

Sermon: Mark 12:13-17, 28-34. “Love God...love your neighbour”

Rev. Bruce Stanley

Sermon text and audio available for download at www.waitara.anglican.asn.au

III – There are some strange taxes in our world. In England in 1696, William Pitt imposed a tax on windows. If your house had 10 windows, you paid a tax of 4 shillings. A 20 window house cost 8 shillings. In Russia, Peter the Great put a special tax on anyone wearing a beard. In Australia we’ve had a lot of talk over the introduction of the GST, the recent Mining Tax and the Carbon Tax.

• Questioning Jesus

• The question – paying taxes to Caesar:

In Jesus’ day, the big talking point was “the Roman tax”. Caesar Augustus put Judea under Roman rule and imposed a tax on all the people living there. Some supported the payment of the tax, but others were totally against it.

The Herodians were a Jewish political group who supported the government. And the Pharisees were a Jewish religious group against the government. And they came together to trap Jesus with a question about taxes. First of all, they flatter him saying: “Jesus, you’re a man of integrity, you don’t care what people think – you just speak the truth, so tell us,

- “Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?”

It’s a trap. If Jesus says: “**No, don’t pay the tax**”, the Herodians will have him arrested by the government for treason – which means he will be killed. If he says: “**Yes, you should pay the tax**”, the Pharisees will call him a traitor and call for him to be killed by all the religious groups. So whatever answer he gives, Jesus could be arrested and killed!

• The Answer

But Jesus knows what they’re up to. He knows they’re trying to trick him. So he takes a coin and says: “Whose portrait is on this coin? Whose image is on this? Whose imprint?”

“Caesar’s” they say. “Then give it to Caesar.” Jesus says. They’re living in a Roman community, living under a Roman government, being paid with Roman coins, so Jesus says: it’s Caesar’s picture on the coin, Caesar’s portrait, Caesar’s image – then it’s his coin!

- “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s.” (But then he adds) “and to God what is God’s”

If the coin belongs to Caesar because it has his image on it, then give it to Caesar. BUT, whatever has **God’s** image on it belongs to God. Now, what in this world has the image of God on it?

- *Genesis 1:27 – “So God created man in his image. In the image of God he created them.”*

You and I are made in the image of God. **People** are created in the image of God. If the Roman coin belongs to Caesar because it bears his image, then WE belong to GOD, because we bear **his** image.

So Jesus says to the Pharisees and the Herodians: “The coin belongs to Caesar. But your life belongs to God! Have you given to God what is his?! Have you given him your life?”

And that’s the challenge Jesus lays out for them. But what does it mean to give our life to God?

- **Seeking Jesus**

Well, in our second passage today, another man comes to Jesus. This man is genuine. This man is seeking answers. He's not challenging Jesus or his authority, or trying to trap him. He wants answers to life. He's a teacher of the law. He knows God's laws really well. And what he wants to really know is

- *"Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"*

III – Here are some important laws:

In Alabama, it's illegal to wear a fake moustache that makes people laugh in church.

In Turkey in the 16th century, anyone caught drinking coffee was put to death.

And in Switzerland, it's against the law to slam your car door!

Jesus says, verse 29:

- *"The most important one is this: hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second commandment is like it. Love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these."*

And the man is happy with that answer. He knows that loving God and loving each other is more important than any sacrifices. To enter the kingdom of God means to enter a kingdom of love. To love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength – in other words, with every part of your life. And to love others.

I think we often set challenges for ourselves as Christians like reading the Bible, praying, going to church, giving generously, being a faithful husband or wife...but really, love is the challenge. Every commandment comes back to love. That's the most important commandment because every other commandment depends on love. God's kingdom is a kingdom of love.

- **Looking outside**

So if we do love God, and we do love others, then how do we show that love? Today I want us to think as a church. In these chapters of Mark, we're seeing how Jesus responded to people coming to him. How do WE respond to people? 2 Corinthians 5:2-0 says that we are Christ's ambassadors. So God makes his appeal to people through us. So how do we respond to people who come to us seeking Jesus, like that second man? How do we respond?

So I want to finish today with some practical steps:

- **Understanding our society...**

First of all, do we understand the people in our society? Let me tell you the results of some recent social research on Australians (source: McCrindle research)...

- Last year, 71% of people in Australian attended some sort of special church service. Only 62% of Australians attended a sporting event last year. More Aussies went to a church service last year than a sporting event!
- 40% of Australians attended a normal regular church service last year. Only 38% of Australians went to a library, and only 35% went to the zoo last year!

Overall, people ARE coming to church. Because people ARE seeking God. People ARE enquiring about God. But often, they aren't staying. So how do we respond to that?

Let me suggest 3 things, which are supported by recent social research:

Recommendation over reputation

1. First of all – **Recommendations**. Our society today puts a lot of value in recommendations. What hotel do you recommend? What car should I buy? What school should I send my kids to? These days, **recommendation** is more important to people than **reputation**. So... Recommend Jesus to people.

Recommend your church. Recommend the activities and events at you church. Recommend the Bible.
Recommend your church family. And recommend your faith!

Effective communication, not ritual

2. Second, we need to be **effective** in our communication. Let me just show you some recent time studies of teenagers – just one part of our society: On average, this is the way Australian teenagers spend each day:

- Internet: 124 minutes a day
- TV: 98 minutes a day
- Phone: 60 minutes a day
- Video games: 43 minutes a day
- Texting: 34 minutes a day
- DVDs: 33 minutes a day
- Music: 22 minutes a day
- Game consoles: 11 minutes a day

Now, you might think “That’s terrible! Kids are spending too much time on the internet and the phone!” But what we need to do as a church, as Christians, is say: “If this *is* the way kids spend their time, then how do we reach this generation with the gospel? How do we effectively communicate with them? We need to think about the way we worship, the way we preach and teach, the way we design our buildings, the events we run. We need to think about ALL of these things for every generation of our society. So when this generation comes seeking Jesus, we can be effective in the way we communicate the gospel.

Authenticity over authority

3. Finally, and I think most importantly, **authenticity**. When people join a group today, they want to be around authentic people. People don’t want to be part of something that is fake. Like a church that says they care, but doesn’t DO anything for the community. Or Christians who talk about being loving, but are always judgemental. In the past, people often came to church because they were told to. And parents told their kids to go to church. Not any more. The authority of church does not appeal to most people in our society today. But authentic faith does appeal to people. Think about buying a car. People don’t want a salesman that uses **authority** to TELL them what car to buy. They want to talk to someone who is genuine, believable, trustworthy and authentic. If your faith is authentic, you will be much more effective as you share the gospel.

• Conclusion:

Let me conclude. Like that second man who came to Jesus, people in our society are seeking Jesus. They are looking for answers. More people are attending churches than sporting events in Australia. **If** we love God and **if** we love the people of this world, then don’t we want to be as effective as we can be in communicating the gospel? How do we help people engage with God and find answers to their questions? How do we even help them to feel comfortable just walking into our church? You know that feeling – when you were at school, and you really wanted to ask the teacher a question, but you were too afraid? People want to know more about Jesus.

The point Jesus makes in this chapter is “give to God what is God’s”. In other words, our whole life. Love him with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. And love others. Every person is important to God because every person is made in the image of God. If that’s true, if every person is important, then our desire is to be effective in sharing the gospel with our society. So let’s consider those three things today – maybe you can try these this week:

1. **Recommend** your faith, your church, your God, to people.
2. Find **effective** ways to communicate.
3. And most of all, be **authentic** in your faith.

Let’s pray.