

Pray: Heavenly Father, thank you that you've created and designed us to think and respond. Give us all wisdom as we sit under your Word today. Renew our minds and our thinking and conform us into the likeness of your Son and our saviour. Amen.

If you have your bible with you today, please open to Matthew 22:15-22 Read verses 17-22.

1. Jesus is very switched on!

So often we see in the scriptures Jesus healing people, even turning water into wine and we marvel at His miraculous deeds, His miracles and the healings he performed. The works of God are awesome. But today we get an insight into the *brilliant intelligence of Jesus*. He is truly switched on!

We stand in awe of people we think are intelligent, and perhaps they are highly intelligent – but Jesus is brilliant. I think of the many pastors around the world at the moment working on their PhD theses, following those who've gone before them. Maybe they even think they've got that special angle or biblical insight no-one else has perceived or written on. And I think to myself – Jesus wrote the book! Go for it – but remember who the real author is (who spoke the amazing message of scripture into being) and give him the glory. Jesus is simply brilliant...

2. Today we jump right in to a slippery situation with our very discerning saviour.

It's slippery because of all the grease and butter...and of course Jesus is in the midst of it all. You might even say he's in a bit of a vice that is closing in on him as he approaches the cross. Present are all the PhD hopefuls from the Pharisees and the Herodians...and they're buttering Jesus up – and laying it on thick!

Now the Pharisees were trying to be extra clever. They've conjured up their most cunning plan to date and I reckon they're getting pretty excited. The PhD hopefuls buttering up Jesus are the Pharisees' disciples – the up and coming bright sparks. Along for the ride and working together with these hopeful Pharisees are the Herodians. These two groups have literally nothing in common except a lust to see Jesus in chains and shackles.

The Herodians – if you've never heard of them were like a political party. They had a religious edge but were more concerned about supporting Herod and Roman rule. So we have Pharisees who loathed Roman rule and the Herodians who thrive on it working together to take down Jesus.

I think we can say that a lot of preparation has gone into this situation. There would have been lots of think tanks going on trying to work out every possible response Jesus might make along with a strategy to shut him down.

The other reason I say this is because it's difficult enough to get people who are in complete agreement to work together on a project – so for two completely opposed groups to work in unison, we can say that the best minds have invested a lot of time and energy into this trap!

So they come to Jesus and grease him up, *"Teacher," they said, "we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are."*

Are their statements about Jesus true? Absolutely! Integrity, Truth, Godliness – being the kind of life God requires His people to walk in and being uninfluenced by human pressure or popularity are all true statements when it comes to Jesus. If only they were being honest and sincere, they wouldn't be facing such a dark and bleak future themselves!

Hoping all their insincere grease would cause Jesus to slide right into their trap they say, ¹⁷ *Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?"*

3. Our Lord takes the most frustrating and persistently hypocritical religious people – and astounds them.

First by calling them play actors (hypocrites) because He sees directly into their hearts and **the malice** behind their words. Secondly he astounds them with His divinely intelligent response.

¹⁹ *Show me the coin used for paying the tax." They brought him a denarius, ²⁰ and he asked them, "Whose image[or icon] is this? And whose inscription?" ²¹ "Caesar's," they replied. Then he said to them, "So give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." ²² When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.*

You see the tax in question here is was a special tax that the Roman's didn't pay – but people subject to Roman authority, like Israel, did have to pay. The Herodian's had no issue here. They'd only be upset if Jesus taught people to evade tax – Rome was their security blanket.

What we know about the Jewish people though is that they hated handing over ***their*** money to Caesar with the fire of a thousand suns!

But here's the thing. That denarius coin sitting nice and snug in their hand doesn't ultimately belong to them does it? The money they have in their possession is something they've first been given to use – but actually it belongs to Caesar. It has his icon; it has his inscription on it.

So I ask each one of you today: **is it ever wrong to return property to its rightful owner?**

How discerning are you when it comes to the coins in your pocket?

