

Church and State

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 20 October 2019

Preacher: Shawn Woo

[0 : 00] Heavenly Father, we have gathered once again around your word to hear you speak to us as our Lord and as our King, as our God.

Knowing that that's what this is about, knowing that we are reading and preaching your word, listening to your word, where I stand here with fear and trembling, as I wrestle with the text and think about what to say, or I have fear and trembling because I don't want to say anything that is not of you.

And I ask for your help now. Help me to guide me by your Spirit, even as preached this morning, so that there are things that I leave out from my manuscript and things that I say that I haven't yet put down on paper that you want me to say.

And may everything proceed from your scripture. Teach us how you want us to live, to navigate the complexities of this world as those who pledge allegiance, their ultimate allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Luke 20, verses 19 to 26. The scribes and the chief priests sought to lay hands on him at that very hour, for they perceived that he had told this parable against them, but they feared the people.

[2 : 15] So they watched him and sent spies who pretended to be sincere, that they might catch him in something he said, so as to deliver him up to the authority and jurisdiction of the governor.

So they asked him, Teacher, we know that you speak and teach rightly and show no partiality, but truly teach the way of God.

Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar or not? But he perceived their craftiness and said to them, Show me a denarius.

Whose likeness and inscription does it have? They said, Caesar's. He said to them, Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's.

And they were not able, in the presence of the people, to catch him in what he said. But marveling at his answer, they became silent. This is God's holy and authoritative word.

[3 : 29] From crusades to jihads, from religious reformations to political revolutions, from emperors and caliphs forcing conversions, to popes deposing and appointing kings, the relationship between religion and politics throughout history has been messy, to say the least.

In the United States, the separation of church and state is codified in the First Amendment, which stipulates that Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.

Now, I'm not going to debate with you this morning about what the framers of the Constitution meant, but I am here to tell you that the Bible provides, this was not Thomas Jefferson's original idea, but the Bible provides guidance on how the relationship between church and state ought to function.

And this idea that's contained in this passage predates Jefferson by 1800 years. And we do want to talk about what Jesus meant, whether or not that's exactly what the framers of the Constitution meant or not.

And we find that here in Luke 20, 19 to 26, and I do believe it provides abiding principles that can help us navigate the complex and ever-changing political landscape that we live in.

[4 : 52] He teaches us here that while we are to be subject to various human authorities, we owe our ultimate allegiance to the Lord our God. I think that's the main point that Jesus teaches here.

And there are two main points to take away. First is that God's authority with relation to Caesar's authority, and then secondly, Christ's authority with relation to Jewish leaders' authority.

So that's what we're going to talk about in two parts. So first, let's look at God's authority with regard to Caesar's authority. This passage begins with verse 19. The scribes and the chief priests sought to lay hands on Jesus at that very hour, for they perceived that he had told this parable against them, but they fear the people.

So the scribes and the chief priests are responding violently to the parable that Jesus just told them, which Ray preached on last week. This parable was about a vineyard and its owner.

The owner of the vineyard is God, and the vineyard represents God's people, Israel. And the owner of the vineyard puts tenants in charge of tending to the vineyard before he goes away on a trip.

[6 : 00] These tenants are the Jewish leaders. And when time for the harvest comes, he sends a servant of his to receive some of the fruit of the vineyard. The servants that the owner sends represent the prophets of God that God sends to his people, Israel, to call them to repentance and faith and obedience.

And the fruit of the vineyard represents those fruits of good works and obedience. Now, however, instead of giving to the owner the fruit that is due to him, the tenants instead beat and cast out the first servant that the owner sends, then the second servant, and then the third servant.

And finally, when the owner is at his wit's end and decides, you know what, I'm going to have to send my own son. They'll surely listen to my son. And he sends him his own son, and then they decide, if we kill this son, who is the heir, we can claim the vineyard as our own.

And so the owner's son, of course, represents Jesus, who will soon be killed by the Jewish leaders that are being addressed here. And at the end of that parable, Jesus prophesied that the owner of the vineyard will eventually return to destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others.

And he warned them that Jesus, he himself, is the cornerstone upon which God's house is being built. And if you reject him instead of being built on him as the cornerstone, you're going to stumble over him, fall, and be crushed by him.

