

The Bracacci Chapel: One Man's Haven From the World

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[0 : 00] I knew coming in this morning that I had prepared a very short talk, and I didn't think you all wanted to leave early, so I had to invent all these technical difficulties to try to keep us on schedule.

So unfortunately, this is not going to appear as I designed it. The way that it was meant to appear was so that you would just see what's in these black squares. But unfortunately, you're also going to see my notes.

So if you find my voice somewhat obnoxious, just ignore me and read what's below. It's exactly what I'm going to say. Though, given the time, I may have to summarize a bit.

So as Bill said, I am married. My wife's here with us, and I'm studying at Regents. In my undergraduate, I studied visual arts, painting, and sculpture.

And when I came to Regents, I came with the intention of studying Christianity and the arts. And it's been over my studies there that I've sort of migrated into the Masters of Divinity track.

[1 : 02] And I'm now preparing myself for pastoral ministry. However, I still have a great love for the arts, and I'm still keen to see how God is going to use both of these vocations in my life.

So this talk represents a little of both of these two spheres that I sort of think around in. So as Bill said, the Brancocci Chapel is a chapel in Florence, Italy.

Before we get there, I just want to read for you. Here's a problem. I know this will surprise you.

There's a problem. I can't see my text on this screen. So if you wouldn't mind just reading to me the text, I might... Yeah, I think I'm going to have to use this.

Okay. Okay.

[2 : 15] Let me read for us from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 17, verses 24 through 27. When they came to Capernaum, the collectors of the two drachma tax went up to Peter and said, Does your teacher not pay the tax?

He said, Yes. And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth take toll, or tax?

From their sons, or from others? And when he said, From others, Jesus said to him, Then the sons are free. However, not to give offense to them, go to the sea and cast a hook and take the first fish that comes up.

And when you open its mouth, you will find a shekel. Take that and give it to them for me and yourself. As Bill said, my wife and I are parents.

We have a young daughter named Greta. And she loves this book, Harold and the Purple Crayon. I don't know if any of you are familiar with it. It's a great story.

[3 : 37] It's about 50 years old. And in this story, Harold decides that he wants to take a walk in the moonlight. So he steps outside, and he finds there's no moon in the sky.

Well, that's not a problem. He'll just draw one with his purple crayon. So begins Harold's adventures with his purple crayon. He goes along, drawing different things with his crayon as it goes.

And in the course of his adventure, he encounters a dragon. He escapes from the dragon with a boat that he draws. And he even takes a ride in a hot air balloon, all of which he draws with his own hand.

Eventually, he begins to long for his home. And so he begins to search for his bedroom window so that he can get home. In hopes of finding his home, he begins to manufacture windows.

In fact, he draws a whole city of windows. But he can't find his bedroom window. Harold is lost in this world of his own making.

[4 : 47] Finally, Harold remembers that his bedroom window always looks right out onto the moon. So he just draws a window around the moon that he drew at the very beginning of the book, sketches out the interior of his bedroom, draws his bed, climbs inside, draws up the covers, and goes to sleep.

Well, like our daughter Greta, I like this book. I think it's a very imaginative tale of a very imaginative boy. But for my purposes, I think it serves as a metaphor for the movers and the shakers that were behind what we refer to as the Italian Renaissance.

For many during this period, the new technology, the new learning, the new social and political realities were seen as convenient means of fabricating a picture of the world as they wanted to see it.

So here's a picture of the exterior of the Church of Santa Maria del Carmine in Florence, Italy. If you could see this better, you would see that this is the interior view of the Carmine Church.

This is the central nave. And attached to this nave, coming out from it, is the Brancocci Chapel. I have here a map.

[6 : 23] This just demonstrates that this is the entire premise of the church. And then this very small little rectangle there is the Brancocci Chapel.

So it's a small chapel off the side of the main church. And I'll just say, if any of you want to have a better view of some of these images at the end, by all means, I can show you to them on my computer.

