

Sermon 11/5/17 Kingdoms! I Peter 2:16

Dear Citizens of two kingdoms:

People in Jesus' day did not like to pay taxes any more than we do, maybe even less so, because their taxes were given in support of their hatred Roman conquerors. Jesus' enemies chose the painful and controversial subject of taxes to set a trap for him.

- Was it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar?
- If Jesus said, "Pay the taxes," then the crowds might very well have turned against him, thinking that he supported their Romans overlords
- If Jesus said, "Don't pay," then his enemies could accuse him of treason and hand him over to the authorities.
- It was a no-win situation.

But Jesus was fully aware of the trap his enemies had planned and he simply asked to see the coin that was used to pay the tax.

- He asked, "Whose image and inscription are on the coin?"
- The coin bore the image and inscription of Caesar and that provided the answer
- Jesus said, "Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's."
- The coin is Caesar's, so give it to him.

Like the crowds of Jesus' day, we too must pay our taxes.

- We owe allegiance to an earthly government. Romans 13:1-7
- We are citizens of this earth
- We live within a certain nation, state, city or town.

We, however, know something about those earthly governments and their authority that is unknown to most earthly rulers.

- We know that their existence, their authority to rule, comes from God.

- The Apostle Paul writes in his letter to the Christians in Rome: “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God...Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to who taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.”

God’s right hand and left hand

- He rules over us in love
- He has given the earthly governments the authority to rule over us for our good

Remember the song: “He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands.”

- God does have the whole world in his hands
- When we describe God’s rule over all things, we talk about God’s “two hands” and about the two kingdoms or realms over which he rules
- The kingdom of his right hand and the kingdom of his left hand

What we call the kingdom of God’s right hand or the kingdom of grace is his rule over his Church, his rule over his redeemed people.

- By God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ we have been brought into this kingdom
- He rules over us with his Word and forgiveness

What we call the kingdom of God’s left hand, or the kingdom of power, is a way to describe God’s rule over all people, Christians and non-Christians alike.

- In the kingdom of his left hand, God works through earthly rulers and their laws to promote what is good and restrain evil.
- Certainly not every earthly ruler governs in a godly way but even unbelieving rulers, those who misuse their power have that power only by God’s authority.

- He works through them and behind them and moves and removes them as he wills.
- Working through them, working “behind them” as though hiding behind them, God brings order to this world that he created and loves.

Martin Luther was a redeemed child of God and he was just as we are, a citizen of God’s right hand kingdom, the kingdom of grace.

- Luther was also subject to earthly rulers, to Frederick the Wise and his successors, the rulers of the territory of Saxony in which Luther lived.
- Luther was also subject to Emperor Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire, the ruler of much of Europe at that time.

Luther lived in an age and place where there was no separation of church and state as we know it, and the reformer had opponents in both.

- Through his study of God’s Word, Luther rediscovered the truth of the Gospel
- The truth that we are saved not by works, not through buying church-authorized letters of pardon, but by God’s grace through faith in Jesus, our Lord and King whose blood paid the price of our salvation.

Martin Luther shared the good news that he discovered in God’s Word.

- He taught, preached and wrote about the salvation that is ours by faith.
- But church officials acted to silence Luther.

The leadership of the church of Luther’s day eventually declared the reformer to be heretic, a false teacher.

- Working in concert with the church, the emperor declared Luther to be an outlaw
- If Luther was a danger to the church, he was thought to be a danger to society as well.
- The reformer could be captured and killed, and no one was to read his writings or give him aid or assistance in any way.

Buy God was at work through the kingdom of his left hand to protect his busy monk.

- Luther's territorial ruler, Frederick the Wise, acted in secrecy to protect his well-known professor and pastor.
- Frederick arranged to have Luther kidnapped and hidden away in Wartburg Castle for safety.
- Even from his hiding place, Luther continued to teach the Gospel, writing letters and translating the New Testament into German.

Even though he was declared to be an outlaw and condemned by earthly rulers, Martin Luther advocated obedience to the government, knowing from his study of Scripture that earthly rulers have their authority from God.

- But when those rulers decided to forbid the teaching of the Gospel, they could not be obeyed.
- The princes and other rulers who embraced the faith of the Reformation had to obey God rather than men, and they risked their lives to declare their allegiance to the King of kings, the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Many years later, those princes and rulers would win the right to worship as they chose.

The Old Testament people of Israel were, for a time, ruled by God himself, who gave them the laws they needed to guide their moral choices, their worship and their society.

- God spoke to his people through Moses and the other prophets
- God spoke through the judges he appointed to lead them
- God spoke through the kings that he allowed Israel to have to rule over them
- Israel wanted a king like the other nations so the Lord granted their request.

1 Samuel 8:7

Throughout their history the people of Israel often failed and faltered in their allegiance to God and finally God allowed them to be overcome by their enemies and taken into exile in Babylon.

- They longed to be home again and free of foreign rule
- But God speaking through the prophet, Jeremiah, told his people to establish themselves in the land of their exile.
- They should marry, build homes, plant crops and pray for the foreign land in which they lived

Today, we are citizens of the kingdom of grace as we wait for Jesus to return. Until then, like the Israelites we...

Kingdom of Grace and Power

- Pray for the earthly nation, states and cities in which we live
- In their good we will find our good
- Ours is a dual citizenship
 - We live as citizens of the kingdom of grace
 - We live as citizens of the kingdom of power
 - The kingdom of God's right hand
 - The kingdom of God's left hand

We know that God really does "have the whole world in his hand" as we live under his care and protection as his redeemed people.

- We live, here and now, as our Lord lives among us, following in his footsteps
- We live, living in love and service toward the people around us

The Apostle Peter wrote: **"Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God."** I Peter 2:16

Today is All-Saints Day. We remember our loved ones and our fellow members of our church who have gone home to heaven this past year. They are now part of the Church Triumphant. The Lord has taken them home. John 14:1-3

But while they were living with us on earth they like we are right now part of the Church Militant. And while we are here on earth we are citizens of two kingdoms...

- The kingdom of grace
- The kingdom of power

God has the whole world in his hands.