

Mt. 22:15-33

Jesus, taxes and the resurrection.

1. A Political controversy vv. 15-22.

V. 15. The poll tax, which had to be paid in Roman currency, was very contentious. The Pharisees (religious leaders opposed to the poll tax) colluded with the Herodians (supporters of Herod and the Romans) to try and trap Jesus. If Jesus had rejected the poll tax (paid to the Roman conquerors) he would have been arrested. If Jesus had supported the Roman taxes he would have been in conflict with the popular nationalism. They thought they had boxed Jesus into a corner.

Vv. 16-21a. They pretend to flatter Jesus before they raise their trick question. Jesus knows their evil intent, so he exposes their hypocrisy. He asks them to produce a coin required to be used to pay the poll tax. They readily produced the contentious coin. Jesus asks them whose portrait and whose inscription is on the coin (Tiberius Caesar, Augustus, son of the deified Augustus, chief priest'). They answer Caesar.

V. 22b. Jesus gives an intriguing response, 'give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's'. Jesus seems to be challenging two commonly held views. Firstly, he rejects the idea that the Jewish people should not have to pay the poll tax to Rome. They are beneficiaries of Roman roads, commerce, education and laws therefore they should be ready to pay for these benefits. But secondly there are limits to human rule and God must be served. The Roman leaders followed the belief that they were in partnership with the gods and so that their rule was absolute, requiring obedience and worship. Jesus rejected Caesar's claim for his people's worship. The Greek word translated 'give' means 'give back' - to give back to Caesar what is his and to give back to God (they bear God's image Gen 1:28) what is his - themselves. Jesus' response amazed them.

Reflection. How do we discern what is 'Caesar's and what is rightly God's?

2. The Sadducees and the truth of the resurrection, Vv.23-33.

Vv. 23-28. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. They create a hypothetical problem to try and show the impossibility of the resurrection.

Vv. 29-32. Jesus confronts them by saying they are in error because they neither know the Scriptures (they only accepted the first 5 books of the OT =Torah) nor the power of God. The power of God will raise people from the dead to live a new eternal life, not a repeat of this present life. The Scriptures (Is. 29:16; Dan. 12:2; 1 Cor 15 and Ex. 3:6 see v. 32) say that God will raise up his people, that is those who believe in Jesus (Jesus taught - Jn. 6:32-58; Jn. 11:25-26). The crowds were astonished at his teaching.

Reflection/Response. Why is the deepest of human relationships, marriage, not a part of the resurrected life? How do our deepest and best experiences of love, joy and peace point to an even better life to come?

BB