Everyone Wants a Piece of Me

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Date: 22 February 2026

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`[0:00]` Blues singer Johnny Copeland sang a song called Everyone Wants a Piece of Me where he was in his typical blues style commiserating about the rent man knocking on his door and all the other people in his life who want something from him and it never seems to end there's always just people wanting something from him so he he writes the song about the difficulty with that but I wonder if you can relate to Johnny Copeland's experience if you think about all the things people want from you the government wanting your taxes the landlord wanting your rent the boss wanting extra hours from you the sports club that you belong to maybe wanting you to be part of the event on a on a Saturday to help out maybe your family also wanting you to be at a particular family thing your school or the school of your kids wanting you to be at the PTA and then of course if you're a Christian add to that church and ministries involved in and tithing to church and going to growth group and you know we live in this world where we just feel pulled in all these different directions and we could well say with Johnny Copeland everyone wants a piece of me so the question is how much should I actually give you know at what point do you draw the line and say no and who actually has a claim on my money and my time well that really is the heart of the question that Jesus was asked here in Matthew 22 in this question about paying taxes to the Romans and first first and foremost it wasn't actually a financial question at its heart he was being asked who has legitimate claim on us these Jews were asking about the the Romans and whether the Romans actually have a claim on their their lives and their lives

And so let me pick it up from verse 16. They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. Teacher, they said, we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by others because you pay no attention to who they are. Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?
Now, it's really interesting how flattering they were to Jesus, but Luke tells us why they're being so flattering. They're trying to actually trap him. The verse before says, then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. And they then choose the most controversial topic of the day, which is paying taxes to Caesar. And they think they've got the ultimate gotcha question for Jesus that it's going to be very difficult to answer. And this is their trap for him. Now, give you a little bit of an insight about this tax. So this is called the census tax that the Romans were charging for the last two decades on the Israelites. And what's interesting, it was a denarius, which wasn't a lot of money. It was a daily wage, which means actually the South African government charge us for more taxes than the Roman census tax. But the problem they had with it was not that it was a lot of money, but it was what it implied, what the Romans were saying through this tax.
Essentially, they were saying that they owned the Jews because they were the occupying force in Israel. And through the tax, they were saying, we are now in, we are in control of you. We have a claim of ownership on your lives. And this is a big thing for the Israelites because they, in their

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history, prided themselves in their freedom, right? You look back at Egypt and they were freed from being slaves in Egypt. Then they were freed from exile in Babylon and they saw themselves as belonging to no one but God. And so this puts Jesus in a very difficult position. If he says, yes, pay the tax, he's basically saying you must obey the Romans rather than God. And if he says, no, don't pay the tax, then they would have reported him to the Romans and he would have been arrested for sedition. So, you know, damned if you do, damned if you don't. That's the position they wanted to put him in by asking him this question. And that is why in his answer, he does neither of those two things.
But the brilliance of his answer is not only that he avoids the trap that they were setting for him, but he turns the question back on the questioners and shows them the problem in how they think about their own obligations in the world. Look at verse 18 to 19. But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, you hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? Show me the coin used for paying the tax.
[5:28] They brought him a denarius. Now, let me just pause there. Jesus was actually very clever in asking them to show him the coin because by them actually showing that they have one on them, it's a subtle way of Jesus showing them they've already submitted to the Roman system. They're already using its money.

In fact, here on the screen is a picture of what a denarius of the day would have looked like. And it was a ready common currency that they were using. And it's clearly a Roman coin and was provided for them by the Roman government, Roman system. Okay, so it goes on from verse 20. And he asked them, whose image is this and whose inscription? Caesar's, they replied. Then he said to them, so give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.
So what he was saying to them, you see, in answering like that, he was saying to them that their obligations to the Roman government were not actually in conflict with their obligations to God as if, you know, giving to their secular government, giving to their secular obligations was going to take away from their obligations to God and what they can give to him. That's how they were thinking. And so that's why they asked, which should we do? Because it's either or. And he said, no, you can do both. You can give to Caesar what is Caesar's and you can give to God what is God's at the same time. But you know, the mistake that they made is also the mistake we make when we think about our lives out there in the world. Because what we tend to do, especially in today's culture, is we divide our world into the sacred and the secular, don't we? And we see some things as belonging to the sacred part of our lives and some things as belonging to the secular part of our lives. And we try to balance the sacred and the secular and give a little bit to each. And it's this constant tension between the two, you know. So on the sacred side, we've got our quiet times and our giving and our contributions to church and growth group and coming to church on a Sunday and getting involved in ministry. That's all our sacred life. But then on Monday morning, we go to our secular life and we go to work and then there's school and then there's sports. And we think of those things as the secular things. And we make this division of our world into the sacred and the secular, just as the Jews were in Jesus' day saying, how much of our lives should we give to Rome and how much should we give to God as if the two were in conflict? Well, Jesus is challenging that view that we have today of dividing up the world into sacred and secular. And he's saying here, your obligations to God are not in conflict with your obligations to people in your life. And the reason why is because all of your life belongs to God.
All of your life belongs to God. And that's the next thing that we need to realize in his answer. Look at verse 20 and 21 again. He asked them, whose image is this and whose inscription on the coin?
[8:51] Caesar's, they replied. Then he said to them, so give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's. It's very interesting. Jesus uses the image of Caesar on the coin to highlight this idea of ownership and to get people asking who actually owns them. And he uses this image on the coin. And what's interesting is that, you know, people in his day who were listening to that would have understood the significance of images and they would have known what he was implying by referring to the image.

