

Jesus and Politics — Delivery Transcript

Matthew 22:15–22 (CSB) · Wes Terry · Sunday, July 5, 2026 · Political Jesus

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All right. Well, great singing this morning. Thanks to everybody. Thanks to our team for leading us in worship, and if you've got a Bible, we're going to be in Matthew chapter twenty-two. Matthew chapter twenty-two. We're taking a little bit of a break in the Sermon on the Mount and doing something that preachers are not supposed to do, which is talk about the issue of politics.

And so before we jump into it, last night my two older kids — well, my oldest, Blaze, and then Addie Jo, are both out of town, so Audra and I just had little Briggs, and so we could afford to pop firecrackers. So we bought some firecrackers for the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of America, and my youngest just loves them.

He loves the fire. He loves the popping. He loves the gunpowder. Kind of worried about it because I was like that when I was his age. But it was a great way to ring in the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the United States of America. Cooked burgers and had a less over since Kelly is with my daughter in California.

But the gift of the United States of America — I do think it is important to just stop and recognize it for what it is, and that is a really good and precious gift. The kinds of freedoms that we have in this country are unique. They don't exist in other parts of the world. They have not existed at other times in human history.

The sense of ordered liberty that we enjoy as Americans is not the natural course of things. It's not the natural course of human governments. The vast majority of human governments have been characterized by tyranny or oligarchy or other forms. And I'm not saying that our country is perfect, and certainly we've got issues that we need to correct, and we're not where we were when we got the founding.

You know, there's a way between where we are and what we were when we were founded. But it is important to celebrate and to give God gratitude for the good gift of what He's given.

And the fact that He has sovereignly in His plan put us in this country at this time, facing the challenges that we face — that is not accidental.

He is sovereign, providentially has chosen to put us where we are. And as Uncle Ben said to Spider-Man, "With great power comes great responsibility." Every gift in a way presents a stewardship of sorts. Stewardships are temporary by their nature, which means we're going to be accountable for how we stewarded the freedoms that we have.

And so I think it'd be good for us to stop for a minute and to think about how to live Christianly in this country, how to think about the relationship between Jesus and politics. And I know that even saying the word out loud, it kind of creates tension. Like the tension in the room rises just a little bit every time I say politics.

Jesus, politics. Goes up a little more. And when I was coming up — I say that like I'm an old man — but when I was coming up, the conventional wisdom was preachers don't talk about politics, because why would you want to alienate half of the people that you're trying to reach? Because we're pretty well half divided in the United States of America.

Most elections are pretty close. As Michael Jordan wisely said, "I don't want to get political because Republicans buy sneakers too." So I don't want to get too political because I'm trying to reach lost people, and there's lost Republicans, and there's lost Democrats, and there's lost Libertarians, and there's lost people all across the board.

So I accept that wisdom. I think it's wise, and I think there's a good way to talk about politics, and then there's a very not good way to talk about politics. But the supposition that talking about politics per se is unbiblical, or is not good, is unbiblical — because Jesus really does care about your approach and my approach to politics.

And you know he cares about politics because when he was confronted with political questions and political issues, he did not dodge the question. He addressed it head-on and addressed it in a way that really speaks to, at a fundamental level, how we should think about politics. And if you think about political issues, at least as they exist today — I've had people say, "Why are Christians talking about poli— why do preachers get up in politics all the time?"

I've heard one guy say, and I agree with it: "It's not because preachers are getting more political. It's because the political issues are getting more theological." And if you think about the issues that we face today, a lot of the core questions: what does it mean to be a human? What is the human body?

What is a man? What is a woman? Who gets to decide? What is gender? What is marriage? What's the value of a human life? When does human life begin? These are political

considerations now that are some of the most hotly debated political topics, and yet at root they are theological questions.

They're questions about what you believe about God and what you believe about man, and God creating man in his image, and who gets to dictate how we talk about the things that he has made and what his good designs are or are not. Those are all theological questions. I said last week that everybody's a theologian.

I really believe that. All you need to be a theologian is to just have an opinion about God, and most of us have one. So the question isn't, are you a theologian? The question is, are you a good theologian or are you a bad theologian? And the same is true with politics, because all you have to do to be political is to have an opinion about the polis.

