

JESUS ON THE STATE

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[0 : 0 0] We give you thanks and praise that you have created us, that you sustain us. We give you thanks and praise that even when we rebelled against you and fell away from you, that you did not stop loving us, but that you sent your son Jesus to die upon the cross to be our Savior.

We thank you, Father, for the grace that we receive through him, the power for salvation that is in his name and what he did for us upon the cross.

We thank you, Father, that when we put our faith and trust in Jesus, you restore us as your own. You fit us for the new heaven and the new earth to be unashamed before you and to thrive before you forever.

We ask, Father, that your Holy Spirit would gently but deeply fall upon us so that we might hear the teaching of your son Jesus, that our hearts, Father, might be struck by what he says, that we might take it deep into our lives and so bear much fruit in this world that brings you glory.

And this we ask in the name of Jesus, your son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated. One of the things which has really struck me more and more as we've gone through the Gospel of Luke is how much of the Gospel of Luke is a profound critique of religion and how much of the Gospel of Luke is a profound critique of spirituality.

[1 : 3 1] And, you know, it just really struck me. I could almost talk about it every single week if I wanted to. It's really, I've been finding it deeply ironic how much time Christians in our day and age complain about the world, so to speak.

You know, and whatever it is, things that are going on in politics and other types of changes in the culture. And it's not as if the Bible doesn't say things, has things to say about that. But it's just really struck me as we've been camping in Luke for a long time, how much of the Gospel of Luke is not actually talking very much at all about the things that go on, so to speak, in worldly things, but as a constant critique of spirituality and religion.

And the text that we have today before us is a perfect example. It embodies and brings before us the great ease with which murderous deceit coexists with religion and spirituality.

It brings before us how easy it is for murderous deceit to coexist with religion and spirituality, with people believing that they're being extremely pious and spiritual while practicing such things.

So it would be a great help to me if you turn in your Bibles to Luke chapter 20, and let's look at that brief Gospel text which I read just a few moments ago. Luke chapter 20, and we'll begin at verse 19.

[3 : 0 1] Once again, there's always some Bibles at the front if you need a Bible with you. And here's how the text goes. Luke chapter 20, beginning at verse 19. The scribes and the chief priests sought to lay hands on Jesus at that very hour, for they perceived that he had told this parable against them, but they feared the people.

That's the story, the parable that we looked at last week, the parable of the wicked tenants. You can either listen to the sermon later on on the web, or you can just read the text earlier to get the context.

Verse 20. So they watched him and sent spies who pretended to be sincere, that they might catch him in something he said, so as to deliver him up to the authority and the jurisdiction of the governor.

And just sort of pause there. Remember, this is the religious and spiritual experts of the culture, and they're angry at Jesus.

And in verse 20, when they said they watched him, don't think of a mother lovingly looking at her little girl, her baby girl. Think of a lion watching a gazelle at a watering hole in a National Geographic special.

[4 : 22] And that's the image of watching there. So this is a type of devouring, aggressive watching of hoped-for prey. And when they send spies, in other words, right an effective spy is that somebody actually thinks they're one of you, but they're actually not one of you.

They're working for some foreign and usually hostile power. And so that's what they do. They pick amongst themselves while they're watching Jesus, like a lion watches a gazelle.

They pick some people who they think aren't known to Jesus and his disciples, who look like they'll fit in with Jesus and his disciples. But they're not with Jesus and their disciples.

They're with these people watching Jesus like a lion watches a gazelle. And that's who they send to be. And they pretend to be sincere. You know, as that football coach said, if you can fake sincerity, you know, you got it made.

And so they're faking sincerity, but they're not sincere at all. They have all these other agendas that are going on in their minds. And just sort of a pause here. You know, what I've noticed in life is that when people are captivated by this type of a mindset of always faking sincerity because they have agendas going on, one of the things about it is that they can't actually ever appreciate that other people in the world aren't acting the same way.

[5 : 55] But you really can see how people can, in a sense, descend into a type of living hell, even in the midst of great prosperity. But they begin by faking sincerity and trying to accomplish things according to their own agendas.

