

Christ and Patriotism

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[0 : 00] It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to your name, O Most High, to declare! your steadfast love in the morning and your faithfulness by night, to the music of the lute and the harp, to the melody of the lyre. For you, O Lord, have made me glad by your work. At the works of your hands I sing for joy. How great are your works, O Lord! Your thoughts are very deep. The stupid man cannot know, the fool cannot understand this, that though the wicked sprout like grass and all evildoers flourish, they are doomed to destruction forever. But you, O Lord, are on high forever. For behold, your enemies, O Lord, for behold, your enemies shall perish. All evildoers shall be scattered. But you have exalted my horn like that of the wild ox. You have poured over me fresh oil. My eyes have seen the downfall of my enemies.

My ears have heard the doom of my evil assailants. The righteous flourish like the palm tree and grow like a cedar in Lebanon. They are planted in the house of the Lord. They flourish in the courts of our God. They still bear fruit in old age. They are ever full of sap and green.

To declare that the Lord is upright. He is my rock and there is no unrighteousness in him. I pray this morning that all of us are the righteous like a palm tree and grow like a cedar in Lebanon.

This morning I have the privilege to carry on Christ and Culture, our sermon series. This morning our topic is patriotism. Close to the 4th of July. Seems pretty relevant.

As I've looked around and I've tried to study this week, it's been clear to me that my generation and younger doesn't really get it. We miss the mark when it comes to patriotism.

[2 : 07] What I see from my vantage point is that there's either two ends of the spectrum and it's either one or two choices. On one choice it's care too little. The 4th of July is just a vacation.

It's a holiday. It's a necessary evil to be an American citizen. And then the other extreme that I see as our choice for my generation is the care too much.

It's us versus them. It's the Rocky IV movie. The U.S. boxer versus the Russian boxer. It's we're the greatest and everybody else is not. Both are wrong.

And this morning I want to try to bring us to the middle. Kind of guide us, hopefully, to where we have a proper perspective of patriotism.

A proper view of where we live and hopefully bring glory to God in it. And as we leave, bring glory to God in our lives celebrating and practicing patriotism.

[3 : 16] So, this morning I'm going to walk carefully and cautiously through this topic. Hopefully to help my generation to celebrate the generations before me who pretty much got it right as a majority.

So, hopefully to answer the question this morning through this is how we as Christians, as gospel-centered Christians, those who love Jesus, whose life has been changed by the gospel, who try to live out the gospel to the world around us, how we are to live with a proper perspective and how we can show that gospel, even in the arena of patriotism and celebrating whatever country we live in, whether that's the United States, New Zealand, Madagascar, whatever that may be.

So, to do so this morning, I want to discuss a problem. A problem that rears its ugly head concerning patriotism, that comes out really quick when thinking and talking about patriotism.

I want to give the solution for the problem, and I want to give some practical ways we can live. practical ways that we can have that proper perspective of honoring God with our lives.

So, turn with me to Matthew 22. We'll walk through this text. I'll read it, we'll pray, and then we'll walk through this text, and hopefully we'll unfold the problem and then work from there.

[4 : 53] In Matthew 22, starting in verse 15, we have a pretty popular and famous set of scriptures.

They read, verse 15, Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle Him in His words. And they sent their disciples to Him, along with the Herodians, saying, Teacher, we know that You are

true, and that You teach the way of God truthfully, and You do not care about anyone's opinion, for You are not swayed by appearances.

Tell us then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not? But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, Why put me to the test, you hypocrites?

Show me the coin for the tax. And they brought Him a denarius. And Jesus said to them, Whose likeness and inscription is this? They said, Caesar. Then He said to them, Therefore, render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.

When they heard it, they marveled, and they left Him and went away. Pray with me. Gracious Heavenly Father, I ask that You would be gracious to us now, that You would speak through me, that I would decrease and that You would increase here this morning.

[6 : 18] That the words that will be spoken will be Your words to us, not my opinions, that it will be rooted in Your Scripture and Your Word. God, I pray that Your Spirit would minister, show us our need for You.

Show us how we can live according to Your Word. And if You would enable us to do what You've commanded, that we can do nothing apart from You.

We need You this morning. Be gracious to us, O God, in Jesus' name. Amen. So let's just walk through this text for a few minutes, and then we'll kind of unfold from there.

So, the story is that the Pharisees tried to trap Jesus in tricking Him and asking Him a question about paying taxes. The Pharisees had, no matter what question they asked, they had an ulterior motive, and that motive was to trap Jesus.

