

**May I never boast...
except...
in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ**

Date: 31 October 2021
Service/s: *Across the Diocese*
Series: Questioning Jesus
Title: Should we pay taxes?
Passage: Mark 12:13-17; 28-34

- From our days as a penal colony, Australians are typically anti-authoritarian
- We don't like others telling us to what to do
- And it's probably worse **now** than in earlier times
- **Parents** struggle to exercise authority at **home**
- **Teachers** struggle to exercise authority at **school**
- **Police** struggle to exercise authority on the **streets**
- The **law courts** struggle to exercise authority in the halls of justice... /
- We claim our **independence**
- We want the right to run our lives our **own way**
- We don't want to be beholden to **anybody** ///
- But hasn't it **always** been the same?
- Since Adam and Eve first claimed their independence from God! //
- That was the issue in the garden wasn't it? – "we don't want anyone to rule **over** us...!"
- So this morning we are challenged on two things...
 1. the question of **authority**...who is calling the shots?
 2. Who is your first love? Where's your heart – the devotion of your heart?
- Here is where we are heading as we look at these two sections from Mark 12
 1. Who is calling the shots?
 2. Who is your first love?

So

1. WHO IS CALLING THE SHOTS

- Let me just set this passage in its context...
- You'll remember that Jesus is heading to Jerusalem – where he knows he'll be mistreated and killed... but he heads there any way in obedience to his **Father** and in love for **YOU!**
- Last week – end of ch 10 – healing of Bartimaeus
- ...and at the start of ch 11 – Jesus has processed into Jerusalem... with a great **throng** of people from **Galilee** who had **joined** him and who were singing his **praises**... /
- But not all went **smoothly** from there
- He curses a **fruitless fig tree** – as a **living sign** of the **curse** of God on a **fruitless Israel**...

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- And he clears the **temple** of **money changers** and swindlers... **again** a sign of **judgement** on **Israel**...
- And the reaction to this is swift and sharp – 11:18 - *The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and **began looking for a way to kill him**, for they **feared** him, because the whole crowd was **amazed** at his **teaching**.*
- So the confrontation between **Jesus** and the **religious leaders** is **heating up**...
- And they **question** Jesus' authority and lay traps for him – **verbal** traps – trying to **trip him up** so they have a reason to **arrest** and **condemn** him.
- But Jesus consistently has **brilliant** either **ANSWERS** or **QUESTIONS** for all **their** questions, which usually either **embarrass** those who've asked them and/or **trap** them right **back**!
- So have a look with me at v13 - *Later they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to **catch him in his words**. //*
- This is a **setup** from **start** to **finish**!
- **Luke's** version makes this even more clear - *Keeping a close watch on him, they sent spies, who **pretended to be sincere**. They hoped to catch Jesus in something he **said**, so that they might hand him over to the power and authority of the **governor**. //*
- who do the religious leaders send?
- - **spies**..
- What's their **modus operandi**? – **pretending** to be **sincere**!!
- What's the **aim**? To **catch Jesus in something he said** so they could get **rid of him**...!
- In their **pretence**... in their **foolishness**... they open their spiel with **flattery**... did you hear that?
- v14 – have a look - *“Teacher, we know that you are a man of integrity. You aren't swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth..*
- What's the **irony** there?
- They are **insincere** in their **intent** – but **entirely accurate** with their **words**! /
- It's **true** – he **wasn't** swayed by others – he **DID** teach the way of God in accordance with the **truth**...
- **IF ONLY THEY REALLY BELIEVED THAT AND TOOK NOTICE!! //**
- But after the flattery comes the trick question: at the very end of v14 *Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?* ¹⁵ *Should we pay or shouldn't we?”*
- “Oh we'll **get him here** that's for sure... he won't expect this... he won't see **this** coming... ha!!”
- But of course – v15a – **But Jesus KNEW their hypocrisy**
- He **knew** it. He saw right **through them** and right through their **question**. //
- Even been found **out** when you are trying to be **cunning** or **sneaky** or **duplicitous**?
- Luke has at this same point – *he saw **through their duplicity**.*
- V15b – Jesus returns serve - *“Why are you trying to **trap** me?” he asked. “Bring me a **denarius** and let me look at it.”* ¹⁶ *They brought the coin, and he asked them, “Whose image is this? And whose inscription?”*
- Of course the image is that of **Caesar** and the inscription describes him as **divine** – as **God**!