In fact, the image on that coin that we saw earlier, that image to the Jews, that was considered an idol. Remember this, the commandment, do not make an image, a graven image and worship the graven image.
In the Ten Commandments God gave to the Israelites, well, they considered the inscription of Caesar and the image as an idol because the Romans considered Caesar a god. And so this was essentially the picture of a god.

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And the reason that God disallowed idols in his people's world, the reason idols were not allowed, goes right back to creation.
That's why we read from Genesis earlier. In Genesis, we actually see why God doesn't allow idols, representations, pictures of himself, pictures of God. And the reason is, is because God has already made pictures of himself in the world. He's already made images of himself.
[10:37] Now, where do we go to find these images of God? Well, look around you. It's us. We are, the Bible says, the images of God. Humans have been made in God's image, which means that we are meant to represent God to the created order. We have this amazing ability, even as created beings in this material world. We've got this amazing ability to connect with the heavenly, to connect with God, to have a real relationship with God. And we are therefore, unlike all the other animals, meant to be God's representatives in the created world. Now, of course, we messed that up big time.

And it doesn't take long in Genesis to see how we do that. And the rest of, you know, the story is is how we fall into sin and how we turn away from our purpose in this world and try to follow our own purposes, and which brings pain and suffering and death into our world. But that is why Jesus came.
Jesus came to save us from that, to undo that, and to bring us back to our purpose as God's image bearers in this world, back to who we were always meant to be. That is, that is the story of the gospel and, and, and God's plan to bring us back to that. So that's the first thing that, that being in made in God's image means. It means we represent him in the created world. But the second implication of being made in God's image is that he owns us. He owns you and he owns me. Being made in God's image is like the maker's mark that he's put on each one of us. All the benefits, actually, of being made in God's image that set us apart from the animals. You know, the ability to relate deeply, the ability to create original things and to love deeply. All of these aspects of being made in God's image, when they come out in our lives, remind us of who made us. And everything that actually makes you and me what we are is from God and confirms his ownership of us, that he made us for his purposes, to be his image bearers. And, and what Jesus is, is here exposing to the people of his day is that they had forgotten that. They'd forgotten that God owns them. They'd forgotten that maker's mark that he had put on them.
And you know what? We do too. Every day we forget that. We think we own us. And just as then they wanted to withhold from Caesar the coins that bared his image and that he gave to them, so we all want to withhold from God what is rightfully his and bears his image, which is the life that he gave to each one of us. Our deepest sinful instinct is to withhold that and keep it for ourselves. And this, you know, this unwillingness to give God what is his, which is really, you could, you could summarize the whole human story and, and why we're in the mess we're in as a failure to give God what is his. And the reason that people's lives are so difficult and messed up is, can be summarized into a failure to give God what is his. And this, this unwillingness to give God what is his has been the whole point Jesus has been trying to make so far in these last few chapters we've been reading. If you've been listening, remember back a few weeks ago, we did the parable of the tenants in the vineyard. Remember that? I hope you remember that. It was only two weeks ago, okay?
Where Jesus gives this parable about these tenants in the vineyard and the owner gives them responsibility. And then they, the owner comes to collect the produce, but they're unwilling to give it to him. They don't recognize that he is the owner of it. They're unwilling to give up what rightfully belonged to the owner. And Jesus used that parable to show that we all tend to do that. We all naturally don't want to give God these lives that are rightfully his. Jesus has been trying to make this point over and over again. Even with these super religious people, no matter how religious they were and how fancy they looked and what good lives they may have lived on the surface, the heart of the problem Jesus is trying to expose to us as well, no matter how much we come to church, is that by nature we don't want to give God what rightfully belongs to him. We want to keep it for ourselves. And the reason is, frankly, we don't like the idea of our lives not belonging to us. And we never have.
[15:34] The great goal of our age and our culture is freedom, self-governance, to live how you want to, to get control of your life, to not have to listen to anybody to tell you what to do. That is the great goal that everybody is striving for, this freedom. And yet, you know what the Bible says?

