

## **Luke 20:19-26 (ESV)**

The scribes and the chief priests sought to lay hands on him at that very hour, for they perceived that he had told this parable against them, but they feared the people.

<sup>20</sup> So they watched him and sent spies, who pretended to be sincere, that they might catch him in something he said, so as to deliver him up to the authority and jurisdiction of the governor.

<sup>21</sup> So they asked him, “Teacher, we know that you speak and teach rightly, and show no partiality, but truly teach the way of God.

<sup>22</sup> Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar, or not?” <sup>23</sup> But he perceived their craftiness, and said to them, <sup>24</sup> “Show me a denarius. Whose likeness and inscription does it have?” They said, “Caesar’s.”

<sup>25</sup> He said to them, “Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”

<sup>26</sup> And they were not able in the presence of the people to catch him in what he said, but marveling at his answer they became silent.

Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s. Two kingdoms. Two kings. Two claims to power and authority.

### **But there is only one Gospel.**

One of these two kingdoms displayed its power visibly; the other spiritually. One kingdom claimed rule over the people by the power of the sword, the other by transforming the heart.

Both kingdoms have a king. One king would kill all who opposed his rule; the other would sacrifice Himself so that others could be free.

One king was a man who made himself out to be a god; the other king was God who became a man.

One king put his image on a coin so that others would remember what he was like; the other king would remind us that we are made in his image.

One king would impose taxes on the people as a requirement to live in that kingdom; the other king demanded far more than just our money to be a part of His Kingdom.

Two kingdoms. Two kings. Two claims to power and authority. Caesar and JESUS.

What is the relationship between these two kings and their kingdoms?

You become a citizen of an earthly kingdom by birth and residency. You come a citizen of the heavenly kingdom through the Gospel.

*Render to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.* Two very different kings from two diametrically different kingdoms.

Caesar was a harsh and severe ruler. He demanded compulsory complete allegiance, but he could never get what JESUS got from His subjects.

One king died and was buried only to be replaced by another early king.

The other died but rose from the grave and remains the king of kings and LORD of LORDS.

On Tuesday of this week, our country will chose not a king, but representatives. Whoever is elected, they will rule not by force, but by the will of the people; not for life but for the next few years.

They will either raise or lower taxes; they will try to implement their agenda guided by their philosophy of government.

Neither political party has a lock on virtue or vice. They both will face enormous challenges. Both have real limits to what the can do with the power entrusted to them; we should be thankful for those limits. Today we look

## **The Claims of the Kingdoms**

## The Limits of the Kingdoms

## The Goal of the Kingdoms

Let's go back to the question that JESUS was asked, "Is it lawful to pay tribute to Caesar?" To understand what that question really meant, you need to understand what was the motive behind the question.

The scribes and the chief priests wanted to put JESUS between a rock and a hard place. Either get him in trouble with the people or with Rome.

### Luke 20:21-22 (ESV)

So they asked him, "Teacher, we know that you speak and teach rightly, and show no partiality, but truly teach the way of God. <sup>22</sup> Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar, or not?"

Beware of those who use flattery. There's usually something else on their agenda.

If it's a politician, they want your vote. If it's a salesman, they want to close the sale. If it's the devil, he wants to lead you astray.

There's a reason why the devil is said to be crafty and devious. He knows that all of us are looking for some kind of affirmation, sometimes desperately so.

If the world, the flesh or the devil himself can give you that, you very well might follow them anywhere.

JESUS is very different from sinful man. He doesn't need or want our flattery. He can see through our duplicity. He knows our hearts. That insincere sweet talk from the teachers of the Law meant nothing.

JESUS is not interested in your compliments either. If you praise Him on Sunday, but then live like you're autonomous from Him the rest of the week, that doesn't score you any points.

In the realm of politics, the LORD isn't impressed with those who claim to support traditional values, as if that gets you an in with the Almighty. It takes more than an endorsement to understand the Gospel.

JESUS demands our worship in spirit and in truth, and that only happens when you come to Him in faith and repentance.

Don't give the line that you love JESUS with all your heart while you're still living independent from His rule in your life.

Don't try to flatter JESUS and then trick him like the teachers of the law did here. It doesn't work. It never has. JESUS sees right through it.

But the actual question that JESUS was asked here is rather striking. "Is it lawful to pay tribute to Caesar or not?" Is it ethical to pay a tax to a pagan ruler who claims jurisdiction over the lives of God's people?

Good question. The Bible does talk about paying taxes; about obeying those in positions of authority and supporting those who administer justice, law and order.

But Caesar? That's a tough one. He claimed to be not just a king, but a god. His rule was often unjust. His policies went against the principles taught in Scripture. How can you ever pay tribute to THAT kind of king?

No matter who gets elected on Tuesday, Christians are going to have to pay tribute to a vast number of earthly rulers. The claims of the kingdom of this world are threefold:

- to obey the laws of the land,
- pay your taxes,
- and do your part to be a good citizen.

I used to be a civics teacher. I taught about the branches of government, and the checks and balances in our political system.

We would also cover the role of the local magistrate and how local government could only work well with an informed and involved citizenship.

The common good has its origins in the Judeo-Christian heritage. It is doing unto others as you would want others to do unto you. It's loving your neighbor as yourself.

**A healthy society cannot exist without a notion of the common good.**

We have become so individualized today that one wonders if that concept can be seen as plausible.

The Ebola scare today is a prime example of that. Some of those who have been exposed to the deadly disease say that their individual rights trump societies' need for public safety.

That is a very different view of the common good that was present a generation or two ago.

Good citizenship means to think outside of your personal comfort and happiness. It means caring enough about your community that you involve yourself in its well-being.