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- So what will **Jesus** say?
- How can Jesus be **party** to that sort of **outrageous blasphemy**...?
- But his answer is **brilliant**...!
- *Then give to **Caesar** what is **Caesar's**, and to God what is **God's***
- If the coin bears **Caesar's image** – then it belongs to **him** – pay whatever **taxes** you **owe**. If it bears his **image** – it is **his!** //
- It's only **coinage**... and he's only a **man**... his claim to be divine is **false**... //
- But as for giving to **God** what is **God's**?
- If the coin bore **Caesar's** image and inscription – he's asking them – 'whose image do **YOU** bear?'
- **Inference: You** were made in the **image** of God – you bear **HIS image** and **inscription**... you are **HIS**... he **OWNS** you....
- And you need to **give** to **God** what **belongs** to **him**!!
- That is // your **entire self**...!
- You are not your **own** – you actually **never** were – but for us – this side of the **cross** of our Lord **Jesus Christ** - – we see even more clearly - we've been **bought** with a **price** – Jesus remember paid our **ransom**... we are **his**. //
- **Who is calling the shots??**
- You are not your **own**
- You bear **God's image**
- Jesus has **redeemed** and **rescued** you /
- Give to **Caesar** what is **Caesar's**.... /
- Give to **God** what is **God's**... ///
- And the response from those who heard Jesus' masterful reply?
- And of v17 – *And they were amazed at him.*
- Of course they **were** – his answer his **brilliant**... he's **escaped** their **trap** – **shown** it for what it **is** – and there is **nowhere** for his opponents to **turn**... ///
- And that prepares us for the **second** part of our passage... where we skip over vv18-27 – there they tried to trap him on **resurrection**... but he has a brilliant answer for that trip also...
- And we come to **another trap**... about which is the most **important** of all the **commandments**...

2. WHO IS YOUR FIRST LOVE?

- Have a look with me at v28 - *One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, (about the resurrection) he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"*
- The rabbis had added up the various laws in the OT and found there were 613 altogether.
- This teacher's question – 'which is the most important?' – was often discussed by experts in the law.
- What would Jesus **say**? /

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- Jesus points not just to **one** but **two** commandments...
- Deuteronomy 6:4-5 - *Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.* ⁵ *Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and [with all your mind] and with all your strength.*
- And then he adds Leviticus 19:18 - *love your neighbour as yourself.*
- And Jesus comments... *there is no commandment greater than these.*
- What is the common theme?
- **Love!!**
- Together these two express the **entire nature of God's will for us... !**
- Note the **nature** of the love which is commanded...
- Our lives are to be **centred** around love for **God**... to give God the **worship, the honour, the focus which is his due...**
- You and I are to love God with our **entire beings**... ALL your **heart**, ALL your **soul**, ALL your **strength**...
- Not **casual**
- Not **half hearted**
- Not on the **side**
- But in the very **centre**
- **Love for God flowing through out entire lives and driving everything we do – all we are on about... all the time!!**
- Can I ask... DO you love the Lord your God with all your **heart?** // the **devotion** of your **affections**...?
- All your **SOUL** – your whole **self** ?
- **Mind** – your mind... your very intellect... and what you do with it... is it given over to the Lord...?
- **Strength**... do you give this love...every bit of energy you have?
- **That** is how we are to love **God!!**
- With all we **are** – our **whole beings!!** ///
- That is what ALL SAINTS DO!!

- ...and then – our **neighbours** as ourselves.... Let there be no doubt – we **love ourselves**... for the main part – we **feed, water, clothe, protect ourselves**... we look **out** for **ourselves**...
- The question is – do we love **others** in the same **way**...?
- Do we ensure that we are as **giving** and **thoughtful** to **others** as we are to **ourselves**?
- Do we love and serve others as we would want to be loved and served
- Do we look out for the needs of others as we seek to have our needs met?
- Do we seek to love the unlovely?
- Do we put the needs of others before our own?

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- So amazingly searching and revealing of the true state of our hearts.
- Of course we cannot love like this on our own
- We cannot love like this unless we've received Jesus' love for us – who loved us by laying down his life for us...
- Once we have received and grasped the significance of the way he love us first... only then can we begin to love him and our neighbours as we ought... ///
- Love for God – love for neighbour – empowered and inspired by the love of God seen at the cross and the resurrection... //
- Elsewhere the Bible says that love is the **fulfillment** of the **law**....
- Friends... love is be to the total expression of our lives....
- It is what defines the **saints** – those who have made holy by Jesus...
- That's why Jesus says... they will know you are **Christians** by your **love**...
- And... that is why when Christians obviously **lack** love... by the way they **behave**, by the way they interact with those at church – and with those outside the church - there us **untold damage** done to the name of Christ... and the reputation of the **church** and **Christian people!!** – **and the gospel itself!!**
- now – just two things I want you to notice as I close...
- the man who asks the question – offers Jesus a response – good answer Jesus...
- and he has a moment of great insight – have a look with me at v33 - *To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.*"
- Isn't that brilliant! – he's beginning to see that it's all about relationship – and all the liturgical traditions and practices are entirely secondary...
- Jesus said to the man v34 – you are not far from the Kingdom!
- we need to grasp this more clearly friends... that all OUR liturgical practices and traditions are entirely secondary to love... love for God, love for neighbour
- And the second thing I want to you notice as I close is right at the end of v34 - And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.
- They saw that the word traps they tried to lay for him were getting them nowhere... he was too brilliant for them...
- And yet – they pursued their evil intent... and within days he will be dead...

RECAP

To whom do you belong?? You bear the image of **God** – you are **his** – bought with the precious life, death and resurrection of the **Lord Jesus**...

Give to **God**, what is **God's!**

And **who is your first love?** Jesus said – Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and [with all your mind] and with all your strength.

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And love your neighbour as yourself.