This is the view of the chapel as it exists today. It's covered from floor ceiling with paintings. The paintings, sorry, I should have told you the chapel was founded in the early 14th century by a man named Pierro Brancocci.

But it was his son, Felice Brancocci, who commissioned the paintings. I believe the year was 1427. February 1423, actually.

So I'm not going to be able to fudge anything. You guys can read all the facts right there. Felice Brancocci commissioned an artist by the name of Masolino to adorn his chapel.

[7 : 38] Masolino had a young apprentice named Masaccio who came with him to work on the chapel. And while they were painting the fresco cycle, Masolino was called away to paint for the king of Hungary.

And so Masaccio was given the commission. Now by the time Masaccio returned, Masaccio, this fellow in the middle here, had so surpassed his teacher that Masolino was learning from him by the time he got back to Florence.

However, Masaccio was called away as well to Rome where he died at the age of 27 before completing the chapel. So the remainder of the frescoes were completed by a man on the far right, Filippolino Lippi.

Today, the fresco cycle at the Brancacci chapel is regarded as a pivotal influence on the development of the high renaissance.

Let me read you this quote. It's from Giorgio Vasari who was an Italian artist and a writer of the 16th century. He wrote a really famous book of art history called The Lives of the Artists which just documents the lives of many of these renaissance painters and sculptors.

[9 : 01] He says that the Brancacci chapel quote, has indeed become a symbol, become a school of art for the most celebrated sculptors and painters who have constantly gone there to study.

Among these may be named Fra Filippo, Filippolino, Lippi, I'm sorry. My pronunciation of Italian is not good. Filippo Lippi who completed the work, Sandro Marcelli, Leonardo da Vinci, the most divine Michelangelo, Raphael also found his style here.

And Vasari is not alone. If you read contemporary art historians, they all agree that this is sort of the incubator of what we now know as the high renaissance. this is a layout of the chapel's paintings.

This center portion here is the back wall behind the altar. And then the sections on either side are the adjacent walls. The program includes ten scenes from the life of St. Peter as well as depictions of the temptation of Adam and Eve and their subsequent expulsion from Eden.

So there's ten paintings but four of them are by far the largest. Four frescoes dominate this fresco cycle. Now if you could see this picture you would see that there's two, one on top of the other.

[10 : 38] And in this picture we see the other two. These four main frescoes depict the tribute money based on the passage in Matthew that I read at the beginning as well as some events from the Acts of the Apostle where Peter raises Theophilus' son, Peter's enthronements, Peter's healing of the cripple and the raising of Tabitha, as well as Peter's crucifixion and an instance where Peter appears with a fellow named Simon Magus before Nero.

So those events are all depicted in the main four frescoes. And so there's six other smaller works.

I won't list them for you. But among these four main frescoes, one of them stands out above the rest. The one that stands out is the one that's on the top left-hand corner as you enter the building, as you enter the chapel.

It's this scene, the tribute money painting, based on the passage I read earlier. It stands out for a number of reasons. first of all, like I said, it's top left-hand corner, so it's the first thing that reaches your eye as you enter the building.

Secondly, just to the left of it is this expulsion of Adam and Eve. And if you could see it, you would see that above Adam and Eve is an angel pointing them out of the garden.

[12 : 25] And as the angel points, it's pointing directly to this main fresco, which is sort of an explicit indicator of the fresco's importance. Thirdly, this painting is very rare.

I don't know of any other instance in our history where this subject is treated. I've never seen any other paintings on this passage in Matthew. And finally, it stands out because it is the first of a cycle of Peter's life, and there's a standard way of beginning such cycles.

Peter's paintings always begin with Christ bestowing the keys of heaven upon Peter. And that seems missing from this fresco cycle.

We get the tribute money painting instead. So, the painting's prominence in the chapel, its departure from traditional treatments of Peter's life, and the fact that it depicts Peter in a rather undignified state have all sort of caused a lot of conjecture amongst art historians.

