

ROAD TRIP DEVOTIONAL

WEEK 3

Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. "Teacher," they said, "we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are. Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?"

Matthew 22:15-22

But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? Show me the coin used for paying the tax." They brought him a denarius, and he asked them, "Whose image is this? And whose inscription?"

"Caesar's," they replied.

Then he said to them, "So give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."

When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.

In a couple of weeks, we celebrate the birthday of our nation. On July 4, 1776, Congress officially adopted the Declaration of Independence. The preamble begins with one of the most recognized sentences in the history of the world...

Consider This...

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

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As a result, July 4th is celebrated as Independence Day. But, to be historically accurate, this was not yet the birth of a nation. This declaration was a crucial turning point that set a vision for the future and led to a long struggle. It was, and still is, a struggle to realize the dream of what the writers of the Constitution called “a more perfect Union” built upon the God given rights of Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. A more perfect union is what we all still hope for. However, even the term itself implied the flaws of any nation or government and the obligation we all share in the struggle toward something greater.



Consider This...

So, as we prepare to celebrate this week, let me invite you to consider Jesus' words in Matthew 22. The Pharisees hoping to trap Jesus asked:

“Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?”

But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, “You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? Show me the coin used for paying the tax.”

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Then he said to them, “So give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”

Jesus is saying that we have dual citizenship. We should be productive members of society and participate in the life of our nation. We should pledge allegiance to our nation and the values we uphold. We should give thanks for the blessings we enjoy and celebrate the freedoms that came at the highest cost. It is right for us to say, “I am proud to be an American.”

However, the ultimate motive for doing so should be our witness as citizens in the kingdom of God. We must not confuse civic responsibility and healthy patriotism which can benefit our witness, with arrogant nationalism which is self-seeking and contrary to the kingdom of God. If we are followers of Jesus, He calls the shots. Our allegiance to Him is foremost. We have a responsibility to make our world the best it can be, seeking change where needed. But our ultimate motive in everything is our motivation to spread the Good News to those within and beyond our borders.

So, when the current situation seems so polarizing, how should followers of Jesus respond?

First, we need to lay aside the negativity and unhelpful criticism which is polarizing and only creates anxiety. We are bombarded with messages telling us of all that is wrong in the world and who is at fault. The world is still filled with the brokenness of sin and the fall, but our problems are not fundamentally new and actually not greater than in past generations.



Consider This...

For instance, Harvard psychology professor and author of *The Better Angels of Our Nature*, Steven Pinker pointed out the fact that in recent history, worldwide violence has been on the decline. Research suggest that we may be living in the most peaceful time in all of history. For instance, the U.S. is currently enjoying the lowest homicide rate in over a century. So why does the world still feel so dangerous? According to Pinker, the media has a lot to do with why the world still feels so scary.

“News is a misleading way to understand the world,” he told Vox. “It’s always about events that happened and not about things that didn’t happen. As long as violent events don’t fall to zero, there will be always be headlines to click on.”

So, with a little perspective, being alive in 2021 isn’t such a bad thing. Let’s take time to give thanks for the good things we enjoy and the sacrifices that were made for our freedom.

Second, we need to lay aside our “me-first” mentality. Share a meal with someone who is different than you, listen to others, show respect in what you do and say... even what you post on social media.

Finally, most of all, we need to seek to know and be transformed by the Word of God.

As the Pharisees try to entrap Jesus, he brilliantly reframes the question. Caesar’s face is engraved on the coin. In the ancient world this was an indication of his divinity. It was a claim that Caesar was a god. “So give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.” You are a bearer of the image of God. Giving to God what is God’s means that we give our lives and allegiance to Him. Giving to God what is God’s means that we let God calls the shots. Giving to God what is God’s means that we make sacrificial love our highest value. Giving to God what is God’s means that we enlist ourselves in His service, giving our highest allegiance to Him.

Our father's God to Thee, author of liberty, to Thee we pray:

Long may our land be bright with freedom's holy light; protect us by

Thy might, Great God our King!



The Prayer

- What are you thankful for? Find someone who has made a sacrifice in service to you or our country and thank them for their service.

- In what way might you be of greater service to our country to make it a more civil place reflecting the values of the Kingdom of God and bearing witness to your faith?

- In what ways do you need to "Give to God what is God's"? In what ways might God be calling you to pledge deeper allegiance to Him? To serve Him or others?



The Questions