And then it can become such a deeply ingrained habit that as it becomes a deeper and deeper habit, it's impossible for people like that to actually believe that other people aren't the same way.

And it's a terrible state to fall in. And maybe a story like this will shake a person up to realize that it doesn't have to be that way, that we need a savior.

But they pretend to be sincere. And they all do this so that they might catch him in something, he said, because they want to give him to the authority and the jurisdiction of the governor.

They want to give him to the pagan occupying powers. And really, when you see this, you see that it's a murderous rage because only the governor has the jurisdiction, the authority to kill, to give the capital punishment, the supreme punishment.

[7 : 04] So here they are. They're profoundly spiritual. They're profoundly religious. They go home at night sleeping comfortably on their pillow. Their conscience doesn't torment them.

They believe they're doing something for the glory of God. But what they're really doing is consumed with fear, with anger, with false sincerity, and with murderous deceit.

Doesn't this sound like a profound critique of religion and spirituality? Hollywood couldn't surpass it. In verse 21, so they asked him, Teacher, we know that you speak and teach rightly and show no partiality, but truly teach the way of God.

Just sort of pause there. Isn't it interesting? They actually speak the truth. They speak the truth, but it's a lie. Like, don't you see? It's a very, very powerful thing how religion and spirituality can lead you to a point that you lie, but the irony is that your lie is an actual accurate description.

Like, this is what religion and spirituality can do to you. They've actually perfectly summarized. I mean, in a sense, every one of us couldn't beat this description about what Jesus is.

[8 : 23] What do we believe Jesus is? We believe that he speaks and teaches rightly. We believe that he doesn't show any partiality, and we believe that the way of God, he teaches it truly. That's what a follower of Jesus believed.

They actually nailed it, but it's actually a lie on their lips. Such is what religion and spirituality can do to us. Verse 22, Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar or not?

And this version of the Bible, it's actually translated this very accurately. One of the things which was surprising to me this week when I did my background research on the text is that, because some versions of the Bible, the English Bible will say, Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar?

And that taxes is, on one level, an accurate translation, but it actually is a far more specific word in the original language. It isn't that they asked Jesus in general about permission to pay taxes.

They actually say one particular tax, which is the tribute tax. In other words, the tax which a conquered, occupied people owe to the emperor who has conquered them and occupies them and keeps them under his thumb, and as a sign that he is over them, he asks for tribute.

[9 : 34] And that's what they ask him. And they don't mean, is it lawful according to Roman law? Because, of course, it is. They're saying, according to God's law, according to Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, according to God's law, is it lawful to give a tribute tax to a pagan emperor who is over us and keeps us under his thumb?

Jesus isn't lawful to do that, according to God's law. And they think they've gotten Jesus. And even their flattery is an attempt to say to Jesus, don't try to weasel out of this one, Jesus.

You speak the way of God. You know the way, and you speak it truly. Let's weasel out of this one. Big guy. Verse 23. But Jesus perceived their craftiness.

And in the original language, the word that's translated here is craftiness. It's only used in a negative sense in the entire New Testament. In fact, it's used in the Genesis 3 when it's describing the devil as the serpent, as being the craftiest, or the subtlest of creatures.

And that's the same word. It's describing, it's a bad characteristic. He perceives their likeliness to the devil, how like the devil they are.

[11 : 00] And he says to them, show me a denarius. And this is a very interesting thing. I didn't know this. But in the day, in Jesus's day, not all coins had a picture of the emperor on it.

But the denarius did. And Jesus didn't just ask for some random coin. He asked for a coin that he knew would have an image of the emperor on it.

In fact, he asked for a coin that he knew had an image of the emperor on it that says on the coin, basically, Tiberius is the son of the god Augustus.

And on the other side of the coin is a picture of Tiberius's mother. And she's portrayed as the goddess Peace, the high priestess of the Roman Empire.