Why is this painting here? Why was this painting chosen? Well, I think to understand Brancacci's selection of this obscure scene, we need to know a little bit about the man himself.

[13 : 50] So, for the rest of this talk, we're going to spend a bit of time talking about Felice Brancacci.

Forty-three verses of St. Matthew's Gospel separate the standard entry into Peter's life, the bestowal of the keys of the kingdom, and this instance we have here, the tribute money.

Forty-three verses in Matthew between the two pericopes. Now, in these forty-three verses, Peter is not depicted in a very positive light. Several things go wrong for Peter.

Jesus calls him Satan, a voice from heaven, presumably God the Father, interrupts Peter mid-sentence. Peter encounters a demon that he's not got faith enough to exercise.

And then finally, they arrive back at Peter's house in Capernaum, and these tax collectors come and question him about his teacher's policy on the tax.

[15 : 05] Things don't get better from there. Jesus continues to question him and sends him off to the lake to go find a fish, to go get his hands dirty. This is not a really good day for Peter.

Nor was it for Felice Brancacci. I'm getting ahead of myself. Sorry, I'm a bit divided here.

I can't decide which computer I want to focus on the most. So, just like Peter's having kind of a bad day in this passage in Matthew, Peter's not looking so great in his painting.

He actually appears three times in the painting. He appears in the center where there's this cluster of figures, and as he's there, he's standing next to Jesus before the tax collector, and Jesus is pointing off to the left hand side of the painting, saying, Peter, why don't you go to the lake and get my tax money?

He appears there at the left hand side, stooping down in the water, pulling a coin out of the fish's mouth. And as he's there in that rather undignified position, there's actually three hands pointing at him.

[16 : 17] Jesus here in the center is pointing at him. Peter's actually pointing to the lake as well, saying, you want me to go there? And then, as I said, the angels point at him. So there's sort of a lot of attention being brought to him in this state.

And then the third time he appears is at the far right-hand side, giving the money to the tax collector. I don't know why the tax collector does not have any trousers on, but that's another talk.

So, now we come to Felice Brancacci. Just like Peter in this chapter of Matthew and in this scene in Brancacci's chapel, Felice Brancacci lived in a rather difficult time.

he lived in Florence. And even if we just take a brief glance at the history of Florence at this time, one thing that we're sure to notice is the chaos and the tragedy brought about by the bubonic plague.

The bubonic plague bore away Florence's loved ones, family members, and friends. An estimated 60% of Florence's population fell to the plague between, let me see, yes, between 1338 and 1427, the population fell from 95,000 to 40,000.

[17 : 54] So, again, that's about 60% of the population. So, it's difficult to imagine that the bubonic plague has no bearing at all on Felice Brancacci's view of the world.

It would be difficult to say, no, that's something that has nothing to do with the choices he made for his chapel. I think it's very much so. In fact, death is a subject that looms very large in the Brancacci chapel.

Of the four main frescoes, three of them are dominated by a people's death or miraculous resurrection or Peter's death. But it's life's other certainty, taxation, that dominates the scene in tribute money, which is what we're going to turn to now.

This is a picture of Pope Gregory XI. and during his time, there was a war known as the War of the Eight Saints. And I want to talk about this briefly just to sort of illustrate that Felice Brancacci lived in a place that was fraught with a lot of economic woes.

Florence was kind of down on its luck economically. During the War of the Eight Saints, the Florentine state took a series of dramatic steps to offset its various overexpenditures, which were mostly caused by its war campaigns.

[19 : 29] Between 1375 and 1378, Florence applied military pressure against the expanding papal state that was returning to Rome after leaving Albione.

His efforts to keep the papal state in check began to sour as Gregory XI gained the upper hand in the War of the Eighth Saints.

Consequently, Florence took the drastic step of liquidating its clerical properties to finance its military expenditures. Nothing like that had been done before.

But the measures taken during the War of the Eight Saints were not the end. They were only a small part of Florence's scrambling to pay its debts.

