

Mark 12: 13-17

One of the big issues at the moment is of course the EU referendum

- Like the Archbishop of Canterbury – no Christian position
- Think you can vote in or out with no sense you are going against your belief
- No Biblical position – some have argued that it is beast in Revelation – that is just nonsense
- I have a position – which I am happy to share – but it is not my job to tell you which way to vote
- But one of the arguments helps us here – we of course pay into the EU
- £13bn goes to the EU each year
- But you could see it as a form of tax rather than a membership fee
- Which helps us here – The Romans had a tax for membership
- The difference is – none came back
- They had no choice – the Romans were occupiers not partners
- Was not paid by Governments – but was an additional tax along with
 - Local taxes
 - Temple taxes
 - Taxes to Herod
- I don't want to sway you either way – and this is not a reason to vote for or against

- It just helps us – to see why some people opposed it so strongly

We don't have the Euro – but can you imagine if the Euro was imposed on us. And on the Euro was a picture of Hitler, how would that make you feel?

The Roman coinage was not subtle

- Like Muslims – Jews did not like images of human beings
- On the Roman coin was a picture of Tiberius
- They did not like the use of the word God
- Often even modern Jews use a star in the place of the O when writing
- But here on the coin was the words “Augustus Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus
- On the back the words High Priest
- Also translated son of God – you shall have no other Gods
- Worship no idols
- Here was a proclamation of a false God! An idol to the false God
- They used it to pay for everything!
- The Roman coin was not just a matter of an imposed Tax
- But highly offensive to Jews
- Could not have been much more offensive
- Some Jews were so offended by this coin that they would not handle it
- Or even look at it

This was more than just a political or social question that Jesus was being asked – but a religious one!

- There is a trap here – one that Jesus instantly recognises for what it is
 - Denounce the coin, win the crowd, BUT be open to the charge of sedition, which would lead to arrest for revolt
 - Accept the coin, avoid arrest, BUT lose the support of the crowd
- If either choice was made – Jesus’s credibility would be effected, or his mission would end very quickly
- They did not expect the third way that Jesus found
- “Get me a coin” Jesus asks
- Firstly, just having a coin would be a source of embarrassment – based on what we already knew
- Jesus starts off by undermining them
- Ridiculing them
- Never lose the place in our society for satire
- When Jesus said you must turn the other cheek, he never meant we should give in to those that oppose us
- Martin Luther King was committed to non-violence
- This week sees the 51st anniversary since he was arrested for eating in a white only restaurant
- Dressed in his best suit
- He exposed the injustice but didn’t resist when arrested
- Jesus first part is to make them look stupid, better than they tried to do to him!
- They he completely baffles them

- Two hundred years earlier there had been a revolt
- The revolt was by the Jewish Maccabees against the Syrians
- Like many modern revolts – there was a phrase that summed up the revolt
- Give the Gentiles what they deserve, and obey the commands of the law
- Yep- not as catchy as some, but still helpful
- But as per usual Jesus subverts the meaning
- Whereas the Maccabean phrase meant – gave as good as you get, and if that means violence you retaliate with violence
- Jesus was an advocate of non-violence
- Where-as they were concerned in undermine the immediate occupying forces – the Syrians 200 years before
- Romans now
- Jesus was interested in greater issues
- Forces that occupy all forces, throughout history
- Forces that still dominate now
- The forces of power, control
- Institutional and personal sin
- Forces of violence and hate
- Of dehumanisation and abuse
- Forces of sin that send us into the spiral of self-destruction
- Or selfish greed that degrade and demean other human beings
- Forces of personal and institutional sin

- While the Romans were a problem – they represented a wider problem
- As Maccabeans discovered if you overthrow the Syrians, you just get the next group come along
- The Romans, the Greeks etc
- While the crowd wanted Jesus to denounce the Romans
- But instead he belittled them
- Give taxes to the Romans – why not – if it has their name on it – give it to them
- But give to God what is God's
- Aim higher
- The petty squabbles of today are just that – petty and squabbles
- But that does not mean we should just accept things as they are
- Jesus was not going to oversee a violent revolution
- But it would be a revolution

Keep Religion out of Politics

- I grew up thinking I was going to be a politician
- I stood in the school election and won
- But as I read scripture – it didn't put me off politics, it informed my politics
- American Elections -every candidate is scrabbling for the Evangelical vote
- In the USA being a member of a political party is part of their belief
- But as Tony Campolo Says "Mixing Christianity up with a political party is like trying to mix ice-cream

with horse manure. It doesn't do much damage to the manure, but it sure messes up the ice-cream."

- While our belief in God can affect and influence our politics
- We need always to be wary when we allow our politics to affect our belief in God
- There are many good Christians in all the mainstream parties.
- In Plymouth Gary Streeter is both a Conservative and a Christian
- I see no contradiction in that
- God is not a communist or a capitalist
- He is neither socialist nor conservative
- We make a mistake if we appeal to God in these areas!
- But we must always seek first the Kingdom of God
- This passage has been used to say that Christians should have no political role
- Jesus by-passes the question
- But as we have seen the question is more than just political
- It is political, social and religious
- But our first point of call should always be God, and the Bible, and not narrow party politics
- It is narrow party politics at play here
- Jesus by-passes the question
- And goes deeper
- Give to God what is God's
- Seek first the Kingdom of God
- That should always be our priority

Give to God's what I God's

- Widows mite
- In the Temple
- Two copper coins – worth a penny – leptos (smallest, thinnest coin)
- Godly attitude
- Not seeking herself or to exploit others
- Responds to the generosity of God – with the little she has
- Not about money at all
- God doesn't need our money
- He needs our hearts
- Give God your heart and everything else will work from that
- Money, time, effort, energy
- But it starts with the heart
- It starts from love – as a response to love
- God so loved the world that he gave
- So we need respond with love
- Gift day coming up – decide in your hearts what to give – and give
- Because God loves someone who gives from the heart
- Give to God what is God's – your heart