

Read: Matthew 22:15-22

You Live in Two Kingdoms

Matthew 22:15,18-21

The Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him [Jesus] in his words. “Teacher,” they said, “Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?”

But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, “You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? Show me the coin used for paying the tax.” They brought him a denarius, and he asked them, “Whose image is this? And whose inscription?”

“Caesar’s,” they replied.

Then he said to them, “So give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Pharisees’ trap was set.

If Jesus had said it was right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar, the Jews would turn on him. The Jewish people hated Caesar and his Roman empire. If Jesus came out in support of this tax, he would have lost a lot of respect from his fellow people.

But if Jesus had said you didn’t have to pay taxes, he would have had a different group upset with him. The Romans would have heard him, thought Jesus was going against Caesar, and reacted with severe punishment.

Jesus sniffed out their trap and said, “Give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.” And with those words, Jesus avoided the trap! The Jews couldn’t be mad at his answer because he glorified God. The Romans couldn’t be mad either because he promoted paying taxes to Caesar. It’s a win-win for Jesus... and one loss, for Jesus’ enemies.

What is Jesus teaching us? As long as we live on earth, we live in two kingdoms at the same time. We live in “Caesar’s kingdom,” the kingdom ruled by governments and officials. We also live in “God’s kingdom,” the kingdom ruled by the King of kings and Lord of lords. Both kingdoms are good, and both kingdoms are established by God.

Caesar’s kingdom is concerned with order, justice, and a smooth-running society. Being a good citizen of this kingdom means things like paying taxes (“giving back to Caesar,” as Jesus says), obeying laws, and being a useful part of society. This kingdom is all about being a good person.

God's kingdom is concerned with the Word of God, giving glory to God, and saving souls. Being a good citizen of this kingdom means, first of all, realizing that we don't deserve to be a part of it! Pause and reflect on how amazing it is that sinners like us are welcomed into the courts of heaven. It's not because we've earned it. It has everything to do with Jesus, the King, bringing us in! This kingdom is all about Jesus who was the perfect person who perfectly obeyed for us.

We live in both kingdoms, Caesar's and God's. One kingdom has an earthly king. The other kingdom has the heavenly King. Both kingdoms are intended for your blessing—one for blessing now, and the other for blessing both now and forever. We want to be good citizens of both!

The questions below are to help families discuss this devotion. The questions are divided by age group as suggestions, but anyone could reflect on any of the questions as they desire.

Questions for the Younger Children

- In what way can we be good citizens of Caesar's kingdom?
- In what way can we be good citizens of God's kingdom?

Questions for Elementary Age Children

- Jesus' main lesson today was "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." Think of a coin or dollar bill you have. Check the pictures and words on it. In what ways would Jesus' words be different if he spoke them today?
- In what ways would Jesus' words be the same if he spoke them today?

Questions for Middle School and Above

- Caesar's kingdom can only make use of the law, which says what is right and what is wrong. God's kingdom has an additional tool: the gospel, which is the good news of Jesus and his love for us. How does that additional tool make God's kingdom different from Caesar's?
- How can Caesar's kingdom be established by God if it's ruled by human beings?

Closing Prayer:

King of heaven and earth, give me the wisdom to walk in both kingdoms. Help me be a good citizen in the world. Help me be a good citizen of heaven. Rule over my heart and all things in my life. Amen.