

Coins

Good evening!

I'm Pastor Doug Browne. Thank you for joining me this evening.

Remember, "In life and in death we belong to God."

We trust in God, and God is worthy of our trust. Even when we are practicing social distancing, and trying not to make each other sick.

During this time when we're not meeting in person, I'm going to post videos here, praying with you and walking through the Bible stories in the Gospel of Mark, continuing from where we left off. I'm going to do this Sunday morning, Wednesday evening, and Friday evening each week until we're back together face to face.

My hope is that this will help us remember that we are God's people, no matter what's happening around us, and that God loves us.

Today, let's continue from where we left off Sunday, with the story of Taxes to Caesar. We're in Mark chapter 12, verses 13-17, if you'd like to read along at home.

"Then they [meaning the Chief Priests of the Temple] sent to him some Pharisees and some Herodians to trap him in what he said. And they came and said to him, 'Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality, but teach the way of God in accordance with truth. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?' But knowing their

hypocrisy, he said to them, 'Why are you putting me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me see it.' And they brought one. Then he said to them, 'Whose head is this, and whose title?' They answered, 'The emperor's.' Jesus said to them, 'Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.' And they were utterly amazed at him."

This is the Word of God, for the People of God.

Thanks Be to God.

The Chief Priests are trying to get rid of Jesus, to get him to say something that will step over the line and make the Romans kill him. Their question is a trap.

If Jesus were to say that a good Jew could pay Roman taxes, then he would have publicly sided with the Roman occupying forces and their puppet king, Herod. Most of Jesus' supporters would walk away.

If Jesus were to say that it was not ok, then that's treason against Rome. The Roman occupiers would have to arrest him and execute him.

If Jesus were to say that he doesn't know, then what kind of spiritual leader is he?

Jesus recognizes the trap for what it is. He knows that this not a serious question. He calls for someone to bring him a Roman coin, the kind used to pay Roman taxes.

When they do, he asks the question that brings things back to the cornerstone. Back to God at the center.

“Whose is this image, and this inscription?” Every Jew there would remember Genesis, where human beings were made in the image of God.

The answer to Jesus’ question is obvious. “Caesar’s.”

Jesus says, “Give to Caesar, then, the things that are Caesar’s, and give to God the things that are God’s.”

The word that’s translated, “give,” here, means specifically to give something that is due. Not give a gift, not skimp on what is due, but to give a full rendering of what is due, like paying exactly the taxes you owe, and not a penny more, not a penny less.

We have things in our lives that are due to the government, and to society in general around us, and we have things that are due to God.

We pay taxes. We pay taxes to the United States, and to the state, and to various municipalities. This is something we owe, and that we should pay. I don’t know anyone who likes paying taxes, but I believe that at least some of what we get for those taxes is useful and beneficial to all of us.

We obey the law. Not because we’re afraid of being punished, but because it’s the right thing to do.

We give to Caesar what is Caesar's, but we also give to God what is made in the image of God.

What is made in the image of God?

We are. Every one of us, male and female, young and old, of every race and ethnicity.

Today, we are practicing physical distancing, limiting how much we're out and about in large groups. That's why you're viewing this online, instead of meeting together face to face. Right now, this is a good thing. It helps flatten that curve, to keep the number of sick people limited to the capacity of the medical system to handle them.

This has nothing to do with a lack of trust in God. I trust in God, and I wear a seatbelt when I drive. I trust in God, and I use oven mitts with hot dishes. And I have smoke detectors in my house. And I will follow the best guidelines to do what is best not just for me, but for you, and for all the people out there. An astronomer named Galileo said that, "I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who has endowed us with sense, reason, and intellect has intended us to forgo their use."

Right now, what we are willing to do to avoid making people sick shows how much we love them.

Right now, what we are willing to give up for other people shows how much we love them.

When we truly love other people, even the other people whom we don't know, then we are giving to God what is due to God.

But there's one more piece of being made in the image of God. Being made in the image of God means that we were made to be in relationships. Relationship with God, and relationships with other people. We were not made to let physical distancing stop us.

So please, call your friends on the telephone. Email them. Facebook them. Text them. Facetime or Zoom with them. The method isn't important. Stay in touch with your friends and your family. Including your church family. Now is a time when your cousin in another state is the same distance away as your friend down the street. One phone call.

Don't choose! Call them both!

And now, People of God, go forth into God's world as someone made in the image of God. Maintain your relationships. Call people. Email them. Text them. However you can keep in touch and express love for the people in your life, even at a distance, do it.

And may the grace of God the Father, the love of Jesus Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit rest upon you and rest in you, now and forever.
Amen.