Let it be certain that the Pharisees hated Jesus. That they did not believe that Jesus was God. They wanted Him arrested. They wanted Him out of the picture.

[7 : 33] They wanted Him removed. So what they do is they approach Jesus with a little bit of flattery. Teacher, we know that You are true and teach the way of God truthfully.

You do not care about anyone's opinion. They were more or less showed respect. Didn't really give them a proper respect.

Maybe they were more polite than even respectful. And whether they believed it or not, what they said was true. It was completely true about Jesus. Jesus does speak truth.

He is truth. He does teach the way of God. And He does not care about anyone's opinion. His integrity is not swayed. He does not compromise that integrity for the sake of what others might think.

He says it like it is. So we come to this point where they get to Him. They flatter Him, so to speak.

[8 : 38] And they ask Him the question, is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Is it lawful to pay taxes?

And this tax they're talking about is called the pull tax. This tax was given by Rome to all non-Roman citizens for living on Roman soil. And to be honest, it's not an unreasonable tax.

It was about a day's wage. It wasn't horrible. And they were required to pay it because they were on Roman soil. In our history, Independence Day, we fought against a similar tax in our history.

So we can kind of relate here a little bit. So they ask Him about this tax. And Jesus, showing the sovereignty of God, showing His all-knowing that He is God, He was aware of their malice.

And He says to them, why put me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin of the tax. And the question I had when reading through this and studying it, why does He call them hypocrites?

[9 : 47] It seems kind of harsh. Let's flip over to chapter 23 and He says it like seven times to them. Seven more times to the Pharisees and Sadducees. But why here?

Well, they're saying one thing but really wanting something else or doing something else. So you and I tend to be hypocrites at some point in our lives. We say one thing and do another.

As Jerry would say, and I think he said a couple weeks ago, here in the South, we tend to lie. Yeah, come on over for dinner. Just show up whenever. We really don't mean that. Call us ahead of time.

Let us know when you're coming. But we're polite here in the South. He calls them out as they are. Hypocrites. Show me the coin for the tax.

And they brought him a denarius, a day's wage, a day's labor. And see, on one side of this denarius, this coin, is a portrait of Tiberius Caesar, who is the Caesar, the emperor.

[10 : 45] And in Latin, it says, son of the divine Augustus. And you flip it over. On the other side, there's a portrait of a Roman goddess of peace called Pax. And there, it says in Latin, high priest.

Now, none of that is really important for this sermon, except the fact that to an Orthodox Jew, the coin itself would be blasphemous.

The coin itself would be a violation of the second commandment. Because terms like the divine Augustus and high priest are in direct...

Yeah, can't think of the word. It's against, we'll just say against, God and the second commandment of not having, making idols, not having any other gods before the one true God.

So, so here we have one of the most famous verses, and I didn't realize it was one of the most famous verses. It's, everybody, look it up in Google, and they'll tell you it's one of the most famous verses.

[11:54] Verse 21 of Matthew 22. Therefore, render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. Now, I hear a news radio host quite often use this term.

It's talking about government and separating, and people use this term, this verse, to separate or defend the separation of church and state. So, you start thinking in that way, you can kind of figure out that it's a fairly popular verse.

Well, the way that Jesus answers them, you see in verse 22 how they marveled at His answer. His answer was to pay back, which is Caesar's, to give Caesar the tax, and to pay back what is God's. So what Jesus does is He walks the line and He gives both parties what they want. He gives the Pharisees what they want, give to God what is God's, and He gives the Herodians what they want, pay the tax.

And He does it without angering either side, without making Himself guilty according to the Pharisees. So, there's kind of the story.

[13:06] You may have been familiar with that story, maybe not, and I helped you out a little bit. But here's the not-so-obvious problem. The problem here is giving what is God's to government or country.

Giving what is God's to government or country. Now, let me unpack this just a little bit more. And hopefully, it will become a little clearer to you. So we have two groups.

We have the Pharisees and we have the Herodians. Now, the Pharisees, familiar, if you know anything about the Gospels, the four Gospels in the Bible, you know about the Pharisees. They're very conservative, religious people.

They tithe their spices. Conservative. I mean, they are just, they're all about following the Mosaic law. And they resented paying taxes to Rome.

They felt like paying the tax to Rome was infringement on Jewish law. Paying taxes to Rome contradicted their devotion to God. So now we've got to pay it to Rome, but my devotion is to God following His law, so how do I do this?