[7 : 25] Now, we don't know exactly to what extent these Jewish leaders, elders, scribes, and chief priests understood the parable. Since they still go ahead and kill Jesus anyway, maybe they didn't fully grasp what Jesus was saying here.

But we know this much. It says in verse 9, They perceive that he had told this parable against them. That much they know. Maybe they don't know the details of the parable, but they know, I think he's saying something bad about us.

I think he's speaking against us. So they're indignant. How does Jesus, an unlearned man from the insignificant village of Nazareth, the son of a carpenter, dare to criticize us?

We're the esteemed leaders of the Jewish community. We're the trained scholars, the professors, moral exemplars, the wise elders among God's people. And they're so angry that they sought to lay hands on Jesus at that very hour.

Right at that moment, they wanted to seize him, lay hands on him, harm him. But they fear the people. Just recently, they witnessed throngs of Jesus' disciples, acclaim Jesus as the king, the messianic king to come to Jerusalem.

[8 : 40] It's saying in chapter 19, verse 38, blessed be the king who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest. So they fear the people, what they might do to them if they were to rashly harm this popular figure.

So they choose to bide their time and resort to a political ploy. Instead of confronting Jesus directly, they had already tried this and failed multiple times.

They hide behind the scenes and they pull strings. They hire spies to do their dirty work for them. It says in verses 20 to verse 22, So they watched him and sent spies who pretended to be sincere that they might catch him in something he said so as to deliver him up to the authority and jurisdiction of the governor.

So they asked him, Teacher, we know that you speak and teach rightly and show no partiality but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar or not?

I think there would have been great suspense and tension in the air after these insincere spies asked their question on behalf of scribes and the chief elders.

[9 : 53] There's an old saying that we're all familiar with, never discuss religion or politics in polite company. Have you guys heard that? Yeah. Why?

I mean, I don't agree with that maxim entirely. I mean, it's unreasonable to discuss the discussion of religion and politics altogether but I do think discussing religion and politics requires a special humility and respect.

And that's because religion and politics more than any other subjects that we can discuss are polarizing. They divide people. People hold those views very firmly and ardently.

And so, as they get impassioned and as they get into arguments it can lead to altercations and strained relationships. And so the caution is well founded. But these spies, they went there.

Their question deals with both religion and politics. And it's literally the most controversial hot button issue among the Jews at the time. Because it concerns the Roman Empire and their occupation and Jewish subjugation.

[11 : 01] The spies ask, is it lawful for us? They're not asking about their Greek and Roman neighbors. They couldn't care less that they pay taxes to Caesar.

They're talking about them as the Jewish people. Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar or not? We are the chosen people of God. We are God's special possession.

God is our king, not Caesar. Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar or not? And the word tribute is a word that specifically refers to the Roman poll tax.

This is not the wealth tax collected by private tax collectors like Levi and Zacchaeus that we saw earlier in the Gospel of Luke. The wealth tax is administered to everybody, including all the citizens of Rome.

The poll tax, however, was collected by the Roman civil magistrates and it went directly to Caesar's coffers. Not only that, Roman citizens were exempt from this tax.

[12 : 03] It was only imposed on the subjected peoples of the provinces. So it's for this reason that Tertullian, the second century Christian theologian, called the poll tax a badge of slavery.

In fact, only about two decades before this incident, a Jewish leader named Judas of Galilee had rallied the Jewish people around their common resentment toward this poll tax and led a revolt against Rome in 6 AD.

He had incited his fellow Jews by saying this, quote, that they were cowards if they would endure to pay a tax to the Romans and would, after God, submit to mortal men as their lords. So this is pretty fresh, just two decades before.

So this is kind of the political context behind this, very controversial issue. And with that background in mind, we can see the trap that these people are setting for Jesus. Remember that they're not sincere, they're pretending to be sincere, and according to verse 20, their intention is to catch Jesus in something he says in order to trap him and to deliver him to Pilate, the governing authority over Judea, the Roman authority.

Now, if Jesus says that it is lawful to pay the poll tax to Caesar, the nationalistic Jews will be in an uproar. They will deem that Jesus is weak, they will forsake their hope in him as their messianic king, the political savior that they expect him to be, they want him to be.

