

Sunday, September 8, 2024 | Holy Week

Week 3 | Luke 20:19-26 | "Money, Politics, & Religion"

Two weeks ago, Jesus was confronted by a group of religious leaders asking, essentially, "Who do you think you are?" In response, Jesus told them a parable about some wicked tenant farmers. By doing so, he established that he was the Son of God and, as such, they had no right to question his authority. Jerusalem was *his* city, and the Temple was *his* house. Furthermore, should they persist in their *willful* disbelief, God the Father will remove them from the "vineyard" and give the Kingdom over to "others"—i.e., any believer, be they Jew or Gentile, who accepts him as Lord. **All who accept the Lordship of Christ will be built up, but all who deny it will be laid low.**

READ: Luke 20:18-26 (ESV)

¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ 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.

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

²⁶ 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.

In our culture, it is generally believed that there are three things you should never discuss: *money, politics, and religion*. Since most people have strong opinions on those topics, discussions can quickly become contentious. As such, to maintain peace, most people avoid them completely. Admittedly, there is some truth to this recommendation. Few things are worse than if Thanksgiving becomes the spark that ignites WWII.

However, to insist that it is never, under any circumstances, appropriate to talk about money, politics, and religion is to ignore three of the most important issues in life. While hesitancy is

understandable, avoiding them altogether in public discourse harms society. Indeed, holidays may be a poor choice for those kinds of discussions. But if not then, then when? If we're not careful, we'll sacrifice truth for the sake of peace, abandoning the world to destruction. Claiming to be a follower of Jesus Christ, the Truth-incarnate (cf. Jn. 14:6), and yet never speaking about Him, is to rob the world of life-saving truth.

As we'll see in today's passage, Jesus Christ wasn't afraid to talk about these subjects publicly, even when he had to deal with all three simultaneously. So long as we take his lead, we'll have nothing to fear. If Christ is the definitive authority on God, then we ought to bow to his wisdom regarding money, politics, and religion. Doing so will save the country and even our own souls.

I want you to notice **three** things:

i. Vs. 19-20 – The Sanhedrin's **Spies**

The reference to "this parable" calls us back to the parable of wicked vinedressers (cf. Lu. 20:9-18). Though the religious didn't always understand Jesus' parables, that one was hard to miss. They "**perceived that he had told this parable against them.**" The things the Lord said had found their target, and the Sanhedrin didn't like it. And if not for the people, they would've taken him. But, as it was, "**they feared the people.**" The religious knew that if they took Jesus publicly, they'd have a riot on their hands. This is why, later, they took him in Gethsemane, during a time when he would not be surrounded by the crowds (cf. Lu. 22:6).

Unable to openly confront Jesus, the religious leaders resorted to cunning. They placed 'spies' in the crowd '**who pretended to be sincere, that they might catch him in something he said...**' These spies, feigning sincerity, would volley question after question, hoping to trip Jesus up with his own words. Like their father, the devil, they were wolves in sheep's clothing, looking for a way to devour the Good Shepherd.

But even at this early stage, they knew they could not kill Jesus on their own. They had to "**deliver him up to the authority and jurisdiction of the governor,**" a reference to Pilate. This is the first of ten where Jesus' betrayal is mentioned in the Passion narrative.¹

ii. Vs. 21-25 – The Sanhedrin's **Scheme**

After attempting to flatter Jesus, they asked, "**Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar, or not?**" Interestingly, this is similar to Jesus' either/or question when he asked him about John's

¹ Edwards, James R., *The Gospel According to Luke*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, (Nottingham, Eng; Apollos, 2015), p. 572.

baptism (cf. Lu. 20:4). Like Jesus' question, there were only two possible answers (or so they thought), and wherever you landed on the issue you were going to make someone unhappy.

Like today, taxes were a controversial topic back in the first century. Given the Jews were under Roman rule, they perceived taxes as a means by which their Roman overlords maintained their iron grip over the country. And while they hated all Roman taxation, the type of tax, here mentioned to be the "tribute" tax, was distinct from other kinds of taxes—i.e., sales tax, state tax, property tax, etc. The word "tribute" is the Greek term **φόρος** (*phoros*), which specifically refers to the "tributum capitis," "poll tax," or "head tax."² And this type of taxation went directly to Caesar. Regardless of your income or how much you had already paid, every person had to fill Caesar's pockets. Thus, out of all the taxes the Jews had to pay, this was the worst one.

