

Good morning, good to see you.

Today we come to the next instalment in our series in Matthew, and we have reached Chapter 21 v15-22.

I have to confess that when I read this text earlier this week, I phoned up Jeremy up wondering why he had preached on it last week...

He said "that he hadn't, but that David had, in the evening, the week before". And he was right.

So I want to say, right now, that any similarity between what I am going to say and what David has said is entirely co-incidental – and if I happen to refer to my wife as Helen and my children as Henry and Annie - then that doesn't necessarily mean that I have "stolen" his illustrations 😊!

If you have been following the series then you'll know that the last few weeks have followed hot on the heels of Jesus clearing the temple and the casting out the money changers'.

And as you can imagine this has really upset the political applecart.

So now every encounter seems to be about the Authorities trying to "trap" Jesus anyway they can. Today the Herodians and the Pharisees team up to try to "nail" Jesus for his political views.

The Herodian's were supporters of Roman imperial power

The Pharisees wanted an independent Israel

And these two implacable enemies unite to get Jesus to take sides, so that one or the other can attack him for his politics.

Now Politics is the way we seek to solve the tough issues of society: injustice, inequality, poverty, hunger - Politics tries to solve these tough issues.

And so Politicians are always talking about "how to solve poverty, how to stop inequality, how to create justice and a fairer, more prosperous world".

So the question to Jesus: what are your Politics? - is enormously important!

Because we all want to solve the same problems.

The Herodians and Pharisees ask Jesus

a revolutionary question – what are you politics!

he gives them a revolutionary answer,

and in it he points to a revolutionary revolution

And that's what I want to talk about this morning

a revolutionary question, a revolutionary answer, and a revolutionary revolution

that answers the key issues facing our lives and our society.

1. So let's begin with their revolutionary question.

v15 The Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap Jesus in his words.

so they sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. "Teacher," they said, "we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are...

And aren't these words just dripping in insincerity?

If this were me, a large orange light would be flashing in my brain

a robot voice would be saying "DANGER WILL ROBINSON";

There is a trap here!

You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are.

v17 Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"

Now there is more to this question than meets the eye...

Firstly, they are not referring to Taxes in general, they are referring to a particular and specific tax.

And you can see this when Jesus asks for a coin. He says

*v19 Show me **the coin** used for paying the tax."*

The coin, The tax.

Now like most societies there were lots of taxes that the Jews had to pay... lots of taxes but there was also "a per head tax", "a poll tax" that was payable to Caesar.

Caesar's annual poll tax was just "one denarius, per person, per year" (which wasn't very much, about a days slave wages, perhaps as little as a single pound coin)

So this is not such an onerous thing to do

But when it was introduced into Palestine 25 years earlier there was insurrection!

It wasn't the amount of money being asked,

It was the symbolism associated with it.

The Denarius was a special coin,

minted from Caesars personal wealth, and to buy it and

to give it back to him was an acknowledgement of your submission to his claims on your life.

So 25 years earlier, 25 years before this seemingly innocent question about Jesus' Fiscal Policy – the introduction of this tiny little tax sparked an armed revolt by a man called "Judas the Galilean".

Judas the Galilean revolted and he did three things

First of all, he called for the Jews to refuse to pay the tax.

Secondly, **with an armed gang**, he cleansed the temple, forcibly removing, driving out: all the foreigners, Gentiles and Romans; and

Thirdly, he said "now we are going to let God be our King and not Caesar, we are going to bring in God's Kingdom and stamp out injustice, oppression, and poverty.

And the Romans responded by finding him, capturing him, trying him and executing him.

It is now 25 years later, and you can see the story under the story...

Jesus has done two things so far

- he has built his entire teaching around the Kingdom of God, “the Kingdom of God is near” he says, and it is going to herald an end to inequality and injustice and oppression;
- He has just cleared the temple, throwing out the money changers and the sacrifice sellers.

And what the Herodians and Pharisees are saying is

“we’ve seen this before...”, “we saw this 25 years ago”.

Kingdom of God? – check!

Cleansing of the Temple? – check!

What about the Tax, what are you saying about the Tax

Jesus, what sort of Messiah are you?

What sort of solution are you bringing?

That’s the real question!

What sort of revolution are you bringing?

You cleanse the temple, you call for the coming of the Kingdom of God, what about this tax?

If he says – don’t pay the Tax – he is aligning himself with Judas the Galilean and the Romans will pounce on him quicker than you can say, Jack Robinson.

If he says “DO pay the tax”.

Then the people will know that he is “no Messiah at all”, “he nothing new to say to their society’s desperate needs!”

This is a revolutionary question they are asking

And it is a defining question for Jesus.

It is the same for us.

Here is the question for us...

How do we respond to the real needs in our society?

How do we respond to the poverty, injustice and inequality that is all around us?

