

GIVE TO GOD WHAT IS GOD'S

Luke 20:20-26; 21:1-4

Key Verse: 20:25

He said to them, "Then give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."

In today's passage, Jesus says, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." Giving is an important part of Christian life. God has given us so much and we must learn to give. Let us ask several questions about giving today. To whom should we give? Why should we give? What should we give? How should we give? May the Holy Spirit move our hearts as we study the word of Christ!

I. PAYING TAXES TO CAESAR (20-26)

Look at verses 20-22. *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. So the spies questioned him: "Teacher, we know that you speak and teach what is right, and that you do not show partiality but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"* The religious leaders in Jerusalem were not a fan of Jesus. In fact, they really wanted to kill Jesus. They regarded him their political threat. Jesus was teaching the word of God to the people who were gathered in the temple courts. He proclaimed the good news. But the religious leaders were keeping a close watch on him. They sent spies who pretended to be sincere. They were hoping to trap Jesus and catch him something he said so that they could hand him over to the power and authority of the Roman governor. They asked him, "Teacher, is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" They didn't ask this to learn the truth. It was a set up.

The Jewish people were forced to pay taxes to the Roman Empire that occupied their land at that time. They hated this taxation because the money was used to support the occupying Roman army and even the pagan gods. The taxation was a boiling issue among the Jews. It was the cause of frequent riots and rebellions against Rome. So how was this question a trap to Jesus? If Jesus said that they should pay taxes to Caesar, they would call him a traitor to their nation and their religion. The religious leaders knew that public opinion of Jesus would turn against him for saying that. On the other hand, if he said they should not pay, he would get in trouble with the Roman government. He would be arrested by the Roman governor. Either way, Jesus would be in trouble. They thought they had cornered Jesus in a perfect trap this time. They were so confident about their scheme that they approached him with a flatter. They said, *"Teacher, we know that you speak and teach what is right, and that you do not show partiality but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth."* What they said about Jesus was true. The problem was that they did not believe what they said. They rejected Jesus' teaching time and again (19:47,48; 20:19). The spies sent by their bosses pretended to be sincere. They were not sincere.

What did Jesus do in this situation? Did he say, “I don’t know the answer” as the religious leaders did? (20:7) Or did he say, “Let me get back to you on that”? No. Jesus took the opportunity to teach them important spiritual truth. Look at verses 23-25. *He saw through their duplicity and said to them, “Show me a denarius. Whose image and inscription are on it?” “Caesar’s,” they replied. He said to them, “Then give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”* The religious leaders were surprised by his answer. They didn’t expect such answer. They were unable to trap him in what he had said in public. Astonished by his answer, they became silent (26). They were astonished by his answer. And yet, they did not repent. They only became silent. Their hearts were hardened.

The Roman coin at that time had the portrait of Emperor Tiberius on one side and the inscription on the other side that said, “Tiberius Caesar Augustus, son of the divine Augustus.” The spies sent by the religious leaders raised a very tricky question. But Jesus answered them on the basis of the truth of God. Jesus taught them the basic attitude one must have before God and before the worldly rulers.

Jesus said, “Then give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, ...” He told them to pay taxes to the Roman government. Of course, Jesus was not endorsing the military occupation of Israel by the Roman Empire. It was not a political statement. To the disappointment of the nationalistic Jews, he was not leading a political movement against Rome. He simply taught them that they had a basic duty to their government as a citizen, whether it was a good or bad government. This teaching applies to us today. We have a basic duty to our government, including paying taxes. This is what St. Paul says in Romans 13: “Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.... This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, who give their full time to governing. Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor” (Ro 13:1,6,7).

Jesus said: “Then give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.” We Christians have dual citizenships. We are citizens of this country and we are citizens of the kingdom of God. As such, we have duties to both God and our government. We should pay taxes, respect our leaders, and obey laws. As Christians, we should be good examples in this. Only if there is a conflict between God and the government, only when the government comes between us and our God, then, our duty to God must come first, knowing that the worldly government is in God’s hands (Ro 13:1).

II. GIVE TO GOD WHAT IS GOD’S (25)

At the same time, we are the citizens of the kingdom of God. Therefore, we must give to God what is God’s. We should bring 10 percent of what we earn to God as an expression of our thanksgiving to him who provides us with everything we need (Dt 12:11). The Bible teaches that we rob God when we fail to bring our tithes and offerings (Mal 3:8,9). But we should know that, no matter how much we bring to God, it is nothing compared to what he has given us. And what we bring would not mean anything

to God unless we offer our hearts with them. God is the Creator of this universe. He is the owner of everything (Dt 10:14). So what can we give to God? We can give our love to him. Deuteronomy 6:5 says, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.”

