Independence Day Matthew 22:15-22
July 4, 2021 617-618-389/620-619

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 MANY, MAJOR problems and definitely needs our prayers. But we must also admit that God has SO RICHLY and GRACIOUSLY blessed us. **Despite our sinful griping** we enjoy a HIGH STANDARD of living. We love our country. We sing from our hearts, "GOD BLESS America."

There's no such GRATITUDE or PATRIOTISM in these verses. It's just the opposite. There's resentment and **bitterness**. The **Jews** weren't a free people. Their taxes supported a **foreign government**, a Caesar who thought he **was a god** on earth. There was no way a PATRIOTIC Jew would sing, "GOD BLESS the **Roman empire**."

But we sing and pray, "**God bless** America." Looking at these verses we see that GOD BLESSES AMERICA – **blesses** a COUNTRY – **as we** 1)"give to Caesar what is Caesar's" and 2)"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 to the governing authorities. For no authority exists except by God, and the authorities that do exist have been established by God."*** AS CHRISTIANS we recognize that **government** is GOD'S SERVANT – that government has GOD-GIVEN power – **authority** – **responsibilities**. ***"God establishes"*** a government but God NEVER ENDORSES 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.

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 China – Russia – Iran.

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. THESE TWO GROUPS – the pro-Roman ***"Herodians"*** and the anti-Roman **Pharisees** – came to Jesus. ***"Tell us, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"*** They figured that NO MATTER HOW Jesus answered **He'd lose**. To say yes to **paying taxes** to Caesar would cost Jesus POPULAR SUPPORT among the people. **To say no** would make Jesus guilty of **treason** against Rome.

THEY wanted to trap Jesus ***"in His words"*** but Jesus trapped them in their words. He asked them for a coin and then asked them, ***"Whose image and inscription is this?"*** EVERYBODY knew it was ***"Caesar's."*** 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 that they lived in the **Roman empire** UNDER **Roman authority**.

With that settled Jesus went on, ***"THEREFORE give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's."*** The government has the GOD-GIVEN RESPONSIBILITY of providing law and order. We as citizens have GOD-GIVEN RESPONSIBILITIES to our government. As both government and **citizens** CARRY OUT their **God-given** responsibilities GOD BLESSES the country and its citizens.

What do WE OWE our government? Paul told us before, ***"Pay what you owe… taxes to whom taxes are owed."*** HONESTLY paying our taxes is part of our GOD-GIVEN **responsibilities** as citizens. Notice that this has NOTHING TO DO with who the government is – **what** the tax rate is – if we agree with the tax or not.

ESPECIALLY AS CHRISTIANS we **also owe** our government obedience and respect. Go back to what Paul said before, ***"THEREFORE the one who rebels against the authority is opposing God's institution"*** and, ***"Pay …respect to whom respect is owed."*** We may not have voted for a person – we may not like their **personal morals** or support their **political agenda** but ESPECIALLY AS CHRISTIANS we still owe them **respect** and **obedience**. NOT WILLINGLY GIVING that **respect** and **obedience** is a sin we then **need to repent** of. Paul wrote that LIVING UNDER a corrupt, **pagan**, **anti-Christian** government. But Paul didn't preach CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE or **rebellion**.

Especially as Christians we owe obedience **even when** we DON'T LIKE a law. I may not like the **speed limit** but I HAVE NO RIGHT to ignore it. Speeding is a sin I then need to repent of. Paul instructed Titus to ***"remind (the people) to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, …to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, to be gentle."*** Peter wrote, ***"Submit to every human authority BECAUSE OF THE LORD."*** The ONLY TIME we can and must disobey is when the government goes against God's Word. The government has no authority to OVERRULE God. We had the example of the **three men** in the fiery furnace in the OT reading. WHATEVER THE COST may be to us PERSONALLY or as a CHURCH ***"we must obey God rather than men."*** We owe our allegiance FIRST TO GOD **then** to the government.

We also owe the government our PRAYERS. Jeremiah told the Jews who were living in exile in Babylon, ***"Seek the peace of the city where I have exiled you. Pray to the LORD for that city, because when it has peace and prosperity, you will have peace and prosperity."*** Paul wrote Timothy, ***"I urge that petitions, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all those who are in authority, in order that we might live a quiet and peaceful life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and pleasing in the sight of 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 – 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." But Jesus wasn't done. There is a BIGGER PRINCIPLE here than simply pay your taxes. GOD BLESSES a country – America…

II. As we "give to God what is God's."

"Teacher, we know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in accord with the truth." If they really believed that then WHY WEREN'T they **following** Jesus? Jesus wasn't fooled - He ***"knew their evil purpose."*** He calls them, ***"hypocrites."*** They were only pretending to **like Jesus**.

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

"Give 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 be pleased with 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 and learn from Him. Jesus REALLY IS our ***"Teacher (who) teaches the way of God in accord 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 – TRUST – in God.

In all honesty we HAVEN'T ***"given to God what is God's."*** We've HELD BACK on back – **held back** our love – our time – our attention – our trust – our obedience. We may give God SOME **love** – SOME **obedience**, etc. but not TOTAL **love** and obedience that come 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 love 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 TRUSTING in Jesus we are members of **His family** and **kingdom**. 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 **hell's** eternal punishment. 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 that 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. We can do the same thing with our **Christian** freedoms. We can take for granted – Jesus – the GOSPEL – the CROSS – HOLY COMMUNION. 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 when we die. ***"The way of God"*** is NOT CRITICIZING or ARGUING with Jesus but trusting in Him as our Lord and Savior. ***"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 determines 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 – and our definition of marriage. THAT is ***"giving to God what is*** rightfully ***God's."***

As we live such GOD-CENTERED lives God blesses America. The **proverb** is still true – ***"Righteousness lifts up a nation, but sin brings shame to a people."*** May God help us to ***"give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's"*** and SO BLESS America. Amen.

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