[13 : 33] But if Jesus says that it is not lawful to pay the poll tax to Caesar, then they will snitch and inform Caesar, inform the Roman governor.

They'll say to him, do you remember 6 AD, two decades ago, do you remember Judas of Galilee that revolted against you about the poll tax? Well, now there's a man named Jesus of Galilee and he is inciting the Jewish people against your rule, telling them not to pay the poll tax.

So this is really a lose-lose situation for Jesus. But the Jewish leaders really should have known better because they had confronted Jesus and tried to trap him in the past and had failed multiple times in the Gospel of Luke and Jesus sees right through their hypocrisy and deceit.

It says in verse 23 that he perceived their craftiness. Then Jesus says to them, show me a denarius whose likeness and inscription does it have?

They said, Caesar. This is brilliant. Jesus already knows that the image and inscription on the Roman denarius is of Caesar, Tiberius.

[14 : 45] But he asks them to show me a denarius so that these insincere spies have to reach into their pockets and produce a denarius.

The Roman denarius was a silver coin worth one day's wage of a common laborer. And at this time, on the front, I think I have an image actually I can project to show you.

On the front, it had the image of Tiberius Caesar. It was inscribed in Latin in abbreviated form. Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus, Augustus.

On the back, it bore the image of Tiberius' mother, Livia, who is styled, he's depicted like the goddess of peace. And it has the inscription Pontifex Maximus, meaning high priest.

So, keep that picture in mind. even the sight of this coin would have been repulsive to devout Jews. They wanted no part in the Roman pagan religion and emperor worship.

[15 : 53] It has two idolatrous images on it. It contains the blasphemy that Caesar is a son of God. In fact, you know that they were offended by this because later in 66 AD, about 36 years later, 30 or so years later after Jesus, the first Jewish revolt, one of the first things that they do after gaining their short-lived independence is they mint their own coins.

And yet, these spies sent by the Jewish leaders pretending to be Jewish loyalists, acting like they're concerned with keeping God's law and wanting nothing to do with the idolatry of Rome, yet here they are right in their pockets, they're carrying the symbol of their subjugation, that economic symbol of their allegiance to Caesar right in their pockets, readily accessible, proving not only that they acknowledge pragmatically Rome's rule over them, they're freely engaging in commercial activity using Roman currency.

So in doing this, in asking them to reproduce a denarius, Jesus is exposing the spies' hypocrisy and since they are acting as the Jewish leader's proxies, he's also exposing the Jewish leader's hypocrisy as well.

Jesus described the Jewish leaders earlier in Luke 16 as lovers of money and in Luke 19, 45 to 46, Jesus accused the temple merchants and the Jewish leaders who gave them permission to sell there at the temple, turn the temple, which is supposed to be a house of prayer, into a den of robbers.

Jesus accused them of that and we see here again that their piety was only a pretext for their greed. They pretended to be offended by the Roman emperor worship.

[17 : 52] They pretended to be Jewish purists who wanted nothing to do with Rome. They pretended to be indignant toward their fellow Jews who seemed content to live under Roman subjugation.

Yet in reality, they didn't bat an eye as they handled the idolatrous Roman currency. As Roman subjects, Jesus is showing them that some of the trappings of the Roman Empire are unavoidable.

And since the image of Caesar is on the denarius, Jesus continues in verse 25, then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's.

The word render can also be translated to repay. It's the same Greek word that's used to refer to repaying debt. So the NIV, the New International Version, translates this verse is then give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.

Jesus is saying, in effect, the poll tax and the denarius that you used to pay, they belong to Caesar. He is your governing authority and your reliable patronage and the services of his government.

[19 : 03] He minted this denarius coin, so repay to him what you owe him. The citizens of a country are, in a sense, genuinely indebted to their civil authorities for their service.

And it's appropriate to pay taxes to them. This idea is similar to what Paul writes about in Romans 13, 1-7. And it says, 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. Therefore, whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed and those who resist will incur judgment.

For rulers are not a terror to good conduct but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good and you will receive God's servant for your good.

But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore, one must be in subjection not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience.

