

Ch. 20: 19 And the scribes and the chief priests tried to lay hands on Him that very hour, and they feared the people; for they understood that He spoke this parable against them. 20 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. 21 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. 22 "Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" 23 But He detected their trickery and said to them, 24 "Show Me a denarius. Whose likeness and inscription does it have?" And they said, "Caesar's." 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." 26 And they were unable to catch Him in a saying in the presence of the people; and marveling at His answer, they became silent.

This story this morning is so complex and has so many parallels with our current situation this morning that we should find what unfolds before our eyes in this passage imminently useful.

The background here is that there are two groups of people who are in a political challenge for supremacy and control. That's the bottom line. Jesus is party to neither group. Two opposing political groups are in a confrontation in this passage. Let me try to define the power struggle.

First and most obvious because they are defined by name are the collective rulers of the religious culture of Israel. You say, Rome rules Israel. Yes, true, but Rome has allowed the religious culture of Israel to have wide authority over the people of that land.

To be sure, Rome occupies Israel, and Rome collects taxes and tributes from Israel, and Rome in turn supplies protection and worldwide access to Israel. Persia isn't thinking about annexing Israel. Come and squash Israel and take away their treasures. Not gonna happen while daddy Rome is occupying that land. Egypt's not going to have a war with Israel while Rome is occupying Israel. Pax Romana. Roman peace through Roman dominance.

There's something to be said for that. The philistines aren't raiding Israel. Rome is keeping the peace. You might mess with the jews, you don't mess with Rome.

And there are trade benefits. Rome was something like the European Union. You could cross over borders and the money was consistent and no one hassled you moving from region to region trading goods from one place taking them to another region where they might be rare and valuable. There is peace and there is opportunity and there is industry. Rome has to have some taxes to keep all of that going.

But Rome was wise in a way. They understood that the way to accomplish those things was to allow religious freedom. The passions around religious beliefs run so strong, especially in Israel, that the way forward for Rome is to allow the religion to run side by side in a different lane.

You guys go in your temple and do whatever it is you do and we'll tolerate that as long as you pay your tributes to Rome and acquiesce to Roman dominance and law. Very smart. Think about the "soul" of America vss the absolute soulessness of communist Russia and China. Religious freedom.

Rome is in the background in this story, but absolutely necessary in order to carry out the hand that the religious leaders of Israel are trying to play. Rome has removed the right of capitol punishment in Israel. They hold that card. The religious jews want Jesus dead but they cannot accomplish that without Rome.

And there's something else in their hand of cards. A dual purpose for Rome. But first, we need to define the opposing political group in this drama. Perhaps we could call them the zionists.

The predominant multitude vastly outnumbers the religious leaders, and their political aspirations are to displace Rome entirely and to realize a messianic age where an all powerful messiah casts Rome out and Israel nationally

assumes pre-emminence in the world. Why not?

This man speaks and food appears. This man speaks and demons flee. This man speaks and every human disease and malady dis-appears. This man speaks and Lazarus rises from 4 days in his tomb and comes out with his death clothes still lashed about him. This man speaks and we are mesmerized by the power of His very words. Surely this is the messiah. Surely He has the power to cast Rome out and rule as King of the whole world. No one has exhibited the power He has ever before.

We'll call them the zionists because their vision is for Zion to be the center of the world. That's what their prophets had promised. The Kingdom of God on earth, centered in Jerusalem. And we've got a man with the power to make that happen.

To properly set the stage for our drama we need to very briefly remind ourselves of what Jesus has just said in His parable of the vineyard. It's a parable that encompasses the entire history of that nation and it implicates the religious leaders of Israel. So let's re-visit that parable in order to set the context for what happens next; If you missed last week,

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. 10 "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. 11 "And he proceeded to send another slave; and they beat him also and treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed. 12 "And he proceeded to send a third; and this one also they wounded and cast out. 13 "And the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.' 14 "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.' 15 "And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What, therefore, will the owner of the vineyard do to them? 16 "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!” 17 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’?*

18 “Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust.”

The vine growers are the religious and national cultural leaders of Israel. The chief priests and elders of Israel. The ruling San-hedrin of 70 elders. The vineyard is Israel, God's chosen land and people. The slaves who come to receive the fruits of the vineyard in behalf of the Owner, who is God, are the prophets of God. Stoned, murdered and rejected, all. And the Son is . . . the Son of God.

