

St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church-WELS
Sermon by Pastor Anthony E. Schultz
Pentecost 22 October 12, 2008 *Matthew 22:15-21*



Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. "Teacher," they said, "we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are. Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? Show me the coin used for paying the tax." They brought him a denarius, and he asked them, "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?" "Caesar's," they replied. Then he said to them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."

People of God – rescued from the flaming lake of fire in hell by the innocent blood of the very Lamb of God:

There was a family from Columbus, Ohio – that is addicted to heroin. The family – the whole family is addicted to heroin. The daddy, the mommy and two of the three sons are all addicted to heroin. The only one who isn't – is the little boy just 13 months old. They put him in his little car seat – and drive him around – looking to get some money – then to score some drugs. Then they quickly shoot the drugs into their bodies. One of the saddest aspects of this – is when they were interviewing the whole family – and the daddy said, "I want to say something! We may look like it – but I want to say – we are *not bad people!* We are *not bad people!*" *Not bad?* It is going to be just about impossible – to overcome this illegal and deadly destructive addiction – if you refuse to admit you are bad! The people doing the interview didn't seem to completely understand either. They said this poor family *fell prey* to this addictive drug. To fall prey makes them what – *victims?* *We are not victims.* We are *sinner*s. We are sinners. We are guilty. We are to blame! We are responsible. I am without excuse! A bad person? Yes, I am! I admit that – confess that – when I say I a poor miserable sinner – confess unto Thee all my sins and iniquities – with which I have ever offended Thee and justly deserve your punishment – both now and in eternity! Bad people? That's exactly what we are! The good news is – God has been merciful to us – forgiving all our sins for Jesus' sake!

Do you know what today (Thursday) is? It's the 10th day of the Jewish month of Tishrei! It's Yom Kippur – the Great Day of Atonement! In Old Testament times – during the days of Moses and the Tabernacle – the days of Solomon's Temple – the LORD was very specific about how he was to be worshiped. People understood in the most graphic ways possible – that sin separated people from the LORD – and only through the shedding of blood was there forgiveness. On the Great Day of Atonement – the High Priest would wash himself – with water from this huge basin in the courtyard. In the holy place he was to put on special linen garments – linen undergarments – and a linen robe – a linen sash around his waist – and a linen turban on his head. He was to sacrifice a bull as a sin offering for himself and the other priests. Then he was to go into the Most Holy Place – with some of the bull's blood, with incense and with coals from the altar of burnt offering. He put some of the incense on the coals – so that the smoke kept him from seeing the Ark of the Covenant. Then he took some of the blood and sprinkled it in front of the atonement cover of the Ark. Then he came outside again and cast lots for two goats to see which was to be sacrificed and which was to be the scapegoat. At the altar of burnt offering the high priest killed the goat for a sin offering for the people and for a second

time went inside the Most Holy Place—this time to sprinkle the goat’s blood in front of and on the atonement cover. Then he returned to the Holy Place—the tent of meeting—and sprinkled some goat’s blood there. Then he went outside to the Altar of Burnt Offering and sprinkled it with the blood of the bull for himself and blood from the goat for the people’s sins. Then he laid both hands on the second goat—symbolizing the transfer of Israel’s sin and sent the goat out into the wilderness to die alone. When the man who took the scapegoat out into the wilderness returned—he washed himself and his garments before rejoining the people. Then the High Priest entered the Holy Place—removed his special garments and went out to wash himself and put on his regular priestly clothes. As a final sacrifice we went out to the Great Altar and offered a ram as a burn offering for himself and another ram for the sins of the people. The conclusion of the entire day was the removal of the sacrifices for the sin offerings to a place outside the camp, where they were burned and there the man who performed this ritual bathed and washed his clothes before rejoining the people. That was all pretty complicated! Get it wrong—or do it with a bad attitude—and the LORD himself could very easily strike you dead on the spot! All of this happened literally thousands of times—as God’s people waited for the ultimate Scapegoat. All of this happened literally thousands of times—as God’s people waited for the ultimate sacrifice—whose blood would be sprinkled—one time—before the mercy seat of God—to cover the guilty stain of all my sins and failures and painful hurtful mistakes! Jesus would be that sacrifice—offered Good Friday afternoon—to atone for the sins of all of mankind! It is in light of all of our sins and the ugliness of all our sins and mistakes that we can say:

Give To Caesar and To God!

1. Some things belong to Caesar

2. Everything really belongs to God

Today’s text is again about fruits of faith. It’s about how you live and act—in light of Jesus’ forgiving love. It’s about sanctification—about fruits of faith! As always it’s important to understand the context—the circumstances surrounding this Scripture. As we catch up with Jesus in spirit today—the end of His three year public ministry is fast drawing to a close. Today we are reading from the Gospel of the tax collector Matthew chapter 22. Chapter 21—begins with the account of Palm Sunday. Jesus—the humble King—rides down the Mount of Olives—into the city of Jerusalem. The little children sing, **“Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD! Hosanna in the Highest!”** **The Pharisees, the Chief Priests, the Elders, the Teachers of the Law all complained bitterly! Make these little children stop! Make them be quiet! Jesus tells them, “If the children are quiet—the very stones will cry out to praise him! Jesus went to the Temple—and just as he had done at the beginning of his public ministry so he did again! Jesus drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. “It is written,” he said to them, “My house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it a den of robbers.” The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. Again the children shouted, “Hosanna to the Son of David.”** From the lips of children and even infants—God the Father ordained praise!”

