

TITLE: "Freedom for Americans and Christians"

TEXT: Mark 12:13-17 (NT p. 49)

<sup>13</sup>Then they sent to him some Pharisees and some Herodians to trap [Jesus] in what he said. <sup>14</sup>And they came and said to him, "Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality, but teach the way of God in accordance with truth. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not? <sup>15</sup>Should we pay them, or should we not?" But knowing their hypocrisy, [Jesus] said to them, "Why are you putting me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me see it." <sup>16</sup>And they brought one. Then he said to them, "Whose head is this, and whose title?" They answered, "The emperor's." <sup>17</sup>Jesus said to them, "Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." And they were utterly amazed at [Jesus].

### Introduction – What freedom?

Although most people think that July 4<sup>th</sup> is just another holiday, the Fourth of July IS about freedom and this morning I will be preaching about freedom; what freedom means to Americans and what freedom means to Christians.

#### 1. The cost of freedom

I wonder how many people actually THINK about freedom when July 4<sup>th</sup> rolls around. One person told me that the 4<sup>th</sup> is the official start to summer and his family always spends the weekend at the beach. An ad on TV said that the 4<sup>th</sup> is biggest barbeque day of the year. Last week someone said, "I hate Mondays and this week, because of the holiday, I don't have to go to work!"

As I told the children earlier, July 4<sup>th</sup> is the anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence which was adopted by the Continental Congress on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1776, 234 years ago today. Do you know what happened to those 56 men AFTER they signed that historic document?

5 signers were captured by the British, convicted as traitors, tortured and executed.

12 had their homes ransacked and burned.

2 had sons killed in the war and two had sons captured.

9 fought and either died from their wounds or other hardships of war.

When they signed the Declaration, they pledged their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honor. Many lost their lives and fortunes, none their sacred honor.

What kind of men were they?

24 were lawyers or judges.

11 were merchants.

9 owned plantations.

Those who signed the declaration of Independence were well educated men of means who signed knowing full well that if they were captured, they would be executed.

Carter Braxton of Virginia, a wealthy planter and trader, had all his ships captured by the British. He sold his home and properties to settle his debts and died in rags.

At the Battle of Yorktown, Thomas Nelson Jr. noted that the British General Cornwallis had taken over his family home for his headquarters. When Yorktown was besieged by the Americans, Nelson urged General Washington to open fire. The Nelson home was destroyed and Nelson died bankrupt.

Francis Lewis had his home and properties destroyed. The enemy imprisoned his wife and she died within a few months.

There have been many wars since: the Civil War, which helped to free American slaves, WWI, WWII, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Gulf War and the Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Many imagine that those who fought in these wars lived happily ever after. That is not the case. Many did not live at all. many others suffered for the rest of their lives because they fought for our freedom or the freedom of others.

So let us have fun tomorrow on the holiday for Independence Day, but let us take a moment of silence to say THANK YOU to those who made our freedom possible.....

Let us never dishonor their names, or THEIR honor, by taking our freedom for granted

## 2. Give to the government

Let's look at this morning's text. There we see that the Jewish authorities conspired to have Jesus arrested. To do so, they chose representatives from two groups, the Pharisees and the Herodians. These two groups did NOT get along normally, but both wanted to get rid of Jesus so they were willing to combine their efforts to that end.

They hoped to trick Jesus into saying that his followers should NOT pay taxes so they could report Jesus and the Roman authorities could arrest him. Jesus saw through their deceit and his answer has come down to us today. What Jesus actually said was: "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God that which is God's."

What does it mean, today, to “...render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s?” ....Will Roger’s was once asked if he would choose to run for president. He replied, “I not only don’t choose to run,’ but I don’t even want to leave a loophole in case I am drafted, so I won’t ‘choose.” I will say ‘I won’t run’ no matter how bad the country will need a comedian by that time.”

I agree with Will. We do NOT need any comedians, especially in Albany. The situation would already be funny enough if it wasn’t so pitiful. Many people in New York State are angry about the way the state government is handling the current financial problems. And it looks like we, who already pay the highest taxes in the country, are going to get socked with even more taxes.

So, does God have anything to say about this? Yes. Jesus said it to the Pharisees and the Herodias and he says it to us this morning: “Pay your taxes.” The Roman government was one of the most oppressive and cruel governments in history and the Caesars themselves were some of the most immoral and unethical Politicians in history. In spite of this, Jesus said to pay the taxes to Caesar and he tells us to pay our taxes.

