

- We are looking for three weeks at how we, as Christ-followers, should respond to the world around us in 2018 and beyond.
- Last week we saw that despite all the problems in our world, we do not have to be afraid.
- Much of what we read and see is fear based. We do not need to live in that space.
- Today we are going to look at a Christ-follower's response to politics and government.
- If I told you this morning that I was a firm Democrat. That I support greater social programs, government responsibility for helping the poor, open immigration, and universal healthcare. We need to control gun purchases, raise the worker's wages and champion women's rights. The wealthy should pay their fair share of taxes, education should be low cost or free, and we need to shore up and expand social security. What would your response be?
- If I told you this morning that I was a card-carrying Republican. That I support the right to bear arms, to control immigration and reduce the government's role in the country. I want to see small business flourish, taxes reduced, and veteran's taken care of. We need to control who enters the country and expand our military presence around the world. We need to encourage innovation and children should have freedom of education. What do you think of me then?
- Politics! It is a dirty word for most people. It had always been polarizing. We have heard the saying to never discuss religion or politics.
- Every single day more and more headlines dig into every facet of government. People spout off opinions in blogs and on social media. The level of anger and vitriol is as high as it has been for many years.
- I was golfing with some friends last year and as soon as the subject of politics came up, one said, "I won't talk about it. Someone will get hurt. We'll get angry."
- As soon as the subject comes up, blood pressure increases, voices are raised, and normally rational people become angry, bitter and caustic people. Not only that, but politics raises concerns, fears and a level of despair that it will ever change.
- It's bad enough when we do it with fellow Christ-followers. But unfortunately, it too often spills out to the world around us. There is a reason Christians are so often dismissed as dumb, gullible, hate-filled people. So what should a Christ-follower do?
- Should we withdraw from this subject altogether? Keep silent in order to not offend? Stay private. Politics is of this world and we are concerned with more "important" things. Don't vote because we don't like anything or anyone.
- Or maybe we should work hard to change things. Convince others we are right. Push policy change. Engage in debate with other people. Post on social media. Write a blog. Get involved in the public sphere. Campaign. Make sure we vote and get our friends to vote.
- Jesus address this topic, but maybe in a way you and I might not expect.
- There was an event that happened in the last week of Jesus life. A powerful one. An incident where Jesus said someone so profound it has spawned books, analysis and some say set the entire direction of modern viewpoints towards government and politics. It is a saying known within and without the Christian community.
- It happened during the Passover festival. The Passover was THE major festival for the Jews. Thousands upon thousands came to the city. It was a pilgrimage. It was hugely significant religiously.
- Jesus had come to the city in the midst of this.
- The triumphal entry had just happened. The city was abuzz with gossip and rumors about this man. Was he the Messiah? Was he the one to deliver them from the Romans?

- The next day he went to the temple and saw the way they were taking advantage of the people coming to give sacrifices. They had turned what was a solemn and God-ordained and God-centered festival into an opportunity for money. In the temple.
- Jesus went off on them. Overturning tables. Criticizing them. Driving money changers out of the temple. It was chaotic.
- If the people weren't already talking about Jesus before, they were now.
- The people were amazed. Astonished. They were paying attention to everything he said.
- The religious leaders were terrified. Jesus was going to upset their entire way of life. They wanted to kill him but the people were too caught up in him.
- So when he came in the next day, they started in on him by questioning him. What gave you the right to do what you did yesterday? What authority do you have? Jesus not only ignored the question, but turned around and told a parable that brought a rebuke to the religious leaders.
- You can feel the tension ratcheting up. The crowd is increasingly amazed. The religious leaders are increasingly angry.
- And so they up the stakes. Let's pick up the story there.

Mark 12:13 Later they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words.

- Jesus posed such a great threat to Jewish leaders that he united bitter enemies. The Herodians, called so because they worked with the puppet king Herod, were seen as conspirators with Rome, and the Pharisees, who rebelled against Israel's occupiers. They came at Jesus together. Both ends of the political spectrum.

14 They came to him and said, "Teacher, we know that you are a man of integrity. You aren't swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth.

- These men project themselves as respectful of Jesus, while at the same time try to set him up for a fall. Their words are not so much an attempt to puff up Jesus, as they are meant to arouse the expectations of the crowd. They want Jesus to feel the pressure of the crowd when they ask their question.

Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not? 15 Should we pay or shouldn't we?"

