Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

A Diagnosis of the Christ-Rejecters
Scripture: Luke 20:19-26
Code: 42-247

If you will open your Bible to the gospel of Luke and the 20th chapter, we're going to return to the passion week, the week of our Lord Jesus Christ's crucifixion, and look at the next in the series of texts that Luke gives to us to record both the earthly and the spiritual history of this great week. Luke chapter 20, and I want to begin reading in verse 9, which will embrace the parable that we last studied because it's an essential one to what follows, what we'll look at this morning.

Luke 20:9. "And He began to tell the people this parable: 'A man planted a vineyard and rented it out to vine-growers, and went on a journey for a long time. And at the *harvest* time he sent a slave to the vine-growers, in order that they might give him *some* of the produce of the vineyard; but the vine-growers beat him and sent him away empty-handed. And so he proceeded to send another slave; and they beat him also and treated him shamefully and sent him away empty-handed. And he proceeded to send a third; and this one also they wounded and cast out. And the owner of the vineyard said, "What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him." But when the vine-growers saw him, they reasoned with one another, saying, "This is the heir; let us kill him that the inheritance may be ours." And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What therefore will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and destroy these vine-growers and will give the vineyard to others.' And when they heard it, they said, 'May it never be!'

"But he looked at them and said, 'What then is this that is written: "The stone which the builders rejected, this became the chief corner *stone*." Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust.' And the scribes and the chief priests tried to lay hands on him that very hour, but they feared the people; for they understood that He spoke this parable against them. And they watched Him, and sent spies who pretended to be righteous, in order that they might catch Him in some statement, so *as to* deliver Him up to the rule and the authority of the governor.

"And they questioned Him, saying, 'Teacher, we know that you speak and teach correctly, and you are not partial to any, but teach the way of God in truth. Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?' But He detected their trickery and said to them, 'Show Me a denarius. Whose likeness and inscription does it have?' And they said, 'Caesar's.' And He said to them, 'Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.' And they were unable to catch Him in a saying in the presence of the people; and marveling at His answer, they became silent."

Israel's history is a long and tragic account of rebellion against God, sin against God, indifference to God's revelation, disobedience to God's Law and God's will, even to the level of killing the prophets, killing the messengers who came to offer grace, and mercy, and forgiveness, and blessing, and salvation, and eternal life. And the war against God culminates in the murder of God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. That history is summed up in the parable that I read from verses 9 through 18.

In spite of all the Old Testament prophetic revelation that pointed unerringly to Jesus Christ, this generation that will do the final act described in the parable, kill the son, rejects the one who is unmistakably their Messiah. They knew of His virgin birth, His sinless life, His divine words, divine works. They knew He had power over demons, disease, death. They knew of His authority over the created world, to still the water and the wind, and create food. They knew that He offered them the kingdom of God, salvation, eternal life, blessing.

And all of these things that were true about Him were connected to Old Testament promises and prophecies. Still, in patterns that were consistent with the history of Israel, they rejected Him, never denying His power, never denying His miracles, never denying His wisdom, they still rejected Him. And it started with the leaders and the leaders influence the nation.

Why did the religious leaders, the self confessed elite, Old Testament scholars and theologians, those who were more religious than others, those supposedly more in tune with God and Scripture than all others, why did they reject Him? And the answer is not complicated. The answer is because their hearts were dominated by sin, a complex of the ugliest kind of sin, as we will see.

Let me set the scene a little bit for you. It is Wednesday of Passion Week, Wednesday. By Friday, Jesus will be crucified. On this Wednesday, Jesus spent the day in the temple surrounded by masses of people who had flowed into Jerusalem because it was Passover time. And when Jesus came into the city, they, in a euphoria of hope, wanted Him to be the Messiah they had long waited for. And so they gave Him a triumphal entry and they were still hanging on everything He did and every word He said by Wednesday in the temple. He is teaching these great crowds.