The Bible says that's not true freedom. To get control of your own life is not truly freedom according to God's Word. No, the Bible says we only find true freedom and we only begin to become our true

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selves when we give our lives over to the one who made us for the purpose that he made us. Think for a second about, in your mind, think of a violin. Picture a violin, you know, like a beautifully made violin, a Stradivarius violin or something. Those really expensive, beautifully constructed violins.
But imagine this violin is sitting safe in its velvet case, its protective case, right? Now, inside the case, in a way, the violin is free to do whatever it wants, to be itself, by itself. It's free of its master. It's safe in its own space. It's never scratched. Its strings are never strained. But in that supposed freedom, it'll never fulfill the purpose it was made for.
It's only when the master reaches in and takes over control of this violin and tensions the strings and applies friction with the bow, which feels like an intrusion of the freedom of the violin to do what it wants. And yet, only then, when it's under the rule of the master, can it begin to play the music it was created to play? You know, we so desperately want to have ownership of our lives.
[17:44] So we can stay just in the position and the situation we want to be in. which is comfortable and, you know, which is under our control. But that's not freedom.

Don't chase after it thinking that'll free you, that'll give you happiness and that'll give you freedom. Freedom is actually being in the hands of our master who knows how to play the music we were made for. But that we can only live those lives that we were made for when we surrender our lives and everything in our lives, our time and our money and our resources to the master's rightful ownership.
And that is what Jesus is challenging us to do here. Because he came into this world, as we learned earlier, to do an amazing thing, to die for the sins that separate us from God. But you know that he came not just to die for our sin, but in doing so, to reclaim God's ownership of our lives. That's why he died to purchase us, to save us, to save us from our sins so that God could reclaim ownership of us and we could happily give ourselves back to him. 1 Corinthians 6 verse 20 says these words, it says, you are not your own.
But you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your bodies. And by bodies, he means everything in our material world that belongs, we think belongs to us. When, especially when Jesus has died for us to purchase us back to God, we are, the Bible says, to honor God and realize that it is not ours. And it never was, actually. You are not your own. You were bought at a price.
And you know, when we realize that, when we start to think of our lives in that way, and we concede God's ownership of our lives, not only then do we begin to play the music we were made to play and begin to live as we were meant to, but the final thing I want us to see is that as we surrender to God, it makes it easier then to give to others what we should.
[20:03] Because you see, Jesus is not avoiding the original question here, the question of taxes. He's not changing the subject, actually. And this question of what are we obligated to give to the Romans? But what he wants us to do in answering this way, he wants us to put our obligations to other people in light, first of all, of recognizing that everything we have belongs to God in the first place. Because then it changes how we think about all our obligations to other people, and we start to see our obligations to other people in a completely different light.

And it changes this hesitancy to give to others of what is mine. Because we have this, you know, the whole reason that we feel pulled in these different directions, everybody wants a piece of me. The whole reason we feel pulled like that, and we feel that tension, is because we think that these people who are wanting things from me are taking away from what is mine. But if we realize it's not mine, well then, it changes how we think about what people want from us. Let me explain it to you like this.
I put a diagram together, and I'm going to use the diagram to explain this concept. So, imagine this circle is your life, and everything in your life, right? And then, let me just move this, so I can have a look at this diagram. Okay, and then there's various things and obligations in your life that demand time and energy of you. So, you've got your work, for example, that demands a certain amount of your time and energy. Maybe you've got school or family commitments that demand another bit of your resources. Maybe you've got your commitment to your sports clubs or whatever it is that demand another part of your resources. And church is one of those things as well. Church is one of the things that demands kind of time and energy away. But this is the idea of how we think of our lives, typically, that we've got a certain limited resource and all these things that are being demanded of us. But then, the rest, what's left in the middle is mine to do with what I want. That's how we think about our lives. But that's not how Jesus is challenging us to think of our lives.

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That's not how our lives really are. According to the Bible, our lives are like this. According to the Bible, all of our life belongs to God, and He wants us to use the time and the energy and the resources that He's given us for His purposes and to divide up His time as stewards of what we have for what He wants us to do. That's how we've got to start thinking about our lives.
[22:56] And it's not just our time. The same goes with our money, how we spend our money, our energy, our opportunities, our career. This idea of this circle with its chunks out can apply to any of those. We think about our money like that, right? We think, okay, well, once I've paid my tithes to church, and I've paid my taxes, and I've paid for these things, and I've paid school shoes for my kids, now the rest of the money belongs to me. But actually, we've got to start thinking about every part of our lives that, no, it all belongs to God right from the beginning. And we've got to think, how can I best use what He's given me for the purpose that He's given it to me?

