

Week of January 29-February 4

APRIL 15TH

Scripture Reading: Read Matthew chapter 22

April 15th! No, the title of today's devotional is not a misprint just in case you were wondering. Rather, it's a date with which millions of Americans are aware. It's Tax Day, the last day folks can file their income taxes without penalty or without extension. As I am writing this devotional, that day is almost three months away. For the procrastinators among us, that's an eternity! For many, it's also a day of whining about having to pay taxes and lamenting wasted spending by the government.

In our Scripture reading today, Jesus has a thing or two to say about taxes. Jesus is challenged by the Pharisees about whether it was right to pay taxes to Caesar. It comes as a question crouched in flattery. The text says it was a trap though. The religious leaders were hoping to catch Jesus with his answer. Either he could say "no" and they would be able to turn him in to Roman officials for treason or he could say "yes" and the people would turn on him. They were convinced they had him either way.

Jesus, however, saw right through their hypocrisy. He requested one of the coins used in paying the tax. Jesus quizzed his opponents about the coin and they acknowledged that both the portrait and the inscription was Caesar's. It is at this point that Jesus provides a masterful response to their trap. He first tells them to pay their taxes to Caesar. Jesus did not advocate rebellion against paying taxes, even when the one collecting them is a pagan emperor. His reasoning, no doubt, is reflected in Paul's thought in Romans 13: *"Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established... This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.* When one pays taxes to those in authority, we are honoring the God of all authority.

Jesus, however, adds to his response by commanding the religious leaders to give to God what is God's. The Roman coin bore an image of the emperor's head along with the inscription "Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus" on one side and "*pontifex maximus*" (which would have been interpreted as "high priest") on the other. This was considered idolatry by the Jews. Jesus agreed. Paying taxes to those who provide services for us is worship of God. When the line is crossed and the government itself demands worship then we cannot say yes. We must give to God what is God's and worship him alone. In other words, we live as dual citizens, of both the kingdom of God and the kingdom of man. We give to each what is required and, in so doing, we worship God in both worlds, something the religious leaders were failing to do by rejecting Jesus. So, when April 15th comes around this year, worship God and pay your taxes.

Action Step & Prayer Focus:

Take a look at how you view April 15th. Do you see it as worship or work? Depending upon your answer, spend some time in repentance or thanksgiving.

Take-a-way: *Believe it or not, paying taxes is one more way for us to worship God.*