

Today you have had the great fortune to hear one of the only passages in the New Testament that we know that Jesus said for sure (ACCORDING TO THE JESUS SEMINAR - a group of NT scholars who do not believe in the inspiration of scripture and seek to find the real, historical Jesus - while ignoring the historical, eye witness testimony!)... (A group that has the basic rules and understanding that since miracles are not possible, every recorded miracle in the Gospels must be a later elaboration by an admiring disciple or follower, or must be explained on the basis of some physical or natural cause (i.e., the Feeding of the 5,000: Jesus gave the signal, and all those present reached beneath their cloaks, pulled out their own "sack lunches," and ate together!).

And because no one can predict the future, Jesus can't, so those prophecies must have been added later by zealous followers. And of course the historical Jesus never claimed any divinity, (He would have been abhorred at such an idea), so again, these ideas and claims were added by His disciples later. With that approach, that is why over 80% of the New testament sayings and actions of Jesus are discounted by the unbelieving scholars of the Jesus Seminar, and you were lucky enough to hear one of those few passages they are fairly certain Jesus actually said MAT 22:21 ESV "RENDER TO CAESAR THE THINGS THAT ARE CAESAR'S, AND TO GOD THE THINGS THAT ARE GOD'S." How wonderful for you in their eyes.

Well, these sadly deluded scholars are not much different than the Pharisees of old, in their denial of what is right before them, as well as the attitude of attacking the person and work of Jesus as we see taking place in our Gospel lesson this morning. They ask Jesus the tricky question: Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?

In order to understand how this was an intended trap, let me paint the scene for you: The Pharisees were once again plotting against Jesus, trying to trap him into saying something that would discredit him. They wanted to silence him and make him look bad in front of the crowd.

Being the hypocrites that they were they baited their trap with a compliment: "Teacher, we know that you are a man of integrity," one of them said, "and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth." Really? They didn't believe that for a minute, but they wanted the people listening to think they were giving Jesus a fair chance.

Then they asked him a loaded question. "Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" A very clever trap! If Jesus says it's all right to pay taxes to the Roman government, then he

will lose support/popularity with the majority of his audience. For the pious Jew it was offensive to pay taxes to the hated Romans. Paying taxes was the same as supporting that detestable government.

However, if Jesus says it's wrong to pay taxes, then he will be in trouble with the Romans. He will be siding with the revolutionaries who want to overthrow the Roman government (what most folks expected from their "Messiah" - a political savior). It was a no-win situation.

Jesus, being the Omniscient/all-knowing God in the flesh knew the Pharisees were trying to trap him. And though the Pharisees thought they were wise and clever, Jesus was much wiser than they. He asks, **"Show me the coin used for paying the tax."** One of them brought a denarius. Jesus takes the coin and asks, **"Whose portrait is this, and whose inscription?"**

Without a moment's thought the Pharisees answer, "Caesar's." When an emperor came to power he would immediately have coins minted with his portrait and his name: The coin they held out to Jesus said: "Tiberius Caesar, Son of the Divine Augustus, Pontifex Maximus." That signified that the coins belonged to him.

So, quietly Jesus says, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." What an incredible reply that absolutely shut the Pharisees up - they never again tried to out-smart the Son of God.

But this famous quote of Jesus also begs two very important questions that we will look at this morning: I. WHAT BELONGS TO CAESAR? (or the secular government), and II. WHAT BELONGS TO GOD? Who gets what?

I

FIRST OF ALL, WHAT BELONGS TO CAESAR?

"Caesar" was the title of the Roman emperor. He was a King, an absolute ruler. So what we're talking about here is giving to the EARTHLY AUTHORITIES that are placed over us -- what is due them (namely our respect, honor, prayers). In the HOME these include our PARENTS, and GRANDPARENTS. (So kids, instead of saying "Hi dad", you can say "Hail Caesar." ☺)

And in SOCIETY, our authorities include police officers, mayors, senators, the governor, the president - our government.

Most of you should remember from the catechism, that the authority of government, and the Christian's obligation to obey the government, falls under the 4th Commandment. **"Honor thy Father and thy mother."** Luther rightly taught that honor, obedience, and respect belong to those civil authorities over us, just as they belong to our parents. To obey these earthly authorities is to obey God.