The polis is the Greek word for people. So if you have an opinion about how people ought to live together, how we ought to go about things as a society — if you have an opinion about that, then you are a political person. You are, as Aristotle would say, a political animal. And so the question isn't, are you going to be for politics or against politics? Do you talk about politics? Do you not talk about politics? The question is, are your politics good? Are your politics right? Are they in keeping with God's design or are they not?

And so what's so interesting about our approach to politics is we are simultaneously both very passionate about our politics and at the same time kind of caged in the way that we talk about them.

For example — very passionate. It's like at the Thanksgiving dinner table, the one thing you're not allowed to talk about is politics, especially these days. Whoo. Don't talk about politics or money or religion, right? Those are the three. Have you ever wondered why it's those three and not others? I think it's because those three grip and animate the human heart more than any other topic.

Like, you are most emotionally charged when it comes to money, politics, and religion. So we're very shy in a way — like, let's not talk about it. And when you're face to face, it's usually pretty polite. But yet, when we get online, we start throwing grenades and spouting off. Like, we say things online that we would never say to anyone else, and we carry it with such strident, unapologetic, can't-change-my-mind, it's-this-and-no-other-way... We become so dug in that it seems like a contradiction. And again, it is because of the nature of the topic. It's because it's getting at how we do life together. And because human beings are made in the image of God, human beings are living life beneath the sovereignty of God, how we think about politics is inescapably theological. It contains theological assumptions.

And so what we're going to see in our passage today is Jesus be confronted with a political question, and as you're going to see, he doesn't dodge it. He doesn't explain it away. He

addresses it head on. And this is a question that was posed to Jesus because of some people who are really upset with his growing popularity.

In Matthew twenty-two, if you're not familiar — Jesus, it's the last week of his life. He is in Jerusalem. He's eventually about to be crucified, but before he's crucified, that last week of his life, he's in the temple teaching and preaching and doing all of these different things. And the things that he was saying, the parables that he was preaching, they were acting as a strong indictment against the religious establishment of his day.

Those would be people like the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the scribes, people like that — the Bible teachers, the religious elite. He was basically calling them out for their hypocrisy and duplicity and the fact that they were leading people astray. And they became increasingly angry with Jesus, so much so that when we get to Matthew twenty-two, it says that they began to plot how they might come up with a plan to put Jesus out of the question — how to either have him killed by the Romans or have the people turn on him so that he is not so influential.

And the thing that they use to snooker Jesus into that trap is a political topic, and it's one of the most hotly debated political topics of all political topics, and that is the topic of taxes. You know, everybody loves paying their taxes. But this is not like most of us think about when we think about taxes.

It's not like income tax. I don't even know if they had an income tax. This is what was called a poll tax. And a poll tax — or, they have another name for it, a tribute — was basically a tax that every single person living within Rome paid as a nod and kind of a gesture to say to Caesar, "I know that you're my sovereign. I know that you're my lord. I know that everything good that comes to me comes to me because of your administration being what it is, the Pax Romana, and so I'm going to kind of pay my fair share to say, 'Hey, thanks, Caesar, for every good blessing in my life.'" That was the gist of it.

And for Jewish people, it was extremely offensive for them to have to pay that poll tax, because in their point of view, the promised land in which they were dwelling, the land of Palestine and the region around it, that was given to Abraham. It was an inheritance for Israel, and Rome came in there with their iron fist and their big boot, and they just conquered that region. And so while they were formerly at least somewhat free, now they are living under oppression, under captivity. They are in an occupied land, and every time that they would pay that tax, it was just a reminder for them that Caesar is your sovereign.

Whether you like it or not, Caesar's your daddy. You better pay up. And it became so offensive and so theologically charged that one gentleman by the name of Judas — Judas the Galilean — in six AD, he created a political movement to try to overthrow the Roman Empire

called the Zealots. And he became pretty effective, and he became effective because he couched his movement on theological grounds.

And he basically said, "For us to pay this tribute is in essence blasphemy against the Most High God." To pay tribute to Caesar is to deny that Yahweh alone is God. And so you can really feel, can't you, just how politically charged this question is going to be. So let's pick it up in Matthew 22, starting in verse 15.

It says that after all this teaching from Jesus had made them really, really mad, that the Pharisees went and they plotted how to trap Jesus by what He said. So they sent their disciples — who's that? the disciples of the Pharisees — to Him along with the Herodians. If you underline in your Bible, you want to underline Pharisees and Herodians. "Teacher," they said, "we know that you are truthful and that you teach truthfully the way of God, and you don't care what anyone thinks, nor do you show partiality."

