

Jesus and Government

September 7, 2025

Welcome to the Beamsville Church of Christ Online Ministry.

This week's message is titled "Jesus and Government." Thank you to Aisha, Amy, and Geoff for being part of the service. The scripture reading is John 19:6 to 12. Happy birthday this week to Glynnis.

Reading

John 19:6-12

As soon as the chief priests and their officers saw him, they shouted, "Crucify, crucify." But Pilate answered, "You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him." The Jewish leaders insisted, "We have a law, and according to the law, he must die because he claims to be the Son of God." When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid, and he went back inside the palace. "Where do you come from?" he asked Jesus. But Jesus gave him no answer. "Do you refuse to speak to me?" Pilate said. "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or crucify you?" Jesus answered. "You would have no power above me if it was not given to you from above. Therefore, the one who held me, handed me over to you, is guilty of a greater sin." From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jewish leader kept shouting. "If you let him go, then you are no friend of--" Caesar? Caesar. Anyone who claims to be king opposes Caesar.

Sermon

I don't know, Amy did such a wonderful job of summarizing some of the things I've been thinking about. And then we sang about crab apples. I should just say "Amen" and sit down, I think, but that's not what you came for, I don't think.

Have you ever wondered at the words of Paul when he said, "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, God died for the ungodly." Romans 5 and 6. How did God decide that the time was right for Jesus to come to Earth? It seems like humanity had lost its way not just once, but several times. Adam and Eve rebelled and had to be exiled from the garden. The world of Noah became so corrupt that God decided he had to start over again. The nation of Israel, after being rescued from Egypt, rejected the God who appeared to them in fire and flame for something they could mold with their hands and party. The nation of Israel rejected God's lordship for a human king so they could be like the others around them. These kings would lead them astray until God was forced to use the might of Assyria and Babylon to punish their misdeeds. And now 400 years had elapsed without a prophet.

Out of that silence, God announces he will come. Galatians chapter 4. What I am saying is that as long as an heir is underage, he's no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. The heir is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. So also when we were underage, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world. But when the set time had fully come, God sent his son born of a woman born under the law to redeem those under the law that we might receive adoption to sonship. This passage also talks about the set time fully coming. It also talks about law. And law is something we associate with government.

Government in Palestine in Jesus' time was a complicated affair. It's not different today. We often think of the Hebrews as being under Roman rule, but there's a history that goes all the way back to the exile under Assyria. Historically, the exile began with the Assyrian overthrow of the northern kingdom. All of the prime citizens were forcibly deported to Assyria over a period of 20 to 30 years. Those too young, too old, or too weak to be a value as slaves were left in the land. The Assyrians had a policy of settling people that were more amenable to their cause into conquered territories. So they brought Gentiles from the east to repopulate the land and produce wealth to

send back to Assyria. It was later intermarriages that produced the Samaritan people that we hear of and come across in Jesus' time.

More than a hundred years after the Assyrians captured the northern kingdom, they were overthrown by Babylon. Babylon's rise was a concern to Egypt to the west and the south, and it began a series of offensives to take that middle ground. This led Babylon to come south not only to take back Israel, but also to attack Judah. The Israelite people were caught between warring superpowers of their day, and the kings of this time they made poorly advised treaties to try and align themselves with the force they thought would triumph. The Bible records the real reason for Israel's punishment was that they had wandered from their god, mistreated the poor, and were evil in their hearts. In the skirmishes and the changing allegiances, Judah came under siege and was destroyed some 25 years later. This led to the Babylonian exile in which Jerusalem and Judah were ransacked, and again a people were deported. Daniel was among the people of Judah who were exiled. That exile lasted 70 years.

And then Babylon too was defeated. Persia had been gaining strength and revolted against Babylon, defeating it. Cyrus, their king, understood that part of his ability to take Babylon lay in the discontent of the many captured people in Babylon, including the people of Israel. As a result, he decreed that the captives should be returned to their homelands. In this he gained the favor of these people, something that he needed to have to hold such a vast territory. And following this, the beginning is the Greek empire rose far to the north when Alexander defeated Babylon. He would create the largest empire that had ever existed, stretching as far as Egypt and India. Judah continued as a vassal state, but now the rulers were Hellenistic rather than Persian.

And finally, the Roman Republic defeated Greece at Corinth about 146 BC. Growth of that Roman empire was slow and Judea retained relative autonomy for close to 100 years about this time. But in 63 BC, Jerusalem was besieged and thus became part of a Roman province. That's the tortured history that Jesus comes into.

The Jews, while nominally ruled by Rome, had in fact a dual political system. While Rome ruled and built and taxed, it was the Jewish political groups that the day-to-day people interacted with. People like Matthew and groups like the Sadducees aligned themselves with the Romans. It was mutually beneficial as Rome could delegate the nasty small work and the conspirators could grow wealthy. Into this complicated melting pot, God decided it was the right time to send his son. 1 Peter 1 and 20. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.