Do you hate taxation with the fire of a thousand suns? Whose icon and inscription is on the money in your pocket? It's Australian legal tender and it's first been given to you. You don't own it – as much as you might like to hang onto it or withhold paying taxes!

The call of Jesus today is to respect that. It's a call to **give back** what rightfully belongs to the state for the services God provides for us through them – even when they don't meet our full expectations. The call is to see those in authority as agents of a loving God who serves us through their office.

That's a pretty tough call for us Aussies isn't it? Regardless of who is in authority, we tend to be pretty disrespectful and cynical of any kind of authority set up over us – particularly when it comes to tax or handing over our money! There's a deep desire to withhold!

4. That's our cash and coins – but what about the image and inscription we bear as human beings? Jesus speaks powerfully to this today, *"So give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."*

If the money we use bears the inscription and image of the state – what about each one of you? Do you bear an image? Absolutely! You bear the image of God!

Right from the beginning it is written, *"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."* (Gen 1:27) You are created in the image of God and for God. And you're called today to give back to God what is God's. That's you!

No wonder the jaws of the Pharisees and Herodians hit the deck – this is huge. They responded to Jesus in amazement, but then they left him. They walked away.

What about you? Will you hold out against God? Would you rather make your own impression on the world - or will you present yourself to God with an allegiance that knows no bounds?

What a blessing to this community and the mission and outreach of the church if you left today **with the joy of an allegiance to God that knows no bounds.** What would that look like? It would be amazing!

We would be allocating finances for the blessing of children in Sunday school – imagine actually investing financially in our children and resourcing them for gospel ministry? What do you think the impact of that might be on the church? There would be an allocation for youth ministry that happens here and at the college, for all kinds of grow courses to bless each one of you and so we could grow deep as a community of faith. Imagine giving to ministry instead of trying to meet a budget...can you see the difference?

Imagine a church where people willingly use their gifts and talents for the building up and edification of everyone. Where people can't stop themselves serving, not to fill a position or because no-one else will, but because they have a passion for ministry and a deep desire to see the gospel flourish in this place. We might even need staff for that. Is your God big enough to see gospel transformation like this?

That's not a pipe dream for the church. That's simply the joy of an allegiance to God that knows no bounds. Open your bible and you'll see it come to life.

5. It's a joy that people know, because of their connection to the God who knows no bounds when it comes to generosity.

God doesn't withhold when it comes to serving you. He doesn't hold back because it's not in His nature to be stingy. God doesn't withhold from you because of sin, but he acts to restore and cleanse you and invites you on a journey of transformation and discipleship. Listen to just a few bible verses.

- ⁹ *This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. (1 Jn 4:9-10)*
- ⁶ *You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Rom 5:6-8)*
- ¹⁶ *And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. (Jn 1:16) - that means over the top, abundant, flowing, generosity at its best*
- ¹⁶ *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.' (Jn 3:16)*

God's generosity and Fatherly care for you knows no bounds. Instead of withholding anything – He gives everything!

- He sent His Son to die and be raised from the grave for your joy and life as His disciple.
- He placed His name on you, adopting you as His own and consecrating you for life in the Kingdom of God;
- He continues to restore and forgive you and calls you to follow Him in joyful, unbound allegiance!

6. Is it enough to be astounded by the brilliant intelligence of Jesus today?

The Pharisees and Herodian's saw that first hand but walked away. Jesus wants much more than to impress you today.

God is inviting you to stop living for self and return to the Lord your Maker. You belong to Him; you belong in Him and you belong with Him.

My prayer for you today is that you would know the joy of an unbound allegiance to God in every sphere of your life. I pray that this church would know the same.

What impact do you think that might have here at Trinity – with such a generous, powerful, all knowing and faithful God at the helm? Would you invest in that? Let me assure you today, I will be investing in that.

Amen.

Pray.