

“Whose Likeness and Inscription?”—Matthew 22:20-21

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Whose Likeness and Inscription?”, is Matthew 22:20-21 → *Jesus said to the Pharisees and Herodians, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?” They said, “Caesar’s.” Then He said to them, “Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

*Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord* (cf. 1Timothy 1:2). Amen.

How sacred is your money? That may seem like a strange question but it is not out of line. According to Title 18, Section 333 of the United States Code it is against the law to mutilate, cut, disfigure, perforate, unite or cement together, or do any other thing to any bank bill, draft, note, or other evidence of debt issued by any national banking association, Federal Reserve Bank, or Federal Reserve System. The penalty for doing such things is to be fined not more than \$100 or imprisoned not more than six months, or both. Hmmm, maybe that will make you think the next time you fold a dollar bill. Don’t worry. The Code places this stipulation upon how you treat your money: It must be “with

intent to render such item(s) unfit to be reissued.” Phew! You’re off the hook!

Yet, it does sound like the government has a rather “sacred” attitude toward money. By the way, this law is supposed to be enforced by the Secret Service. If you are honest with yourself, money is pretty sacred to you as well. After all, it is what basically drives most everything in our culture because it is the medium by which we acquire the basic necessities of life. Unfortunately, many people hold it so sacred that it is “the love of their life” and that upon which they *set their hopes*. Instead, Scriptures calls us *to set our hopes on . . . God, Who richly provides us with everything to enjoy* (cf. 1 Timothy 6:17). After all, money bears only the likeness and inscription of man. You bear the likeness and inscription of God.

Our text brings us to Jerusalem where Jesus is teaching in the temple on Tuesday of Holy Week. The religious leaders of the people, looking *to entangle Jesus in His words* by saying something worthy of an accusation leading to death, ask Him: *Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?* (cf. Matthew 22:17) They were referring to the Roman-imposed poll tax which was detested by the Jews, not because their money was so sacred to them but because it marked them as subjects of Roman oppression. If Jesus answered “yes” to their question he would be denounced as a traitor of the Jewish people in company with

those despised Jewish *tax collectors and sinners* (cf. Matthew 9:11). If He said “no” His opponents would have a charge to take before Pilate, also for treason.

Jesus, being true God and knowing their hypocritical hearts, told them to *show him the coin for the tax. So, they brought Him a denarius* (cf. Matthew 22:19). A denarius was a coin minted by Rome for paying this tax and constituted a day’s wages for the common laborer. I picture Jesus inspecting the coin closely, handing it back to them and saying, *Whose likeness and inscription is this?* (verse 20) They said that the denarius bore the image of Tiberius Caesar. The coin also identified him as “son of the divine Augustus.” Ironically, the question was put forth by Jesus, the true Son of God.

I’ve often wondered if a person from Jesus’ day would look at the likenesses and inscriptions on our money and conclude that they are pictures of our gods. This could also be reinforced by the inscription “IN GOD WE TRUST” on all our money and also as they watch people do anything—even using/abusing, cheating and killing others in an effort to get people’s money into their pockets. They could easily conclude there is a lot of idolatry in connection with our money.

In His continued discussion with the religious leaders Jesus made the simple but profound statement in verse 21 of our text: *Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that*

*are God's*. Aside from answering in such a manner that His opponents were astonished and speechless (cf. Luke 20:25), the teaching behind His words extend to the depth of your identity. By distinguishing clearly between Caesar and God, Jesus protested against the false and idolatrous claims made on the coins. More importantly Jesus actually called these men to consider their identity in relationship with Yahweh, repent of their sins and hypocrisy and give themselves to Him and His will for their lives by trusting in the Person & Work Jesus as the Christ.

By virtue of creation you bear the image of God. In other words, in contrast to the rest of all life in creation, you were created with a soul to live in perfect relationship with Him (cf. Genesis 1:26-27). However, by virtue of sin that image was lost and your relationship was broken (cf. Genesis 3; 5:1-3). However, by virtue of Yahweh's steadfast love for those whom He created in His image, He took on human flesh in the Person of Jesus of Nazareth and did what was necessary to restore that image, that relationship with Himself. Romans 8:29 says: *Those whom God foreknew (i.e. you and me) He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, in order that Jesus might be the firstborn among many brothers.*

Being *conformed to the image of Jesus* will be completely realized at His coming on the Last Day when He *will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body* (cf. Philippians 3:21). Thus, as *the firstborn from the*

*dead* (cf. Colossians 1:18) never to die again, He will bring all those to trust in His atoning work for the forgiveness of their sins into the glory of God eternally. We are *many brothers* who share in a restored perfect relationship with Yahweh again!

Whose likeness and inscription do people see when they look at Christ's *brothers, God's children* (cf. 1 John 3:1-2), those who believe in Him and are now *of the household of faith* (cf. Galatians 6:10)? 2 Corinthians 3:18 says He has given us His Holy Spirit so we who reflect *the glory of the Lord* and *are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory* (NASB). As we live by faith in Jesus daily, waiting to be translated into His heavenly glory on the Last Day, we reflect the Lord Jesus in our daily vocations, conversations, relationship and tasks.

Jesus challenges all sinners to examine their own hearts and repent of their sins. Human hearts naturally belong to their Maker, Who stamped His image on them at creation (cf. Genesis 1:28). Though sin shattered that image in us, the Lord still wants us for His very own people and sent Jesus to make that possible. Ephesians 4:22-24 says: *Put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and . . . be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and . . . put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.* God's likeness and inscription is reflected in our thoughts, words and deeds in accord with His righteous

Word and Will.

*Whose likeness and inscription is this?* While Jesus was making reference to a coin in his hand, His instruction to *render to . . . God the things that are God's* is a reference to you. In Isaiah 49:16 the LORD says: *Behold, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands.* They are the nail scarred palms of the hands of Jesus which have restored our relationship perfectly with God in His righteousness. The Holy Spirit empowers you to bear God's perfect image and likeness by faith in the Person & Work of Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

*I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God,  
to present your bodies as a living sacrifice,  
holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*

*Do not be conformed to this world,  
but be transformed by the renewal of your mind,  
that by testing you may discern what is the will of God,  
what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

(Romans 12:1-2)

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