[14:16] Now, the Herodians, on the other hand, is a small group of Jewish people who are loyal to Herod's family. So everything that Herod's family had was by the Roman Empire.

He was put in place to rule over the province for Rome, by Rome. So the Herodians support the tax. They felt like it was an appropriate way to fulfill their responsibilities as good citizens.

The Herodians, they looked to Rome to provide for them, to keep them safe, to protect them, and even to bless them.

Their faith was not in God, but in country. Rome. So here's what each group would say. The Pharisees would say, tax is an abomination to the law and to God.

Rome is anti-God, so we must avoid paying the tax to prove our godliness. The Herodians would say, the tax is our obligation because we need Rome.

[15:29] Rome will take care of us. Rome is God. The Pharisees lived godly lives. They lived a specific way to earn their salvation or to attempt to earn their salvation.

salvation, even if that meant not paying taxes. Now, I'm not saying the Pharisees didn't pay taxes, but they certainly did not want to pay taxes. The Herodians, their salvation came through paying the right people and letting them be their provider, their god, so to speak.

So what we have here is we have the conservative Pharisees who are stealing the worship from God to themselves because they're earning their salvation. They're attempting to live a certain way to earn God's favor.

And then you have big government Herodians who are stealing the worship from God to their government. Does this sound familiar? Conservative and big government? The problem is giving what is God's to self or to government.

A worship issue. An idolatry issue. See, we can easily look to government to provide physically. [16:47] But sometimes that turns into spiritually as well. We look to government to provide spiritually to take care of us, to be our answer, to be our savior sometimes.

Now we may not be anyone in this room, may be all of us in this room, but we certainly know someone who looks at government as their savior. savior. See, we elevate this nation as some savior nation.

Thank God for this nation. Thank God for our freedoms that we have. Romans 13 tells us that God has placed the government in the places that they are over us for our good.

We live in a great country, an amazing country, but God is a global God. God is not an American God. We have to get that right.

So as we celebrate, remember God is a global God. And now, here in 2012, we've got an election year, and we're hearing, and I hear it, I hear usually from people who call in on the radio shows, not the hosts, although some are a little out there.

[18:01] We hear how things are going to be better when so-and-so is in office. How things are going to get so much better, and things are going to get taken care of, and we're not going to go down this road, or this road, or when so-and-so is elected.

No. No, it's still going to be men, still going to be sinners, making mistakes, leading and trying to do the best that they can. And as Derek Webb said, we'll never have a savior on Capitol Hill.

We won't. Our faith needs to be in something better, something greater, something higher. So the question, are you living for that moment when so-and-so, or when things will get better, or when we're not at war, or when will we be part of the answer, and not rob God of worship by building idols?

See, Jesus is the answer. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the answer. The gospel transforms evil to good, death to life.

So here's the solution. We see the problem, stealing worship that belongs to God, not giving God what is His, paying what is His.

[19:30] So the solution to the problem, So how do we live then through this? Turn to Jeremiah 29. Jeremiah 29.

We'll start reading in verse 4. Jeremiah 29 verse 4. It says, Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.

Build houses and live in them. Plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters. Take wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage that they may be sons and daughters.

Multiply there and do not decrease, but seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile and pray to the Lord on its behalf for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

So, God through Jeremiah is speaking to Israel. The nation who is now in exile who have been sent out from Jerusalem to Babylon they are not in their home.

[20:43] They are not in the place where they want to be. They are not in the place that they know, in the place that they feel like they have been promised. And God tells them to build houses, live in them, plant gardens, eat their produce, take wives, have sons, take wives for your sons, give your daughters away in marriage, for them to bear sons and daughters, multiply there and do not decrease.

Note that none of these things here in this list are revolutionary. It doesn't say take up arms, it doesn't say fight, it doesn't say stop paying taxes, it doesn't say avoid the government, it doesn't say get into politics, it doesn't say any of that.

These aren't revolutionary things, these are pretty normal things. Build house. Plant yourself there in exile. Have a family, have babies, get your babies married, have more babies, plant gardens, grow, invest in where you are.

Look out for the welfare, the peace of the city. Not to look for what you can get from the city, but what you can do for the city.

As John F. Kennedy says in his speech, ask not what your country can do for you, but ask what you can do for your country. That whole idea, a selfless citizenship, a selfless lifestyle that is formed and shaped by the gospel, by Jesus living in us and out of us.