[20 : 09] For because of this you also pay taxes. For the authorities are ministers of God attending to this very thing. Pay to all taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom honor to whom honor is owed.

So being subject to human governing authorities and being subject to God are not necessarily mutually exclusive is what Jesus is teaching here. In fact, no human ruler comes to power outside of God's sovereign rule.

All human authorities exercise derived authority from God. They exist to do God's business. So it's appropriate for Christians to pay taxes and be subject to them.

As long as in this story, as long as the Jews are not themselves worshiping Caesar Tiberius themselves, paying the poll tax to him does not need to violate their conscience.

Because in many cases, political allegiance to human authorities is not directly opposed to our allegiance to God. So Jesus is saying here that he's not the political revolutionary that many people wanted him to be.

[21 : 23] But Jesus is not merely being submissive to the Roman Empire either. Because in one sense, he is calling for submission to human authorities, but in another sense, Jesus' answer is very subversive.

Because he's not simply saying that Caesar and God are these equivalent but separate authorities that should have nothing to do with each other. That's not what he's saying. Look again at what Jesus says in verse 25.

Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. At the very least, then, Jesus is asserting here that Caesar, contrary to his own presumptuous claims, is not God.

The things that belong to Caesar are not the same as the things that belong to God. He distinguishes Caesar from God. But beyond this, Jesus had asked in verse 24, whose likeness and inscription does the denarius have?

And people replied, Caesar's. It's appropriate for people to pay Caesar the poll tax because the denarius, which is what it would have cost, it has his likeness or image on it.

[22 : 36] It's the same word. Now, that begs the question, what are the things that are God's? If the things that belong to Caesar are the things that has his face on it, his image on it, what has God's image on it?

The word likeness is the same word that is used in Genesis 1, 26, the time of creation, when God says, let us make man in our image after our likeness.

Humans have God's image stamped on them. They were created by God to represent him and to resemble him by ruling over creation as his vassal kings, as his vice-regents.

So then, what are the things that are God's? You can see why this is so subversive. He's saying, give to Caesar the things that belong to Caesar, and give to God the things that belong to God.

What has God's image on it? And what he's saying in essence is you owe your very selves to God, your very lives to God. Sure, you owe a portion of your income to Caesar, you owe taxes to Caesar, but you owe everything to God.

[23 : 51] As King David prays to God in 1 Chronicles 29, 14, for all things come from you, and of your own have we given you. What Jesus is teaching here is simultaneously submission to human government, but it's also a form of subversion.

He's teaching us that while we are to be subject to various human authorities, we owe our ultimate allegiance to the Lord our God. Caesar and God are not equivalent authorities.

God's claim claim on our lives and on our world trumps Caesar's claim on our lives and on our world. And Jesus also in doing this is exposing the idolatry and condemning the idolatry of emperor worship.

In the second of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20, verse 4, it says very clearly that we are not to make an image or any likeness of anything as a representation of God.

That's why Deuteronomy chapter 4, verses 15 to 16 say this specifically, since you saw no form on the day that the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, beware lest you act corruptly by making a carved image for yourselves in the form of any figure.

[25 : 13] Because we serve God who is spirit, because we serve an invisible God, he's saying it's inappropriate to depict him. That's why the Bible never describes God's appearance.

The New Testament also never gives a picture of Jesus. It's not interested in how he looked, only in what he said. The word, not the image, is what's prominent in Christianity.

And so Jesus is teaching the ultimate superiority, the ultimate allegiance that we ought to give to God. His image is on you. It doesn't matter how loyal you are, how patriotic you are, it doesn't matter what kind of human authorities are in your lives, no president, no country, no governor, no parent, no professor, has a higher claim to your allegiance than your creator God who stamped on you his very image.

That's the point that Jesus is making. this is why we see many examples throughout scripture of God commending civil disobedience as well. The Egyptian midwives disobey Pharaoh when Pharaoh commends them to kill the Jewish male babies.

Obadiah disobeys Jezebel the queen when she commends him and everyone else to kill the Lord's prophets. And Obadiah instead protects them and provides for them in secret.

[26 : 44] Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to bow down and worship the golden image of Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel disobeys King Darius' edict that no one in the kingdom should pray to anyone but to the king.

