Matthew 22.15–22

15 Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him in what he said. 16 So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, 'Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. 17 Tell us, then, what you think. 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.' And they brought him a denarius. 20 Then he said to them, 'Whose head is this, and whose title?' 21 They answered, 'The emperor's.' Then he said to them, 'Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.' 22 When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

Tax has always been an issue.

When I was a student there was a tax that became a tinder box issue.

The Community Charge or Poll Tax.

It was a tax that was seen by some as hugely unfair. To others it was entirely logical and just - we all have bins and rubbish they said so we should all pay equally to have them emptied.

In the end, the Poll Tax brought down the government and caused the Prime Minister to resign.

Politics has always about allegiances and issues.

Are you for immigration or against it

For net zero or against it

Cut welfare or maintain it.

For Palestine or for Israel.

This is an incident that shows what happens to politics when it collides with the coming of kingdom of God.

What they are asking Jesus is this question:

Who do you vote for?

This is a very famous encounter that actually forces each of us to face a choice

And it's the answer Jesus gives to a question that is posed to catch him out that forces a choice upon us.

Look at v 15

...they laid plans to trap him

Another translation says ....'they plotted how to entangle him with his words'

You may recall when you were grappling with the gospel you might have asked the question

'What's the catch?'

Eternal life for those who believe in Jesus - ok

Tick

Forgiveness of all my sins past present and future? Tick

Purpose and meaning and vision for my life not being about me but being about Jesus and learning to follow him?

Those are the plusses of the gospel.

But what of the demands?

Well, the demand is the total surrender of yourself to God.

Why do that when the here and now is so pressing and consuming and do some quite nice.

Let's explore that.

There were two distinct groups here seeking to entangle Jesus.

Look at this in 3 ways:

A revolutionary question
A revolutionary answer
A revolutionary choice

1. A revolutionary question.

Firstly:

The Pharisees. You'll note it actually says....

the disciples of.

So these were in effect theology students. In my experience, theological colleges are big on talk and head knowledge but less effective on practical matters of how we actually live in the real world with real problems and complexities.

You may know that to do a phd you have to be asking an original question. I would sit at lunch with very clever doctoral students at Oxford and always ask ‘What’s your question?

My follow up was to ask them ‘Is anyone else asking that question?

Everyone at this time was asking questions about tax. They still are.

The budget beckons.

The Pharisee’s represented the Jews.

If Jesus answers them saying pay Caesar he’d be surrendering to the Roman occupiers and as a result he’d lose his popularity and Jewish followership.

On the other hand, if he says don’t pay which is what the Herodians hope to hear he’ll be in trouble with Caesar. They were a political movement that supported Roman imperial power. Jesus becomes a revolutionary and he’d be immediately reported to the Romans as an insurrectionist.

Either way, so they think, they have him.

Jesus is aware of their malice- v 18 ‘evil intent’.

He calls it out.

Sometimes you have to call out evil.

Jesus eyeballs them

V 18 Why are you doing this?

He wants to reveal their motives. Very significant.

So many relational conflicts ignore the need for an honest revealing of motives.

Matthew 27v 18 when it says Pharisee’s handed Jesus over to Pilate it says they did this

‘Out of envy’. They were envious of Jesus‘ popularity. He was carrying the day.

Move on to

2. A radical answer

So what does Jesus do?

Give me a coin and they brought him a denarius.

Need to understand the backdrop. All sorts of taxes. They are asking about ‘the head tax’

It was a tax for the privilege of being a subject of Caesar.

25 years earlier a man called Judas the Galilean called all Jews to refuse the head tax. With an armed band he went and cleansed the temple of Gentiles. He then said God should be king not Caesar and said he was going to get rid injustice and overthrow the oppression of the occupiers.

- Jesus had taught and was teaching about on the kingdom of God

- He just turned over the money changers tables in the Temple.

That’s why he’s being asked.

What about the head tax?

What they are asking him is ‘Are you a revolutionary or not?’

The irony is those defending Gods honour are carrying the coin of the occupying power and participating in the very economic system they want Jesus to pronounce upon.

Common coin. About a days wage.

Who’s on this?

They said Caesar.

Then he said to them

‘Render to Caesar what is Caesar and to God what is God’s’

Kjv uses the word render.

Didn’t address the scope or the sphere.

There are things that are Caesar’s.

There are things that are God’s

The relationship between them

How do the two renderings relate to each other.

Jesus doesn’t answer that - what he does though is expose divided loyalties.

Serious implications emerge if you look carefully.

Things to God

Everything belongs to God.

Everyone should agree with that.

Things that belong to Caesar are derivative.

Caesar does have some influence. God has said so and allowed it. But human leadership and power is limited so...

2. Caesar's claims are limited.

If Gods claim on you total then the claims of Caesar must be limited. That'd means there may be times to say I'm not doing that.

3. Caesar wanted to be a King and acted as one. His face was on a coin. We want the same. We want to be in charge.

Jesus told us to see the signs of the times

The President of the United States has just produced a $250 bank note with his face on it. A leader just like Caesar who again wants to be a king.

Jesus is the true king but without a coin for your sake. His face is on the cross where he took the poverty you deserve so that you could have the incredible wealth of God's acceptance and welcome and future.

Dane Ortland has just released a wonderful book on heaven. It's called 'Finding home'

This sentence stopped me in my tracks:

'For anyone not united to Jesus Christ, this life is the best it will ever get. For anyone united to Jesus Christ, this life is the worst it will ever be'