But in every crowd, the religious leaders are present. And there are repeated confrontations between Jesus and these religious leaders. The crowd just wants to hear Him teach. They want Him to say the things they're longing to hear. The religious leaders want to trap Him in His words. The people know He's a miracle worker. They know He raised Lazarus from the dead. They want Him to be the long-awaited Messiah and at this time, on Wednesday, they're still hopeful that He will indeed be that Messiah.

Tide has not turned against Him, but the leaders have hated Him for a long time. They have hated Him for years. They want Him dead and they want Him dead fast. And they will get what they want by

Friday. The same crowd that cried “Hosanna,” on Monday will cry, “Crucify Him,” on Friday. The shift is massive, 180 degrees. And the religious leaders are essentially the architects of this shift. They’re brilliant.

How can you turn the tide among hundreds of thousands of people in a few days from hailing someone as a would-be Messiah, to wanting His blood as a criminal and an imposter? Theirs is a kind of malevolent genius and every day they want Him dead more than they did the day before and every hour they want Him dead more than they did the hour before, and everything He says only escalates their animosity. Every confrontation they have with Him only steels their objective and their purpose.

By the time we come to our text, which begins in verse 19, they are at a feverish level of desperation. Jesus is popular, wildly popular. He has the attention of the masses and He’s telling them things that are destructive of these religious leaders, and the people know it. Look at verse 19.

“The scribes and the chief priests tried to lay hands on Him that very hour, and they feared the people; for they - ” that is the people “ - understood that He - ” Jesus “ - spoke this parable against them - ” the religious leaders. They were getting it. Jesus was not just teaching them theology, He was exposing the falseness of these religious leaders to the people. They were the ones who killed the prophets in the past. It had always been led by the false leaders. They are the ones who will lead the execution of the Son of God, as well.

The stakes were really high. The people were pro-Jesus and becoming increasingly anti-Pharisee, anti-Sadducee, anti-Herodian, the complex of sects that made up the powerful and influential religious leaders. They have to put it to a stop. They have to turn the crowd the other way. That is not an easy job. If they had their way, they would stone Him on the spot in the good, old-fashioned Jewish way: Find a ledge, throw Him over, and crush Him under stones. They can’t do that. Caesar has removed their right to exercise capital punishment. Caesar has the power to take life. The Jews do not. They can’t do that. They’ve got to come up with a way to get rid of Jesus, preserve their own position and to turn the crowd 180 degrees the other direction. And in this text, we see their malevolent genius at work.

Now, there are a lot of ways that you could break this text down to understand it, but I think what perhaps is most direct is to look at it as a complex of sins and call it a diagnosis of the Christ rejecters. Do a little bit of spiritual pathology, looking into those specific sins that characterize their efforts. Let’s begin with the sin of hatred in verse 19. That was the dominant reality. They hated Jesus.

Verse 19, “And the scribes and the chief priests tried to lay hands on Him that very hour.” If they had their way, they would have taken Him right there, right then, on the spot. It mentions the scribes and

the Pharisees. The scribes, you know, were the scholars, the lawyers of the law, the theologians. The chief priests were those who were the most prominent priests.

There were also, according to Matthew, and Matthew records this same incident, Matthew 22. Mark records it, Mark 12. So you have three different accounts of this which all mesh wonderfully, and I'll make reference to some of the others as we go through it. Matthew 22:15 says that it included the Pharisees. So you have the chief priests, you have the scribes, and you have the Pharisees. By now, the hatred of the chief priests, the scribes, and the Pharisees is very well established. Matthew tells us there was another group there, and Mark does as well, called the Herodians.

The Herodians are another sect. They are a political party of pro-Herod Jews. They're sort of the odd man out, in a sense. The Jews did not particularly like the Herods. They were not Jews, they were Hasmoneans. And yet they had dominant power and rule in the land of Israel. That was not a happy situation for the Jews, particularly for Pharisees and others who were zealous for Judaism. But there were some who saw it expedient for themselves to be pro-Herod because the Herods were wealthy and powerful. The Pharisees basically hated the Herodians cause the Herodians were pure politicians who wanted to be attached to the reigning power and knew to do that you have to play the game with Rome. The Pharisees were willing do that a little bit, not to the degree that the Herodians were.