What are **we going to do** about injustice, inequality and poverty in our town, country and world?

Do we say, just go with the system, support the system, go with the flow, pay your taxes and have done with it...

in which case, as a church, and as individuals, we have nothing new to say, we are pretty irrelevant to our community,

there is nothing special going on here in this church as far as the town is concerned.

OR

Do we preach revolution, do we back this or that political party, do we pitch our tents outside St.Paul’s, with placards saying – redistribute the wealth! Change the system!

Jesus doesn’t fall into that trap – and neither should we.

neither of those responses work...

2. Jesus gives a revolutionary answer.

He says

v19 Show me the coin used for paying the tax. Whose portrait and whose inscription is this?"

"Caesar's," they replied.

Then he said to them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."

I guess we've all seen Interviewers hound Politicians

We've heard John Humphrys or Jon Snow try to trap them, get them to give "yes" or "no" answers, reduce their arguments to sound-bites which can then be distorted and used to crucify them.

And we've all seen Politicians evade the question, change the subject or simply waffle.

*And I guess we're all used to being **so frustrated** with this approach that we've shouted at the Radio – or turned off the TV – or is that just me 😊*

Well, after the Herodians and Pharisees had posed their question and

Jesus had given his response – are they frustrated?

Do they think Jesus has evaded the question?

Is his answer Waffle?

Not all.

v22 When they heard his answer, they were amazed.

They were amazed.

Jesus blows them away with his answer.

They are asking him to say "yes or no", "left or right", "Conservative or Labour", "UKIP or Part of Some Great European (in this case Roman) Super State"

Who do you support? - one side or the other?

And Jesus doesn't say "yes" and he doesn't say "no".

He goes **deeper** than that.

He asks them to bring him a Roman Denarius

and we know a lot of the Roman Denarii because they survive today.

The denarius they brought would have borne the image of Tiberius Caesar and it would have had the inscription "Tiberius Caesar.

Son of the God Augustus", "Pontifex Maximus"

In other words "King Tiberius, Son of God, Great High Priest".

And he asks, whose image, whose image does the coin bear?

And they say "Caesar's".

And he says Give to Caesar all that bears Caesar's image, and give to God all that bears the image of God.

If Caesar has his image printed on the coin – give the coin to him
If you have the image of God’s printed on you – give yourself to God.
That’s his sound-byte.
And it blows them away!...

Jesus is saying two things simultaneously!
Do not accept the Primacy of Politics
Do not be Politically Complacent.
He doesn’t “yes or no” he says “yes AND no”!

Do not give your Allegiance to Politics do not become Politically Complacent!

Politics is not the answer to our society’s ills, but don’t opt out.
Politicians’ and Political Systems are not our Saviour - but don’t ignore them

Jesus says

Pay back the Politicians what they deserve!

Render to Caesar, literally means, “give back to Caesar” what he deserves!

*Caesar has minted this Silver, Caesar has constructed roads, Caesar has given trade wealth,
Caesar has introduced Romans Baths (and we are all glad about that!) so give him his due;
But Caesar is also a tyrant, he is also merciless and his systems oppress the poor – how do you pay
back a tyrant!*

Firstly, do not think that Politics will ever give you the answer to society’s needs.

Do not put your faith in Politicians or Political Systems

*Do not be like the **Zealots** who spent their life (quite literally) in armed revolt because they believed
THAT was where the answer lies; and*

Secondly, do not just opt out either – and say “well we’re in our little spiritual bubble” who needs
politics!

*Do not be like the **Essenes** who said “blow this for a game of soldiers”
we’re off into the desert to live apart from this world,
we want nothing to do with your unjust systems and your inequality,
we’re going to grow our beards and become Amish!*

Jesus calls us as a church and as individuals to be absolutely involved in this world, involved in its
politics, involved in the tough social issues of our town, involved in pulling down unjust systems,
involved in practical caring...

but we are not to believe, **for one moment**, not for one moment, that this is the mission of the
church, or that this is where people’s salvation lies.

Jesus is lifting the people’s horizons for Salvation beyond what lies in their own hands, and yet at
the same time saying but you have responsibilities.

Jesus both preached and healed
But the healing alone is never an answer; and
Preaching alone just seems irrelevant!

For us it is the same: our gospel and our practical love for Lewes and beyond go hand in hand and we must never separate them!
So many churches have made this mistake
So many churches have launched brilliant social justice projects that don't point to where salvation lies; and
So many churches preach a brilliant gospel but seem utterly irrelevant to the needs all around them!

This is not the Jesus way...
The answer is not "yes" or "no" it is "yes AND no"
And the people were amazed with Jesus' answer
Their mouths hung open, because
they had never heard anything like this before

And then he went further...
3. He pointed to a Revolution behind Revolution.
The only revolution that will work
A revolution unlike any other revolution.
It is a revolution of the heart.
and it turns our world's values upside down...

