



“Jesus, Caesar & the Living God”

Luke 20:19 - 26

March 22, 2020

This morning we are going to continue in our ongoing study of the Gospel of Luke, which I have found to be relevant for the days that we are living in. We are going to be in Luke Chapter 20.

This morning we are going to see the wisdom of the Lord Jesus Christ put on display in a marvelous and memorable way, as we see how Jesus left people marveling at a nugget of truth that He provided. It is a nugget of truth that I think most of us have heard before.

We have this statement from the heart of the Messiah: “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesars, and render to God the things that are God’s.”

I think that is a statement that a great many of us are familiar with. Brothers and sisters, I want to let you know that I think that this is so relevant for the day that we find ourselves in, and not because April 15 is less than a month away. That’s been extended to July.

Rather, I find this passage of Scripture so relevant because this statement gives us, in compact, form the will of the Lord for His people in relation to the governing authorities in view of the fact that we also belong to a greater Kingdom.

We are living in days that are unprecedented in terms of the way that our governing officials have found it necessary to intervene in the daily pattern of life for us American citizens. In my forty-six-years, I have never seen anything like this. Perhaps even more impressively, those of you in your 70s, 80s, and into your 90s, you have never seen days like this either.

Last Sunday morning there were about twenty-five people that were here. I can guarantee you that this week, there are a total of seven of us here—on a Sunday morning! It is crazy. This is by order of governing officials for the greater good of society, but we might ask ourselves if this is okay. Is it right for us to be doing what we are doing here?

Again, I think the portion of Scripture ahead of us helps us with these questions. This statement from Jesus is something of a springboard into teachings from Scripture that are expanded upon throughout the New Testament. So we will be considering that this morning as we continue in the Gospel of Luke.

As we dig in here and set our attention in Luke Chapter 20, let me remind you that it is an intense context. Evil was at work in the city of Jerusalem. These were the final days before the Lord was crucified on Mount Calvary.

The enemies of Jesus, the religious leaders that were so very jealous of Him and whose hearts were filled with so much animosity toward Him, they were setting clever traps to try and catch Jesus in His words.

They wanted to make Jesus say something He would regret so they could condemn Him, either as a blasphemer or as an insurrectionist. So here in the context of the Gospel of Luke, we understand that the land of Israel was crackling with resistance against the Roman Empire. They hated the fact that there was a Roman presence in their land, especially in the city of Jerusalem.

At the same time, the Romans were there with their watchful eyes to squelch any hint of rebellion or resistance or insurrection against Rome. It was in this context that the religious leaders of Israel sent a delegation to trap Jesus.

Let's see if they succeeded in doing that. Luke Chapter 20 and Verses 19 through 26:

¹⁹The 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. ²⁰So 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. ²¹So they asked him, "Teacher, we know that you speak and teach rightly, and show no partiality, but truly teach the way of God. ²²Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar, or not?" ²³But he perceived their craftiness, and said to them, ²⁴"Show me a denarius. Whose likeness and inscription does it have?" They said, "Caesar's." ²⁵He said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and render to God the things that are God's. ²⁶And 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.

Years ago, John Piper wrote a book called *Seeing and Savoring Jesus Christ*. In that book he elaborates on thirteen qualities or attributes of our Lord Jesus. Reflecting upon them, they help us to know Him and love Him.

One of the chapters in that book was on the wisdom that filled the Messiah. The title of that chapter was *One Greater Than Solomon is Here*. That refers back to King Solomon and the time when the Queen of the South, the Queen of Sheba came to visit Israel. She came to behold all that Solomon had built and to hear all the wisdom that He accrued.

What we read in that story in I Kings Chapter 10, was that hearing his wisdom, the queen was literally left breathless. It took her breath away. It made her silent. Something like that happened here. Jesus in His wisdom and in His ability to just think on the spot and come up with these amazing answers, He left His opponents silent. You might even say that He shut them up!

This is right here in the text. Next week we are going to read how Jesus did it again. We see the wisdom of the Lord Jesus here.

Those of you who know what it is to be a part of various team meetings, when you are thinking up strategies, you might think about how easy it is to spend an hour or more thinking about certain ways to go about things that need to be accomplished.

I picture these men strategizing how they would close in and trap Jesus. Just in a single moment, Jesus killed their attempt. I call it intellectual Jiu Jitsu, where you take the force of the blow that is coming against you and send it right back to those who sent it.

