

Eternity Daily Bible Study - No. 325

Series: St. John's Passion - Gospel of John chapters 12-21

Verses: John 19:10-15

Topic: No King But Caesar

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John 19:10-15 MKJV Then Pilate said to him, Do you not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to crucify you, and I have authority to release you? (11) Jesus answered, You could have no authority against Me unless it were given to you from above. Therefore he who delivered Me to you has the greater sin. (12) From this *time*, Pilate sought to release Him. But the Jews cried out, saying, If you let this man go, you are not Caesar's friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar. (13) Then when Pilate heard that saying, he brought Jesus out and sat down in the judgment seat at a place called the Pavement (but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha). (14) And it was *the* preparation of the Passover, and about *the* sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, Behold your king! (15) But they cried out, Away with *him*! Away with *him*! Crucify him! Pilate said to them, Shall I crucify your king? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar.

Behold your King – we have no King but Caesar! And how true that became when, in 70AD, the legions of Titus put an end to the Jewish nation and the temple and the Jews truly had “no king but Caesar”.

John's Passion is full of dramatic moments brought about by the apostle's use of juxtaposition – the dramatic technique of putting opposites next to one another for heightened contrast and effect. In my opinion John (under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost) is among the greatest scriptwriters of all time! And today's verses are breathtaking.

They start with the question of authority. A conflicted and exasperated Pilate says: “Do you not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to crucify you, and I have authority to release you?” This is the positional authority of government and Jesus validates it when He says: “You could have no authority against Me unless it were given to you from above.”

Government has legitimate authority over our lives, but it is not absolute, it is contingent – it is “from above” and God can make or break any ruler and any government. The statement of Jesus (in John 19:11) does not automatically make all forms and acts of government legitimate and must be taken in the context of the whole of the biblical revelation. We find in Scripture a wide range of responses to different kinds of government. God says different things to different kinds of administration and calls His Church to react in a wide variety of ways to the prevailing political climate.

Is the government generally seeking righteousness like that of Solomon so you can BLESS it like God did? (1 Kings 3:5-15)

Has it committed a specific wrong act so that it needs to be REBUKED like Nathan did to David? (2 Samuel 12:1-14)

Is it idolatrous and wicked like that of Ahab and Jezebel so you can OVERTHROW it like Elisha did? (2 Kings 9:1-37)

Is it stubborn and cruel so that you must LIBERATE people from it like Moses did? (Exodus chapters 1-15)

Is it a "good pagan" government like that of Nebuchadnezzar so that like Daniel you PARTICIPATE in the government and DEMONSTRATE the power of God to the ruler so he is converted (Daniel 4)?

Is it an efficient but unrighteous pagan government like Rome - with good law and order but hostile to God so you RESPECT the government but SEPARATE yourself from its wicked ways? (Romans 13:1-8)

If a government is corrupt we must never ally ourselves with it but rather EXPOSE it.. (Psalms 94:20, Ephesians 5:11)

Is it crafty and dangerous like the government of Herod so that you SAY NOTHING AT ALL and keep your distance like Jesus did? (Luke 23:8-9)

To sum up this section: There is no "one right way" to respond to all types of government. We have to discern the nature of the government and then react appropriately. The way to do this is to find a parallel situation in Scripture and then to ascertain how God spoke to it.

The Jews rebut Pilate's attempts to free their Savior with the statement: "If you let this man go, you are not Caesar's friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar." Ultimately the Church "speaks against Caesar" with the statement "Jesus is Lord" and the end-times expectation of the manifest Kingdom of God: Revelation 11:15 MKJV And the seventh angel sounded. And there were great voices in Heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world have become *the kingdoms* of our Lord, and of His Christ. And He will reign forever and ever.

The stone cut without hands in Daniel 2 will smite the kingdoms of the nations and make them 'as fine dust' while the Kingdom of God fills the earth in their place. From Psalms to Revelation we see the Messianic expectation of the sole rule of God upon the earth. Psalms 2:8-9 MKJV Ask of Me, and I shall give the nations *for* Your inheritance; and the uttermost parts of the earth for Your possession. (9) You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.

Whoever speaks of the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the return of the Lord "speaks against Caesar" - which was a large part of the reason that the early Christians were persecuted by Rome. Even today China bans teaching on the Second Coming.

Thus Church and State will ALWAYS be in tension because the Church, if she is to be faithful, must be the bride of Christ - not the hand-maiden of a politician.

In most cases we can respect Caesar and pay taxes to the state - giving unto Caesar what is due unto Caesar and to God what is due unto God. (Matthew 22:15-22)

Yet all ultimate loyalty must be to God and we need to remind the State that it needs to fear God and remember that it rules by His appointment and can be removed at His say-so (Daniel 4:17,25). There are times when we may have to speak a prophetic word, and perhaps even accept martyrdom, particularly when the Anti-Christ is revealed. On the whole Christians are either too passive politically or are wrong-headed in their uncritical support of a particular person or party. We need to speak for God and the Church, issue-by-issue, moment-by-moment, according to the wisdom of God.

In the end the State always disappoints. Pilate caves in, and in the next verse he hands Jesus over to be executed. When dealing with Caesar, we need to remember that political realities tend to overcome truth, conscience and idealism. The State will honor the Church only up to the point that it is politically expedient to do so. After that point it will crucify us.

Blessings,

John Edmiston

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