At this point, if you were hoping to hang Jesus, using his own words against him, or distance the public from him, this was a brilliant question. If he says to pay tribute, he'll lose followers. If he says not to pay tribute, he'll be accused of sedition, and they can drag him before the Roman authorities. In fact, the religious leaders will claim that Jesus did say not to pay tribute. In Luke 23:2, the Jews say to Pilate, "We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king."

However, unlike the Jews who avoided the question of *John's baptism*, Jesus didn't avoid the question of *Rome's taxation*. But before he answers, the Lord gets a denarius³ from the crowd and asks, "Whose likeness and inscription does it have?" They say, "Caesar's." And Jesus says, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." This means that if it is *Caesar's* coin they carry in their pockets, it is *Caesar's* right to demand that they give it back, for it is *Caesar's* own image stamped on its surface. The Jews did not make the coin; *Caesar* did. And it was his to command. Furthermore, the fact that they even had Caesar's face on a silver circle, sitting in their pockets was proof that *they were under the dominion of Rome*. So, like the coin, the Jews were Caesar's to command. If Caesar wanted tribute, the Jews were duty-bound to give it.

What does that mean for us? Let me be as clear as possible. God does not want Christians to seed division, spurring political turmoil; the Almighty expects us to submit to the "governing authorities."

² Bock, Darrell L., *Luke 9:51-24:53*, The Baker Evangelical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), p. 1611.

³ Edwards (2015), p. 573, interestingly, one denarius was not only equal to a day's wages (cf. Matt. 20:2,9), but it was also the exact amount of the "tribute" tax.

READ: Romans 13:1-7 (ESV)

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. ² Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.

³ 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, ⁴ 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.

⁵ Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. ⁶ For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. ⁷ 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.

Even if the government is unjust, immoral, and idolatrous, God expects us to fulfill our civic duty. So much so that, as John Phillips puts it, "Disobedience to governmental authority is disobedience to God and will be judged." This is not to say we are to obey the laws that directly contradict God's (cf. Dan. 3:16-18; 6:16); in such cases, our primary allegiance is to God's Word and not man's (cf. Ac. 4:19-20; 5:29). But make no mistake, civil disobedience is the exception, not the rule. Just because you're upset with lawmakers does not give you the right to disobey.

Most Christians throughout history have been called to be obedient to some form of government, not obstinate (Rom. 13:1). Even Christ said "to render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's" in an era of over-taxation, subjugation, and oppression. If ever Christians had the right to foment rebellion, why not during the reign of Caligula (37-41AD) when sexual depravity reached its peak? If we were called to revolution, why did we not have a call to arms during the reign of Nero (54-68AD) when he impaled Christians and then set them on fire to light his gardens? Far from causing political upheaval, we should make every effort to "live peaceably with all men" (Rom. 12:18). A bad situation does not excuse us from making good decisions.

So, brothers and sisters, obey the law of the land while asserting the preeminence of God's Law. Pray for the good of those in civil authority (cf. 1 Tim. 2:1-4), regardless of whether they're in "your camp." Your prayers have the power to influence those in civil authority. And yes, pay your taxes even if they're going towards things that you disagree with or are outright ungodly.

A good friend (Ron Young) once said, "The account for how the government spends taxes will not be given by the taxpayer, but the collector." Be pilgrims in Babylon while endeavoring to usher in the Kingdom of God (cf. Matt. 6:10), where your true citizenship resides.

But in the same breath with which he said, "render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's," Jesus said, "and to God the things that are Gods." Jesus, of course, is speaking about the *imago Dei*.

READ: Genesis 1:26-27 (ESV)

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." ²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Imago Dei is Latin for "image of God," which refers to humanity's creation. God said in Genesis 1:26a, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." Unlike the rest of creation, men and women are made in God's "image." This means that, in some unique way, a human's "likeness" is like God's. But in what way do people resemble God?

