

Matthew 22:15-22

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Preacher: David Moser

[0:00] Good morning. Good morning. For those of you I've not met, my name's Dave.

! I'm one of Shoreline's pastors. And if you'll open your Bibles with me today to Matthew chapter 22, we're going to continue our sermon series in the Gospel of Matthew. If you don't have a Bible, there are some on the back table.

And they are already bookmarked. To today's passage. And let me pray.

Oh Lord, our God. What can we say before your great love for us? Except, Father, show us your glory.

So, Father, as we open your word today, by the power of your Spirit, will you show us your Son? And may we delight in Him.

[1:25] Lord, will you, by the power of your Spirit, supersede my weaknesses and our distractions? Lord, and may you be all in all. We pray that in the name of Jesus Christ, our King and Savior.

Amen. Amen. In the book of Matthew, we've been walking through these last few weeks, the last week of Christ's earthly ministry, before He went to the cross.

And this week, we're going to see as His opponents continue their opposition to Him. Join me. Matthew 22, starting in verse 15.

Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle Him in His words. And they sent their disciples to Him, along with the Herodians, saying, Teacher, we know that you are true, and teach the way of God truthfully.

And you do not care about anyone's opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances. Now, if you're not current on first-century Israel, the Pharisees were a religious group in Palestine.

[2:54] And you could almost think of them as like a denomination, right? Today, we have Baptists and Presbyterians and Methodists. Sorry, I'm kidding. In Israel, there were Pharisees and Sadducees and Essenes and Zealots.

The Pharisees were the most conservative of the denominations, so to speak. They overlapped more in politics than current denominations, but similar.

They're very conservative in their observance of the law. They were very tightly tied to the Scriptures. And so you'd think that they would like a teacher like Jesus, who said things like, Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets.

I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot will pass from the law until all is accomplished.

And so the Pharisees should like people like that, who are, again, have a high view of Scripture and want to obey it. But they didn't like Christ.

[3:57] First, he wasn't one of them. He didn't sign up with any of the rabbinic schools. And so as he gained more and more of a following in Israel, they saw him as a competitor.

And what's more, he contradicted them. For example, when the law said, Do not work on the Sabbath, because God wants his people to rest and worship, they had extended that, right, and added a whole host of regulations on top of it.

And Jesus had criticized them for heaping up burdens on the people. And worst of all, he had just ridden into Jerusalem, a triumphal entry, right, to the crowd's acclamation that here was the Messiah, the promised coming king, and he didn't deny it.

So as far back as chapter 12, the leaders of the Pharisees had to set themselves against him to destroy him. But how?

Right? Every public debate they had with Jesus, every time they confronted him, they left humiliated. Most recently, in chapter 21, when they challenged his authority, more on that in a minute, he left them speechless and humiliated.

[5:17] And Matthew then immediately records three parables that he tells against them in the temple courts. And so how will they get rid of him?

Well, they send their disciples to set a trap. And whether that's sending their disciples is because they've lost too much face and they're too embarrassed to go confront him again, or if they think Jesus is more likely to fall into their trap if it didn't come from the same people, Matthew doesn't tell us.

But they bring along some interesting accomplices. History doesn't tell us much about the Herodians, but by their name, it's very obvious that they supported King Herod, Rome's puppet king in Israel.

And if he sounds familiar, it's because he's the son of Herod the Great when we met at Jesus' birth. You're probably familiar with that story. But this should strike us as a very odd pairing.

The Pharisees do not like pagan Rome. They must despise Herod, who isn't from the line of David, yet rules as king over Israel.

[6:31] Why would they team up with those who support him? Well, as we're going to see in a minute, it's part of their trap. But before they spring the trap, they do something very cunning.

Verse 16, they smother him with compliments. And what they say is very carefully crafted. This isn't just buttering him up.

Maybe if we're really nice to him, he'll fall into our trap. We'll lower his defenses. Probably that. But they're also disguising their motives. Maybe if we come looking friendly, he won't sense our real intentions.

And even more than that, they are manipulating his response. When they compliment him for not being, bending to other people's opinions, telling it like it is, they're actually paving a pathway for him.

They're hoping that's going to guide him down a line of reasoning. And we see what that is in verse 17.

[7:40] Because here's the trap. Tell us then what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Now, it might not seem at first that this is a very sophisticated trap, but it's actually an excellent trap.