But amazingly the Pharisees and the Herodians can get together to get rid of Jesus, and this isn't anything new. In Mark 3:6, way back, long before this, way back at the start of Jesus' Galilean ministry, it says, "The Pharisees went out and immediately *began* to take counsel with the Herodians against *Jesus*, as *to* how they might destroy Him." So they have been in alliance or collusion to get rid of Jesus literally for years.

So you have everybody in on this thing: Scribes, Pharisees, priests, Herodians. Some of the priests, no doubt, would have been Sadducees, as well. Sadducees were the religious liberals. Pharisees were the religious fanatics and fundamentalists. Herodians were the politically motivated. They were all together, along with the theologians called scribes. All of them had the same common end, get rid of Jesus.

So here is Judaism's brain trust of that day. And Matthew tells us they were plotting together. This is a high-level, multi-lateral meeting, a meeting of all the minds on one common end, getting rid of Jesus. And they really wanted to lay hands on Him that very hour. They didn't want to wait one more hour. They wanted to take Him and kill Him, but they couldn't.

Why? "They feared the people, for they understood that He spoke this parable against them." If they did anything that looked like what Jesus said they were going to do, they would then create a self-fulfilling prophecy and bring the wrath of the people down on their own heads. They had to play this one very carefully. They had to find a way - just think of it - to turn this massive populous from positive

attitudes toward Jesus to negative attitudes toward Jesus, from wanting Him to be their king to wanting Him dead. How were they going to do that?

There was only one way. There was only one power of execution in the land, and that was Rome. In the end, Rome had to kill Him. But they didn't need to have Him dead to have the people turn against Him. All they needed to do was have Rome arrest Him. They were anti-Rome, all of them, really. They played whatever game they needed to play with Rome to keep their power, but they bitterly hated all things Roman and they knew the populous despised all things Roman. But they needed Rome's help, not just to execute Jesus, but they needed Rome to arrest Him, and they needed it quickly. How were they going to do that? Rome was hyper-sensitive about one crime, insurrection. Insurrection.

They prided themselves on p*ax Romana*, keeping the Roman peace. They prided themselves on quelling rebellions. They prided themselves on executing insurrectionists and rebels. They needed to trap Jesus in an insurrectionist statement, and then the Herodians would report Him because they had all the lines of communication to the Romans, who would swiftly execute this rebel, as they did other such rebels.

So the Pharisees, and the scribes, and the chief priests, and the Herodians all get together. They have this planning meeting to come up with a strategy to make this happen. All they needed to do was get the Romans to arrest Him, and that would turn the people against Him.

Why? Because the people believed that the Old Testament promised the Messiah would come and set up a kingdom, right? And they weren't wrong about it. That the Messiah would come and establish His throne in Jerusalem in Israel, deliver Israel from all Gentile domination, and then Israel would be the primary nation over the whole world, that when the Messiah came, He would establish a kingdom that would break the back of all Gentile, pagan, blasphemous, idolatrous tyranny.

Anybody who wanted to be a Messiah, anybody who wanted to be accepted as a Messiah, would have to be anti-Gentile, anti-Rome. And if they could get Jesus to appear anti-Rome, Rome would step in fast. And as soon as this would-be Messiah showed that Rome had the power over Him and not He having the power over Rome, the tide would turn cause He couldn't be the Messiah. How were they going to make it happen? How are they going to turn Jesus into what appears to be a dangerous revolutionary? The Romans already knew He had power over masses of people. They could see it before their very eyes.

And Pilate was in Jerusalem at this time, though he wasn't always there. His abode was in another place. He was there because it was Passover and the city was swelled with all these pilgrims, and he was there to make sure he kept things in control. They had to have Jesus arrested by the Romans, and that would prove finally that He was not the Messiah. So how were they going to get Rome to

arrest Him? They had to do it that way and then - back to verse 20, end of the verse - “they *could* deliver Him to the rule and the authority of the governor.” That was the whole objective.

