Taxes in Matthew

BIG Idea!

ULTIMATE WORTH

In an effort to discredit Jesus, the Pharisees hatch a plan to politically smoke Jesus out. The issue they chose was not so ordinary as taxation in general, but a specific annual tax which could only be paid with a specific coin known as a denarius. The coin bore the image of Caesar, inscribed with the self-aggrandising title "Divine Augustus". This coin was to be paid to Rome as an acknowledgement of the 'privilege' it was to be a subject of Caesar.

Following the introduction of the tax, some 25 years prior, a revolt was led by a man named Judas the Galilean. Although the revolt was ultimately put down, Judas left a lasting legacy in the Jewish psyche, cleansing the temple in Jerusalem of all Gentile influence and declaring Israel to be God's kingdom, not Rome's.

The question put to Jesus, therefore, was incredibly dangerous. If Jesus rejected the tax then the authorities would accuse Him of rabble-rousing. On the other hand, if Jesus simply accepted the tax, then His own claims about the Kingdom of God would ring hollow, suggesting He was too frightened to challenge Rome's oppression and, therefore, would be labelled a false messiah. All of this, of course, in the wake of Jesus' own temple cleansing, albeit in a manner vastly different to the messianic claimants who came before Him.

Jesus' answer rejects political simplicity, political primacy and political complacency. Indeed, Jesus offers a nuanced perspective which reflects the complex nature of so many political issues. He provides no silver bullet, no 'righteous' answer. He reminds us that God does not belong to a political party. Instead, Jesus deftly reorientates our perspective. Our values should not be shaped by politics, rather our politics should be shaped by Kingdom values. Pointedly, Jesus asks the question "Who are you more concerned to repay? The emperor of Rome, or God?". For just as a denarius bears the image of its creator, so we all bear the image of our creator, personified in the character of Jesus. A rebel from Galilee, come to lead a very different kind of revolution.

DIGGING Deeper!

Context:

It should be noted that on this occasion, discussing this sensitive issue, the Pharisees do not personally question Jesus. Rather, the Pharisees' own students are sent to face the great teacher, complimented by members of a political sect known as the Herodians. As their name would suggest, the Herodians were supporters of Herod's Kingdom. This was a position not shared by the Pharisees, nor the majority of the petty king's subjects (this was in no small part due to Herod Antipas' scandalous marriage to his own niece and recent execution of John the Baptist). However, there seems to have existed enough Jews who either disagreed with this sentiment, or else valued the authority of a Jewish king (competency not withstanding) over any form of foreign rule. Either way, the inclusion of the Herodians in the Pharisees plan speaks to their willingness to work with historical adversaries to put an end to Jesus, as well as the convoluted nature of the political issue at hand. So blurred were the lines between 'church' and 'state', that answering one way or the other could see Jesus labelled as a rebel, or even as a Roman collaborator. All of this within a societal tinderbox, just waiting for an excuse to revisit their grievances upon the occupying forces who were levying these exploitative taxes.

Start by checking in with how everyone is doing and ask a state of your soul question.

Today's Reading: Matthew 22: 15-22

READ the verses out loud.

THEN and THERE

Considering how much emotion we see in modern politics, how much more emotional would this conversation have been, only 25 years removed from a deeply traumatic episode in Jewish history?

Read Digging Deeper.

DISCUSS

Given the contemporary relevance of taxation today, what lessons can we take from Christ's response?

QUESTIONS to Consider

1. What sticks out to you about these verses?
2. What do you think of Caesars tax?
3. How can I model Christ in my approach to political discourse?
4. How should the Church go about balancing political questions?
5. How do we avoid the errors of political primacy and/or political complacency?
6. What does it look like to be concerned with social justice? How is this part of the Kingdom of God?
7. What might God be challenging us in as we study this scripture?

PRAY for each other that we seee with God's eyes and have grace and peace for others who think differently to us.

1 PRAYER POINT

What can you pray for this week, for yourself, your family and friends?

2 ACTION POINT

Try asking yourself these difficult questions "Am I shaped more by politics than I am by the Gospel? How can I be sure?"

3 MISSION POINT

How should Christians engage in political discourse? What separates a Christian politician from a secular one?

The Greatest Law

BIG Idea!