They used the best playbook ever. Christ's own strategy. Up to this point, who opposes Jesus? The people love him. And Rome seems very unconcerned about him. It's only the priests and the elders and the Sadducees and the Pharisees, the religious establishment, who oppose him. And by themselves, they can't do much. They're afraid of the people who believe Jesus is a prophet and have just hailed him as the coming king. And they can't just kill him because Rome doesn't allow the leaders of conquered nations to put people to death.

And so the priests and the Pharisees are leaders without followers. The crowds are not following their lead. And they're figureheads without power because Rome won't let them lift a finger. And so by themselves, they can't accomplish their own goal.

[8:55] What they need is one of these other groups to turn on Christ. It doesn't really matter which, for their purposes. The crowds or Rome either could turn. But someone has to turn on him.

But how? Well, selfishness, and it was selfishness that led them to hate Christ, right? That he would rob them of their prominence. Selfishness is nothing if not sly, if not cunning.

The last time they tried to trap Jesus, he thoroughly embarrassed them. If you turn back to chapter 21, verses 23 to 27, they demanded to know on whose authority he rode into the city to the shouts of Hosanna and flipped the money changers' tables and taught like a prophet in the temple courts. And Jesus had replied with a no-win question. He said, John the Baptist, was his ministry from heaven or from men?

And he had put them in an impossible position here because they couldn't answer, not from heaven, because everyone believed that John was a prophet commissioned by God. But if they

answered that he was indeed from heaven, Jesus would have said, well, there you go.

[10:13] John, who you just said was commissioned by God, testified that I'm the Messiah. That's my authority. And so they punted. How did they end? They just said, we don't know. And I'm sure that made the crowds really respect them, right?

So the last confrontation ended with Jesus giving them an impossible question. And they needed to get another powerful group, either the crowds or Rome, against Christ.

And so either the crowds would abandon him or that Rome would see him as a threat. And so join me as we just eavesdrop a little bit. Back in verse 15, on the Pharisees as they conspire. They're saying to themselves, well, what to do?

What to do, right? We better be careful or he'll ask us another impossible question. People won't come to us for answers if we keep saying we don't know. So what to do?

Wait. Wait, wait, wait, wait. Let's just use his playbook. Let's ask him an impossible question. I mean, we need either Rome to back us against him or the crowds to turn on him.

[11:25] And it just so happens that they aren't friends. Rome is a foreign occupying force in a crowd's homeland. All we have to do is ask a question about that relationship and he's bound to upset one or the other.

And what is the most visible symbol of that tension between the common people of Israel and the Roman government? It's the poll tax, right?

For Israel, it's an annual reminder that Rome subjugates them, that they are not free and it hits everyone in the wallet where it hurts. No one likes paying taxes, but paying taxes to a pagan foreign ruler for the privilege of being occupied?

No thank you. And for Rome, Rome had a lot riding on that tax as well.

There were several revolts in recent history in Israel about the poll tax. And Rome values stability above everything else.

[12:38] And so they are hypersensitive about the poll tax and the possibility of another insurrection. So if we can get Jesus to weigh in on the tax, it doesn't matter if he's for it or against it.

We've got it. If he says pay the tax, people will turn on him. If he says don't pay the tax, we can hand him over to Rome as someone plotting and inciting insurrection.

And the better option is to have Rome kill him, right? If he loses face with the people, he might come back next year and rehabilitate his image and then we'll be dealing with this problem again. But if Rome kills him, he can't make a comeback. He who has ears to hear, let him hear. So we'll trick him into answering against the Roman tax by buttering him up, saying, oh, Jesus, you're so amazing.

You're not afraid to stick it to the man and goad him down that path. And we're going to need witnesses, right, so that this goes down smooth.

[13:42] So quick, round up some Herodians to take along with us. Problem solved. Thank you, Jesus, for giving us an ironclad strategy.

And with that, they send their lackeys to the temple, spraying the perfect trap. But, verse 18 begins, but, as Jesus responds.

But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, why put me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin for the tax. And they brought him a denarius, and Jesus said to them, whose likeness and inscription is this?

They said, Caesar's. And he said to them, therefore, render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. When Martin Luther, the great reformer, preached this passage, here's how he put it.

He said, Jesus strikes them with their own sword and entraps them in their own device, whereby they thought to have entrapped him.