In 1345, Florence instituted a floating public debt, which is known as the Monte Commune. The debt was never actually reduced, so basically this debt forced the citizens of Florence to pay off the government's debt.

[20 : 45] And the debt was never reduced. The people were never giving back their money. And in fact, the debt just grew and grew over the decades. So during the time of Fouis-Brancacci, the elite citizens of Florence, like himself, were being forced to pay extra taxes to help finance Florence's wars.

Now, if that wasn't bad enough, during the 1420s, Florence introduced what they called the Catasto, which was an innovative form of taxation.

It far exceeded previous taxes in its systematic accounting of a person's wealth. It was designed to take account of movable goods, such as business investments at home and abroad, holdings in the state debt, the Montecomian, and other assets, which had usually been regarded as too ephemeral to track down and to tax.

So what that means is that when Brancacci commissioned the paintings for this chapel, not only was he being forced to subsidize his government's war with the papal state, but he was also being taxed on his holdings in the state debt.

So the more taxes he paid to the Monte Comune, the more taxes he had to pay to the Catasto. So this was not likely to sit well with anybody, but there's some evidence that Felice Brancacci felt a particularly tight pinch because he was indicted on fraud charges around the same time.

[22 : 30] So it's not difficult to imagine how this situation with the aggressive taxation and the bubonic plague might have weighed on his minds as he was making his choices for the chapel.

There's one other thing that we need to consider, and that's the house of Visconti. The Italian peninsula during the 14th and 15th centuries was marked by intense struggles between independent city-states that were vying for control over the limited land of the Italian peninsula.

While Florence sought to aggrandize its surrounding municipalities, Milan was competing with them for control over Tuscany. And the struggle went back and forth, but during the end of the 14th century and the beginning of the 15th century, Milan began to hold the upper hand.

This was primarily due to one man, this fellow here on the far left, Giamgielizo Visconti. When he died in 1402, Florence rejoiced and viewed his death as an act of divine intervention.

In fact, it was so great for the Florentines that his son, Giovanni, succeeded him and quickly undid much of his father's successes.

[23 : 52] But after a few short years, Giovanni was succeeded by Filippo Maria Visconti, who was a much better military commander and reasserted threat of Milanese control over central Italy.

Now, here we see a picture of the Visconti coat of arms. And I show this to you because I believe that this painting that we're talking about, the tribute money painting, makes an allusion to the Visconti.

In the painting, there's a coin sort of popping out of a fish's mouth. But the Visconti coat of arms shows a mythical creature, a viscione or a leviathan, with a man sticking out of its mouth.

And some people think that he's eating the man. Others say that he's giving birth to the man out of his mouth. But in any case, I think it's plausible to read the tribute money painting as a subtle statement about the Visconti.

Rather than this mythical creature, the Visconti are merely a cold fish used to sort of serve Florence's financial purposes.

[25 : 08] So I think there are three main things on Felice Brancocci's mind when he commissions these paintings.

Death, taxes, and the Visconti. So my reading of this series of paintings, which I've sort of illustrated very quickly through discussing the tribute money painting, it supposes some layers of meanings behind the painting's composition.

So I'm looking at factors in the life of the patron rather than just the painting itself. But I believe that my influences that I'm projecting onto Felice Brancocci are conservative.

It would be difficult to construe a scenario where Felice Brancocci was not thinking about death, taxes, and Visconti. In fact, we know that Felice Brancocci was directly involved with the struggle against the Visconti.

I've lost it in my notes. But what happens is that after this fellow, Felice Brancocci, takes over, they eventually reach a peace treaty, Florence and Milan, that is signed by Pope Martin V.

[26 : 43] And the person that basically orchestrates the terms of this treaty is our very own Felice Brancocci. He led a successful campaign against Milan.

They united with Venice and defeated Milan in Brescia. And after the defeat of Brescia, Milan was willing to sign the terms of this peace treaty.

