

**REDISCOVER JESUS, PART 74: "THE QUESTION OF CAESAR OR GOD"**  
**LUKE 20:19-26**  
**Ps. Eric Yee**

## **Personal Introduction**

Hi everyone. If you don't know me, my name is Eric and I'm a pastor at HMCC of Jakarta, and it's my privilege to preach the Word of God to us today.

## **Sermon Series Introduction**

We're currently in Part 74 of our sermon series called "Rediscover Jesus," where we're going through the Gospel of Luke together.

So let's get right into today's sermon: "The Question of Caesar or God."

## **Sermon Introduction**

Let's start today by looking at a few pictures and answering a few questions.



Is this a strawberry or a fruit? <pause>

Is this a square or a rectangle? <pause>

Is this a whale or a mammal? <pause>

Well, as you may have realized, these are not fair "either-or" questions because the answer is "both-and" for all of them.

A strawberry is a type of fruit, a square is a special case of a rectangle, and a whale is a kind of mammal.

<pause>

In today's passage, the Jewish religious leaders are going to ask Jesus a similar kind of "either-or" question on the lines of: Should we submit to Caesar or should we submit to God? Should we submit to governing authorities or should we submit to God's authority?

And Jesus will show them that this is not a fair "either-or" question because the answer is "both-and" because governing authorities are part of the "everything" within God's authority.

## **The One Thing**

***Submit to governing authorities  
as part of submitting everything to God's authority.***

## **Scripture Introduction**

Turn your Bibles to Luke 20:19-26.

Just want to give a bit of context before jumping into today's passage.

This is Jesus' final week before his crucifixion in Jerusalem, and the religious teachers are trying to find a way to kill him (Luke 19:47). One day, as Jesus is teaching people in the temple, the religious leaders question his authority.

Jesus answers their question with a question of his own and with a parable, essentially testifying that he is the Son of God acting in the authority of God.

And by the end of the parable, Jesus exposes the murderous intent of the religious leaders, and that in killing him, they will be fulfilling prophecy about him, where Jesus will become the cornerstone of God's new temple—the church (cf. Eph. 2:19-22). But they will lose their spiritual authority over God's people and they themselves will be crushed.

And that's where we are in today's passage.

## **Scripture Reading**

Let's read Luke 20:19-26.

<sup>19</sup> 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.

## **Overview**

We'll look at this passage in two parts.

- I. Jesus is asked an "either-or" question (vv. 19-22)
- II. Jesus gives a "both-and" response (vv. 23-26)

### **I. Jesus is asked an "either-or" question (vv. 19-22)**

Look at verse 19.

[<sup>19</sup> 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.]

So the religious leaders "perceive" (or understand) what Jesus was exposing about them in the parable of the vineyard and the wicked tenants—that they want to kill him, that they will lose their spiritual authority, and that they will be crushed.

And *how* do they respond? Do they confess their murderous intent and repent of their exposed sins? Not at all. Instead, they "sought to lay hands on him at that very hour"—that is, they wanted to do violence to Jesus right there and then.

Their initial reaction to the exposure of this sins was not *repentance* but *rage*. Instead of *humbling* themselves and owning up to their sins, they get even more angry and *harden* themselves in their sin.

So the religious leaders wanted to hurt Jesus right there and then, but what stopped them? “They feared the people”—that is, they feared risking their own reputation and losing their authority in the eyes of the people by doing direct harm to Jesus “for all the people were hanging on his words” (Luke 19:48).

This was the height of Jesus’ popularity. In his earlier triumphal entry into Jerusalem, there was a “whole multitude of his disciples” spreading their cloaks and palm branches on the ground, shouting “Hosanna [or salvation has come!]” (Mark 11:9-10) and “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!” (Luke 19:38). Even though the religious leaders hated Jesus, they knew they couldn’t touch him without suffering severe consequences from the people.

So what do they do?

Look at verse 20.

[<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.]

They “watched him,” trying to find some vulnerability or opportunity in Jesus that they could exploit. And they “sent spies, who pretended to be sincere,” or who pretended to be followers of Jesus but who were *really* conspiring with the religious leaders.

Why were these spies sent? “That they might catch him in something he said.” They were to get Jesus to publicly say something controversial that would get him in trouble.

And what was their goal? “So as to deliver him up to the authority and jurisdiction of the governor”—that is the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate.

