

HEAR MINISTRIES

SERMON FOR **October 18th, 2026**

Text: Isaiah 45:1-7, I Thessalonians 1:1-10, Matthew 22:15-22

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*Prayer: Lord, as we listen to Your Word today, clear our hearts and minds of anything that is distracting us. By the power of Your Holy Spirit, show us today, through Your Word, how we can heed Your call to **honor You first** as citizens of two kingdoms. And, Lord, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be pleasing in Your sight. Amen.*

(Hold up a coin.) Do you know which Presidents have their pictures stamped on American coins? There are several: (Time for answers)

George Washington – \$1 coin (since 1932), quarter (since 1932)

Thomas Jefferson – \$2 coin (since 1976) and nickel (since 1938).

Abraham Lincoln – \$5 coin (since 1914) and cent (since 1909)

Andrew Jackson – \$20 coin (since 1928)

Ulysses S. Grant – \$50 coin (since 1914)

Franklin D. Roosevelt – dime (since 1946)

John F. Kennedy – half dollar (since 1964)

On these coins we see the face of a leader who represents authority in our country – an administration that sets the rules in our nation and to whom we submit, in a sense. In Biblical times a picture of the reigning King would be on the coins, indicating allegiance to that ruler.

Now, imagine looking into a mirror. **Whose image do you see?** Is it just your own reflection or is there something deeper....something divine....printed on your very being?

Our **Scripture Readings for today all deal with the sovereign authority of God and how He uses rulers and ordinary believers to fulfill His purposes.** He calls us to live in a way that honors Him, respects authority and bears witness to His authority through our actions.

Isaiah says **God calls and shapes even those who don't know Him.** **Paul** says the **Thessalonians became "imitators of the Lord,"** reflecting God's image so clearly that their faith "rang out" across the region. In **Matthew, Jesus affirms that God is Lord of all,** including earthly authority, and that ultimate allegiance must be paid to Him. Typically, this Matthew text focuses on taxes that need to be paid. But **our Scripture Readings today are REALLY about a bigger issue: Our Identity. Whose image do we bear?**

In our **Old Testament Reading, Isaiah 45:1-7,** God speaks to **Cyrus, a Persian King who doesn't even know who God is.** God calls Cyrus "*My Anointed.*" (*Isaiah 45:1*) God uses Cyrus to accomplish His purposes – freeing the Israelites and demonstrating that God alone is the Lord.

This is actually shocking! **God's image and authority are not confined to the "religious" sphere.** He can work through kings, nations and even those who don't acknowledge Him (remember Balaam's donkey?).

The truth is, **if God can use Cyrus (who was not a believer), He can use anyone – including you and me – to accomplish His purposes in the world. His image in us is not for decoration – it is functional. It's meant to be lived out in action.**

In our **New Testament Reading, I Thessalonians 1:1-10,** the Apostle Paul writes to the Thessalonians, **praising them for becoming "imitators of us and of the Lord."** (*I Thessalonians 1:6*) Their faith had become so visible that it "rang out" across the region! The members of the house church in Thessalonica bore the image of Christ – not just in belief, but in behavior. **They turned away from idols and pagan practices to serve the living God,** and were waiting for Jesus to return.

Bearing God's image is not a private thing. I know many people consider their faith to be a private thing between them and God. But, bearing the image of God and living for Christ, is not just a private thing. **It is a public testimony.** People should be able to look at us and see something different than they see in the rest of the world. **They should be able to see something of Jesus in us: His compassion, His truth, His courage and His grace.**

We are getting close to the time of year when children enjoy going "trick-or-treating." I wondered **where the idea of "tricks" came from?** Apparently it is a mixture of cultural traditions in which people would show up at the homes of neighbors with masks on and try to "trick" the person into thinking they were someone else. The person wearing the mask would ask if they had "tricked" the neighbor and, if so, they would get a treat.

Have you ever experienced anyone trying to trick you? Maybe someone tried to trick you into saying or doing something that would make you look foolish?

Well, today in our **Gospel Reading, Matthew 22:15-22**, the Pharisees (who strictly adhered to Jewish Law) and the Herodians (who were a political party that supported Roman rule) tried to “trick” or trap Jesus with a politically charged question about paying taxes to Caesar (*Matthew 22:15-16*). **Their goal** was to force Jesus into a statement **that would either alienate the Jewish people** (who represented Roman taxation), **or provoke the Roman authorities**, potentially leading to Jesus’ arrest. This encounter actually took place during Jesus’ final week in Jerusalem, following His teachings and parables that challenged the religious leaders. Tensions were high between the politicians and the religious leaders. The Pharisees and Herodians were hoping Jesus would fall prey to their trickery and embarrass Himself in front of His followers so the people would become disillusioned with Jesus and stop following Him.