So there again, just to sort of support my claim. What am I doing? Support my claim about death, taxes, and Visconti.

I think these are the things that are behind Brancocci's choices for his chapel. So let's return to the chapel itself, briefly.

Turning back to the pains in the Carmine Chapel, with death, taxes, and Visconti in mind, one is struck by the way that each of the four main frescoes depicts a story that could console Brancocci's anxieties.

[27 : 52] In two of the scenes, concerned with death, the dead are brought back to life. In the third scene that deals with death, we see Peter's noble martyrdom.

The tribute money painting shows the Pope's, i.e. Peter's, supernatural intervention to provide for the financial needs of Florence, while humbling the Visconti at the same time.

So the conciliatory nature of the pictorial narrative is actually apparent in many details. And if we had more time and better pictures, I could point out to you how many of the key players in the struggle between Florence and Milan actually show up in some of these pictures.

Their portraits are painted onto the walls. So this is very much about Felice Brancocci's life as much as it is about St. Peter's.

Art historian Laurel Martinez identifies Masaccio as the most influential painter of the 15th century.

[29 : 05] Now remember, Masaccio's the man who did most of these paintings, and he did the tribute money painting. He was the most influential painter of the 15th century, who was associated with everything that made for the new style.

Man-based proportions, one-point perspective, nudes, portraits, deep modeling, gesture, and the smart effects of foreshortening.

Even a superficial glance around Brancocci Chapel would lead one to add to Martinez's list his own observation elsewhere that perceptions of the urban space were changing in the 15th century, and artists were there to register it.

And this leads me to just one final observation about the chapel itself. If you see here what looks like a column on the left-hand side of this painting, that's actually painted onto the surface of the wall.

There's not really a column there. And those artificial architectural features are all over in this chapel, and it's the first time it's ever been done.

[30 : 17] So the effect of that is to give the interior of this chapel a sense that all of the views on display are somehow interconnected with the chapel at the center.

The intertwining of these urban spaces, as I said, is a result of this innovation. And Massaccio... Hold on.

Okay, so the painted-on architecture affects the illusion of a network of city spaces that are all connected to the chapel. And the result is that this illusion that Felice Brancacci was worshiping sort of at the center of all these conciliatory views of his anxieties, of his troubles, of his hardships.

It was a world where Felice Brancacci was at the center, and it provided him an illusion of idealized, conciliatory space. And looking at it, one has the distinct impression that Felice Brancacci's anxieties and his earthly concerns played as much a part of his choices for the chapel as anything else.

Okay. So, I think at this point, it would be really plausible for us to just leave Felice Brancacci back in the abstract world of history, maybe sum up what we think of his motives, think a bit about whether we sympathize with him or not, and then just leave it.

[32 : 03] But I think that actually Felice Brancacci can tell us something about ourselves. Not only was the chapel that he commissioned to become the incubator of the high renaissance, but it reveals, rather tellingly, a human motive that stayed with us and remains very pervasive.

It's a common human impulse today. This impulse to sort of surround ourselves with pictures of the world as we want to see it.

Sort of shut ourselves off from the way things are, and to create, like Harold, our own world as we go along. So, because I think that this can be a real tendency for us, especially those of us living in this age with computers, as you see, I mean, computers can open up all kinds of doors for you, right?

That's closed. Yeah, closed down. Slam them in your face. But you could spend your whole life inside a screen like this.

And it isn't just that. I mean, there are so many choices available to us that we could design and fabricate our lives in such a way that we only ever see what we want to see.

[33 : 32] And we only know those people that we want to know. And we only consent to play in the games that we make up ourselves. I think this is a real possibility for us.

And I think if we're honest, if I'm honest, it's something that happens far too often. So, I think the thing for it is to look again at the passage that this opinion is based on.

What is Peter looking at in that? It looks like scripture. You know, where he's kneeling down? Oh yes, that's where he's kneeling down to the fish in the lake to take the money out of the fish's mouth.