That is what Jesus did here. He did so with this famous statement, a genius reply: Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and render unto God what is God's. Not only was it a sharp and thoughtful reply, but the genius of it is that what we have here in this sentence given to us by Jesus is the will of the Lord.

We have the command of the King for His people as they are citizens in the various nations of the earth that they find themselves in. This is not just a pithy little comment, it is something more. It is a summation of the biblical teaching of the New Testament for Christians like us.

I find it very relevant for the moment that we are living in when we are being asked to organize life in a way that is difficult, in a way that is challenging, in a way that is going to have some long term affects. We as Christians need to live as compliant citizens in the land that we are in. This is the will of the Lord.

What I would like for us to do is focus on what is here in Verse 25, that statement from Jesus to render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's. I want for us to see the command of the King for Christian citizens.

My sermon is going to boil down to two points this morning. As we read the New Testament and the teaching of Jesus, we are to give the civil authorities our compliance, our submissiveness, our obedience, in as far as we can do so without going into sin. We are also to give the civil authorities compliance, but we are to give the Living God our ultimate allegiance and worship.

First, let's consider that we:

- 1. Give the Civil Authorities Our Compliance**
(Romans 13:1-7)

Jesus said to render unto Caesar what is Caesar's. At the most basic level here in this text, that means that Christians are to be tax payors. Christian don't evade taxes. Christian pay their taxes.

If Jesus could issue forth this statement in Israel who were subjugated to the imperial nation of Rome, an empire that was bent on conquest, we also as Christians need to be good citizens who pay taxes as well. That is at the very basic level.

I remember one time when I was about twenty-years-old. I was with about four friends and we were driving on the 405 freeway. We were coming back from surfing in San Diego County. I remember sitting in the car and talking about how frustrated I was that such a portion of my paycheck was going to pay taxes. One of my friends who was studying to be an accountant. He was studying economics as well. He said to me, Jeff, let me ask you this, *Are you glad that we get to drive home on this nice paved freeway, rather than on a dirt road?* Of course, I said I was happy about that. Then my friend asked, *Are you glad that we have police officers to provide protection in the land that we live in?* I said yes and that I was thankful for that too. Then he asked, *Are you thankful for things like running water? Are you thankful that we have a United States Marine Corp.?* I responded that I was thankful for all those things.

Finally my friend got to the point and said, *Dude, then shut up and pay your taxes!* That is what he said! Yes, that is what is called *being taken school*. I was taken to school by that friend of mine. We are to pay our taxes, and that is what is clear in this passage.

But there is more here in seed form. What we have here is as close to a political statement that Jesus made during His incarnation and teaching ministry. But let's remember that the teaching ministry of the Messiah was continued through His apostles, as they went on to write the books of the New Testament.

What we find throughout the teaching of the New Testament is that God has positioned governments for the common good. He has sovereignly placed them, and Christians are to be humble, compliant, and submissive citizens in the lands that they live in.

There are four passages that are particularly relevant that teach these things. I am going to list them for you. You need to take some time in a time like we are living now to reflect on and consider them.

Four passages for your continued contemplation. One is Romans Chapter 13 and Verses 1 through 7. Second, we need to look at I Timothy Chapter 2 and Verses 1 through 4, which calls us to pray for all those who are in positions of authority. Third, Titus Chapter 3 and Verses 1 and 2. Finally, I Peter Chapter 2 and Verses 13 and 14. These are four passages that, at a time like this, we really need to be chewing on.

The text in Romans Chapter 13 is the longest portion and the most theologically rich portion, where, through the Apostle Paul, who was living in the Roman Empire under Nero, declared in the Holy Spirit that there is no governing authority except that which is established by God.

God is sovereign over the governing authorities. In view of that, we need to be compliant. Read that text for this teaching of God's sovereignty. God has positioned the one who is in the White House; the one who is in the governor's mansion; the ones who are the local authorities. We understand God has put them there. Read Romans Chapter 13 and Verses 1 through 7.

However, if you want to see a passage that really deals with the heart and the spirit with which we comply, just listen to what it says in Titus Chapter 3 and Verses 1 and 2. Listen carefully to what the Word of the Lord says. This is so important for a time like this.

¹Remind them...

Speaking to the body of Christ, the Christians, the disciples of Jesus, the followers of Christ.

¹Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, ²to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people.

