

Foothills Christian Assembly Sermon December 6, 2020

Luke 20: 21 – 26 “Worship While Subjugated”

17 Then He looked at them and said, "What then is this that is written: 'The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone'? 18 "Whoever falls on that stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder." 19 And the chief priests and the scribes that very hour sought to lay hands on Him, but they feared the people--for they knew He had spoken this parable against them.

20 So they watched Him, and sent spies who pretended to be righteous, that they might seize on His words, in order to deliver Him to the power and the authority of the governor. 21 Then they asked Him, saying, "Teacher, we know that You say and teach rightly, and You do not show personal favoritism, but teach the way of God in truth: 22 Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" 23 But He perceived their craftiness, and said to them, "Why do you test Me? 24 Show Me a denarius. Whose image and inscription does it have?" They answered and said, "Caesar's." 25 And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." 26 But they could not catch Him in His words in the presence of the people. And they marveled at His answer and kept silent.

27 Then some of the Sadducees, who deny that there is a resurrection, came to Him and asked Him, 28 saying: "Teacher, Moses wrote to us that if a man's brother dies, having a wife, and he dies without children, his brother should take his wife and raise up offspring for his brother. 29 Now there were seven brothers. And the first took a wife, and died without children. 30 And the second took her as wife, and he died childless. 31 Then the third took her, and in like manner the seven also; and they left no children, and died. 32 Last of all the woman died also. 33 Therefore, in the resurrection, whose wife does she become? For all seven had her as wife." 34 And Jesus answered and said to them, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage. 35 But those who are counted worthy to attain that age, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; 36 nor can they die anymore, for they are equal to the angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection. 37 But even Moses showed in the burning bush passage that the dead are raised, when he called the Lord 'the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' 38 For He is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live to Him." 39 Then some of the scribes answered and said, "Teacher, You have spoken well." 40 But after that they dared not question Him anymore.

I. Introduction

- a. **“Seleucids** (si-loo´sidz), a dynasty of Hellenistic kings that ruled an area including, at various times, Bactria, Persia, Babylonia, Syria, and southern Asia Minor. The name originates from Seleucus I Nicator, son of Antiochus, one of the generals of Alexander. In the struggle for power following Alexander’s death in 323 bce, Seleucus was eventually successful in carrying out a series of moves that made him one of the most powerful of the Diadochi (“successor kings”).<sup>1</sup>
  - i. The successful war for independence by Judas Maccabeus began under the Seleucid reign over the Jews, after the Seleucid ruler attempted to force pagan worship inside the Jewish Temple. (~167BC) This eventually

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<sup>1</sup> Garcia-Treto, F. O. (2011). [Seleucids](#). In M. A. Powell (Ed.), *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary (Revised and Updated)* (Third Edition, p. 932). New York: HarperCollins.

led to the establishment of the (Maccabean) Jewish Hasmonean rule of the Jews. This rule came to an end after internal strife and warfare was settled by the Roman governor of Syria, Pompey, and at this time, Herod the Great became the pro-Roman ruler of the Jews. They were at that time, by God's Providence, brought under subjugation to Roman rule by Herod the Great (a practicing Jew), and they accepted it because it brought peace and prosperity. Herod the Great brought great internal improvement via many building projects, including his work to build up the Temple. He ruled from 37BC to 4 BC and is mentioned in the Gospels as the evil ruler who killed so many little boys under 2 years of age.

- b. Today's Sermon: Luke 20: 21 – 26 "Worship While Subjugated"
  - i. V20 The Setting – A trap
  - ii. V21 The Flattery
  - iii. V22 The Trick Question
  - iv. V23 Christ Aware of their deception
  - v. V24 Christ's Question of Coinage
  - vi. V25 Christ's Answer: Worship While Subjugated
  - vii. V26 The deceivers are silenced
  - viii. Questions to know, love and obey God
- II. V20 The Setting – A trap
  - a. 20 So they watched Him, and sent spies who pretended to be righteous, that they might seize on His words, in order to deliver Him to the power and the authority of the governor.
    - i. We discussed this conspiracy last week. Christ has defeated all the public attempts of Jewish leaders to embarrass Him in front of the people. They will no longer risk their own reputations, so they move to the background and hatch this criminal enterprise, using spies and their greed-lubricated network of connections to entrap Jesus into treason against the Romans (ideally) or at least offending the people. Instead of being seized by the Word of Christ, they sought to seize on His words.
- III. V21 The Flattery
  - a. 21 Then they asked Him, saying, "Teacher, we know that You say and teach rightly, and You do not show personal favoritism, but teach the way of God in truth:
    - i. Note all the ways these spies seek to gain Christ's confidence. They use an honorable title, "Teacher", and they praise His teaching because He teaches God's Way without regard to individual favoritism. These are all impressive compliments. A normal man may not have realized these snakes were using personal favoritism.
    - ii. In addition, we know from Matthew and Mark that the Pharisees and the Herodians are present for this attack. Usually, these two groups opposed one another on such political questions, the Pharisees opposing paying the Roman tax, and the Herodians favoring it, but here we see them unite against Jesus Christ our Lord.

