

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Luke 19: 19-26

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the Bible again. We'll continue to read Luke Chapter 20 and today we will read verses 19 to 26.

Verse 19: "And the chief priests and the scribes that very hour sought to lay hands on Him, but they feared the people—for they knew He had spoken this parable against them."

Earlier we read that Jesus told the people the parable of the vineyard. The meaning behind this parable was actually very clear to the Israelites; especially to the chief priests and the scribes, who were thoroughly familiar with the Old Testament, they knew clearly that Jesus was speaking about them. In particular, the warning at the end exposed exactly what was in their hearts—they truly wanted to kill Jesus. So after hearing Jesus speak in this way, they actually wanted to seize Him immediately. However, the people at that time greatly loved listening to Jesus teach. Wherever He went, large crowds followed Him. Therefore, because they feared the people, they did not dare to act against Him right away.

Verse 20: "So they watched Him, and sent spies who pretended to be righteous, that they might seize on His words, in order to deliver Him to the power and the authority of the governor."

Since they did not dare to act openly, they chose to work secretly instead. They even sought to cooperate with the political authorities of that time, trying to use the power of the government to get rid of Jesus. So they sent spies to mingle among

the crowds, pretending to be sincere and upright people, with the purpose of catching Jesus in something He said so that they could use it against Him.

At that time, the two most influential groups among the Israelites were the Sadducees and the Pharisees. The Sadducees tended to support Rome and cooperate with the Roman government; the chief priests of that time were basically Sadducees. The other group was the Pharisees. They strictly observed the Law and considered themselves God's chosen people and guides for the blind. They insisted on not cooperating with the Romans and regarded those who aligned themselves with Roman rule as traitors to Israel. Originally these two groups were completely opposed to one another, yet in order to persecute Jesus, they were actually able to sit together and devise a plan.

The background of these events is recorded in John 11:47, "Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, 'What shall we do? For this Man works many signs.'" Then in verse 49: "And one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them, 'You know nothing at all, nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish.'" Politicians often speak in lofty and honorable-sounding ways, and so they sought a way to seize upon some accusation against Jesus.

The next two sections in Luke chapter 20 were likely the result of the council's discussions. On one hand, they tried to find grounds in political matters to persecute Jesus; on the other hand, verses 27–40 show them trying to find grounds in religious matters to persecute Him.

Verse 21: "Then they asked Him, saying, "Teacher, we know that You say and teach rightly, and You do not show personal favoritism, but teach the way of God in truth."

What he said was not wrong at all; in fact, it was completely correct. The problem was that his motives were wrong. When a person's intentions are not right, no matter how beautiful or noble-sounding his words may be, they are still wrong in

essence. The purpose behind his words was to catch Jesus in something He said and use it against Him. Then what did he say next?

Verse 22: “Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?”

This was an extremely deceptive question. At that time, the Roman government required the Jews to pay a poll tax. The Sadducees, because they were aligned with the Roman authorities, believed that the tax should be paid. In contrast, the Pharisees opposed paying taxes and did not acknowledge Roman rule. Anyone who paid taxes was considered by them to be a traitor, a corrupt Jew who had sold out his own people.

This question was like a double-edged sword. If Jesus answered, “Do not pay,” then they could seize upon His words and report Him to the Roman authorities, accusing Him of inciting people not to pay taxes. But if Jesus answered, “Pay,” then they could stir up the Pharisees against Him, saying, “How could He possibly be the Messiah? The Messiah is supposed to restore the kingdom of Israel—how could He instead support and flatter the Roman government?”

Moreover, before asking this question, they first flattered Him up by praising Him, saying that He taught the right way and faithfully proclaimed God’s truth. It was as though they first tried to trap Him with flattery and then presented Him with a difficult dilemma.

Verse 23-24: “But He perceived their craftiness, and said to them, ‘Why do you test Me? Show Me a denarius. Whose image and inscription does it have?’ They answered and said, ‘Caesar’s.’”

Jesus is the Son of God, full of the Holy Spirit. A spiritual person discerns all things, and Jesus immediately saw through their scheme. Not only did He see through it, but He also handled the situation with great wisdom. He said to them, “Show Me a denarius...” Clearly, Jesus Himself was not carrying a Roman coin. At that time, since

the land was under Roman rule, Roman coins were commonly used in daily business transactions. However, in the temple, offerings had to be exchanged into Israeli shekels. Jesus Himself did not carry Roman coins, so He turned to them and said, “Bring Me a denarius.”

