

"Render... unto God the things which be God's"

The words in the title of our discussion come from the very familiar passage found in Luke 20:25, "*And he said unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's, and unto God the things which be God's.*" These were the words of Jesus in response a question asked by some unscrupulous

men that were meant to not only entrap Jesus but possibly thwart His ministry all together. To get a good grasp of what was going on and to truly get a good understanding of what Jesus was actually saying in His response to their question, we must put this answer into its proper context within the Gospel account.

Our starting place needs to begin actually in Luke 19:35 with Jesus' "triumphant entry" into Jerusalem. This whole scenario was a fulfillment of the prophecies concerning the welcoming of Messiah by the Jewish people into Jerusalem. (Zechariah 9:9) As Jesus was entering the city the people began to spontaneously declare, "*Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest.*" (Verse 38) This was another prophecy coming to pass as it is found in Psalm 118:25,26. What actually was happening was that Jesus, for the first time in His ministry, was allowing the people to openly declare who He actually was - their Messiah. Previously, throughout His ministry, Jesus always told people not to "let it out" that He was actually "the Messiah." However, now in Jerusalem, it was the appointed time to "make it known" and "*rejoice with a loud voice.*" Immediately, we see the Pharisees trying to squash the moment by telling Jesus to "rebuke" the people and tell them to stop what they were saying. (Verse 39) Of course Jesus did not bow to their wishes. In the verses leading up to the text of our discussion we see the following events taking place:

- Jesus weeping over Jerusalem. (Luke 19:42,43)
- After this, Jesus goes immediately into "His house," the Temple, and begins to cast out the moneychangers and the others who were selling things for the Passover feast. (Verses 45, 46) Notice that Jesus very clearly said, for all to hear, "*...MY HOUSE is the house of prayer*" By saying and using the phrase, "*My house*" specifically, Jesus was equating Himself with Father, God. Again, we see the religious leaders immediately desiring to "*destroy Him.*"
- As we begin Luke 20, we see Jesus teaching in the Temple area. This was what He was doing for the next few days following His entry into Jerusalem.
- The religious leaders came and asked Jesus by whose "authority," or in other words, who gave Him the right to do the things He just previously did. (Luke 20:2) Jesus answers them in His customary manner - with a question of His own. This question concerned John the Baptist. The question was one in which they actually knew the answer but refused to openly admit it, so they responded by saying that they didn't know. Ahhh. In this case, ignorance was not bliss. (Luke 20:3-8)
- Jesus then responds to their "non-answer" with a parable. (Luke 20:9-16) Without going into this parable in-depth, it was a parable concerning the rejection of the "One" sent from God by those who were entrusted by God (the religious leaders) with His people and the religious leaders' ultimate fate because of their rejection of the true Messiah. Their fate would be destruction.
- In Luke 20:17-19, Jesus again reiterates to the religious leaders the result of rejecting the One whom God has sent whom He refers to Himself as the "Cornerstone." Again, it is destruction. We read that the Pharisees were not stupid. They knew exactly who Jesus was referring to - it was them!!!

As we now approach the scenario of our text we get a good idea of the "mood" of the religious leaders concerning Jesus. It was always a very precarious relationship, however, now it was at a "fever pitch." They were out to "destroy" Him. The word "destroy" used in Luke 19:47 comes from the Greek word "apollymi" which means, "to put out of the way **entirely**, abolish, put an end to ruin; render useless; **to kill**; to declare that one **must be put to death.**" One way or another, they were determined to rid themselves of this menace called Jesus.

As a side note, we had mentioned that these events were all taking place after Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, which were a few days prior to the Passover. What we fail to realize is that, at the same time Jesus was entering Jerusalem on that first day of the week, the priesthood would be preparing to bring the Passover lamb on that same road because it led to the Eastern Gate of the Temple. This again is significant because it points to the fact that Jesus would be and is that "sacrificial, Passover Lamb."

It would also be the custom of the priesthood that during the days leading up to the Passover, they would carefully examine every inch of that lamb to make sure that it was totally spotless and without blemish. It is not coincidental that the days following His entry into Jerusalem we see that Jesus was constantly bombarded with questions by the religious leaders to try to "trip Him up" and find something that they could accuse Him of. Actually, whether they realized it or not, they were in the process of carefully examining the true and final "Passover Lamb." They desired to find fault with Him in any way they could. As we see through the Gospel accounts of that final week, they were unsuccessful in their attempts to find any fault with Him. They could find absolutely nothing to accuse or find Him guilty of. They could find no "blemish or fault" in this perfect, sacrificial, "Passover, Lamb of God." As we know, even neither Pilate nor Herod could find any fault in Jesus. No one could!!!