In other words, the Roman Empire is characterized by peace, ruled by the goddess Peace, who looks like the emperor's mother. And Tiberius, the son of a god, is therefore the son of a god.

[12 : 03] His father is a god. And his mother is a god. He is a god. And that's what's on the denarius. And that's what Jesus asks for. And then he says, who's icon?

And we're going to, and not yet, but in a few moments, I'm going to have the scripture text put up because we're going to really just spend, I know I have, it's a short time with the sermon today, but we're going to spend some time. And it's sort of important for me to get the word likeness off there and use the original Greek word because we need to sort of, in a sense, be shocked into hearing what Jesus is saying, which is not as obvious in the English, but is more obvious in the original language.

And so Jesus says, show me a denarius whose icon, an inscription does it have. They said, Caesar's. And Jesus said to them, then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.

And they were not able in the presence of the people to catch him in what he said, but marveling at his answer, they became silent. Now, in the few minutes that I have left, let's try to quickly unpack this.

It's a very, very powerful scene. And it's a very, very powerful teaching. And in some ways, the line, render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.

[13 : 26] It's one of those, it's one of those thoughts that shuts down certain political possibilities, but actually speaks into every political context and situation.

And, and propels thought in, in, in, in a whole range of directions. And it's all done in the context of Jesus reminding the hearers of this idea of icon.

And so, Andrew, if you could put up the scripture translation up there, and if, could you folks say it with me? Is it up? I can't see the screen. Is it up? Could you folks say this with me? Whose icon and inscription is on it?

They said, Caesar's. Jesus said to them, then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. Now, one of the reasons I use the word icon, spelled E-I-K-O-N, which is the transliteration of the Greek, is because on one hand, it's very similar.

I mean, in our culture, it might very well be that the next time they translate the Bible, they're going to use the word icon, because with, with high tech, with phones and apps and icons, it's actually a very, technology is actually, in a sense, reintroducing the biblical idea, you know, in a, in a model that, so it might be later on, but I didn't want to, icon is, I-C-O-N is obviously the same word, but it's similar but different, and I want it to have the, sort of, let the whole word and the sound, but the differentness play in your minds.

[14 : 55] I mean, that's why I always pray that, if you remember the scripture more than my words, then God's word can, can do all sorts of havoc, I mean, good things, in your mind, and in your lives, and, and here's the first thing about this, when we see this text, the icon of God, asks a person made in the icon of God, whose icon is on the coin, if you could put that up, Andrew, it sounds odd, but you look at it up here, this is what's going on in the story, the very icon of God, and I'm going to show you that later on, how that's how the Bible understands who Jesus is, the icon of God, in a sense, himself, asks a person, a human being, made in the icon of God, whose icon is on the throne, this is a very, very, very powerful moment, that's why in a sense, to try to understand, render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and the God, the things that are God's, without understanding, that Jesus is going back to Genesis, he's, he's making the original hearers, immediately think of Genesis chapter one, verses 26 and 27,

I'm going to read it, if you're really good at sword drills, you can find it quickly, it's the very first page in your Bible, if you have an Old Testament as well, and the very, very beginning of creation, it's one of the most important texts, in understanding who God is, and who human beings are, it says this, in the sixth day of creation, verse 26, then God said, let us make man in our icon, that's in the, the early Jewish people, very, before the time of Jesus, they, as, as more and more Jewish people, were living in Greek speaking lands, they, they commissioned the writing of, it was organized, the, the writing of the, of the old, what we, the Old Testament in Hebrew, was written into Greek, and it's called the subjugant, and, and it's an important, anyway, and so the very, very early translators, 100, 200 years before the birth of Jesus, when they were translating this, from Hebrew into Greek, they said, in verse 26, then God said, let, let us make man, that's man and woman, human, humanity, in our icon, after our likeness, and let them have dominion, over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over the livestock, and over all of the earth, and over every creeping thing, that creeps on the earth, just to make sure, we get the point, verse 27, so God created humanity, in his own icon, in the icon of God, he created him, male and female, he created them, in other words, it's a very, very, very powerful text, a whole other sermon, men and women are not,

