



## LENT BIBLE STUDY - 2022 ENTERING THE PASSION OF JESUS

#3

### TEACHINGS – RISKING CHALLENGE

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#### INTRODUCTION

Anytime we teach, there is always the risk that someone may misunderstand. Jesus takes many risks by teaching in the Temple, as he has as his audience, not just those who want to learn, but also those who wish to trap him – the Herodians and Pharisees. It is thus good to note that, whenever a ‘tricky’ question is asked, Jesus first figures out what lies behind a question. He also knows the Scriptures very well. He discerns those who are genuine and responds with respect and empathy.

#### TAXATION

[Matthew 22: 15-22, Mark 12: 13-17, Luke 20: 20-26](#)

Taxation in Jesus’ day was complex – some would provide public services; some went to Rome. In Matthew this incident is described as a trap as he makes clear that both the Pharisees and Herodians aren’t really bothered about taxes – just making Jesus look bad. They begin by flattering Jesus – showing their hypocrisy. The tax in question is probably the ‘head tax’ based on Roman census information (see Luke 2:1-5). It is a clever ruse, because if Jesus says ‘yes’, he would alienate those who resist the Roman occupation, or ‘no’, he would be in trouble with Rome. He faces a dilemma – it is a loaded question, and Jesus is aware of their malice.

In Mark (12:15) Jesus asks why they are putting him to the test or, alternatively, why they are trying to tempt him. He calls for a denarius – a big silver coin with an image of Caesar on one side with the probable words: *Caesar Augustus Tiberius, son of the Divine*

*Augustus*. On the other side was a picture of a seated woman, probably Tiberius’ wife, Julia, with the words meaning ‘high priest’.

In Matthew, Jesus asks for the coin that is ‘used for tax’ – which begs the question why the Pharisees are carrying coinage with the emperor’s image on it, and proclaiming the emperor’s divinity.

Jesus, doesn’t actually answer their question, when he says to render to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and what belongs to God, but is posing a question of his own: What do they think belongs to Caesar and what belongs to God?

The question of paying taxes is one that still resonates today – particularly those living under occupied and unjust regimes. How far does one go along with the emperor – when must one resist?

What should our response be? Check what the pounds are paying for? Should we think more about what we do with our money and what others do with our money? If we are to be our brother’s keeper, how do we show our care?

#### GREATEST COMMANDMENT

[Mark 12: 28-34, Matthew 22:34-40](#)

Jewish tradition recognises some 613 commandments in the Scriptures of Israel. Among these, there are 365 negative “you shall not” commandments, and 248 positive “you shall” commandments. There are laws about sacrifices, treatment of strangers, how to plant fields, about the military, monarchy and so forth. Often laws were added if the context changed – eg. between rural and urban environments. As society changes, so the laws change.

In the Bible we see various attempts to sort out which were the most important commandments – see Micah 6:8 or Isaiah 56:1. When this is done it is not saying all the other laws are irrelevant, but which ones provide the guiding principles for all the others in how they are understood.

The scribe genuinely wants to know what Jesus thinks. Jesus answers, citing Deuteronomy 6:4-5, and then adds “*with all your mind.*” Then he cites Leviticus 19:18. The scribe is impressed.

Jesus, though, does not expect us to follow these two commandments only – for many of the other commandments show how we love God and neighbour. A good question for us is:

What do we mean by loving God and loving neighbour?

In it all we realise that whatever love we have for God, God’s love for us is even stronger. This love enables us, as Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:39), to be utterly honest with God – no matter how painful that may be.

## THE LESSON OF THE WIDOW’S MITE

Mark 12: 41-44, Luke 21:1-4

A ‘mite’ was the smallest copper coin used in England in 1611 when the King James Version of the Bible was produced. The Greek actually says that the widow presented two *lepta* – the smallest coins of the day in Jesus’ time.

So, the term ‘widow’s mite’ is quite misleading as the story concerns two coins, not one. The story, though, is not about the money – but the woman who was poor and gave all that she had.

When Jesus says ‘truly’ I tell you . . . the word translated truly can also mean ‘amen’. When the term is used at the beginning of a sentence it is indicating the importance of what is being said.

The passage does not say that she gave all she had to live on, but all that she has - her whole life. She could have given one coin and held on to the other, but she gives it all.

Often a sermon will refer to the widow as a victim of a crooked Temple system which takes advantage of the poor. However, Jesus is not pointing out exploitation, but generosity and trust. We could then legitimately ask how she came to be so poor.

We note the following:

She is at the Temple, where she would expect to be cared for.

It is a place that welcomes both rich and poor.

It is also a place where all donations are valued. Even the poorest of the poor have something to contribute.

If we see the widow as Jesus sees her, then we know her poverty is not because of sin. There is no blame, and she is not to be honoured because she is poor – she is to be loved.

It is imperative that we “see” this widow – the one who gave a donation bigger than any other. She literally ‘emptied herself’ – just as Jesus will do on the cross.

This story does ask of us what we do with our money, and time. It also reminds us about how much we trust in God, and the community (church/Temple) that claims to represent God.

If the widow were to speak, what do you think she might say?



You shall love  
your neighbour  
**as yourself.**