authority and God** The word that Jesus used here literally means 'give back'. Therefore, Jesus' saying tells us to respect the authority of the state and give it its taxes, and also give God His due, but what do we owe God? We must give God what belongs to Him, for His 'image' has been impressed upon us in our creation (Gen 1:27)! Those who know they are God's must give themselves to Him!

A number of issues arise directly from this. Clearly, the teaching bids us do our duty to God as a priority. However, what does this really tell us about the relationship between God's Kingdom and the state? Some have argued that this text teaches the complete separation of church and state; but that is an oversimplification. All kinds of earthly situations have arisen within history as God's people have organised the church differently in relationship to either hostile or friendly state governments. However, the teaching of this saying rises above particular circumstances and tells us to keep a clear mind about the difference between earthly and heavenly authority, so that we honour God in everything. Secondly, it asks us to ensure that we give God the highest honour. His is the first call on our lives.

Jesus' teaching is very important, particularly in a world in which Christian faith is identified with a dominant western culture. It is important to remember that the Church exists in every country of the world, finding its way and exercising its ministry within as wide a variety of cultures as the world knows. When it people give to God what is His, then they are best placed both to meet their obligations in the world, and also hold it accountable to its Creator.

## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. What does it mean for you to give the state its due? What do we owe the state or country in which we live?
2. How do we put into practice the command of our Lord to give back to God all that is God's?
3. Does the teaching of Jesus make impossible demands on us? In what circumstances might we find our duties to God and the state conflict?

## Discipleship

### Personal comment:

*The way that we live our discipleship is affected by the culture in which we live, as well as the state laws, taxes and judicial systems. Perhaps it is a disease of our times, but I am of the opinion that many people are not able to see the difference between the claims of Christ upon their lives and the demands of the culture in which they have been brought up. The two need to be teased apart enough for people to see the difference, but this can be very difficult. For example, many Christians will happily shop on any day of the week, but insist that the Sabbath (however they understand it) is sacred, yet surely it is not enough to observe some kind of Sabbath oneself and not advocate its just requirements for all people and its godly origins?*

### Ideas for discipleship programme