I mean sometimes, it's, you know they talk about, men are from Mars, and women are from Venus, it's actually more correct, that maybe men are from North Dakota, and women are from South Dakota, I don't know, we're all the same species, we're not from different planets, we both equally bear, the icon of God, what makes a human being, a human being, is a human being, is created by God, and made in the icon, of God, that's what makes a human being, a human being, and who is standing before, this, excuse me, this, these, so what's happening is, Jesus, the very icon of God, not made, in the icon of God, but the very icon, itself, is speaking, to a person, made in the icon of God, and in a sense, then you see that, the coin matters, on one hand, but the coin, is just a coin, it's just a coin, it's just stuff,

I mean, you know, we live in a day and age, when human life, is increasingly devalued, and our culture, is increasingly confused, about what it means, to be a human being, is increasingly confused, about the dignity, and value, and worth, and integrity, of human beings, and we're increasingly, completely, and utterly confused, about it, but you know what, human beings, are unique, in being made, in the icon of God, and all the other stuff, money is just stuff, it's just stuff, and doesn't matter as much, have the same value, as one human being, who is a creature, made, in the icon of God, and so we have some stuff, with the picture, of a king, who foolishly, thinks he's a God, the irony is, the picture, on the coin, is a picture of a man, who bears, who's made, in the icon, of the living God, and on the flip side, is his mother, who's made, in the icon, of the living God, and the coin, is just stuff, we'll see in a moment, when it matters, but Jesus, is the icon of God, who asks a person, made in the icon of God, whose icon, is on the coin, let's,

Andrew, if you could put the scripture, text up again, let's say it together again, whose icon, and inscription, is on it, they said, Caesar's, Jesus said to them, then render to Caesar, the things that are Caesar's, and to God, the things that are God's, here's the second thing, every human being, is made, in the icon of God, but Jesus of Nazareth, is the icon of God, that's just what I said before, but I just sort of put it, in a different type of way, to try to bring the point home, every human being, is made in the icon of God, but Jesus of Nazareth, is the icon of God, you see, what makes us human beings, isn't that we have a soul, what makes us human beings, isn't necessarily, that we have a mind, angels have minds, angels have in a sense, they're like souls, but without bodies, but they're not human beings, they're angels, that's not what makes us, it's a mystery, what exactly this icon is,

[20 : 58] God has made us, to be bodies with souls, or in soul bodies, or in fleshed souls, or, but whatever it is, about that part of us, as a creature, there's this unique thing, and obviously, it includes something about, it involves an ability, for communion of the icon, that made in the icon of God, to the actual icon, that whose image, that we're made in, and so there's, you see, that's why in a sense, Christians understand, that the meaning of our life, is outside of ourselves, because we're made, in the icon of God, we image, something else, and so we can never, fully understand, the meaning of our life, within space and time, within secularity, within this world, we were made, by someone outside, of this world, and we never fully understand, who we are, what a human being is, without taking reference, of that, that's why, the humanity, the dignity of human beings, all of these, these are theological concepts, they're not biological concepts, they're not sociological concepts, it's a theological concept, and that's why, every human being, we're made, in the image of God, and therefore, there is a profound, dignity and worth, whether it is, a fetus, within the womb, a terribly deformed, or handicapped child, a senile, adult, close to death, person who wins, athlete of the year,

Bill Gates, the richest guy, on the planet, President of the United States, still the most powerful person, on the planet, all of them, are equal, in that they bear, they are made, in the image of God, and that is why, the scriptures say, you do not take, innocent life, you do not kill, innocent life, that's why, it's never appropriate, for a Christian, see that's in a sense, part of the whole basis, of a Christian understanding, of compassion, and of justice, that you cannot say, well we can just, you know, so what if these people, these babies, are abandoned, in the streets of Seoul, South Korea, they're just, probably just the sons, and daughters, they probably have, down syndrome, and they're probably, just the sons, and daughters, of prostitutes, or drug users, you know, so what if there's babies, abandoned in the streets, of India, they're probably just, from the untouchables, they don't matter, they're just orphans, they always matter, they always matter, they bear, the image, the icon, of the eternal God, they are made, in the icon, of the eternal, living, unchanging God, every human being, is made, in the icon, of the eternal, living God, but Jesus, is the icon, let's say the text again,