LOVE GOD, LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR

When asked what the most important law was by the pharisees Jesus answers in a simple yet profound way of Loving God, Loving your neighbour and loving yourself. Love the lord you God with all your heart, soul and mind. It does not leave much wriggle room or any doubt what Jesus is saying. You might think that the pharisees must have been getting used to Jesus not focussing the adherence to the physical law but addressing the heart issue behind the law that Jesus obviously sees as more important. He exposes again the attitudes of the religious leaders towards what is really important in the Kingdom of God.

Matthew is trying to get us to see throughout his Gospel that without our hearts being transformed by the power that is in Jesus in his death and resurrection that brings forgiveness and freedom, the law is powerless and cannot be obeyed in our own strength but rather is an invitation and promise of a new way to live. A new Kingdom way. A life of worship to our God and a life given to serve, love and care for the others. The upside down kingdom that exposes the power and dominance placed over others to maintain status and self importance to a servant hearted kingdom of love, grace and compassion. This is emphasised in comparing the Davidic messiah, that was seen to be a warlike Messiah that would bring about the Kingdom of God in a violent militaristic reign of a revolutionary that would come to free the people of Israel from their oppressors, to a King that comes as a servant to bring healing, salvation, and rule to the whole world and the enemies of this world will be dealt with, that is sin and death. And so we continue our journey to the cross where these victories are cemented in the selfless act of sacrifice, pain and and ultimately death to see the power of sin and death beaten once and for in the death and resurrection of Jesus as he takes his rightful place of the promised Messiah bringing life and true freedom to all the human race.

DIGGING Deeper!

Context:

The Pharisees and religious leaders have spent the last 3 chapters in Matthew circling around the Messiah trying to trap, confuse, and discredit him. Jesus in his wisdom and insight has seen what they were about and dealt with them in a number of ways. Through out Matthew Jesus dealt with the hypocritical and power hungry religious leaders in a number of different ways. 1. He has given counter questions to expose their hearts(Matthew 21:23–27), 2. He offered a 3rd way not being trapped in two problematic options (Matthew 22:15–22), 3. He bypassed the letter of the law to emphasise the heart or spirit of the law that was being challenged (Matthew 19:3–9), 4. He questioned their understanding of the law that they supposedly adhered to and challenged them by saying… Have you not read in the scriptures? (Matthew 21:42), or 5. He was silent and refused to be taken into their argument (Matthew 26:62–63).

Now they ask which one of the many hundreds of laws is the most important again in a ploy to trap and prove Jesus' guilt of blasphemy. Jesus in his usual way names not one but two; Love God with everything you are and love your neighbour as yourself. He states that these 2 laws covers all other laws and then pushes back questioning their understanding around the prophet's statements around The Messiah coming from the line of David but still also being Davids master. In frustration and confusion the religious leaders dared not ask any other questions but maintained their plans to discredit and ultimately get rid of Him - permanently.

1

PRAYER POINT

Pray that we have our hearts transformed into the likeness of Jesus.

2

ACTION POINT

What can we do to develop our love and relationship with God?

3

MISSION POINT

If it is God's kindness that leads us to repentance. How can we show that kindness to those who do not know god yet?

Start by checking in with how everyone is doing and ask a state of your soul question.

Today's Reading: Matthew 22: 34-46

READ the verses out loud. Try reading these verses in different translations.

THEN and THERE

Imagine what is was like for the paharisees to again be exposed andconfronmted by the wisdom and truth of Jesus words.

Read Digging Deeper.

DISCUSS

What does it really mean to love God with every part of our being?

QUESTIONS to Consider

1. What stands out to you as you read these verses?
2. What does it mean to Love God with heart, soul (life) and strength?
3. Who are our neighbours? Is there a parable Jesus uses to help us understand this?
4. What might loving our neighbours look like for us as a small group?
5. What does it mean for the …"whole law and the all the demands of the prophets" (NLT) to be based on these two commandments?
6. Which neighbour is God inviting you to love in a specific way?

PRAY for each other that we would see our neighbours in a different light and show us how we might love them in a significant way.

Blessed are the poor...

BIG Idea!

Blessed are the poor...