So what you’ve got here is a kind of impotent rage. They hate Him so much. Their hatred is at the fever pitch. They want Him dead, but they must protect their own positions because they fear the people. This describes their hatred and a second sin, their pride, their pride. In that statement in verse 19, “They feared the people; because the people understood that He was telling them a parable about them - ” that they were the ones, He said, were killers of the Son of God. They feared the people.

What do you mean “they feared the people”? They feared that they would lose the people’s esteem, trust. You see, popularity, acceptance, elevation, honor, respect came to them from the people. They fed on it. In fact, it was essential to feeding their self righteous egos. They loved to draw attention to themselves. They loved to wear certain clothes, and act in certain ways, and carry on certain behaviors that drew people’s attention to them and made them seem pious, and holy, and elevated, and superior. They sought the chief seats at the banquets, Jesus said in Matthew 23. They wanted people to call them “father, teacher, master.” They needed the people like all false religious leaders do.

All their power, all their honor, all their esteem, all their position, all their prominence came from the people. And the people right now were still feeling the buzz of the triumphal entry that Jesus might be the Messiah. Matthew 21:46 says, “These leaders feared the multitude because the multitude believed Jesus was a prophet.” At least He was a prophet. And so they were afraid to go against the crowd because they needed the crowd.

By the way, the words of the New Testament, the words of our Lord Himself in Matthew 23 tell us that these leaders had no love for the people, no love for the people. In fact, they used the people and they abused the people. They heaped upon them heavy burdens, legalistic burdens, and wouldn’t lift a finger to help them carry those burdens. Jesus said they put upon them a yoke that no person could bear. They ruled by fear and intimidation, the way all false religious leaders rule and work. They put people under fear that if they don’t obey them and do what they say, they’ll go to hell. They’ll miss the kingdom of God. They didn’t do anything for the people. They turned them in to sons of hell. They made them worse by their false doctrine.

And they had nothing but contempt for the people. They despised them, thought them lower than they, never invited them to their homes, or their luncheons, or their dinners, or their banquets. Had no contact with them. They were not God pleasers but they were not man pleasers, either. They were self pleasers who fed their proud souls on the accolades of those that they intimidated and abused. And they knew that if Jesus was arrested by the Romans, the people’s hopes in Him would be crushed, and they would get rid of Him, and secure their ongoing prominence.

So they're full of hate and they're full of pride. And they have to find another way because they can't just lay hands on Him - which is a term that means "seize Him" and "take Him away" either to kill Him or to the Romans to have Him killed - until they have a reason. And if they did that with no apparent reason before the people, the people would turn on them. So they have to turn the attitude of the people.

That leads them to a third sin in this complex of sins, hypocrisy. They have to play their game, the game at which they were so adept, the game of hypocrisy. All false religious leaders are hypocrites, then and now and always. And they are masters at their disguise. So verse 20 says, "They watched Him - " surveillance. They watched Him. What are they looking for?

They "sent spies who pretended to be righteous, in order that they might catch Him in some statement, so as to deliver Him up to the rule and authority of the governor." The end of the whole plan was to get Him to Pilate, the Roman governor who represented Caesar, whose job it was to make sure there was no trouble in Israel, who would deal with any rebel or insurrectionist. They had to get Him to the governor.

In order to get Him to the governor, they had to catch Him in some statement that would cause the Romans to want to arrest Him and kill Him. In order to catch Him in that kind of statement, they had to find Him in the right moment, and so they watched Him, and they sent spies masquerading as honest truth seekers.

By the way, Matthew says the spies were disciples of the Pharisees along with the Herodians, because the Herodians had the direct access to the Romans. They were largely in cahoots, tightly. So the idea was we'll catch Him in something, and the Herodians were rushed to the Romans, and since the Herodians don't have religious issues at the top of their list but political ones, it will be much more believable if the story is told by the Herodians.