Only the Romans had the authority to execute the death penalty—not the Jewish religious leaders—so only the Romans could legally execute Jesus. And if the Roman governor was the one to execute Jesus, then the religious leaders would not be *directly* harming him, so they could claim some level of innocence as they got Rome to do their dirty work.

So this would enable the religious leaders to *simultaneously* kill Jesus *and* preserve their authority in the eyes of the people.

It must have seemed like the perfect plan to them. So how does it play out?

Look at verse 21.

[<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.]

Now, it was completely true that Jesus speaks and teaches rightly, and that he shows no partiality (or favoritism), meaning that he isn’t swayed by others in teaching the truth, but he *truly* teaches the way of God. All of this was *true* of Jesus.

But we know that these spies sent by the religious leaders didn’t really believe these things to be true, so this all constituted as *flattery*.

If *gossip* is saying behind a person’s back what you would never say to his face, *flattery* is saying to his face what you would never say behind his back.<sup>1</sup>

These spies were saying things to Jesus’ face that they would never say behind his back.

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<sup>1</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Luke*, PTW, rev. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

Flattery isn't strictly about the *truthfulness* of what is said, but about the *sincerity* of the one who says it. *Truthfulness* is regarding the accuracy of information that is being communicated, but *sincerity* goes *beyond* truth-telling to express something genuinely from the heart. So flattery *can* sometimes be *true* statements, but they are never *sincere* statements.

And to be clear, flattery is a sin.

Proverbs 26:28b: A flattering mouth works ruin.

Proverbs 29:5: A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his feet.

Psalms 12:3a = May the LORD cut off all flattering lips.

Just think about that for a moment. If you are prone towards the sin of flattery, God's Word says, "May the LORD cut off [your] lips." It's better that you are unable to speak at all than for you to speak flattery.

Now *why* were these *spies* flattering him? Because they wanted to "catch him in something he said" and ultimately get him killed.

Now ask *yourself*: why do *I* use flattery?

In short, flattery is used to *manipulate* people. We use flattery to win people's approval. We use flattery to get our own way. We use flattery to manipulate their feelings towards getting what we want.

Whereas *encouragement* is generous, sincere, and strengthening, *flattery* is selfish, insincere, and manipulative.

Flee from selfish, insincere, manipulative *flattery*, and commit to regularly practice generous, sincere, and strengthening *encouragement* towards others.

On a related note, Christians should be characterized by honest speech, where our yes is yes, our no is no, and we can be trusted to maintain appropriate confidentiality. In other words, we ought not to be what the Bible calls "double-tongued" (1 Tim. 3:8).

- Do you say to a person's face what you would never say behind his or her back. Then you are flattering.
- Do you say behind a person's back what you would never say to his or her face? Then you are gossiping and perhaps breaking trust with others who shared things with you in confidence.

So much damage has been done to individuals, to churches, and to Christ's name due to flattery, gossip, and breaches of confidentiality.

Perhaps some of us are not so different than these spies here. In our tendency to be "double-tongued," we unknowingly are working ruin, we are spreading a net for someone else's feet, and it would be better for us to be unable to speak at all.

If you're beginning to realize that you're prone towards any of these sins, then the proper response is to confess that and repent—to turn away from it. Resolve to cut off your own "double-tongued" lips (so to speak), and resolve to be characterized by honest and encouraging speech.

<pause>

[<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.]

Going back to the spies, just look at how *calculative* this flattery was. "You speak and teach rightly," "you are not swayed by others in teaching the truth," but you "truly teach the way of God." Basically, they're setting up Jesus for their trap question to follow. They don't want him to answer with another question or another parable like he did before, but they want him to give a straight answer and not be concerned with the consequences that might follow.

And then, they ask their trap question.

Verse 22 says this:

<sup>22</sup> Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar, or not?"

Notice, the spies don't ask an open-ended question like the religious teachers asked before ("by what authority [do you] do these things?"). Last time they did that, Jesus asked them binary "either-or" question ("was the baptism of John from heaven or from man?"). So they seemed to have learned their lesson, took notes from Jesus, and are now turning around and asking Jesus the same kind of binary "either-or" question here.

Now, in order to understand how explosive of a question this was, we need to understand a bit more of the historical context.

