

Expository Thoughts On Matthew - Matthew

22:15-22

by J.C. Ryle

Transcript

We see in this passage the first of a series of subtle attacks which were made on our Lord during the last days of his earthly ministry. His deadly foes, the Pharisees, saw the influence which he was obtaining, both by his miracles and by his preaching. They were determined by some means to silence him, or put him to death; they therefore endeavoured to entangle him in his talk. They sent forth their disciples with the Herodians to try him with a hard question: they wished to entice him into saying something which might serve as a handle for an accusation against him. Their scheme, we are told in these verses, entirely failed: they took nothing by their aggressive movement, and retreated in confusion. The first thing which demands our attention in these verses is the flattering language with which our Lord was accosted by his enemies. "Master, they said, we know that thou art true and teachest the way of God in truth. Neither carest thou for any man for thou regardest not the person of men. How well these Pharisees and Herodians talked. What smooth and honeyed words were these. They thought no doubt that by good words and fair speeches they would throw our Lord off his guard. It might truly be said of them the words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart; his words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords." (i.e. Psalm 55:21). It becomes all professing Christians to be much on their guard against flattery. We mistake greatly if we suppose that persecution and hard usage are the only weapons in Satan's armoury: that crafty foe has other engines for doing us mischief, which he knows well how to work. He knows how to poison souls by the world's seductive kindness, when he cannot frighten them by the fiery dart or the sword. Let us not be ignorant of his devices. "By peace he destroys many." We are only too apt to forget this truth: we overlook the many examples which God has given us in Scripture for our learning. What brought about the ruin of Samson? Not the armies of the Philistines, but the pretended love of a Philistine woman. What led to Solomon's backsliding? Not the strength of outward enemies, but the blandishment of his numerous wives. What was the cause of King Hezekiah's greatest mistake? Not the sword of Sennacherib, or the threats of Rab-shakeh, but the flattery of the Babylonian ambassadors. Let us remember these things, and be on our guard. Peace often ruins nations more than war; sweet things occasion far more sickness than bitter; the sun makes the traveler cast off his protective garments far sooner than the north wind. Let us beware of the flatterer. Satan is never so dangerous as when he appears as an angel of light: the world is never so dangerous to the Christian as when it smiles. When Judas betrayed his Lord, it was with a kiss. The believer that is proof against the world's frown does well; but he that is proof against its flattery does better. The second thing that demands our attention in these verses is the marvelous wisdom of the reply which our

Lord made to his enemies. The Pharisees and Herodians asked whether it was lawful to give tribute to Caesar or not. They doubtless thought that they had put a question which our Lord could not answer without giving them an advantage. Had he simply replied that it was lawful to pay tribute, they would have denounced him to the people as one who dishonored the privileges of Israel and considered the children of Abraham no longer free, but subject to a foreign power. Had he, on the other hand, replied that it was not lawful to pay tribute, they would have denounced him to the Romans as a mover of sedition and a rebel against Caesar, who refused to pay his taxes. But our Lord's conduct completely baffled them. He demanded to see the tribute money. He asks them whose head is on that coin. They reply, "Caesar's." They acknowledge that the Roman Emperor Caesar has some authority over them, by using money bearing his image and supercription, since he that coins the current money is ruler of the land where that money is current. And at once they receive an irresistibly conclusive answer to their question: "Render to Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's." The principle laid down in these well-known words is one of deep importance. There is one obedience owing by every Christian to the civil government under which he lives, in all matters which are temporal, and not purely spiritual. He may not approve of every requirement of that civil government; but he must submit to the laws of the commonwealth, so long as those laws are unrepealed. He must "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's." There is another obedience which the Christian owes to the God of the Bible in all matters which are purely spiritual. No temporal loss, no civil disability, no displeasure of the powers that he must ever tempt him to do things which the Scripture plainly forbids. His position may be very trying; he may have to suffer much for his conscience's sake: but he must never fly in the face of unmistakable requirements of Scripture. If Caesar coins a new Gospel, he is not to be obeyed. We must "render to God the things that are God's." The subject unquestionably is one of great difficulty and delicacy. It is certain that the church must not swallow up the state; it is no less certain that the state must not swallow up the church. On no point, perhaps, have conscientious men been so much tried; on no point have good men disagreed so much as in solving the problem where the things of Caesar end, and where the things of God begin. The civil power, on the one side, has often encroached terribly on the rights of conscience—as the English Puritans found to their cost in the unhappy times of the Stuarts; the spiritual power, on the other side, has often pushed its claims to an extravagant extent, so as to take Caesar's scepter out of his hands—as it did when the church of Rome trampled on our own English King John. In order to have a right judgment in all questions of this kind, every true Christian should constantly pray for "wisdom from above." The man whose eye is single, and who daily seeks for grace and practical common sense, will never be allowed greatly to err.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jc-ryle/expository-thoughts-on-matthew-matthew-2215-22/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net