

Jesus Has Answers  
Matthew 22:15-22

“Mr. Vice President, will President Trump publicly condemn white supremacy?” “Well, let me tell you about this administration’s track record on the economy. We have worked tirelessly to create new jobs and made foreign trade deals to protect American interests.”

“Senator Harris, if elected, will the Biden administration push to pack the Supreme Court by adding three more positions and filling them with your nominees?” “I would like to speak to the current administration’s handling of the pandemic. They knew in January how bad this thing was, but hid it from the American people. They continue to stumble along, failing to give the leadership this country needs to get out of this crisis.”

We are so used to politicians giving non-answers that it doesn’t even surprise us anymore. It has become almost comical. We don’t really expect to hear anything of much substance in a debate. What we are watching for is someone to slip up and then have the other person pounce with claws ready to tear the person apart.

*Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? ...* What did those who asked that question expect? ... It might help to understand who they are.

The Pharisees were the religious leaders outside of the temple. The chief priests ran the temple stuff. They were in charge of teaching about and offering the sacrifices and

leading the people in worship. The Pharisees were the teachers of the people when it came to living out daily life. They led by example. They were very pious people, following all the dietary laws and rules about keeping the Sabbath. They were also very nationalistic. They longed to see the throne of David restored and the Roman invaders driven from their land.

The Herodians were from the other side of the aisle. The descendants of Herod the Great ruled the region of Israel on behalf of the Romans. They had their power and position because of the Romans. Knowing who buttered their toast, they supported Roman rule.

It is the Pharisees then, with the Herodians within earshot, who butter Jesus up first by saying, *Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully*, (which is a lie. They don’t believe that at all. But they continue:) *and you do not care about anyone’s opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances*. Then they lay the trap: *Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?*

They expect Jesus will have to answer yes or no. They will have Him either way. If He says yes, it is the Pharisees who will pounce with their claws ready to tear Him apart. They and most of the populace hate the Romans. If He says no, it is the Herodians who will pounce with all the authority of the Roman government to punish such treasonous talk. Either way, they will have Him. They will win the debate.

That's what they think. But Jesus gives them an answer that not only fails to spring their trap but also points them to what is most important.

Is the upcoming election important? Kind of. It will have an impact on our country for the next four years, maybe even the next forty years. But how long will you spend in either heaven or hell? I do encourage you to cast your vote, but more importantly to think about your relationship with God. We will be impacted by who sits in the Oval Office. But who sits on the throne of our hearts is a much, much more important issue.

Rather than asking about taxes they should have asked Jesus who He was and what He had come to do. That was the message Jesus has been trying to get across. In parable after parable He has been teaching about the kingdom of God – who the Father is and what He is like, who the Son is and what He has come to earth to do, and what that means for God's people.

But even as God's people we are very tempted to think in the short term, to get sucked into thinking the here and now is what is most important. Who is going to save us? Trump or Biden?

We have a different Savior – Jesus the Christ. He didn't save us by getting the most votes. In fact, Isaiah describes Him as stricken, afflicted and rejected by men. And that He was – choosing neither fame nor power, instead, choosing the way of a servant, choosing to carry our shame and guilt to His cross and to suffer and die for it – for you.

Who would put their trust in such a one – stripped bare, beaten and bloody, nailed to a cross, and whose only crown was one of thorns? And yet, one nailed to a cross beside Him did call out, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” To which Jesus replied, “Surely I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Every earthly hope of this man was gone, and yet he still had hope – hope in the One who could grant him eternal peace and rest. And he was not disappointed. He received the goal of his faith – the salvation of his soul.

We will be disappointed by all earthly leaders because they are mere men and women. Jesus is the only one who does not disappoint. Everyone who looks to Him in faith receives the forgiveness of sins and the promise of life eternal with Him.

Jesus reigns over all creation and grants to all of His followers strength to face what this life throws their way with an eye toward the time when every tear will be wiped away and there will be no more pain or sorrow. Many make promises. Jesus keeps them.

You were marked as His in holy baptism, and He continues to work through His means of grace to keep you strong in faith to life everlasting.

The leaders of this life have some influence for a time, but you are held firmly in the loving arms of the One who takes care of all your needs of this life, and gives you the gift of life eternal with Him. Amen.