Andrew, could we say it together, whose icon, and inscription, is on it, they said, Caesar's, Jesus said to them, then render, to Caesar, the things that are Caesar's, and to God, the things that are God's, so, some of you might say then, you know, in this type of thing here, is Jesus saying, that you have to give, everything to God, is Jesus making, a type of totalitarian, claim in our lives, is Jesus like, you know, there's two types, of totalitarianism, which we've seen, on the planet, over the last hundred years, and it's very, very interesting, one group, don't want to confess up, about it, but one group, was made up, of atheists, and agnostics, it's the whole, communist empire, they had totalitarian, their image, is in a sense, of a state, all powerful state, with all social institutions, completely, and utterly, under their thumb, because at their heart, they just want, the state, and the individual, naked, under their thumb, under complete control, serving the state, the other form, is a theocratic, type of, of totalitarianism, and we see it, with ISIS, we see it, with Islamofascism, it's a type, of totalitarianism, is God, a totalitarian, is Jesus saying, when he says, what we're made, in the icon, of the living God, and that we give to God, what is God?

Does that mean we give, everything to him? Is God a totalitarian? Not at all. Point three, the living God, is not a totalitarian, He has a proper claim, on my total life, but it is not, a totalitarian claim.

The living God, is not a totalitarian. He has a proper claim, on my total life, but it is not, a totalitarian. claim. Well, some of you might be saying, George, how on earth can you, I don't understand how that makes sense. Like, if we, to render to God the things that are God, and the things that are God's, and in a sense, it's, I have the icon of God, and I sense belong, like I'm marked by him, doesn't that mean I, how can that not be totalitarian? Well, let's say the scripture sends again, Andrew, if you could put it up, whose icon and inscription is on it. They said, Caesar's. Jesus said to them, then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. We're going to have to race through this because of our time thing. I apologize for that. Here's the thing. Why is it that Jesus makes, God makes a total claim on our lives, but not a totalitarian claim? Well, it's because of this. If you could put up the fourth point, Andrew, the living Trinitarian God created and sustains the inherently social creature known as human.

[26 : 58] The living, real, true, actual, existing God who is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, three persons, one God forever and ever, amen. This God created and sustains the inherently social creature known as human. You see, he made us male and female. He made us thinking of marriage. Before there was a fall, before there was government, before there was the state, he made us social. He made us so that a man would leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, and the two would become one flesh.

He made us so that there would not just be a husband and wife, but that there would be a husband and wife, and by God's grace and God's providence, that there would be children, that there would be a family.

And by implication, he made that there would be a whole range of social institutions, including something of which government is some vague image of what was originally intended before the fall.

God made us inherently social. And that means, it means that when we come to Jesus, it isn't as if he somehow turns us into angels, and we stop being human beings, and we're just like a naked soul before God. But when Jesus comes into our lives, it's to start to restore what it means for me to be a man, and for a woman to be a woman, and to bring healing into that, so that our manhood and our womanhood more perfectly and fully reflects the icon of God, and that we can have healed relationships in marriages between husbands and wives, and healed families with children, and healed other social institutions. And so it is that we come to receive Jesus as our Savior, and Jesus becomes a Savior and the Lord in our lives, and it means that, it doesn't mean that we love God, and we completely and utterly ignore every human being, but that we are to rediscover the proper love of a man, of a husband to a wife, and the proper friendship between two men and two women, and the proper love of a parent to the child, and the proper relationship to all of the social relationships, which was all part of God's good creation, which is why the claim in our life is total, but not totalitarian. The fear of a totalitarian takeover of who we are, if we, is actually a fear of demons and idols. It is not a proper fear of the true and living God.

