

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ!

Did you ever read or hear a passage of scripture and think “it’s talking to me”? That seems to happen to me every so often, especially as I do my morning devotions. Sometimes I feel convicted of something, actually discomfited as the scripture speaks to my heart.

Our gospel this morning might be one of those passages for you. Now I’ve found that it’s helpful to know some of the background to passages of scripture, including our gospel this morning. Perhaps I will see myself reflected somewhere in it, maybe you’ll see yourself as well.

Here we have the disciples of the Pharisees working with Herodians, an odd combination, but they are plotting together to trap Jesus. I said they were an odd combination, it’s like this. We have disciples of the Pharisees learning their way of doing things, of thinking, of living, and we have Herodians, very pro-Roman, attached to the Herods, immersed in their way of thinking and their ways. Pharisees incredibly legalistic, following the letter of the law but not its intent, who know scripture but don’t understand it. They’re not in the Roman camp, but here they are working with Herodians.

They come up with a tricky question to ask Jesus, figuring no matter how he answers, one party or the other is going to capitalize on it. They aren’t seeking understanding, they are seeking an advantage, to portray Jesus as a pawn of the Romans, or get the Romans very upset with him. Because at this time the people love Jesus and the Romans are leaving him alone. But answer the question one way or another, and one side or the other is going to be unhappy with him and he will lose credibility, his teaching and reputation will suffer.

The Pharisees or Herodians aren’t concerned here about paying taxes, they simply want Jesus to commit to paying them (in which case he’s selling out and the Jews are going to be upset), or not paying them (in which case he’s inciting rebellion and Herodians and Romans are going to be upset).

The way they see it, Jesus loses no matter which answer he gives.

So the question for you is, do you see your reflection in this passage? Have you ever tried to phrase something in prayer to God a better impression and hide your true motives? Have you ever tried to “corner” God into giving you what you want? Maybe you’ve already decided what to do with what you consider is rightfully yours, you know, time, talents, treasure, and you look for a loophole to get out of giving. Have you tried to excuse behavior on your part that you know isn’t pleasing to God, but you’ve done it and you’re going to continue to do it?

The Pharisees’ disciples and the Herodians were amazed at Jesus’ answer, give to the emperor what is the emperor’s and to God what is God’s. It’s the emperor’s

likeness, it's his inscription, it's used to pay a poll tax, it one way or another supports the government, peace, roads, security, so pay it.

So now give to God what is God's. Well, everything including you and me belongs to God. We are God's. And God sees through us, and he loves us anyway, in spite of our faults, our sins, our entrapments when we try to trick him into getting what we want or what we think we deserve.

So do we walk away from God angry at a response we don't like? Do we walk away from God's grace, the forgiveness of sins, the righteousness that comes from faith in Jesus? Do we walk away from the loving presence of God, or do we see ourselves for what we are, and accept the grace offered through faith, maybe laughing a little at ourselves, and thanking God for grace and faith and forgiveness, for life, for all that we have and are!

True life is only found in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. There's no other way, truth or life. We will eat and drink of God's grace at the Lord's table, and we know we are loved by our God, that we live in our God, and that no matter what, we see the reflection of our Jesus Christ cloaking us whenever we read a passage like our gospel this morning.

AMEN