If we can summarize the entire Bible in one word, I think that one word is love. And to love in essence is to give. We can say that Christianity begins with the word “give.” God gave us our life as a gift. When we sinned against him and were condemned, God gave us his one and only Son to be our Savior. John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” Jesus’ life in this world was literally a life of giving. Mark 10:45 says, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Jesus gave his life on the cross to take away all our sins. What can we give to the Lord Jesus who gave us his own life?

There was a boy who worked for a circus company. One Sunday, he saw many people going to church and he decided to follow them. In the church, he heard the good news of Jesus Christ. He heard that God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son to save the sinners. He was deeply moved by the love of God. He also saw many people offering money to God to express their thankful hearts. He was very sorry that he didn’t have any money to give. That night, he gathered all his tools of trade and sneaked into the church. He said to God, “Lord, I am sorry I don’t have any money to give you. But I want to give you what I have here.” There before the Lord, while no one was watching, he performed his circus acts, jumping and juggling. Let me ask you. Do you think God was pleased with this boy?

Jesus gave his own life to save us. Then he said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Ac 20:35). Why should we love? We love because he first loved us. Why should we give? We give because he first gave us. In our sinful nature, most of us want to receive than to give. We are selfish and self-centered. Even when we give, we often do so, expecting something in return. But it is more beautiful to see a person giving sacrificially when he or she doesn’t expect anything in return. During the recent massive flood in Texas, many people gave sacrificially their time and money to the needy. I saw pictures of many thousand people jammed into one shelter. One reporter noticed that there were also many volunteers who helped them – one volunteer for every five people. I am often moved by the giving spirit of many American people. Their giving heart comes out during difficult times such as 9-11 and Hurricane Harvey. Many of them are Christians, but not all of them. If non-believers have a giving spirit, how much more should we give, knowing that how much God has given us!

III. THE WIDOW’S OFFERING (21:1-4)

So we know to whom we should give and why we should give. Now what should we give and how should we give? To find answers to these questions, let us turn to Jesus’ teaching in Luke 21:1-4: *As Jesus looked up, he saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. “Truly I tell you,” he said, “this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these*

people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.”

Jesus and his disciples were in the temple in Jerusalem. There were several offering boxes in the temple and they saw the rich people putting their gifts in the boxes in a showy manner. Perhaps they stopped their motions before the boxes to make sure TV cameras were pointed at them. They wanted to see their generosity become the talk of the town. Jesus also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins, probably worth only a couple cents. She didn't want anyone to notice it. Jesus' disciples were more impressed by the huge amount of donation by the rich. They ignored her as did many others. But Jesus drew their attention to the poor widow. He said, "Truly I tell you. This poor widow has put in more than all the others" (3).

Jesus said the widow offered to God more than the rich people, even though what she offered was only a couple of pennies. What kind of math is this? How can you say that two cents is more than \$20,000? We learn that Jesus was talking about more than money. He was talking about the heart of a person. Jesus sees our hearts more than what we give to God. In Genesis 4, we read the story of Cain and Abel, two sons of Adam and Eve. Both Cain and Abel brought their offerings to God. Cain the farmer brought some of the fruits and Abel the shepherd selected the firstborn of his flock and brought the prime portion of it to God. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor (Ge 4:4-5). Cain was angry with God. He was boiling with anger. God came to him and said, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it" (Ge 4:6-7). God taught him that he sees our hearts, not just our offering. Abel's heart was right with God. Cain's heart was not. Hebrew 11:4 says, "By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead." God sees our hearts. This is very important for us to remember. I thank God to know that our coworkers faithfully bring their tithes each month. But we should not be arrogant to think that God should be thankful for the 10% of our income we bring to him. God is not a charity. He does not need our money. He owns everything in the universe. He is pleased only when we bring our offerings to him with our hearts of thanksgiving and love for him.

Jesus saw that the widow put her heart in the offering box along with her coins. We learn that what God wants from us is not money per se, but a broken heart. The rich people would have been mistaken, if they had thought they were doing a favor to God by offering their money. In God's accounting system, it is not the amount of money that is important, but a broken heart that we bring to him. King David understood this. He said, "I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing" (2Sa 24:24).

Jesus said the poor widow put in more than all the others. The rich gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on. Let us think about this widow. In Jesus' time, widows were economically vulnerable. They

needed help from others. They were not in a position to give. If anyone needed an excuse not to give, it was the widows. But this widow did not think she couldn't give because of her poor condition. She out of her poverty put in all she had to live on. Why did she do this? How could she do this? She did so because she loved God. If you love someone, you really want to give him or her, even if you have very little. She also trusted in God when she gave all she had to live on. Perhaps she prayed, "Lord, I bring you everything I have, because I know that you love me so much and I want to show my love for you."

Let us not say that we don't have anything to give to God. All of us have something to give. We have our hearts. We can express our love and thanksgiving to the Lord. With a broken heart, we can invite students to the word of God and to pray for them, know that this is pleasing to the Lord. May God help us to offer our heart-offering to God who has given us his one and only Son to be our Savior!