The vine-growers, the leaders of Israel are going to cast out and murder the Son of God. Two days from when He spoke it. They are seething with hatred for Jesus. They have lost their grip on the people of Israel, they have lost their control and their status because of this massive shift away from them and towards this man who the multitude believes can be a messiah.

19 And the scribes and the chief priests tried to lay hands on Him that very hour, and they feared the people; for they understood that He spoke this parable against them.

The politics is; The masses have moved away from the religious and national leadership, towards Jesus who they think can give them a better future. The leaders of Israel need to eliminate Jesus in order to re-capture the control and status that they have always had before.

But it's a touchy situation. How do you accomplish that without a revolt of the masses? Rome hates revolts. Rome hates uprisings and problems. The local governor who has been put in place by Rome must keep the peace with a heavy hand because if the people revolt and riot, Rome blames the governor and will replace him with someone who can keep the peace.

All these things are in play. If the religious and national leaders make the wrong move and cause a revolt, the governor, Pilate, is forced to intervene and that never ends well. He has to come down strong in order to keep his job. And in fact with Rome it's 3 strikes and you're out, and Pilate already has 2 strikes.

How do we get rid of Jesus without an uprising and riot from the multitude? They have to come up with a plan that engages Rome on their side of the political power struggle, and one that shifts all these looney tune zionists back into reality. How can they accomplish both of those objectives?

They need to convince Rome that Jesus poses a real danger to order. Jesus can be the catalyst that upsets the pax Romana. Jesus is a real challenge to Roman rule and dominion. He's a dangerous powerful personality that can lead the masses into a serious uprising that Rome doesn't want.

Likewise, their plan is to kill the passions of the zionists movement, the masses who have put their hopes on a messiah, by having Rome exert control over Jesus.

To the zionists, Messiah is supposed to come on the scene with all guns blaring and dominate Rome. If Rome comes and dominates Jesus, all of those hopes will be dashed. If Rome can capture their messiah and dominate Him, He's not who they hoped He was, He's useless to them. These folks are after a political dream, not the kingdom of God.

And so these brilliant and deviot leaders have to come up with a way to cause these things to happen. And they are brilliant. They aren't in places at the top of the pyramid because they're stupid. These men are brilliant, but it's the world's brilliance, not God's. Satan is on their side. What they come up with is brilliantly diabolical.

The plan is to ask Jesus a question that will either pit Rome against Him, or pit the zionists against Him. It's a lose lose question. Any answer can cause a

riot. Any answer can cause an uprising, and that's what they're after. But we're getting ahead of Luke's masterful story telling.

20 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.

That's the diabolical set-up. Spies are present. Watching His every move. Waiting for the right time to pounce.

Matthew tells us about the spy thing. These leaders are the rock stars. They can't be unsuspected in the crowd. They are recognizable. So Matthew tells us; 22:16 *And they sent their disciples to Him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher,*

The rock star leaders send their groupies, their disciples to spy. Along with the herodians. Herodians are the jews who are sympathetic with Rome. Insiders with the Romans. The Herodians would be the people who can get to the folks in the Roman governors office to get a hearing to make things happen. Devious.

Disciples of the leadership who want to elevate themselves in that world, sympathetic to what the leaders want. And Herodians who can get into the inner circles with the Roman leadership. Their plan is brilliant and it is politically astute.

21 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.

Oh! the incredible hypocrisy of flattery. Flattery is a sin. Flattery is the sin of using the pride of fallen men to trap them. You gain an audience through your flattery, then you pull out your dagger and go for the kill.

And their little speech sounds Oh so righteous. How pious they are, these

unsuspected spies sent from the pit of hell. How lovely their words sound to the zionists who are listening and agreeing with the treachery.

What's really pathetic is every word they said is true, but it becomes sinful, because they don't believe one word of it. It's a case where to the flatterer what they are saying is a bald faced lie in order to gain something illicit. Even though what they said was entirely correct, God will judge them for the dual sins of lying flattery in order to cause mischief and harm.

But they are entirely correct. Jesus speaks and teaches what is correct and truthful, the very words of God His Father, and He does it with no partiality to anyone. These flatterers are blinded by hatred and don't believe a word of the truth they just stated. It's totally a ruse to gain power over Him by flattery.

