

Sermon – October 18, 2020  
"Where Is Your Treasure?"  
Crown of Life Lutheran Church  
Pastor Dave Schilling

Let's pray, "O Lord, speak to each of us wherever Your love finds us this morning, speak to us in our minds, speak to us in our hearts, speak to us by the words of my mouth, and in the thoughts we form. Speak, O Lord, we, your servants, are listening. Amen (please be seated)

There was a man who liked to appear to be full of virtue. As the story goes, he once said to Mark Twain, "Before I die, I'm going to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. I shall climb to the top of Mount Sinai, and read the Ten Commandments aloud!" To which Twain reportedly replied, "I have a better idea! Why don't you stay right at home and keep them?"

I once saw a report of a pastor who, sort of tongue-in-cheek, printed an item in his Sunday bulletin. In it, he listed all the reasons why he stopped attending sporting events. He wrote...

"Every time I go, they ask me for money.

The fans don't seem very friendly, and the seats are too hard. The referee makes decisions that I don't agree with.

Some games extend into overtime, making me late getting home.

Usually the games are scheduled when I want to do other things.

And don't you know it, ever since I read that book on sports, I know more than the coaches do anyway!

So now, I don't take my own children because I want them to choose for themselves what sport they like best."

GEE, I wonder what that pastor was getting at ... I wonder what that story was all about?

Just in case you missed the point, let me sum it up in one word hypocrisy. And it's a subject that Jesus often really attacked.

And when He did, it was always against His own people ... the Church-going, law-abiding people. He condemned them for "show-boating" when they gave their offerings ... "Hypocrites looking for applause."

He condemned them for show-boating when they prayed ... "in order to be noticed."

In Luke's Gospel, He famously called to account those who focused on the faults of their neighbor first, before examining their own faults. "Hypocrite!" Jesus said, "Take the plank out of your own eye first, and then you, will see clearly enough to take out the splinter that is in your brother's eye" (Luke 6:42).

In today's Gospel Lesson Jesus continues teaching more of these hypocrites. In fact, Jesus uses the image on Roman money as an illustration for this teaching moment.

I thought it would be interesting to see and hear some background information on early Roman coins ...

## VIDEO "First Century Coins"

Jesus has now been preaching, teaching and healing for about 3 years. Large crowds have gathered to listen to Him, and there was beginning to be talk about MAKING Him the new king of Israel. After all ...

- He could inspire huge crowds with His words.
- He could feed thousands with very little food.
- He could heal the sick, the lame and the insane.
- And He had the power to even raise people from the dead.

If Jesus were their King, there'd be no power on earth that could stand against Israel ... not even the hated Romans. Israel would once again become a great nation.

But there was a problem ... the job of King was already taken. Judea already had a King, and that king's name was Herod, the King who'd executed John the Baptist years earlier.

Herod's followers were called Herodians, and they wanted Herod as their king ... not Jesus.

So, these Herodians conspired with the Pharisees to discredit Jesus in the eyes of the people. They approached Jesus and asked, "Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?"  
Matthew 22:17

The only reason they joined forces was because they both hated Jesus, and wanted Him destroyed ... sounds a lot like our current political climate doesn't it?

If Jesus answered that the people had to pay their taxes, the Pharisees could condemn Him to the crowds as a friend of the hated Romans.

BUT, if Jesus replied that people SHOULD NOT pay their taxes, the Herodians would brand Him an enemy of Rome and have Him arrested.

It was the perfect trap. They knew Jesus was a Rabbi, and Rabbi's ALWAYS answered questions people would ask them.

"Teacher," they said, "we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are. Tell us then, what is your opinion?" Matthew 22:16-17

(pause) I suspect about now, they were smiling to themselves, and just giddy with excitement.

But perhaps their excitement about this trap was a little premature. As you and I both know, Jesus is not your normal Rabbi ... in fact, He is God!

As Jesus begins His response, He slaps them down a little bit first, when He says, "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me?" Matthew 22:18

Essentially Jesus is saying, "Seriously? Is that the best you've got?"

Then, Jesus simply turns everything around, and traps them.

He looks at a Roman coin, similar to what we just saw in the video, and says to them, "Whose image is this? And whose inscription?" Matthew 22:20

After replying, "Caesar's", I don't believe any of the Pharisees or Herodians saw this coming ... then Jesus tells them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."

In that simple answer, Jesus destroyed their trap once again.

The Herodians couldn't accuse Jesus of being a revolutionary, because He'd just endorsed paying the Roman taxes.

And the Pharisees used these very coins themselves. In fact, they used these coins to pay their Temple tax, because these coins were backed by the Roman government.

In using these coins, the Pharisees were agreeing that Rome owned the coins, and thus had the right to levy a tax on those coins.