[14:51] The coin they brought him, the coin that was used to pay the tax, was a denarius, a silver coin. On the front, it had the face of Tiberius, the emperor. And on the back, the flip side, it said, Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus.

And it was equivalent to roughly one day's wages for a peasant. Now you can see just by the description of it, how having an image on one side and a blasphemous title on the back, how the Jews would not even like the coin itself and what it represented.

One commentator put it this way. Politically, the tribute went to support the hated imperial court in Rome and the pagan cult of the Roman state. And that's because Caesar is hailed as a god among the pantheon in the Roman Empire.

It kept the subject nation ever mindful of its domination by a superior Roman power. And it represented tacit assent to the legitimacy of these institutions.

Theologically, it was an infringement of the first commandment with the blasphemous imagery and the denial of God's ownership of the land. But the first thing that Jesus says in response is what?

[16:11] Pay your taxes. Now, we know from the scriptures that the Lord establishes rulers and nations.

Raises them up and tears them down. The book of Daniel, chapter 2, we read, Blessed be the name of God forever and ever to whom belong wisdom and might. He changes times and seasons. He removes kings and sets up kings.

He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding. So far as what they command is legal, the Lord wants his people to submit to those authorities.

1 Peter, chapter 2, Peter tells us, be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good for this is the will of God that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.

kings and princes and governments are not ultimate. Psalm 118 says, it is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in princes.

[17:33] And there are exceptions to the extent of the power and the authority that all governments have. Acts chapter 5, Peter and the apostles answered, we must obey God rather than men.

And there are some disagreements among Christians about where we think those exceptions lie and how that is supposed to look like. But in terms of taxes, Jesus commands that taxes be paid to fund a government that supports emperor worship, a government that supports slavery, a government that fights wars of expansion, not just wars of defense, a government that tortures. Tortures some people to death. Jesus knows that they will crucify him that very week. Now, it doesn't mean that Jesus supports those things or that we should not speak out against them. But it doesn't exempt us from paying our taxes. Jordan's gonna give us a quick story about how this very thing has impacted his life.

Can everybody hear? All right. So good morning. Dave wanted me to come here and share about a time when Jesus, these are the words of my coworkers, Jesus told me to pull permits!

[19:01] for the town of Waterford. But before I get into that, I wanna, let's go back to Jesus' story. So throughout the book of Matthew, one thing that's really impressed me and, uh, Rob's snickering, okay, one thing that's really impressed me, right, is just the wisdom of Christ and how he answers a lot of these questions that he's given.

It's wiser and more compassionate and deeper than we'd expect on the surface. And today's passage is another example of this, um, and it's this deep, unexpected wisdom that changed my heart towards taxes a few years ago.

Um, so when the scribes and Pharisees, um, ask Jesus about taxes, Jesus responds by asking them to bring up a coin. Um, when they brought him a coin, he simply asked them whose inscription is on the coin.

They respond with the obvious, well, Caesar's. And Jesus continues, then give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. And their response is that they marvel and then they walk away, right?

Um, and, and in this moment where I was debating on, on whether or not I should pull permits for my house project, um, I read this text. Um, and this, this, this, and they marveled really stuck out to me.

[20:17] Like, I'd heard this before, it seemed obvious, yeah, I give, pay your taxes, whatever. Um, it seemed really obvious, but I dug deeper. I was like, why did they marvel? Like, what was so marvelous? And I think

part of it is that they're walking him into a trap and he wisely evades that.

But he goes even deeper. He goes deeper and I think he's, he's drawing attention to the coin because he wants to get the heart of it. Um, you see, he's drawing their attention to the inscription on the coin.

Um, when he asked them to see it, they readily produce it because it was something they had on their person. And in this, Jesus is pointing out that they are using Roman currency and along with the currency they have been blessed by Roman wealth, infrastructure, protection, and all kinds of other benefits.

So on one hand, they're sitting here profiting from Rome and all the stability and infrastructure and everything that he brought him. On the other hand, they're stubbornly refusing to contribute to that which they're benefiting from.

And so, so Jesus is drawing attention to this and he was drawing attention to that in my heart. Um, I don't know if you guys really understand permits. I'll explain. Basically a permit is me filling out something to ask permission to do a construction project.