To be an image-bearer can't mean that we literally look like God. Earthlings have bodies, whereas Yahweh is a spirit, devoid of any physical traits (cf. 1:18; Jn. 4:24). Nor can it mean that humans take after God in some psychological way—i.e., creative, intelligent, logical, moral, etc. That is indeed part of it, but it cannot explain it entirely. If it could, this would mean that angels and demons were also made in God's image, a claim that is without any scriptural support. Out of all creation, only man is said to bear the *imago Dei*, and, as such, there must be some aspect in which we are similar to God and wholly distinct from all other creatures.

So, what does it mean to be made in God's image? The other half of Gen. 1:26 states, "And let them have *dominion* [emphasis added] over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." Just as the Lord has authority over existence itself (cf. Isa. 37:16), mankind has been given "dominion...over all the earth." Thus, to be an image-bearer is to be the visual representative of God in the world; it has to do with our status, not some physical or psychological quality. In the beginning, God made earth-kind subordinate to humankind because of our God-given right to rule (cf. Psa. 8).

Now, if the *imago Dei* establishes that humans have a legitimate claim over this planet, so does it demonstrate that God has a rightful claim on all who bear his image (cf. Psa. 24:1-2). The

Almighty is justified in demanding total allegiance from his image-bearers. Not unlike how a government will exact taxes, God expects us to give ourselves—our entire being—over to him. Jesus' point is that just as the Jews bore evidence of Rome's sovereignty in their pockets, so they bore proof of God's sovereignty on their being. The Jews presented Jesus with an "either/or" question, and he gave them a "both/and" response.⁴ And the same principle applies to us today.

iii. Vs. 26 – The Sanhedrin's Silence

Though the question of taxes was brilliant and though they tried their best, Luke tells us that the religious leaders “were not able in the presence of the people to catch him in what he said, but marveling at his answer they became silent.”

Given the length of this sermon, I will not belabor this point. But I must say that when we stand before Jesus, no one will be able to say anything. Just as he silenced the Sanhedrin, stopping their duplicitous tongues, all of humanity will be silenced before the King of Kings, save for the moment when all will confess him to be Lord (cf. Rom. 14:11). We will not question him. We will not demand any answers from him. We will bow or burn.

So, what's the takeaway?

Just as the government is owed its coins, the Lord is owed his copies.

All human beings have been stamped with the imago Dei. The Psalmist says of God, “For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well” (Ps. 139:13-14). The Lord is owed his copies—i.e., us. He has given us life. He has given us purpose. He brought us into existence to serve alongside him. Just as we have no right to withhold our taxes from the government, we have no right to withhold ourselves from God.

⁴ Bock (1996), p. 1613.

Video Description:

Holy Week | Week 3 | “Money, Politics, & Religion” (Luke 20:19-26)

SPEAKER: Ben Hyrne, Pastor

In our culture, it is generally believed that there are three things you should never discuss: *money, politics, and religion*. Since most people have strong opinions on those topics, discussions can quickly become contentious. As such, to maintain peace, most people avoid them completely. Admittedly, there is some truth to this recommendation. Few things are worse than if Thanksgiving becomes the spark that ignites WWII.

However, to insist that it is never, under any circumstances, appropriate to talk about money, politics, and religion is to ignore three of the most important issues in life. While hesitancy is understandable, avoiding them altogether in public discourse harms society. Indeed, holidays may be a poor choice for those kinds of discussions. But if not then, then when? If we're not careful, we'll sacrifice truth for the sake of peace, abandoning the world to destruction. Claiming to be a follower of Jesus Christ, the Truth-incarnate (cf. Jn. 14:6), and yet never speaking about Him, is to rob the world of life-saving truth.

As we'll see in today's passage, Jesus Christ wasn't afraid to talk about these subjects publicly, even when he had to deal with all three simultaneously. So long as we take his lead, we'll have nothing to fear. If Christ is the definitive authority on God, then we ought to bow to his wisdom regarding money, politics, and religion. Doing so will save the country and even our own souls.

Pastor's manuscript can be found here:

Grace Pointe Baptist Church

12029 Eastern Ave.

Baltimore, MD 21220

Contact: info@GracePointeLife.com

Website: <https://www.gracepointelife.com>

Give here: <https://www.gracepointelife.com/give/>

Podcast Details:

Season 39 | 3