That little phrase, "pretended to be righteous," was a standard then for false religion and it always is. Pretended to be righteous. What they actually wanted was to trap Him, catch Him in some statement that would cause Him to be arrested and taken to the Roman authorities, and executed as a rebellion leader, a rebel.

Pilate, as I said, was there. They were going to use Pilate to kill Jesus. But listen to this. They didn't need Jesus to be killed to turn the tide. They wanted Him dead and they would get their wish, they just needed Him to be arrested. That's all. The Jews expected, the populous, the people expected Messiah to come and overthrow all Gentile rule, to come and establish the kingdom promised by the prophets, deliver Israel from the nations, and set up Israel over all the nations.

Any claimant to be the Messiah had to be ready to call for a break with Gentile power. Any true Messiah would see Rome as an unwanted, ungodly, idolatrous, blasphemous, pagan intruder, usurper. Messiah then, by nature, had to be a revolutionary. It had to be His agenda to establish the kingdom, to break Gentile dominion, to bring an end to idolatry in the establishment of God's kingdom.

And that's true. The prophets did say all of that. The next time Jesus comes, that's what He will do. The prophets also talked about the fact that He would come and be a sacrifice for sin the first time. But they were looking only to the end. All the Jews would have affirmed in unanimous chorus, Messiah will come and destroy Gentile blasphemers who've dominated this land and raise again the standard of God and the kingdom of God here. They knew the people wanted that. And they assumed Jesus would be forced to agree with that. If Jesus wanted to continue to be thought of as the Messiah, He would have to agree with that.

Now they didn't think Jesus was the Messiah. They were completely confident He was not the Messiah. They thought He was just a guy trying to make people think He was the Messiah and in order to keep up the game, He would be forced to take the popular view that we have to overthrow Rome. So all they have to do is put Him in a position where He has to say that. And once the Romans arrest Him and He shows that Rome has the power over Him, He doesn't have the power over Rome, the people will turn in a minute. It will be over and the Romans will kill Him.

So they're looking for their moment. It leads us to the fourth sin, flattery. Finally, they find their moment in verse 21, "And they questioned Him, saying - " notice how they set Him up with flattery. "Teacher." That word was reserved for only the highest of rabbis. They're elevating Him. It must have been painful for them to do this. They hate Him. But they say what they think they need to say.

And there are two reasons they talk the way they talk. One, they want to elevate Jesus in His own mind to make Him feel proud so that He'll try to act in a way that's consistent with what they've said. Secondly, they want to show that they agree with the people because this is how the people thought about Him. "Teacher - " people thought He was a teacher, and an astute one at that " - we know you speak and teach correctly." That was the popular view. You're getting the popular view right here. They're telling us what conventional wisdom was, what the people thought. "You teach and speak correctly. You're not partial to anyone, but teach the way of God in truth."

This is absolute flattery. This is intended to destroy. This is also true, right? Everything they said is true. He is the teacher. He does speak and teach correctly. He is not partial to anyone. And He does teach the way of God in truth and nothing else. That is true. That was also the way people were viewing Him. You speak and teach correctly, that's *orths* in Greek, *orths.* I mention that word because from that word we get "orthopedic." It simply means "straight" or "upright." We also get the word

“orthodox” which really comes from two words, *orths* and doxology, or *doxa*, “giving right honor to God.” You speak orthodox, truth. You are not partial to anyone.

Matthew’s text, a little variant, literally says in the Greek, “You look not into the face of men.” In other words, you don’t adjust your message by the kind of response you’re getting or who you’re talking to. You don’t equivocate because of human opinion or consequence.

All this is absolutely true. They don’t believe it. This is the popular idea, but it’s also the truth. And then they come to their highpoint, “You teach the way of God in truth.” You teach the way of God in truth. Hypocritical haters, proud, all they want to do is flatter Jesus, elevate His ego so that He’ll be forced to do something consistent with the way they’ve portrayed Him openly and publicly, so He doesn’t lose face, doesn’t lose the reputation they’ve just established for Him.

