

July 14, 2019

“Paying Taxes to Caesar”

Matthew 22:15-22

FCF: Our hesitation to entrust ourselves to an all-powerful king
PROPOSITION: (anchor) Jesus has revealed Himself as our King.
 (magnet) We must order our lives under His rule.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

“Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely.” A fairly well-known observation and quotation by the 19th century British politician Lord Acton. What does it mean? It means that as a person’s power increases, their moral sense decreases. They inevitably lose their way.

This is partly our struggle with Jesus. His message is the gospel of the kingdom. And, clearly, He is the King. What if Lord Acton’s statement applied to Jesus? Could we trust Him? We can because of His character. For with Jesus, absolute power loves and rules absolutely well.

SCRIPTURE READING: [Matthew 22:15-22](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

Wealth means influence. Who is the wealthiest person in history? Not Bill Gates or Jeff Bezos. It was Mansa Musa, a 14th century king of the Mali Empire. The Mali provided much of the resources used by Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. Under Musa’s rule, the empire’s wealth grew all the more. But the wider world did not know much of him until he traveled to Mecca in 1324. Musa took 8,000 couriers, 12,000 slaves, and 100 camels carrying 300 pounds of gold. As he passed through Egypt, so much gold flowed that it led to a currency crisis.

Think about it - a king who disrupted a whole nation’s economy just by passing through. That’s influence. But there is another historical figure with far more influence. And He is still disrupting things wherever He goes. I’m speaking of Jesus, the One we read of in Colossians 1.

As we pick up in Matthew 22, it is Holy Week. On Sunday, Jesus rode into His city. On Monday, He cleansed His Temple. On Tuesday, the religious leaders pushed back. “Who do you think you are?” Jesus replied with three parables. Understand that Jesus’ opponents were not stupid. They knew He was criticizing them. They also knew they could not go at Him directly. He was too popular. So they came at Him indirectly. Which failed. Jesus has revealed Himself as the King. How are we to respond to Him? We must order our lives under His rule.

We must order our lives under His rule - especially as we see these three things. First, the opposition to the King. Second, the resolution of the King. Third, the sovereignty of the King.

I. THE OPPOSITION TO THE KING

First, the opposition to the king ([READ Matthew 22:15-17](#)). See the hatred and hostility.

A) *The Level of the Hostility*

1. Rivals united

Note the level of hostility - two rivals united. The Pharisees were nationalistic. The Herodians supported the Roman occupiers. The two groups agreed on only one thing, getting rid of Jesus.

2. Words spoken

Which leads to their words of flattery, all so insincere. All meant to set up the dilemma they put to Jesus regarding this tax. If He opposes it, He will be charged with inciting rebellion. If He supports it, He will lose the people's approval. It's a trap meant to entangle and ensnare.

B) The Reason for the Hostility

What's behind this? What's the rationale for so much energy expended in this way?

1. Embarrassed

They are embarrassed. The crowds have been listening and had heard these parables as well.

2. Concerned

They are concerned. They see Jesus as a heretic, a false teacher leading the people astray.

3. Threatened

And they feel threatened. Their influence is waning. The people are flocking to Him.

There's a lot going on here with their opposition to the King. More than we think.

Illustration:

It's like a crime scene in a Sherlock Holmes story. All any of us would see is a dead body. But Holmes sees the cause of death, the motive, and who did it. He sees so much more.

Application:

It's like that here. There's a lot going on with the opposition to the king. And there still is. Think of the typical reasons people give for rejecting Christianity - the problem of evil, the exclusive claims, a perceived tension between faith and science, the reliability of the Bible. We need to take those questions seriously. And help people see that there are persuasive answers.

But we need to remember this as well. Sometimes there are reasons beneath the reasons. Sometimes the rejection of the faith is rooted in hurt from people who said they were Christians. Sometimes it's from the desire to sleep with whoever we please. Jesus has revealed Himself as our King. We must order our lives under His rule. And have an eye to the opposition to Him.

II. THE RESOLUTION OF THE KING

Which then brings us to the resolution of the King (**READ Matthew 22:18-22**).

A) A Stern Response

How does Jesus respond? Given the hostility of His audience, not softly but sternly.

1. He knows the truth

He knows the truth. He knows the malice of their hearts, what they're trying to do and why.

2. He speaks the truth

He knows the truth and so He speaks it. Not for His own sake but for the sake of those listening. "You hypocrites" - those who wear a mask, who pretend to be something that they are not.