[21:22] Towns have permits for good reasons, right? They want to protect zoning, um, they want to make sure things are done safely to code, uh, and they also want to get proper, they want to be able to properly tax, right?

So, the internal conflict in me was, well, I'm in the correct zoning, right? Obviously, it's in my house, I'm building another room, right? Um, there's nothing structural about this, there's nothing safety-oriented this, so the only thing Waterford wants to do is just get my money, right?

And so I was stubborn, I was like, they don't have, what right do they have to step into my home and cause me to ask their permission to do work on my own home, right? So I was stubborn and I had plenty of people at work that would back me up in this argument, right?

And so I was wrestling with this, and what Jesus showed me is, hey, look, I'm living in Waterford and I'm benefiting from good schools, uh, you know, safe neighborhoods, um, I have utilities, I have infrastructure, I have a good government, I have all these benefits from Waterford, but I'm not seeing that, right?

And I'm not willing to contribute to all the things that God has blessed me through this town, right? And he changed my heart in that, in that, in that realization through this text to recognize all that I have and that I've received from things that I've never earned or worked for based on the government that surrounds me and it made me so much more willing to pull those permits and it's actually changed my heart towards taxes in general.

[22:48] I mean, there's still always that fight of frustration or whatever, um, but to recognize that all that I've been given through the, through the, the government and country that I live in, um, has enabled me to be like, no, I, I've received many benefits and I can happily contribute.

Uh, so I think it's really cool before I get back to Dave, uh, this isn't Jesus' main point of this text, but, but even his sub point has brought so much freedom in my perspective, right?

Freedom in an area where I was previously very frustrated and, and tempted to like neglect what I should have done, right? And argue it away and there's no shortage of voices that said, yeah, you're right to keep them out of your personal business, right?

um, but, but he just, through, through this secondary point that Jesus is making, it's brought me so much freedom and, uh, it's cool and, and Jesus' point gets even deeper and better, uh, but it's so wise, right?

He's evading a trap, he's giving us reasons to pay our taxes and even more so in his final point, so, turn it back over to Dave. Thank you for listening. Thank you. Thank you.

[23:55] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. What Christ is saying in this is that a Christian's default posture towards the government is to obey its God-sanctioned authority.

Even when we disagree with its policies, right? Daniel taught us that God raises up and casts down leaders and in, so in time, even unjust leaders, like, he will bring them their due.

And he will bring restoration to those who have been slighted by it. And that also means that our discipleship is not dependent on our political circumstances, right?

You can be a faithful, God-honoring, joyful Christian in a monarchy, in a democracy, in anarchy, and everything in between. No matter where the Lord takes you in your life, no matter the winds of political change in our nation here, no matter what, we can follow Christ regardless of the leaders and policies that are put in place.

It might be costly, right? See, Daniel and his friends, but it will be worth it. And it is always possible. But as Jordan said, that's not where he ended and that's not even his main point because of the wisdom of this is that he didn't only answer their question.

[25:24] He has an agenda of his own. So he doesn't just say render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's. He also says render to God the things that are God's. And what is he saying by that?

Even as he says pay Caesar's tax, he is undermining Caesar. He's saying the things of God, remember, Caesar calls himself a God, right?

The things of God, the things that really matter, Caesar doesn't own those. They can't be bought or sold. He's saying go ahead, pay Caesar his tax because that's not what ultimately matters.

politics and economics are not the main arena where your life is lived. You live before the face of the living God.

That's what matters. That's what counts, not this tax. You have a much higher duty, a much higher calling where you put your focus there.

[26:41] Friends, we need to, in our own minds, devalue the things of this world. Riches and popularity and political influence are not the things of God, the things that really matter, nor are they the things that last.

What's Jesus saying here about the tax? He's saying that money you're holding, it's monopoly money. right, the ultimate currency, right, is not the denarius.

It's a broken heart living with the one true God. That money will be worthless soon.

Right, everyone who ever used a denarius in exchange, right, in their own, as their own currency, has no use for it today.

Right, and you and I will very soon have no use for dollar bills. How much will everything you own be worth in 10 million years?

[27:56] What will matter to you then? The things of this world are not as important as we think they are. Things like money and popularity and political influence, they feel solid and weighty to us.

They feel important in our hands, but they are not nearly as weighty as we think. And by the way, one way to signal this is to submit to the governing authorities that the Lord has set in place.