Well, Jesus was aware of the trap being set for Him. He also knew the hearts and intentions of those who questioned Him. So, everyone in the crowd was eager to hear what Jesus had to say as He prepared to deliver a response that would not only avoid their trap but also reveal a deeper truth about the relationship between earthly authorities and God’s Kingdom.

Here is Jesus’ dilemma: If He opposes the tax, He risks offending the Roman authorities. If He supports it, He risks alienating His Jewish followers who resent the Roman occupation.

So, when Jesus asks for a coin and says, “*Whose image(or likeness) is this? And whose inscription?*” (*Matthew 22:20*), He is doing more than evading a trap. He uses the coin to illustrate a deeper principle. **The coin bears Caesar’s image, which represents earthly authority. Humans bear God’s image** (“...so God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” *Genesis 1:27*), **indicating divine authority over our lives.**

The Pharisees and Herodians wanted to trap Jesus into choosing whether the Jewish people should be loyal to the Roman ruler by paying taxes. **Jesus sidestepped their trick with a deeper truth and a bigger issue: the coin (we are like a coin) in the hand of Jesus reflected the image of the human ruler, indicating they were to bear the image of Roman rule and respect that authority.**

We, as God’s “coins” (so to speak), bear the image of God. Therefore, **our primary allegiance is to God.** Our identity, (who we are, what we believe, how we act) are all a reflection of God. This means our very selves – our hearts, minds, bodies and lives – belong to Him. Our actions and our witness reflect God’s authority.

The real question here is not about taxes or politics. **It's about identity or authority. If we bear God's image, then our identity, our loyalty, our worship, our obedience and our love all belong to God.**

Jesus' response to the religious leaders **emphasizes the concept of dual loyalty** by instructing to render to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's. This means **we are called to give respect and obedience to both earthly authorities and to God**, each in their rightful places. Having said that, **our loyalty to God must always take precedence over our loyalty to the state.** We are called to be good citizens by obeying the laws of the land, as long as they do not contradict the commands of God. **Our ultimate allegiance is to God**, and we are to prioritize following His will above all else.

Balancing loyalty to God and the state requires discernment and wisdom in understanding when the two line up and when they may come into conflict.

Imagine a man named Charlie who runs a small business. Charlie struggles with the ethical implications of paying taxes, knowing that some of his money potentially funds things he disagrees with. As a Christian, Charlie realizes that, while he must fulfill his civic duties (like paying taxes), his ultimate accountability is to God. This perspective brings him peace and clarity. He begins to focus on how he can honor God in his business practices, from treating his employees fairly to contributing to his community.

The encounter between Jesus and the Pharisees offers timeless wisdom. It teaches us to navigate the complexities of civic and spiritual responsibilities with **integrity and clarity**. It is important for us to remember that we bear God's image and owe our highest allegiance to Him. Think about that. **What image of God do people have when they look at each of us individually?** That is a sobering question to make us think about how we reflect the image of God to others.

If we bear God's image, how can we live it out? Here are three ways to think about:

1. **Reflect His Character** – Let our words and actions mirror His truth, mercy and justice. **Be honest, speaking the truth in love, and always maintain integrity in all our actions.** Sometimes that might mean speaking and sometimes NOT!
2. **Represent His Kingdom** – Whether in our workplace, home, community or church, we are actually ambassadors (representatives) of God's way of thinking, acting and loving.
3. **Return to Him What is His** – Our time, talents and treasures are not ultimately ours. They are entrusted to us by God for His glory! We can never outgive God and He will always honor our giving. Remember, *“God loves a cheerful giver.” (II Corinthians 9:7)*

He knows our hearts and our motives/attitudes when we give. A begrudging, grumpy giver is not really representative of God's Kingdom!

This morning we have seen how **Isaiah shows God's work through human instruments;** how **faith transformed the lives of the Thessalonians into living testimony;** and how **Jesus in Matthew calls for respectful engagement with earthly authority.** Together, they point to a life where belief is expressed through obedience, respect and witness.

Every morning, when you look in the mirror, remember: You are not just seeing You. **You are seeing the image of the One who made you, redeemed you, and calls you His own!** The coin may bear Caesar's image, but we bear the image of the King of Kings. So, let's give to God what is God's – our whole self!

Amen.