

Jim Gill

November 6, 2016

"Renderings"

Haggai 1:15b-2:9 Luke 20:20-26 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5

MINUTE FOR MISSION -- PLEASE CHECK IN ON YOUR CELLPHONES

INTRODUCTION TO Luke 20:20-26

As we have been reading through Luke we have been treated to a parable about a rich man and a beggar at his gate, a parable about a rich religious man and a rich tax collector in worship. Last week we read about a rich tax collector names Zacchaeus and his encounter with Jesus. In this morning's gospel lesson we see an encounter between some rich religious leaders and Jesus. Will you please stand for the reading of the gospel from Luke 20:15-22

Let's pray. Lord we have so many questions, especially when it comes to our finances. As we meditate on Jesus answer to these questions, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer.

\*\*\*

At some time every older sibling has pulled this on a little brother or sister over a disagreement. "Okay," the older child offers, "let's flip for it. Heads I win, tails you lose." The little kid agrees: "Sure!" Then when heads appears the older proclaims "Heads, I win!" Of course if tails comes up the declaration is "Tails, you lose." Slowly it dawns on the younger child that this is truly a no-win situation. Whatever way the coin lands the older sibling is going to win.

That's what the question the Pharisees put to Jesus was designed to do. The Pharisees are not being honest. They have no intent in entrusting Jesus with anything. They are not looking for the answer to a question. They are looking for a way to get rid of this trouble making Nazarene named Jesus..Not for a moment did they believe in Jesus' sincerity. It was a set up. It was a way of putting him at ease before they stabbed him in the back. Tell us then, they continue, what do you think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor?

First, I would like take a look at the actual question that is being asked of Jesus. For the Pharisees are not asking Jesus a secular question, "What do you think about paying Taxes?" They are asking a religious question. Look at how they phrase the question. They say, "Is it permitted..." The question could be paraphrased: Is it in accord with Torah to pay taxes to Caesar? They are asking Jesus if the Mosaic Law would support taxes paid to a pagan ruler.

We are told that the Pharisees went out of the temple and laid plans to trap Jesus in his words. That's interesting in itself. They had to go out of the temple to conspire; they dare not do it in that holy place. When they return, Jesus is presented with a dilemma. If he says don't pay the tax they will be able to accuse him before Pilate of anti-Roman

activity. If, on the other hand he says, pay the tax he will lose favor with the people for whom the Roman tax was a necessary evil and a symbol of their lost freedom. So, what to do? He calls for a coin.

If you were to hold a Roman denarius in your hand you would quickly understand the use Jesus makes of it. The head displays the reigning emperor, and on the tail an inscription, reading, in the time of Jesus, "Tiberius Caesar, Son of the Divine Augustus, Pontifex Maximus." The emperor was the high priest of Rome's pagan religion.

There is a bit of irony here. Standing on the Holiest ground in all of Israel, within the Temple walls, Jesus' adversaries have quickly produced a coin that bears a graven image, an idol. The second of the Ten Commandments expressly warns against the use of idols. Yet they manage to produce one. (Notice, Jesus didn't have one.)

And then Jesus answers, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesars and to God the things that are God's.

**First, we are to render unto OUR country.** Have you ever noticed that when you combine the two words, "THE" and "IRS," it spells "THEIRS"?

We owe money to our country because we drive on its roads. Somebody has to pay for those roads. Somebody has to pay for our schools, our military and all the benefits of a free and affluent land. In much the same way we give to God in order that the Gospel may be proclaimed and that future generations may have the same spiritual benefits that we enjoy so we are to give to our government to provide some of the benefits we enjoy.

The Apostle Paul recognized the role of government, when the Roman government was one of most oppressive on earth. It was that government that imprisoned him. Yet he said that government is "God's servant, and agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer" (Romans 13:4).

If you will study the prophets of God's Word they spoke truth to power. Nathan spoke to King David, Elijah spoke to Ahab, Eleazar to Jehoshaphat, Daniel to Nebuchadnezzar, Moses to Pharaoh, and John the Baptist to Herod. We need to tell every governmental official, whoever he or she is, that nothing is politically right that is morally wrong.

