

Matthew 22:15 HCSB 15 Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to trap Him by what He said. **16** They sent their disciples to Him, with the Herodians. “Teacher,” they said, “we know that You are truthful and teach truthfully the way of God. You defer to no one, for You don’t show partiality. **17** Tell us, therefore, what You think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?” **18** But perceiving their malice, Jesus said, “Why are you testing Me, hypocrites? **19** Show Me the coin used for the tax.” So they brought Him a denarius. **20** “Whose image and inscription is this?” He asked them. **21** “Caesar’s,” they said to Him. Then He said to them, “Therefore give back to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” **22** When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left Him and went away.

- I. In order to fully grasp the message of the familiar passage we just read, it is necessary for us to go back in scripture; before the New Testament, before the Exodus, before Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; even before Noah. We must go all the way back to the first family.
 - A. The Bible tells us that in the beginning God created a man from the dust of the ground, breathing the breath of life into him that he might become a living soul.
 - B. From the man’s rib, God created a counterpart for him, a woman, that would be his companion and friend. He planted a beautiful garden paradise where they would live and rule over God’s creation.
 1. Nothing in all of creation was withheld from them except for one single tree, the fruit of which they were instructed not to eat. Everything else was at their disposal, given for their enjoyment.
 2. Above all of that, they enjoyed a direct fellowship with God, walking with him in the cool of the day.
 - C. But as you may already know, they broke the **one rule** God had given them, and partook of the tree which had been forbidden to them. As a result of this, they were banished from their beautiful home and subjected to a life of hard labor and pain in childbirth.
 - D. The Bible tells us that following those happy years, their family began to grow and they had two sons named Cain and Abel.
 1. The joy of children didn’t last however, as one day, when they were older, Cain killed his brother in a fit of jealous rage.
 2. God confronted, and subsequently punished him, condemning him to a life of restless wandering on the face of the earth. Have you ever looked at what happened next though?
- II. **Genesis 4:16 ESV** Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden. **17** Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. **When he built a city**, he called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch. **18** To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad fathered Mehujael, and Mehujael fathered Methushael, and Methushael fathered Lamech. **19** And Lamech took two wives. The name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah. **20** Adah bore Jabal; he was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock. **21** His brother’s name was Jubal; he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe. **22** Zillah also bore Tubal-cain; he was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron. The sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah. **23** Lamech said to his wives: “Adah and

Zillah, hear my voice; you wives of Lamech, listen to what I say: I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me. **24** If Cain's revenge is sevenfold, then Lamech's is seventy-sevenfold.”

- A. Notice the progression of events:
 - 1. God judges and punishes Cain. Cain wanders away. He marries a wife and starts a family.
 - 2. Next, he builds a city. He begins to experiment with organization and government.
 - a) His city becomes a birthplace of agriculture, the arts, and industry.
 - b) But his city is also a breeding ground of the same types of sin that had brought such severe condemnation to his own life.
 - B. What is happening here? Cain was born into a family that was created for dominion; created and appointed to rule. But the authority that they had been given was a stewardship, managing creation so that all the glory would be reflected back to God.
 - C. But now he builds (taking dominion) without a thought for God's glory.
 - D. Do we still do that? We seek power, plans and organization to repair the damage done to us by our own sin! More laws, more oversight to keep our wayward hearts in check and bring order to the world. But the power that is gained or granted is always eventually lavished on ourselves and lorded over others.
 - E. Though in our hearts, the original call or intent may have been noble, sin eventually sets up (real and symbolic) cities, kingdoms, and nations so that we may seek to make a name for ourselves apart from God. And I wish the evidence for this ended at Cain and Lamech, but look at Genesis 11...
 - F. It's the story of how the people of the earth gather on the plains of Shinar in modern-day Iraq. We know it better as Babel or Babylon.
 - 1. There they declare, ““Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, **and let us make a name for ourselves**, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.”
 - a) “Let's build! Let's do something important and become famous in the process! And in so doing we can be the masters of our destiny, beholden to nobody; neither man nor God!”
 - b) When we eject God from our lives through sin, all of our building projects and government initiatives will be governed only by willful pride.
 - 2. But God comes down to see what they are doing and in a stroke of his power frustrates their self serving plans, proving himself to be the true power in the universe!
 - G. You may ask, “Isn't planning, building, planting, and governing ultimately a good thing? Part of our mandate to subdue the earth and exercise dominion over it?”
 - 1. Without a doubt, these things are in our DNA as the image-bearers of God!
 - 2. But the problem is that once we are corrupted by sin, all of our efforts are tainted with arrogance and self-centeredness.
- III. Throughout the remainder of the Old Testament, we see this truth vividly played out in the God-rejecting pride of the Egyptians, Amalekites, Philistines, Assyrians and a host of others. All of these nations tried to dominate and put the world in order

through force under the banner of their own greatness. But in Genesis 12 we see that God has a different, and infinitely superior plan to put the world in order...

