

PRAYERS AND REFLECTION FOR
SUNDAY 18th OCTOBER 2020.

Introduction and Explanations

Dear friend,

Few people like paying taxes! We usually moan that we are paying too much! Today we are exploring the tricky encounter Jesus had in the Temple – a conversation in the surface which looks like it's about paying tax – but as we'll discover, it's about something even more important.

May God bless you as we reflect in worship together today.

Yours in Christ,

David

Revd David Hinchliffe,

Chair of the South East District of the Methodist Church.

Preparing to Worship

You may like to be still, light a candle, or listen to a calming piece of music as we gather in worship



Call to Worship

Sing to the Lord, and praise him,
proclaim his glory to all the world,
for the Lord is great and highly to be praised.
Sing to the Lord, sing a new song to the Lord.

HYMN (Singing The Faith) 340 – Ye servants of Godⁱ

Ye servants of God, your Master proclaim,
And publish abroad his wonderful name ;
The name all-victorious of Jesus extol ;
His kingdom is glorious, and rules over all.

God ruleth on high, almighty to save ;
And still he is nigh, his presence we have ;
The great congregation his triumph shall sing,
Ascribing salvation to Jesus our King.

'Salvation to God who sits on the throne !'
Let all cry aloud, and honour the Son ;
The praises of Jesus the angels proclaim,
Fall down on their faces, and worship the Lamb.

Then let us adore, and give him his right ;
All glory and power, all wisdom and might,
All honour and blessing, with angels above,
And thanks never-ceasing, and infinite love.

Prayersⁱⁱ

We praise you, Lord, for witnesses through the ages who have told your story and made you real to the next generation. We thank you for people whose names are well known and prominent, and we thank you for those whose names are long lost in the annals of history – but who are known to you. We praise you for all whose good Christian lives have impacted on who we are, and what we are, and where we are. We praise you that in every generation there are witnesses who stand out, who stand up to be counted, who make a difference to the Christian path. We praise you, Lord God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, that we have been brought by word, by deed, by action to follow you. **Amen.**

We confess before you, O God, that we are not always a good example of what it is to be a Christian. We do not feel worthy that others should follow us. And yet, Lord, you encourage us to share your love and reveal your truth and lead others to you. We confess that we fail, and we are sorry. We confess our inadequacies and carelessness in standing up for what is right against what is wrong. Forgive us, Lord, and guide us in the ways of truth and justice. We want to be a good example, a shining example of what it means to be a Christian, a follower of Jesus. **Amen.**

Holy Spirit, be among us as we worship,
as we sing and as we read,
as we listen and as we speak,
as we hear and come to know,
as we learn and begin to understand.
Holy Spirit, be among us. **Amen.**

BIBLE READING: 1 Thessalonians 1.1-10

HYMN (STF) 272 – From heaven you came, helpless babeⁱⁱⁱ

From heaven you came, helpless babe,
Entered our world, your glory veiled,
Not to be served but to serve,
And give your life that we might live.

*This is our God, the Servant King,
He calls us now to follow him,
To bring our lives as a daily offering
Of worship to the Servant King.*

There in the garden of tears
My heavy load he chose to bear;
His heart with sorrow was torn,
'Yet not my will but yours,' he said.

This is our God,...

Come see his hands and his feet,
The scars that speak of sacrifice,
Hands that flung stars into space
To cruel nails surrendered.

This is our God,...

So let us learn how to serve
And in our lives enthrone him,
Each other's needs to prefer,
For it is Christ we're serving.

This is our God,...

BIBLE READING: Matthew 22.15-22

Sermon "Whose likeness...?"

- Revd David Hinchliffe

One of my most treasured possessions is a photograph taken soon after his birth, of four generations of Hinchliffes: my son, me, my Dad, and my Grandad. What was shocking when I saw it for the first time, was the family resemblance. My Dad and Grandad had a close resemblance; I had never seen the likeness in me. Now I did. Heaven help my son, Jonathan!

"Whose head is this?" is the question Jesus asks of the Pharisees and Herodians. The Pharisees and Herodians were a suspicious combination. The Pharisees were hostile to Rome; the Herodians (followers of King Herod) were friends of Rome, collaborators. Seeing them together was suspicious enough. Yet what united them was their distrust of Jesus. Could it be that they had at last found a way to trap Jesus? They thought so.

No full-frontal attack, however. They begin with shameless flattery. "Teacher, we know that you are sincere..." (The very opposite to them!) "...and teach the way of God in accordance with truth,

and show deference to no-one; for you do not regard people with partiality.”^{iv} As one commentator put it, “as true a description as one could want.”^v But of course it was the opposite of what they *thought*. They were out to trap Jesus. And what better way than to ask Jesus about money? “Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor or not?”

