

Render Unto Caesar, part 1

Luke 20:19-26

As we return to our study of the Gospel of Luke, we come to Luke 20 and come to what has to be one of the most iconic of all of Jesus' sayings: "Render to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." Many are familiar with that saying, "Render unto Caesar." In fact, they just use that as shorthand, kind of referring to the entire passage, "Render unto Caesar." It seems like a bit of a mantra, but it seems to me that many have abstracted that saying from its actual context, and that allows people to make that saying, "Render unto Caesar," mean whatever they assume it might mean, and particularly about the relationship between God and government, or the relationship between the church and the state. Some people see this as a call for radical division between the church and the state. Some people see it as a call to do whatever the state tells you to do.

And so you have these widely divergent views that come out of that same saying, "Render unto Caesar." Some say "Render unto Caesar" requires unquestioned obedience to civil authority as an authority ordained by God. And so this text goes beyond just paying taxes to the duty to salute whatever the government says, and whatever mandate comes out, we do a, whatever the state says.

Others say we shouldn't neglect, and they rightly say this, we shouldn't neglect the second half of Jesus' saying, which is "rendering to God what is God's." And so Caesar, too, must bow before God. And then they go this far, and they say if he fails to do so, then citizen-kings have a right to resist, a right to protest, a right to refuse to follow Caesar. Some say "Render unto Caesar" simply means pay your taxes. That's all. Others say this really has nothing to do with legitimizing taxes, but simply giving back to Caesar what he created, namely the coin itself. So if we're going to use Caesar's money, we have to pay his taxes, too. But if we forego using his money, well, we don't have to pay his taxes. Then you say, "Which view is right?" One of these, none of these? Something else? Is this even important? Why wrangle over the text at all?

First of all, I just want to say from the very start, this text is important to understand. It's really seminal to understanding our duty to Caesar or to the government, Caesar's role before God, our duty to both. All of this is important to understand, and we understand also as we read through Scripture and read through what happened in Jesus' life and his teaching, this is not the only place that Jesus commented on the role of government. He didn't often speak about the role of government in the life of the, of the individual believer, but he did refer to it. This is a very direct text, a very direct saying, and it's seminal, as I said. It's a, a basis for other teaching in the New Testament.

But we also see in places like John 18 and 19, as Jesus is on trial, as he stands before Pontius Pilate, who is the very image of Caesar, the face of Caesar in Jerusalem, in Judea. In John 18:36, as Jesus is standing trial, he told Pontius Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting so that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not of this world." If you take that text out of its context, and from that

text alone, it might seem that the kingdom of Christ and the kingdoms of this world don't have any intersection or interaction with each other at all, promote some kind of a, a radical, two-kingdoms theology with one, the one having nothing to do with the other.

But if we keep reading, we see that Pilate told Jesus in John 19:10, when Jesus is looking at the cross, he's looking at execution before him, and Pilate looks at him in bewilderment because Jesus is not answering his question; he's not defending himself, and Pilate says, kind of in exasperation, he says, "'Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?' And Jesus answered him, 'You'd have no authority over me at all unless it had been given to you from above.'" So Jesus clearly sees Pilate's role, clearly sees Caesar's role. He sees God as reigning above all, over all, as the true sovereign over all human kingdoms and all human authority on earth, which is what he is teaching in Luke 20:25 as well: "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

And thus here in this text, Jesus distinguishes between God and Caesar with the obvious point that Caesar is not God. God is not wrapped up in everything Caesar is doing. They are distinct. And yet, as Caesar is an authority ordained by God, Caesar himself is to be honored and to be obeyed. The rest of the New Testament bears this out in passages such as Romans 13 and 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Peter 2, all of them and others resting on this foundation of Luke 20:25.

So it is important to go back to this foundational text and interpret the text in its context. If we follow sound principles of hermeneutics, following rules of grammar, studying the facts of history, paying careful attention to the context, trusting in the perspicuity of Scripture, that is to say, the clarity of Scripture, which causes us to prefer the simplest meaning over the more complex meaning. And by the way, there are many people who make a hash of this text by turning it into this great complexity. They love to insert their predetermined theology into the text and make the text, then, say whatever they want it to say.

I remember talking to a, a young man who'd visited our church, and as he was walking out, he sort of, and this is during, you know, right after COVID. A lot of people were flooding into churches that were open because, not because they really loved the truth and loved the Gospel; they just loved a church that was open because we seemed to be defying Caesar. And so they said, "Oh, we're going to go there, and we're all going to come together and wear MAGA hats and, and take over."