And he prays to God as he has always done. And in Acts 5 verse 29 when the apostles of Christ are strictly charged by the Jewish authorities never to preach in Jesus' name again, Peter and the apostles answer them, we must obey God rather than men.

all these show that when submitting to human authority means rebelling against God, we must obey God rather than men because he's a higher authority. Now, this shows us also that there isn't a strict separation.

Our ultimate allegiance to God should affect the way we pay allegiance to our political authorities. And this is why I'm going to digress just a little bit to give some principles that I think flow from this.

And this is why I think it's inaccurate and unbiblical to resign ourselves to total political passivity, saying, you know, well, we can't legislate morality, right?

[27 : 54] We should seek to influence our civil authorities to be more closely aligned with what God teaches us to be right and wrong. We saw earlier in Romans 13 verse 3, rulers are not a terror to good conduct but to bad.

It is the government's job to legislate and enforce morality. And they're going to do that whether you like it or not. And as citizens in a country where we have the right to vote, we need to exercise that right.

It's impossible only to preach the gospel and act like we have nothing to do with politics. To take no stance at all is to take a stance. And this is actually the exact logic that some Christians used in the 19th century to punt on the issue of slavery, saying let's not get too political, let's just focus on preaching the gospel.

To be neutral on those things is to take a side. Now let me be clear in saying this, that it is not the church's mission, the gatherer church, it is not the church's mission to legislate morality and lobby for political change.

The church's mission is to glorify God by making disciples of Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit. That's our explicit commission from the risen Lord Jesus in Matthew 28. That's where our primary focus should be.

[29 : 08] However, it is also true that every Christian who truly believes the good news of Jesus Christ does good works as they live in society, as they relate to their neighbors.

And seeking political change for the sake of the common good, especially in a democratic society like ours, is good works. It's true that only the gospel of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit's power can transform us inside and out.

Only the gospel of Jesus Christ, only God can transform human hearts. So we shouldn't be deluded into thinking that we can somehow bring about utopia through political activism.

That's never going to happen. And that's why we should prioritize the preaching of the gospel, also because that's our unique Christian vocation. Unbelievers can be active politically. They can lobby for change.

They can fight for social justice. Only believers can proclaim the gospel. That's why there should be a priority for that. Priority for proclaiming the gospel. However, this does not mean that we should be totally detached from the things of Caesar.

[30 : 13] We can't be. Good laws not only restrain bad behavior, they also teach good behavior. And there are real civic responsibilities that we ought to carry out.

And in our carrying out of our civic responsibility, we should reflect our ultimate allegiance to God. And I'm going to just give you two words of caution as you engage in political discourse.

First, we need to distinguish general revelation and special revelation. General revelation is what God has revealed in general to all of humanity.

It's what we can know about God and his will through natural means. This would include our reason, what we know about God or what we know about his creation from biology, from history, from sociology, for example.

And this would include our conscience, the moral compass that we have in general that all of humanity has. Even though these things are compromised by sin, they are still there and there is still a lot of common ground with the rest of the world.

[31 : 18] Special revelation, on the other hand, is what God has revealed especially to his people, to his people whom he saves for his glory. It's knowledge that can be gained only through supernatural means.

As 1 Corinthians chapter 2, 1 Corinthians chapter 2 verses 6 to 16 teaches, only the spirit of God can reveal saving personal knowledge of God.

That's special revelation. We can legislate things, vote for things that pertain to general revelation because that knowledge is available to all of humanity. We can reason with them about, for example, the sanctity of human life.

We can reason with them about the of all peoples, the dignity of the poor. We can reason with them about these things. We can legislate those kinds of moral issues.

But we cannot legislate things that pertain to special revelation because that knowledge is unavailable to unbelievers. We can't legislate faith. We can't legally require that people be Christians to worship or to pray to God.

[32 : 22] You can force fake conversions but you can't force real ones. And second caution is that we need to distinguish biblical principles from the political policies.

We can all agree from general revelation that caring for the poor, the widows, and the orphans is a good thing. Even unbelievers can recognize that. As believers, we are taught this specifically from God's word as well.

That's the biblical principle but there could be a range of differing opinions on how we actually accomplish that. Some people will argue that the best way to do that is to care for the poor is to let the free market run its course so that there is increased wealth overall throughout society.

