

Pentecost 5/Independence Day
July 4, 2010

Matthew 22:15-22
617-618-397/620-619

God Blesses America (a Country)

- I. As we “give to Caesar what is Caesar’s.”
- II. As we “give to God what is God’s.”

Dear Christian friends,

Today we thank God for the **blessing** of being Americans. We realize that our country is FAR from perfect. America has its problems and definitely needs our prayers. But we must also admit that God has SO RICHLY blessed us. **Despite our gripping** we enjoy a HIGH STANDARD of living. We love our country. We are proud of our country. We sing from our hearts, “GOD BLESS America.”

We don’t see such GRATITUDE or PATRIOTISM in these verses. It’s just the opposite. There’s resentment and **bitterness** . The Jews weren’t a free people. They had been conquered by the Romans. They lived under FOREIGN OCCUPATION. Their taxes supported a **foreign government** – a Caesar who thought he was god on earth. They were no way a Jew would sing, “God bless the **Roman empire**.”

But we sing and pray, “God bless America.” As we look at these verses we see that GOD BLESSES AMERICA – God blesses a COUNTRY – 1)as we “give to Caesar what is Caesar’s” and 2)as we “give to God what is God’s.”

I. As we “give to Caesar what is Caesar’s.”

We heard Paul say before, **“Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.”** As Christians we RECOGNIZE that God establishes a government – that government is GOD’S SERVANT – that government has GOD-GIVEN power – **God-given authority** – **God-given responsibilities**. **“God establishes”** a government but God DOESN’T ENDORSE any one particular form of government. God at times establishes a **monarchy** – a dictatorship – a **republic**. God uses a government to BLESS a country – or at times to PUNISH a people.

We can see that in Israel’s history. **History** is not just the BORING RECORD of war – politics – **greed** – **intrigue**. History is finally GOD IN CONTROL working all things **according** to HIS plans and schedule. Or as Psalm 2 put it, **“the One enthroned in heaven laughs.”**

At this point in Israel’s history God had established **“Caesar”** – the **Roman empire** – as Israel’s government. That didn’t sit well with the Jews – JUST AS we wouldn’t like it if **America was ruled** by a foreign country.

But there was one thing that UPSET the Pharisees **more than the Romans**. That was Jesus. They just had to GET RID of Jesus. They thought they had the PERFECT PLAN. They teamed up with the **“Herodians”** – a political party that **backed** King Herod. Now the Romans had made Herod a king so Herod supported Roman rule. THESE TWO GROUPS – the pro-Roman “Herodians” and the anti-Roman Pharisees – came to Jesus. **“Tell us, what is Your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?”** They figured that NO MATTER HOW Jesus answered **He’d lose**. To say yes to **paying taxes** would cost Jesus POPULAR SUPPORT. To say no to paying taxes would make Jesus guilty of **treason** against Rome.

Jesus’ answer caught them BY SURPRISE. He asked them for a coin. Jesus looked stupid asking, **“whose portrait is this and whose inscription?”** EVERYBODY knew it was **“Caesar’s.”** They

wanted to trap Jesus ***“in His words”*** but Jesus trapped them in their words. By answering that the money was ***“Caesar’s”*** that settled the question of WHO WAS their government. The money you use SHOWS WHAT COUNTRY you’re living in. Using Roman money PROVED they lived in the Roman empire and lived under Roman authority.

With that settled Jesus went on, ***“therefore give to Caesar what is Caesar’s.”*** The government has the GOD-GIVEN RESPONSIBILITY of providing law and order. We have GOD-GIVEN RESPONSIBILITIES to our government. As we carry out our responsibilities GOD BLESSES America – God blesses a country.

What do we OWE our government? Paul told us before, ***“If you owe taxes, pay taxes.”*** Honestly paying our taxes is part of our GOD-GIVEN responsibilities as a citizen. Notice this is NOTHING TO DO with who the government is – what the tax rate is – if we agree with the tax or not.

We also owe our government OBEDIENCE and RESPECT. Go back to what Paul said before. ***“He who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has established.”*** And, ***“If you owe respect, then respect.”*** We may not have voted for a person – we may not like their personal morals or support their political opinions – but we STILL OWE them respect and obedience. When Paul wrote this he was LIVING UNDER a corrupt – pagan – anti-Christian government. But Paul didn’t preach CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE or rebellion.