That's brown-nosing if I've ever seen it. "Tell us then, what do you think? Is it lawful" — AKA is it proper to God, is it proper in God's eyes — "to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" And perceiving their malicious intent, Jesus said, "Why are you testing me, you hypocrites?" Now, we're going to go to what Jesus says in just a moment, but I just want to kind of set it up, because you can't really appreciate just how charged this moment is unless you know some of the background.

I said you should underline Pharisees and Herodians because these are two different political camps that could not disagree more. They are polar opposites. The Pharisees were a popular lay movement of religious people who were fastidious in their commitment to obeying the Torah. They were super spiritual, super religious, and they hated the Roman Empire.

They thought Rome was... what's the word I'm looking for? They were not a rightful heir to their power. They were unjust, and most Jews believed that as well, and so they found in the Pharisees a political expression of their rage and their angst against the Roman Empire. They were an illegitimate power. That's the word I was looking for.

And then on the other side, you had the Herodians. Now, you guys probably have heard the word Herod. Remember when Jesus was born, you had Herod upset about it. Herod was a ruling authority that was Jewish, but it was Jewish collaboration with the Roman Empire. The Herodians were basically saying, "Hey, the water's warm over here. There's a lot of power when you participate with the Romans. There's a lot of privilege. There's a lot to be gained here politically and financially, and so, you know, I may have to compromise my morals. I may have to, like, lose some of my Jewish identity, but I'm cool with that." And so they got in bed with the Romans.

So you could not be more different politically. And as is often the case in politics, a common enemy makes for some very strange bedfellows, and you see people join forces in politics to try to take out what they see as a shared and common threat, and that's what's happening with Jesus.

And so Pharisees' disciples and some of the Herodians, they come to Jesus, and notice they raise the question, "Is it lawful?" And I said that's another way of saying, "Is it proper in God's eyes?" They're not saying, "Is it legal or illegal in the eyes of Rome?" That's an obvious — you have to pay your taxes. That's the law. But they're saying, "As a practicing Jew, is it proper in God's eyes, yes or no?" And right there, they're trying to trap Jesus, because no matter which way Jesus answers, he's going to lose. If he sides with the Pharisees, he's essentially going to lose the people, because they were with the Pharisees in their hostility and angst against the Roman Empire.

But if he answers, "No, you shouldn't pay the tax," then the Herodians are going to turn Jesus in, and the Romans did not look kindly on sedition. You would lose your life. And so either Jesus loses his influence with the people, or Jesus loses his life through a political execution. No matter which way he answers, if he answers yes or no, he is a goner. Which is the first thing I want us to see about politics as a Christian: political questions are often complicated, and if you begin to approach politics as if it's either/or, yes or no, right and wrong, good and bad, then you will lose the political game, number one, and I think you will separate yourself from the kind of wisdom that is necessary to navigate political issues in a Christian way.

What's so unique about Jesus and the way that Jesus answers is that He responds in a way that, in effect, challenges the wrong assumptions that were being carried into the question, and He does so on either side. He challenges both camps, because they were framing the question in such a way that it was refusing to deal honestly with the complexity of the issue, and I think that's what we need as Christians.

We need that kind of wisdom, and that kind of wisdom only comes when you are willing to consider the context in which these political questions are raised. And I want to point out a couple of things about the context that Jesus is facing, because it's really instructive, I think, for our situation here in the United States, given our political polarization and people trying to squeeze you into a tribe.

Are you with us? Are you against us? Are you this team or that team? I think what Jesus does here is absolutely brilliant and kind of shows you that His politics sits above so much of the earthly politics that gets so polarized and divisive today. Number one, He considers the context that they are not asking a question in good faith.

They were asking this question for political leverage to justify political violence. That's number one. The second thing is Jesus knows that them buttering Him up with these fancy compliments — "Oh, Teacher, we know that You are truthful, and You teach truthfully." You notice the repetition of truth? "You teach truthfully the way of God. You don't care what anyone thinks. You don't show partiality." They are not saying these things because they believe them. They are saying these things to disarm Jesus so that He's not aware of the threat that He's actually under. It's ironic, because they are speaking truthfully, but they're speaking truthfully as they're trying to deceive.