You see, God always works through means. Not only of course through the means of Grace in the Word and Sacraments where He creates and sustains faith within our hearts to trust in the saving work of Jesus, but also in our daily lives. God doesn't just simply and directly give us what we need for daily living, but instead works through means (our parents, our government, etc.) to provide and care for us (peace and orderliness). Therefore, we are to view the authorities over us as being God's representatives in our lives and treat them as such.

Yes, but what if we are citizens in a country such as North Korea, Belarus, Zimbabwe...under someone whom we might consider to be an unjust dictator? Or what if our parents treat us unfairly and put unreasonable demands on us, do we still have to obey them? Where does the Christian's allegiance lie in such a case?

The Christian's obedience to the government or to parents becomes difficult when they seem unfair in our eyes. But still, the Word of God is clear when it says: **Rom. 13:1 "The authorities that exist have been established by God."** Even the wicked Caesars who fed Christians to the lions; even communism, which tore down churches and imprisoned believers; even dictators; even present leaders in Washington that you may not be fond of; even parents who seem unfair and hard to get along with, all these have been established by God for His good purposes, even if we may not be able to see any good in them.

You see, whether they do a good job or a bad job is really not the point. Whether they are faithful or unfaithful, democrat or republican is really not the point. Whether they are good parents or bad parents is really not the point. They **are** in authority - placed there by God that He may work through them to provide for you.

Remember the conversation Jesus had with Pontius Pilate? Pilate asked: **"Don't you know that I have the authority to release you, or to put you to death?"** Jesus answered: **"You would have no authority if it had not been given you from above."**

Even the authority figure who put Jesus to death was established there by God to do God's will.

And so the answer to our question is that we owe these "Caesars": honor, respect, and obedience (our prayers and support) because they are God's representatives, exercising His authority in this world. To honor those in authority is to honor God. If they are unfaithful, then they will answer to Him. We are to give unto Caesar, the earthly authorities over us, what is due them (honor, obedience, respect, our prayers and support).

Of course this does not mean that we violate our conscience, or sin against the Word of God in the name of the government. (We don't have to tolerate abuse - can protect ourselves, flee. We can petition and express opinion against abortion, when the government endorses that which is against the Word of God).

The Reformation occurred when Martin Luther had the courage and conviction to stand against the church and the government BOTH, because they were going against God's Word (And even then though, it is done with respect and peace). We give unto Caesar what is Caesar's, but we are to give unto God what is God's, (first)!

II

WHAT BELONGS TO GOD?

That's easy: EVERYTHING belongs to God. Deut. 10:14 **"To the Lord your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it."** He MADE everything, so it's obviously all His.

And yet though all is His, He is so generous and gracious a God Who wants to share all that He has with His children.

Though God owns all things, He gives those things to us as a gift. Everything we have is a gift from Him. The most important gift being salvation: being saved from sin, death, and hell. (Won for us in the most costliest of ways, the shedding of the Life Blood of God the Son in our place)

What does Jesus mean then when He says: "Give to God what is God's?" What does that really mean? If He gave us everything we have, does He now want us to give it all back again? [I could easily turn this into a STEWARDSHIP SERMON and remind you that yes, you are to give everything back to Him to His glory and the welfare of your neighbor. You are to give Him of Your TIME, TALENTS, and TREASURES because they're all His anyway. And so when you receive the ROTA sheets prayerfully consider what areas you would like to serve the congregation this year.]

But I'd much rather remind you that God first & foremost wants something far more important: your faith, and your love. He doesn't want you to try and work your way into heaven, or buy your way there, or expect to get in because you're not as bad as some other people. (Ridiculous, unscriptural thoughts)

That's exactly what these Pharisees thought they could do through their deeds and sacrifices. And so Jesus speaks this against them: "Give to God the things that are God's" because they weren't! They were giving all kinds of things to God, except the right things.

Jesus is saying: "God doesn't want your money or your deeds, if He doesn't first have your heart." (Your faith, love, worship, in response to the Love and grace and mercy He has

first shown you in Jesus!) That's what's most important. "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's," honor, obedience, and respect that they deserve as God's representatives, "and give to God what is God's." Your hearts. That's what He wants most.

Those of you who are parents -- what do you want most from your kids? For them to work for you? To open jars in the kitchen? Is that what you want **MOST** from your kids? No, of course not. Your greatest desire is for them to love you, and honor you. And that's what God's greatest desire is also - for us to love and honor Him, because of His love for us.

Who gets what? "Give unto Caesar what is Caesar's", and "Give to God what is God's." Mindful of His mercy and love toward you He enables you to do both.

Amen