- Many of you have heard this story, but it is difficult in our modern environment to gauge the magnitude of this question and what it represented.
- The imperial tax or "poll tax" they were referring to was the annual one denarius tax, about one day's wage, that Rome imposed on every non-citizen. Men from fourteen to sixty-five and all women from twelve to sixty-five throughout Empire. This tax funded the continued Roman occupation of Judea.
- Every time they paid it, the Jews were reminded that they were a subjugated minority group under Rome's thumb. This tax was considered the symbol of Jewish oppression. It made them feel like slaves to Rome. Messiah was supposed to deliver them against such tyranny.
- It was such a thorny issue that a few decades before Jesus' ministry, Judas the Galilean led a failed insurrection against the Romans fueled precisely by frustration over the poll tax. A few years after Jesus' death, there was another insurrection, again put down by the Romans, spurred on by this question.
- It was cleverly designed to be a no-win question. If Jesus said "No, don't pay the poll tax" he could be killed by the Roman authorities as a political revolutionary. If Jesus said, "Yes, pay the poll tax" he'd lose his following since the Jewish masses mostly believed supporting the poll tax also meant colluding with a pagan empire and overlooking their personal and systemic suffering. And if he refused to answer altogether, he'd be branded as a moral coward more interested in saving his own skin than telling God's truth.

But Jesus knew their hypocrisy. "Why are you trying to trap me?" he asked. "Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." 16 They brought the coin, and he asked them, "Whose image is this? And whose inscription?" "Caesar's," they replied.

- The inscription on a Denarius read "Tiberias Augustus Caesar, son of the divine Augustus Caesar." The coin said that the emperor was a god. He was "divine."

17 Then Jesus said to them, "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." And they were amazed at him.

- The answer is absolutely brilliant. In one statement, Jesus turns everything on its head and reframes the issue. He answered their question and diffused it at the same time. This is not simply a statement about money. It is a statement that changed everything. A statement that gave direction to all those who would follow Jesus with regards to politics and government.
- They were amazed because Jesus, as he so often did, re-defined and expanded the scope far beyond the original question. It is not, "Republican or Democrat or Libertarian." It is not "USA vs North Korea." It is not "Capitalism or socialism?" It is not, "Which way is best or most godly?"
- It was a statement that said, "If you want to follow me, you need to walk a higher road. A better way.

I. "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's"

A. Christ-followers are good citizens.

- Again, it is difficult for us to grasp the enormity of this statement. In this one statement, Jesus is telling the people, who wanted nothing more than to see Rome obliterated, that the government of Rome was a legitimate government. You should pay the taxes due.
- The same government that less than a week later would authorize and execute the orders for Jesus death, was legitimate?
- That's why this question was so important. The Jews linked their faith in God to their political identity. Jesus statement is actually a statement about authority.

- Authority, by nature, reflects God's authority. It's been that way since the beginning.

Genesis 1:28 God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

- Governing is God-ordained. From the beginning we were to govern the world with all that implies.
- Authority and government are a reflection of God's authority and government.

Romans 13:1 Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. 2 Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.

- Hear me – government is not specifically Christian, but it is good. It is God ordained. Everyone knows that completely unfettered self-interest is not the best way for the world to work.
- Because someone is a bad father does invalidate the office of father. Because a mother fails doesn't mean mothers shouldn't exist. Just because the government you are under is not exactly how you'd like it to be, does not invalidate government.
- Jesus is saying "swear allegiance to God as ultimate, and then pay your local taxes as just one expression of your ultimate allegiance to God."
- Christ-followers are to be good citizens. This means we **WALK THE HIGHER ROAD** in how we live.
- Pay your taxes. Don't cheat the government. Live honestly. **WALK THE HIGHER ROAD.**

- We give to Caesar what is Caesar's by working to improve the world around us, to serve others, to work for the good of the people we are near. **WALK THE HIGHER ROAD**.
- If we claim to follow Jesus, we are to be good citizens.
- We can do this, no matter what the government is where we live because:

