

Written Copy: Matthew 22:20-21 "What Should I Render to God?"

Proper 24-20th Sunday @ Pentecost

Sunday, October 18th, 2020

Text: Matthew 22:19-21

¹⁹ Show me the coin for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. ²⁰ And Jesus said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" ²¹ 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."

Exegetical Statement

After hearing the previous parables of Jesus aimed at them and their failure to repent and believe, the Pharisees depart from His presence and go off by themselves to plot. They want to come up with a way that they can trick Him into saying something that will get Him into trouble with either the people or the Roman government. They come up with a question for which there is no good answer, no way out. They send their disciples to Him hoping Jesus will mistake them for men who have a real question of faith and doctrine to ask a learned Rabbi. With them are the Herodians who would be witnesses in case Jesus speaks against Rome. They begin with words of empty flattery, calling Him a teacher who is always truthful and teaches only the divine truth of God. They point out that His character is such that He would always speak the truth without concern for popularity or what Rome thinks. "That being said, Teacher, tell us if it's permissible according to God's Law to pay taxes levied by Caesar, since God alone is our ruler that we pay homage to. Jesus knows what's in their hearts, that they do not really honor Him as they say, nor are they really interested in a doctrinal answer. They are hypocrites working as part of an evil plot. He makes them answer their own question when they agree that the money they use has Caesar's inscription, and therefore the Roman government is the source of their economy, and they owe Rome for what it provides them. But even more they owe God for all He provides as the Creator of all, ruler of all, and the One who provides temporal peace, and through Jesus the Messiah will provide the eternal peace His kingdom brings. These men who came to question Jesus probably didn't get the depth of His answer, but they realized that He escaped their trap of either turning the people against Him, or the Romans. They walk amazed at His wisdom, but not changed to repent in their hearts.

Focus Statement:

Jesus and His work of salvation has made us members of God's kingdom. We are things that are God's and Jesus paid the price to make us so. God graciously provided His Son to make us good enough to be in His kingdom. He also graciously provides rulers in the temporal kingdom so that His will and plan is fulfilled through them and us.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

Just as those men of Jesus' day, we can get overlook what we owe to the two realms we live in. We can fail to see what we owe to God as those who while living as citizens of His eternal kingdom have stewardship responsibilities in the temporal kingdom that is His gift to us

What the hearer should do as a result:

Live as responsible members of both kingdoms which God rules by fulfilling our vocational responsibility as citizens to express God's will through our voting for those who support the tenants of Natural Law.

Subject Sentence: Render to God our obedient stewardship in Vocation

Introduction:

Well, in 15 short days we as Americans will be tasked with the job of selecting a new President, along with other Federal, State, and Local officials and lawmakers. And perhaps like me you are hoping and praying that when it's all over the anger and divisiveness that has surrounded this election will subside. Then we as a country can begin to heal. In the meantime, over these next 15 days, those of us who have not already submitted absentee ballots have a formidable task on our hand. It is so formidable that some have decided to avoid the whole thing entirely. Fed up with the candidates, a corrupt political system, and the belief that their vote will not count, some have decided to sit this election out. They might even picture Jesus looking down at the negative campaign ads, and how Christians have joined in with intolerance against their fellow man and feel that even Jesus must be washing His hands of the whole affair. But is that really what Jesus expects of us come November 3rd?

Maybe we should consider "WWJVF": Who Would Jesus Vote For? On the surface this may sound intriguing. But my guess is that those who already have a favorite political party, and a favorite candidate, would not be swayed by this from where they already stand. Instead of prayerfully considering their vote through the eyes of their faith, they would be at work building a defense of why Jesus wants them to vote for their candidate. I've heard people claim that the Democratic Party is the Christian Party while others claim the Republican party is the "Christian" party. You know Republicans and Democrats didn't exist when Jesus walked the earth. It wouldn't matter if they did because Rome didn't seek input regarding who should be in charge. They told you who is in charge. And if you didn't like it, just try to do something about it. The only thing that will change is you will be dead. Now there were religious/political parties around during Jesus time: the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Zealots, and the Herodians. But Jesus was not a member of any of them. How do you think Jesus feels about us as Christians identifying ourselves as one political party or another?

Jesus is telling us something very important in our Gospel Lesson today. **Matthew 22:21b** **"Then he said to them, "Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."** But perhaps we miss it because while it's short and seemingly simple at first, it is rather deep. And we can get so hung up on the first part of His statement that we can miss the import of the second part. Jesus is responding to men who came with a question about paying taxes, which is not one of the most favorite things in any of our lives. But is that really what Jesus' answer is really about?

What Jesus is Teaching Us About Stewardship?

