

# "HEAR YE HIM"

## A Devotional Series For Radio

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Program Number 131  
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The Sermon: THE THINGS THAT ARE CAESAR'S

Scripture: Luke 20:19-26

And the chief priests and the scribes the same hour sought to lay hands on him; ... And they watched him, and sent forth spies, which should feign themselves just men, that they might take hold of his words, that so they might deliver him unto the power and authority of the governor. And they asked him, saying, Master, we know that thou sayest and teachest rightly, neither acceptest thou the person of any, but teachest the way of God truly: Is it lawful for us to give tribute unto Caesar, or no? But he perceived their craftiness, and said unto them, Why tempt ye me? Shew me a penny. Whose image and superscription hath it? They answered and said, Caesar's. And he said unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's, and unto God the things which be God's. And they could not take hold of his words before the people: and they marvelled at his answer, and held their peace.

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Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.

"Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar, or no?" When the hired spies of the high priests asked Jesus this question, they thought they were offering him the two horns of an inescapable dilemma. If Jesus said that it was lawful to pay the tribute tax to Caesar, he was almost certain to alienate the fervent nationalists among his followers. On the other hand, if he answered that it was not lawful to pay Roman taxes, he was inviting certain trouble from the Roman governor. Jesus did not evade the question, but he did evade the horns of the dilemma. He replied: "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's."

Our American philosophy of government is that there are certain areas of jurisdiction which belong to Caesar, or to secular government; that there are other areas of jurisdiction which belong to the church, or to ecclesiastical government; and that these two areas of jurisdiction must remain forever separate. At the time when this concept was written into our constitution, the idea of constitutional separation of church and state was unique among the nations of the world. Most of the nations of Europe had established churches, supported by taxes levied on every citizen whether he subscribed to the doctrines and beliefs of the established church or not. The alliance of church and state to enforce a particular kind of worship by all within the state was almost the universal rule. Even today, most of the nations of the world

still have either an established church, or at least a politically favored religion. Even the godless Communist nations have a political philosophy which is their brand of religion. The United States of America, thanks to the efforts of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, is still one of the few nations of the world in which the citizens have full freedom of political thought and religious worship.

According to our American philosophy the duty of the state is to maintain that atmosphere of freedom in which each man may worship as his conscience dictates and his will chooses and to protect each citizen in his freedom. It is not the privilege of the state to prescribe religious beliefs, or the forms of religious worship. It is not the privilege or the duty of the state to choose or to pay the clergy or church officials, or to tax men for the support of an established church in which they do not believe.

The duty of the church is to inculcate in its members those moral and ethical principles which will make them guardians of the state and of the inalienable human rights and freedoms which the state is designed to protect. It is not the privilege or the right of the church to demand financial support or political preferment from the government. The church has no right to punish violations of its discipline by depriving men of life, liberty, or property. The church has no right to compel men's allegiance by force.

The only punishment which the church can rightfully administer to offenders against its discipline, is disfellowship, or the curtailment or denial of religious rights, privileges, and sacraments.

We subscribe to this philosophy of the separation of church and state, unequivocally. We believe that it is fundamentally Christian. But we do not believe that Jesus' primary intention was to teach the separation of church and state when he said, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's." The question put to him was not about the relationship of church and state, but about individual duties and responsibilities. Paying taxes is an individual duty; and the question was whether it was lawful to pay a specific tax required by the Roman government. Jesus replied that it was lawful, but escaped being impaled on the other horn of the dilemma by saying that while men were obligated to perform certain duties to the state, they were primarily obligated to perform certain duties and obligations unto God.

Most of man's trouble with government has not grown out of the fact that he did not respect government, but out of the fact that he did not respect God, or give him his just due. When men neglect their duty to God, their government falls into decay and degradation, and the citizens themselves become slaves. A hundred years before our American Constitution was drawn up, William Penn said "Those people who will not be governed by God will be ruled by tyrants." In recent years, Clarence Manion, formerly head of the Law School of Notre Dame has said, "Where there is no God, government is God." Unless godly people are concerned about government, it will be taken over by the ungodly, who will eventually set themselves up as God, demanding an absolute allegiance and obedience, and the abolishment of all human rights and freedoms.

When men fail to refuse to render unto God the things that are God's, eventually they lose their liberty both in this world and in the life to come. Jesus came to set men free from the bondage of sin and death; but if they neglect God or deliberately choose to live by the laws of sin, they will be ruled by tyrants in this world, and by the devil in the world to come.

Too many people have tried to read into this "Render unto Caesar" saying the idea that Jesus was teaching that whatever government is, is right. He was not saying any such thing. He was not commanding men to obey political rulers regardless of whether they are good or bad. He was not taking sides in the dispute between the partisans of Rome and the partisans of the Jews. It would have made little difference to the common people if the Romans had been driven out, and the government taken over by Annas and his greedy and corrupt politicians. One cannot imagine Jesus telling the American colonists to be content with the Stamp Act, or to make no resistance against the infamous tax on tea. One cannot imagine him advising the Jews in Germany, or the nations occupied by Hitler's armies in the last war, to be content with their government and pay their taxes willingly, meanwhile continuing to render their duty to God by going to church and saying their prayers.

Life cannot be divided into watertight compartments; it is one whole. Man is one entity, not a collection of isolated parts. We cannot live by one set of rules, ethics, and moral principles in the service of God, and live by a completely different set of rules, ethics, and morals in the service of Caesar. In other words, although there must be separation of church and state as institutions, there can be no real separation between the religious conduct and the political conduct of the individual. The principles by which men govern their individual lives will sooner or later become the principles by which the state governs them.

Nations, like men, are continually being judged by the way they render unto God the things that are God's. Many nations have perished because they neglected to give God his due, or to live by his moral principles. Our own nation was founded on fundamental religious and moral principles which stem from our Judeo-Christian ethic. Our national motto is "In God we trust." If the day ever comes when we, as individuals, or as a nation, fail to render unto God the things that are God's, then we shall lose every liberty we hold dear, and this nation which has had such a glorious past, will crumble into dust along with ancient Greece and Rome.