How can I use the limited resources God has chosen to allocate to me for God and His world and the people in His world? That is a completely different way of thinking to how we ordinarily think about our lives.
And we think, we think that's going to restrict us, because we want that bit in the middle to ourselves. Now, if it's all belonging to someone else, we think that's going to restrict what I can do. But actually, it frees us. It really does. When we start to think of our lives this way, it frees us from the burden of trying to hold on to what is mine, and always being resentful when others take away my time and my money. But all that resentment dissolves away when we realize, you know, it's not mine anyway.
And it affects how we consider everything in our lives. It affects the original question that Jesus asked for how we consider the question of paying taxes, for example. And, you know, should we pay taxes because this is God's money, right? So, should we, does He want us to pay taxes to a government that isn't honoring Him? Well, you know, the Roman government certainly didn't honor God.
[25:01] And yet Jesus said that it is good to pay taxes, and we see it elsewhere in Scripture, because actually, for law and order in God's world, in any country, the government needs resources, even, yes, in a corrupt government that misuses a lot of those resources, because now we're sitting in Africa, which is known, you know, for corrupt governments. And it's easy to think, well, no, I shouldn't give my money to the government because they're going to misuse it. But you know what?

Even a corrupt government is better than anarchy. Even a corrupt government is better than no government. And that's one of the things God wants us to do with some of what He's given us in His world for law and order. But it also affects not just how we look at taxes, but how we see that function we have to go to next Wednesday, or the extra hours the boss wants us to work, or the duties that we've got at our sports club, whatever it is, whatever other people are asking of us, this view changes how we consider those things. Listen to Colossians 3. It says, this is Colossians 3, 23 to 24. It says, whatever you do, whatever you do, any area of life, work at it with all your heart as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. That's profound, actually. What it's saying is anything we do in this world is actually serving Christ. Why? Well, because Jesus, now resurrected from the dead and ascended to take up the throne of creation, is now the Lord of all. And he's going to come back, and he's going to hold all to account that he is now a rightful Lord and judge over. But even now, as we wait for his return, he is Lord of all, and it belongs to him, which means all obligations we have in this world are actually serving him. Because he is the Lord, not just of the sacred part of our world and our lives, but the secular, supposed secular part. There is actually no distinction, because he is Lord of all. He is Lord of the buildings out there. He's Lord of the governments. He is Lord of the municipalities. He is Lord of the resources. He is Lord of the mines.
He's Lord of everyone. And so every little bit of work we do in the world out there is actually, this verse says, serving Christ, who is the Lord of this world. And we can do that joyfully, no matter what it is, and not resentfully, but only when we learn the habit of giving to God what is God's. Rendering to God what is God's in the original. We need to learn that habit. If what Jesus is saying here is true for us, we need to learn the habit of actually giving back to God what is rightfully his in our lives. So how do we do that in closing? Well, we do that, I think, by looking differently at our money and our time. You know, when you look at your bank balance, don't ask, what part must I give to God?

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Rather, realize that it all belongs to him and ask, how does God want me to use his money this month? Or when you look at your schedule on Google Calendar for the week or the month ahead? Or in your diary if you're old school? Don't ask, how much time should I put aside for God each week and each day? Rather ask, how can I best use the time God gives me this week for the purpose he gave it to me? And that does require a mind shift and it does require a change of thinking and a change of habit. It's not going to happen automatically. But I think it's what Jesus is challenging us to do here. I found, personally, that the best way to get into that mindset, because it's not, it doesn't happen by default. As sinners, we automatically think, my day is mine. My money is mine. And so, I found the best way to get into that mindset regularly is, firstly, doing my quiet time in the morning. I find, you know, people do quiet times in different times of the day. I find doing the quiet time in the morning is vital as a way to devote the day ahead to God and not seeing my quiet time as the 20 minutes that I give to God each day, but rather seeing it as the way of reminding my heart that the whole day ahead belongs to Him. And I need to remind myself of that every day. And so, you know, maybe the season of Lent is a great opportunity to get into that habit. Maybe if you don't have a good habitual quiet time at the moment, forget not eating chocolates. Eat all the chocolates you want, right? Rather use Lent as a way of getting into the habit of each day, spending time with the Lord and realizing this day belongs to Him.
I promise you, if you do that for 40 days, it'll change your life. Because when we learn to render to God what is God's, then we find a whole new freedom to give to others what we should. Let's pray that God helps us with that.
[30:49] O Lord, our Master, our God, our Creator, who has given us every breath we breathe, every rand in our bank account, every minute we live. Lord, we recognize once more, Lord Jesus, it's based on your teaching here that it's all always belonged to you. And we confess for how we so often forget that, just like the people of your day. And so, Lord, help us as a body of believers.

Help us to learn the habit of rendering to you what is rightfully yours each day. Help us all to find the freedom of surrendering our lives to the one who can truly make us live.
We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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