That's kind of what's so crazy about it, and that's true in a lot of politics. A lot of the ancient Sophists — they were called Sophists because they were really effective public speakers, and they could use persuasive speech in public to, in effect, lull people to sleep so that they would unquestioningly adopt the conclusions of the Sophist even though the Sophist was not telling the truth. The Sophist would lead them astray, causing people to believe all manner of nonsense and foolishness just because it sounded really good. Sounds really nice. Does that sound familiar?

So much of our political discourse is characterized by this kind of speech. I use the word in your notes: casuistic speech. I didn't even know what that word meant until a couple of months ago, but now it's one of my favorite words ever. It means to use persuasive, fancy, elaborate, compelling speech to deceive. And you should look up that word in the dictionary and put every politician's face right there, because that's what they do.

They are characterized by casuistry. They are great at speaking and terrible at telling the truth, and they use words as a way to kind of lull you to sleep sometimes and cause you to unquestioningly adopt their conclusions. And they prey on your... in this case, they were trying to prey on Jesus's vanity, I guess, his ego. But politicians will prey on our anger and our rage and our jealousy, our zeal for justice, our zeal for mercy, and they will lead us astray.

The other thing that's casuistic about their speech is this false contradiction. That's what we would call it in logic. I say that like I'm in logic. I'm not in logic, but I just know that's a logical contradiction. It's called a false dilemma. Either/or, yes or no. Do we pay taxes to Caesar or not? And the reality is it's not a yes or no question, as you're going to see in just a moment. But they had presented the question in such a way that it's framed as a yes or no, and you got to know that that happens in our politics as well.

Are you on this team? Are you on that team? Are you for us or are you against us? And Jesus just refuses to be caught up by those kinds of verbal tricks because of his wisdom. Which leads to the next thing. It wasn't just that he identified their deceptive speech. He also recognizes the corruption of their motives.

They were not there because they were seeking the truth. They were not there because they were curious about Jesus's perspective on tax policy. They were there to get him to fall into a trap so that they could then justify political violence. They were using his response as a pretext to take him out of the equation, and Jesus recognizes it and calls them out for it.

"Why do you question me? Why are you testing me, you hypocrites?" Now, how did Jesus know? It's not like Jesus gets to tap into God mode when he needs it. Like, it's not a Nintendo cheat code. Him being fully God is not a cheat code where he turns on God mode — "oh, these are bad intentions." That's not what happened. He's just as fully human as he is truly God. And so he operated in his ministry in the same way that you and I operate in the Christian life: filled with the Holy Spirit. And so his wisdom to discern the context enabled him to discern these are not honest actors. These people are not asking this question because they're sincere in wanting to know what I think.

And so much of our political discourse is the same way. If you could really see the sincere convictions and the sincere agenda of so much of what animates our political discourse, you would be amazed. So much of the things that we talk about and the way that we talk about them are fanned into flame by Internet algorithms that we don't see and by misaligned economic incentives that don't push us towards truth, but they push us towards outrage and polarization and anger.

We're so upset about — it's not that we shouldn't be upset about it and that you shouldn't have a view on it, but it's used as a tool to distract you from the more important thing that more broadly affects the way that our politics impacts our daily life. The motives are often corrupt — not just by the politicians, but by the political actors in service of political agendas.

And all I'm saying is, as a Christian, one of the things that Jesus is modeling for us is to consider that context so that we can wisely navigate it, so that you're not getting caught up in all of that. And the other thing it enabled Jesus to do is it kept him from adopting either camp. Now, what I'm not saying is that you shouldn't have a politics. Like, I have very strong opinions politically, and I am definitely in one camp and not the other camp. But I hope I would also recognize from what Jesus is doing here that there are problems in every camp. No one camp has a corner on the kingdom of God. So much of human politics is in service of a human agenda, and so much of kingdom politics is above that. It's beyond so much of what gets human politicians wrapped up and what they use to deploy so that they can get votes and so on and so forth.

So what Jesus is doing in his response is he's saying there are problems with either camp. The way that you're posing the question is wrong, but the people who are dug into their respective perspectives, they also are wrong in some of what their assumptions are. And the way that Jesus answers the question shows you He has the wisdom to see the problems in

both sides, in both camps. And I'm not just talking about left and right. You can use left and right, libertarian, not libertarian — you can use it in a lot of different respects, but what wisdom does is it separates you, it emotionally removes you enough so that you can think soberly about what's really at play here.