So, let's just look briefly again at this passage. I'll read it one more time. When they came to Capernaum, the collectors of the two drachma tax went up to Peter and said, Does your teacher not pay the tax?

He said, Yes. And when they came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth take toll or tax? From their sons or from others?

[34 : 42] And when he said from others, Jesus said to him, Then the sons are free. However, not to give offense to them, Go to the sea and cast a hook and take the first fish that comes up.

And when you open its mouth, you will find a shekel. Take that and give it to them for me and for yourself. So the story takes place in Capernaum, which is Peter's hometown.

And the tradition was that while in Capernaum, Jesus and his disciples stayed in Peter's house. And if that's the case, then it kind of explains why the tax collectors would come to Peter, because he's the head of this house.

But it quickly becomes apparent that their real interest is in knowing what Peter's teacher, Jesus, thinks about this tax. So what is this tax? The two drachma tax is the temple tax.

It was collected annually from all Jewish males over the age of 20. And it was two drachmas, or the equivalent of a half shekel.

[35 : 48] And the tax that was based on the tax decreed in Nehemiah 10 for one third of a shekel. But it was later raised to a half shekel, probably because of something that's said in Exodus.

That's not too important. What is important is that it's about a day's wage, and the money was used to keep up the temple, to maintain it and keep it running. However, there's no indication that the temple tax was mandatory.

Like the tithe, it was probably treated as a voluntary tax. And also like the tithe, it was likely almost only paid by the Pharisees.

This was sort of their system that they bought into. And they, by and large, were the ones that participated in it. Hence, the tax collectors in our passage have to ask Peter, well, does he pay the tax or doesn't he?

They want to know whose side is Jesus on. Aware of this conversation, Jesus asks Peter this question about the kings of the earth.

[36 : 54] And it kind of raises an interesting question, a couple of them. Who is the king of the temple? I think we can answer that. But he says, he refers to plural sons.

And this raises another interesting question. Who are the multiple sons of the king of the temple? So you can think about that in your spare time.

I'm not going to dwell on it here. What's very clear to me is that Jesus is taking a conciliatory position towards the Pharisees.

This is not his game. This is not his thing that he's sort of invented around the temple. But he plays into it. I think what makes this fact that Jesus plays into this tax even more striking is, as you all know, the clear tension that exists between Jesus and the Pharisees.

It's no secret by this point in the gospel that the Pharisees are dead set against Jesus. And there have been plenty of opportunities already in this gospel for Jesus to not spare his criticism of the Pharisees.

[38 : 12] So this tension, this animosity, is already extremely clear. Nevertheless, Jesus says, let's not offend them and pay the tax.

Seems to me that Jesus' attitude was quite different from Felice Brancacci's. And indeed, quite different from the attitude that I take very many times when I'm facing some kind of hardship, something that I would like to get away from.

Instead of retreating from his enemies and from the suffering in his life, Jesus quite intentionally stepped in among his enemies and quite intentionally bore his sufferings without seeking to escape or to comfort himself.

In fact, I think Jesus' one haven from his sufferings and from his enemies was to go off alone and pray to his Father. Indeed, I think by his very incarnation, Jesus models for us, he gives us a powerful example that God does not escape the trouble, the hardship, the problems in the world, but he meets them head on.

He steps directly into them. So, what I want to say in conjunction to these two ways that we've seen, there's this way of Felice Brancacci or indeed of our young friend Harold with his purple crayon and if we're honest, our own way of dealing with hardship and suffering.

[40 : 14] Well, there's the way that Jesus shows us. There's the way of stepping directly and intentionally into the pain, into the opposition. So, I think it's still early in the year and we are still in this turning point in the life of our church with our ongoing struggles for our building and for countless other reasons.

I think this is an opportune time to be aware of these two ways and to just spend some time reflecting. Am I more like Felice Brancacci trying to surround myself with pictures of the world as I would like to see it?

Am I more like Harold making it up as I go along? Or can we with Jesus pray to the Father that we could be more like his Son?