As God's people, need to speak to the government and to our leaders. We dare not be silent. We need to sound a warning. But that's not our main cause. Our main cause is preaching the Gospel and when it comes to that ... we dare not be silent. It is contrary to our calling for good people to be silent in evil times.

I know many Christians are squeamish about judgment. They say we are not to judge. But my friends if you pay taxes you are supporting a judicial system that judges. There is no way around it. There is a role for the punishment of crime and a Christian's duty is to support that system. As citizens of this world, we owe support to our government. As

Christians, we are to pay our taxes. Christians are even commanded to pray for our tax collectors and .. our tax dollar allocators. We are even supposed to vote for our tax collectors and tax dollar allocators.

In 1800 ONE VOTE kept Aaron Burr from becoming President.

In 1845 ONE VOTE made Texas part of the United States.

In 1868 ONE VOTE saved President Andrew Johnson from impeachment.

ONE VOTE admitted California, Oregon, Washington, and Idaho into the Union. (1850, 1850, 1889, 1890)

In 1876 ONE VOTE elected Rutherford B. Hayes to the Presidency, and the man in the Electoral College who cast that vote was an Indiana Representative also elected by ONE VOTE.

In 1923 ONE VOTE made Adolf Hitler head of the Nazi Party.

In 1941 ONE VOTE maintained the Selective Service System only 12 weeks before Pearl Harbor.

In 1960 ONE VOTE per precinct would have elected Richard Nixon, rather than John Kennedy, President.

I'm only one but I am one. I can't do everything but I can do something and what I can do I ought to do and that by the grace of God I will do. That should be the attitude of every Christian citizen.

### **The second question Jesus asked is: What is God's?**

It's like the window cleaner who was working on a scaffold outside the 20th floor of a skyscraper. He was surprised to see a secretary pressing a large sheet of paper up to the window. On it, in big letters, she had written: "It's 72 degrees in here." Undaunted, the half-frozen window cleaner reached into his pocket, pulled out a pen and notebook, and scribbled a message of his own. With a big smile he held it close to the window. It said, "It's \$25 an hour out here!"

Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's! If Caesar wants his tax, give it to him. His face is on the coin anyway, so it must be his. But what is God's? What is God's? My friends I want you to know that this is not a fifty-fifty proposition. God is due more than the government. The government's role in your life is vastly inferior to God's role in your life. If the coin bears the image of George Washington then it must be his, give it to him. But you bear the image of God. You are created in His image; give yourself to God. Render yourself to God and God's service.

**There are at least 3 things we are to render unto OUR God. First, we are to render ...our money.** The Bible has roughly 2300 references to money and only 500 references to prayer. Jesus talked about money more than any other subject. He knew we'd have trouble when it comes to money. When it comes to dues, the Biblical standard for kingdom dues has been 10%-- the tithe.

This week I attended the Bay Area Ministerial Association and our speaker was from the United Way. One of the statistics she quoted was that nationally the citizens of the USA

give away 2-3% to charitable causes. That's counting those who give through the churches. She said Utah is the highest at 7%. That's because the Mormon Church REQUIRES the tithe. The rest of the residents of the state that are not Mormon bring the percentage down to 7%.

Leighton Farrell was the minister of Highland Park Church in Dallas for many years. He tells of a man in the church who once made a covenant with a former pastor to tithe ten percent of their income every year. They were both young and neither of them had much money. But things changed. The layman tithed one thousand dollars the year he earned ten thousand, ten thousand dollars the year he earned one-hundred thousand, and one-hundred thousand dollars the year he earned one million. But the year he earned six million dollars he just could not bring himself to write out that check for six-hundred thousand dollars to the Church.

He telephoned the minister, long since having moved to another church, and asked to see him. Walking into the pastor's office the man begged to be let out of the covenant, saying, "This tithing business has to stop. It was fine when my tithe was one thousand dollars, but I just cannot afford six-hundred thousand dollars. You've got to do something, Reverend!" The pastor knelt on the floor and prayed silently for a long time. Eventually the man said, "What are you doing? Are you praying that God will let me out of the covenant to tithe?" "No," said the minister. "I am praying for God to reduce your income back to the level where one thousand dollars will be your tithe!" (1)

Jesus believed in the tithe. In Matthew 23:23. Jesus congratulated and challenged his opponents. He congratulated them by pointing out that they DID tithe. But Jesus challenged them because they stopped at the tithe. He said, "You tithe BUT you have neglected doing justly loving mercy and showing kindness. You've tithed. That's step one. But God wants you to step up. God wants more than your money. God wants your compassion, your care, your service to God and others..

