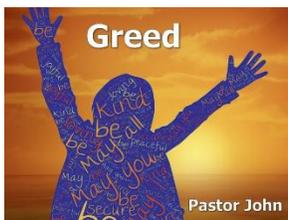


Greed

October 22, 2017

Matthew 22: 15-22

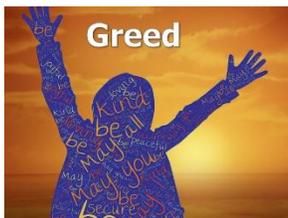
¹⁵ Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him in what he said. ¹⁶ So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. 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.



There are many things that can cause us to lack gratitude.

We have looked at how nostalgia, worry, and entitlement can prevent us from having an "attitude of gratitude". In today's scripture reading, we see the Pharisees trying to trap Jesus and they use age-old topics that cause heated debate under normal circumstances – money and taxes. "*Whose money is it anyway?*", they ask Jesus. As good Jews, they understood the implication that all things belong to God, money included. The Pharisees are really cornering Jesus. Added on is the danger of Jesus saying not to pay taxes to the ruling authorities – the Romans. Jesus is in quite a predicament. Let us pray.

Today we take on the topic of greed. Money is mentioned in the Bible more than any other topic, so this is serious business today. As Americans, we can relate. Step back into our history a mere 243 years. The “patriots” were upset over the new higher British taxes on their beloved tea. Samuel Adams and the Sons of Liberty threw 342 cases of tea into the Boston Harbor, moving the two sides closer to war as tensions continued to rise. The underlying issue was taxation without representation. This dislike of paying taxes, especially when we consider them too high, has always been an issue in our nation. Step back about two thousand years and now meet the Jews. If you think the colonists disliked or current Americans dislike paying taxes, then consider the Jews’ situation. Much like the colonists, they were taxed and had no say in the matter. The Romans allowed temple worship to continue, but the Jews had very few other rights. The already high taxes seemed to always be going up. Like the British raising the tea tax yet again to help bolster the failing East India Tea Company, taxes regularly went up in Palestine to support the ever-growing Roman government.

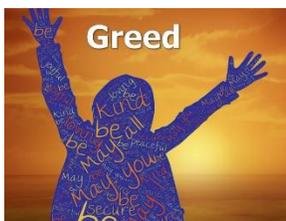


In today’s scripture reading, we see the Pharisees trying to trap Jesus. Again, they use age-old topics that always seem to cause heated debate, even under normal circumstances – money and taxes. “Whose money is it anyway?”, they ask Jesus. Any good Jew would say that all things belong to God, money included. So, if Jesus says to pay your taxes to Caesar, then Jesus is basically going against God’s will. The religious zealots in the crowd would want to stone Jesus for such a stance. But if Jesus says not to pay taxes to the ruling authorities – the Romans - they could arrest Him for being an instigator. Jesus is in quite a predicament. It appears to

be a no-win situation. I can picture the religious authorities eagerly awaiting Jesus' answer to their seemingly impossible question. But Jesus simply asks for a coin: "*Show me the coin used for the tax*".

One would not know it, but suddenly the tables have turned. Leading up to the request for the coin, Jesus said, "*Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites*"? It is maybe a curious question, but, in reality, the Pharisees and other religious leaders have long publicly preached against using Roman currency – saying that it is appalling to God. Here they are in the temple courts and Jesus asks them for the coin that He somehow knows they have in their pocket. Can you picture them sheepishly digging into their robe pocket, slowly producing a coin for Jesus?

Jesus takes the coin and looks at it, as if for the first time ever. Then Jesus asks the religious leaders, "*Whose head is this, and whose title?*" Well, this is a pretty silly question, isn't it? Of course, it is the emperor. Even a child would know that. Come on, Jesus.



It is much the same, though, with Christians when we are asked who our money or our time or our whatever REALLY belongs to. When pressed hard, we will cough up, "God" in response to this question. This too is a silly question. We really know that all things belong to God. But to admit I should because it means that God has a

right to all of our money, our time, our whatever. Yet there is something deep inside of us that cringes at the suggestion that what we have worked so hard for or when and how we can spend our time does not really belong to us at all. We want to dictate how we spend our time. And if we worked hard to get our money, we want to control it. Right down to the last penny. And while we are working so hard to lay aside that nest egg for retirement or money for our children's college education or for that new boat, suddenly our time becomes very valuable to us – maybe even more so than our money. Later in our service today, we will come forward and lay a card on the altar rail that represents how much we think belongs to God. On the front we will indicate how much of our wealth we think belongs to God and on the back we will indicate how much of our time we think belongs to God.



