

**“YOU’RE GONNA HAVE TO SERVE SOMEBODY!”**

**A SERMON BASED ON THE GOSPEL OF  
MATTHEW (22:15-22) AND PRESENTED FOR  
ORLEAN UMC ON OCTOBER 18, 2020-----**

**MOST IF NOT ALL OF YOU ARE FAMILIAR WITH  
BOB DYLAN AND AT LEAST SOME OF HIS ICONIC  
WORK....DYLAN IS WIDELY REGARDED AS ONE  
OF THE GREATEST SONG WRITERS OF ALL TIME  
---- HE HAS BEEN A MAJOR FIGURE IN POPULAR  
CULTURE FOR OVER 50 YEARS.....I PAUSE AND  
REFLECT ON HOW IS SONGS HAVE ALWAYS  
BEEN A PART OF MY LIFE EXPERIENCE AND  
HAVE ALWAYS HAD A PRESENCE AND  
SIGNIFICANT INFLUENCE IN THE GREAT EVENTS  
OF MY WORLD -----**

**FURTHER -----I REALIZE---ALBEIT RATHER  
SLOWLY --- THAT DYLAN WILL TURN 80 NEXT  
MAY.....OH.....WHERE DO THE YEARS GO.....**

**WELL-----AMONG HIS WORK IS A SONG TITLED  
“GOTTA SERVE SOMEBODY,” LISTEN TO THESE  
WORDS:**

***YOU MAY BE AN AMBASSADOR TO ENGLAND OR  
FRANCE,***

***YOU MAY LIKE TO GAMBLE, YOU MIGHT LIKE TO  
DANCE,***

***YOU MAY BE THE HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION OF  
THE WORLD,***

***YOU MAY BE A SOCIALITE WITH A LONG STRING  
OF PEARLS.***

***BUT YOU'RE GONNA HAVE TO SERVE  
SOMEBODY, YES INDEED,  
YOU'RE GONNA HAVE TO SERVE SOMEBODY.  
IT MAY BE THE DEVIL OR IT MAY BE THE LORD,  
BUT YOU'RE GONNA HAVE TO SERVE  
SOMEBODY.***

***"YOU'RE GONNA HAVE TO SERVE SOMEBODY."***

**"GOTTA SERVE SOMEBODY" WAS THE LEAD  
SONG ON DYLAN'S 1979 ALBUM "SLOW TRAIN  
COMING" AND WAS HIS LAST HIT SINGLE**

**IT WON THE GRAMMY AWARD FOR BEST MALE  
ROCK VOCAL FOR 1979.**

**DYLAN WAS RAISED IN A CLOSELY-KNIT JEWISH  
FAMILY AND COMMUNITY BUT HE PUBLICLY  
CONVERTED TO CHRISTIANITY --- AT LEAST FOR  
A TIME --- IN 1978 ----AND THIS SONG WAS  
AMONG A NUMBER OF GOSPEL SONGS THAT HE  
RECORDED -----**

**BUT JUST TO KEEP THE RECORD STRAIGHT -----  
DYLAN'S PRONOUNCEMENTS OF FAITH HAVE  
BEEN HERE AND THERE OVER THESE MANY  
YEARS.....**

**SO---WHILE SOME OBSERVERS HAVE ATTACHED  
A GOOD BIT OF RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE TO  
THESE WORDS----I PREFER TO TAKE THEM ON  
FACE VALUE FOR WHAT THEY SAY .....AND NOT  
TRY TO READ A GREAT DEAL INTO DYLAN'S  
THINKING -----OR HIS FAITH -----AS HE WROTE  
THEM**

**SO HOWEVER WE MAY HAVE COME TO RECEIVE  
THIS SONG FROM IT'S WRITER ----IT HAS  
RELEVANCE FOR US TODAY AS WE CONTINUE  
TO STUDY AND JOURNEY THROUGH MATTHEW'S  
GOSPEL-----**

OUR TEXT TODAY INCLUDES JESUS' OFT-  
QUOTED WORDS IN RESPONSE TO THE TRICK  
QUESTION FROM THE PHARISEES AND THE  
HERODIANS,

"IS IT LAWFUL TO PAY TAXES TO THE EMPEROR  
OR NOT?" "GIVE THEREFORE TO THE EMPEROR  
THE THINGS THAT ARE THE EMPEROR'S, AND TO  
GOD THE THINGS THAT ARE GOD'S."

LIKE ALL THE RECENT TEXTS WE HAVE BEEN  
HEARING FROM MATTHEW'S GOSPEL, THIS ONE  
NEEDS A LOT OF CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND  
EXPLANATION.