The men who came to Jesus with that question weren't who they appeared to be. They probably weren't the men who had been questioning Jesus authority and identity since He arrived in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. Those men would be members of the party called the Pharisees. They had already decided Jesus was not the promised Messiah. They didn't like Roman rule but liked less the idea of Roman Soldiers slaughtering them because they put their support behind a false Messiah like Jesus. They saw Him as a dangerous heretic, an imposter, one who must be done away with. But the problem is that the people see Him as a man of God, a prophet. The Pharisees needed to come up with a plan to ruin His reputation in the eyes of the people. They wanted the people to see Him as what they truly believed in their hearts He was.

Also fueling their vendetta against Him is what Jesus has been teaching. Just preceding our Gospel Lesson Jesus had told a series of parables aimed in part at these Pharisees, calling them to repent. In the parables He taught that God had given them their positions as religious leaders so that they might faithfully point to the Messiah. Now that Messiah stood before them. But they, in their sinful pride, refused to see Him as He really is. Out of love, Jesus was calling them to repent, otherwise they would suffer the fate of all who fail to repent: eternal hell and suffering.

Offended by His parables which were aimed directly aimed at them, they go off by themselves and plot. They come up with what they consider to be a sure-fire plan to discredit Jesus and get rid of Him. It's a question which they believe has no good answer. If He answers one way, he will earn the anger of the Romans who will charge Him of rebelling against Roman authority. If he answers the other way, He will provoke the anger of the people who dislike Rome and its authority over them.

It's the perfect question, but the Pharisees want to catch Him off guard with it. So, they commission some of their followers to ask Jesus the question. These approached Him sounding like men who were Jesus own followers. **Matthew 22:16 "Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone's opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances."** They're saying 'Hey Jesus, we know you are a righteous dude! You don't care about making friends like politicians do. You don't just tell people what they want to hear. You teach the truth of God because you are a truthful person above all else. That's why we know you will tell us God's truth about this. We've been wondering, how does God feel about us paying taxes to Rome? Doesn't God's law say that His people should only give honor, glory, and tribute to Him alone?'

Sounds like a difficult question, doesn't it? And if these men were who they pretended to be, as men with a genuine religious question, Jesus might have answered it differently. It doesn't matter that Jesus may not have seen these men before. He knows who they really are. He calls them hypocrites: those who are only acting the part of being His dutiful disciples. He can see right through them. He knows they are not really interested in what God has to say about taxes. They hate paying them and they are sure God's law supports that position. Jesus knows they have been sent with that question in order to tempt Him, to trip Him up. If He answers that only God alone should receive His people's tribute then the Romans will arrest Him and make an example of Him, the Herodians who accompany these men will make sure of it. But if He answers that people should obey Rome, then the people will turn against Him. Either way the Pharisees can claim that Jesus is the hypocrite, one who claims to teach God's truth but twists it in fear of Rome, or in fear of the people. Sounds a lot like a modern-day politician doesn't it?

But they are dealing with no mere politician. This is the divine Son of God. And just as He has already done earlier in the day, He is going to force these men to answer their own question. He does so by asking to see the coin that is used to pay the tax. If He were talking about the tribute each Jew was to give faithfully to God, He would've asked to see a shekel, the money accepted in the temple. But instead they are asking about the "poll tax" the tax all adults had to pay in Roman currency. He says (**Matthew 22:19-21a**) **¹⁹ Show me the coin for the tax.** **And they brought him a denarius.** **²⁰ And Jesus said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?"** **²¹ They said, "Caesar's."** **Then he said to them, "Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's..."** Jesus is saying "Look at this coin gentlemen. Whose image is carved into it? Whose name and title are inscribed upon it? Caesars? Then it must be his. Give to Caesar what belongs to him since his name is carved upon it." Jesus is pointing out that Rome underwrites the value of the denarius. The economy is driven by the ruling power of the land, and that is the Romans. How can you then claim you don't owe Rome anything?

But overlooked by us just now, and by many who have come before us is the rest of that verse. For the second part is far more important than the first (**Matthew 22:21b**) **and (render) to God the things that are God's.** What are the things that are God's? Everything! He is the Creator and sustainer of all things. He gives life to all things and sustains all things upon this earth. As **Isaiah 45:5a** states "**I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God;**" Every creature on earth owes its existence to God and God alone.

Who We Are as Those Who Belong to God

But you and I especially should confess that we owe God everything we have and everything we are. Because He chose to make us His. You and I are precious things, precious children of God. That's why Jesus came to earth. That's why Jesus is in Jerusalem teaching in the temple. He was showing all who are present who He is: One who taught with godly wisdom and authority, and did miraculous things with divine power. And He had come to Jerusalem to do the most extraordinary miracle ever.