And so all of that is demonstrated by Jesus in His response. What is His response? He says, "Bring me the coin. Bring me the coin that you use to pay this tax" — because Jesus doesn't have the coin, which is brilliant, because they're trying to trap Jesus and make Him guilty of either Roman sedition or Roman collaboration, and Jesus is saying, "I don't even have the thing. Where's the thing? Do you have the thing?" And they're like, "Yeah, we actually have the thing." And it's like an awesome way of Jesus setting a trap for those trying to trap Him and saying, "Well, then you're the collaborators, aren't you? You have the coin. Why don't you tell me?"

"Bring me the coin. Show me what it looks like." And when they bring Him a coin — and it was a silver denarius, which was one day's wage — then Jesus says, "Whose image and inscription is this?" And so then they respond, "It's Caesar's image." Now, what you want to know about these Roman coins called the denarius: it was one day's wage, and it was a piece of political propaganda, as is all fiat currency. Well, that's another discussion for another day. But it was a piece of political propaganda because on the front face of the coin, it had the words, "Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus."

Now, I don't know if you're familiar with Roman history, but Rome used to have kings, and then they got rid of their kings, and they hated kings, and then they had — it's a long, sordid history, but basically one guy came along named Julius Caesar. He became really effective as a politician. The Romans just absolutely loved him. He became Augustus Caesar. The month of August became named after Augustus Caesar because he claimed himself a status of divinity. He was the first Roman politician to exalt himself to the status of a god, and Tiberius was one of his sons.

And so Tiberius is saying, "I'm the son of the divine Augustus, which means I'm also divine." Except — at least Augustus waited until after he was dead to become divine. Tiberius says, "I'm God right now." And so he put on the back of every coin Pontifex Maximus, which is translated in Latin, high priest, and it was his way of saying, "I'm no mere politician. I am a Messiah figure. I am your intercessor. I am your go-between between the God that you worship and yourself. In other words, I'm higher than your God, or I'm equal with your God."

What you need to know about the Roman Empire — one of the reasons that the Romans were able to establish such a political peace for such a long period of time is because they would conquer these peoples, various different cultures, and they would all worship different gods and have different opinions about God. And they would say to these different cultures

that they would defeat, "You are welcome in the Roman Empire with your religion and all. You can speak the language you speak now. You can worship the way you worship now, believe the same God that you believe. The only thing we ask of you is that you also worship Caesar."

And that was their political tool to keep everybody in check. That's why Christians were so fiercely persecuted by the Roman Empire. They called them atheists, because they refused to bow the knee to Caesar. The top religion in Rome was the Roman imperial cult — the cult that Caesar is king — and that's what this coin represents. Bow the knee to Caesar.

So not only is it his court, which is the extent of his sovereignty — like if you break the speed limit in Rome, you're going to be in... did they even have a speed limit? I don't know. If you rob a store in Rome, you're going to land in Tiberius' court, okay? It's his sovereign domain. But it also represented his cult, which means for a faithful Jew, the day that this coin was minted, it violated the first two of the Ten Commandments — a graven image and an idol — which is why so many people were against it.

So Jesus says, "Show me the coin." Whose image? Caesar's image. And he's saying, "Yeah, it's his cult, right? It's his court, and it's his cult. And you want to know my opinion on Caesar's court and cult? Here's my opinion. Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar. And give to God what belongs to God."

The way I'm going to phrase it in your notes: give to Caesar that which is his claim, but keep from Caesar that which he should never control. And this forms the foundational layer of the politics of Jesus — namely, that human governments, human authorities have been given a real but limited claim. They have real but limited authority, and we should give to government that which is theirs.

Here's essentially what Jesus is doing. It's really fascinating. When he says "Give to Caesar," he changes the verb. When they say, "Should we give tribute to Caesar?" they use a Greek word called *didomi*. It means to take something that's yours and to give it to someone else. Jesus changes the verb. He says, "No, don't give what's yours to Caesar. Give back to Caesar what's his."

Render back. Give back to Caesar what belongs to him. In other words, Jesus is saying, "You used Caesar's roads to economically advance yourself, so give Caesar back what is his. They're his roads. You used them. Give it back. You used Caesar's army to economically advance yourself. You used the Pax Romana to have free exchange and freedom of movement. So it's his army, it's his peace, so give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar."