This is the will of the Lord for us at all times, and especially for a time like this. Not only are we to render unto Caesar our taxes, but we are to render unto Caesar obedience and we are do so with a joyful spirit.

If that means what I think it means, Christians are to be model citizens. Titus is all about the Gospel—that we are sinners saved by grace by the Messiah and Gospel living. Gospel living has Christians being those in the public sphere who walk with humility. They want to be those who are helpful and compliant in every way they can be in view of the different orders that come down.

It is insane to me that it is 11:16 on a Sunday morning and I am talking to seven people here at Bethel Grace. But understand, the church has not been singled out and told not to worship God. If the church was singled out and told not to worship God, we would find a way to go underground and find some way to continue worshiping God. Understand that.

However, we are being called to participate in something that everybody else is being asked and even ordered to participate in for the greater good as we seek to do battle against and eradicate this novel infectious disease.

So, brothers and sisters, it is the will of God that we be gracious and compliant citizens, looking for ways to do all the good works that we can do in Jesus Name in the context that we are in right now.

We are not to do these things as those who are agitators or rebel-rousers or resisters. We are not to be slandering officials, mocking or scorning or throwing rocks at governor's mansions or the White House.

We are to be those filled with the Spirit and we are to be those who are helpful. These are the things that we are being called to render unto Caesar in a time such as this for the common good and to glory of the greater King that we serve.

We continue and we see that there is another part of this. Yes, there are governing authorities here on this earth, but there is One who is greater than all. There is One who we are submissive to above all. There is One whose will we do. His name is Jesus. He is the King.

The other part of rendering unto Caesar what is Caesar's and rendering unto God what is God's is to:

2. Give the Living God Your Worship (Romans 12:1-2)

When Jesus asked for that denarius from the people that were questioning Him, they were able to produce a small coin. That coin would have had the image of Tiberius Caesar on it. It was similar to the way a penny has the image of Abraham Lincoln or a quarter has the image of George Washington.

So the image of Caesar was stamped on the coin and Jesus was saying, *So let Caesar have his coin, recognizing the expenses involved in governmental programming and provision.* But, brothers and sisters, there is something glorious that is also at work here.

That is that the image of the Living God is stamped on every living being, on every living person. So, let us recognize God, our Creator, His Lordship as our Creator as our Sustainer. Church, as our Redeemer, as the One who provides for us.

Yes, we render taxes and earthly obedience under governing authorities, but we render unto the Lord the worship of our lives as those who have been saved by the grace of the Lord in Jesus Christ. We are to be worshipers. That is the most basic reality of our existence on earth and in heaven. We have the joy of worshiping the Lord.

Listen to how the Apostle Paul expanded this idea of rendering unto God what is God's in Romans Chapter 12 and Verses 1 and 2. What is it to render unto God what is God's?

¹I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of god, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ²Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

We are to be mindful Christians. We are to be those transformed by the renewing of our minds. We are to be those who test and approve that which is good. In Chapter 13, Paul talked about what is good and pleasing in the sight of the Lord in relation to the governing authorities. We have already covered that.

But here in this text, we are told that as those redeemed by Jesus we offer our very lives up to the Lord in worship. We render unto God what is God's. Brothers and sisters, that involves gathering together as Christians to sing praise to His Name, to lift up prayers, to dig into the Word, to give offerings. There is the gathered aspect of worship and there is so much more.

First and foremost, understand it is the will of the Lord for Christians to gather together. We are living in strange days that have called for these temporary measures. I want to you understand that what is happening right now, the fact I'm teaching six other people here, this is abnormal.

Get this: I'm talking to you, the one sitting on the sofa in your living room right now. You sitting there on Sunday morning instead of here with your church family is abnormal. Don't get used to it! Let us not give up meeting together as is the custom and practice of some. But let us encourage one another—Hebrews Chapter 10 and Verse 25. Christians are to assemble and sing praise to the Lord, to dig in the Word together, to follow Christ together.

Don't get used to sitting at home on Sunday mornings! You hear me? It has been my prayer that in this time period where Sundays services are live streamed, it produces in all of us such an appreciation for the gathering of the saints that when these regulations lift and things calm down, we will be busting at the seams with people that are so joyful and happy to be back together. Amen!

Maybe what we are going through right now is going to bust any of that sense of apathy that easily creeps up within us about what a precious gift it is for us come together in throng. It is the will of the Lord that we gather together in worship. However, it is so much more than that.