Our Old Testament Lesson tells of the man named Cyrus, the one the LORD chose before he was ever born. The Lord chose him to be the means by which God would save His people from exile in Babylon. Jesus too was chosen before He was ever born of the virgin Mary. God chose Him for an even greater act of salvation. Jesus was the only man who could take upon Himself the punishment due to each and every man because of their sinful disobedience toward God. The weight of the world's sins would crush any other man. But Jesus wasn't just a man, He was God in the flesh. He had no sin of His own but suffered like the worst and most evil sinner. He suffered in your place and mine, the perfect sacrifice for our sin. And in doing so He made you and I good enough to be precious and beloved children of the Heavenly Father.

You have been attested to be God's own and have been stamped with the Father's own name in Baptism. Jesus earned for you that right in His death and resurrection. And the Holy Spirit gave to you all that Jesus earned for you in your Baptism. You are a very precious part of God's kingdom. You belong to the Father, and the Spirit is working to keep you as part of His property, to keep you as His precious child throughout your time on this earth. God has given you life, your new life in Christ, and eternal life to come. And along with He has given all that is needed to sustain your life physically and spiritually until He calls you home.

How to Be Godly Stewards as Christian Voters

Looking at it that way you can see we have been given surpassingly great gifts. And what does God expect from us who have received them? To be good stewards, good managers of all He has given us. Not to earn those gifts, they come to us freely through our faith in Christ, but as our love response to gifts we could neither earn nor deserve. He calls us to be good stewards of all our gifts. You who are here today listening to this message and are preparing to receive His Sacrament are being good stewards of the faith God gave you. That is what we do as members of His Church.

But what about our lives lived out on this earth? We have been greatly blessed to be born and live in a country where we have freedom to worship when, where, and how we choose. God provides this for us through His gift of government. Government keeps the peace by making people follow the 2nd table of the commandments, the moral laws: you shall not murder, you shall not kill, you shall not bear false witness, honor authority. The purpose is to force everyone to observe the rights of others so that people can live without killing one another. What do we owe God for this wonderful gift? Jesus says in **Matthew 22:21** **"Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."** Our government is one of those gifts from God. And when we render what we are called to do as citizens of this country we are also honoring the God who gives it to us. Certainly, this does mean pay taxes. But for us in America who are given the privilege of selecting who will lead us, that includes voting.

Luther described the life of a Christian as living simultaneously in two realms. You and I live under His love, grace, and mercy in the realm of the Church. But we also live and fulfill our Christian vocations as citizens of the realm of government. Our founding fathers designed our government so that it cannot tell us who to worship. But they recognized that if the people had the power to elect leaders and pass laws, they needed to be guided by Natural Law, which is the moral law, which is the 2nd table of the 10 commandments. Government now more than ever needs our influence and our voice. We live in a world where God doesn't exist, Natural Law doesn't exist. Instead truth is relative. What is lawful is not what conforms to Natural Law, but what the majority think and like. We are desperately needed to be a voice for the moral law this coming November.

How do we do this? By selecting candidates not based on their political party, or what their negative campaign ads say, but what they stand for regarding what the Bible teaches as truth. We should look at where they stand on issues that the Bible speaks for or against. Some issues that come to mind that our culture says are OK and moral, but the Bible clearly teaches against are homosexual marriage, transgenderism, cohabitation, defining family in opposition to God's original design of one man and one woman, and the killing of the unborn in abortion. This is a lot to consider and research. Pick one or two issues that rise above the others and see where your candidate stands. Google the issue and then your candidate's name and see what pops up. One great site I found provides non-partisan answers to candidates and their issues: search on the web for **www.votesmart.org**

Conclusion

Within 15 short days each of us as citizens are going to be called upon to render to Caesar what is Caesar by going to the polls to vote. In doing so we are also rendering to God what is God's, since everything we have, including our government, as well as our life is His gift to us. We have been made His very own by Jesus gracious gift of His life, death, and resurrection. God calls on us, His Church, to work to elect leaders who will pass laws and govern according to His will and His law. And because His will and law is the best thing for all people, our support of them work as our witness to His great love for all people. We do this by wisely using the information that is provided to us about issues and where the candidates stand, and not according to the attacks they, or their followers make against each other. And what if we choose wrong? What if we fail to speak in our vote as Christians? Because we have been made God's own children by the work of Jesus and not what we do, we have Jesus assurance by faith that we are forgiven. What if our candidate doesn't win? It is the Lord God who made all things and continues to rule all things. Caesar and Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor in Jerusalem didn't believe in God. And yet God worked through them to make sure that His Son was sacrificed on a cross to so that salvation might be made available to all mankind. He has called us, as the Church, to be His means to make that available. He will use whoever is elected to ensure the Gospel Message continues to be spread until that day our Savior returns. And His Spirit will continue to ensure we remain the Father's precious children until that day comes. Amen.