- A. Instead of installing a King, God calls a man in Genesis 12. His name is Abram (later Abraham). He came from the same plains where the tower of Babel was built, in the days following that disaster.
 - B. And starting with this one man, God starts to organize; he starts to build. Though the man is childless, God gives him a son, and in the course of time, his family becomes the 12 tribes of the people of Israel.
 - C. When this nation is enslaved by the world's greatest political and military power, God secures their release, not with a politician, diplomat or army, but by using 10 miraculous plagues and an elderly stutterer.
 - D. He gives this nation a homeland, and though they sin by rejecting him, he gives them a courageous and benevolent King in David who is promised that he will be the progenitor for the Greatest King ever, who will one day sit upon David's throne and rule all the nations forever.
 - E. A couple of generations later, and the promise seems broken because David's kingdom becomes a chaotic mess ruled by one idolatrous despot after another.
 - 1. It gets so bad that 5/6 of the nation is dispersed forever into the sands of time by Assyria, while the other 1/6 sees the temple destroyed and is placed in exile for 70 years in Babylon.
 - 2. But God is still at work, building a kingdom by different rules than those employed by the would-be emperors and dictators that rise and fall all around his people in Babylon, Persia, and Greece.
 - F. Then one night, many years later, under orders from yet another ruler, Caesar, from another empire, Rome, a man from Nazareth arrives in Bethlehem with his pregnant fiancée to be counted and taxed by the government.
 - 1. And it is on this night that God reveals the man who will subdue every government, every power and ideology of this world to become it's King!
 - 2. But it would not be through political cunning, or military might, or social engineering, but through love, sacrifice, and a violent confrontation with the Prince of this World who sat behind every one of the world's self-aggrandizing schemes, from the garden to the Imperial palace. This was predicted 600 years earlier.
- IV. **Isaiah 9:6 ESV** For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; **and the government shall be upon his shoulder**, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. **7 Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end**, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness **from this time forth and forevermore**. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.
- A. God's intention is total, cosmic government with Christ as King. But it would be a kingdom based on worship, expressed through love and service.
 - B. We see this in one of the oddest (and most embarrassing!) stories in the Bible:
 - 1. In Matthew 20, the disciples James and John, to whom Jesus had given the manly title "Sons of Thunder", send their mommy to Jesus with a very specific request. ""Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom."

2. These knuckleheads have learned nothing from being with Jesus! They want exactly what the whole world wants! Power! Status! Respect! They have walked with Jesus and listened to his teaching, but their hearts are no different than the rest of the world!
 3. But before you get too hard on these two, what do you think happened with the other 10 disciples? The Bible says, “when the ten heard it, they were indignant at the two brothers.” Why? Because they wanted the same thing, and were not about to be bumped by these two usurpers! Now listen to Jesus’ response to this drama:
 4. **Matthew 20:25 ESV** But Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. **26 It shall not be so among you.** But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, **27** and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, **28 even as the Son of Man** came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”
- C. New kingdom, new rules!
- V. This brings us back to the scene we saw played out in our original text: Jesus is in Jerusalem for the final week before his crucifixion. While there, his enemies opposed him, trying over and over to trick him into saying or doing something that will result in him losing favor, being condemned or even executed.
- A. So as the forefathers of “gotcha journalism”, two of these groups from opposite ends of the political spectrum conspire together and pick a prime political hot button issue of the day: taxation by Rome, the foreign occupying power.
1. First, there were the Pharisees, a conservative, anti-Rome faction.
 - a) Their name literally meant “separated ones”. They were known for their insistence that Old Covenant law be strictly adhered to, including all the laws regarding ritual purity.
 - b) They hated Rome (and all Gentiles), regarding them as God’s unclean, uncircumcised enemies. They would love to hear Jesus instruct people to pay taxes to Caesar, because it would enrage all of the blue-collar, anti-Rome conservatives in the crowd and cause Jesus to lose favor as a traitor.
 2. Next, there were the Herodians, a more liberal, pro-Greek custom, pro-Roman law faction.
 - a) They were called “Herodians” because of their similarity to Herod in that they were willing to compromise with the Romans in order to gain power, status and possessions.
 - b) They would love to hear Jesus instructing people to stick it to Caesar because it would give their followers reason to accuse him, as well as condemn Jesus as being guilty of imperial treason.
- B. So **together** they put the unanswerable question to him: “Should we pay taxes to Caesar or not?”
- C. But Jesus is not fooled! “Why are you testing Me, hypocrites?”, he says. He knows that resistance to God’s kingdom rule makes for strange bedfellows! That’s why he said: **Mark 8:15b ESV** “Watch out; beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.”