I guess we see this most powerfully in the Sermon on the Mount.
In the sermon on the mount Jesus looked at his disciples, and said:
Blessed are you who are poor in spirit, for yours is the kingdom of God.
Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied.
Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh and
Blessed are you when men hate you... for great is your reward in heaven.

But woe to you who are rich, woe to you who are well fed now, woe to you who laugh now, woe to you when all men speak well of you... woe to you!!

Would any Politician say such things?!

Jesus takes 4 values that our society strives for, that Politician's work for: power, wealth, comfort and recognition;
and he says "you don't need it!".

You don't need to have control over your future;
You don't need to invest so that you can take life easy
You don't need to strive after recognition or status
Why?

Because there is something you need first...

Look at me says Jesus...

v19 Show me the coin used for paying the tax."

Do you see in that one action he points at something revolutionary?

Do you see?

He says "bring me a coin" and the reason why he says that is obvious - because he doesn't have one himself!

He doesn't have any money to pull out of his pockets, he doesn't have any money! So he asks for someone to show him a coin...

Jesus is a King without a Coin.

have you ever seen a King like this?

He has no coin because he's given his money away,

He doesn't look for status because he's left that behind in heaven

He doesn't need power because God is all the power he needs.

Jesus is a king without a coin because he has something greater

So Jesus uses his wealth, his money, his time

to love the poor, comfort the sick and feed the hungry,

And he can do that because he knows who he is, and he knows what he has got and he knows in whom his faith is invested.

And Jesus says to you and me

This is the way to make a difference in society - "walk in it"

These are the values that will change injustice and inequality - "follow them"

Be the solution to society's needs, model it, point to it.

It is a different way of thinking

All human revolutions just seek to rearrange to wealth, the power, the control between people.

All Politicians can do is rearrange the furniture.

Jesus says "let me give you a completely new set".

Let me change you – and then you can change the systems

You ask, how is this possible?

how is it possible for us to be like that – it is so difficult?

how is it possible to be live like Jesus?

Well here is how – there needs to be a revolution in our heart.

The old Kingdom needs to go – the new needs to come.

And that happens only, only when we see

that Jesus is a King without a Coin for you.

It is all just good theory until the day we realise that

Jesus gave it all up for us.

he became poor - so that we might become rich (the Kingdom of God awaits)

he gave up control over his life to death – so that we might live (and live forever)

he gave up his comfort even death on a cross – so that we might always know God’s presence

he gave up recognition and became rejected and despised – rejected even by his Father – so that we might be forgiven and accepted unconditionally.

And until, and only when, we see this for ourselves.

Only when we embrace this for ourselves

Only when we stand amazed that this is truth is for us

Can the revolution of revolutions happen in our heart.

Jesus is a king without coin for us,

he takes our failures, our guilt, our anxiety - and

giving us his Kingdom, his love, his security.

And only when we see this for ourselves does the revolution happen.

Look,

If this world is all there is then why should I lose my job to stick up for what is right?

If this world is all my hope then why should I sacrifice my comfort for others?

If this world is all the meaning I am going to achieve then why should I forego recognition and status and applause?

But IF there is more, IF there is much more,

then two things happen in our lives

- we will not let our lives be dominated running after money, control, comfort, recognition; and
- we will not let our life decisions be driven by our need for them

Instead we will use what we have to serve others as individuals and as a church.

During these last few years a revolution has been quietly happening in our life as a church:

more than 70 people have visited Rwanda to see how we can make a difference in lives of others who “have not”

John and Fritha Washington have just returned from the Ukraine preparing to go out and found an orphanage for children who have nothing.

Janette Watkins has launched Southover Community Care for vulnerable people in Lewes

Jenni Taylor launched Southover Counselling for those that need support

Dianne Rhodes runs a Friday Night Youth work with between 60 and 80 young people

Christine Angell works in Egypt to teach people life skills so that they can get employment

We are an Eco-Congregation because the world matters

And that’s on top of a bursting Monday Club, Causeway Prospects, the Contact Centre and all the myriad of others things you do... to love Lewes, to love God, to love each other...

But this is just the start...

We are not about rearranging furniture on the Titanic
We do not think Social Justice and Social Action will save anyone
We have more to say than the tents in front of St.Paul's stand for...

We want to point people to the God whose image they bear
We want to point people to the Christ who loves them to death
We want to be like Jesus in our town
And that will only ever happen, when you and I see
that this King is a King without a Coin for us.

It will only ever happen when the Kingdom of God replaces the Kingdom of Caesar in our life.

Will you give to God what is God's
your love... your life... your time... your service.
Will you start the revolution in your life?
Will bring about the revolution to end the need, for all revolutions?