Now we can get a good understanding of what was truly going on - both in the natural realm and the spiritual realm. Even though they didn't realize it, the religious leaders were actually proving that Jesus was without "blemish" or fault. They were sending these "unscrupulous men" that "feigned" or pretended to have pure motives in their questioning of Jesus for the real purpose of finding fault with Him. However, as we know, this attempt, as well as all the others, would backfire on them. The word "spies" used here is the Greek word "egkathetos" which means, "one who is bribed by others to entrap a man by crafty words."

As we continue with our discussion, let us read the account:

"And they watched him, and sent forth spies, which should feign themselves just men, that they might take hold of his words, that so they might deliver him unto the power and authority of the governor. 21 And they asked him, saying, Master, we know that thou sayest and teachest rightly, neither acceptest thou the person of any, but teachest the way of God truly: 22 Is it lawful for us to give tribute unto Caesar, or no? 23 But he perceived their craftiness, and said unto them, Why tempt ye me? 24 Shew me a penny. Whose image and superscription hath it? They answered and said, Caesar's. 25 And he said unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's, and unto God the things which be God's. 26 And they could not take hold of his words before the people: and they marvelled at his answer, and held their peace."
Luke 20:20-26 (KJV)

We read that the question they brought forth was meant to entrap Jesus and expose some weakness within His ministry. The question we must ask ourselves is why would this question be one that would get Jesus in trouble? The reason was two fold. Why would this be a twofold problem? Let's see.

On the one hand if Jesus simply answered, yes to their question and tell them to pay their tribute (tax) to Caesar, the Jewish people that were present would have been angry with Him. To begin with the Romans were heavily taxing them. Secondly, they were looking at Jesus as the One who would free them from the bondage of the Romans. In their mind, that was what the Messiah would be sent to do. The Messiah was to lead the Jewish people into getting their land, Israel, as well as Jerusalem, back to the Jewish people. That was their concept of Messiah. Their concept of Messiah was not to be the one that would save them from their sins. No, their concept of Messiah was that He would be the one to get them their land back and free them from Roman tyranny. If Jesus had simply answered that they were to pay their taxes it would cause the people to become disenfranchised with Him to the point of possibly stoning Him as a "false messiah." That would be one way to solve the religious leaders' dilemma concerning Jesus.

On the other hand, if Jesus was to answer their question by saying that the Jews were not to pay their taxes to Rome, that would have not gone over too well with the Roman government. They would have come and

taken Jesus away and placed Him in prison for starting a rebellion against the Roman authority. Again, that would have solved this "Jesus problem" for the Jewish Religious Leaders.

Instead, we read that Jesus answered, in a way that some may say was a most wise answer. His answer was what some may call a "neutral" response that no one would be able to quibble over. We read that the people "*marveled*" at His answer and the ones who tried to entrap Him, "*held their peace.*" Yes, this was a very wise response by Jesus to a "trick" question. However, I believe that Jesus' response goes much deeper than just being a wise response that kept Him out of trouble. His response had nothing at all to do with money, taxes or tithes and offerings. Jesus was referring to a much more "spiritual" aspect.

When questioned, Jesus responded with the request to be given a coin. It was a Roman coin. It had to be a Roman coin because that would be the only acceptable currency in circulation within the Roman Empire. Exchanging local money to Roman currency is what made the greedy tax collectors/publicans very rich. They would charge an exorbitant rate of exchange thereby cheating the people and taking more than they should have. Jesus, when given a coin, asked whose "image" and "superscription" or name was on that coin. Of course, being a Roman coin it would have had the engraved "image" of the emperor as well as his name. In that time period the image would have been of the emperor Tiberius Caesar.

Remember that the term "Caesar" was really more of a title than an actual name at this time. It came from the original emperor, Julius Caesar. That was His actual name. However, after Julius Caesar's death, his son, Augustus, had used it. The term "Caesar" was then used as a title by the emperors that came after them. The emperors declared themselves to be a god and commanded to be worshiped as such. That is a very important fact that goes to the point of Jesus' response. The coin had the "image" and name of this so called "emperor god," Tiberius Caesar. Therefore, this entire encounter was really about worship and which "deity" should you truly give your worship to. It was also about "ownership," as we will discuss.

