

**Bible reading: Matthew 22:15-22**

## What it means to belong to God and others

Jewish leaders seek to entrap Jesus with a question about allegiance to the emperor and to God. Jesus counters with a carefully worded answer: give to each what they are due. The leaders are amazed at his teaching and leave him alone – for now.



## Bible notes



In first-century, Israel the paying of taxes was a contentious issue. The land was occupied by the Romans, who gathered these taxes on behalf of the emperor. Generally, locals were employed to collect the taxes on behalf of the local Roman leaders, and they were viewed by their peers as traitors.

This was exacerbated because the role of tax-collector was unpaid, and so there was a custom of collecting a greater amount than that demanded by the emperor, the surplus being kept as a wage for their work.

The question asked of Jesus was therefore intended to cause trouble, hence Matthew's note of the questioners' malice (verse 18). Jesus was presented with a likely no-win situation. Speaking in favour of taxes could diminish his popularity among his followers and set him once again at odds with the religious leaders. Speaking against would set him firmly against the Herodian supporters of Rome. Jesus' own question also had the potential to cause trouble. There were various titles given to the emperor. Some of these – Lord, Saviour, Son of God – were clearly offensive to the people. Jesus' answer, however, requires his hearers to reflect, to pray, to use their consciences. However unpopular, there are things that belong to the emperor. More significantly, however, is that all things belong to God. The coins have the mark of the emperor; all of creation has the mark of its maker. This also requires Jesus' hearers to reflect, to pray, to use their consciences, to consider how this works out in practice. God can use whoever, or whatever, is necessary to achieve his purposes. God can work through the emperor just as he worked through Cyrus in today's Isaiah passage. Being the people of God entails joining in with what God is doing.



Lay out play dough or clay and lots of coins of different shapes and sizes. Press different coins into the play dough. Or, do rubbings of the coins with paper and a crayon. Can you see the imprint, the design the maker put on the coin? How can people see that you belong to Jesus?

## First impressions

- What signs are there that you belong to God?
- What responsibilities or duties does it bring?
- In today's world, what are the tensions between our duty to state and to God?



# LOOK

Inspect your thumb. Use a magnifying glass if you have one, or use an ink pad to make a thumbprint. What do you see?

Sir Isaac Newton said, 'In the absence of any other proof, the thumb alone would convince me of God's existence'. Is it, then, a 'mark of the maker', a reminder that we carry the imprint of God? Our thumbs are part of the wonder of who we are and our uniqueness.

# LISTEN



Play the song 'I belong to Jesus' by Bethel Music feat. Paul & Hannah McClure. Listen to the lyrics and choose one line that resonates with you. Write it down and keep the note somewhere you'll notice it in the coming week.

## Pray

Lord God, help us this week to wear the marks of your love; so others can see the joy and hope that belonging to you brings to our lives here on earth. Amen.

# REFLECT

Hold your hands out to receive something. What gifts will you receive today?  
Hold out a hand as if you are about to give something away. What do you give today?  
Hold out your hands as if in a hug. Who are the people waiting to receive gifts from you today – within the local community, or perhaps across the world?

What is God asking of you today? What is your response to God?