The new kingdom had its first disciples chosen and now comes the manifesto for what that kingdom was about. A new way to see the world and a new way to live according to the promised messiah and His upside down message of life for all. The audience was a crowd who lived under the oppression of the Romans and their own religious leaders. They had lived under control, greed and violence and would have been deemed societies most unimportant.

"Follow me, Jesus said to the first disciples; because in him the living God was doing a new thing, and this list of 'wonderful news' is part of his invitation, part of his summons, part of his way of saying that God is at work in a fresh way and that this is what it looks like. Jesus is beginning a new era for God's people and God's world. From here on, all the controls people thought they knew about are going to work the other way round. In our world, still, most people think that wonderful news consists of success, wealth, long life, victory in battle. Jesus is offering wonderful news for the humble, the poor, the mourners, the peacemakers."*Excerpt From Matthew for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-15 N. T. Wright*

Blessed is the one... other translators say; God blesses those...wonderful news for... or the good life belongs to ... those who are; poor in spirit, mourners, meek, those hungry and thirsty for justice, the merciful, pure in heart, the peacemakers, persecuted and falsely accused. The lowest of the low the broken, lonely and oppressed all have a place in the this new kingdom. God is not after the elite, the clever, the powerful or the ones whose lives are perfect but those who are in need and undone and seeking for better. In the same way that Jesus called ordinary men to be his first disciples, he calls us all as ordinary broken people to be the kingdom on this earth and therefore bring the kingdom of God here in our space. These are not guidelines to live by but an invitation to all who may have disqualified themselves from being a part of this great kingdom; a kingdom that will not pass away. Further instructions will come on how to live and what it means to be a true believer that would completely change the fabric of society if we all chose to live in His way. The invitation is there, but will we chose to follow the one who made the first call and explained what it means to be a true follower and disciple of Jesus the Messiah being transformed by his love and living counter to our culture to increase his kingdom

DIGGING Deeper!

Kingdom manifesto introduction:

Jesus has just called his disciples; a rag tag diverse group of men to be in the inner circle of his followers. He had chosen the most diverse group of ordinary men. Labourers, fishermen, zealots and even a despised tax collector. Not the collective sort of men you would likely choose for an upcoming launch of a world-wide political or religious movement. BUT - this was not your ordinary plan for an ordinary development with an ordinary mission. So having chosen his ordinary disciples Jesus now enlightens them and the world at large the framework of the new kingdom that he was calling forth. Known as the sermon on the mount he outlines for all that the kingdoms of that era would not be anything like the kingdom he was calling into being. Tom Wright refers to this announcement as like in an old movie where breaking the sound barrier meant the pilot had to use the controls in the opposite way once they had reached the magical 735 mph. Jesus here informs all who will listen that the way of the Kingdom of God is actually the opposite of what you would think. The poor, the broken, the grieving ,the meek, the mourners, the persecuted and the peacemakers were all the people of the kingdom. Not necessarily the powerful, elite, educated, mighty, successful or in human terms the perfect to start a new movement with. The upside kingdom is announced and in the following verses Jesus elaborates on what it means to be a disciple in the kingdom of God and the how the revolutionary sound of different has shaped the world ever since.

1

PRAYER POINT

Pray thanksgiving for all God has done for you and walking with you in the situation you find yourself in.

2

ACTION POINT

Consider how you might be a peacemaker in your world today.

3

MISSION POINT

Who in your world might need reminding that Gods love and kingdom is for them?

Start by checking in with how everyone is doing and ask a state of your soul question.

Today's Reading: Matthew 5: 11-12

READ the verses out loud.

THEN and THERE

Try to imagine what it would have felt like to be on the despised side of sovciety and Jesus telling you that you will gain the kingdom of God.

Read Digging Deeper.

DISCUSS

Which of these types of people do you mostly identify yourself in?

QUESTIONS to Consider

1. What sticks out to you about these verses?
2. Why would this passage have been so radical to the disciples and crowd Jesus spoke to?
3. How is this radical upside down view of success different in the way people see others as successful in today's society?
4. What do you think it means for the meek or humble to inherit the earth?
5. What is the difference between peacekeepers and peacemakers
6. What would you say to a crowd today if you were introducing the Kingdom of God as a radical new way of being?

PRAY for each other that the Holy Spirit will transform us to see the world through Kingdom of God lenses.