

This transcript was developed using an AI-based speech to text generator. We apologize for any typos or other errors.

. . . . .

“Beyond Dualism, Beyond Fear” The Rev. Aaron M. G. Zimmerman  
(10/22/2023, Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost)

.....

Let us pray.

Almighty God made the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be always

acceptable in thy sight, O Lord our strength and our redeemer, amen.

I want to rock right now, my name is Rob Base and I came to get down.

I'm not internationally known, but I'm known to rock the microphone because I get stupid.

I mean outrageous.

Stay away from me if you're contagious because I'm a winner, no not a loser, to be an

MC is what I choose.

So begins the 1988 Platinum hit from Rob Base and DJ Easy Rock, who I saw.

Thanks be to God here in Waco, at least just Rob Base was here, DJ Easy Rock may he rest

in peace.

This song is known by many to be the greatest hip hop single of all time.

It was featured in the proposal with Sandra Bullock if that was a movie you have seen, which

is hard not to if you're human in this country.

But I bring it up because it conveys the name of the song is It Takes Two.

It takes two to make a thing go right, it takes two to make it out of sight, it takes two.

We often see the world in pairs, sort of two things, two sides, two sides to every story,

it takes two to tango, we see things in this way.

The big fancy word if you need more syllables is dualism, you see things in a dualistic way.

And once you start to see this, you see it everywhere, of course it's in our politics,

the liberals and the conservatives, it was in the Civil War, the North versus the South.

It's in all kinds of ways we see the world, there are the people who are going to heaven

and there are people who eat their pizza with ranch dressing.  
There are, I know, I know, I kid, I kid, you're fine, Jesus loves you too.

We begin to see it in our own lives, it doesn't have to be stuff out there.

When you look at your career, you want it to be not a failure and you do want it to be successful,  
not realizing that often to be successful, you have to go through failures and gain the wisdom that comes through that.

When you look at your children's lives, you want them to have good lives, not hard difficult ones, not remembering the fact that to have a good life, usually you need to go through the hard experiences.

But we tend to see things in these dualistic, this or that, us and them kinds of ways.

An election coming up, yay, and we're going to see this just everywhere.

Are you with me?

Are you against me?

Are you a good, smart person that votes this way or an evil, bad person that votes this way?

This dualistic thinking, it's everywhere and it's not a great way to view the world.

It's overly simplistic.

It forgets that things are complicated and almost nothing is just one thing or the other.

It leads us to see this world in an eternally almost conflicted way, which is an anxious, awful way to live.

But I want to just not say that dualism is bad, don't do it.

I think there's more to it and I want to get to it in this passage from Matthew 22, because

I think if you view the world in that way, if you begin to open the hood and look what's going on underneath, this kind of way of thinking, it is driven by a lot of fear.

I don't know about you, but I want less of that in my life.

I would like more peace and trust and hope.

So this passage from Matthew 22 is one that people think that it's about the separation of church and state.

I'm going to walk through it and tell you why people think that, but I do think it's about much more than that.

It's about whether you can sleep at night.

And I want to talk about that.

So we're going to do some Bible stuff and then I'm going to get to the

point.

So the Bible stuff, you have Matthew 22, Jesus is there being questioned by two groups of people, the Pharisees and the Herodians, and that's where some of you fell asleep.

So let me explain.

So the Pharisees are devout and religious group of Jewish people, and the Herodians are

a group of also Jewish people who are maybe less devout.

They care, but they don't want to get too crazy with their religion.

And they've come to ask Jesus a question.

This is the Admiral Ackbar story about Jesus.

Who here knows who Admiral Ackbar is?

Yeah, there's a hand.

Don't be ashamed, fellow nerds.

Admiral Ackbar was a fish type anthropomorphic creature, so a body of a man, but hands in

head of a fish, not hands, fins.

But somehow he was a good guy in Star Wars.

And Admiral Ackbar is famous for one line and one line only, and you will complete the sentence.

It's a trap.

Yes, it's a trap.

And the Pharisees have come to trap Jesus, it says, they have malice, they're not really

asking sincerely, but the Pharisees and Herodians want to trap Jesus with a question.

Tell us then, in verse 17, what do you think?

Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?

What a weird question.

Why would it not be lawful to pay taxes?

It is literally the law to pay your taxes.

Well, yes, that is the state law.

That's the law of the Roman Empire.

But they're asking about, in God's law, is it okay to pay taxes?

Now, why would it not be okay to pay taxes?

Has that been a moral question for you in your quiet time, Lord?

I don't know if I should pay my taxes?

Should I?

I don't know.

Maybe I just won't pay him.

I hear you call him, Lord, not to pay my taxes, okay.

The reason they're asking is because to pay your taxes for a very good, devout, and you

really want to, if you're the kind of religious person that dots eyes and crosses tees, you

want to follow all the rules, there's at least two problems with paying your taxes in

the Roman Empire.

