

The title for today's message is: **The Two Kingdoms**

Jesus said: **“render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.”**

Grace and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our Gospel lesson for this morning is another one of those texts, that raises more questions than answers.

Now, the questions that are raised in our text, really have no answers. In fact, the more one studies today's text.

The more convinced you become that it leaves us to struggle with our own conscience, guided of course by God's Spirit.

So I invite you to come along with me this morning, as we explore today's text. First of all, let us consider the strange circumstances in which this story unfolds.

Once again we're told that the Pharisees plotted to entrap Jesus. And of course that's nothing new, is it?

As you'll see, in these last few chapters of Matthew's Gospel, there has been this ongoing battle between the religious leaders of Israel, and Jesus.

A battle concerning Jesus' authority-versus-that of the appointed leaders of the Temple.

As always the Pharisees were concerned about the people that were following Jesus, so they set out to discredit Jesus before them.

But, what's strange about today's text, is the fact that the Pharisees, those deeply pious, religious priests, would team up with the Herodian's.

Now as their name implies, the Herodian's, were partisans of the ruling Roman family.

They were a group of Jews, who had compromised their faith, and piety, in order to win favors from the governing Romans.

Clearly, the Pharisees, and the Herodian's, made for strange partners in their attempt to discredit Jesus. The fact is, they despised each other.

Now after some sweet talking, this group set the trap. They asked Jesus: **Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?** Now the problem with that question is:

If Jesus answered "No its not lawful," the Herodian's, those who enjoyed the benefits of Roman rule, would report Him to the authorities as a traitor.

Or, if Jesus answered "Yes, it is lawful," the Pharisees would discredit Him, as a Roman sympathizer, a person unfaithful to the faith of Israel.

Perhaps, this is what prompted Jesus, as these two conflicting groups approached Him, to refer to them as hypocrites.

Jesus knew that there had to be some devious intent behind their teaming up to confront Him.

But Jesus didn't succumb to their attempt to entrap Him. Instead, Jesus asked to see the coin that was used to pay the taxes at the time.

As it turned out, it was a coin that bore the image of the Roman emperor, so Jesus asked them: **"Whose likeness and inscription is this?"**

Both groups quickly answered, **“Caesar.”** Jesus then said: **“Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.”**

Now, Matthew tells us that when they heard this, they were amazed, and they left Jesus, and went away. Look, that answer was so good.

It enabled Jesus to escape the trap, that these two extreme but opposing groups were trying to set.

It acknowledged to the Herodian's, that we do have obligations to uphold the laws of the land, and in this case, paying taxes.

Yet, we also have obligations to uphold the laws of God. Jesus said; give to God what is God's.

Now the answer Jesus gave here to their question was two sided, which did more than foil their trap.

Jesus was teaching them which left them with a challenge. A challenge that rings down through the centuries.

In fact, Jesus' response presented them as well as us today with a far more difficult question?

Look if we stop and think about it, we conclude that we Christians are indeed citizens of two kingdoms.

The first part of Jesus' answer acknowledges the fact that we do have a responsibility, as citizens of the world.

That is to the governing authorities of our Nation, our State, our County and our community.

Here, Jesus acknowledges that we have, not only an obligation to pay taxes to the government, for the various services, and benefits.

But we must also acknowledge that His response goes further than simply paying taxes. Jesus said: **render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's,**

Those who first heard Jesus' response, and those who hear it today, recognize that governments ask their citizens for more than just money.

Governments also ask for our allegiance, they have the right and duty to establish laws, as well as to enforce them.

And in times of war, governments ask for military service, which may require the taking of lives, or the sacrifice of one's own life.

I believe Jesus' response here upholds the authority of governments. And so the apostle Paul, as he asserts repeatedly in his writings.

That believers are to respect governmental authority. And from our first lesson for this morning.

The prophet Isaiah showed how the heathen who ruled Cyrus, could even be an instrument of God's purpose.

If Jesus' response would have ended with **“Give to Caesar the things that are the Caesar's,”**

We would have been, left with a mandate to live our lives adhering to the authority of our worldly rulers.

But Jesus didn't end there! No! He also added, **“and to God the things that are God's.”**

What Jesus was saying is that, God also deserves our allegiance, as citizens of His kingdom, so, God deserves our tithes, and offerings.

Our worship, and thanksgiving for His gift of redeeming grace as members of His church here on earth.

But wait, what else belongs to God? The Roman coin that Jesus was handed bore the image of Caesar, therefore it belonged to Caesar.

But what bears the image, and name of God? Nothing but our whole being! In the very first chapter of Genesis, God said:

**"Let us make man in our image, in our likeness,** And the author of this first book of the Bible concluded by saying: **So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.**

We're the coins of God's realm, of His kingdom. So, if we're to "give to God the things that are God's."

Then we must conclude from our Lord's teaching, that there is no limit to what we owe God. We owe God our whole being, our very life, all that is ours.

No part of our life is excluded from our fundamental covenant with the one who is our Creator.

And who has redeemed us from sin, and death to make us citizens of His kingdom.

Therefore, Jesus' response to the question meant to entrap Him, traps us all! Because we live as citizens of two kingdoms.

An earthly kingdom, to which we owe certain allegiances, and a heavenly kingdom to which we owe everything.

Jesus' response doesn't really settle the dispute between the Herodian's and the Pharisees.

Any more than it settles the conflict that each of us face today, as we try to live out our faith.

Rather, Jesus invites us into the struggle. He invites us to acknowledge that our government has a right to expect a certain allegiance from us.

Yet the allegiance we owe our earthly kingdom is limited. What we owe to God is not.

And when we perceive a conflict of allegiance, when we believe that our government is in conflict with that of God's authority.

We are the ones who must follow our conscience, and the guidance of God's Holy Spirit, to resolve the conflict.

Now, I'm not making a political statement here. I'm not taking a personal stand on any issue before us at the present time.

I'm simply inviting you into the struggle, that our Lord puts before us. I am inviting you to think about your faith seriously.

And to realize that we are citizens of two kingdoms, to which our greatest allegiance as Christians, no!, as mankind, belongs to God.

I'm inviting you, as you live your daily life, to think about what belongs to God, and let it influence the way you live.

I invite you into the struggle that Jesus faced, as He struggled on the Mount of Olives.

As He gave to Caesar what belonged to him, and to God what belonged to God.

Clearly, Jesus acknowledged the right of Pilate to take His life, even though He could have avoided death.

Yet He gave His life, His all, back to His Heavenly Father on our behalf, for our redemption, according to God's will.

So let us, with the gift of God's Spirit, enter the struggle of giving to God the things that are His, and our government that which belongs to it.

Amen.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all. Amen.