And now comes the entrapping question. The question that has no answer that will be satisfactory to every party. The question that they hope will start a riot;

22 *“Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?”*

Lose Lose. If He answers Yes, you need to pay your taxes to Rome, the zionists will gasp. The wind will escape from that balloon. What kind of a messiah that's going to depose Rome and elevate Jerusalem as center of the world will acknowledge that Rome is deserving of jewish taxes.

Rome is evil! We pay taxes to Rome so they can build a few more temples to idols. Tax money paid to Rome is a direct affront to our God and His causes. Tax money to Rome elevates evil in the world. You're no messiah if you're in bed with evil Rome and say we have to pay taxes to those idol worshippers!

Messiah overthrows Rome! He doesn't pay taxes to Rome. Messiah will crush Rome. What's left of Rome can pay taxes to Israel.

Or . . . if He plays to the zionists, and He says absolutely not. We don't pay money to foreign idolatrous governments who have illegally occupied us.

We're going to depose Rome. No more righteous money to illegal idol worshippers. Out they go. Israel will be restored and no tribute will be paid any more to Rome.

That would fill the zionists with glee and hope. And the Herodians would go straight to Pilate and say, you've got an insurrectionist on your hands. A serious threat! All Israel has gone to follow this man who says he'll overthrow Rome. He's already told his massive followers to stop paying taxes to Rome.

Do you see how diabolical their question truly was. Either answer accomplishes their purposes. If He acquiesces to Rome He's no Messiah. And if He opposes Rome and Rome takes Him prisoner, He's no Messiah. Either way, they've got Him. Either way the dis-illusioned people will turn against Him and come back under their control. It's perfect! Diabolically perfect.

23 But He detected their trickery and said to them,

One thing they keep forgetting. They may have the mind of Satan, but He has the mind of God. John chapter 2 tells us; He knew what was in the heart of man. He reads minds. It's an unequal playing field. They should have known that. They are so blinded by their hatred that they cannot understand how far out of their league His mind is.

He reads their minds. He understands the flattery for what it is. He looks inside their hearts at the very vitriol of Satan who would have Him murdered. He see's all of that. How foolish to shake your little fist at God and make plans to subvert His will. It's suicidal, but they're too blind to see that.

Here is the answer from the mind of God that no wise person should ever challenge;

24 "Show Me a denarius. Whose likeness and inscription does it have?" And they said, "Caesar's."

Good thing the Herodians were there. The Jews did their level best to not even carry Roman coinage because they considered it idolatrous. So it might have been a challenge to even find a denarius in that crowd. But the Herodians are beyond all that. They've got some. Probably several.

A denarius was a Roman coin and it had the bust of Caesar on it. It was equivalent in value to a day's wage. That was the standard then. A denarius for a day's work. It was symbolic of Roman world dominance, this coin with Caesar's bust on it. In Rome we Trust.

And Jesus plays right into their trap; *Whose likeness and inscription does it have?*” And these guys are rubbing their hands together saying to themselves, Oh this is working even better than expected. We've totally got Him. This is gonna be a triumph for the leadership. *And they said, “Caesar's.”* And then . . . disaster. Don't pick a fight with God. You'll lose.

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.”

Bam. Give Caesar what belongs to him. Give God what belongs to Him. The profundity of that answer is jaw dropping. And it never becomes obsolete. This is still the rule of life now in our time as it was in Jesus' day.

We give to whatever government we are under the honor and obedience that it requires of us, whether good or bad.

Honor all men; love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king. 1Pet. 2:17 For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor. Ro.

13:7

And we give our heart, soul, mind, and strength to God because He owns us. Give the thing that has Caesar's image to Caesar, and give what has God's image back to God who owns it. We are image bearers of God. We belong to

Him.

Pay your taxes. Submit to every human authority put in place by God. Give the rest to God. He has all authority. Within that economy of words, Jesus defined two of the three authority structures designed by God and how we are to interact. The third authority structure not mentioned here by Jesus is family. God designed families, He designed Governments, and He designed spiritual authority, which is the church of Jesus Christ, on earth.

We are to submit to authority in all of those realms, differently from each other. We won't talk about families this morning because Jesus didn't here, but let's consider the meaning of His words. Render unto Ceasar the things that are Ceasars and unto God the things that are God's.