- D. So he teaches them an object lesson by asking for someone to show him the currency with which the people are to pay taxes and asking them two questions. Whose Image is this on the coin? Who's inscription? "Caesar's!", they answer.
1. When Jesus is asking a question, it is never because he needs information! With his question, he is pointing out to them something flawed with their question about taxes, and by extension, with themselves.
 - a) The image on the coin was the profile of Caesar himself. Jesus was showing them that, like a graven image in a pagan temple, the currency was not "neutral" it represented something, a power behind the world's power. A power that had aligned itself against God, and a power that Christ had come to unseat.
 - b) The inscription confirmed this as it said, "Caesar Augustus Tiberius, son of the Divine Augustus"; meaning: Caesar is the Son of God!
 2. Jesus answer is simple, "Give back to Caesar what belongs to him." He is saying that if you want to be a follower of God, you don't change the world like Caesar and his minions do; with money, power, control, and violence. Whether you are the emperor of the world, or the assistant manager at Chuck E Cheese, the followers of Jesus lead, and bring order to the world differently than their counterparts who don't know Christ.
 3. The idea wasn't "government is bad" within the realm that God had assigned to it, but that there is a power that exalts itself, and opposes God, claiming the right to rule the world. But God has said differently...
- E. **Psalm 47:1 ESV** Clap your hands, all peoples! Shout to God with loud songs of joy! **2** For the Lord, the Most High, is to be feared, **a great king over all the earth.** **3** He subdued peoples under us, and nations under our feet. **4** He chose our heritage for us, the pride of Jacob whom he loves. *Selah* **5** God has gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet. **6** Sing praises to God, sing praises! **Sing praises to our King,** sing praises! **7 For God is the King of all the earth;** sing praises with a psalm! **8 God reigns over the nations; God sits on his holy throne.** **9** The princes of the peoples gather as the people of the God of Abraham. For the shields of the earth belong to God; he is highly exalted!
- VI. But it's not enough to decide simply not to cling to whatever belongs to Caesar. Every political leader in history promised to do things differently than the guy that preceded him! As Christ followers, we must also give back to God what is his!
- A. How did Jesus determine what was Caesar's? By inspecting the image and the inscription! When we see Caesars image and inscription, we must turn the thing bearing them back to Caesar!
 - B. How do we determine what belongs to God? We look for the image and inscription of God!
 - C. But where do we find the image of God? Genesis tells us that WE are the image of God! Where do we find his inscription? **2 Corinthians 3:3 ESV** And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, **written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God,** not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

- D. Jesus is saying that we must Give back to Caesar all that belongs to him; every token of force and the manipulation of human power and bending others to our will. We must refuse to use Caesar's tools to accomplish Caesar's goals!
 - E. But because Caesar and all the power he represents has been cast down by the resurrection and ascension, Christ is exalted above all of the idols of finance, the allure of politics, the threat of military might, the deception of Islam, the demands of popes and denominations, and the ideologies of atheism and humanism, and above everything else in heaven and on earth!
 - F. We must give back to God what is God's; that which bears his image and inscription - us! The people that Jesus purchased by his own blood!
- VII. You may have thought I forgot that we were in a series called "What's The message?" I didn't. The take home lesson today is that when we are interpreting the Bible, we must not neglect the context (like I told you two weeks ago in my message in Philippians 4:13), but we must also not apply a 21st Century context to the message that isn't there.
- A. We do that when we make the message of "Rendering to Caesar and to God" a treatise on the separation of church and state.
 - B. Or when we use it to justify living in two distinct compartments of life; one of religious service and obligation, and one of living in the real life tax-paying, blood, sweat and tears world.
 - C. We must remember that the Bible is first and foremost the story of God's kingdom triumphing, and Jesus being crowned king far above every king, pharaoh, emperor, or president. When we look for that reality, we will see the Bible in a whole new light. It will become more than a collection of "tips for living in a fallen world".
 - D. If you understood and celebrated the fact that Jesus is already King over all the earth, you would worry a lot less about money and respect.
 - E. You wouldn't worry so much about whether your guy wins the election or who's in charge in Washington, Austin or Lubbock.
 - F. You don't worry as much about the kingdom that is passing when you have been brought into the kingdom that will never end, where the king will reign in majesty and power forever and ever.
- VIII. Right before he went to the cross, Jesus stated what was at stake. **John 12:31 ESV** "**Now** is the judgment of this world; **now will the ruler of this world be cast out.** **32** And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."
- A. By the cross and the empty tomb, the ruler of this world has been cast out. There's a new King on the throne, and he'll be there forever.
 - B. He has been lifted up both on the cross and in our praise and is drawing all people; Texan people, Iranian people, white people, black people, rich people, and poor people.
 - C. All that remains is for us to give back to God what is God's.