1. Note: what are usually enemies will unite for a time together against God and His people.
- iii. Henry “Thus they thought to flatter him into an incautious freedom and openness with them, and so to gain their point. They that are proud, and love to be commended, will be brought to do any thing for those that will but flatter them, and speak kindly to them; but they were much mistaken who thought thus to impose upon the humble Jesus. He was not pleased with the testimony of such hypocrites, nor thought himself honored by it.”<sup>2</sup>
  1. Note, Christ, being humble and wise, possesses perfect discretion. We, because of our pride and foolishness possess imperfect discretion and are truly vulnerable targets for flattery, lest we fall wholly on Christ’s glory and wisdom for discernment.
- iv. Their flattery is indeed a good description of an honest preacher.
  1. Calvin “And therefore from their words we may obtain a definition of a good and faithful teacher, such as they pretended to believe Christ to be. They say that he is *true, and teaches the way of God*; that is, he is a faithful interpreter of God, and that he teaches it *in truth*; that is, without any corruption. ... So then he ought to be reckoned a *true teacher*, who does not introduce the contrivances of men, or depart from the pure word of God, but gives out, as it were, with his hands what he has learned from the mouth of God, and who, from a sincere desire of edification, accommodates his doctrine to the advantage and salvation of the people, and does not debase it by any disguise. ... It is also worthy of attention, that those hypocrites likewise add, that Christ teaches rightly, *because he has no regard for the person of men*. Nothing has a more powerful tendency to withdraw teachers from a faithful and upright dispensation of the word than to pay *respect* to men; for it is impossible that any one who *desires to please men* (Gal. 1:10) should truly devote himself to God. Some attention, no doubt, is due to men, but not so as to obtain their favour by flattery. In short, in order to walk uprightly, we must necessarily put away *respect of persons*, which *obscures the light and perverts right judgment*”<sup>3</sup>
    - a. Note, any preacher of God’s Word can only be faithful as he has regard for the Person of Christ above all men, thus ever striving to speak only that which is pleasing to Christ and in accord with His Word.

#### IV. V22 The Trick Question

- a. 22 Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"

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<sup>2</sup> Henry, M. (1994). [\*Matthew Henry’s commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume\*](#) (p. 1897). Peabody: Hendrickson.

<sup>3</sup> Calvin, J., & Pringle, W. (2010). [\*Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke\*](#) (Vol. 3, pp. 42–43). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

- b. So, now these spies bring out their trick question with an appeal to the law. They ask if it is lawful.
    - i. To what law do they refer. It is not clear and is a nicely contrived question, veiled in ambiguity. Certainly the Herodians would be focused upon the Roman law of paying tribute to Caesar, and the Pharisees upon Jewish law, seeking to draw out the apparent dilemma. Yet, they both are but babes in understanding God and His Ways in this earth.
    - ii. Bock “The question that the spies put forward involves taxes paid directly to Rome, specifically the poll tax (... References to such foreign taxes are common in Josephus ... This tax stands in contrast to the τέλος (*telos*; BAGD 812 §3; BAA 1619 §3), an indirect tax gathered by tax collectors in toll booths. The poll tax was paid directly to Caesar, in this case, Tiberius. As such it acknowledged and honored the emperor. In asking whether it is “legal” (ἐξέστιν, *exestin*) to pay this tax, the leaders are in effect asking, “Are God’s people exempt from paying such a tax to a foreign power? Jesus, are you loyal to Israel, looking for its independence, or should we knuckle under to Rome?”<sup>4</sup>
- V. V23 Christ Aware of their deception
- a. 23 But He perceived their craftiness, and said to them, "Why do you test Me?
    - i. First, before answering, Christ our Lord openly informs them that He understands they are not their with an honest question, but rather are seeking to have Him fail their entrapment test.
    - ii. Henry “Note, Those that are most crafty in their designs against Christ and his gospel cannot with all their art conceal them from his cognizance. He can see through the most politic disguises, and so break through the most dangerous snare; for *surely in vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird*. He did not give them a direct answer, but reproved them for offering to impose upon him—*Why tempt ye me?*”<sup>5</sup>
    - iii. We should note Christ’s wisdom and courage here. Not only does He see their hidden design, He tells them so. How might we have similar wisdom and courage? Maybe via open statements of observation followed by real questions if insight, like Christ?
- VI. V24 Christ’s Question of Coinage
- a. 24 Show Me a denarius. Whose image and inscription does it have?" They answered and said, "Caesar's."
  - b. So, instead of answering their trick question, Christ puts them on notice that He knows what they are up to, and He then calls for a denarius as the focal point of His response. He does this to show forth the reality of their situation. They are in subjugation to Rome. Their question has already been answered by God’s Providence.

