

Render Unto....

Introduction:

- Tax day, April 15th for most of us is just around the corner. While it is not a day that lives in infamy, as does December 7th or September 11th, it tends to be a day most people do not like to see, or think about.
- On the other hand we all like, use, and enjoy some or all of the governmental services that our tax dollars pay for.
- How much of our money the government should be allowed to tax in the form of taxes is open for debate. (And I for one think they are already taking too much... but I digress)
- Some people think that we should pay more in taxes. Others think that we should pay less in taxes. However, for the sake of this discussion the how much is relatively unimportant.
- One way of looking at taxes is that they are the price we pay for living in this country. And for all of the things government does to and for us.
- In a perfect world logic and common sense would be the controlling principal. Want lower taxes? Demand less of the government.
- Jesus once said that the poor would always be with us. I think that it is safe to say that taxes will always be with us as well.

P1 Matthew 22:15-22 (Jesus examines a coin)

- This whole conversation takes place shortly after Jesus has told the story of the wedding banquet, and ruffled the Pharisee's feathers by saying that ("*For many are invited, but few are chosen.*") So they are out to get Jesus. But instead of confronting him themselves they send their disciples.
- V-17 (*Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?*)
- V-13 (*But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me?)*
- V-19/20 (*Show me the coin used for paying the tax." They brought him a denarius, and he asked them, "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?"*)
- V-13 (*"Caesar's," they replied. Then he said to them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."*)
- Just about every one has heard that story and can recite that part - Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's. But for the most part we overlook or don't think about the second part of that. Render unto God what is God's

P2 Acts 2:42-47 (what happened after Pentecost)

- V-42 (*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*)
 - The important word in this verse is DEVOTED. Devoted means (Characterized by loyalty and devotion - the fact or state of being ardently dedicated and loyal) Not just a passing whim. Not just something to do because there is nothing on TV. This meant something to them and they made it a priority in their lives. Take another look at what these people, the first church were devoted to.
 - To the apostle's teaching – which were a mixture of what Jesus had taught them, and them teaching others about Jesus.
 - To breaking bread together. There is a reason that so many of our fellowship times, both within the church and outside of church are centered around food and eating. Sharing a meal brings us closer together.
 - To prayer. There is not much that needs to be said about this one. There are times when we need a prayer that has a sense of formality and specialness to it. But prayer can also be just an informal sort of chat, and a time to pause and listen
- V-43 Get ready for this one because it has something important as well as fundamental for us. (*Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.*)
 - They – meaning the outsiders, the ordinary people, the ones who are just sort of passing by. Going about their daily lives. Maybe they had heard about Jesus and his claim to be the Son of God. Maybe they had heard, or even experienced the way he went around the country teaching and healing. Maybe

they were there when he was crucified, when they found the tomb empty. Maybe they had been in the crowd when Jesus appeared to 500 people at once.

- Or they might well have been among the larger group that had only heard a little here and there and really didn't know much about this whole Jesus thing – perhaps they didn't even believe in God.
- It is certainly possible and we know it for a fact because we have people like that living among us and throughout the country and the world.
- But they **SAW** how the disciples were living and they **CERTAINLY** saw the great things they were doing in Christ's name.
- And some of those people were saying to themselves and others, "I'm not 100% sure I understand what all of this is about, what all of this means, but I have got to get me some of whatever they have. People liked what they saw, and knew that they wanted to be a part of what was happening.
- That is the kind of people that God is calling us to be. That is the kind of church that God is calling us to be. A church should be, and this one is a place where the word is read and preached as we worship God. But it is also to be a place where the hungry are fed, both with earthly food and spiritual food, and where people's lives are changed!
- Now that is rendering unto God what is God's. Living, loving, and serving with a joy in our hearts that shines like a beacon in the dark proclaiming God's presence in our lives, and doing it in a way that people say, "Man, I have got to get me some of that. I want to be a part of what they are doing.
- V-45 (***Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.***)
 - This is not a sermon about money. This is not a sermon telling you that you have to sell everything you have and give it to the poor.
 - It is a sermon about rendering unto God what is God's.
 - It is good from time to time to pause and reflect on the words of the doxology, the words that we sing as the offering is being brought forward, "Praise God, from whom ALL blessings flow."
- V-46 (***Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts,***)
 - Every day they met.... Church and being Christian's is not about coming to a church building once a week, it is about how we live our lives and what we do with God's gifts. Coming to church on Sunday is certainly part of that, but don't forget that there are six other days.
 - Remember, you may be the only bible some people ever see. You may well encounter someone who is lost in the darkness and desperately wants to find a way out – and God may well have placed you there at that time and place so that you could be the one to hold up the light of hope and point to Christ, proclaiming that he is the light, the way, and the life.
- V-47 (***praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.***)
 - There is where the rubber meets the road. In verse 47 we see the bottom line so eloquently revealed.
 - I have to confess that when I first read that passage this week I miss read it. I thought that the last word was SERVED. ***And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being SERVED.***
 - And as I reflect on it, perhaps it was more than a mistake, perhaps it was the Holy Spirit leading me, and leading us to the heart of the matter.
 - Certainly it is God, through Christ who does the saving, but we can help by making the introductions.
 - And we can best do that when we are serving. We can best lead others to Christ by devoting ourselves to serving and loving others as Christ served and loved us.

Conclusion (A call to action)

- The latest studies indicate that we work until mid may just to earn enough money to pay the taxes.
- We set aside one day to actually pay the taxes. It is ok to grumble and complain when you pay your taxes and render unto Caesar
- On the other hand we are given the opportunity to render unto God what is God's every day. In thought. In words. In deeds.
- So let us join with those early Christian's and devote ourselves to the apostle's teachings, to breaking bread together, and prayer.