And I think the Lord would say the same thing to us. You need to pay your taxes — all of it. You should not break the speed limit. And I'm real bad about that one. You should not break the speed limit. Anything that would land you in court, you should avoid, okay? To the point

of being respectful to the police officers that pull you over, even when they're jerks — which rarely, rarely happens around here, for all the police officers in the room. Give respect. Give Caesar what is his claim.

But here's the kicker. Keep from Caesar what is not his to control. He can't control your conscience. He can't control your worship. He can't control your morality. He can't control your affection. He can't control your speech. This is what makes America such a Christian nation. We recognize implicitly what belongs to the state and what belongs to the Lord. And what Jesus, I think, would say for, like, Communist China or so many governments in human history is they are claiming for themselves that which does not belong to them.

You cannot have a politics that puts the state in the place of God, and you want to resist the urge to make Caesar your lord. Which, by the way — this was not the only Caesar to try to do that, nor is this the last generation that tries to wed the altar and the throne. There is even in our own politics a temptation, if we're not careful, to say, "Well, this one political leader, we can make him a messiah. We can make him different. He can realize our dreams. He can realize our hopes. He can establish the utopian vision, a flourishing that we know is possible if we could just have our way."

Any time that the altar and the throne have been forged together, it has resulted in all manner of chaos and death and destruction, because no man has that kind of claim. And when we put men or women in positions of power so that they exercise that kind of claim, it corrupts them, and it damages the politics. And so Jesus says, "Give to Caesar that which is his claim, but no more, and then give to God what belongs to God."

And that's the part that everybody hears but nobody really thinks about. Everybody hears the part about "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's," and they kind of focus on that. It's the second part that I think is so fascinating, because Jesus is saying two things that are really, really powerful. When he says, "Give to God that which is God's," the answer to that question works at two levels.

One, everything belongs to the Lord. In fact — in your notes — every earthly crown sits beneath the crown of God. Every Sabbath, when the Herodians and the Pharisees would go into the temple, they would sing the song of Psalm 24:1, "The Earth is the Lord's and everything in it. The world and its inhabitants — everything belongs to the Lord." They would remember Proverbs 8:15, "It is by me, Yahweh, that kings reign and rulers enact just law." Daniel said to a pagan Nebuchadnezzar, who was no friend of Yahweh, "The Lord removes and establishes kings." The reason you're in charge, Nebuchadnezzar, is because the Lord wills it, and the Lord will remove you when he wants to remove you — or make you walk around like a crazy cow. "The Lord God of the heavens has given you sovereignty, power, strength, and glory."

So from the beginning, Christian people have been understanding that earthly powers have power because the power was given to them by the Lord who owns it all. And that's why Paul would say to Christians, even under a pagan Roman government, "Submit to your governing authorities. They are God's servants for your good." Not submit to them because Tiberius deserved it. He didn't. He was wicked, man. For my 10th grade humanities class, we read through the annals of Roman history, and we read about this dude. He was a bad dude. Corrupt — he had all kind of problems. You don't submit because he deserves the submission. You submit out of reverence to Christ, because Christ in his sovereign authority has instituted this government for your good, even when it's pagan and terrible. And so submit to government unless and until they ask you to sin against God, and in that case, you obey God rather than men. But you submit to government because everything belongs to the Lord.

But the other thing — the more profound implication — is not that God owns everything. It's give to God what belongs to God. What belongs to God? You belong to God. And you belong to God in the same way that Caesar's coin belongs to Caesar — because his image is on the coin. Caesar's image is on the coin, and God's image is on you.

Now, Jesus never says this explicitly, but it is so strongly implied you can't but see it. Every Jewish boy and girl would have grown up reading Genesis, the Torah — Genesis 1:26, "God created man in His own image. In the image of God He created them; male and female He created them." The thing that separates us from the rest of the animals is that God has breathed the breath of life into us, and we image Him. We mirror Him. We are like God. We represent God in our reasoning and the way that we relate and take responsibility and dominion.

And Jesus is essentially saying, "You must give Caesar his coin because his image is on it, but you must never forget — you must give your own self, your entire self, to God, because His image is on you." And so ultimate allegiance always goes ultimately to the Lord, because we carry His image. And when you braid those two convictions together, it creates a very distinctively Christian politic.