<sup>4</sup> Bock, D. L. (1996). [Luke: 9:51–24:53](#) (Vol. 2, p. 1611). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

<sup>5</sup> Henry, M. (1994). [Matthew Henry’s commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume](#) (p. 1897). Peabody: Hendrickson.

- i. Calvin “When Christ orders them to bring forward a coin, though at first sight it appears to be of no great importance, yet it is sufficient for breaking their snares. In this way they had already made an acknowledgment of subjection, so that Christ did not find it necessary to enjoin upon them any thing new. The coin was stamped with *Cesar’s likeness*; and thus the authority of the Roman government had been approved and admitted by the general practice. Hence it was evident that the Jews themselves had voluntarily come under obligation to pay tribute, for they had given up to the Romans the power of the sword; and there was no propriety in making a separate dispute about *the tribute-money*, for that question depended on the general arrangements of the government.”<sup>6</sup>
  - 1. These misled Pharisees did not know how to deal with God’s Providence of subjugation to a foreign, God-hating power. They were focused upon flesh and blood enemies and such attempts usually fail in bloodshed, imprisonment and wider shame and suspicion upon the people of God.
  - 2. Bock “By producing this coin, they indicate that they carry on trade with it ... They use these coins without blinking an eye, thus the question’s edge is lost in their daily practice. They live in the state and freely use its currency.”<sup>7</sup>
- c. Once the denarius is on display, Jesus asks them whose “image and likeness” is on the coin. Ownership is in view. Authority is brought forth in the concept of ownership. And, “image and inscription” would certainly have reminded the Jews how God made man in His image and likeness, owned and commanded by Him.
  - i. Bock “Ancient coins usually had some written indication of the coin’s nature and an image of the ruler, which would offend the Jews, who did not put images on coins, especially images that represented deity (Exod. 20:4, 23 [20:4, 20 njpsv]). For example, the inscription on a silver Tiberian denarius reads, “Tiberius Caesar, Augustus, son of divine Augustus.” On the reverse side his mother Livia is portrayed as an incarnation of the goddess of peace, along with the inscription “high priest” (Fitzmyer 1985: 1296; Marshall 1978: 735–36).”<sup>8</sup>
- d. There is only one answer these spies can give. “Caesar”
  - i. Jesus takes them right into the heart of their question by using the very coin in question, and all this points to their subjugation to Caesar. Jesus emphasized their political reality in answering the question.

## VII. V25 Christ’s Answer: Worship While Subjugated

<sup>6</sup> Calvin, J., & Pringle, W. (2010). [\*Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke\*](#) (Vol. 3, pp. 43–44). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

<sup>7</sup> Bock, D. L. (1996). [\*Luke: 9:51–24:53\*](#) (Vol. 2, p. 1612). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

<sup>8</sup> Bock, D. L. (1996). [\*Luke: 9:51–24:53\*](#) (Vol. 2, p. 1612). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