In His response to the question, Jesus went straight to the heart of the matter. He used very specific terms - "image" and "superscription/name." When Jesus used the term "image" it was for the purpose of bringing to mind of those who were present of the account found in Genesis 1:26,27. This is where we read of Adam being formed and fashioned by God. Genesis 1:26, 27 tells us, "*And God said, Let us make man in our **image**, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own **image**, in the **image** of God created he him; male and female created he them.*"

The word "image" used in Genesis is from the Hebrew word, "*tselem*" which means a shadow of; resemblance; a representative figure. The Greek word in our text for "image" is "*eikōn*" which means an image, figure, likeness; one in whom the likeness of any one is seen. They are basically synonymous in their definition. Jesus was saying that if the coin had the image of Caesar, then give it to him. However, we, as God's highest form of creation, were created by God in **His** image, therefore, we should give ourselves to Him totally. Just as giving the coin with Caesar's image represented giving to their "emperor god," so must we as God's creation, made in His image, render all that we are - our lives and lifestyle, unto Him.

Jesus' response also pointed to the fact of His own deity. Remember, earlier, when He went into the Temple and drove out the moneychangers and others, He referred to the Temple as "*My House.*" Jesus was now expressing that, yes, He truly was God, now incarnate (in the flesh) and He was Himself, the image of God upon the earth. The scripture tells us in Colossians 1:15 concerning Jesus, "*The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.*" (NIV)

As Jesus, who is the image of God, walked on the earth, He expressed and manifested the lifestyle of what a true child of God could and should be. He showed us that it was possible to live the lifestyle of obedience expressed by the commandments found within the Jewish scriptures. Jesus' lifestyle was truly God come in the flesh. He was the perfect, spotless example of rendering one's life unto the God whose image they

were created after. Jesus, by responding to the question of those unscrupulous men, made it clear that all mankind were created in the image and likeness of the One and only true God. Therefore, were to now turn towards, kiss towards, bow down in total submission and acknowledge by "rendering" unto God what is truly His. This is what true worship is all about. It is simply giving to God what is His - all that we are. It is following the words found in Deuteronomy 6:5, *"And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might."* Ephesians 2:10 puts it this way, *"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."*

The other aspect of Jesus' answer to the question presented to Him was that he responded by asking two questions. The first question was about whose "image" was on the coin. The second question was about whose "name" was upon the coin. This is many times overlooked.

We know that that emperor's name was on the coin. As we mentioned previously, this coin must have had Tiberius Caesar's name engraved on the coin, as well as his image. This meant that the coin belonged to him. It was his. It had his name on it. It was a statement of ownership. We are all very familiar with this. We all have placed our names on items so that anyone who mistakenly picks up what is ours will know that it is actually ours. Why? Because we have our name on the item. Our name on that item is a statement that we are the owners of that item. When Jesus used the term "name" in His response, He was referring to "ownership." It would have also caused the people listening to bring to remembrance an account of their Hebrew ancestors found within their scriptures that they would be familiar with - The Aaronic blessing.

As believers, we also are familiar with the Aaronic blessing found in Numbers 6:24-26 - *"The LORD bless you and keep you; The LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you; The LORD lift up His face on you and give you peace."* However, if we continue to read Numbers 6:27 it states, *"And they shall **put my name upon the children of Israel**; and I will bless them."* This "Aaronic blessing" was vital to the Hebrews as they were journeying in the wilderness for those forty years. Aaron, as the High Priest, was to speak this blessing over the people. It was because of this blessing spoken over the people, that Yahweh would place His name upon them and be with them upon their journey. When the Jewish people hear this blessing, it brings them to remembrance that their God will be with them through their journey of life. We as believers, have now been blessed by our High Priest, Jesus, through His blood, thereby allowing God to "place His Name" upon us, His children. Yahweh, in and through Jesus has placed His name upon our hearts. We are His. We were purchased with a price - the atoning blood of Jesus and now we are His. There is a "transfer of ownership." We are sealed unto our God through the Holy Spirit. He has placed His Name upon each and every one of His people. Below are some scriptures expressing this:

Revelation 3:12 - *"Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, [which is] new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name."*

Revelation 22:4 - *"And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads."*

As we conclude our discussion, my purpose was to discuss not simply a wise answer by Jesus to a question that was meant to entrap Him and find fault with Him. My purpose was to realize what Jesus was actually trying to impart to those listening at that time as well as believers today concerning how very valuable they were and we are. Mankind, men and women, are made in the image of their creator, Yahweh Adonai. His name is written upon all mankind. They are all His. The vital aspect, however, is that a person must "render" - totally submit, totally surrender and totally give their life unto God. This becomes an action of true worship by yielding and giving ownership of our lives to a loving Heavenly Father. This is to be accomplished not just with "lip service" but with your whole heart - with all that is within you. We must "render" our lives, our lifestyle, all that we are, to the One whose "Image" and "Name" we bear.

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