Having been publicly flattered and publicly pumped up in His ego so high, He’s not going to want to contradict that exalted commendation. So they’re putting Him in a place where He’s going to be forced to give them a straight answer, a straight answer that they think is consistent with God. And they know that that straight answer is what the people would all say and that if He wants to win the people, He’s going to have to say it, too.

Now, connected to the sin of hypocrisy and flattery is the sin of deception, that’s the fifth one, verse 22. Here comes the question. I wonder how long it took them to come up with this question. It’s really brilliant from their viewpoint, the best that they could have done. “Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?”

Now remember, they came pretending to be righteous, verse 20, but verse 23 Luke says, “But He detected their trickery.” So we come to the fifth sin, deception, deception. They want Him to make an anti-Rome statement. Then they’re going to report Him, have Him arrested, and the Romans will execute Him because He has such a massive following.

The greatest honor that you could ever pay an esteemed teacher was to ask him a question. That was the greatest honor you could ever pay was to ask a question, maybe a hard question, and particularly a question about the law of God. That’s what this is. “It is lawful?” Not in terms of Roman law, but is it lawful in terms of the Law of God? ”Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?”

In their minds, there’s only one answer biblically, ”No.” They know that the people would say, “No. We are being forced to pay taxes to Caesar. We should not be paying taxes of the grain, and the oil, and the wine, and the land, and the income that God gives us in God’s own land, this land, and all that it produces belongs to God, and we should not be giving this to a Gentile, idolatrous, occupying power, oppressing God’s people with no right to God’s land.” The people would uniformly rise up and say, “No. It is not lawful, but we are forced to do it.”

The Jews, by the way, hated paying taxes to Rome, not only because they hated to part with the money, but because they hated to give it to pagans, idolaters, occupiers. The word here, taxes, plural, general word, *phoros,* just a general word for tax. There were lots of them. There was a land tax: One tenth of the grain, one fifth of the oil and the wine; an import tax: Every harbor, every border and every city gate; there was a tariff on any goods going through.

There was an income tax of one percent of wages, and then there was a poll tax, a poll tax. Everybody paid it. It was one denarius a year. It was the poll tax, by the way, that Joseph and Mary went to pay in Bethlehem when Jesus was born. Matthew uses the word "poll tax," actually, and it's the word *knsos* from which we get census. They hated paying taxes to Rome because Rome was a blasphemous, idolatrous, and godless people.

Josephus tells us some interesting history, before the birth of Christ. A man named Judas of Galilee comes along. He leads an insurrection against the Romans and he leads this insurrection against the Romans on the basis of the fact that they shouldn't have to pay tax. He says, "God is our only Lord and ruler." And he revolts against the paying of census tax and any other tax because he says it is basically funding paganism and idolatry.

Well, they killed him. They killed him. And everybody who was trying to follow his rebellion scattered all over every place. But the sentiment that Judas developed remained and it smoldered in the hearts of the people, and they all remembered that, even though it was over 30 years before this. It was part of their familiar history. "Remember when Judas tried to get us out from under the necessity to pay these taxes?" And Josephus the historian says that in 66 A.D., when the great revolution started which ended in 70 A.D. when the Romans came in and destroyed Jerusalem and massacred the people, that insurrection in 66 A.D., that's 72 years after Judas, was started on the same premise, the intolerable issue of taxation.

So that conviction about that smoldered in the hearts of the people because that was the daily routine consistent, constant reminder of the reality of Roman occupation and idolatry. The Jews saw genuinely taxation by Rome as treason against God, the true and only King of Israel.

Now the leaders were sure that Jesus would have to give the popular view, that when He's asked, "Should we pay taxes to Caesar?" and He's just been told that You only speak the truth of God, You only speak correctly, orthodox, and You don't care what the results are, they've got Him painted into a corner. And as soon as He says what He has to say, "No, it's not right to do that. It's against the Law of God," they will dispatch the Herodians to the Romans. The Romans will come and seeing the massive crowd, assuming that He is spreading this kind of thing and another insurrection is about to be launched, they will arrest Him, and at the moment that they arrest Him, everybody will know that He is not the Messiah for sure because He is now a victim of the same Gentiles. So they put Him into

that position.

