

God's due-Sermon on Matthew 22:15-22-Preached October 18, 2020

Have you ever been asked a question where you realize no matter how you answer it, it is dangerous territory? I don't know what scenarios you women might think of regarding that question, but I can definitely think of some as a man.

Like when my wife asks me, what do you think of my outfit or my hair? As you know men, there is sometimes the truthful answer and then there is the right answer. I have learned in my marriage the answer fine will not cut it. I have learned if I answer too quickly, without giving it due thought, it is not sufficient. I have also learned that it doesn't matter what I say if she doesn't believe it herself. Sometimes there is no easy answer.

Well today, we see Jesus get a taste of this kind of scenario and how he answers it can have a lot to say to us on how we are to relate as Christians to both our government and our God, as he answers, Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's. It reminds us we are citizens of two kingdoms as Christians. One being the kingdom of the world, in which we are under governments and laws and earthly leaders, and the kingdom of Christ, in which He interacts with us according to grace through His church.

We see this scenario as one day Matthew tells us, the Pharisees decided they were going to try to entangle or trap Jesus in his words. This was the Tuesday after Jesus had rode into Jerusalem to the fanfare of Palm Sunday. It led the Pharisees to realize all the more they had a deep problem in Jesus. The people were lauding him as their king. They needed to do something to get rid of this Jesus, so they hatched a plot.

They sent their disciples along with a group called the Herodians to ask Jesus a question. The question, **is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?** It was a question loaded with lots of pitfalls.

For one, if Jesus answered yes, the disciples of the Pharisees could report back to their Jewish leaders that Jesus was a supporter of Rome and was for the taxes the Romans were levying against the Jewish people. Like in our day, they would use that as political fodder against Jesus among the crowds.

However, if Jesus answered no, the Herodians, who actually were people the Pharisees despised because they supported the Roman government, could report back to the Roman authorities that this Jesus was opposed to their taxes and the government. It would be a bad look for Jesus, in which the Roman government could view him as a threat and insurrectionist.

In many ways, this question is like some of the debates I have watched lately. They were trying to set him up by the question to get him to say something that could get him in trouble.

But Jesus as the Son of God is not going to take the bait. Matthew reveals that Jesus was aware of their malice and says to them, **"Why put me to the test, you hypocrites."**

They were strong words from Jesus, yet it was because he knew the Pharisees didn't have a problem benefitting from the Roman government's rule, like Herod building the temple for them or the Romans fighting wars to protect them, while at the same time, grumbling about the taxes they had to pay for those things.

So Jesus asks to see a coin. He asks them, **“Whose likeness and inscription is this? They said, Caesar’s. Then, he said to them, “Therefore, render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God, the things that are God’s.”**

Jesus doesn’t really answer the question, but yet answers it perfectly at the same time. He was really trying to get them to see that they owed Caesar what was his for the benefits that came from his rule. The fact that they had one of his coins with his face on it, which allowed them to buy and sell and live under the comfort of Roman rule, was evidence that they owed him a certain due. It is why Luther says on this verse, **“The Lord replies, “this coin is used to pay taxes due Caesar, and you have sworn loyalty to him; so bear this in mind and give him what is his.”**

However, Jesus is also leading them to ask the question of themselves. But what is God’s due? What has He given you that you ought to receive with thanksgiving and give back to him praise and worship for giving?

The answer was standing right in front of them. It was Jesus. He was the image of God standing in their midst they were not accepting. Therefore, who was in the real jeopardy? Jesus by his answer, or the answer of their hearts who were rejecting Him as the gift of the Father for their salvation. The Messiah to come.

It is where there is a lesson in these words for us too. I know a lot of us are worried and fretting over who is going to be the next Caesar over us through our elections. We can worry over how their election will affect our lives. We may find ourselves, like those Pharisees, resenting certain aspects of how they might rule over us.

Yet Jesus teaches us to simply give them back what is due them, no matter who they are. If we are benefitting from them, even though we may not agree entirely with their specific rulings, we still owe them a due. A due of paying them back in taxes for the benefits we receive from them. The due of respect as they are carrying out the function of maintaining order and protecting our borders and neighborhoods. And while individuals within those offices will fail and sin, and there may be times when we have to stand up to orders of government for their orders contrary to God’s word, we as a general rule are called to be obedient, law-abiding citizens, giving back to Caesar what is owed him.

However, what we also can’t lose sight of is that there are certain things we dare not owe the governing authorities, which should be reserved for Christ alone. Such as a faith and trust that should be reserved for God alone. Because while our Lord will use the governing authorities to protect us and meet some of the needs of the body, they should never be idolized for those ways the Lord uses them, as if they are coming from them.

Scripture is clear that God establishes governing authorities and powers on earth, but only as ordained by him. Israel only had a leader to deliver them from Egypt because God raised up and equipped Moses for that purpose. Saul, David, Solomon, and the judges only had success in battle and had authority over the people because God granted them success and raised them up for that purpose. When we begin to look to our earthly leaders in any way other than as servants used and equipped by God, we are giving Caesar more due than he should receive.

It is why Luther says in his Large Catechism about the first commandment these words, he says, “The intention of this commandment, therefore, is to require true faith and confidence of the heart, which fly straight to the one true God and cling to him alone. What this means is: “See to it that you let me alone be your God, and never search for another. In other words, “Whatever good thing you lack, look to me for it and seek it from me, and whenever you suffer misfortune and distress, crawl to me and cling to me. I, I myself, will give you what you need and help you out of every danger. Only do not let your heart cling to or rest in anyone else.”

If we look at our earthly leaders as anything more than mere human beings, flawed in sin, who cannot meet all our needs nor protect us from all harm, we may be giving them more due than they deserve. But when we fear, love and trust in God first and foremost for those things, realizing these men or women are not God, but merely people God uses for his purposes, then we begin to view them rightly and give them their proper due. Because Jesus alone is our true king and Lord, as He is the image of God for us.

His presence at our altar and at the font of baptism is the reminder of to whom we belong. He came to be God’s gift of salvation for you, so you could stand redeemed and saved one day before the throne of God because God gave us what was His in His Son to forgive our sins.

For this, we owe him our very life and our very hope for eternal life with God. Something no ruler on earth could ever give or promise.

Therefore, I know many of us are worried and anxious about the election. Many of us are putting a lot of stock on who gets elected and what that will mean for our future, but when we stop to remember who is our true king and Lord. Who we look to for protection and hope and the well-being of the future, Jesus, we can know we will be in good hands no matter who is the face of our nation after November 3rd because we will still be in Christ’s hands, in His kingdom.

For while worldly kingdoms rise and fall and leaders come and go, Christ and His kingdom will endure forever. Amen.