B. Christ-followers do not belong to an earthly kingdom.

- Jesus' approval of paying taxes to Rome was revolutionary. It is hard to fathom how counter-revolutionary this was.
- For the past 1000+ years, Israel operated as a theocracy. They were selected by God to reflect him in the world. Their faith and their nation and government were intertwined. From Moses and the Exodus, through the conquering of the Promised Land, all the way to the return of Ezra and Nehemiah with the people was God telling Israel that their nation was to demonstrate God. Their God was the only true God. Living God's ways was their way and it was the right way. In other words, the legitimate government is one that focuses on the true God.
- Jesus was saying that the legitimacy of the government is not determined by whether it supports the worship of the one true God.
- But NOT requiring his followers to support only states that are allied to the one true God, he unhitches his followers from any particular nation. In making this statement, Jesus was severing the identity of God's people to government and politics.
- No earthly kingdom can be uniquely identified with God's people. Christians are international. If followers of Jesus could support Rome with their taxes, which government today – no matter how corrupt – can't Christians support?
- He was telling them to pay taxes which paid the wages of the very people that were going to drive the nails into his hands. Not because what the government was doing was right, but because government reflects the character of God. God will deal with the problems and injustices. What it does for Christ-followers is bring freedom. We are free to support the government of whatever land God has called us to be in.
- USA / Europe / Pakistan / Somalia / Indonesia / China

1 Peter 2:13 Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, 14 or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.

15 For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people.

17 Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor.

- We can **WALK THE HIGHER ROAD** in what we say. Our hope is not here.
- We are not trying to build a single nation, a "Christian country" that will have legitimacy before God.
- Until Christ comes to return in his fullness, we will be under governments of some type. But kings, monarchies, congresses, presidents . . . they are all temporary and they are not our hope nor do we belong to them.
- *"This is one of the problems with referring to any country as a "Christian nation." Just because the principles of Christianity clearly influenced our nation's founders, and some of them were themselves evangelical Christians and even if the Supreme Court has recognized the long history of significant Christian influence in our nation, that does not mean that most Americans are Christians or that a Christian worldview dominates our public culture or our government today, or that one needs to be a Christian to be an American citizen." (Mark Dever)*
- We are not dependent on just governments for the gospel to go forward.
- You don't have to "win." You don't have to be threatened. You don't have to hate those who differ from you. You don't have to get angry at what is happening. You don't have to fear

decisions being made. You don't look down on those who think or believe differently. You can listen. People are more than the sum of their political opinions.

- We pray for them. We listen to others. We treat other opinions with respect. We seek common understanding and middle ground. **WALK THE HIGHER ROAD.**
- We can **WALK THE HIGHER ROAD** because we belong to a different kingdom!
- If Jesus had stopped here, it would have still been a brilliant answer. But he went one step further.

II. Give to God what is God's.

A. Christ-followers walk the high road of ultimate accountability to God.

- This is far more than a command to just pay taxes to the government and tithe to God.
- This is a statement of authority and accountability.
- The coin said that the emperor was divine. Jesus said that the governments of this world do not have final authority. God does and when we follow him, the buck stops there.

B. Our duty to earthly authority is limited.

- We are to be good citizens. We are to follow because we don't belong to any one earthly kingdom. BUT, the authority of our government will never be used perfectly.
- There is always room for civil disobedience. In the early church, the apostles were forbidden by the ruling body to talk about Jesus. Their response was this. "We have to obey God rather than men."
- We are to live as good citizens unless we are being instructed to directly disobey the commands of God on our lives. This should never be done lightly, but with prayer, study of Scripture, and the input of others.
- This truth frees us. Who is in the white house. Who gets elected. What the media are saying. Our ultimate responsibility is not to this government. It is to God.
- No matter what you think about anything that happens in government or politics, your accountability to God trumps all of it.

C. Our duty to God is comprehensive.

- Give your coin back to Caesar – it bears his likeness.
- But give yourself to God. Consider that we are ALL made in God's image. Humans – ALL humans – are made in the image of God.
- When we give to God what is God's, we should be driven towards Christ as our Savior and trusting him at every single point.
- Your duty to God, your responsibility to your fellow-man far outstrips any opinions you might have.

- What should be a Christ-follower's response to politics and government?
- Be good citizens. Get involved, be a part of government (we have some here that are part of government – thank you!) Engage in debate. But in all things, **WALK THE HIGHER ROAD.**
- Because you belong to a different kingdom and your ultimate responsibility is to the KING who has ALL authority.
- It is helpful to remember that:
- News is driven by ratings and ad dollars, not by truth.
- Most opinions on social media aren't worth the time it takes to read them.
- Every government or politician is temporary.
- We are looking forward to when God rules perfectly again.
- Until then, we should return coins to Caesar, but give ourselves to God.