The issue of paying tribute to Caesar was highly controversial among Jews in Judea. The "tribute" was the basic Roman tax imposed on every Jewish citizen just for living and working in the Roman empire. But particularly in Judea, which the Jews considered to be their own land that God owned and had given to them, some zealous Jews considered paying tribute to Caesar to be a sin because the Romans were robbing money that rightly belonged to God.<sup>2</sup> On top of that, the tribute went to support imperial worship, where Caesar was deified and worshipped as a god.<sup>3</sup>

Around 6 A.D. (when Jesus was a boy), there was a man called "Judas the Galilean" who taught that God alone was Israel's King, and therefore, it was high treason against God for his people to recognize any Gentile (or non-Jewish) ruler by paying him tribute.<sup>4</sup> He led a revolt against the Romans, which was crushed (Acts 5:37), but out of that crushed revolt came the Zealot movement, which sought to overthrow Roman oppression and re-establish theocratic Israel.<sup>5</sup>

A *theocracy* is a form of government where essentially religion rules the state; it's where the government uses its laws to enforce its citizens to live in accordance with its religious standards. For example, Vatican City is the smallest country in the world and it functions as a theocracy, where the Pope is the supreme leader of the Roman Catholic Church and the state.

So, *theocratic Israel* was a theocracy, where God was the supreme ruler over his people and he placed King David on the throne and called him (and his descendants) to lead his people in conformity to his Word.

So for first-century Jews living in Judea, the question of paying tribute (or taxes) to Caesar was a matter of *allegiance*.

Especially for the more zealous Jews, it was about lordship, where paying tribute to Caesar conceded that *Caesar* is lord instead of the one true God.<sup>6</sup>

So this was an explosive "either-or" question that was being posed to Jesus. Should we submit to Caesar or should we submit to God?

And this seems to be a lose-lose situation for Jesus, where he risked either *alienation* or *arrest*.<sup>7</sup>

In terms of *alienation*, if Jesus tells the people to pay tribute to Caesar, then many of the Jews would label him a traitor to his own people. They were expecting Jesus to be the Messianic King who would liberate

<sup>2</sup> Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, REC (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009). See also Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., Peter H. Davids, F. F. Bruce, and Manfred T. Brauch, *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 444.

<sup>3</sup> *Matthew-Luke*, ESV Expository Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021).

<sup>4</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., Peter H. Davids, F. F. Bruce, and Manfred T. Brauch, *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 444.

<sup>5</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Luke*, PTW, rev. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

<sup>6</sup> *Matthew-Luke*, ESV Expository Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021).

<sup>7</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Luke*, PTW, rev. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

them from Roman rule, not try to keep them under it. Jesus would quickly lose his popularity and following, and that would be the end of his influence.

In terms of *arrest*, if Jesus tells the people *not* to pay tribute to Caesar, then religious leaders would report that to the Roman governor, who would label him an insurrectionist and arrest him for sedition (or for inciting people to rebel again Rome). The Romans refused to tolerate any kind of rebellion, so Jesus would be swiftly arrested and punished.

So no matter how Jesus answered, he seemed trapped. So how would he answer. We'll look at that next.

<pause>

So first, Jesus is asked an “either-or” question, and second...

## **II. Jesus gives a “both-and” response (vv. 23-26)**

Look at verse 23-24.

[<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.”]

Jesus sees through the spies’ flattery, and he sees their “craftiness” (or “deceit” [NET] or “duplicity” [NIV] as other translations have it). Jesus knows that this question is meant to trap him.

Jesus then asks for a *prop* (so to speak). He asks them to show him a “denarius,” which was a small silver coin, worth about one day’s wage for a laborer.

You can feel the tension building up as the people are waiting for someone to put forward a denarius. People are wondering, “How in the world is Jesus going to answer this question? And what in the world is he going to do with that coin?”

And once the denarius is put forward, Jesus asks them “whose *likeness* and inscription does it have?” The word for “likeness” is the same Greek word used in the Greek Old Testament in Genesis 1:26 [which we read earlier in our service] that says that humanity is made in the “image” of God.<sup>8</sup> So “whose *image* and inscription does the denarius have?”

And they reply, “Caesar’s.”

Again, some historical context will help us better understand the relevance of the denarius.

