

# Sunday School Prize Giving Service

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Date: 28 June 2015

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[ 0 : 00 ] So I'd like to talk to you about tax this morning. Who ever said church was boring? I want to talk about tax. And tax, for those of you who don't know, is a compulsory contribution you have to make to the state for different things that you earn, services that you use, and purchases that you make.

You will look about as excited as this as I am. So you pay income tax, you pay inheritance tax, you pay road tax, which they certainly don't use to solve the pothole problem in Edinburgh.

You pay capital gains tax, you pay value added tax, and all sorts of other kinds of tax. Benjamin Franklin said this, certainty in this world nothing is certain but death and taxes.

Good news. So just to give you an example of tax. Jack did some work for me. And I didn't have any money, so I'm going to pay him in kinder bars.

Jack worked really hard, he did really well, so I'm going to pay him ten kinder bars. Are you ready, Jack? Hold out your hands. Check I don't shortchange you, I am English. One, two, three, four, eight, ten.

[ 1 : 31 ] Agreed? Good lads. Problem is, Jack, this is a church, so this isn't like a brown envelope under the table, say no more, say no more kind of deal.

You're going to have to pay some tax. Here's your tax bill, it'll come up on the screen, and you must pay it immediately. Okay, so there's a parent tax. 20%, that's two bars, and they need to go to your mum.

Parent tax. On you go. What else do you have to pay, Jack? Brother tax. Ten percent.

One bar. And a bargain at the price. What else? A cleaning tax. Unfortunately, Irene's gone out, so I'll take that for her.

What else? A youth pastor tax. Ten percent. You need to pay Peter. He works very, very hard, and his tax is well earned.

[ 2 : 31 ] And then there's a tech tax. You see, they're serving you by putting your tax bill on the screen, so you better go and pay them. Let's see what else you've got.

That's actually it, Jack. Ten kinder bars, your total tax bill, 60%. How did you like paying tax? You didn't, but you'll need to get used to it.

Thank you very much. No, you don't need to pay me tax. I'm all right. It's amazing, isn't it, that tax is kind of ubiquitous. Everyone pays it.

And Romans 13 says, by obeying civil authorities, you're worshipping God. So next time you pay something to the government, think I'm actually worshipping the Lord by paying tax.

Story I want us to look at this morning is about paying tax. Problem is, I'm not very good at reading, so any words that's in blue you're going to have to help me with and all read it out together.

[ 3 : 33 ] Okay, you all look very educated, if not slightly worried. Okay, here's the story. It's from Mark chapter 12. It starts like this. Later they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to to him in his words.

They came to him and said, we know that you are a man of integrity. I was better at reading than I thought. You aren't swayed by others because you know attention to who they are, but you the way of God in accordance with the truth.

Is it right to the imperial tax to Caesar or not? Should we or shouldn't we? But knew their hypocrisy, why are you trying to me?

He asked, bring me a denarius and let me look at it. They bought the coin and he asked them, whose is this and whose inscription Caesar's they denarius Then Jesus said to them, back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to what is and they were at him.

It's a very little story, isn't it? And we're going to try and understand it just very briefly together. The first thing we're going to have to do to understand this story is understand who the two groups of people are.

[ 4 : 59 ] We need to know who are the Pharisees and who are the Herodians. So let me give you a little bit of history. If tax was an exciting, history will certainly do it for you.

Here we are. Now, these two groups of people usually hate each other. The Pharisees are a group of religious extremists. They hate the Romans who were the occupying force in Israel at this time. They are ultra-religious. The Pharisees hate Romans' religious extremists. Here are the Herodians. The Herodians love the Romans.

They're very political and they're collaborators. They work with the Romans. Do you see how normally these two groups of people would not get along at all?

They're actually opposites to each other. The Pharisees look down on the Herodians as being compromises and the Herodians look down on the Pharisees for being religious neat-necks.

[ 6 : 07 ] But here in our story, we find them working together. And the reason they're working together is because they both are threatened and they hate Jesus.

In fact, this collaboration, this coalition has been going on since chapter 3, verse 6, when Jesus heals a man with a withered hand and at the end of that story it says, and the Pharisees and the Herodians went out together to plot how they might kill Jesus.

It's a story about tax asked by these two groups of people and this is how it comes about. The Herodians and the Pharisees come to Jesus to catch him in his words.

They want to trap him. They want to catch him out. This is part of their plot to try and shut him up forever. And so verse 14, they come with a lot of flattery.

Teacher, we know that you're a man of integrity. Your insides are the same as your outsides. You're a good guy. You aren't swayed by others because you pay no attention to who they are.

Single-minded and focused on teaching the way of God in accordance with the truth.

[ 7 : 21 ] It's very flattering. Slithery tongues baiting the trap and here's the trap and it is a killer question.

Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not? Should we pay or shouldn't we? The reason that is such a brilliant question is because if Jesus says yes, then the Pharisees will condemn him for being a collaborator, for being willing to go along with what the Romans say.