The government has the rights and authority to protect it's citizens. Governments make laws designed to protect the rights and freedoms of it's citizens to own property. God says you shall not steal. Government says if you steal we will punish you severely. Do not take from your neighbor what belongs to him or we'll step in and protect him and punish you.

God says you shall not murder. Government says if you murder your neighbor we may ultimately take life away from you. Certainly we'll remove you to a prison so that the rest of society is safe from you. And ultimately government says we will build up a protective force strong enough so that other governments don't come and take everything away.

But what happens when a government crosses over into the spiritual realm where God has ultimate authority. Then it gets messy.

When Ceasar says, I'll be god and you need to bow down and worship me with all of your heart, soul, mind, strength; That's a problem. When that happens they've gotten out of their lane of God given authority and crossed over into God's lane.

We've witnessed that just within the last year. When Covid started the

government took measures to protect people. That's good. That's what governments are supposed to do. We were told 1 in 4 would be missing by the time Covid had run its course. Frightening numbers.

We obediently closed up the churches to ride it out somehow as safely as possible. But 6 months later with all of those orders still in place the math wasn't adding up. I'm not saying Covid isn't dangerous. But it turned out the real death rate was something like 7 in 10,000.

The government enforced the church closures while blessing crowds of thousands out in the streets committing chaos. We Christians aren't the brightest plates in the cupboard but eventually we had to say; hey, wait a minute. This playing field isn't level. The Casinos are full but the churches are empty?

Our God has mandated us to gather together. That isn't an order to be inside the church house if the church house is on fire. But it is a mandate that had better have a very good reason to be willfully dis-obedient to it. Walmart is wide open. Costco is wide open. The marijuana dispensary is wide open, but the churches are closed?

The government had come out of its lane and into God's lane and ordered the churches to be dis-obedient to God's mandate that they not cease to gather together. The answer is in what Jesus just told these spies.

We will give Caesar what his authority demands, but we will not dis-obey God's mandate because Caesar demanded it. We have to give to God what belongs to Him. Corporate worship. Together. Saints with other saints building one another up with their gifts. Singing their hearts out to God from pure hearts. Taking the communion elements. Together. Encouraging one another as the day draws near.

Those are mandates the church has from God, and when the government tries to interfere, we must obey God and take our lumps. 7 in 10,000 is not a pandemic. 7 in 10,000 is about the odds that you'll be squashed by a truck on

the drive from your house to church. The danger level of Covid does not allow you to dis-obey God.

What happens when the Government says we have to protect our citizens and we need to prioritize who will be the protected class and who we will decide, as the government is the antagonist class. We need to protect the abused from the abuser's. We have to protect the oppressed from the oppressor's. So far so good.

But then the government gets out of its lane and decides that the Christians who hold to the authority of the words of this book as God breathed are the abusers and oppressors and the abused and oppressed are the folks who hate God and His book and His morality. Those are the folks we have to protect from the oppressors, the Christians. What happens then?

We're about to find out. Jesus' command is simple enough. But it takes a lifetime of study and a faith that does not originate with you, it's given to you by God to rightly divide between when we obey Caesar and when we hold out our hands for the cuffs because we must obey God and conscience above Caesar.

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."

If you're ignorant of what your book says, it's pretty much a lost cause trying to rightly divide. OK, what do I render to Caesar and what must I render to God. It's not so simple being a Christian in the 21st century. It wasn't simple then, either.

And what makes it most difficult is thousands and thousands of people who call themselves Christians pointing their finger at you and saying, you're a fool to die on this hill. All you had to do was compromise just a little bit more and all would've been well. Completely unnecessary. Obey your government.

24 and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds,

25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.

Hebrews 10:24,25

This is a mandate. If we're not going to physically obey this, the church house had better be on fire. God commands physical interaction of the saints, one with another, for His worship and glory, and for our good.

Well, what was the outcome on that day so long ago when these men thought they had concocted the perfect trap?

26 And they were unable to catch Him in a saying in the presence of the people; and marveling at His answer, they became silent.

Even the blinded adversaries of Jesus, who having their mouths stopped, they become silent and marvel at such an answer that only the mind of God could have devised.

No one picks a fight with God and wins. Therefore, however you divvy up what you'll give Ceasar and what you'll give God, my encouragement to you is this; You want this man, Jesus, on your side in the battle. We want to be fighting with Him, not against Him. Because He always wins. Always.