There were multiple currencies that were being used during the first century. Out of respect to the Jews’ religious beliefs, the Romans allowed them to mint their own coins without images of people on them because the Jews believed such images on coins violated the second commandment—that is, not to put images of so-called gods on anything.<sup>9</sup>

But the denarius was a *Roman* coin, and it had the image of Caesar imprinted upon it, with the inscription, “Tiberius Caesar, Augustus, son of divine Augustus.” Such coins were highly offensive to Jews. Especially for the more zealous Jews, to have an image of Caesar in one’s possession would be considered as idolatrous.<sup>10</sup>

But it was almost impossible for anyone *not* to have a denarius if they lived within the Roman empire because they operated in the economic world of Rome.<sup>11</sup> In some sense, the rule of a nation extended as far as their coins were in circulation.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> NET footnote

<sup>9</sup> R. C. Sproul, *A Walk with God: An Exposition of Luke* (Great Britain: Christian Focus, 1999), 363.

<sup>10</sup> *Matthew–Luke*, ESV Expository Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021).

<sup>11</sup> NET footnote

<sup>12</sup> R. C. Sproul, *A Walk with God: An Exposition of Luke* (Great Britain: Christian Focus, 1999), 363.

It would be like living in Indonesia and *not* having any Indonesian rupiah. It would be very difficult *not* to have any Indonesian rupiah while living within the nation of Indonesia.

So even though the Jews didn't like it, the fact was that they lived within the rule of the Roman empire was shown by the fact that they had a denarius.

And the denarius was the tax amount that had to be paid as tribute to Caesar by all adult men and women, and it could only be paid with that coin bearing Caesar's image and inscription.<sup>13</sup>

So this was directly relevant to the question of giving tribute to Caesar. But what's the punchline? What's Jesus' point?

Verse 25 says this:

<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."

To "render" means to "pay" (NASB) or to "give" (NIV, NLT).

This is probably the most influential political statement that Jesus ever made.<sup>14</sup>

But this was not the "either-or" response that the religious leaders and the spies were hoping for. Essentially, Jesus responds with "both-and."

Their question was basically, "Should we submit to Caesar, *or* should we submit to God?"

And Jesus' response is basically, "Submit to Caesar *and* submit to God," but we are not to submit to them in the same way, for clearly God is greater than Caesar. We'll see that Jesus wants his people to submit to governing authorities as part of submitting everything to God's authority.

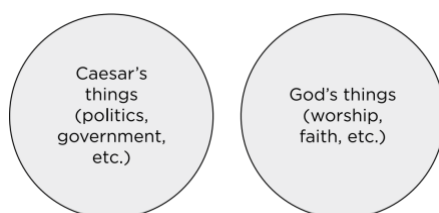
How can we make that conclusion? Let's spend some time unpacking what Jesus is saying here.

First, Jesus denies that Caesar is divine because *God* is distinct from *Caesar*. That means, Caesar is *not* a god, but God alone is the one true God. So God is clearly *greater* than Caesar.

Second, Jesus is saying that God's authority is all-encompassing because Scripture is clear that "the things that are God's" includes *everything*. "For *from* him and *through* him and *to* him are *all* things. To him be glory forever. Amen" (Rom. 11:36). There is nothing that is outside the category of "the things that are God's."

Third, Jesus affirms the authority of Caesar—that is, the authority of civil government or governing authorities: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's." Caesar clearly exercises *some* legitimate authority that the Jews living within the Roman empire ought to submit to.

But fourth, Jesus quickly clarifies how they should understand Caesar's limited authority in *relation* to God's all-encompassing authority.<sup>15</sup>



<sup>13</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Luke*, PTW, rev. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

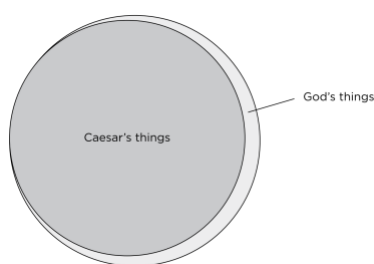
<sup>14</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Luke*, PTW, rev. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

<sup>15</sup> The following diagrams are from Jonathan Leeman, *Authority* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023), 214-216.

They should *not* understand them as mutually exclusive in the “either-or” way that many of the more zealous Jews understood them to be at the time—that you’re either aligned with Caesar or you’re aligned with God.