This is confirmed in several places and I have chosen the text from Romans 13:1-6:

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God.  
<sup>2</sup>Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. <sup>3</sup>For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; <sup>4</sup>for it is God’s servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. <sup>5</sup>Therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience. <sup>6</sup>For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, busy with this very thing.

God KNOWS your financial situation. God knows it to the last cent. Gods know how much taxes you have to pay and God WILL provide for you and your family if you put God first in your life. How do I know? .....The Bible tells me so. Jesus says, “Seek FIRST the kingdom of God and God’s righteousness and all the things you need will be added to you as well” (Mt. 6:33). The more we render unto the government, the more the Lord will provide for us and our families.

If you still fell persecuted – remember two things 1) The IRS and the NYS tax people are doing the Lord’s work. How do I know? The Bible says we came into the world without riches and we will take no riches with us when we go. So, in a sense, tax people ARE doing the Lord’s work.

If you STILL feel rather persecuted by taxes, listen to what Jesus says: “Love your enemies and PRAY for those who persecute you” (Mt. 5:44). Carol and I pray each week for those in federal and state government. You should pray, too. They need it.

### 3. Give to God the things that are God's

To render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's means to pay our taxes. What does it mean to "...give to God that which is God's?"

God wants you. You came from God, God loves you and you will go back to God when you die and, if you have faith in Jesus Christ, you will be with God forever and ever. God wants you, ALL of you, right now. God does not want 5%. God doesn't want what is left over when all else is done. God wants 100% of you.

My first reaction to hearing this was, "Sorry I want a little of myself FOR myself." We ALL want to do what we want to do and we ALL want to work on the things WE want to work on and we ALL want to direct our own lives. This has been true of every person since Adam and Eve.

Let me tell you something that is one of the truest things I know: You find yourself as you lose yourself in Christ Jesus. People who lose themselves in themselves become self-centered monsters. People who lose themselves in another person become slaves of that person. People who lose themselves in Christ Jesus become the wonderfully unique people God created them to be.

As I said, JESUS said: "Seek FIRST the kingdom of God and GOD'S righteousness and all the things you need will be added to you as well." If you put God FIRST, GOD will help you to become the wonderful person God created you to be.

#### Conclusion – A taste of eternal freedom now

And if you think life is wonderful now, just wait until you are totally in Christ Jesus and TOTALLY free to be the person God made you to be. ...Actually, you don't have to wait. You can actually get a taste of that wonderful freedom right now.

This story is called "FOOTPRINTS...A New Version." My cousin Sue who lives in Cooperstown sent it to me this past week.

Imagine you and the Lord Jesus are walking down the road together. For much of the way, the Lord's footprints go along steadily, consistently, rarely varying the pace.

But your footprints are a disorganized stream of zigzags, starts, stops, turnarounds, circles, departures, and returns.

For much of the way, it seems to go like this, but gradually your footprints come more in line with the Lord's, soon paralleling, His consistently.

This seems perfect, but then an interesting thing happens: Your footprints that once

etched the sand next to Jesus' are now walking precisely in His steps.

Inside His larger footprints are your smaller ones.

This goes on for many miles, but gradually you notice another change. The footprints inside the large footprints seem to grow larger.

Eventually they disappear altogether. There is only one set of footprints. They have become one.

This goes on for a long time, but suddenly the second set of footprints is back. This time it seems even worse! Zigzags all over the place. Stops. Starts. Gashes in the sand. A variable mess of prints.

You are amazed and shocked.

Your dream ends.

Now you pray: 'Lord, I understand the first scene, with zigzags and fits. I was a new Christian; I was just learning. But You walked on through the storm and helped me learn to walk with You.'

'That is correct...'

'And when the smaller footprints were inside of Yours, I was actually learning to walk in Your steps, following You very closely.'

'Very good.... You have understood everything so far.'

When the smaller footprints grew and filled in Yours, I suppose that I was becoming like You in every way.'

'Precisely.'

'So, Lord, was there a regression or something? The footprints separated, and this time it was worse than at first.'

There is a pause as the Lord answers, with a smile in His voice... 'You didn't know? It was then that we danced!'

Be grateful for your freedom. Pay your taxes. Pray for those in government—they need it. Seek first the kingdom of God and God's righteousness and you will dance with the Lord now, and forever and ever and ever. ...Amen.