[22:28] So the question is, what if every Christian, instead of looking for the answer in government, would live looking out for the welfare of the city, would live looking out for what is good

for the city, whether it's this list or even some other list that we make that is positive, that is good for the city.

in every city across the globe, what if that happened? A global movement of the kingdom would occur.

God's kingdom would grow globally and the global God would get all the glory. So looking for the welfare of the city as U.S.

citizens celebrating this nation, how do we look for the welfare of the city? What are the practical things that we can do? Well, a couple of them are here in these verses.

But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile and pray to the Lord on its behalf. For in its welfare you will find your welfare.

[23 : 44] For in the city's welfare you will find your welfare. In the country's welfare you will find your welfare. In the government's welfare you will find your welfare. So pray for the city, the country, your government, the leadership.

That's one practical way that we can help shape through the gospel. Looking out for the welfare of the city. Another one is get involved.

Get involved. people out. You can't live the gospel out in any arena to be seen when people aren't there to see you. If people aren't there to see you, then what's the point of trying to live it out?

Get involved with people. Get involved in events and things that are happening around you in the city. Looking out for the welfare of the city. I used to think that Christians, you couldn't be a Christian and a politician.

And some of you might be shaking your head and saying, yeah, they're all crooked, they're all liars. That is a small view of God. That is a small view of God, and I've been convicted of that.

[25 : 05] Because if God hasn't called you into politics, or God has called you into politics, He's going to enable you to do it to the glory of Him and not to you.

He's going to enable you to do it. Let us not have a small view of God when it comes to even as simple as politics. If God calls you, do it.

Another practical way to look out for the welfare of the city and country is on events and holidays like Wednesday, the 4th of July.

Honor the men and the women, the veterans who have fought, who some have died. We have a couple veterans in this room, at least one I know of. And then families who are represented with veterans, and guys who are serving even now.

Celebrate these guys for giving up their lives and their freedom so that we can have freedom. them. I'm pretty sure that being in the army or any of the armed services is not as much of a joy as me doing whatever I want, whenever I want to.

[26 : 15] Let's just be honest, that these guys give it up for us. So we honor these guys. We honor the veterans. We celebrate the sacrifice that they have made. Abraham Lincoln said, I like to see a man proud of the place in which he lives.

I like to see a man live so that his place will be proud of him. That is looking out for the wealth for the city.

That is living the gospel out. That is being a man who lives for the city and not against the city. Who lives for the government and not against the government.

A man who makes an impact for the kingdom. Whether that's what Abraham Lincoln had in mind or not, I don't know, but what he is saying certainly can be applied.

See, patriotism is not foundationally evil or bad. It's when we elevate country above God. When we elevate government above God, it becomes a worship issue.

[27 : 24] And when we elevate country, when we elevate city, when we elevate government, government, why in the world would we leave? Why would we leave this place when we're worshipping where we are, who we have above us?

Why would we go anywhere else? It's a worship issue, and so we wouldn't go to the ends of the earth, I would say.

Logically, that would be my result of thinking that government is God. We cannot be that way.

And let's think about this too. Let's say that we do go, and our God is country. What are we going to try to convert them to?

Us. America, U.S., God, country, be like us. That's not the gospel. That's not the gospel. You don't do that.

[28 : 36] See, our view of our God, whatever that is, little g God, country, government, people, will have an impact on how we live, how we decide to and decisions that we make.

or are people going to see the God of the Bible? Are they going to see Jesus through our life? And are we living and elevating God above everything else?

1 Peter 2, verse 9, says that, but you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession. Why? That you may proclaim the excellencies of him, not where you are, not the government of Great Britain, or the government of the United States of America, or whatever, the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

The gospel shapes every area of our lives, every bit of our lives, not just here Sunday morning, but every area. So, on Wednesday evening, we go to fireworks, let's celebrate America through the gospel, through what God has done in our lives.

[30 : 19] Let's show people how great he is. Thank him for living in such a country where we can stand here, I can stand here, you can sit here with freedom to do so.

Render to Caesar that which is Caesar. Pay the taxes. Pay the government. Follow the laws. Obey the laws. Don't cheat on your taxes.

Be honest. Render to God that which is God's. And ultimately, that's worship. Ultimately, that's elevating him above everything else.

So, patriotism is not evil. We've got to keep it in line. We've got to keep it in proper perspective. Keep it below God of the Bible.

Below Jesus. Let's pray together.