

On Martin Luther King Jr. weekend in January 2018,
I came face to face with my mortality in a way I never expected or experienced before...

During the next six weeks, we will be
looking at our own EKG Extravagant Kind of Generosity
We will be celebrating and focusing on
matters of the heart in different ways every week.
Taking a heart exam, if you will.
And I hope that these weeks
will be a heartwarming time of celebrating what we love.

I think one of the things that makes
Matthew 22 harder is that part of it is so well known.
Many of us know the saying "Render unto Caesar"?
And I think it is its familiarity that keeps us
from seeing the deeper meaning in this passage.
The story starts with the Jewish church leaders
looking for some way to get rid of Jesus.
They know that they do not have the power to do anything to him themselves,
except flog him, which might have made Jesus more popular.

So, they finally tried to find ways to get him
to say something against the Romans so they could keep Jesus quiet.
But there is a small problem.
A lot of the ordinary people regarded Jesus as a prophet.
Then they come up with a plan that, if it works,
whatever Jesus does will upset one side or another.

There were two main groups arguing against each other.
One was the Herodians, a non-religious group of
Jewish people who wanted closer ties with Rome.
They supported Roman taxation and believed it
was only right that everyone pays taxes.

The other group was the Pharisees.
This religious group objected strenuously to
paying anything to Rome, claiming it was a heresy.
They based this claim on the fact that the tax
had to be paid in Roman coins which had an image of Caesar on them.
They refused to pay anything except the Temple Tax,
which was paid in Jewish shekels.

So the Pharisees conspired with the Herodians,
proving that politics does make for strange bedfellows.
They thought they had a question, that no matter what Jesus answered,

he would condemn himself.

The question was **17 Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?**

What an important question!
Wouldn't it be nice if Jesus had said,
"No way, keep that money!"
About the middle of every April, I reread this passage
just to make sure I didn't misunderstand it.

The conspirators thought there were only two possible answers.
Yes, it is right to pay taxes, or no, it is not right.
Either answer would condemn Jesus.
A foolproof plan.
If Jesus said, "No, don't pay taxes,"
he would have been arrested as a traitor to Caesar
and could be handed over for trial and execution.
Or if he said "Yes, pay taxes," he would have been seen
as loyal to Caesar and would have lost all his popular support.
Stuck between a rock and a hard place. Ever been there?

So, they sent off their team to set up Jesus.
Their first action was to try and flatter Jesus
and lull him into a false sense of security.
Then they asked their gotcha question.

18 But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites?" 19 Show me the coin used for the tax." And they brought him a denarius.

This silver coin was a Roman denarius,
worth about a day's wage.

**On it was the picture of the emperor and
the inscription: Tiberius Caesar,**

August son of the divine Augustus, high priest.
So right away, this coin violated two Jewish commandments:
do not have any other gods before me,
and do not worship graven images or idols.
The very existence of this coin was blasphemous to God-fearing Jews.

But you know what shocked me here?
When Jesus asks for one of these coins,
Guess where it comes from?
From the pocket of a Pharisee,
a holy leader standing in the temple,

the most holy place in the Holy Land! Holy cow!
Jesus says, "Can anyone show me
one of these idolatrous, blasphemous,
God-mocking coins?"
And a Pharisee says, "Sure, got one right here."
This showed the hypocrisy of objecting to Roman coins
when they were in common usage.
The Pharisees deserve to be called hypocrites.
He then asked whose image and inscription was on it.

They answered, "Caesar's."
This was a good question, because at that time,
any item with a stamp or inscription on it belonged to that person.
Therefore, the coin belonged to Caesar.
So, if it belongs to Caesar, then give it to him.
But there was another part to the answer.
But also give to God what is marked for God.
It seems the perfect and simple answer
and it certainly ended the Pharisees' and Herodians' plans.
Jesus' main point in this passage is
his answer to their trick question.

Then he said to them, "Give therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's."

Jesus takes their small-minded perspective and
explodes it to reveal the workings of God in our lives.
And what is his message to us as we consider our EKG
and at the center our heart of Giving?

One message is that when we have a
structure, such as government, to administer
and run the laws of the land, then it is right
that we pay for that support and protection.

Give to Caesar what is Caesar's.

Other translations say, "Render to Caesar,"
which means to "give back."
What do we have that belongs to our government?
Well, certainly, a portion of our money.
If you enjoy Caesar's benefits, you should pay Caesar's taxes.