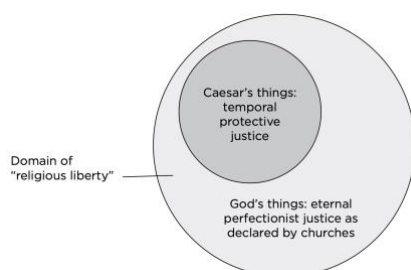
Perhaps many of us don’t think of governing authorities and God’s authority in the “either-or” way that many of the more zealous Jews did at the time, but some of us are tempted to function like they are *completely separate* categories as if they never overlap—as if “God’s things” only includes our personal devotions and church life, and has nothing to do with how we think about “Caesar’s things” (or government and politics).

But notice, Jesus does *not* say, “render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, *but* to God the things that are God’s” as if they are in *contrast* with one another, but “render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, *and* to God the things that are God’s” because there is *some connection* between them, namely that *Caesar’s* authority is *subordinate* to or *under* God’s authority.<sup>16</sup>



They are also *not* to understand them as *almost completely* overlapping categories as if Caesar’s authority is only *slightly* subordinate to God’s authority. The goal for believers is *not* to get Caesar (or any governing authorities) to enforce their faith through the government—to create a theocracy of sorts. That’s actually what many of the Jews were hoping that *Jesus* would do. They wanted him to overthrow the Roman government and to re-establish the theocratic government of Israel as the Messiah King, and to use his governing authority to ensure that all the citizens are living in accordance with God’s Law.

But that is *not* what Jesus came to do—at least not in his *first* coming—which he has been telling his disciples over and over again. Ever since Israel’s exile, no governing authority is to ever exercise *that* kind of authority again until Jesus’ *second* coming, when he *himself* will come to establish the fullness of the kingdom of God on earth (Rev. 11:15). Until then, Caesar’s authority and all other governing authorities are *greatly* subordinate to God’s authority.



So then, how are we to understand Caesar’s authority in relate to God’s authority?

Rather than these two misunderstandings, Jesus teaches that Caesar’s authority is a legitimate yet limited sub-category within the much larger, all-encompassing category of God’s authority.

And so, the people’s submission to Caesar’s authority is *not* high treason against God. And the people’s submission to God’s authority does *not* mean that they are to overthrow Caesar’s authority and try to re-establish the theocratic government of Israel.

<sup>16</sup> Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, REC (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009).



Rather, their submission to Caesar was a part of submitting everything to God's authority.

<pause>

This is how the apostles Paul and Peter put it in their respective NT letters.

Romans 13:1: 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.

1 Peter 2:13-14: Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.

This was a huge paradigm shift for the first-century Jew living in the Roman empire, but this was not a new idea. This was Jesus expounding other parts of the OT.

In Genesis 9, in the covenant God made with Noah, God authorized governing authorities to administer the justice required for protecting human life and to enable people to fulfill the cultural mandate (Gen. 9:1, 6-7).

The "cultural mandate" is what God originally gave to Adam and Eve in the Garden [that we heard earlier in our service in the Scripture reading], and which God reiterates to Noah and his descendants. It's to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over [it]" (Gen. 1:28).

So at the very least, governing authorities ought to protect the basic structures of marriage and family to "be fruitful and multiply." And on a broader scale, governing authorities ought to facilitate the development of culture.

But that's not all. The NT also adds to our understanding of God's purposes for governing authorities. We already looked at Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2, but there's also Acts 17 and 1 Timothy 2.

We won't be able to go into the details of all these passages, but this is what it says in...

1 Timothy 2:1-4 = First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

So we are to pray that governments would work for peace and safety, which is important *because* God wants people to be saved. And this redemptive work of sharing the gospel and making disciples is primarily the work of the *church*, which is what the entire book of 1 Timothy is about (vv. 1-4).

That means part of God's purposes for governing authorities is to provide a stable context for his people to share the gospel and make disciples that more people may be saved.

So putting all this together, what are some of God's purposes for governing authorities? There are at least three:

- To administer the justice required for protecting human life,
- To enable people to fulfill the cultural mandate (that is, to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over [it]"), and
- To provide a stable context for God's people to share the gospel and make disciples.<sup>17</sup>

But the governing authorities are still just a limited sub-category within the much larger, all-encompassing category of God's authority. We only need to hear a few verses in the OT to recognize this:

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<sup>17</sup> The above excursus on the legitimacy and purpose of governing authorities is adapted from Jonathan Leeman, *Authority* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023), 197-207.

