

Pentecost XVIII FLC A  
Matthew 22:15-22  
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## SHOW ME THE COIN

I am passing out money today! I am sharing my coin collection with you. Some of you received a coin and I am asking you to look at it. Turn it over and see what is on that coin. Can you identify the people on it? can you read what the inscription is?

We take these things for granted. Coins do change from time to time. They used to be made from precious metals, now they have changed. They also mark countries or stand as memorials to people or events. There is a lot there on a coin.

I

This is the setting that Matthew tells about in our lesson today. Those who want to test Jesus ask if it is lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, the Roman Emperor.

This is sort of a trick question since many considered Caesar a god in the Roman Empire. And it was the Roman Empire that ruled the land of Israel in Jesus' day.

If Jesus answered: "It **IS NOT** right to pay taxes to Caesar" he could be in deep trouble with the government. If he had answered "It **IS** right to pay taxes to Caesar", then he could appear to pay allegiance to another god, the worldly god, Caesar. And that would go against the First Commandment, "You shall have no other gods before me, says the Lord God."

II

So Jesus asks to see the coin that paid the tax, and they gave him a coin, a denarius, a Roman coin and a typical day's pay. He asked them, "whose head is this and inscription?"

As you look at the coin in your hand, you see that coins have changed little in 2000 years. They still carry the head of the state and an inscription or title, and the value of the coin.

Some of you received a coin that carries no depiction of a human being. On the reverse it may have some funny writing or even the depiction of another coin! These are coins from Israel, and to this day, they do not carry any human likeness, lest their leader seek the status of a god. Israeli coins to this day observe the first commandment: "You shall make no likeness of anything on the earth, under the earth or over the earth!"

Jesus' answer came from the coins themselves: "Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God."

This answered the question and left the crowds amazed.

### III

But there is still another message here in Jesus' answer. If we think about it, where did the Emperor get his authority? Where did the Emperor get his power? Where did the Emperor get the trust of the people?

Jesus' answer reflects that, yes, we pay taxes to the government for many things, and appropriately so. But even the government is accountable to God. Our Leaders get their authority from God, they get the trust of the people from God, they get their power from God.

When the President of the United States or members of congress, or Supreme Court are sworn in, they lay their hand on the Bible and acknowledge that all authority ultimately comes from God. They are entrusted servants, they are stewards of the concerns of the nation, they are not gods, but are accountable to God. These images on the coins are accountable to God.

### IV

It is the sovereign God whose creating and redeeming Word moves among the nations. All authority and power come from God alone. All authority comes from God, and is entrusted by God to us. It is God's gift of grace that entrusts us. We are accountable on our watch for what we do with that gift.

So we appeal to God that our actions might be guided by God's will. We seek God's guidance in our life as we come in worship and prayer, seeking God's will in all things.

Prayer changes us from self-centeredness to seeking God's will among us. Worship restores to us the community of belief that nurtures and sustains us. Reflection on God's Holy Word in scripture ensures us that we are living within God's plans for us and for our community.

We wish to have our lives reflect God's will as we live and work with God and with one another and, in the words of the old hymn:

Print Thine image, pure and holy,  
On my heart, O Lord of grace:  
So that nothing high or lowly  
Thy blest likeness can efface.  
Let the clear inscription be:  
Jesus crucified for me,  
And the Lord of all creation,  
Be my refuge and salvation.

(Please return my coins in the offering plate, they will get back to me. Thank you. DBS)