One, the coin you use, and Jesus asked for the coin and hold it up, it's a denarius, and on that coin is the face of the emperor, emperor, Tiberius. And on that coin, it has an inscription, and in Latin, it says, this is Augustus, Caesar Augustus Tiberius, son of divine Augustus. Now, Augustus was the previous emperor, and he was seen as a God, son of the divine Augustus. So it says, claim to being the son of God. Here is your emperor, the son of God, and it's got his face on there. So if you've read the Ten Commandments, thou shalt not make any grave in images, and you shall have no other gods but me. And on this coin, it says, here is a God, and here is a picture of a God, a graven image, an idol. So you're breaking at least two commandments, so that's problem one, with paying taxes with this coin. You had to pay with this coin, that was the loss in 6 PC. The other problem with it is you were paying the evil empire, you're paying these apostate horrible Romans with all their multiple gods and their awful sacrifices and their immoral practices and their oppressive crushing economic and military policies that have destroyed your family as a good Jewish person living in the Holy Land. So is it lawful in God's law to pay these tax? And so this is the question they put in front of Jesus, and now you can see why a lot of people thought maybe it wasn't lawful in God's law to pay these taxes, and the Pharisees were those folks. They said, don't pay the taxes. It says, in the Bible, I stand on the Word of God, no graven images, no God but me, don't pay the taxes to those evil, nasty Romans. End of story, the Bible says. The Herodians, named for Herod, the Roman-appointed king of the area, a Jewish guy, yes, kind of, but a little more flexible and more flexible with the Bible. Yes, the 10 commandments, I've read them, but there are more guidelines, sort of general overarching principles. Don't be so literal about it. We live in the real world, and we have to make real world compromises sometimes. We've got to play the hand that we've been dealt, and the Romans are in charge, and I don't want to go to jail, so let's pay the taxes.

You can still go to synagogue on Saturdays, and believe whatever you want in your heart.

So what is happening here is Jesus has been cornered by the fundamentalists in the Liberals.

Pretty amazing to get both those groups to hate you.

It's like RFK Jr. It's a joke.

It is a joke.

I'm just kidding, folks.

So he's gotten the Liberals and the conservatives to dislike him, and they both want to trap him.

They both want to get rid of him, and it's clear, either answer he gives, either group

he tries to appease, he loses.

So if he says, with the Pharisees, yes, don't pay the taxes.

It's immoral and wrong.

Don't do it.

Then the Romans will happily swoop in and arrest Jesus, and for saying you shouldn't

pay your taxes.

If he says, no, you can go ahead and pay the taxes.

It's fine.

Then all the very devout religious Jewish people, and the religious police, the temple police

might have a word for Jesus, and so he's caught.

In this dualistic thinking, which one do you pick, A or B?

Now here's what I want to say is going on underneath this.

As Jesus famously doesn't answer, he answers them with a question.

He says, give me the coin, and he holds it up, and he says, whose face is on this, and

whose inscription?

And they say, the emperors, and he says, will give to the emperor the things that are

the emperors, and give to God the things that are gods, or in the old King James, render

unto Caesar those things that are Caesar's, and render unto God those things that are gods.

When you are caught in a dualistic way of thinking, either or where there's choice A or

choice B, what is often going on behind that is a view of God that God is judging your

choices, and you better make the right choice, so God likes you, and don't make the wrong

choice, so that God is angry with you.

There is a lot of fear and anxiety, anytime someone presents you with dualistic options,

because the way they see God as this divine bean counter, who's tracking your performance

with the clipboard.

And Jesus is questioned when he says, whose face, and then he has this statement, give

to God the things that are gods.

Well, what belongs to God?

All things.

You belong to God.

You are already gods.

You are his.

You don't need to be trapped in this, do I do this thing or that thing, this dualistic fear based way of thinking, where if I do the wrong thing, I might get smited.

All things are the lords.

All things belong.

You are his.

There's an old monk once told me, you are safe in the sacred heart of the Savior.

You are his.

Whether you pay the taxes, or you don't pay the taxes, whether you read the Bible my way, or read the Bible your way, you are gods.

Now this is frustrating, because there might be people that disagree with you.

Morons.

But Jesus seems to be pointing us to a view of God, where all things are his, including yours, and you are called to give to God all things, but even when you don't, and you get wrapped around the axel like the Pharisees of the Herodians, and you get stuck in a fear-based anxious way of thinking.

The thing about the cross of Christ is that it shows us that God gives all for you, even if you not always give all to Him.

The cross is where all the good and all the evil of the world, the good in Jesus Christ, our sin, our death, our anxiety, our fear, our pain, all those things meet in Christ and are integrated, saving us from this dualistic, God-counting, or being-counting God, and inviting us, maybe, to be in a place where all things are gods, and you are gods, and you can rest in that.

Now what does this look like, and I'll just wrap up with this.

I said I wanted to talk about something in this passage, not about the separation of church and state, but about how you can sleep at night.

And one's mind is racing at night, and there are all these worries pressing down, and

this doesn't just happen at night, it happens all the time.

Most people I know are living with sort of diagnosable levels of anxiety, and the racing

thoughts.

And often, if I make the wrong choice, everything will be terrible.  
If I make the right choice, everything will be okay, and I don't have  
enough information  
to make the right choice, and I'm scared, and I'm stuck, and I'm  
paralyzed.

But Jesus comes to you to say, if you are gods, all things are gods,  
and you could make  
the wrong choice on those two roads that diverge in the yellow wood.  
But at the end of each one is Christ, who has given all for you.  
Amen.