**JEWS IN FIRST CENTURY PALESTINE PAID A LOT OF TAXES. THERE WAS A TEMPLE TAX; THERE WERE ALSO LAND TAXES, CUSTOMS AND TRADE TAXES TO NAME JUST THREE MORE.... THE TAX IN THIS TEXT WAS ADDITIONAL TAX, ONE PARTICULARLY DESPISED BY THE JEWS - IT WAS CALLED THE IMPERIAL TAX, REQUIRED AS A TRIBUTE TO ROME TO SUPPORT THE ROMAN EMPIRE'S OCCUPATION OF ISRAEL..... *THINK OF THAT A MOMENT - FIRST CENTURY JEWS WERE REQUIRED TO PAY THEIR OPPRESSORS A YEARLY TAX TO SUPPORT THEIR OWN OPPRESSION!***

**OF COURSE, NOT EVERYONE SAW THE TAX THAT WAY. THE HERODIANS WERE LOCAL SYMPATHIZERS WITH THE ROMAN RULERS..... THEY WERE A FAMILY POLITICAL PARTY RELATED TO KING HEROD, THE LOCAL PUPPET RULER SUPPORTED BY THE ROMANS..... SOME FOLKS THINK THE APOSTLE PAUL CAME FROM THIS FAMILY..... THE HERODIANS SUPPORTED THE IMPERIAL TAX, THEY BENEFITED FROM IT. THE PHARISEES, ALSO A POLITICAL PARTY AS WELL AS RELIGIOUS SCHOLARS, DID NOT HAVE MUCH USE FOR THE IMPERIAL TAX, BUT THEY PROBABLY GRUDGINGLY SUPPORTED IT SINCE IT ALSO HELPED KEEP THEM IN POWER.**



**AND, AS FAR AS MATTHEW WAS CONCERNED,  
THE PHARISEES WOULD DO ANYTHING TO TRY  
TO TRAP JESUS.**

**THE IMPERIAL TAX WAS OPPOSED BY THE MOST,  
IF NOT ALL, OF JESUS' FOLLOWERS..... MANY OF  
THEM WERE NATIONALISTS WHO FOUND THE  
IMPERIAL TAX PARTICULARLY OFFENSIVE SINCE  
IT DAILY REMINDED THEM OF THEIR  
HUMILIATION AND OCCUPATION BY THE ROMAN  
EMPIRE..... NOW, THE IMPERIAL TAX SHOULD  
HAVE BEEN A PROBLEM FOR THE PHARISEES,  
TOO, AND NOT ONLY FOR POLITICAL REASONS.**

**A COIN ENGRAVED WITH A PICTURE OF THE  
EMPEROR CAESAR TIBERIUS AND A  
PROCLAMATION OF HIS DIVINITY - WHY, THAT  
BROKE THE FIRST TWO COMMANDMENTS! -----  
THUS, IN JESUS' TIME, ANY CONVERSATION  
ABOUT THE IMPERIAL TAX WAS VERY DIVISIVE  
AND IMMEDIATELY REVEALED WHERE ONE  
STOOD IN RELATION TO ROME AND FAITH.**

**AND THAT IS HOW THE HERODIANS AND  
PHARISEES GOT TOGETHER TO TRY TO TRAP  
JESUS.**

**NORMALLY, THEY DID NOT GET ALONG, BUT ON THIS OCCASION, THEY WERE UNITED IN THEIR DESIRE TO TRAP JESUS. JESUS HAD JUST ENTERED JERUSALEM – AND THE PEOPLE LOVED HIM..... NOW, JESUS WAS PREACHING IN THE TEMPLE AND STIRRING UP ALL KINDS OF TROUBLE FOR THESE STATUS-QUO FOLKS..... SO, TOGETHER, THE HERODIANS AND PHARISEES DECIDED TO TRY TO TRAP JESUS. WITH THEIR QUESTION ABOUT THE IMPERIAL TAX, JESUS' FOES THOUGHT THEY HAD JESUS TRAPPED - IF JESUS ANSWERED ONE WAY, IF HE ADVOCATED PAYING THIS TAX, HE WOULD DISAPPOINT HIS FOLLOWERS.**

**IF JESUS ANSWERED ANOTHER WAY, IF HE  
ADVOCATED NOT PAYING THIS TAX, HE WOULD  
BE IN TROUBLE WITH THE ROMAN RULERS. THEY  
THOUGHT THEY HAD HIM!**

**BUT, AS WE KNOW, JESUS NOT ONLY EVADED  
THEIR TRAP, HE TRAPPED THEM IN THEIR OWN  
QUESTION. "WHOSE FACE IS ON THE COIN?"  
JESUS ASKED..... PERHAPS OVER-EAGER TO  
ADVANCE THEIR OWN PLOT, JESUS' OPPONENTS  
FORGOT THAT BY SHOWING A COIN WITH THE  
EMPEROR'S IMAGE ON IT, THEY BETRAYED  
THEIR OWN COMPLICITY WITH THE ROMAN  
SYSTEM.....**

**THEN JESUS ASKED WHOSE IMAGE AND PROCLAMATION ADORNED THE COIN. "THE EMPEROR'S," THEY ANSWERED. EVERYONE IN ATTENDANCE KNEW THE COMMANDMENTS AND THEY KNEW THAT JESUS HAD JUST TRAPPED THE TRAPPERS IN THEIR OWN BLASPHEMY ACCORDING TO JEWISH LAW!**