Obedience to the valid commands of a government that God has ordained, even when you don't like them, especially even when you don't like them, is one way of showing, submitting, demonstrating that you have a better hope in God and that you trust in Him.

Now, this is not to say that all governments are good. Caesar was not, right? It's not to say that we shouldn't speak truth to power, as they say, right? It is good that people disobeyed the Nazi regime and hid Jews in their homes.

It is good to resist unjust laws. It is good to speak out against them. That's not what we're saying here, that we blindly do that, right? But paying our taxes is one way to say my stuff is not ultimate.

[29:31] I'm rendering to God what is God's. And if we take it one step further, He uses odd language, doesn't He? Whose image is this?

If Jesus says that the imprint of Caesar's image means that the denarius is one of those things that are Caesar's, well, then we better ask ourselves about the things that are God's.

What is made in God's image? Us. Right? Genesis chapter 1. God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness.

Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So God created man in His own image.

In the image of God, He created him, male and female. He created them. The things that are God's are human beings made in His image.

[30:37] You were made by Him for Him in His image. You belong to Him.

What does that mean? One commentator put it this way, if one rendered to Caesar His restricted due, taxes, all the more was one to render to God His unrestricted due.

The totality of one's being and substance, one's existence was to be rendered to God and nothing left. Friends, there is no aspect of your life, your plans, your finances, your speech, your relationships, your time, your very thoughts that does not belong to God.

Oh, that we would live like that is so. That we would submit our lives to Him comprehensively. That we would not live as if Sunday mornings are His and the rest of the week is mine.

Right? That in our plans, we would pray for His wisdom and His honor. That we would spend our money to further His kingdom. That we would obey His commands about our words.

[32:00] That we would speak of Him more often. That we would consider others before ourselves. That we would spend our time wisely and with holy intention. that we would submit even our thoughts to Him.

Friends, do we live like we belong to Him in every aspect of our lives? Or do we render unto ourselves, reserve for ourselves, that which belongs to God?

Now, there are two ways to hear that. That can feel like an awful burden.

Oh my goodness, you mean I have to give everything to God? Like, what's left for me? But that is to miss the point entirely. This is such good news.

God wants you. Even you. Belonging to God is not a burden, it is a blessing.

[33:15] The first question of the Heidelberg Catechism asks this, what is your only comfort in life and death?

Friends, what is your comfort in life and death? Here's how that catechism answers. My only comfort in life and death is that I am not my own, but belong body and soul in life and death to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.

He has fully paid for all my sins with His precious blood and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven.

In fact, all things must work together for my salvation. what is your comfort?

I hope that it is that you belong to Him. Right? It would be terrible news to find out that you belong to a tyrant slave master, but it is the best news, exceedingly,!

[34:33] extraordinarily excellent news to belong to this faithful God.

Friends, all humanity belongs to Him.

Right? He made them, so we're His, and He made us in His image, so we're His. But Christians, as the Heidelberg Catechism also reminded us, we belong to Him a second time in redemption as He paid our ransom.

Right? Jesus bought us back from damnation at the price of His blood. Who doesn't want to belong to a God like that? And so rendering unto God the things that are God's, giving our whole lives to Him, is not a burden, it is a blessing.

Who doesn't want to belong to a God like that? Well, some still do. Verse 22, when they heard it, they marveled, and they left Him and went away.

That looks almost like a throwaway line, just like, and he's wrapping up the story. As Jordan already pointed out, they marveled. They gave Him an impossible question, and He answered it.

[36:13] They put Him in a no-win situation, and He won it. They used His own playbook, and He still outmaneuvered them. but they still leave.

In fact, Matthew emphasizes it, right? The Greek literally reads, leaving Him, they left. don't turn from Him.

Turn to Him. Give Him what He's owed yourself, and find your only comfort in life and in death, is that you are not your own, but belong, body and soul, life and in death, to your faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.

Let's pray. Lord, our God, we thank You that You have not left us to our own, but Lord, that You have made a way that we might belong, body and soul, in life and in death, to our faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.

Lord, I pray that that would be true for every person who hears this today. Lord, those that have never trusted in Christ, Lord, that You would draw them to Yourself.

[37:50] And for those of us who have already received that highest blessing, might live like it is true, with every breath that we breathe,

and pray that in His name.

The matchless name of Jesus Christ our King. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.