Others will argue that the best way to care for the poor is to redistribute the wealth, existing wealth that's concentrated at the top. And still others will land somewhere in between.

But the Bible does not provide specific guidelines for many political policies especially in our specific context. So we need to distinguish the biblical principles and the policies and recognize that good Christians who agree on the principles can still disagree amicably on the policies.

[33 : 37] That was, sorry, kind of a long digression. But I do think it flows from the text. Hopefully it forms you as you think about these things about the relationship between church and state and about God and Caesar and what are obligations in both spheres.

And so the, but the main point to get back to it is this, the spies ask Jesus an either or question. Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar or not?

Should we serve Caesar as our king or should we serve God as our king? But Jesus answers with a both and answer. Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's.

There are duties to civil authorities that do not infringe upon our ultimate duties to God. Perform those. But civil authorities do not have total claim on us.

Our allegiance to them is subordinated to our allegiance to God. So then we should perform our duties as citizens of the kingdom of man without forgetting our primary identity and prior responsibilities as citizens of the kingdom of God.

[34 : 42] I think totalitarian governments understand this, how subversive this idea is. that's why many totalitarian governments throughout history have felt threatened by Christians, by churches and have persecuted Christians.

I think they're wrong to think that Christians pose a military threat because Jesus specifically said my kingdom is not of this world. If it were, he would have people fighting for him.

But they're not. This kingdom is not of his, not of his, his kingdom is of another world. So we do not fight to establish an earthly kingdom but we are citizens of a heavenly kingdom.

But the governments that try to have absolute power, try to have the total allegiance of their subjects have historically persecuted the church. And there's an example of this from fourth century.

Roman historian Eusebius recounts this persecution of an early Christian named Sanctus. This man was tortured for his faith in 177 AD and Eusebius writes about it this way, quote, with such determination did he stand up to their onslaughts that he would not tell them his own name, race, and birthplace or whether he was slave or free.

[36 : 01] To every question he replied in Latin, I am a Christian. This he proclaimed over and over again instead of name, birthplace, birthplace, nationality, and everything else.

And not another word did the heathen hear from him. In one sense, governments should feel threatened by the church if they seek total allegiance.

We will not seek the military might to usurp the throne of the kingdom of man, but should they seek to usurp the throne of God, should they seek to prevent us from following God and obeying God, they better be afraid because we have one master and one king, one God.

We will resist to our death. That's part of what Jesus is talking about. God's authority vis-a-vis Caesar's authority, God's authority trumps it all.

No, it doesn't matter what your name is, what your nationality is, what your race is, what your country of origin is, what your country of citizenship is, your allegiance to God trumps it all.

[37 : 13] This is what Jesus teaches about God's authority with relation to Caesar's authority, but that's not all that this passage is about. There's something kind of, I don't know if this is the appropriate way to use this term, but there's something kind of meta going on here.

I had to look it up. And I've heard some of you guys say this before. In this passage, Jesus is teaching us that while we are to be subject to various human authorities, including Caesar, we owe our ultimate allegiance to the Lord our God.

And through this passage, so that's what Jesus is teaching in the passage, but through this passage, Luke, the author, is also teaching his audience that while we are to be subject to various human authorities, including the Jewish scribes and chief priests, we owe our ultimate allegiance to the Lord our God and to Lord Jesus.

Jesus is teaching us in this passage that we owe our ultimate allegiance to God, and Luke is teaching us that we owe our ultimate allegiance to Jesus, the Son of God. Remember that this is one part, this passage is one part of a series of confrontations between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem and entered the temple in chapter 19, he cleared the temple by driving out the merchants and the money changers to create space for people to pray and space for people for him to preach the good news of salvation.

[38 : 43] And the Jewish elders, the scribes, and chief priests were understandably incensed, and they challenged Jesus in chapter 20, verse 2, by demanding, tell us by what authority you do these things, or who it is that gave you this authority.

They're saying, we are the power brokers of the Jewish community. We are the gatekeepers of the temple of God. And we did not give you permission to do all that you are doing.