**AND THAT MAKES JESUS' RESPONSE EVEN MORE BITING - "GIVE, THEREFORE, TO CAESAR, THE THINGS THAT ARE CAESAR'S, AND TO GOD THE THINGS THAT ARE GOD'S."**

**JESUS TURNED THE TABLES, SO TO SPEAK, ON HIS QUESTIONERS.... WITH JUST A FEW WORDS, JESUS REVEALED THE TRUTH ABOUT HIS WOULD-BE ACCUSERS AND SIMULTANEOUSLY CALLED THEM TO A HIGHER ACCOUNTABILITY AND FIDELITY THAN THEY HAD IMAGINED POSSIBLE.**

***THAT'S WHERE BOB DYLAN'S SONG COMES IN - YOU GOTTA SERVE SOMEBODY. JESUS MADE IT ABSOLUTELY CLEAR WHO HE SERVED.***

**MIGHT JESUS ALSO BE TALKING TO US? HE IS**  
**NOT TRAPPING US, OF COURSE, BUT JESUS IS**  
**INVITING US TO DECLARE OUR ALLEGIANCE TO**  
**GOD. THUS, PERHAPS THE KEY QUESTION HERE**  
**IS NOT WHOSE IMAGE IN ON THE COIN BUT**  
**RATHER WHOSE IMAGE IS ON US! WHOSE IMAGE**  
**IS ON OUR HEARTS? JESUS IS INVITING US TO**  
**DECLARE OUR ALLEGIANCE TO GOD.**

OFTEN, THIS TEXT IS INTERPRETED TO PRESENT  
THE DICHOTOMY IN OUR LIVES, THAT WE HAVE  
DUTIES TO BOTH GOD AND COUNTRY..... AND,  
WHILE THAT IS SO, I BELIEVE JESUS IS TALKING  
HERE PRIMARILY ABOUT OUR DUTY TO GOD.

**MANY OF US HAVE STRONG POLITICAL VIEWS - WE MAY BE DEMOCRATS, REPUBLICANS, OR INDEPENDENTS. BUT, BEFORE AND ABOVE ANY OF THESE, WE - YOU AND I - ARE CHRISTIANS, FOLLOWERS OF JESUS CHRIST. JESUS IS OR SHOULD BE OUR FIRST LOYALTY, ABOVE ALL OTHERS.**

**JESUS RAISES IMPORTANT QUESTIONS FOR US IN THIS TEXT AND HE DOES NOT GIVE PAT ANSWERS. THERE ARE ELEMENTS IN OUR LIVES THAT ARE, INDEED, PART OF THE WORLD ORDER AND SHOULD BE "RENDERED TO CAESAR," AS THE TEXT STATES.**



**BUT THERE ARE OTHER PARTS OF OUR LIVES,**  
**OUR VERY PERSONS AND OUR VERY SELVES,**  
**THAT BELONG TO GOD ALONE. IF WE**  
**REMEMBER THAT, ALL OF LIFE CAN TAKE ON**  
**GREATER FOCUS AND MEANING. WE BELONG,**  
**NOT TO ANYTHING THIS WORLD - WE BELONG TO**  
**GOD.**

**AND THIS MEANS THAT NO MATTER WHAT WE**  
**MAY DO OR SAY, NO MATTER WHERE WE MAY**  
**GO, NO MATTER WHAT MAY HAPPEN TO US, WE**  
**ARE FIRST AND FOREMOST AND FOREVER,**  
**GOD'S OWN BELOVED CHILDREN. AND, IF WE**  
**BELIEVE THIS AND LIVE THIS, GOD WILL SHAPE**  
**ALL THAT WE SAY AND DO AND HOW WE LIVE.**

**WE BELONG TO GOD. WE ARE GOD'S BELOVED  
CHILDREN.**

***BUT YOU'RE GONNA HAVE TO SERVE***

***SOMEBODY, YES INDEED,***

***YOU'RE GONNA HAVE TO SERVE SOMEBODY.***

***IT MAY BE THE DEVIL OR IT MAY BE THE LORD,***

***BUT YOU'RE GONNA HAVE TO SERVE***

***SOMEBODY.***

***YOU'RE GONNA HAVE TO SERVE SOMEBODY.***

***AND WE KNOW WHO WE SERVE.***

**ALL OF LIFE IS GOD'S. THIS TEXT TELLS US THAT**  
**WE ARE TO "RENDER UNTO GOD THE THINGS**  
**THAT ARE GOD'S." AND, SINCE ALL OF LIFE IS**  
**GOD'S AND SINCE YOU GOTTA SERVE**  
**SOMEBODY, WE - YOU AND I - WE SERVE AND**  
**LOVE AND LIVE IN THE LOVE AND RULE OF**  
**JESUS CHRIST.**

**WE BELONG TO GOD. WE ARE GOD'S CHILDREN.**  
**OUR TASK IS TO BELIEVE THAT AND LIVE IT.**

**AFTER ALL-----YOU'RE GONNA HAVE TO SERVE**  
**SOMEBODY.**

**PRAISE GOD AND MAY IT BE SO FOR YOU AND  
FOR ME.....AMEN.**