And if he says no, the Herodians will have him as a rebel, as somebody who's usurping what Caesar says. If he says yes, he's condemned.

If he says no, he's condemned. Jesus, should we pay tax or not? Brilliant question. Jesus is in a catch-22 situation.

He is literally between a rock and a hard place. He's condemned if he does and he's condemned if he doesn't. What's he going to do? How's he going to get out of this trap?

[ 8 : 40 ] Well, he says, bring me a denarius. Here's to warm up. That's a two-pence piece. Whose picture is on it? Liz. Liz is on it.

But that's not, they don't, Jesus doesn't say bring me a two-pence. He says, bring me a denarius, which was a coin that was paid for one day's labor for a normal person.

Whose image is on this? Brilliant, Aaron. Unbelievable. Tiberius Caesar.

And Jesus says, whose image is this and whose inscription? They say Caesar. And then Jesus says, give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.

And then it comments, and they were amazed at him. They've gone from trying to trap him in his words to being amazed at him all by using a coin and asking one question, whose image is this?

[ 9 : 48 ] Why is that so brilliant? What is really going on here? Well, let me walk you through the logic. The reason that you pay taxes to Caesar is because your coin has Caesar's face on it, Caesar's image on it, and Caesar's inscription.

So what bears Caesar's image and bears Caesar's inscription, you're to give back to Caesar. But he's making a very profound point. Because in the mind of these people, there's this word image and this word inscription.

In Genesis 1.26, God at the very creation of the world says, let us make man in our image. That humankind is to bear the image of God.

humankind is indwelt with value, dignity, and worth as image bearers of the living God. And then in Jeremiah 31.33, God says this, I will put my law in their minds and inscribe it on their hearts.

The coin bears Caesar's image and Caesar's inscription. I, you, we, bear God's image and God's inscription.

[ 11 : 23 ] And so Jesus says, give the coin to Caesar because it's Caesar's. But the question, the answer behind the answer, well before you get to that, understand that everything you are and everything you have belong to God and it's important that you give yourself to him.

That's why they were amazed at him. That's why they marveled at him because he took their trap and he flipped reverse to them. They were left undone as people who knew that they weren't giving all of their lives to God as those who bear his image and his inscription.

And so Jesus would say exactly the same thing to each of us this morning. Give to Caesar what is Caesar's or give to Liz what is Liz's but give to God what is God's.

And this presents a massive problem for each and every one of us because we're all guilty of tax evasion. We've all failed to give to God what is rightfully his.

Each individual one of us has failed to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and none of us love our neighbor as ourselves.

[ 12 : 41 ] And the problem is for this tax evasion before a holy God the penalty is not a fine. It's not a prison sentence. It's death.

Romans 6.23 will say that the wages of sin, the penalty for sin is death. And we're all undone. We're all guilty.

We're all fraudsters and tax evaders because we haven't given to God what is God's. So a story about tax actually becomes a very condemning story about how we failed before God.

But there is good news that the very center of Mark's gospel is this verse. For even the Son of Man that's a phrase that Jesus uses to refer to himself.

For even the Jesus did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom to pay the penalty for many, for us.

[ 13 : 56 ] We were tax evaders who failed to give to God everything that was his. Jesus came and gave all of himself all of the time to God. He paid it in full.

And yet he goes to a cross and dies a death. And why? That the only one who gave to God what was truly God's fully died on the cross so that we who have failed to give to God what is rightfully God's could go free.

Could have a clean bill of health from HMRC in the heavenly places. This is good news. Give to Caesar what is Caesar's but give to God what is God's and we failed but Jesus won for us.

And therefore we get a great credit score by trusting in him. How do we take hold of this bailout?

By trusting in Jesus and saying you did it for me. I accrued a load of debt that I couldn't pay and yet you came and died in my place so that your perfect credit history could be replaced by my fallen failing pitiful credit history.

[ 15 : 20 ] so you died for me so I can go free. Start Romans 6.23 for the penalty of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus.

Why? Because Jesus didn't come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. I wonder if you're a Christian here today in response to this great news are you giving to God what is God's?

Are you giving your all to him trusting him with everything and saying if Christ Jesus did this for me then nothing I can do is too much for me to do for him.

But perhaps you're not a Christian here today and this is the first time you've even heard that you owe a debt that you cannot pay. Well the only answer is to trust Jesus who pays it for you and say Jesus I'm sorry that I haven't loved the Lord my God with all my heart soul mind and strength and I haven't loved my neighbour as myself thank you that you came and you died my death please will you forgive me that I might go free that you might pay my ransom for me why don't I pray Father God we can come and we confess that we owe a debt that we cannot pay we've sinned in ways that we ourselves cannot atone for but Lord we thank you so much that you loved us that you sent your son that he came that he died in our place for our sins that he gave to you what was rightfully yours which was all of himself and so

Lord would we trust him would we lean our whole life upon him and Father now those who are free free of sin would we give to you our lives our dreams our hopes our possessions our all because you Lord are worthy so come and take your rightful place in our lives we pray Amen