So what right do you have? Who do you think you are? And from end of chapter 19 all the way through the end of chapter 20, it's all a series of confrontations between Jesus and the Jewish leaders.

And the main question on the reader's mind is, who has the real authority? Whom should we listen to for guidance, to find a way of salvation?

The official Jewish religious leaders or Jesus? That's the question. That's the main question that Luke is answering in this passage.

[39 : 51] And he makes the choice obvious by drawing a sharp contrast between Jesus and the Jewish leaders. He says in verse 19, the Jewish leaders fear the people.

They're crowd pleasers. But Jesus, as his answer shows in verses 24 to 25, has fear for neither Caesar nor for the masses.

And he says in verse 20, that the spies acting on behalf of the Jewish leaders pretended to be sincere. That phrase is literally to play the hypocrite.

In contrast, from the mouths of these hypocrites, Jesus is declared in verse 21 as someone who speaks and teaches rightly and shows no partiality, but truly teaches the way to do it.

The spies here are insincere, insincere. So they don't mean what they say, but nonetheless, what they're saying is true. In contrast to them who are insincere, Jesus is true.

[40 : 52] He is sincere. He teaches the right way of God in contrast to the Jewish leaders and their puppets. And there's a decisive victor in this confrontation in this passage as well.

He says in verse 20 that the Jewish leaders sought to catch Jesus in something he said. So as to deliver him up to the authority and jurisdiction of the governor. They had evil, murderous intent.

They sought to destroy Jesus, it said in chapter 19, verse 47. While pretending to be concerned about keeping God's law, they are blatantly trying to break one of the Ten Commandments, trying to frame and kill an innocent man.

But their plot is thwarted by Jesus because the result is in verse 26 that they were not able in the presence of the people to catch Jesus in what he said. But marveling at his answer, they became silent.

They tried to trap Jesus in his words, but instead they ended up being awed and marveled, silenced by Jesus' words. So who is the authoritative teacher here?

[41 : 59] Who is truly sent by God? Luke is telling us in this passage that Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior of the world, the Teacher of righteousness.

He is the true Son of God. Caesar claimed to be the Son of God, but Jesus really is the Son of God. The image of Caesar is on a denarius, but Jesus, as it says in Colossians 1.15, is the image of the invisible God.

He's the image of God restored. We as human beings were created to be God's image bearers. We were meant to represent Him to the rest of creation.

We were meant to resemble Him, be like Him, and rule in His stead. We were meant to pledge our ultimate allegiance to God, but we have all failed in this regard, and that's what the Bible calls sin.

We've all rebelled against God by choosing to live for ourselves instead of for Him. We've refused to acknowledge Him in our lives, have lived like He doesn't exist, as if His image is not stamped on us as our Creator.

[43 : 09] We broke all of His, we broke His righteous laws and sinned against His glory, His majesty. And all that remains for sinful people who has transgressed, rebelled against, committed treason against, and eternal God is eternal punishment.

But God so loved us that He sent His only Son to redeem us, to restore the image of God in man, and He does this by dying on the cross for the sins of His people.

And thereby, He receives our punishment, He clears our blotched record, so that He might, so that we might be saved by Him and renewed as people in His image to live for Him.

So that's the contrast that Luke is drawing here. Jesus is the true good teacher that the Jewish leaders were not. The Jewish religious leaders got in the way of God's people and prevented them from coming to God in order to cling to their own power and glory.

Jesus made the way for God's people to come to God by laying down His power and glory. Jewish religious leaders were seeking to kill Jesus while pretending to be righteous, but Jesus, who is righteous, is killed for our sake on the cross.

[44 : 36] And it's to Him that we owe our ultimate allegiance, even while we are subject to various human authorities. And that's the case for our church, too.

That's the case for the relationship between the pastor and the church's members, too. That's why it is your responsibility as members of the church to test everything.

And I want you to do exactly that with what I said this morning, tested by Scripture. Does God's Word really say what Sean just said? If it doesn't, discard it.

I don't want you to believe it. But if it does, believe it like your life depends on it. Believe it like God, the Creator, Himself spoke it to you.

It's to Him we owe our ultimate allegiance. Please reflect on that for a few moments, and we'll respond to that by praying out loud together as a church.

[45 : 42] Amen. Amen.