A dictatorship like that of Caesar demanded blind obedience. A government of the people, for the people and by the people demands active involvement.

**[picture # 1]**

The National Monument to the forefathers of this nation stands outside Plymouth Massachusetts honors the principles that our nation was founded upon by the Pilgrims and those who followed.

**[picture #2]**

The center statue represents faith. Faith not in the power of man but in the rule of God. The four seated statues represent Morality, Law, Education and Liberty.

Such monuments of stone remind us that the kingdoms of this world stand or fall based on their foundations. If those foundations crumble, no nation can survive.

Could such a statue be constructed today? What values would be trumpeted? What view of morality guides today's youth? Can an education void of any references to our spiritual heritage hope to build good citizenship?

The Kingdom of God is different from any earthly kingdom.

The Kingdom of God does not depend on the will of man to survive. But the claim of the Kingdom of God upon us is to acknowledge God's sovereignty in every area of life.

The famous quote from Abraham Kuyper is that there is not one square inch in the entire universe where JESUS Christ does not declare "this is mine."

No matter what happens on Tuesday, nothing in God's Kingdom changes. Every square inch of the universe will still be under His control.

Our ultimate hope is not in the hands of those who hold temporal power. But your involvement in the political process will determine what kind of government we will live under here.

That takes us to the Limits of the Kingdoms. In dealing with this coming election, the limits and scope of government is really the main issue to be decided.

It is interesting to note that both conservative and liberal groups advocate the limits of government; but in very different ways.

One side takes a very libertarian view of morals and lifestyles, saying the government should have very little to say about the personal choices that individuals make.

The other side says that government controls and regulations in business is the biggest hindrance to growth in the economy.

In other words both sides are saying, "don't tread on me." What are the limits of this earthly kingdom?

Looking at the big picture, the classic definition of the purpose of the state is to restrain evil and promote virtue.

Westminster Confession of Faith

God, the Supreme Lord and King of all the world, hath ordained civil magistrates to be under him over the people, for his own glory and the public good; and to this end, hath armed them with the power of the sword, for the defense and encouragement of them that are good, and for the punishment of evil-doers.

Restrain evil, promote the common good. That sounds like an oversimplification, but whenever the government ventures off into other areas, it almost always does more harm than good.

The government cannot replace the family. No matter how well intentioned, the state does a lousy job of parenting. When the government is asked to do what others are ordained to do, an artificial dependency is created.

The very definition of freedom is to be self-govern. Dependency upon anyone but God will destroy freedom.

The kingdom of man has its limits. When it is asked to do more than it was ordained to do, people will begin to look to Caesar in their time of need rather than to God.

The Kingdom of God on earth has a different kind of authority than Caesar does. It is a spiritual kingdom, winning hearts not by the sword but with the Gospel.

It places restraints on our actions and desires more by self-control rather than by the threat of the magistrate.

It relies on the Law of God written in your heart at least as much as the law of man written on paper.

It is bound by conscience more than whether or not something is legal. A spiritual kingdom conquers hearts. It attacks sin, not citizens.

The Kingdom of God may look meek and powerless to the world, but it's far more potent than the iron fist of Caesar.

The one rules through fear and intimidation, the other is more than a conqueror through the Gospel.

Whenever a totalitarian dictatorship tries to rule its people with terror, it sucks the life right out of its people. When Christ rules in our hearts, He gives life, and He gives it abundantly.

The kingdom of man work best when they know their limits. The Kingdom of God works best when we know our own limits.

Finally, what is the goal of the two kingdoms? To what end are they striving?

#### **Luke 20:24-26**

"Show me a denarius. Whose likeness and inscription does it have?" They said, "Caesar's." <sup>25</sup> He said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." <sup>26</sup> And they were not able in the presence of the people to catch him in what he said, but marveling at his answer they became silent.

What's the goal of the two kingdoms? For Caesar, it was world domination. For JESUS, it is to reconcile the world to the only true God who is absolutely holy.

For Caesar, it was to achieve power through military strength. For JESUS, it is to rescue those who are perishing.

For Caesar, it was to become rich through the enslavement of many. For JESUS, it is to make us rich through His poverty.

For Caesar, it was to enshrine himself as a mighty king who would tolerate no rivals. For JESUS, it was to redeem fallen sinners who had rebelled against Him.

Caesar sought glory. JESUS gave up His glory. Caesar proclaimed himself to be a god. JESUS not only became a man, but He took on the sin of the world.

People would follow and obey Caesar because they knew that it was in their best interest to do so. They would obey his laws because of the consequences that would come if they didn't.

They would cheer and even worship Caesar because they were required to. And there was the possibility of earthly gain if they got on Caesar's good side.

But isn't it interesting that people in every age throughout history have gladly given up all of their earthly possessions in order to follow JESUS?

**Philippians 3:8 (ESV)**

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ

Caesar put his image on a coin that had some monetary value. We are made in the image of God and remade in the image of Christ and that is of infinite value.

We are to give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, but we are to give to God what belongs to Him.

I urge you to do your duty as a citizen of this nation. People on both sides of the political spectrum love this country. But the goal of politics is simply to win elections.

As God's people, we have bigger goals in mind. We are to preach the Gospel and make disciples of all nations.

In the book of Acts the believers were accused of being disloyal to the ruling powers.

**Acts 17:7 (ESV)**

...they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus."

The evangelical church is not a voting block, but we are a part of a kingdom.

Whether we are a part of silent majority or a part of the loyal opposition, our kingdom is not ultimately of this world.

Our kingdom is found in the Gospel. Have you given your heart to the only true sovereign in the universe? Are you trusting in Him for your ultimate needs?

Will you follow JESUS today, tomorrow, on Tuesday and for all eternity?