This church would not be here if you did not believe in giving God your money. Whether you give God a tithe, 10 percent, or even a fraction of that, you and I understand that giving is part of our responsibility as followers of Christ.

I believe most of us understand that, but it is good to be reminded. A church like ours couldn't survive very long if people just gave to God when they felt inspired to do so. There are some people who give according to whether they like the pastor or whether they approve or disapprove of what the denomination is doing. The church, however, depends on more mature followers of Christ who give because they recognize that all of life is a gift from a loving God, and we are simply returning a portion of what God has bestowed on us.

Sometime back ABC TV news carried a brief story about Louise Hauser of Houston, Texas who won \$50,000 on the game show, "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire." Here is the remarkable thing about Louise. Her home had sustained significant damage in Hurricane "Ike" a few months before. She was not a wealthy woman. She could

certainly have used all of the \$50,000. Yet Louise Hauser gave \$10,000 of her prize winnings that's 20% or two "tithes" of that money to the West Houston Assistance Ministries, a food pantry where she works. She gave to her church as well. By way of explaining her generosity to an astonished reporter, Hauser said, "My husband Nick and I have a very simple life and we don't require much in the way of 'stuff' to be happy. I'm very blessed." (2)

She is blessed. Beyond the blessing of material goods, Louise is blessed with spiritual maturity. She understands that happiness does not consist in having stuff. Happiness comes from being in a right relationship with God and our neighbor. The first thing we owe God is our money.

**The second thing we owe God is our joyful service.** I say joyful service because the people who serve God best don't think of it as a duty, but as a privilege. For them service is a natural response to God's goodness. Joyful service can be in our Food Pantry, at the Thrift Store, attending a Small Group, at your job.

The editorial staff of a Sunday magazine at one time created a "Faith in Life" award. This was their way of increasing their readership and at the same time recognizing those who best demonstrated their faith in daily living. The readers were encouraged to submit letters of nomination to the paper telling stories of those persons who best lived their faith in their daily lives.

A large number of the nominating letters that came in mentioned people who either (1) had attended church regularly for years; (2) had given a sizable amount of money to their church or favorite charity; or (3) had done both. Many of the letters included newspaper clippings that showed the dedication of the person who was being nominated for the award.

Some folks were surprised when the winner was announced. His letter of nomination had arrived at the paper written in crayon with no newspaper clippings attached. The letter read like this: "Anthony is a plumber. He helped some people fix up a house for my friend's family because their first house burned down. He also visits my grandmother in the nursing home and makes her happy with his stories and his harmonica playing. He is a lot like Jesus. I hope he wins. But if he doesn't it won't matter. He will still be the same good old Anthony." And it was signed, "Love, Anne." (3)

I like that. He "makes my grandmother happy with his stories and his harmonica playing. He is a lot like Jesus." There are people I've known through the years like Anthony the plumber. Some are members of this church. (except for the harmonica part). They take being a good neighbor seriously. They are continually doing good things for others.

**But the most important thing we owe God is, of course, ourselves.** We need to understand this. More important than our material possessions, more important than our acts of neighborliness, is that we have dedicated ourselves whole-heartedly to God.

I like the way a retired pastor, Walter Harms, sums this lesson up. He says that we cannot do anything for God. "You cannot hug God. You can't give God a dime. You can't demonstrate in concrete form love for God. But you can love all those made in the image and likeness of God. You can hug them. You can give to them in their need. You can demonstrate to them you are vitally interested. You can give them your attention and time. And in loving them you love our Lord Jesus who in flesh and blood has shown us the image and likeness of God!" (4)

Which leads me to suggest one more pledge. In addition to pledging your financial commitment to the work of this church and in addition to pledging your joyful service and yourselves I would like you to consider the Great Commission we have all been issued. What would our church look like if each of us pledged to bring at least one person to become a part of our church family in 2017? We don't have a card for that, but what would that be like?