What we have here in Romans Chapter 12 and Verse 1 is that we give something physical. Giving something physical is essential to worship that is spiritual. I say that even at the risk of potentially conjuring up the melody by Olivia Newton-John back in the 1980s, *Let's Get Physical*.

It says in Romans Chapter 12 and Verse 1:

¹I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

O Christians, your worship is not only what happens in a gathered meeting, but worship continues on as we go out into the world and as we serve the Lord in these bodies He has given us. Just like we sang in the song this morning, all the different capacities that we have living in the bodies that we have, we offer them up as worship to the Lord.

We come to the Lord and say, Lord, here are my feet. Move them in such a way that they take me to the places and the people that you want me to go to Here are my lips. Lord, I pray that they would be used to release truth upon people, grace and love. Let my speech be filled with words of spiritual truth and conviction and kindness and love, and never for insulting or scorning but always for bringing encouragement in the truth of Jesus Christ.

Here are my hands. Use them to lift the fallen. Use them to perform daily tasks that will benefit the people around me. Here are my arms. Use them to embrace the lonely. Here are my ears. Help me to listen to people and to the things they are going through. Here is my life!

During these days where there is so much pain and fear in the world, I pray that the church, the redeemed of Jesus, would be activated in worship, knowing that we shine with the grace of the Messiah when we serve others with love. We do this in view of the mercies of God.

This is where we will finish this morning.

¹I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice...

This is rendering unto God what is God's. We do this by the mercies of God. We don't try to render to the Lord such a life of worship and service to somehow gain His mercy, somehow earn His favor.

Rather, we do so as Christians who by grace have already received the mercy of God; who have already through faith by grace received the forgiveness of sin and new life. We don't offer ourselves up like this to earn anything, but in view of what has been given by grace.

The book of Romans is an extended discussion of the heart of the Christian faith, the Gospel. In the initial chapters of Romans, Chapters 1 through 3, we are instructed with the truth that the human race, though created in the image of God, has fallen into sin—every last one of us. This is me and it is you.

We are sinners by nature and by choice. There is a lot of discussion about that physical disease called Covid-19. But there is a spiritual disease called sin. Because of these inward inclinations, we have all rebelled against the will of the Lord.

We are living in a society that does not take the idea of sin very seriously. But there is a God in Heaven who is holy, holy, holy. He sees the evil of human sin, which includes yours and mine. God must judge sin.

There are some things that we see happening in this world that stirs our indignation. Likewise, the righteous indignation of God is stirred against your sin and mine. We must confess that we are fallen in sin. However, the good news is that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

The epicenter of our faith is that the Messiah, the Son of God who is the God-Son, He came into the world and He lived a life of perfect obedience and grace and love. He did so for us as a gift. Jesus lived a perfect life in our place.

Then in the thirty-third year of His life, this Unblemished One, this pure and pristine and glorious and good One, He was nailed to the cross and He, who knew no sin, became sin for us that, in Him, we might become the righteousness of God as it says in II Corinthians 5:21.

Our sin was imputed to Him. Jesus paid the price. He who never sinned was treated as though He was the one who committed all sin. He paid the price for our sin, so that wherever there is one who will humble themselves before the Lord saying, *I am a sinner. I am in need of mercy. I need healing of this disease in me. Lord, I need forgiveness and grace.*

The one who looks to Jesus in faith like that, their sin is washed away by His precious blood. They are covered in the gift of His righteousness. These are the mercies of God. It is by this knowledge of God's mercy that we are then released with freedom to live a life of worship in

great gratitude for all that He has done for us in Christ. Let's live for Jesus. Let's live for the King. Let's have ears to hear the voice of His Spirit guiding us and prompting us in the days that we are living in.

If you are out there in YouTube Land, and you would like to talk more about what it is to be a follower of Jesus, sent me an email. Get on Bethel Grace Baptist Church.org website. My email address is there, along with other church leaders. Get in touch with us. We would love to talk to you about what it is to follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

Church, if you have any prayer requests, be in touch with us. The church leaders are looking to reach out and know how everybody is doing. If anything comes up, you let us know. We want to be supporting you. We want to be praying for you and helping in any way that we can, even as we are walking through these strange days together.

They might be strange days, but our God is unchanging. He is the Rock on which we stand. Jesus is our cornerstone. With that, I am going to close in a word of prayer.