

Theme: "Jesús Teaches us God's Way"

Text: Matthew 22:15-22

"Grace and peace to you from God our Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit who has brought us together". Amen

Out text for meditation for this morning is from the gospel of today, which I read before. Let us pray: "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, Oh Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer." Amen

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Prior to our text, the Pharisees heard the parables of Jesus regarding the kingdom of God. These parables told them that the kingdom of God has arrived in the person of Jesus Christ. The parables also accused the Pharisees for their unbelief to the One who has power to forgive sin. But the pride of the Pharisees was so great that instead of repenting, they become enraged and they seek a way to accuse Jesus of something that He may do or say.

In our text for meditation the Pharisees found a way to put Jesus in trouble: they used a coin. They sent their disciples with a question to Jesus regarding paying taxes to Caesar. The Pharisees also sent the "Herodians," who were members of Herod's party and who would report Him to the Roman authorities. No doubt it was a masterful plan against our Lord.

The trap that they put to Christ was a simple question adorned with flattery words: "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" According to the Pharisees this question about paying taxes to Caesar would put Jesus in a dilemma. If He asserted the positive, the people would look upon Him as a traitor. If He asserted the need of not paying taxes to Rome He would be a revolutionary who was against the Roman Empire.

Our Lord Jesus Christ did not fall into the trap of His enemies. The disciples of the Pharisees had a hidden agenda against Him, but Jesus knows the hearts of people. He knew their true intentions. Our text say that Jesus: "aware of their malice, said: "Why put me to the test, you hypocrites?"

Friends in Christ to God, we cannot hide our real intentions or thoughts. People can hide their true intention toward others as a mask cover the face of a person. And sin makes people to behave in this way. But God sees and knows the human heart. No doubt the Pharisees and Herodians tried to challenge Jesus and get Him mixed up on the wrong end. **"Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?"** But Jesus did not fall into their trap.

The kingdom of the church and the kingdom of the state are both God-given kingdoms under God's authority. Both are good, yet with different responsibilities. Both are used by God, but in different ways and for different reasons.

And it is important to keep their realms distinct. And so, Jesus says, **"give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."** Now clearly, taxes,

among other things, are given to Caesar and belong to the state. The question for us today is: what is it that we give to God that is rightfully His?

St. Paul gives us the answer in the second reading of today when he said to the congregation in Thessalonica: **"We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ."**

Paul was praising the Thessalonians here because they were giving to God what He wanted: their faith, hope, and love. A faith which trusts in Jesus for all things, a confident hope in His work now and in the future, and a love which overflows from faith in service towards our neighbour. Where these are right the heart is at peace. Where these are wrong there can be no peace.

And that is the danger of bringing any other word into the pulpit that belongs to Jesus alone - it robs us of the peace and hope that is our in Christ Jesus by offering us false gods and false hope. For it is not the right primer ministry, or a good supreme court, or better laws and reforms passed in our country that are going to solve the problems that a country faces.

There is a far deeper and greater problem that has caused all of our problems - and you know what it is: our sin. Laws can ban guns, but can do nothing about the violence and hatred in our hearts. Laws can limit abortions, but can do nothing about the murder and lust in our hearts. And laws can regulate financial dealings, but can do nothing about the greed and selfishness in our hearts. And so while the law is good (as even St. Paul affirms), and has its place, it is limited; it can only do so much; and we dare not ever place our hope in the law or in governments.

And so pastors, as pastors, are not to be about politics, but if they are faithful stewards, about one thing only: we are to faithfully dispense the Lord's gifts to His bride, the church; to you; to give you life and hope in the forgiveness of your sins. A pastor that speaks any other word is a thief and a robber - for he is robbing you of the gifts, the joy, the hope, the life, and the forgiveness of Jesus, that Jesus wants given to you here.

These gifts that Jesus earned for you on the cross and that He has placed in His Word, water, bread, and wine. For this Saviour and these gifts are the only thing that can save us from a world gone mad, from a constantly attacking Satan, and from the sin in each of us that keeps dragging us down and diverting our eyes from Christ. From the pulpit is to sound forth the voice that cuts through all the false gods and false hopes in this world - that we often wrongly put our faith in - and proclaim to us a Saviour, here for us. That you and me and all people put our faith in Him alone.

That is what Isaiah did in his day, from his pulpit. In his words spoken to us today in the first reading he foretold of a time when a King Cyrus was going to rise in power and release the people of Israel from their captivity and exile and return to their land.

But in King Cyrus they were not to put their hope! This was all done so **“that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the Lord, and there is no other. I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity. I am the Lord, who does all these things.”** The Lord does all these things - giving both well-being and calamity - to this end: that all may turn to Him and live; that we turn from our idols, and receive His forgiveness and life.

So what are they for you? The idols that you are clinging to and need to turn from? Those people or things you think will give you life but which, in fact, are robbing you of life? That which you love more than your Saviour, or fear more than your Lord, or trust more than your Father?

That to which you look for the answers to your problems, or for hope for the future? What are they for you? **Let us repent my dear friends in Christ.** And today and every day-let us **cling instead to Him who clings to us.** To Him who does not reject us for our sins, but who came and took our human flesh as His own. The Son of God who came and was born as our brother; Jesus, to do what no one else - politician or pastor - could: die for our sins and then rise from the dead. That our sins and their penalty be dead and buried once and for all, and we be raised to a new life as sons of God. And that is what we are, for it is what He has made us. He has shown us God's way.

For the Gospel that is given to us here at this place is powerful. The Gospel is not like the wonderful words and promises of political campaigns, telling us of what they hope they will do. The Gospel is words telling us what has been done by our Saviour, and is now given to us here. For here the image of God is restored in us. Here the name of Jesus is inscribed upon our head and our heart. Here the body and blood of your Saviour is placed into our mouths and poured over our lips.

And we are forgiven our sins, raised from the dead, and given a new life. For we belong to our Saviour, who created us and redeemed us. And so **to give to God what is God's** is to give Him ourselves - to trust in Him as our Father, and to live as His children. A week ago the provincial election were held, and the same premier was elected for a third term. When you voted for your favourite candidate you **“Gave to Caesar what is Caesar's.**

And it could have not matter if another candidate would have been elected for Premier in Ontario. Your faith, hope, and love remain unshaken. For not in mere men is our faith and hope, but in the God-man, our Saviour Jesus Christ, the King of kings. And nothing is hopeless when your hope is in Him.

My dear friends in Christ; what the Law and governments are unable to do our Saviour has done it. For while the Law can only change the actions of the outside, it is Jesus who gets to the heart of the matter - our heart - creating in us a clean heart and giving us His Spirit, to guide and direct and sanctify us all the days of our life. That we rely and trust and live only in Him. For **He is the Lord and there is no other.** He is our life, and there is no other. Amen

“The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keeps your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour”. Amen