

Matthew 22:15-22 + We Are Dual Citizens + Series: What Does This Mean?
Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY
23rd Sunday after Pentecost + 19 November 2017

“Citizenship?” The border guard asks as I hand him my enhanced drivers’ license on another trip between the US and Canada. That’s always a question I want to answer without hesitation. I have no reason to be confused or unsure about where my citizenship is—“The United States.” After scanning my license and asking a couple more questions about firearms and leaving or purchasing things, the border guard lets me enter the country.

It’s important to know your citizenship. Of course, there’s always a certain amount of pride in being a citizen of this country or another. There’s also benefits. American citizenship has its own set of rights, privileges, and freedoms. That’s one of the reasons why so many people every year go through the long, expensive process to become American citizens.

...But did you know that someone can actually be a “dual citizen?” Depending on the immigration laws of a country, a person may be able to hold citizenship in two countries. For example, some of our American called workers and their families in Canada have been able to get dual citizenship in Canada. Being “dual citizens,” they get to enjoy the benefits that come with being citizens of both countries. They may also have responsibilities to both.

Now you might be thinking, “This is supposed to be a sermon on God’s Word, not civics class,” and I would agree with you. So what does all this talk about “citizenship” and “dual citizens” have to do with Jesus or what God’s Word says or your life as a Christian? Well, actually quite a bit. God’s Word tells us that as Christians, we are “dual citizens.”

...But what does that mean? Our worship theme provides a little more clarity. “We live in two kingdoms.” That was a phrase that Martin Luther used when he discussed the kingdom of grace and the kingdom of the sword or as we know them more commonly—church and state. You see, back in Luther’s day, there was all kinds of confusion about the two kingdoms. The church claimed divine authority over secular kingdoms, while secular rulers made all kinds of religious laws from what religion was legal to what vestments pastors wore. Peasants revolted against nobles for mistreatment, which included banning them from reading certain religious books, while some soldiers wrestled with reconciling their Christian faith and their profession. So, as he often did, Luther went back to Scripture to write about these “two kingdoms” of which we are citizens.

The “kingdom” of the church includes all who believe in Jesus as their Savior. God makes us citizens of his kingdom and keeps us in his kingdom through the gospel in Word and Sacraments. We get to enjoy all of the blessings that come with being citizens of Christ’s kingdom—forgiveness, joy, peace, eternal life, etc., but we also have responsibilities. God sends us out into the world with his saving gospel. He also sends us out to serve others on his behalf.

In Romans 13:(1), we heard Paul describe the “kingdom” of the state. **“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.”** We are citizens of that kingdom, so we get to enjoy blessings like public safety, good roads, fire protection, clean water, and the list goes on. Yet it’s also important for us to remember that God has established government. While the form of government is manmade, God established government to maintain peace and order in society, curbing criminal behavior with the threat of punishment and force.

Yet there’s one word in Paul’s description that might’ve stuck out to you—the word **“submit.”** What does Paul mean? He’s saying that your responsibility and mine to government is to **“submit,”** to willingly admit that since God has established this authority over us, we’re going to willingly obey that authority, even paying respect and honor. Now I imagine at this point, the wheels are starting to turn in your mind and the objections are starting to pop up. “But, but, but I didn’t vote for this or that president! Aren’t Washington and Albany swamps full of slimy, greedy hypocrites that just want to waste our tax dollars? What about the racial and cultural divisions in our nation, which were caused at least in some part by failures by the governing authorities? What about the freedoms people are trying to take away? What if I don’t like this policy or that politician or that public figure? Why can’t I say what I want about them? It’s a free country! How could I submit to this government or president or governor? I only pay taxes because I have to, not because I’m willing. St. Paul must be mistaken. I won’t submit!”

And that takes us out to a fine, spring Tuesday in Jerusalem. A couple days before, Jesus had ridden down the Mount of Olives into the city on the back of a donkey with crowds singing and waving palm branches in the air. But on that Tuesday, an unusual team of people found Jesus with one goal—to trap him. ***“Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. 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.’”***

So what was unusual about this situation? This wasn’t the first time people tried to trap Jesus. Well, the Pharisees were zealously religious—the conservatives of their day. They hated Rome’s oppressive rule and its constant military presence. They hated paying exorbitant taxes to the pagan Romans and their local tax collectors. The Herodians weren’t religious. They were all about politics, supporting King Herod and his Roman backers. These two groups never united on anything. They were on polar opposite ends of the political spectrum, but they came together to oppose Jesus. They tried to sweet talk him before going in for the kill. ***“Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?”*** They wanted to trap Jesus, to get him either condemned by the state if he spoke against taxes or condemned by the people if he supported paying taxes to Rome. It was an impossible question, right? Wrong.

That strange team failed to realize that they were dealing with the all-knowing God. ***“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 portrait is this? And whose inscription?’ ‘Caesar’s,’ they replied. Then he said to them, ‘Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.’ When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.”*** Jesus took the narrow road down the middle and told them to do the one, but don’t leave the other undone. Or as Paul put it in Romans 13, ***“This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, who give their full time to governing. Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.”*** God has provided government for our good and has given government great responsibility to provide physical care for its citizens. Therefore we give what we owe.

So what’s the real problem here? Is it really with your president or governor or Congress or Senate? Is it really with Washington or Albany or people in the NFL? Is it really because our society is so much less moral than it was X years ago? Or is the problem with me and you? Is it our lack of willingness to submit to what our God has instituted for our good? Yes, the form of government is manmade—and therefore far from perfect, made only worse by the fact that it’s populated by sinners like us. Yet that doesn’t give us the right to look at our God and say, “I refuse to submit or show respect and honor for what you’ve put into place for my good!” If we were to rebel against our government, they would have the right to punish us for that rebellion. How much more our holy God for our rebellion against him?

How do we escape his holy punishment? Look to the One holding the denarius in his hand and silencing his enemies. Look to Jesus who perfectly lived as a dual citizen in our place—a citizen of church and state. Look to Jesus who paid his taxes to the governing authorities, even though they were paid to a ruler who considered himself to be a god.

Look to Jesus, who just days after this conversation, faced tremendous injustice and a criminal’s death at the hands of the very governing authorities he had established, yet he still showed them honor and respect, even going so far as to pray for those putting him to death. Look to Jesus, who also faced punishment at the hands of the holy God—not for himself, but for you and me and for our sins so the holy God would declare us not guilty and set us free.

Compelled by Christ’s self-sacrificing love for us, we give ***“to God what is God’s”*** in every aspect of our lives. That includes willingly submitting to the governing authorities. We pay respect to the governing authorities God has placed over us and even pray for them that God would grant them wisdom and humility and concern for the weak, the hurting, and the defenseless. We obey the laws of the land and pay taxes not grudgingly, but willingly, because God blesses us and others through government. Just think of all the blessings you’ve enjoy through government from the food you eat to the prescription drugs you take to the car you drove this morning to the roads you drove on to peace and safety—all actually given to us from our gracious God.

Now we dare never expect government to be our savior. That’s not why God established the state. That’s why sent Jesus! We can’t expect government to legislate morality or make laws to change people’s hearts and minds—only the gospel can do that. That gospel has been entrusted to us. As dual citizens of the two kingdoms, we can be a blessing to our neighbors, to our communities, and to our country. We can live as citizens of Christ’s

kingdom and share with others how much Jesus loves them that they may become part of his eternal kingdom too. May God bless us then as his dual citizens and bless others through us here and for all eternity! Amen.