And, and this is one of those, you know, one of those young guys, and he sort of boasted on the way out that he refused to register his vehicle with the county, wouldn't register his vehicle, wouldn't pay the taxes because obviously the county is not in submission to God's law. And I said, "Well, do you, do you pay taxes?" He said, "Well, yeah, but I shouldn't." And I just thought, "Well, that's interesting. You're driving on the government's roads, roads that they require to be maintained through the tax money that you want to withhold." And as I challenged him to think about these things, he went off in a huff and he hasn't returned. But he quoted this passage to me and said, "Caesar is under God, and if he doesn't obey God, if Caesar doesn't obey God, we don't have to obey him." Well,

again, inserting your own theology into the text is going to make hash of the text every single time.

And so we want to do our best to interpret this text, paying careful attention to the context, not, not distorting its simple meaning by adding our own preconceived notions. And I think in humility before the Lord we'll come to a right understanding of it by his grace.

But since it's been a while since we've been in Luke's Gospel, let's go back to Luke chapter 20, verse 1. Okay? Luke 20:1. And we'll remind ourselves about the controversy that erupted when Jesus came into his own temple and he cleansed the temple. Well, that provoked the temple leaders and the Sanhedrin. Notice what happens here.

"One day, as Jesus was teaching the people in the temple and preaching the Gospel, the chief priests and the scribes with the elders came up and said to him, 'Tell us by what authority you do these things or who is it that gave you this authority?' And he answered them, 'I also will ask you a question. Now tell

me, was the baptism of John from heaven or from man?' They discussed it with one another, saying, 'If we say from heaven, he'll say, "Well, why did you not believe him?" But if we say from man, all the people stone us to death, for they are convinced that John was a prophet.' So they came back, and they answered that they did not know where it came from. And Jesus said to them, 'Well, neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.'"

The question of authority from the temple leadership, these are representatives, we understand, from the Sanhedrin, and they had already decided to destroy Jesus, as we read in the previous chapter, Luke 19:47. So it's a question of authority. It's a legitimate concern, but we can see it's not an honest question. And they're, they're not after an honest answer, so that they can pardon Jesus, so they can bow before him. They are trying to entrap him.

Jesus answers them and, in an indirect way, and he presses their conscience. He ties his own authority to the authority that had commissioned John the Baptist, that had commissioned his ministry. And so if they'll acknowledge divine authority in



John's ministry, well, they'll acknowledge that same authority at work in his ministry. If they refuse to acknowledge divine authority in John's ministry, well, it's a moot point with Jesus as well.

They discussed with one another, thinking, seeing that Jesus had caught them. They refused to acknowledge either side, refused to answer Jesus' question, so he provided them, as he often does in Scripture, he provided them with a warning and telling them a story, delivering a parable that recounted the history, really, recounted the whole history of Israel's response to prophetic authority, Israel's response to divinely commissioned authority.

Basically, their track record was not good. When divinely commissioned authority came to them, they resisted it and wanted to put it to death. Look at verse 9 and following: "Jesus began to tell them," the people, "this parable. 'A man planted a vineyard, let it out to tenants, and went into another country for a long while. When the time came, he sent a servant to the tenants so that they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-

handed. He sent another servant, but they also beat and treated him shamefully and sent him away empty-handed. He sent yet a third. This one they also wounded and cast out.

“The owner of the vineyard said, “What shall I do? I will send my beloved son. Perhaps they will respect him.” When the tenants saw him, they said to themselves, “This is the heir. Let us kill him so that the inheritance may be ours.” They threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others.’ When they heard this, they said, ‘Surely not!’ But he looked directly at them and said, ‘What then is this that is written? “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.” Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces. When it falls on anyone, it'll crush him.’”

Israel's tragic history of rejecting the servants that God had sent to the tenants of the vineyard, their history of rejecting the prophets, it provides a warning to this current generation, the ones who are receiving the son of the vineyard owner. Receiving, they're the one, this is the generation

witnessing the coming of the Messiah. Jesus is the very Christ of God. He is God's chosen cornerstone, and Jesus warns them that all who resist him will be either broken to pieces or utterly crushed. Either way, a wrong response to Jesus will result in your tragic loss. Verse 19 says that the scribes and the chief priests knew that Jesus told this parable about them. Even though they wanted him dead, they'd have grabbed him right there if they could, but his popularity with the crowd restrained them from taking action against him.

And this is the problem that brings us into the text today. It is the what-to-do-about-the-Jesus problem that they're facing. They're troubled, they are angry, they have murderous intent. They intend to drive him to the cross, and yet their hands are tied. They feel this great tension because Jesus has such popularity with the people. "Oh, what to do? What to do?"

