

10/19/2008

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY Lord of all, govern the nations of the world so that Your Church may joyfully serve You in confidence and peace; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

OLD TESTAMENT LESSON Isaiah 45:1-7 *God uses the pagan king Cyrus to do His bidding.*

1 "This is what the LORD says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armor, to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut: 2 I will go before you and will level the mountains; I will break down gates of bronze and cut through bars of iron. 3 I will give you the treasures of darkness, riches stored in secret places, so that you may know that I am the LORD, the God of Israel, who summons you by name.

4 For the sake of Jacob my servant, of Israel my chosen, I summon you by name and bestow on you a title of honor, though you do not acknowledge me. 5 I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God. I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me, 6 so that from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting men may know there is none besides me. I am the LORD, and there is no other.

7 I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things.

THE EPISTLE LESSON 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

This is the beginning of Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, where he gives thanks to God for the endurance the Thessalonians have, which is inspired by hope in Jesus.

1 Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you.

2 We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. 3 We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

4 For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake.

6 You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. 7 And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. 8 The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia-- your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, 9 for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, 10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead-- Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

THE GOSPEL LESSON Matthew 22:15-22

Jesus responds to a question about paying taxes. Jesus' direction is render to Caesar and to God.

15 Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. 16 They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. "Teacher," they said, "we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are. 17 Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"

18 But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? 19 Show me the coin used for paying the tax." They brought him a denarius, 20 and he asked them, "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?"

21 "Caesar's," they replied.

Then he said to them, "**Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.**"

22 When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.

THE SERMON "Christians Are Called to be the BEST Citizens Matthew 22

INTRO Did you see this headline in Wednesday's paper about the debate? "Tough and Personal." It is the political season again, and the records of our leaders and potential leaders are being examined. It is getting personal.

Let me tell you of an experience I had a couple of years ago in Oregon. I was returning from a Pastors' Conference and riding the hotel van, when we almost had an accident. The driver had seen someone whose car had a bumper sticker supporting our current president. He swerved, then started cursing, and said he would like to murder the person who would have such a bumper sticker on his car. Politics can get ugly.

I. This is the Political season, not just for national elections, but for our state, our Borough, and our city.

A. God calls Christians to "speak the truth in love." Even when we disagree that we should be able to speak and act with respect, but in many ways politics have become ugly.

1. I read an article the other day that said that the last President who left office with a respect similar to that of when he first took office is Dwight D. Eisenhower. That was 1961, 47 years ago!
2. According to the article much of this disrespect is because of media attention, and the media need for sensationalism and ratings.
3. But, regardless of the reason, instead of politics becoming a way to bring people together, they have often acted to divide people into blue states and red states.

B. Now let me ask you a question. Have you always spoken with respect about our leaders?

1. Our current president is Republican, if you are not of a Republican persuasion, have you always spoken kindly about the actions and intentions of our leaders?
2. Our previous President was Democratic. If you are not of the Democratic persuasion, did you always speak kindly about the actions and intentions of our leader?
3. Even if there was seeming reason for some of the disagreement, I believe we have all become part of the ugliness and division.

II. Our Sermon series this month is looking at ways that Christians are called to be different, called to be set apart from the rest of the world and our culture. Believe it or not, Christians are called and set aside to be the best citizens.

A. In our lesson for today the Jews had a negative opinion of Caesar, the world wide leader of the Roman Empire.

1. He was not Jewish, but Caesar was the leader of the country that had conquered Judea.
2. The Jews tried to use the cultural resentment and disrespect for Caesar to trick Jesus.
3. But Jesus' response surprises them. **"Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."**

B. So, what do Christians owe Caesar, or the government?

1. In Romans 13 Christians are told **submit . . . to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established.**

A. Therefore, we owe the government the following.

B. **7 Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.**

C. You see, God has set up the government for a purpose, to keep order.

1. Governing is not an easy job, and the government is not perfect.
 2. So God calls Christians to be set aside, different from the rest of the world, to submit and show respect for our leaders.
2. How are Christians to be different? In 1 Timothy 2 we are called to pray for all in authority.