And I want to talk about that, and then we're going to be done. In the first century, there were a variety of political movements that had different philosophies for how to interact with the Roman Empire, and every one of them got it wrong. We've already looked at two of them with the Pharisees and the Herodians. There were two others I want to talk about briefly, and then we're going to wrap it up.

We know that the Pharisees were characterized by a spirit of what I'm going to call political contempt. By contempt, I mean they looked at the Roman Empire and they hated them. There was resentment, hostility, you're-no-good. And this kind of politics shows up in our world today when you show contempt for the other side of the political aisle. When you look

at the person who has that yard sign up that is in the opposite political camp, and you get so worked up that you forget that they're created in the image of God — they're a human being created in God's image, worthy of dignity and respect. They're not evil. They're not your enemy. They're not subhuman. And you begin to talk about them in ways that treats them as though they're less than human, or you begin, in your political discourse, to refer to them in ways that are cruel and rude and demeaning.

If that is you and you are a Christian, your politics is not Christian. That is a very un-Christian approach to politics, and yet it's increasingly becoming true even among Christians, because the polarization in our culture today has got us so entrenched. And I'm not saying you shouldn't have a side — like, I legit have a side. But when your commitment to that side, because it shares more of your convictions, causes you to mistreat or to condemn and cruelly tear down people who are of a different persuasion, then you are rejecting the politics of Jesus, in my opinion, and I think he would demonstrate that in his response.

The second wrong-headed approach to politics is shared by the Essenes, and that's political cynicism. Political cynicism is this idea that the politics is so broken — I quit, I give up. I'm not going to vote. I'm not going to participate. I'm out. And the way that the Essenes did this is that they literally packed their bags, and they moved out into the desert, and they built a whole different community in the caves of Qumran and just hung out out there and wrote about eschatology and the Lord coming back and stuff like that.

You've heard about the Dead Sea Scrolls? The Dead Sea Scrolls that were so amazingly preserved — it was because they were out there in the Qumran Essene community. I shouldn't call them lunatics, but they were a little cuckoo for Cocoa Puffs in some ways politically. That is not — I don't think that's the way of Jesus. I don't think it's take your ball and go home, especially if you're an American. For goodness sakes, we have a voice. We have ways to participate. We have ways to shape the process of a democratic republic. Why would you check out? Why would you abandon that stewardship? So don't fall into cynicism. Don't black pill. Don't despair.

But also don't join the Zealots. Remember Judas the Galilean? "They are causing us to blaspheme God. What do you do with someone who's causing you to blaspheme God? You kill them." Isn't that wrong? Doesn't God say do not murder? "Yeah, but in this case it's okay, because they're really bad, and sometimes you got to do really bad things to take out really bad people." A politics that justifies political violence for the sake of expediency, or for the sake of a means-justify-the-ends kind of a politics — you are in very dangerous territory. It's very un-Christian.

Jesus never advanced his kingdom by force. His kingdom always advanced through persuasion, through faith, repentance, voluntary commitment. It was never through

violence. Now, he did have his disciples who were Zealots, but I like to think he challenged them on their zealotry, and he never once endorses that approach to politics.

And I know for Americans you would say, "Well, I would never justify violence," but a lot of times we do justify taking away people's freedoms, subjugating people who may disagree with us. "You're just going to have to live with it. You're just going to have to deal with it. I'm going to take away your freedoms, because that's the only way to establish the kingdom of God." If you establish the kingdom of God by taking away the choice of human beings, that is not a Christian politic — and it's not American either. That's what makes America so awesome, so beautiful. It's the freedom. It's the political freedom to go based on your conscience, and freedom of religion, freedom of worship. And if you take that away in the name of Jesus, there's nothing Jesus about it.

And then the last one is the Herodians, and that's political capitulation. This is the idea that — "I can't beat 'em, I'm going to join 'em." So I may disagree with the Democrats about X, Y, or Z policy, but because I hate the other side so much, I'm just going to sacrifice my Christian convictions and I'm going to affirm in them that which I should not affirm. I'm going to celebrate in them that which I should not celebrate. I'm going to endorse and defend that which I should never endorse or defend. Or the same thing on the right side of the aisle with Republicans or MAGA or the Libertarians — or any number of governments around the world wherein participation or identification with that party requires you to compromise spiritually.