Can we with Jesus venture further out of our safe places and into the world that he is saving? So let me close by apologizing for this muddle up here.

I wish this was all much more streamlined and so I apologize for that. It's forced me out of my safe would have been quite safe and comfortable to just stand behind this screen but I thank you for bearing with me.

[41 : 54] I thank you for the opportunity to speak and I'll close finally with this prayer. Almighty and ever living God ruler of all things in heaven and earth hear our prayers for this parish family.

Strengthen the faithful arouse the careless and restore the penitent. Grant us all things necessary for our common life and bring us all to be of one heart and mind within your holy church.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Amen. Is there a question here?

Yeah. Thank you for this. I have to say I enjoyed Harold a lot too. Can I just say briefly when I came to visit I'd never been to one of these before came to visit a few weeks back before I was scheduled to do this the first time and Bill you made a comment about the Artizo students and their academic approach to this and I thought well I've got to do something to upset that stereotype.

So I was really tempted to just bring the book and read it. Maybe I would have been better off. It struck me when you were talking that the three themes that you picked out of this would also have been concerns of the painters who made the point that Florence was surrounded by enemies causing a war etc.

[43 : 31] Losing its population daily the carts going by to pick up the bodies etc. So what I really don't understand never having commissioned to painting myself is how much negotiation goes on about this with painters or would the painter have a lot of freedom about choosing what goes into it.

I have difficulty imagining Felice sitting down and saying I want three themes illustrated and cover the walls with a piece. I don't know how that happens.

Who really decides the content of the picture? Is it the painter or is it the patron? and the painter just decides how it will be accomplished? That's a wonderful question.

I don't have a straightforward answer. I think that this is a unique case because if I had had more time and were able to show you pictures of for example Masaccio's paintings prior to working on this chapel they're all very much of a different kind of genre.

They look much more like an Eastern Orthodox icon than the paintings we've seen. so that suggests to me that and Masaccio was continuing to work in that other mode after he did these paintings for Brancacci.

[45 : 03] So he was doing something very different before and after doing this. And so that suggests to me that to some degree Felice Brancacci was involved in the innovation here and had a voice.

And that's supported by what little documentation does exist around this question. To really answer the question we need to be sort of a fly on the wall when people like Brancacci are talking to people like Masaccio and we're not that.

And most of the time they did this stuff in person not through letters. So there's very little documentation for how the choices are made. But what does exist is kind of a mixed bag.

In some cases you see letters from patrons giving very detailed instructions for what they want, where they want it. And then within those narrow confines the artist does whatever they do.

But in other cases and increasingly throughout the Renaissance, this chapel sort of marks the very beginning of the Renaissance, by the time we get to Michelangelo, when he does Sistine Chapel, for example, the Pope that commissions that work says, now I want this.

[46 : 20] And Michelangelo says, well, that's well and good. Here's what I'm going to do. So this is a dynamic that's kind of evolving as we go. So it's really hard to say with certainty how much Felice Brancacci sort of dictated the terms of his paintings and how much Masaccio was, and the others with him, were just sort of making it The fact that he returned to a former style after this suggests that there was a bigger market for that.

That's right. That's right. There's a lot of, with all these things, there's a number of facts. None of these things are simple. And I've kind of streamlined it into a rather simple equation.

Felice wants this, that's what he gets. I don't even necessarily think we have to say that Felice Brancacci was consciously wanting to depict themes of death, taxes, and the Visconti.

Now, if my theory on the fish and the Visconti coat of arms has any substance to it, then I think that must have been a conscious choice. But with respect to the plague and the taxes, I mean, I rather doubt that he was conscious of those things.

Yes, sir? Does Visconti relate the tax money to Jesus' question about who has the sale of the coin? Yeah, there's not that much detail in the picture, so it's just sort of a blank coin.