It is not a proper fear. There is a type of fear of the living God, but that's not what the fear is. In fact, what many of us fear is demonic possession. Ironically, demons make us think that God will be like them, and they make us think that God will be like them so that we will go to demons and not to God. Can we say the scripture text together again, Andrew? Could you put it up? Let's say it together.

[30 : 14] Whose icon and inscription is on it? So we can see that, so let's get to the text as well. I have like three minutes, two minutes. So I'll just give you my points, and then I'll read the scripture text, and I apologize that I can't give you the full explanation for them, but here's the thing that we see in this text. We see that Jesus is specifically rejecting that in his kingdom and in his way that he'll create a country. He rejects it. What we see here is something that fit together with all of Jesus's teaching. What we see is that Jesus understands this. Andrew, the fifth point, Jesus calls to himself a people out of every people group to be in his kingdom, which exists amidst the kingdoms of this world.

Jesus is not becoming another Caesar. I mean, Caesar kills people to stay Caesar. Jesus will die for people so they can be reconciled to God and be part of his kingdom.

Jesus calls people to himself. He calls people to himself out of every people group on the planet, and he calls them to be in his kingdom, which will exist amidst the kingdoms of this world.

And this is all why, you see, in a sense, we are to pray for the good of our city. We can serve the government. We serve the government because we understand that the human beings were made social, that there are supposed to be families and marriages and other types of human institutions, and that there's proper type of respect and honor, which is done. Our translation uses the word render, which implies that there's some type of debt that we owe to these external things. There's a debt that I owe to my wife. There's a debt or responsibility I owe to my children. There's a debt or responsibility that owe to human institutions. I can be critical of them. I can say to the government, you should not pass legislation that allows doctors to murder people, whether they're old people or people in the womb. They are made in the image of God. That's wrong. Yes, I will pray and I will work. I will start businesses. I will write songs. I will be a good neighbor. I will strive for the good of this city and the good of this nation. But Caesar, that is wrong. You've overstepped your bounds and what you were for. The final slide. Let's say the scripture text one more time, and then we'll say,

I'll give you the final point. Say it together with me. Whose icon and inscription is on it? They said Caesar's. Jesus said to them, then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. So nothing else today you've memorized a scripture text.

[33 : 09] If that's all you've got out of this, that's a really good thing, because God's word is far more, it's infinitely better than any word that I can come up. Here's the final thing. Andrew, if you could put it up. Only the icon of God can redeem everyone made in the icon of God.

That is why Jesus's death upon the cross is not a solitary act, but is a once for all act. That helps you to understand why the cross applies potentially to everyone who receives it.

I am made in the image of God, the icon of God. The very icon died for me. Therefore, it is an act that affects every icon. Everything made in the icon of God is affected by what has happened. The actual icon itself has died to reconcile me to God.

Just close with the text that's been sort of lurking in the back. Some of you might have guessed that I'm referring in a lot of this to Colossians chapter 1. Colossians chapter 1, 15 to 23, and then we'll just close in prayer.

Jesus is the icon of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him, all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities.

[34 : 54] All things were created through him and for him, and he is before all things, and in him all things hold together, and he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him, all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.

He's not just the icon of God. He is the fullness of God. And through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh, by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him.

If indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister. Let's stand. Let's bow our heads in prayer. Father, we give you thanks and praise that you have made us creatures who are in your icon, that in your, made in your image. Father, we thank you that you have made us for yourself, that you have made us in your image. We thank you, Father, that the icon himself came and walked amongst us and died upon the cross to redeem us, to reconcile us to you, for us who are hostile and alienated from you, that we have peace with you through what Jesus did for us on the cross. Father, we ask that you make us disciples of Jesus, gripped by the gospel, who live for your glory. Father, make us disciples of Jesus, gripped by the gospel, who live amongst other human beings made in your image. And Father, may we so love them and that you might be glorified by how we live as followers of Jesus. Father, may you be glorified in how we live. And this we ask in Jesus's name. Amen.