It has been said—the enemy of my enemy is my friend! How else can you explain the fact that the disciples—the students, followers and imitators of the Pharisees—the arrogant, self-righteous hypocritical Pharisees went to see Jesus along with the Herodians. The Pharisees loved the nation of Israel—and hated Caesar and the Romans and the tax collectors for the Romans and they hated King Herod whom they considered a collaborator with the accursed Romans. Herodians were people who along with King Herod thought a little power is better than no power at all—so let’s cooperate for what’s in it for me! Their plan was brilliant in its

simplicity! They begin by trying to butter up Jesus with words of insincere flattery!! **“Teacher,” they said, “we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren’t swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are.”** Thinking they have Jesus off guard they try to spring their trap!

Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?” How they must have bit their lip--struggling not to smile – when they asked – *so* – is it right to pay taxes to the accursed Romans or not? It couldn’t miss! If Jesus said – pay taxes to Caesar – the disciples of the Pharisees could say – how can you call yourself a child of Abraham – and yet condone giving money to these pagan Roman occupiers and oppressors – who are responsible – as Pontius Pilate for mixing people’s blood with their sacrifices in the courtyard of the Temple! How horrible was that? And if Jesus said – don’t pay taxes to Caesar – there were the Herodians who would be quick to say – that’s against the law! It’s against the law to say don’t pay taxes to Caesar! You are a traitor to Rome! You should be arrested and thrown into prison for insurrection and rebellion – for tax evasion! So – which is it? Pay taxes and we got you or don’t pay taxes – in which case we got you there, too!

But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, “You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? Show me the coin used for paying the tax.” They brought him a denarius, They gave to Jesus the coin that was used to pay taxes – the coin that constituted a generous day’s wages. He asked them, “Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?” “Caesar’s,” they replied. Then he said to them, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.” Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords. Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth. Jesus said – **Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s!** This message is consistent through Scripture. Romans chapter 13 says, **“Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is not authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.”** Romans 13:1 What do we owe Caesar? Paul wrote, **“This is why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, who give their full time to governing. Give to everyone what you owe: if you owe taxes, pay taxes; of revenue then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.”** Romans 13:6,7 For Jesus’ sake we will show respect for the governing authorities – for our Mayor, for our Governor, for our President and Vice President, our Senators and Congressmen, the Supreme Court – we will show respect for the office – for the position. We will give to Caesar civil obedience – that is we will not speed through town – or down the freeway. We will show respect to police officers and fire fighters – to paramedics and first responders – quickly and safely pulling over when we see their emergency lights flashing. We will serve in the military – the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and Coast Guard – wearing the uniform of our country – perhaps making the ultimate sacrifice – laying down our life for our Country – for her protection – for our freedoms.

“Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.” What is God’s? Everything! Absolutely everything! Sometimes we forget that. Thousands of years ago a man named Asaph wrote in Psalm 50 **“Listen, my people, and I will speak; I will testify against you, Israel. I am God, your God. I bring no charges against you concerning your sacrifices or concerning your burnt offerings, which are ever before me. I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens, for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains and the creatures of the field are mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it. Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats? Sacrifice thank offerings to God, fulfill your vows to the Most High and call on me in the day of trouble, I will deliver you, and you will honor me.”** Psalm 50:7-15 The LORD – the Great I AM – the Holy One of Israel – is not in need of

anything from us. The Great I AM—is not in Heaven—pleading with us to please bring him our offerings—because he is dependant upon our generosity. Everything—absolutely everything is already His. When we remember that—we will not hesitate to bring joyful, cheerful thank offerings—*thank* offerings—returning to him the first and the finest—of everything that is always and ultimately already his!

“Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.” We were on the freeway—heading for Green Bay the other day—going about 65 mph when a very nice black jacked up pickup—went flying by—going, I don’t know—85 miles per hour. They were flying! About two miles later—there was that big black jacked up pickup—resting on the shoulder—a little silver colored car parked right behind it—a very thin line of blue and red lights—motioning approaching cars—to go around! Now—what do you think? Do you think—serves them right? Or do you think—there but for the grace of God—go I? It’s easy to see the flaws—the weaknesses and shortcomings—the sins of other people. It’s easy to downplay our own shortcomings and mistakes. The fact is—I am a poor wretched sinner—deserving of God’s white hot burning judgment and crushing punishment. It is by grace alone that we are forgiven. It is in light of that forgiveness that we have motivation and ability to give to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to give back to God—everything, absolutely everything that he has given us. Amen!

To God alone all glory!

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