Getting kind of serious, huh? So, a story:



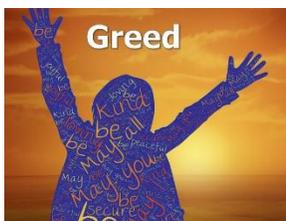
A one dollar bill met a twenty-dollar bill and said, "Hey, where've you been? I haven't seen you around here much."

The twenty answered (as the dollar bill listened enviously),

"I've been hanging out at the casinos, went out on a cruise and did the rounds of the ship, came back to the United States for a while, went to a couple of baseball games, to the mall, that kind of stuff. How about you?" The one dollar bill said, "You know, same old stuff, church, church, church."

In our scripture for today, after establishing just whose picture is on the denarius, Jesus says to the Pharisees and other religious leaders standing in the crowd: *"Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's"*. The literal translation would have been: Pay back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar. Give to him what he deserves. If the tax is five percent, give Caesar five percent. Simple enough, Jesus says.

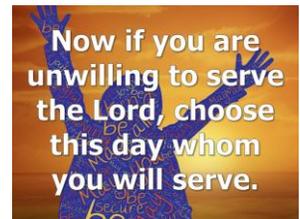
The Pharisees, and probably us here today, would be okay if the story ended here. But it does not. Jesus then continues, saying, *"And give unto God the things that are God's."* It turns out that Jesus is not really talking about taxes here at all. Like with the coin, Jesus is really saying to give to God the things that have God's image on them. Genesis 1:27 reads, *"So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them"*. Give unto God the things that are God's. God created humankind in his image. Give unto God the things that are God's. In the image of God, he created them. Give unto God the things that are God's. Male and female, he created them. From the little baby that we baptize today, to the oldest person that will walk through our doors today, each of us fully belongs to God.



As the people of Israel stood on the brink of coming into the Promised Land, they too faced a hard decision. In Joshua 24, as they prepare to cross over the Jordan River, Joshua calls upon the people to decide whom they will serve. Before they enter into the land that the Lord God is providing, he wants to be sure that they know who is giving

this land to the Israelites and he wants to make sure they are committed to God. Joshua says to the people, *"Now therefore revere the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD"*. Joshua wanted them to commit to serving the one true God.

Today we can serve many gods. Our money and time are but two of the gods we can become slaves to. They are but two of the gods that rob us of the joy of serving the Lord in sincerity. Joshua clearly puts the Israelites to the test, saying, *"Now if you are unwilling to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve"*. Make a choice. Joshua is challenging them to make a choice. We too face the same choice: Are you willing to give to God what is God's? Or are you going to choose to give your money, your time, or your whatever to another god instead?



Joshua draws this decision point to a conclusion by stating his choice: *"But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."* The people of Israel will also make the same choice. They too will choose to serve the Lord.



We too face the same choice today. Who will we serve? Let us, the followers of God, decide today that what we have, what we are, what we do, what we think – it all belongs to the God who knit us together in the womb. In reality, we face

the same exact question every day. Each and every day we must decide who we will serve. Each and every day we must decide to whom we will give our all. So, this day, let us ask ourselves, "What belongs to God"? Then may we find a way to put it back in God's hands. May it be so each and every day. Let us pray.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve

- 1) What makes you most uncomfortable when we talk about money and time in the church? What is at the root of your discomfort?
- 2) When pressed we will say all we have belongs to God. Even so, what is the hardest to joyfully and willingly give to God? Pray for a willing spirit.
- 3) How is what we are willing to give a reflection of our trust level with God? What can you give to God this week that reflects your trust in God?

Children's Message Idea:

Mrs. Baughman was a Sunday School class teacher in my 6th grade class. One morning she brought a pan of brownies to our class. As the goodies sat tantalizingly over by her chair she gave each child a slip of paper marked with a household expense: house payment, phone bill, credit card bill, entertainment, and so forth. My slip had "car payment" on it. Before long, Mrs. Baughman picked up the tray of fresh brownies and began naming the expenses named on the papers. As we gave her our expense slips, she redeemed each one for a brownie from the pan. Finally, the last brownie had disappeared. But one boy named Donald still held his unredeemed slip. "God!" called Mrs. Baughman. Donald came forward, hoping the teacher had one more brownie hidden somewhere. With a knife, Mrs. Baughman scraped the crumbs from the bottom of the pan into Donald's napkin. He got a pretty raw deal, I thought - just the crumbs. "The brownies represent your money," the teacher explained to us. "If you don't give God his share right away, he probably won't get anything at all except maybe crumbs."