He detected their trickery. Matthew says, “He perceived their wickedness.” Luke calls it “trickery.” Matthew goes behind the trickery to the wickedness that motivated it. He knew what was in them. How did He know their trickery? Because He knew what was in them. John 2:25, “He knew what was in the heart of man.” He’s God. And He puts it on display.

Verse 24. “He said to them, ‘Show Me a denarius.’ ” Probably would have had to find one somewhere in the crowd because the Jews didn’t like to carry them. They were Roman coins and it was like having a little idol in your pocket. And there was no idolatry in Israel after the Babylonian captivity historically. They carried copper coins and Hebrew shekels. You’ve heard that word. They didn’t like to carry Roman coins. Denarius is basically a day’s wage coin, valuable coin, made out of silver sometimes or gold. They were used between, well, 300 B.C. to 300 A.D., about 600 years, 6 centuries. They were minted by the emperor, and depending on who was the emperor, they had his image on it.

So all the long line of Caesars had their faces on the coins that were minted during their own reign. They bore the engraved image of the emperor on one side, and then the inscriptions and identifying information on the other side. And as I said, the Jews didn’t carry them because they were little idols. But Jesus said, “Find Me one. Show Me one. Whose likeness and inscription does it have?” Everybody knew the answer to that. “Caesar’s.” And I’m sure at this moment the spies and the questioners that are there and probably the rest have managed to show up, not just the spies, they’re all there now, are rubbing their hands thinking, “He’s going down this path just like we thought He would. He’s identifying them as belonging to Caesar and therefore blasphemous and idolatrous.”

And by the way, Augustus Caesar had coins minted in 17 B.C. identifying himself as the son of God, which made those coins particularly repulsive to the Jews. Tiberius Caesar had coins designating himself as high priest of God. Well, since Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, and since He claimed to be the mediator between men and God, certainly He, if He is the true Messiah and a true prophet of God, sees these blasphemous idol coins for what they really are. Really a clever plan.

But they didn’t expect His answer, verse 25, “And He said to them, ‘Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.’ ” Folks, the profundity of that should not be lost in its simplicity. Somebody said, “Well, does this mean pay your taxes?” It is way beyond that. But the answer is yes. It is way beyond that. Render is the Greek verb *apodote,* meaning “to give back because it is owed, because it belongs, return, restore.”

There are some things in this world that belong to this world. There are some things in this world that belong to the earth, that are earthly. There are some things that belong in the providence of God to the temporal realm. Do your temporal duty under God’s providence in history, the divine God Himself

had brought Israel under Roman rule. God had brought them there. Caesar is their earthly king. Caesar is their earthly ruler. And they must support his rule because all government is ordained by God. Romans 13. Powers that be are ordained by God and they don't carry the sword for nothing. Government is ordained to protect the innocent and punish the evil.

And the Romans did that. They were powerful militarily and they produced peace, and security, and protection, and great roads, and shipping channels, and added to the prosperity of life. This had value, and you paid for that. We understand that. We live in two realms as Christians. We live in a worldly realm and we are obligated and we owe to that worldly realm what belongs to that worldly realm. And in the providence of God, we happen to be the United States of America and if they want my tax money to provide the highways and fix the bridges and do the rest, then that's their right. And this is a world I live in. Is it Christ honoring? God-exalting? No. But it's not supposed to be.

The payment of our tax set by earthly government, even idolatrous, blasphemous, communist, oppressive, autocratic kinds of governments, even those that are pagan, even those that are about to execute the Son of God are still government established by God. And we owe them the debt that belongs to them.

First Peter, "Honor the king, submit to everybody who is authority over you." I don't care whether it's a democracy in a congress or local authorities, police, or a communist dictator, or a Caesar, Caesar has his sphere by God's design, and we owe what we owe in the providence of God what that government requires is what we pay. Jesus affirms the role of government, the right of government to collect taxes for its support because it is ordained by God for man's well being and protection and without it you have anarchy, chaos and destruction.