The bottom line is that the money they had wasn't owned by them – it was owned by Rome ... and the same is true of the money you carry in your wallets and purses today. All of that money belongs to the United States Government.

It's a Federal Crime for you to mutilate or deface those bills.

Title 18, Section 333 of the United States Code says if you mutilate or destroy the money in your wallet or purse, you could be fined and/or imprisoned. The image on our money declares WHO these bills belong to.

Look at any bill you have, and you'll see these words, "Federal Reserve Note ... The United States of America". Those words on those bills declare WHO owns those bills.

And this is precisely what Jesus was saying ... the image on the coin declares who it belongs to. He said: "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." Matthew 22:21

So how do I know what to give to the government ... the simple answer is by the images on the bills and coins. That seems easy enough to understand, but here's the hard part ...

What do I give to God? Where do I find God's image?

We can start with Genesis 1:26, where "...God said, 'Let us make man in our image...'"

We were made in God's image. You and I need to give what belongs to God - back to Him. We need to give ourselves back to Him.

About now, you are probably wondering, "How do I do that?"

First, you need to BELONG to Him, and to do that ... you need to believe in Jesus ... believe in His life, death, and resurrection. Remember the Reformation cry ... Grace alone, Bible alone, faith alone for our salvation.

Ephesians 1:13 tells us. "When you believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,"

So, when our faith in Jesus leads us to belong to Him, God expects us to do what Peter teaches us in Acts 2:37-38, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

I recognize that there are some people who do this faith/repentance/baptism thing ... as if it were fire insurance ... insurance to prevent you from being thrown into eternal fire, so to speak.

They pay their dues once in a while, and then they believe they can escape the fire.

But it is similar to buying car insurance. For example, you may sign some papers, pay a deposit, and then set up a payment schedule so that your bill would be taken out of your checking account every month.

After that is all done, how often are you going to go back to that insurance office? They may never see you again. And, they don't expect to see you any oftener than that.

Unfortunately, there are people who treat salvation in Jesus in much the same way. They may sign up, pay their "dues", and then show up only once in a while ... if that.

But Jesus said, "Give to God that which belongs to God." So, we have to decide, do we BELONG to God, or are we just pretending?

When the Herodians tried to trap Jesus, He called them Hypocrites.

The word hypocrite literally means that a person has put on a false face. In the days of Greece, an actor would wear a mask to symbolize the character he was portraying.

So a hypocrite is someone who "pretends" to be something they're not. They're counterfeiters. A hypocrite tries to look like the real thing, but they have no intention of actually BEING the real thing.

So, how can one tell if you are BEING the real thing? There are many ways to answer that question, but let's stay with the topic Jesus was addressing in our Gospel lesson ... money and possessions.

A theologian (Howard L. Dayton Jr) once observed, "Sixteen of the 38 parables of Jesus were concerned with how to handle money and possessions. In the Gospels, an amazing one out of 10 verses deal directly with the subject of money.

And the Bible offers a total of 500 verses on prayer, less than 500 verses on faith, but more than 2000 verses on money and possessions.

Here is a scenario that I believe often happens on Sunday mornings, which is a symptom of our lack of planning ahead for our giving. For example, we may come to church, and then notice that I have a \$20 and a \$5 bill in my wallet.

Now I'm faced with a last-minute decision ... "Do I give the \$5 bill, the \$20 bill, or both.

In that scenario, do you realize what I've done? I've given God my leftovers, because my heart isn't focused on God ... it's focused on my treasure.

The bottom line in that scenario is that I did not give God my first fruits ... I only gave God what I had left over. If people ask me today how they could better honor the first fruits giving, I suggest the automatic payment from on-line banking, either weekly or monthly.

Proverbs 3:9-10 (page 439) tells us...

“Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.”

This is what is important for being the real thing ... when you make Jesus the Lord of your life, you die to your old life, and you now live totally for Jesus.

At one time at the City Temple in London, there was a man who owned a restaurant there, and he was also a close friend and benefactor of Albert Schweitzer.

The restaurant owner was known for the fact that he would never allow a Christian worker to pay for a meal. But once, he did happen to open his cash register in the presence of the Secretary of the London Missionary Society.

As the owner was making change for another customer, the Secretary was astonished to see among the bills and coins a six-inch nail. “What is this nail for?” He asked.

The owner explained, "I keep this nail with my money to remind me of the price that Christ paid for my salvation."

What an interesting reminder. Perhaps it would help all of us, if we had a nail in our wallets and purses as a reminder of the price that Christ paid for our salvation.

Jesus said: “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Matthew 6:21 Amen

Prayer: “Father, thank you for bringing us into your Kingdom through Your Grace. Help us to fully understand what it means to really put Jesus first in our lives. We pray that we may always rest in the peace and love of Your promises through our Lord Jesus. Amen”