

# starter

## paying taxes:

**based on Matthew Chapter 22 verses 15 – 22**

### AIM

To explore attitudes to paying taxes amongst followers of Jesus both 'then' (i.e. 1<sup>st</sup> century AD) and 'now' (21<sup>st</sup> century)

### GETTING STARTED

Read Matthew 22:12-22 aloud to the group.

### A few initial questions to discuss

Jews in Jesus' day resented paying taxes because the money financed the Roman occupation force.

- What is your attitude to paying taxes?
- Do you regard this as a way of being faithful to God, or is it offensive to your faith?

Jesus is being tempted to say that Roman taxes should not be paid; in his day that would have been a dangerous, revolutionary pronouncement.

- Have you ever seriously considered withholding tax, or breaking the law in some way?
- If so, on what grounds?

### MOVING ON

Read Matthew 22:12-22 aloud to the group for a second time.

As you listen again: notice how Jesus turns the challenge back onto his hearers.

### To discuss further

- What do you think Jesus expects you to give back to God?
- What do you want to say to God about that now?

### Bible background

You might find some Bible commentaries give you useful background information relating to the scenario (which may raise further questions). For example:

- A Roman coin such as the denarius would bear Caesar's head (ie. his image) and his title claiming divine status; both would be regarded by Jews as blasphemous.
- By contrast British coins bear the words - in abbreviated Latin - that Elizabeth is queen by the grace of God; American bank-notes say "in God we trust", but do these indicate a financial system any less corrupt?
- The Greek word usually translated as 'give' - give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar - is arguably better translated as 'give back' thus emphasising the ultimate ownership. Does this make a difference to your understanding of Jesus answer to the Pharisees?

### More than a Starter?

If you want to make this starter longer here are some further questions you could discuss

- Jesus cleverly avoids the trap set by the Pharisees here, but he does make a costly stand against idolatry and money-changing elsewhere. So why is that?

- The Herodians were those supporting King Herod. What, if any is the purpose in their being mentioned here?
- How do Jesus' words relate to questions of personal financial security and national (or global) confidence in the markets, particularly since the credit crunch and global recession?

### EVALUATION

Please try to answer these questions for yourself and for others who will use this material:

1. What was the most helpful thing?
2. What was the least helpful thing?
3. What would you like to try now?

### NEXT STEP

If you would like to follow this up with other Vision4life ideas here are a few.

The inspiration for this style of mediation comes from using similar ones available (for free) as podcasts or mp3 downloads from [www.pray-as-you-go.org](http://www.pray-as-you-go.org)

For those who find written material easier to use, how about looking in a set of Bible Reading Notes for an interesting passage to share with others in this way. The main things to remember are:

- Use open questions so that participants can use their experience to respond, rather than searching (and failing to find) the 'right' answer. The questions are intended simply to engage hearers' awareness of links between the scripture and their own life.
- Choose the questions simply by asking: what questions does the scripture raise in me? Perhaps it raises different (even better) questions in you; then use these!
- Thinking about life can lead the hearer down various avenues, so it is important to keep focussed on the Bible if the intention is hear from God (it is!). The questions never leave the biblical scenario behind. Hearing the passage read twice helps to keep this focus.
- The meditation ends by inviting a response from the hearer to God. So this is not biblical meditation for its own sake, but as a vehicle for engaging with God. Close the session with prayer.

### What else can we try?

It may be that a good meal can be provided by moving straight from the starter to a dessert. Vision4Life desserts (see website or booklet for some examples) are more playful exercises. Here are ideas for providing one that relates to this passage:

#### A taxing drama

Arrange for a group to prepare and act out a drama based on the story. Do some research into what each character brings to the scene. Think of ways of presenting the 'punch-line' so that it makes an impact on the modern hearer.

#### Make your own money

Gather a group to design a bank-note for the kingdom of God. What images or words would it bear? Consider modern examples (ask people to bring examples of bank notes from other countries or look some up on the internet). A fruitful discussion may arise if you can try to delay the moment when someone says that there will be no money in the Kingdom!

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