

The 21st Sunday after Pentecost

“God’s gracious Gospel loophole given in Jesus’ name” (Matthew 22:15-21)

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our text for this 21st Sunday after Pentecost is from our Gospel reading, Matthew 22:15-21.

“15 Then the Pharisees went and plotted how they might entangle Him in His talk. 16 And they sent to Him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that You are true, and teach the way of God in truth; nor do You care about anyone, for You do not regard the person of men. 17 Tell us, therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?” 18 But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, “Why do you test Me, you hypocrites? 19 Show Me the tax money.” So they brought Him a denarius. 20 And He said to them, “Whose image and inscription is this?” 21 They said to Him, “Caesar’s.” And He said to them, “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”

So far the text...

“Render”... Now that’s a word that we don’t use very often, but we certainly know all about taxes. Nobody likes to pay taxes, but they are a part of life. And Jesus acknowledges this, doesn’t He?

Some Bible translations choose the word “give” for the word “render”. “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s”. Well, that’s a good start. Taxes certainly involve a giving of your checkbook to the Government’s treasury. But the exact meaning is to “give back” or “restore”. Paying taxes are a giving back to the government for services that are owed. Whether we like it or not, a percentage of what we earn belongs to the government. Another good translation for “render” would be “pay back”.

The government which exists by God’s authority must be obeyed because God gives the government its authority. That’s the 4th commandment. “Honor your

father and mother”. Parents are the authorities that God has established in the family for good order, peace, and especially the teaching of God’s word to the children.

What is the meaning of the 4th commandment? Luther explains: *“We should fear and love God that we may not despise nor anger our parents and other authorities, but give them honor, serve, obey, and hold them in love and esteem.”*

Jesus wants us to enjoy peace, prosperity, and protection in our nation. Yes, render to Caesar what’s Caesar’s so that Caesar can build and maintain roads, schools, military, veterans benefits, police protection, health services, social security etc. The dollar gets divided up according to how the people want their government to be run.

Now, in the convoluted tax system that we have, there are legal ways to reduce your taxes that the government allows – loopholes. Basically, you are not required to pay more than what you owe, so make sure you know the loopholes.

But this is just the first part of Jesus’ answer to the spies that the pharisees sent to Him to try and trick Him, isn’t it.

The pharisees plotted to destroy Jesus, because they didn’t accept His authority. This is Tuesday of Holy Week still Jesus was asked the question whether it was lawful to pay taxes to Caesar. The pharisees had demanded from Jesus to know by whose authority Jesus was healing people in the temple and teaching them. And as we have been hearing these past Sundays in the vineyard parables, Jesus warned them that by rejecting Him, they were in fact rejecting God. For Jesus is God’s Son. And in fact, the workers in the vineyard seize the owner’s son and kill him, because they believe that they can take the inheritance by force.

So, this trap was cunningly laid. First, a few compliments which they didn’t believe **“Teacher, we know that You are true, and teach the way of God in truth; nor do You care about anyone, for You do not regard the person of men.”** And then the trap. If Jesus says it’s not lawful to pay taxes, then He’s in trouble with the government. If He says it is lawful, then Jesus will not be well liked by the people who despise the Roman government.

But, Jesus saw through their hypocrisy.

“Why do you test Me, you hypocrites? 19 Show Me the tax money.” So they brought Him a denarius.20 And He said to them, “Whose image and inscription is this?” 21 They said to Him, “Caesar’s.” And He said to them, “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”

And they left speechless and marveling at His words.

For it is required of each of us, to render, give back, pay back what is God’s. And what is God’s? Everything. We, ourselves belong to God. We owe everything to God for He has given us everything including what the government gives and more...our very life, health, families, work, food, home, clothing, friends...etc.

But most of all, He has given Himself to us. On all our currency, we have a phrase that reminds us who is the higher authority, who reigns above all governments, who establishes all governments, who controls the universe. “In God we trust”.

The pharisees were not willing to acknowledge that Jesus was true God. We know you are “true”, but they would not acknowledge Jesus as “true God”. They would not acknowledge His authority. They would not pay back to Jesus the honor due to Him. They would not trust Him, but rejected Him.

Whose image is on the coin? Caesar’s. In whose image was Adam and Eve made? God’s. God’s image was given to Adam and Eve. His holiness, an intimate perfect, sinless relationship with the Creator. But that image was lost in the fall of man. Adam and Eve rejected God’s authority and desired to become gods themselves.

Payback what you owe me, God says. I made you perfect and you owe Me perfection. You owe me complete holiness. And man has tried in many and countless ways to payback what is owed to God by trying to keep the commandments, trying to love God with all one’s heart, mind and strength and one’s neighbor as oneself. Man has tricked himself into believing that he or she can payback to God what is owed by saying thousands of prayers or giving thousands of dollars. But that is impossible. Impossible for man. Impossible for you and me.

So, God in His great love, who doesn't desire any person to be lost forever paid the sin tax. He paid it not with the blood of bulls or goats, but with the precious blood of His Son Jesus. Jesus paid all that is owed for every person's sin, yours and mine.

Jesus willingly went to the cross at the hands of deceitful, conniving men who rejected Him. God used their evil for His good. By Jesus' death the sins of the world were paid. God restored His creation. This is the Gospel loophole. We don't owe God anything for our sins for we could never payback God with our works. The Gospel loophole is the work of Jesus on the cross for all. It's by grace! Grace alone that we are saved!

And God in His loving heart gives this gift freely to all people with His invitation to come to the wedding feast as we heard last week. All is ready. Just come! Jesus has rendered the sin tax payment. Come celebrate the King's Son's wedding to His people that He has redeemed!

And God in His loving heart gives this gift of redemption freely through His means of grace – the waters of baptism. By water and word, God gives to us what Jesus paid on the cross – His righteousness. The robe of Christ's righteousness is placed on the baptized child or adult and Jesus presents you to His Father as perfect and holy!

In baptism sinful man's lost image is restored. God claims you who have been baptized as His own, gladly calls you His own, for what separated you from Him has been removed – your sin. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you receive your new image – a holy child of God- a member of the royal priesthood, the holy nation, the communion of saints! What joy it is for us to witness God doing this in the lives of Ryan and Raegan this day!

It's all God's doing! He renders to Himself payment for our sins by the blood of Jesus and gives to you baptized child of God entrance into the heavenly banquet for you are now robed with the wedding attire needed to enter heaven! This is the Gospel, the Gospel loophole that God alone created by the sending of His Son into the world to pay for all our sins. Yes, we marvel at God's love for us!

In God we trust. In Jesus the Savior we trust. And we joyfully give back to God our lives in humble service for all He has done! Amen.

“The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)