- Psalm 22:28: For kingship belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations.
- Proverbs 21:1: The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.
- Daniel 4:17b: The Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men.

God sovereignly reigns even over and through pagan governing authorities to accomplish his kingdom's purposes. Throughout Scripture, he used Egypt as the stage for his great deliverance of his people, he used Assyria and Babylon to bring about the exile of his people amidst their disobedience, he used Persia to bring about their return amidst their repentance, and he used Rome to set the stage for his greatest act of deliverance of his people in the birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ.

<pause>

So what does this all mean for us? What does it look like for us to submit to governing authorities as part of submitting everything to God's authority? There are many applications, but let me just offer four.

First, pray for governing authorities. Don't give in to frustration or passivity, but pray for governing authorities as God commands us to in 1 Timothy 2. Pray that they would administer the justice required for protecting human life, that they would enable people to fulfill the cultural mandate, and that they would provide a stable context for God's people to share the gospel and make disciples.

Second, pay your taxes. This is probably the most direct application from this passage (cf. Rom. 13:7). Paying our taxes is ultimately part of our submission to *God's* authority, and this also relates to the next application.

Third, obey the law. Generally, Christians should be law-abiding citizens. Of course, there may be times when we must stand up and say, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29), such as...

- When governments command us to do anything that God forbids, like worshiping or praying to idols (Dan. 3; 6), or
- When governments forbid us to do anything that God commands, like sharing the gospel (Acts 5:28-29).

But generally, we ought to be known as those who honor governing authorities and obey the law.

Fourth, as we saw from 1 Timothy 2, we ought to share the gospel and make disciples. Why do we pray for a stable context? Is it merely to live a quiet, safe, and comfortable life? No, we do not pray for a stable context as an *end* but as a *means* for us to share the gospel and make disciples.

What's more, if we regularly pray as a church for our persecuted brothers and sisters to be faithful in sharing the gospel and making disciples in their *unstable* environment, would it not seem a bit hypocritical for us *not* to endeavor to share the gospel and make disciples in our more *stable* environment?

So those are four suggested applications: pray for governing authorities, pay your taxes, obey the law, and share the gospel and make disciples.

<pause>

Now I know that the Indonesian presidential election is coming up early next year, and there may be different worries and concerns about the future of our nation. We won't tell anyone how to vote, but as you do vote, just keep in mind God's purposes for governing authorities:

- To administer the justice required for protecting human life,
- To enable people to fulfil the cultural mandate, and
- To provide a stable context for God's people to share the gospel and make disciples.

And no matter what the outcome of the vote, trust that God is sovereignly reigns over and through all governing authorities to accomplish his kingdom's purposes. And then, pray for them, pay your taxes, obey the law, and share the gospel and make disciples.

In your worries and concerns, remember what Jesus said to the Roman governor Pontius Pilate who had the authority to *spare* his life or *take* his life; he said in John 19, “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above” (John 19:11).

The sinless Savior died so that sinful men may be saved. He bore our punishment on the cross so that his righteousness may be freely given to all those who repent of their sins and believe in him as Lord and Savior.

Jesus’ submissive death made no sense to any of his disciples at the time, but on the other side of his resurrection and ascension, we see that the most God-glorifying act of salvation that Jesus accomplished involved *not* overthrowing the Roman government as they all wanted him to but *submitting* himself to them as part of submitting everything to God’s authority.

<pause>

Now, there’s one more thing that we need to see in Jesus’ response to the spies that we haven’t noted yet. In what Jesus says, he gives a more profound principle that goes far beyond the issue of taxation or civil governments.

The *denarius* has *Caesar’s* image, and so he can rightfully lay claim to it through tribute, but all of *humanity* is permanently stamped with the image of *God*, so he can lay claim to each of our lives.<sup>18</sup>

Even Caesar himself, who is also made in the image of God, is under the category of “the things that are God’s.”

This is *not* just about taxes and civil government. This is *not* just regarding our time, treasures, and talents. But this is about giving ourselves *wholly* to God. As those who are created in *his* image, we rightfully belong to *him*.

As believers, this is meant to be our greatest hope in life and death. That we are not our own but belong, body and soul, both in life and death, to God and to our Savior Jesus Christ.