We have a dual citizenship. We are citizens of the United States of America, of Texas, of Harris County of Baytown, Beach City, Mont Belvieu, Crosby, Highlands, (where else?). But we are ALSO citizens of the Church of Jesus Christ, the Presbyterian Church USA, the Synod of the Sun, the Presbytery of New Covenant, and of Faith Presbyterian Church.

During our tour of duty on earth, we have obligations to both. We are to render unto Washington and to Austin and to Baytown the things that are THEIRS—(some of which result in services provided to us). But we are also citizens of God's kingdom, and as such we are to render unto God the things that are GOD'S--which lays on us a much more basic claim to our loyalty. Caesar and God are not on the same level of loyalty. God is the foundational loyalty on which all others are based.

Jesus' brilliant answer to those who tried to trap him that day taught them and teaches us that both have a claim on our loyalty but on much different levels. Not only am I called to be a good citizen in good standing with the governing authorities because I regularly pay my taxes, and fines should they come, I have an even greater responsibility to be a good citizen in God's kingdom. Just as there are dues (and fines) in the kingdoms of this world, there are dues in God's kingdom.

This morning we have the privilege of declaring what we are called to pledge to God's work in the year to come. Part of what we pledge will go to continue to support this place where we can gather to grow in our Faith. Part of what we pledge will go to support what we learn and what we decide to do because we have gathered here. It is a holy moment. What we pledge will determine what we will be able to do in the year to come.

Centuries ago the Psalmist wrote a Psalm of thanksgiving for recovery from healing, Psalm 116. In verse 12 the Psalmist asks,

“What shall I render to the Lord for all his bounty to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people.”

When you consider all that God has given us, “Heads we win, and tails we win.” And so today we pledge our renderings.

Let's pray. O God, you are rich in love for your people. Show us the treasure that endures and, when we are tempted by greed, remind us of your lavish mercy. Call us back into your service and make us worthy to be entrusted with the wealth that never fails.

O God, you prepare a table for us, and we want to assign seats. You offer a banquet, and we want to write the guest list. You invite, and we make excuses. You provide enough, but we want more than enough and watch others lack enough. We consume but fail to give thanks. We consume but fail to share the bounty. We consume but fail to share the load. We are offered a sacrament, but we manage to turn it into a sacrilege. We set our own tables that you rightly overturn.

Forgive us our table manners. Turn our meals into celebrations. Turn our Feasts into fellowship. Turn our consumption into communion. Turn our table fare into justice. Enable us to be the body of Christ, because we see the body of Christ in others and therefore receive the body of Christ as we commune together, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (C. Eric Mount Jr.)

1. Bob Younts
2. Pastor Richard Allen, <http://www.mamaroneckumc.org/2008sermons/20081116.htm>.
3. Rev. Richard J. Fairchild, <http://www.rockies.net/~spirit/sermons/c-or32sesn.php>.
4. Walter W. Harms, <http://www.predigten.uni-goettingen.de/archiv-7/051016-4-e.html>.

### A prayer for Election Day November 5, 2016

Almighty God, as people go to the polls this day we pray first and foremost for peace. May the sense of community and connection be greater than any division or difference, no matter how entrenched. Knowing we will vote in schools, churches, synagogues, and other communal gathering places, may our commitment to care for one another grow as we stand in lines, talk to our neighbors and recognize we have more in common than we often realize. May we show one another kindness and respect, today and in the days to come.

We thank you for the freedom to vote our conscience, of which you alone are Lord. After this election, we are keenly aware that even if the political rhetoric fades the acrimony it highlighted will remain. Grant us the courage to step into the breaches and not shrink back into our enclaves of homogeneity. Send your Spirit to drive us to the places where you are already working to bring reconciliation. Remind us relentlessly that you are greater than every category we devise, more powerful than any estrangement we have created, eternal, ever present and always calling forth justice, peace and abundant life. Show us today and everyday how to live in the love of Jesus Christ, the perfect love that casts out fear. Amen. Jill Duffield. Presbyterian Outlook