Our reading this morning outlines the trial Jesus endured before Pilate. He's listened to the charges that have been brought against Jesus and he can find nothing against the man. Earlier in chapter 18, John had said, "The Jewish leaders had brought Jesus to the governor's home, though they wouldn't go in, lest they be ritually defiled."

Pilate asks, "What is the charge against the man?" They have no answer. So instead they resort to, "Well, if this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you." Verse 30. I don't know about you, but that sounds an awful lot like when my children were young and bickering with each other. It sounds like what Amy talked about, not understanding the problem. He did it. No, she did it. I did not. Did what? They couldn't even voice a clear and concise concern. It was really a symptom of something much deeper they didn't know and couldn't express. She's getting all the attention. He always gets to go first. It seems to me this is exactly how the Jewish leaders are behaving. They're making this life and death because Jesus was challenging their tradition. In reality, Jesus had done nothing against Rome.

John has recorded that Jesus had already pointed out before the leaders that he had done nothing secretly. He had done it openly and according to tradition in the synagogue. Wasn't this the place where open discussions of how to live and serve God were supposed to happen? The synagogue, like the church of today, should have been a place of healing, a place where imperfect humans could find peace and relationship with God. That had been Jesus' message ever since he first stood up and read from a scroll that he had come to proclaim freedom and release to the people, to proclaim the Lord's favor and love upon them. Jesus calls on the leaders to speak to the people he ministered to. If you want to know what I've taught, speak to those who have listened. It was a fundamental

component of a Jewish trial that there should be a testimony of witnesses. Jesus' appeal is that these witnesses knew his message. It wasn't divisive, but it was meant to bring them together as a people and with their God. The message was revolutionary indeed, but only because they had strayed so far from God's plans and his ideals. The high priest's officer chose to hit him because they're beyond reason. They've nothing left but just to lash out, kind of like kids who don't recognize what's really bothering them.

And so Jesus finds himself at Pilate's house in the dawn hours, surrounded by an angry mob. Pilate recognizes the danger in what is happening. He wants to know the accusation against Jesus and he's met with this empty retort that if he were not a criminal, we wouldn't have brought him. Pilate commands them to take him away and try Jesus under their own law. This isn't any concern of Rome and just exactly what was the charge of their own law. Mark records the trial before the high priest Caiaphas.

Mark chapter 14, "The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus so they could put him to death, but they didn't find any. Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree. Then some stood up and gave this false testimony against him. We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with human hands and in three days we'll build another, not made with hands.' Yet even then their testimony did not agree. Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, 'Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony these men are bringing against you?' But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer. Again the high priest asked him, 'Are you the Messiah, the son of the blessed one? I am,' said Jesus, 'and you will see the son of man sitting at the right hand of the mighty one and coming on the clouds of heaven.' The high priest tore his clothes. 'Why do we need any more witnesses?' he asked. 'You've heard the blasphemy, what do you think?' They all condemned him as worthy of death.

But they were faced with a dilemma. If indeed Jesus was blaspheming God then their law called for death. But under the Roman occupation they themselves would be guilty of sedition and plotting against Rome if their mob put Jesus to death. Only Rome could apply the death penalty. So now they found themselves appealing to Pilate who found no reason for a charge. As a result they need to invent a charge. Rome has no interest if this man claims to be the son and chose an emissary of God, a God they don't recognize. Instead the Jews need to convince Pilate the prefect that this man is claiming to be divine and directly challenging Caesar. Now the charge becomes treason and insurrection which if proven is of interest to Rome.

And so the leaders in an angry near riot bring Jesus bound and bruised to Pilate. Pilate however understands the gravity of the mob situation for his own position. So he offers them an out. Jesus can be released according to a festival custom that he appears to have put in place to appease the Jewish people. But they want none of that and instead call for Barabbas, a known revolutionary and we're told elsewhere a murderer. When that does not appease the crowd Pilate takes Jesus away and has him flog John reports severely. Then we have the scene of the soldiers mocking Jesus as king of the Jews. And Pilate brings Jesus out one more time and protests his innocence.

But the crowd shouts for crucifixion. Luke records that not only did Pilate find no reason for the accusation and three times tried to have Jesus release. Pilate reminded the crowd that Herod too had found no reason to charge Jesus and had sent him back to Pilate. Mark records for he that is Pilate knew that the chief priests had handed him over because of envy. In our reading it's clear that Pilate is afraid of what the crowd might do. So once more he goes back to Jesus and asks Jesus where do you come from? But Jesus realizing it's futile to respond lets it go without a response. To which Pilate replies with this key idea that both he and the Jews have missed. "Do you refuse to speak to me?" Pilate said. "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or crucify you?" Jesus answered. "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above." I'm going to come back to this later. This is the main point of our lesson today. The notion of authority and who commands it.