You say, "Well what about when the government asks you to do what God forbids? Or when the government forbids what God asks?" Then you come to an Acts 5:29 issue and you say, you judge whether we obey God or men. If they tell me to stop preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, then I say, "I'm sorry, I have a higher command than that." That's where the two intersect. I obey God, do with me what you will.

Since the end of the Old Testament theocratic kingdom and until the establishment of the future theocratic kingdom of Christ when He returns to set up His kingdom on earth, there is no sacral society, there is no sacred society.

We live in two worlds. We're citizens of this temporal world and a human government, while at the same time citizens of the kingdom of God under the rule of God Himself and Christ. The church is not to take over civil government. The church is not to rebel against civil government. The church is not to become the critic of civil government, neither by war, by civil disobedience, or by political power are we supposed to control civil government. This is not a sacral society. This is not a theocratic kingdom.

America is not, neither is any other earthly nation.

Give Caesar what's Caesar's and thank God that providentially you are under a government that you are under because there are some far, far worse in places of the world and through history than this. But whatever it is, we are known as good citizens. That is the message of the apostle Paul to Timothy and to Titus, if you remember.

More importantly than that, however, though, and this is the message He's directing at them, one more gracious kind merciful invitation, "And to God the things that are God's." Why will you not give to God what is His?

What is His? Your soul. Right? Your soul, your eternal being, just like you owe certain things to the government, you owe certain things to God. You owe the government what the government owns. And they will tell you what they own by the laws that they impose. You owe to God what God owns and what does God own? God owns you. God owns you. He's saying to them, "Why don't you bow your knee to the greater, more important, ultimate throne? Give honor to God."

God is owed worship, praise, adoration, glory, obedience, love, trust. Give Him my life, everything. They were not giving God what God commanded: Their hearts, their souls, their lives. The coin belongs to Caesar. You belong to God. The coin has Caesar's image. You have God's image. The coin is Caesar's. You are God's. That was His invitation. It's an invitation today extended to you.

And it led to a final sin, hate, pride, hypocrisy, flattery, deception, number six, stubbornness. I'll finish right now. Stubbornness, verse 26, "They were unable to catch Him in a saying in the presence of the people; and marveling at His answer, they became silent." I wish it said they repented. They're so stubborn. This is an irredeemable, irremediable situation. They go away only frustrated because they failed to catch Him in a saying in front of the people that would have caused Him to be arrested and executed.

Instead of going away and marveling and saying, "His wisdom is staggering. It's stunning and we do have obligations to God, and we need to take a look at our obligation to God," they are so stubborn. This is, I guess, the old word pertinacity, stubbornness. This is a complex of sins that is beyond hope, beyond hope.

Oh, by the way, turn to 23:2, 23:2. Well, verse 1, finally they get Jesus to Pilate, we'll cover the ground in between obviously, they get Jesus to Pilate. Verse 1, "They brought Him before Pilate and they began to accuse Him, saying, 'We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar.' " Outright lie. Bold-face lie. They knew that that was the way they were going to get Him arrested and executed and if He wouldn't say something, they would fabricate it.

Is that stubbornness? You become a self-righteous liar in an effort to reject Christ. Such hatred in some ways is incomprehensible, but it is a complex of sin without remedy that eventually will in the plan of God bring them to success and they'll have Him arrested, and executed, and the crowd will scream for His blood and re-embrace them as their spiritual heroes.

I hope no one here today will walk away from Jesus Christ. Pick a side. You're either with Him or with them.

Father, this is such rich, powerful experience for us to be there in that confrontation. May it be applied to every life directly, purposely, pointedly. Lord, we don't want to stand with those stubborn rejecters. We want to come to Christ. Lord, work Your work in hearts of any here who have still rejected. May they not come back time after time again and find comfort in that rejection. Be gracious to them and may they come to Christ in love, repentance and faith. And we pray in His name. Amen.

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