[47 : 54] And it's interesting, I skipped over this in my notes because I was sort of lost in this space between the computers. But what's interesting about Jesus choosing to pay this tax is, as I mentioned, there's clear opposition between he and the Pharisees, and this was largely, if not only, a Pharisaic practice.

There's also tension between he and the temple system, just more generally. And later on in Matthew's Gospel, he goes in and he drives out the money changers from the temple.

And those guys were there in the temple simply for the purposes of changing the coins, because the coins that people would have paid this temple tax in would have had an image on it, and those couldn't go into the temple.

So you need to have money changers there to exchange these Roman or Greek coins for coins acceptable in the temple. So it's very interesting that he chooses to pay this tax, given what we see later in the Gospel.

Yes, sir? Would you say that the images in the brand catchy in chapel are politically motivated in some measure?

[49 : 19] Yeah, I would. So, following on that, John Ruskin made the comment that he believes that the modern era of painting, modern era, began when art, especially in the churches, were not Christ-centered and moved away from that.

He suggests that the modern period, when it started even with Raphael, he began to paint other subjects, other than the things that were Christ-centered.

Have you ever come across that idea at all? Yeah, I have, and I'm inclined to agree. It can be deceptive, because Christ is all over these walls, and indeed, Christ and his apostles feature prominently throughout the art of the Renaissance.

But I would say even earlier than Raphael, who comes along late in the Renaissance, this chapel is really a depth charge for what's going to happen by the time Raphael comes, and indeed, further into the Enlightenment period, where painting becomes quite estranged from its original purpose, which was to aid in and facilitate worship.

So, there's this great quote that I wish I had off the top of my head. It's, I can't even remember the fellow's name.

[51 : 00] He's a filmmaker of the mid-20th century. I think he's from the Netherlands or something. He made a ton of films. He made the Seventh Seal. Swedish, right.

And he says, in effect, that when art is separated from worship, it basically becomes like a hall of mirrors where you're just constantly sort of nasal gazing on yourself, navel gazing.

And I think by the time we reach the middle of the 20th century, that becomes quite apparent. Yes?

You showed a drawing of how the paintings were laid out on the chapel wall. Is that something that has been found historically or is that something that's been known after the chapel?

That's just a, I took that from the website of this chapel. It's kind of a tourist attraction now. And so I think just after the fact, people have just kind of charted out where things are so that you know what you're looking at.

[52 : 04] I was just wondering if things have been found in the preparation, from the preparation stages of doing the painting. Oh, I see. I see. There's lines and layouts and so on.

Yeah. Do you know if there was anything from that? I'm not aware of any such thing. And my second question was how did the teaching on Kachi die? Thinking about martyrdom and feeling like maybe he had paid all he could to get his city out of debt and having negotiated this peace treaty, maybe he himself felt like a bit of a lawyer for his hometown.

I wish I could tell you. I was frustrated by what I could learn about Feliz Brancacci. You notice I didn't show any pictures of him and I couldn't find any pictures of him.

It's likely that he's in the chapel as one of the figures. But two of the artists that I showed you, Masaccio and Filippo Lino Lippi, those were both painted and those are taken from the walls of the Brancacci chapel.

So these artists put their self portrait in the chapel and it's almost certain that Mr. Brancacci is there as well.

[53 : 22] I know very little about him. I think very little is known about him. Is he buried there in the chapel? It's likely. So the point of the chapel was to pray for his soul.

Yeah, I mean it was common practice to sort of found a family chapel adjacent to these larger churches and it would, if not his soul specifically, just sort of for the family generally, they would have sort of private family celebration of the Eucharist.

At this time, the Eucharist was celebrated on the behalf of people. People typically didn't receive communion themselves, at least not with any regularity. And so if you're sitting in church, what's going on at front is done on your behalf.

And if you can sort of fund your own sort of private space, then I suppose the idea is that you have a bit more exclusive sort of benefit.

That's right. That's right. both. Can I parties go ahead well, thanks again to you all for your patience and it's been a privilege to be here.

[54 : 37] Thanks. Thank you.