By asking this, He exposed the fact that those questioning Him were themselves carrying Roman coins. Then Jesus asked, “Whose image and inscription does it have?” Roman coins at that time were very similar to modern coins. On one side was the portrait of a man—the Caesar of that time. On the other side was the inscription Pontifex Maximus, meaning “the greatest ruler” or “supreme high priest.”

Jesus Himself had no coin, so He asked them to produce one. After looking at it, Jesus asked them to answer for themselves: “Whose image is this? And whose inscription?” They answered, “Caesar’s.” Through this very simple action and simple question, Jesus led them to give the answer themselves: it belonged to Caesar.

Verse 25: “And He said to them, ‘Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.’”

Jesus used one very simple question and, through their own answer, revealed an extremely important principle to us: “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” Because the coin bore Caesar’s image and Caesar’s inscription, it rightfully belonged to Caesar.

Then what belongs to God? Perhaps today we may not immediately understand, but I believe those Jews understood very clearly. In Genesis 1:26, when God created man, humanity was created in the image of God. It says: “So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” Human beings were originally meant to resemble God both inwardly and outwardly; mankind was created with the image of God. In other words, people themselves belong to God. Just as the coin bore Caesar’s image and therefore belonged to Caesar, we as human beings were created by God and for God’s purpose, and therefore should belong to God.

There is another very important point. When they asked whether taxes should be paid to Caesar, the Greek verb they used for “pay” was *didōmi*, which simply means “to give” or “to offer.” “Should we give taxes to Caesar?” But when Jesus answered, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s,” the word “render” is the Greek word *apodidōmi*. It is formed by adding the prefix *apo* to *didōmi*, similar to adding “re-” in English. Therefore, English translations often render it as “render” or “repay.” The question asked was whether they should “give” taxes to Caesar, but Jesus answered not with the idea of merely “giving,” but rather of “repaying” or “rendering back.”

In other words, under a government, the authorities provide military protection, maintain public order, build roads and bridges, and create stability and convenience for daily life. All of these things require resources and expense. Because of these benefits, people ought to repay what they themselves enjoy. Jesus deliberately used the word “repay.” This means that as Christians living in society today, many societal costs are borne by the state. Therefore, according to conscience, we ought to repay those costs. This is what Jesus meant by: “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s.”

At the same time, we ourselves have been redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. We belong to Him because we have been bought back by Him. Therefore, we ourselves should be given to Jesus: “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”

At that time, Jesus answered these people with great wisdom, and this is also a principle every Christian today should follow. We should not bring the things of Caesar into the church, nor should we give to Caesar what belongs to God. We ourselves have been redeemed and returned to God. If we give ourselves to the world, the church will become desolate; but if we bring worldly things into the church, the church will become full of strife and confusion.

Especially today, under so-called democratic nations and democratic systems, we particularly need wisdom to discern what things may properly be brought into the church and what things should be kept outside of it. We need to truly follow Jesus

Christ's instruction: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." This distinction is especially important in today's society.

Verse 26: "But they could not catch Him in His words in the presence of the people. And they marveled at His answer and kept silent."

In the face of so many political movements and currents, may God help every one of His children to have this same wisdom—to clearly distinguish between what belongs to Caesar and what belongs to God; then render to Caesar what is Caesar's, and render to God what belongs to God. With such a pure distinction, the people around us will find no grounds for accusation against us, and in the end they will have nothing left to say. May God help us.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You for placing before us such a clear principle: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." Grant us wisdom, and work this same separating work within us, so that in all things we may bring everything into prayer and seek Your leading. Also grant wisdom to Your children, so that we would not be like the Pharisees, who tightly clung to the regulations of the law without letting go; nor like the Sadducees, who casually attached themselves to the powers of this world. Help us to be people of clear understanding, bringing everything before You. Make us wise people, able to recognize each leading You have for us. Bless Your children, and bless every church where Your children gather, that each one may become a church according to Your heart. Thank You, Lord. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen!