

Render to God What is God's

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[0 : 0 0] All right. Thank you. Thank you. And I just have to say that I don't know about you, that first song, it took me back. Like if you grew up in church, like, and did children's church at all, I've had pictures of me like dancing around my little kids ministry classroom back in the day, singing that song to a very different melody.

But man, the words were so rich and so good. But that was a quite enjoyable worship time. Thank you guys. I just want to say again, good morning. My name is Jesse. I'm one of the pastors here. Those of you who are listening online, thank you.

And also those of you who are new with us, glad that you are with us. And I would say to all of us, a little public service announcement before we get into the sermon. Just by way of reminder, we are changing the way that we are doing communion.

Moving forward, so we got rid of the pre-packaged cups and wafers and whatever that wafer was made out of will no longer be put into your body. We got gluten-free crackers and juice in the cups, all that good stuff.

And there's four stations. So there's two up here, two in the back. You kind of see like in the middle of the seating, there's a big wide aisle. And so if you are behind that big wide aisle, make your way to the way in the back.

[1 : 1 6] If you're in front of that, you can use these tables up here. And that is not buffet style. Isn't just get up whenever you want during the sermon and go get it for yourself. There'll be a point in the sermon where it's very obvious that we're going to be doing communion.

Cool? We're all tracking with that? Awesome. All right. So we're jumping in to Mark. And if you've been tracking closely with us, you'll notice that we've skipped some verses.

It's not because we don't particularly like those passages of Scripture or we think they lack any value for us. But it's because they are parallel to other passages we've already covered. And so like teaching on them again would be redundant.

And so we're skipping ahead. Actually, we're going to be in Mark 12 and start in verse 13. If you have a Bible, go ahead and turn there. If you don't have a Bible, all good. We'll have the verses up on the screens.

You can read along with us. Now, I just want to say this. Before we get into these verses today, it's helpful to know where we're at in the story of Jesus. And he's in his final days before his death on the cross.

[2 : 1 4] He's becoming more clear about who he is and his messianic identity. And he's also become more bold with his actions. All right. We see the triumphal entry a few weeks ago.

That he enters into Jerusalem, not quietly. I mean, it is to a lot of fanfare. There was no missing that. And then we, as Elliot pointed out last week, he gave us a brilliant sermon about how he came and he purged the temple.

And the temple there, he purges it of its corruption. And then he calls out, and he continues to call out, the corruption publicly. And as you would imagine, these actions have caught everyone's attention, but not everybody is happy.

And as Jesus is becoming more bold, so is his opposition toward him. And in this account, some people are sent to trap Jesus, in his own words, with this impossible question.

And what they're trying to do here is they're trying to discredit him publicly. And so let's jump into it. Mark 12, verse 13. It says this, And they sent to him some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians to trap him in his talk.

[3 : 2 5] And they came and said to him, Teacher, we know that you are true and do not care about anyone's opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances, but truly teach the way of God.

Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Should we pay them or should we not? But knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, Why put me to the test?

Bring me a denarius and let me look at it. And they brought one. And he said to them, Whose likeness and inscription is this? And they said to him, It's Caesar's. Jesus said to them, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.

And they marveled at him. This is God's word. So, if you're on team Jesus right now, you are riding a high.

You're really digging this moment, right? To use a modern political phrase, Jesus owns his opponents. But there is a lot more to appreciate than Jesus escaping their well-conceived trap. [4 : 24] Jesus here gives us wisdom in how a Christ follower can navigate the treacherous waters of living for God's kingdom while living in the kingdoms of this world.

Because that is exactly what is at the heart of this exchange. The question being asked is both a political and theological one. And Jesus' answer as the kingly representative of God's kingdom is surprising.

Because first it shows us that Jesus values the role of government. Jesus is pro-government. In fact, government is one of the three main institutions given us by God for our flourishing.

The other two being family and the church. And we often think of government being something that is apathetic toward God at best and anti-God at worst.

Which in this fallen world is impossible to deny. Yet, even when governments ignore God or deny God, their very existence proves his nature whether they like it or not.

[5 : 27] And here's some good theology around the purpose and role of government and how God instituted it. From Romans 13 in verse 1 to 5, it says this, Let every person be subject to the governing authorities.

For there is no authority except from God. And those that exist have been instituted by God.

Therefore, whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed.

And those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad.

Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good and you will receive his approval.

For he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid. For he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God.

An avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore, one must be in subjection. Not only to God's wrath, but also for the sake of conscience. Now, I realize that when we read this, when you hear this, we will read our current political environment into it.

[6 : 35] And we might have all kinds of red flags. Like, hey, Paul, that was great. But like, man, I got some objections here. To you claiming that governing authorities are only a terror to bad conduct.

And I would say, you may be sitting there with some legitimate objections. And that's okay. Man, if you look at what government has done in the past, it hasn't always been very good.

They have dehumanized certain people groups. If you look at the government today, their tendency to be okay with redefining what is like objective science and objective truth to fit subjective desires.

That is going on. And as much as we might have justifiable objections, Paul wrote this passage at a time when there was open hostility and persecution of Christians by the government.

And yet he defends the role of government as being an overall good. And that is important for us to remember for our modern context. Sure, we may have laws and governing authorities that we disagree with because of moral and ethical reasons.

[7 : 39] However, on the whole, we do live in a nation of laws that govern and protect us for our good. And they protect us from ourselves a lot. See, a law is a boundary that defines what is acceptable and what is unacceptable.

And that truth reflects the very nature of who God is. From the very beginning, God created a kingdom. It was called Eden. And in that place, he put Adam and Eve.

And he gave them guiding principles to follow. Marry, multiply, fill the earth, subdue it, cultivate it, bring it into its full potential. But do not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

And so in the beginning, God had laws and he had some boundaries. There were very few, but he had them. And then what happened is that we sinned. We broke those boundaries, those good ones that God made.

And so more laws and more boundaries had to be defined for all the ways that we sinned. Because one thing that we have learned, if you look over the course of human history, we have become very clever in the ways that we sinned, don't we?

[8 : 42] And when God delivered Israel out of Egypt, what he did, he pulled them out. He delivered them. He gets them across the Red Sea. He divides it and they get across. And then they stop at Sinai and he covenants with them.

And he gives them his laws that would govern and guide them on how to be his people that were for him. Now, perhaps you might be new or exploring Christianity.

And you're just like, you know, Jesse, I'm less interested in like the theological proofs of this thing. So that's okay. Let me make an appeal from history. Now, if you study history and you study nations throughout history, it proves over and over again that nations governed by laws flourish more than ones that are lawless.

That is just the nature of the beast. And I'm not saying that any nation is perfect and they don't have their fair share of problems. But on the whole, like they had a tendency to flourish more.

The ones that had laws and held on to those laws. And the argument the Bible makes and history makes is that life is better than government than without it. Now, getting back to our text in Mark, we should remember that Jesus makes his statement here having lived within a geopolitical system.

[9 : 56] He was living in a nation defined as God's chosen people and God had given them his laws to obey. And yet in Jesus's day, there is also a, they were also a Roman occupied nation.

And because of that, they couldn't just submit to God's laws. There were Roman laws that they had to adhere to as well. And this is where things can get tricky and confusing.

Because in Jesus's day, there's no shortage. There was no shortage of ideological landmines to navigate. And the two groups who came to Jesus with their question, the Pharisees and the Herodians, they represented two opposing views, two very different ideological positions.

Today, think Republican and Democrat coming to Jesus with these questions. See, on the one ideological extreme were the Pharisees who were either zealots in their political ideology or at least zealot adjacent, to use a modern term.

And what was a zealot? A zealot was a person who held to a black and white view that allegiance to God and any allegiance to Rome was completely incompatible.

[11 : 07] And so it required total rejection and rebellion against Rome and all its accompanying idolatry. And this denarius that Jesus asks for in this story, it was a Roman coin minted to pay for a poll tax.

And all Roman taxes, like if you were a Jew, a Jewish patriot in that day, any Roman tax was unpopular. But this specific tax, this poll tax, had a special place of disgust for them.

Because it had a recent history which involved a revolt. Some Jewish men rose up and revolted against the Roman occupiers. And they were squashed by the Roman military.

And a lot of people died because of that. And in moved Rome with even greater military might to occupy them. And part of that was paying this poll tax. So the Pharisees, they despised this tax and the coins for political reasons.

But they also had religious ones as well. The denarius had the image of the Roman emperor on it. With the words, son of the divine Augustus. Which would have been a violation of two of God's ten commandments.

[12 : 19] Do not make any graven image and have no other gods beside me. One of, like the Romans had a pantheon of gods. But one of those gods was the Roman emperor. And he was seen as a god and was expected to be worshipped as one.

And so you can see on one side of the trap, when they asked the question, Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not? You have the Pharisees that represented the side of, heck no.

But then you had another ideological side. Which was the Herodians. They were pro-Rome. They were pro-tax. They were big fans of King Herod and his family.

And Herod and his family, over the course of decades, they had done a lot to bless the nation of Israel by building up Jerusalem. The city of Jerusalem.

And by actually putting a lot of money into rebuilding the temple as well. So Herod, he was also this quasi-religious figure.

[13 : 17] He was good at playing the political game of giving lip service to Judaism. While breaking many of God's laws. The Herodians, they were such fans of Herod that they were okay with him.

They saw the benefits of government and how it helped to restore the glory of Jerusalem and the temple. And they see God using him and using government to bring about his will.

So they were okay looking the other way at some of his moral indiscretions. And so you can see the other side of the trap. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar?

Well, for them, it was, oh yeah, absolutely. And this question posed to Jesus, it looks like a lose-lose for him. It looks like a binary choice.

You're going to have to choose the Pharisees. Or you're going to have to choose the Herodians here. And if he sides with one, if he's anti-tax, he'll be branded as a rebel. And in trouble with the Roman authorities.

[14 : 14] But if he is pro-tax, he will be discredited toward his messianic claim. And he would alienate Jewish patriots who were anti-Rome.

And let's step back, right? You see what's going on here. You see what they're trying to do. And we can kind of connect with this, can't we? This feels a lot like our politics today.

It feels like we only have binary choices in front of us. We have to be all in for one side of the aisle or we have to be all in for the other. But Jesus' answer shows us that there is another way.

There's a different framework to work with. And in verse 17, it says, render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God's the things that are God's. And we're going to focus for the rest of the sermon on that statement.

And for right now, we're going to look at the first part of this statement. Because the better framework that Jesus teaches us begins with recognizing the truth that honoring your government means giving them what they are due.

[15 : 19] Part of the brilliance of Jesus' answer here is that he changes the starting point of the argument. They came and posed the question to Jesus using a Greek word that means offer to pay.

Kind of sounds like a choice. Jesus switches it by using a Greek word which means to pay back. The first implies that you have an option. The first implies that you have a choice.

And if you're going to do that, it's out of your own willingness to do that and go along with it. But Jesus, he switches to paying off a debt you owe. He uses a word that implies you're paying off a debt that you owe.

Which isn't an option. It's just doing what is right. And Jesus is saying here by his wording that a government has the right to demand certain things from you and me.

And in that sense, taxes make sense. It's a way of giving the government what they are due for the things that you benefit from. Roads, schools, police, military, the court system, all those things.

[16 : 19] But there are other things besides taxes. That we are told to give. And getting back to that passage we read earlier in Romans 13 about the governing authorities. Paul concludes with this in verse 6.

For because of this you also pay taxes. For the authorities are ministers of God attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed to them. Taxes to whom taxes are owed.

Revenue to whom revenue is owed. Respect to whom respect is owed. Honor to whom honor is owed. Now we read that. And for most of us, we pay our taxes.

Not because we are happy to do that and want to, right? We have to. But what about the things listed in verse 7 that we don't have to render? Respect and honor.

Now I would venture to guess a lot of us in this room would have a hard time rendering to Joe Biden any respect and honor. And yet we would happily do it for a president with an R in front of their name.

[17 : 19] And that is true if your shoe is on the other political foot. Now the Bible doesn't say to respect and honor the politicians you like. Again, Paul wrote that passage when there was an emperor far more anti-Christian than anything we have ever experienced.

So how do we show appropriate honor and respect to our governing authorities? How do we do that as Christians? As followers of Jesus? Well, perhaps the best way we can do that is to pray.

Pray for our governing authorities. And I'm not saying praying like God smite them. God take them out. Right? And it's praying blessing over them.

It's praying that, man, God would give them wisdom. God would give them insight and understanding on how to make choices and decisions on difficult things. And we can pray for those.

We can pray for them that way and bless them that way. Even those who might have policies that we disagree with. You know, there was this virtuous saying. That I grew up with.

[18:20] Probably a lot of you grew up with and are familiar with. And it was this. If you have nothing nice to say about someone, then just don't say anything at all. Right? I don't know if you guys remember that at all.

That is a form of Christian charity. And we've lost that. We really have. And we need to reclaim it. We need to get that back. In James 3, we are commanded to tame the tongue.

We are warned about the power of this thing. Like, it can destroy things. What we say. And James goes on to say that, you know what? Our speech as Christians, man, it should bring life.

It should be a spring of life that brings blessing and not cursing. And I've got to be honest. In this church, out of my own mouth, I've witnessed plenty and I've said plenty of disparaging remarks about every single sitting president over the last five years.

And these passages should get our attention. These passages should convict us as followers of Jesus. It should give us pause before we make a disparaging remark about a governing authority or a disparaging social media post.

[19:37] And perhaps it should make us rethink and reconsider the amount of listening to or the amount of watching news outlets that just happen to do the disparaging remarks for us.

Let's be honest. You either watch Fox News or CNN, not because one has better journalism, but because they're saying things about the people you like or don't like.

They're saying the things that you want them to say. Here's some food for thought. Jesus and the apostles never register one disparaging remark against a ruling authority in all the New Testament. You do not hear it. Now, I will say this. John the Baptist clearly calls out Herod's sin of adultery. He does that. But he doesn't call out his politics.

And that should tell us something. And it does. And it goes in tandem with this framework that Jesus teaches us. And it's best understood by looking at the second part of Jesus' statement, right?

[20:45] He starts with, render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's. And then he goes on to say this. Render to God the things that are God's. And so when you put those things together, it's what Jesus is saying.

Man, honor government. Because that's a godly practice. But it's important to remember that government isn't God. Don't give your government what only God deserves.

And I would say this. For many of us, me included here, if we aren't railing against our governing authorities, we are going out of our way to sanctify them as faultless and perfect.

Meaning we aren't calling out their sins. We aren't calling out when they are doing things wrong. Or we're giving them too much of our hope and our hearts and time and attention.

And when Jesus asks for the denarius and asks whose picture's on there, what he is doing, he is making a theological point. That coin had Caesar's image imprinted on it.

[21:51] It said, whose likeness is on this coin? They said Caesar. And so that coin, it was Caesar's. It belonged to Caesar. And so Caesar expected it to be rendered, paid back in return for all the blessings that his rule bestowed on his subjects.

Right? When Rome would go into new territories and conquer a land, there would be a proclamation of the Pax Romana, the Roman peace. This message of the gospel of good news of Caesar, that now you are under his rule and all his blessings are flowing to you now.

You were coming under that. That was a legitimate thing that was happening in that day. And Jesus is saying to them, you know what? You got this guy's coins in your pocket.

You're carrying around an image of this guy who claims to be a son of God, a divine being. And so Jesus is calling that out.

He's saying that he gives them to you. This guy's Caesar. He gives them to you to return to him as recognition for his blessings that benefit you. And Jesus says, go ahead, do that. Go ahead.

[23:04] Give Caesar what is due him. But now he shifts and gets us to consider what is owed to God. Well, when you think about what he's talking about here, we know where God's image has been printed.

We know where his likeness has been given, don't we? Because it begins, the Bible tells us right at the beginning in Genesis 1. Where is God's image and likeness imprinted?

It's on you and me. It's not on money. See what Jesus is getting at. Caesar, he can get some of your money, but God deserves your whole life.

God deserves your whole being. We can render to the Caesars over us the honor they are due, but we never give them our lives. We never give them our ultimate allegiance.

And I want to say this to us because we're coming into a big election year, right? And let's remember that. It's okay to give someone your vote, but it is not okay to give that person your heart. [24 : 02] It isn't. Your life, your ultimate allegiance, your affections are meant for one king and one king only, the king. His name is Jesus Christ.

And if we don't do that, we will be in danger of hypocrisy, the same hypocrisy that Jesus calls out in this passage. Right? In verse 15, it says, Jesus knowing their hypocrisy, he sees it in them. These guys came to Jesus with all this pretense of sincerity. Teacher, we know that you're true and don't care about anyone else's opinion. But you are not swayed by appearances, but truly teach the way of God.

And I would say yes and amen to all of that. But here's another important contextual point. They're doing this inside the temple. Remember, Jesus had recently thrown out the money changers. He had purged his temple saying, this isn't a place for Caesar's image to dwell in. See, Jesus beat Thomas Jefferson to giving us the truth that his kingdom and his church should be separate from the state.

[25 : 10] Sorry, Thomas Jefferson. Listen, the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, the hypocrisy of the Herodians goes beyond their false sincerity here. Jesus is saying, you pretend not to violate these commandments of God that said, worship no other gods but the God of Israel.

And do not make for yourself a graven image. Yet, you come into this temple carrying a false God's image in your pockets. You use it in this temple.

And you are mixing it with your temple worship. You're mixing your politics with your religion. And the Pharisees and the Herodians were blind to their hypocrisy, but Jesus wasn't.

Jesus is showing them that they are mixing the two more than they realize. And I want to say this to us. Are we any different? That's the question for us today.

That's what he's putting, that's what he's laying at our feet. And over the next few days, Jesus would stand before Pilate in a moment to be questioned.

[26 : 18] And Pilate questioned him about his king, his kingship and his kingdom. And Jesus tells him, my kingdom isn't of this world. It's not the kingdom you know and understand. It doesn't work like yours, Pilate.

It doesn't have defined borders like yours. It isn't sustained like yours. It doesn't expand like yours. And here's the thing. Jesus' kingdom will continue after other kingdoms fall.

Rome fell. Rome fell. Israel, in a few decades, Jerusalem would be utterly destroyed. The temple razed to the ground.

But you know what? God's kingdom kept chugging along. It's a different kind of kingdom than the kingdoms of this earth. See, Caesar spread his greatness through military might.

They would conquer and subdue nations at the tip of the Roman sword. The nations were brought into Caesar's kingdom through coercion, through threat of punishment.

[27 : 25] People were forced to surrender and render their dues back to him, to pay unto Caesar the things that were Caesar with the image on Caesar's coins.

Jesus' kingdom is totally different.

Our whole being. We hold nothing back. And why do we do that? Because he deserves it. Because we do it in love. And if anything that we can take away from this, it teaches us, man, the danger of politics is that it can poison our faith.

So that we are more concerned about the kingdoms of this earth than the kingdom of heaven.

That's just going to keep chugging along and outlive all of them. As the band comes up, some ways we can respond.

I want to say this. Jesus' kingdom is concerned about who is sitting on the throne in people's hearts. It isn't threatened by who's seated in Congress.

[28 : 49] It isn't threatened by who's seated in the Oval Office. Every kingdom, every nation of this earth will pass away, but Jesus' kingdom will remain forever.

And if you're here and you're not yet a Christian, or if you are already a Christian, we have the same question being posed to us. Whose kingdom are you giving your life to?

Are you rendering to God what is God's? Whose kingdom are you giving your life to? And in a moment, we are going to take communion.

And communion is this beautiful moment where we draw near to God and Christ draws near to us as we partake of the body and the blood of him whose image we bear.

And in his body, we see how our king was broken for us, for our healing and for our wholeness. And we not only get to see it, but we get to eat it.

[29 : 46] We get to eat of him. We get to eat of that suffering, that brokenness that makes us whole. And it unites us to him in this beautiful fellowship. In this blood, when we drink the cup, this blood, the life of our king that was shed for us in our place, it calls us to live not for ourselves, but to live for him and to him alone.

And in drinking of that cup, we unite to the life and the person who is our savior, Jesus Christ. And I want to say to you, if you're here, you've never put your faith in Jesus.

Communion isn't for you today, but you can reflect. And we invite you to reflect on who he is and what it means to follow him. And man, if he's calling you to give your life in faith.

And there's going to be a prayer up on the screen, if that's you, to pray to him today. For those of us who are followers of Jesus, before we come to the table, I want to give us some time to reflect.

I want to give us some time to listen to what the spirit of God is saying to us, how he is examining our hearts and discerning what is going on in our hearts. And make yourself available to him.

[30 : 57] Because he is there, he is the spirit of truth to show us what is true inside. And sometimes those truths might not be things that we should be holding on to. They should be things that we should be repenting from and running from.

And if that's you today, man, that's the spirit's kindness. That's God's grace to you. He's not angry with you. He's not mad at you. He's here to bring correction where there needs to be correction. Realignment to what it means to follow him.

That's so good and necessary. So before we go and we partake of our savior, whose kingdom is going to outlast every other kingdom, let's do some business with God.

And we're going to give some time to do that today. And then when you're ready, come to the table, take your gluten-free cracker, your little juice, and go back to your seat.

And you could take communion then. Let's go for it. Let's take some time to pray. Let's pray.