It doesn’t seem so big a deal. We might grumble, but we pay our taxes, our contribution to the common pot. So what? But Jesus knew it was a trap. “Whose head is on the coin?” he asks them. They have a coin; Jesus doesn’t. They are compromised already; they don’t see it. And of course the answer is “the emperor’s.” Then Jesus tells them, “Give to the emperor what is the emperor and to God the things that are God’s.” So what is the big deal? Is it all about tax? No. It’s about image.

Seeing myself in my Dad and Grandad (and in my son) was a shock. Yet it was a sign that somehow we belonged together. To worship a graven image was a sin – yet whose image was on the coin? The Emperor’s. The Herodians were avowed collaborators; but the Pharisees were hostile to Rome, but still had the coin in their hands. They had already tacitly submitted their allegiance.

In whose likeness are you made? Paul is celebrating the life and faith of the Thessalonian church in the opening of his first letter to them. He praises them and remembers them before God for their works of faith, their labour of love, and the steadfastness of hope they had in the Lord Jesus.^{vi} And what was more important, Paul notes that “you became imitators of us and of the Lord.” In other words, the image they displayed, through imitating the work and sufferings of the Lord Jesus were Paul and Jesus himself. If you looked at the Thessalonians, you would see their likeness; they were born of the same family. They were as one. Look at one and see the other!

The Pharisees and Herodians thought they were going to trap Jesus by talking about tax – a common thing for politicians!! But instead, Jesus was able to look inside *their* hearts and was able to see to whom *they* belonged. And it was not the face of God they saw in the mirror.

It’s easy for us to condemn the Pharisees and Herodians. Familiarity with the story perhaps makes it easy to do. But are we different, really? Are we collaborators (overt, like the Herodians, or in denial like the Pharisees) – willing to compromise the gospel for the sake of ease and comfort, or are we willing to allow the beauty of Jesus to be seen in all we do. Are we imitators of Christ, through whom our work of faith, labour of love, and steadfastness of hope in Jesus can still be seen?

May God give us humility to look into the mirror honestly, and see whose image is in the mirror. And when we do, may our prayer find expression in the words of Charles Wesley:

“Let him to whom we now belong
His sovereign right assert,
And take up every thankful song
And every loving heart.”^{vii}

Amen.

Prayers of Intercession^{viii}

For our prayers, I invite you to use the words of this hymn, by Marjorie Dobson. Before you use it, you might want to hold before God

- Yourself
- Those who love
- Your neighbours and the community around you
- The world and its leaders
- Those who look at themselves in the mirror and cannot find anyone to love

Listening God, you hear us when we cannot speak,
When despair and turmoil leave us faint and weak.
In love you call us back to you again
And your grace reminds us how you feel our pain.

Searching God, you find us when we go astray,
As self-centred living takes us from your way.
In love you seek us, show us what we've lost,
And your tears remind us what forgiveness cost.

Suffering God, you lift us from our deepest grief,
When emotion blinds us to our own belief.
In love you touch us with your nail-torn hand
And your wounds remind us why you understand.

Risen God, you show us love too strong for death,
Evil deeds defeated by your living breath.
In love you teach us never to despair,
Your new life reminds us, hope is always there.

The Lord's Prayer

Amen.

HYMN (STF) 504 – May the mind of Christ my Saviour^{ix}

May the mind of Christ my Saviour
Live in me from day to day,
By his love and power controlling
All I do or say.

May the word of God dwell richly
In my heart from hour to hour,
So that all may see I triumph
Only through his power.

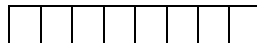
May the peace of God my Father
Rule my life in everything,
That I may be calm to comfort
Sick and sorrowing.

May the love of Jesus fill me,
As the waters fill the sea ;
Him exalting, self forgetting —
This is victory.

May I run the race before me,
Strong and brave to face the foe,
Looking only unto Jesus
As I onward go.

The Blessing^x

**The love of the Father enfold us,
The wisdom of the Son enlighten us,
The fire of the Spirit enflame us;
And the blessing of God, the Three in One,
Be upon us and abide with us now and for ever. Amen.**



Acknowledgments:

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ⁱ Charles Wesley (1707–1788). Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, number 340.

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^{iv} Matthew 22.16 (NRSVA).

^v Stanley Hauerwas, *Matthew* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 189.

^{vi} See 1 Thessalonians 1.3 (NRSVA)

^{vii} Charles Wesley (1707–1788). Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, number 557, verse 1.

^{viii} Marjorie Dobson (b. 1940). Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, number **524**. Words: © 2004, Stainer & Bell Ltd, 23 Gruneisen Road, London N3 1DZ <www.stainer.co.uk>

^{ix} Katie Barclay Wilkinson (1859–1928). Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, number 504.

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