In essence, Jesus’ response transcends the question of the spies. This is not just about giving *tribute* to Caesar or to God, but this is ultimately about giving *everything*, including *yourself*, to God.

<pause>

Peter Torjesen was a missionary to China in the early 1900s. He was born and raised in Norway by Christian parents and he personally put his faith in Christ when he was 12 years old.

When he was 18 years old, he heard a presentation about the great spiritual need in China, where they had little access to the gospel. He was immediately cut to the heart, and when an offering plate was being passed through the congregation after the presentation, Torjesen emptied his pockets to give everything he had. But even after he gave all that he had, he still felt that there was more to give. So he took out a piece of paper and wrote the words, “And my life,” and he dropped it in the offering plate as well. And that was Torjesen’s pledge to give his life for the people of China.<sup>19</sup>

<pause>

Torjesen’s response may seem extreme to some of us, but when we understand the gospel—that our God left the comforts of heaven to be born as a man and to die on the cross to *literally* give his life for such undeserving sinners like us—when we truly grasp *that* gospel, how could we give anything *less* than our lives to God?

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<sup>18</sup> NET footnote

<sup>19</sup> Charles Lindquist, “Evergreen,” World Mission Prayer League, September 25, 2013, <https://wmpl.org/evergreen/>. See also “Peter Torjesen,” Wikipedia, accessed December 15, 2023, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter\\_Torjesen](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Torjesen).

If we have truly embraced the gospel, then the reality is that we already belong to God. Not only are we stamped with his image, but we are bought with his blood. He *doubly* owns us, you could say.

So to give our lives to him is simply coming in alignment with what we already have embraced by faith in the gospel. It is to say, as one pastor puts it, "I'm no longer my owner, my master, my wisdom, my hope, my source of fullest and lasting pleasure. I renounce finding all of that in me. I look for it now in you, because I am utterly yours."<sup>20</sup>

The fundamental question we ask ourselves is not, "What do *I* want?" or "What do *others* want?" but "Lord, what do *you* want?"

What might you be withholding from the God who has every right to your life?

As followers of Christ, we don't just give our church life to God, but we give our family life, our financial life, our work life, our romantic life, our emotional life, our thought life, our social life, our private life—we give *all* of who we are to God, for there is nothing that is not already his.

And the great comfort we have in giving *our* lives to the one who gave *his* life for us is that he promised that he did not come to steal or destroy our lives, but to *give us abundant and eternal* life (John 10:10).

<pause>

So, *all* of that is embedded into this one paradigm-shifting principle that Jesus stated here: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

And how do the spies and the religious leaders react to Jesus' masterful response?

Look at verse 26.

[<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.]

Jesus leaves them "marveling at his answer" and they are effectively silenced.

No more manipulative flattery, no more trapping questions, no more foolish talk. They are left in awe of Jesus' answer and, like Job who was left silent in God's response to his questions, they have nothing more to do than to put their hand over their mouths and proceed no further (Job 40:4-5).

Though they came to dishonor and discredit Jesus, they are left in silent awe of him.

Though they came to do him harm, Jesus shows himself to be the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24).

And though they came with a limited understanding of God's lordship, Jesus manifests God's lordship over all things—not only over taxes and governments but over everything in his creation and every individual person made in his image.

## **Conclusion**

Now, as we close, and as we are in this season of Advent, it's interesting that this issue of taxation brings us back to the *birth* of Jesus, where Caesar Augustus called for a census for the purpose of taxation (Luke 2:1).

During the census, everyone had to return to their ancestral towns to register themselves, so Joseph and Mary returned to Bethlehem. Even in *that*, we see that God was sovereignly reigning *through* the governing authorities to have Jesus of Nazareth to be born in the city of Bethlehem in accordance with His Word (Mic. 5:2).

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<sup>20</sup> John Piper, "How Do I 'Give My Life to God'?" Desiring God, June 14, 2017, <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/how-do-i-give-my-life-to-god>.

Our God is above every ruler and authority in heaven and earth. And after his resurrection, Jesus says that *all* authority in heaven and earth have been given to *him* (Matt. 28:18). So now, as his people, we give *ourselves* wholly to him, submitting *everything* to *his* authority, which includes submitting to the governing authorities that *he* has established, and *he* is sovereign over.

## **The One Thing**

***Submit to governing authorities  
as part of submitting everything to God's authority.***