B) A Wise Response

It's a stern response. But He presses on and we then begin to see Jesus' great wisdom.

1. The coin

He asks for a coin, a day's wage. On one side, an image of Tiberius Caesar and the words, "son of divine Augustus." On the other, the Roman goddess of peace and the words, "High Priest." This was blasphemous. You would only carry this to pay the tax. So it's odd that they have one.

2. The lesson

With the coin comes the lesson. To "render" means to pay a bill, settle a debt, give what is due. Basically, Jesus says, "You benefit from Caesar's roads and bridges. Pay what you owe. Pay the tax. But what do you owe to God? Yourselfes." Give Caesar his tax. But not your worship. And where Caesar crosses the line and claims what is God's, the claims of God take priority.

Little wonder folks were amazed. There's a lot going on with the resolution of the King.

Illustration:

Our support of the state is simply part of our obedience to God. There are parallels here to how wives are to relate to husbands, children to parents, and workers to employers. Assuming there is no abuse of power, the support given is to be an expression of our obedience to God.

Application:

It's the same with the Christian's stance to the civil authorities. It's why we are to pray for our leaders - no matter the branch they serve or the political party they represent. It's why we are to obey them and the laws of the land. It's why we are to watch over them, ready to remind them of who ordained them to rule, protect, and keep order. It's part of our service to God.

Jesus is the King. We must order our lives under His rule - with an eye to His resolution.

III. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF THE KING

Which brings us to this last point, the sovereignty of the King. What do we learn through all this? It's a concept often referred to as "sphere sovereignty." And it's worth our attention.

A) An Explanation of the Spheres

Let's start with a basic explanation. This is not a reference to geometry or astronomy.

1. Distinct

The idea is that God has made things, universally and across cultures, such that human societies consist of distinct spheres. The basic ones being the church, the family, and the government.

2. Different

Each of these spheres is distinct with different roles, different realms of influence and authority. Each is to mind their place, stay in their lane, fulfill their role without encroaching on the others.

B) The Implication of the Spheres

Now that's a pretty heady concept. And even that has some deeper implications.

1. Part of God's design

First, this is all part of God's design. It arises from the created order and is governed by Him.

2. Limited sovereignty

It is under God's sovereignty. But sphere sovereignty also has to do with each particular sphere. The only reason any of them has any authority at all is because God has arranged it that way.

The great sovereignty of the King - that's part of the backdrop to Matthew 22.

Illustration:

Let me give you an example of how this can go wrong. A British judge recently ordered that a woman with a mental disability, in her second trimester of pregnancy, be forced to have an abortion. This was contrary to the wishes of both the woman and her mother, who is a former midwife. The judge said that, while this was "an immense intrusion," the state was acting in her "best interests." Fortunately, the English Court of Appeals overturned the judge's ruling.

What's going on here? Among other things, a poor understanding of sphere sovereignty and an obvious trespass of one sphere into another, the government interfering with the family.

Application:

What do we do with this ourselves come tomorrow morning? Again, Jesus is the King. He is Lord of all - not just in theory but in reality. This means He is sovereign over all spheres and all of life, the big things and the small. If we are His disciples, that means our submission to His authority must be factored into every single decision. We don't get to pick and choose.

Which means we don't rob the bank. Nor do we pirate software. We don't murder. Nor do we speak harshly to anyone. We don't just give occasionally when it's convenient. We give regularly and sacrificially. We don't have affairs. And we stay off of internet porn. And where we have failed in any of these things, we repent, go to Jesus for forgiveness and get help.

Jesus is the King. We must order our lives under His rule - looking to His sovereignty.

CONCLUSION:

Think of it this way. Imagine a fleet of ships sailing in formation. What will make the voyage successful? They must stay out of each other's way and not crash into one another. And each ship will need to be seaworthy with their steering in good working order. You have to have all that. In fact, you can't have one without the other. If the ships are colliding, they won't stay afloat long. And if their steering gears are fouled up, they will not be able to avoid the collisions.

What's the point of bringing up this analogy? When we give ourselves to Christ, when we yield ourselves to His lordship, He begins to set these things aright. He makes us seaworthy and repairs our steering. Even more, He gives us the charts so as to get us where we need to go.

Why is that worth saying? Because we are told by so many all the time that fulfillment and flourishing can only come with absolute autonomy, with our self-reliance and independence. We are to be the captain of our own ship and the masters of our fate. So we are told. Let me ask you. Take a look around. Take a look within. What signs do you see that that's the way to go?

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