First I want to look at two other incidents that show us Jesus' approach to the government of his time. Matthew chapter 17. "After Jesus and his disciples arrived in Capernaum the collectors of the two drachma temple tax came to Peter and asked, 'Doesn't your teacher pay the temple tax?'" "Yes he does," he replied. When Peter came into the house Jesus was the first to speak. "What do you think Simon?" he asked. "From whom do the kings of the earth

collect duty and taxes from their own children or from others?" "From others," Peter answered. "Then the children are exempt," Jesus said to him. "But so that we may not cause offense go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch, open its mouth, and you will find a four drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours."

We recall the situation which the temple tax collectors came looking for the tax. Jesus had little money, but Peter confirms that Jesus will pay it. And Jesus reminds Peter that taxes are paid by foreigners not sons of the king, but that he should not offend. Jesus arranges a miraculous solution. The lesson to us is that where possible disciples should adhere to the principles and practices of the ruling government.

A greater challenge perhaps comes in the paying of taxes to a republic that does not recognize God. That previous situation was with the Jewish leaders, but this is with Rome. Perhaps there's a lesson here for us if we think our government is moving further and further from God's principles. Mark chapter 12.

Later they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words. They came to him and said, "Teacher, we know that you are a man of integrity. You aren't swayed by others because you pay no attention to who they are, but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not? Should we pay or shouldn't we?" But Jesus knew their hypocrisy. "Why are you trying to trap me?" he asked. "Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." They brought the coin and he asked them, "Whose image is this and whose inscription?" "Caesar's," they replied. Then Jesus said to them, "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's," and they were amazed at him.

We might miss some of the irony of this story. We know that Jesus understood their duplicity and that they were out to trap him, but what we may not realize is the extent of his challenge against them. When he calls for a coin, he makes special attention of whose image is on the coin. To the Jews, a graven image was considered an idol. In fact, Pilate himself had instigated writing when he put up Roman standards with Caesar's image throughout the holy city of Jerusalem. There's much depth to this word translated image. It's the same word used in the Greek Old Testament in Genesis 1.26 when God says he will make mankind in his image. It conveyed the idea that since Caesar's image is on the coin, Caesar has dominion over it, but since God's image is imprinted upon mankind, God has dominion over us.

It's easy from Western eyes to consider that Jesus is simply stating that church and state don't mix, but I think he's saying something far more fundamental. Government is there for your own good, but at the end of the day, government is established by God, and God can do good things even through bad or evil governments. As for you, belong to God, and that means following him, and as long as the government has not allowed its rule to be in opposition to what you must do to worship and obey God, then you need to follow them as well.

Let's go back to the key idea that I want us to wrestle with today. John chapter 19 beginning in verse 10. Pilate said, "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?" Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above." Pilate thought he had authority. His claim was that he held the power of life and death over Jesus, but he was wrong. Jesus had already given himself over to the true authority. He was the lamb about to be given for the people. The high priest had ironically said earlier that it would be better if one man died for the populace. He didn't understand the true reality of his statement.

In Acts 2 and 23 we read about Jesus, "This man who was handed over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God you executed by nailing him to a cross at the hands of gentiles." Pilate sees his offer and his entreaties to the people as a way out for a man he didn't see as guilty, but Jesus sees that this day has been in his father's mind since before the original rebellion. Jesus was Israel's rightful king. He obeyed the rules of the land that submitted to the government, but more importantly he recognized that governments are established by God. His birthright and his destiny is ownership of all of this and all of us. Yet when God decided and when the call came as the king of all people Jesus submitted his will to the will of God. He gave his life for those people who were against him, for the Romans who crucified him, and for you and I to have a relationship with God, the true authority.

When we think about Jesus and his relationship to government we need to think about these five points. We're asked to pray for the government. We honor and even pray for governments because they are from God and our honor is ultimately directed to him and the son that he loves.

Contact & Copyright

Thanks for watching or listening. The Beamsville Church of Christ meets at 4900 John Street, Beamsville, Ontario.

Scripture quotations marked NIV, taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version, NIV, copyright 2011 by Biblica, Inc., used by permission, all rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations marked NET are from the New English Translation Bible, copyright 2019 by Biblica Studies Press, LLC, netbible.com, all rights reserved.

Scriptures marked NKJV, taken from the New King James Version, copyright 1982 by Thomas Nelson, used by permission, all rights reserved.

You can learn more about the congregation on our Facebook page or at beamsvillechurchofchrist.ca.