Now, I'm not saying if you vote for one party or the other that you are compromising spiritually. I really don't believe that, because it's a two-party system whether we like it or not, and it's almost always the lesser of two evils, and it takes discernment and wisdom to decide what that is. And I definitely have an opinion about which one that is, and you do too. But the point is that you become so committed to that cause that you begin to defend things you would never defend as a Christian — should never defend. Or you begin to excuse things that cannot be excused, and that's capitulation. That's exactly what the Herodians did.

Jesus rejects every one of those four wrong-headed ways of doing politics, and he embodies what I'm going to call political captivation. Jesus paid his taxes, in case you don't know. He obeyed the government. In fact, he sat through an unjust trial wherein he was accused of something he didn't do, and not once did he buck the system and say, "This is nonsense. I'm outta here." He didn't do any of that. He just submits.

And Jesus, more than any other human being, demonstrates what it looks like to give yourself completely to the Father. Jesus, more than any other human, was created perfectly in the image of God. He perfectly reasoned, he perfectly related to people, he perfectly took responsibility and did what he was supposed to do. And even though in his entire life he fully gave himself to the Father, he allowed himself to be put on a cross so he could pay the

penalty for your sin and for my sin. And not once did he demonstrate a politics anything other than what we see in this passage, wherein he gives to Caesar that which belongs to Caesar and he gives to God that which belonged to God.

He's the perfect illustration. And what he does through his life is he sets a new standard. He establishes a new politics. He invites people into a new kingdom — a better kingdom, an eternal kingdom, a heavenly kingdom — and they willingly repent, they willingly believe, they willingly join that movement, and they give their lives, and their lives are changed by virtue of their faith in that Messiah, that king, and that kingdom.

And then those people, through their changed lives, become salt and light in the world, and people around them see their good deeds and go, "You know what? I may not agree with their politics, but I cannot deny their lives are flourishing. Their marriages are flourishing, their finances are flourishing, their businesses are flourishing, because they've adopted the standards and designs of this King Jesus."

And what Christians are able to do, whether they're left-leaning or right-leaning, is show a better world, a better America, better politics, because it is ultimately subservient to a true and better kingdom that is the kingdom of God. And through that, they captivate the world, and the world becomes changed through their witness, and it subversively begins to work its way into the politics.

Now, in a lot of ways, that's kind of the story of America, and that's the story we need to retell if we're going to survive the brokenness that is in our country right now. But if the Lord has been faithful these last two hundred and fifty years to bring us to this place, and he has put you and me in positions of influence and stewardship at this time and in this place, then he has given us everything that we need in the Holy Spirit and in His Word to model something better, something Christian, something God-glorifying.

And so as we enter into what's bound to be a very partisan and ugly political season, with some very nasty things said in either direction — might we be a people who show a better way, a distinctively Christian politics that denounces as sub-Christian these other approaches, and treats every person with dignity and respect as people created in the image of God, and gives to no man, to no Caesar, that which belongs to God alone, but will give to Caesar that which Caesar is owed — and do so with great joy and great humility, because in submitting to Caesar, they're submitting to the Lord.

And so I don't know what that feels like or looks like in your context, but I think that it would be worth our time to reflect upon it and to respond. And so just right there where you're seated, if you can bow your heads and close your eyes, and just take a few moments to — as David prayed — "Would you search me, O God? See my heart. See if there's any unclean way in me."

And I know for myself, this week I had to admit I've gotten a little too worldly in my politics. It has gripped my heart in ways that are a little too strong, a little too much like this world and not enough like the kingdom of God. Whatever the Holy Spirit brings to mind, would you just ask the Lord: would you give me wisdom and discernment to know how to navigate these next six months? Would you show me the way of our Lord Jesus? And help me in the way — not just the way that I vote, but in the way that I participate in the process. Would you help me to be salt and light? A new covenant Christian pointing to the new covenant and the new kingdom brought about by that covenant, which has as its king and Lord the Lord Jesus Christ.

Father, I thank you for your word. I thank you that even for the very earthly, practical realities of life — like money and sex and politics and power, all of it — you have a design, and your design is given for our good, for our flourishing. And so we want to flourish as a country, we want to flourish as individuals, we want to flourish as a church. And so would you help us to adopt your design as it relates to politics. Help us to do it in a distinctively Christian way, as individuals and as a church family. And we pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.