A. **1 I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone-- 2 for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.**

B. Because creating a world where people can live peaceful and quiet lives is difficult, we are called to pray for our leaders. Pray that they act in wisdom, in justice, in righteousness.

C. Do you know that even in the Old Testament, in Jeremiah 29, the Jews in captivity are called to work for the city of their captivity? **7 seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."**

3. There is a limit to this submission. In Acts 5:29 we are told that "Peter and the other apostles replied: **"We must obey God rather than men!**

A. We have a great opportunity to speak what God says in His word in a democracy. If the government adopted unrighteous policies we can and should work for change.

B. But, because God set up the government, even when we disagree, we are called to show respect and honor.

C. If Christians lived this way, they would be, or they are, the best citizens.

1. That is what God has called us to be.

2. But, this is not easy to show respect even when there is disagreement.

III. In World War II Lutheran pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer felt a horrible tension. He knew God's call to submit to government, and he knew the horrible evil of the regime of Adolph Hitler. "How can you do the will of God, showing respect and honor, and still stand up for the righteousness God calls for?" That is our question.

Bonhoeffer, by the way, choose the side of obeying God, not obeying men.

A. First, Today, we not only hear Jesus' call to **"Give to Caesar what is Caesar's,** we also hear his call to **"Give to God what is God's."**

1. Yes we are called to honor and respect our rulers. We are set apart to pray for our leaders.

2. But, remember who is ultimately the ruler of our rulers. In Revelation 19:16 We are told of Jesus that He is **the King of Kings and Lord of Lords!**

3. We remember that our rulers are not sovereign by themselves, but called to submit to their creator and Lord, whether they know it or not.

B. Secondly, it helps to know that God set up government for a purpose.

1. He calls us the render to caesar, to pray for all in authority so that we can live in a community that has peace and quiet and order, so we can serve the Lord..

2. In a democracy we exercise "Giving to God" by expressing our opinion, especially if our leader disagrees with God's Word. But we are still to respect and pray for our leaders.

C. Finally, please remember how Jesus exercised His kingship.

1. This is Jesus, the King of Kings, allowing himself to be questioned by these religious leaders.

2. Jesus is the servant king. Jesus could boss me around, but instead served me, suffered for me, died for me. **I want** to serve Him.

CONCLUSION - On the 11th of February in 1861, the day before his 52nd birthday, president-elect Lincoln left his hometown of Springfield, Illinois, to travel by train to Washington to assume his new duties. After speaking of his "oppressive sadness" at parting, Lincoln spoke words that remain true today for us and for our nation. "Today I leave you; I go to assume a task more difficult than that which devolved upon General Washington. Unless the great God who assisted him, shall be with me and aid me, I must fail. But if the same omniscient mind, and Almighty arm that directed and protected him, shall guide and support me, I shall not fail, I shall succeed. Let us all pray that the God of our fathers may not forsake us now. To him I commend you all – permit me to ask that with equal security and faith, you all will invoke His wisdom and guidance for me. With

these few words I must leave you – for how long I know not. Friends, one and all, I must now bid you an affectionate farewell.”

God has set Christians aside, made us to be different, to put the our leaders into the hands of the King of Kings. May we be citizens who work for the good of our country in a godly way in this election year.

Parallel Passages

Romans 13:1-7

1 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. 2 Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.

3 For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. 4 For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.

5 Therefore, **it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.** 6 This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. **7 Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.**

Acts 5:28-29 28 "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name," he said. "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood." 29 Peter and the other apostles replied: **"We must obey God rather than men!"**

1 Timothy 2:1-4

1 Timothy 2:1 **I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone-- 2 for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.**

3 This is good, and pleases God our Savior, 4 who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

Jeremiah 29:3-7

3 He entrusted the letter to Elasah son of Shaphan and to Gemariah son of Hilkiah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon. It said: 4 This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon:

5 "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. 6 Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. 7 Also, **seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.**"