

# A Stewardship Sermon Before I Say Farewell

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October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2020

Scriptures: I Thessalonians 1:1-10; Matthew 22:15-33

When I was reading through the possible texts for this morning, reading them through last Sunday evening, I first read our text for 1 Thessalonians. After reading it I said to myself, “Self – This is simply an excellent text to use to say goodbye to your congregation!” After all, look at how Paul so affectionately addresses the Church at Thessalonica:

**<sup>1Th 1:2</sup> We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. <sup>1Th 1:3</sup> We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>1Th 1:4</sup> For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, <sup>1Th 1:5</sup> because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake.**

Wow! I don't know if things jump out at you like they sometimes do me, but here it could be:

**Your work produced by FAITH  
Your labor prompted by LOVE  
Your endurance inspired by HOPE**

Paul says then also – **You know how we lived among you for your sake.** The outline of a well-gounded goodbye, just happens to be in the text. Perhaps a fitting scriptural way of saying thank you and that I will always love you! “Thank you and I will always love you!”

But then next I read the gospel lesson for this morning and it turns out to be a text on money. It's a well-known scripture, perhaps not one normally one might chose to preach a stewardship sermon but at that point my mind said, “Mind” What better way to say goodbye than to offer a stewardship message because as you all know and remember, with Covid-19 we had to amend our Stewardship Campaign this year from years past. No banquet, no outside speaker, no special stewardship message. What better way to say I love you than to try to do what possibly might be done to put the Church financially on the best possible footing before saying farewell? Are you all with me?

Now in Matthew's Gospel, a week or so ago Jesus has totally put the Pharisees on notice! They took it as Jesus intended and they were on red alert! They understood, the text tells us this, that the 3 parables Jesus had just told directly applied to them they made an absolute decision:

**Mt 21:45 When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them. Mt 21:46 They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.**

And also this at the beginning of this morning's text in chapter 22t:

**Mt 22:15 Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap Him in His words.**

Here's how Matthew's Gospel seems to be laid out for the rest of Chapter 22. Jesus has not only embarrassed the Pharisees but they realized in his previous couple of parables he has openly told them they were going to be judged and punished severely in the final judgement and they knew, the text says, He was talking about them and so they decide they had to eliminate Him. They wanted Him dead!

So, in this morning's text the first of at least 3 specific attempts are made, one right after another, to trap Jesus in order to publicly gain the upper hand so that they might feel justified to condemn Him. They hate Jesus and they want Him gone - so the first of those traps comes with two groups who normally would not associate with each other. In other contexts they actually stand opposed to one another, going together here to trap Jesus. Think about it, the Herodians were Herod's men! Herod was the puppet of the Romans who were hated by the Pharisees! Here we see them working together...

The issue appears to be a political question and it was. Do you support Caesar or do you not. Yes or no Jesus? It was intentionally phrase to elicit an either/or answer! (Sample question here) The Herodians are looking for a yes answer or they will be able to report back treason to Pilate. The Pharisees know that the people hate the Romans and want the answer to be no. It's one of those questions that no matter how much fluff they tried to put forward, Jesus sees right through them! Jesus calls them out but he also shows that they are no match for the Son of God!

Now here are a couple of details you need to know about this money. The coin was the coin minted by Caesar. It had his image on it. It's wasn't a Jewish coin, as a matter of fact it was technically against Jewish law to even have one of these coins in the Temple area let alone be willing to use it. It had a graven image on it with one who claimed to be the Son of God and that was a breaking of the first and second commandments.

Furthermore this tax was not a large some of money, rather it was relatively small. The issue wasn't the amount but rather who had the authority to claim Lordship!

The Coin used for the poll tax was probably the denarius, one day's wage and it was used to support Rome's armies.

What does Jesus say? By referring to the image on the coin Jesus acknowledges that the coin belongs to Caesar and thus the People should not give it as they had asked, but rather render it back to Caesar as his due, but what about the next phrase? Render unto God the things that are God's! What is it that Jesus was referring to here? Well it's easily answered. Whose image is on the human being? Caesars was on the coin, whose image is on humankind?

It's you and me right? We bear the image of God as human beings. As such we are to give back to God all that He has created and all that bears His image. It's that plain and simple.

This morning I decided I'm not going to ask you to give more money. Instead I wanted to thank you as your pastor for what you have already given and how that giving has shown that you understand what an image bearer is all about. You have made sure that the work of Jesus Christ has always been able to have a clear voice that goes out from this corner to our community and our world. You have given regularly and above average than many others.

I have always been proud of our congregation that all of our bills were paid and that we carried no debt. Not the case for many churches in our community. You have always paid me fairly and I have never gone without or ever felt unfairly treated or underpaid. I am by far the richest person in this congregation. I have everything that I need, most of the things I have wanted, and many of the things that are just frivolous and nice.

And what about you all? Has your giving caused you to suffer? Have you gone without? Some of you give way more than others but let's face it, you are as rich as I am, right? I speak this morning and I testify to this truth to simply to encourage you to know that you cannot ever out give God! It can't be done. So pay your taxes. Buy a car or a truck. Have a home to live in. Work hard and understand whose image has been stamped on you. May it be so... amen.