We owe obedience even if we DON’T LIKE a law. We may not like the speed limit or some fishing restriction but we HAVE NO RIGHT to ignore or disobey the law. Paul instructed Titus to ***“re-mind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be peaceable and considerate.”*** Peter wrote, ***“submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every authority instituted among men. Fear God, honor the king.”*** The ONLY TIME we can and must disobey is when the government goes against God’s Word. We had the example of the three men in the fiery furnace in the OT reading. ***“We must obey God rather than men.”***

We also owe the government our PRAYERS. Jeremiah told the Jews who were living in exile in Babylon, ***“Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which the Lord has carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it.”*** Paul wrote Timothy, ***“I urge that requests, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings be made for everyone – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good and pleases God our Savior.”*** Since the prayers of unbelievers are WASTED on false gods it is so important for us Christians to pray to the ONE REAL GOD for our country.

As we live as RESPONSIBLE – LOYAL – OBEDIENT – RESPECTFUL – PRAYERFUL citizens God blesses America. Such lives promote peace and order and stability in a country.

“Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s,” Jesus told them. But He wasn’t done. There was a BIGGER PRINCIPLE here than simply paying taxes. GOD BLESSES America – a country...

II. As we “give to God what is God’s.”

These enemies of Jesus tried to BUTTER Him up with flattery. ***“Teacher, we know You are a man of integrity and that You teach the way of God in accordance with the truth.”*** If they really believed that then WHY DIDN’T they show that by following Jesus? Jesus wasn’t fooled by them. He ***“knew their evil intent.”*** He calls them ***“hypocrites.”*** They were pretending to like Jesus when they really wanted nothing to do with Him.

Let's start right there with WHAT WE OWE God. We owe God HONESTY. Can you see some hypocrisy in **your own** life? We TALK about loving Jesus – following Jesus – trusting Jesus. But **at times** are we MORE IN LOVE with ourselves than with Jesus? Are we more wanting Jesus to FOLLOW US wherever we lead Him? Are we more trusting of our OWN IDEAS and FEELINGS than of God's Word and promises? If we see such hypocrisy let's BE HONEST about it and repent of it. Our relationship with God is NOT BUILT on hypocrisy but **honesty**.

“God to God what is God's.” FIRST and FOREMOST we are to ***“give God”*** our hearts. God says in Proverbs, ***“My son, give Me your heart and let your eyes keep to My ways.”*** The ***“greatest commandment”*** is ***“LOVE the LORD your God with ALL your heart and ALL your soul and ALL your strength.”***

We owe God our EARS – that we listen to Him and learn from Him. Jesus REALLY IS our ***“Teacher, who teaches the way of God in accordance with the truth.”*** Jesus HONESTLY and TRUTHFULLY ***“teaches the way”*** GOD WANTS us to live our lives. Jesus teaches us that ***“the way of God”*** is one of FAITH – of TRUST – in God.

In all honesty we haven't ***“given to God what is God's.”*** We've HELD BACK on God – **held back** our love – our time – our attention – our obedience. We may give God SOME **love** – SOME **obedience**, etc. – but not the TOTAL love and obedience that comes from the HEART. But our sins didn't stop God FROM GIVING US His heart – His full love. God didn't HOLD BACK on us **one bit!** ***“God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son.”***

As we enjoy and thank God for being citizens of America let's also thank God that we are MEMBERS of His family. As PRECIOUS and COSTLY as our American freedoms are they can't compare to our **Christian freedom**. God has set us free from ALL OUR SINS – from guilt and the eternal punishment of hell. God has **set us free** from the power and control of **death** and the **devil**. God did that WITHOUT ANY HELP from us. God did it – NOT BY SENDING **in the troops** – but by sending us His Son to be our Savior. God did it not by using the LATEST TECHNOLOGY but with the perfect life and sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross.

There's always the danger that we'll take our **American freedoms** FOR GRANTED and end up losing them. The same thing can happen with our Christian freedom. We can take for granted JESUS - the GOSPEL – the CROSS – the HOLY SUPPER. But all that is God giving us His HEART! **In our place** and **to our credit** Jesus perfectly obeyed all the commandments. Bearing the sins of the whole world Jesus suffered and died on Calvary's cross. Rising triumphant from the dead Jesus promises us eternal life in heaven. ***“The way of God”*** is NOT CRITICIZING or ARGUING with Jesus but trusting in Him as our Savior from sin and death. ***“The way of God”*** is NOT AVOIDING or IGNORING Jesus but clinging to Him for peace with God and eternal life in heaven.

That gospel is also OUR MOTIVATION to ***“give to God what is God's.”*** In joyful thanks we give God our HEARTS – our LIVES. God controls and directs what we BELIEVE – **how** we live – our PRIORITIES in life – our morals and **values** – the language we use – the way we treat and talk about other people. THAT is ***“giving to God what is (rightfully) God's.”***

As we live such GOD-CENTERED lives God blesses America – God blesses a country. The proverb is still true – ***“Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people.”*** Today we pray that GOD HELP us to ***“give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's”*** and SO BLESS America. Amen.