- a. 25 And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."
- b. Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's: Subjugation life
  - i. Therefore: Jesus has established that this coin belongs to Caesar because it has his image and his inscription. And, by voluntarily using this coin in their commerce, the Jews are using that which is Caesar's to carry out their business. Thus, they have already granted to Caesar the authority to tax some of these very coins because these coins clearly belong to Caesar.
    - 1. This is a powerful monetary principle. The maker of the coin/money is ultimately the owner of the money and may take it back. Lots to think about here in terms of building Biblical economies.
  - ii. So, Jesus indirectly tells them to pay the Roman tribute, but does so by relying upon the Providence of God that has established Caesar as their governing power. This submission to God's Providence is directly in view in Romans 13:1,2
    - 1. "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves."
    - 2. While this brings up the broader, deeper question of when disobedience to civil rule is accepted/required, nonetheless, note that when God places a people under a God-hating political rule, answers about taxation/currency must lean heavily upon the Providence of God in placing such a government over His people. Why did He do this? How will He deliver us?
    - 3. Bock "Jesus says to pay the tax, but he asserts the need to honor God as well. Since ἀποδίδωμι (*apodidōmi*) often means to pay back a debt (BAGD 90 §2; BAA 180 §1; Matt. 5:26; 18:25–26, 28–29, 34; Luke 7:42; 10:35; 12:59; 19:8), by using this term, Jesus acknowledges the genuine existence of civic debt and the need to pay it. His answer implies recognition of political government's authority and also seems to recognize God's providence in the midst of that rule, much like Rom. 13:1–7 (Arndt 1956: 407; 1 Pet. 2:13–17) "<sup>9</sup>
  - iii. Thus, God uses God-hating governments to bring in debased currency and heavy taxation as a means to call His people back to Himself. The money and the power should not have belonged to the Romans, but it did. This daily experience was placed their by God as a discipline. Would they repent, or in fleshly response, rebel?

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<sup>9</sup> Bock, D. L. (1996). [Luke: 9:51–24:53](#) (Vol. 2, p. 1613). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

1. Gamaliel understood this well enough in Acts 5: “When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death. 34 But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while. 35 Then he addressed the Sanhedrin: “Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. 36 Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. 37 After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered. 38 Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. 39 But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.”
- iv. Yet, obviously, Caesar does not own all things. And, in fact, Caesar is owned by God. So, the question of ownership and authority shows that Caesar will be held accountable by God, and when Caesar tries to take that which belongs to God, the Lord will not hold him guiltless.
  1. Point: God will bring His judgments, and when He does, will His people be found faithful?
- c. “[render] to God the things that are God's." – Worship while subjugated
  - i. In this statement, our Lord points more deeply to why the Jews are in subjugation in the first place. They have not been living lives of faithful service and love to their God Who owns them and all things. Their rebellion toward God is the foundation for their subjugation to the Romans.
  - ii. In addition, the Lord Christ shows them the way out of their subjugation to Rome. Live the life of faithful love and obedience to God that His Word requires, crying out to Him for mercy, and they could be delivered. Conversely, if they do not repent before God and then go on to use human effort to fight Rome, the prior massacres of small rebellions will be nothing compared to what will come upon them.
  - iii. Henry “in sacred things God only is your King. You are not bound to be of Caesar’s religion; you must *render to God the things that are God’s*, must worship and adore him only, and not any golden image that Caesar sets up;” and we must worship and adore him in such way as he had appointed, and not according to the inventions of Caesar. It is God only that has authority to say *My son, give me thy heart.*”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Henry, M. (1994). [\*Matthew Henry’s commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume\*](#) (p. 1897). Peabody: Hendrickson.



- iv. Ps 24 “The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness, The world and those who dwell therein. 2 For He has founded it upon the seas, And established it upon the waters.”
- v. Note: we may always worship and obey God, no matter what is happening in this fallen world.
  - 1. Psalm 23 “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. 2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. 3 He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake. 4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me 5 You prepare a table before me **in the presence of my enemies**; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever.”

VIII. V26 The deceivers are silenced

- a. 26 But they could not catch Him in His words in the presence of the people. And they marveled at His answer and kept silent.
  - i. Again, we see the futility of all those who would seek to outwit God. Even His foes will marvel at Him and keep silent. This text echoes the final reality for all who die still attempting to trick God and evade Him.
  - ii. Romans 3:19 “19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.”
  - iii. Calvin “Here, too, it appears how God turns to a different purpose the wicked attempts of His enemies, and not only disappoints their expectation, but even drives them back with disgrace. It will sometimes happen, no doubt, that wicked men, though vanquished, do not cease to growl; but, though their insolence be not subdued, however numerous may be their assaults on the Word of God, there is an equal number of victories which God has in his hand, to triumph over them and Satan their head. But in this reply, Christ intended to give a peculiar display of his glory, by compelling those men to depart crowned with shame.”<sup>11</sup>
- b. As the people of God, let us be encouraged by the victory of Christ in this attempt of evil to snare Him. Let us always remember He makes us more than conquerors in Him, no matter what the devil may bring our way, no matter what failures or difficulties we may face here in the battle.

IX. Questions to know, love and obey God

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<sup>11</sup> Calvin, J., & Pringle, W. (2010). [\*Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke\*](#) (Vol. 3, pp. 45–46). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.