Over the last weeks, I saw those tax dollars at work...???
I kind of like having paved roads to drive on,
my neighborhood protected by the police and fire department,
and the security of knowing that my money in the bank
will be there when I want to get it.

Jesus says, plain and simple, give to Caesar what is Caesar's.

But Jesus finishes his answer with a much more involved message to our hearts:

we **"Give to God what is God's."**

Have you ever asked what I am supposed to do for or give to my God?

That is what we are going to ask about different parts of our life over the next 6 weeks.

And that answer causes me to ask the question

What has the stamp or mark of God on it?

The answer is we do.

We were made in the image of God and bear God's mark.

We have to give ourselves to God.

Here's another way to think about it.

In the beginning, in Genesis 1:27,

God said, "Let us make humans in our image, in our likeness."

How do we know what belongs to Caesar?

They bear his image.

How do we know what belongs to God?

They bear God's image!

We are coined in God's image,
bearing God's image in this world.

Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's.

Give unto God what is God's.

We bear God's image; so we give ourselves back to God!

Everything we have and everything we are belongs to God.

We are merely managers of the gifts of our lives.

And we show that God is
the true ruler of our life by an
extravagant kind of generosity
given with gratitude in all parts of our life.

Winston Churchill once said,

**"You make a living by what you get...
you make a life by what you give."**

And while we get little choice on paying taxes,
we do have a totally free choice
in what and whether we give to God.

Our government may have many tax rates,
15%, 20%, 35%, varying year by year.

God only has one rate. 100%!

We have to give ourselves totally 100%

to God all day, and serve God every day.
But there is one major difference in
what we pay to the government and what we give to God.
If we cannot find the money to pay our taxes or
forget, then we face a punishment.
If we forget to give God his due,
God doesn't send in agents; God forgives us the debt,
God allows us to start again.

And sometimes, honestly, I think that grace
allows us to get away with too much.
And lets us not give God what God has earned.
But in our heart of hearts, don't we know
we want to give God something even though
we know it doesn't even begin to repay
what has been done for us?
Sort of like when we eat out...
What do we do to show our appreciation?
We tip our servers...hopefully generously
(Great Clips)

And I want you to hear this about
how we serve and give from the heart.
Jesus isn't asking those who do so much to simply do more.
Or those who are struggling to balance life
or take care of aging parents or the loss of them,
or starting a new job, or health issues or...
Right? Boundaries are important,
and sometimes a no is a yes for our balanced life.

But in every situation our EKG should still include
serving God in some way for that season.
And at different times there are areas in our life
where we can serve or give more.
The most important thing is that whatever
we give God comes from our heart
And not an obligation or guilt or some self-driven need to satisfy.

Jesus is asking the question to them and us
: from whom do we receive the blessings of our life,
and to whom do we owe thanksgiving? God or Caesar?
I think that Jesus gave us the answer. Where?
When he told us that the most important
commandment was to love God

with all our hearts, all our souls,
all our minds and all our strength.
The second commandment was to love one another.
But the other part is to love ourselves too.

But there is no way we can live a good EKG
if our life is not based on having the love of God
at the heart of who we are and in everything we do.
With the love of God as the center of our beings,
then things in this world become less important
and temporary as we learn that God's love is forever.

The question Jesus was asked could have been,
"Whose side are you on? Israel or Rome?"
Jesus' reply was not Israel; it was not Rome.
His answer was "on God's side"
It could also have been "Who do you love?"
How would you answer that?
And how do you show that love?

Paul says whoever sows generously will reap generously.

Whatever we give, we will be that much more
richly blessed in return through
God's goodness and love for us.
Back at Great Clips after my haircut...
Don't look at whatever you give to God
as just another obligation.
See it as a chance to express gratitude to God,
a chance to serve God for all that God has given you,
a chance to have an extravagant kind of generosity
and be a sower for God's harvest in all areas of our life.

Pastor Adrian Rogers said

Give God what's right , not what's left

The inscription on the Roman coin
pledged allegiance to the emperor.
But you know what is actually on our money?
Our money in America says
In God we trust! Right? Do we?
As Christians, may we bear that inscription
and give to God in such a way in every way
that it reflects that we are coined in God's Image.
And what would it look like if we were
To serve God in whatever ways God calls us?
How is your heart's EKG?