Let's look at the text, starting in verse 19 and reading through verse 26, the text for today. "The scribes and the chief priests sought to lay hands on him at that very hour for they perceived that he had told this parable against them. But they feared the people, 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 jurisdiction of the governor.

“And so they asked him, ‘Teacher, we know that you speak and teach rightly and show no partiality, but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar or not?’ But he perceived their craftiness and said to them, ‘Show me a denarius. Whose likeness and inscription does it have?’ They said, ‘Caesar’s.’ He 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.”

All three synoptic authors, Matthew, Mark and Luke, all three of them draw attention to the reaction, this reaction of the spies, namely, that they marveled at Jesus’ answer. It was, it was a stunning answer to them. Luke’s summary, here, is the fullest, not only drawing attention to their bewilderment, but also noting their failure to entrap him, and then the resulting silence, the stopping of their mouths, the stopping of their

plans, the exposure of their pretensions. And obviously we could see from the text that Jesus didn't mean "pay your taxes." But that's not all he said, here. That's not all he meant, either. Whatever he said, and whatever he meant by what he said, it caused his opponents, all of them, to marvel, and then it completely silenced them.

And so what was it that left his enemies so awestruck that they shut their mouths and could not respond? Was it a treatise on the relationship of the church and the state? That's like, "Whoa, I've never heard such teaching." No, not merely that. What is going on here is far deeper and far more penetrating and soul-searching in the text. So I'm going to use several points to kind of guide us through the text. And these points aren't, you know, particularly striking, or they don't even rhyme, you know, it's not even good for, good for me. They don't even kind of, they're not even alliterated.

But we'll just start with number one, number one: the setup, the setup. And we go back for the setup to verses 19-20. The setup and the main point I want to emphasize here in the setup of the whole text, and this is Luke's setup to helping us

to understand what's going on kind of behind the scenes, what we need to see here in the setup is that this section represents for the leadership a change in tactics, change in tactics. Same, same goal, same strategy, but this is a change in tactics.

Look at verse 19 again: "Scribes, chief priests, they sought to lay hands on him at that very hour, but they perceived that he had told this parable against them. But they feared the people." So change in tactics, "they watched him and sent spies, spies who pretended to be sincere, pretended to be," the word is actually, righteous, "sent spies who pretended to be sincere, so that they might catch him in something he said, so as to deliver him up to the authority and jurisdiction of the governor."

So these chief priests, these scribes, they want to get their hands on him. And as Luke tells us, any desire that they had to take action, and by the way, it's a murderous action, it was thwarted by a competing desire: They had to maintain the favor of the people. After all, it's maintaining the favor of the people that put them in positions of power. If they lose the favor of the people, they lose their positions of power. So the

goal though, is the same. They must have the destruction of Jesus.

And we can see on a human level, we can see all of the pride and all the covetousness and all the greed and all the things that that drove them and motivated them. But we also know from Scripture that this is satanic. There's a satanic conspiracy afoot to, to drive human beings to commit the greatest crime of all human history, to condemn this pure, innocent, holy man, put him on a cross, dying a death that he did not deserve. Their goal, though, is the destruction of Jesus. No matter how ludicrous it seems, they want to destroy him.

Luke also tells us how the Sanhedrin planned to make use in their plan, now, of Roman authority. In fact, this is revealing to us, that they calculated this. They understood that under Rome, they, the Sanhedrin, had no legal authority to condemn anyone, no right of capital punishment, no power to execute a death sentence. And so the governor's involvement was a key requirement, a prerequisite to accomplishing their goal. So the strategy then, is to get Jesus to incriminate himself, to say

something that goes too far and gets him in trouble with the state, and then go and report it to the governor, who will arrest him, try him for sedition, and lights out. That's their plan.

Tactically, there's a change, here, because it had once seemed to be a good idea for the leaders, especially the scribes and the Pharisees, they liked to confront him personally, and they liked to make use of their skill in debate and rhetoric and logic, their knowledge of Scripture, hoping to embarrass him publicly before the people. And that, as we've seen in the Gospel account, that's backfired repeatedly, hasn't it? Over and over again, as they try to embarrass him, they end up embarrassing themselves, leaving them looking more and more foolish before the people, disqualified before the people, discredited before the people.

So new tactics. "We're going to go about this in a different way." Whereas the religious leaders had once been involved personally in confronting Jesus, well, no more. Now they recede into the shadows. They take a different tactical approach. They're going to surveil him, and they're going to



send their agents to confront him, not they themselves, but agents who basically do their bidding. They're going to avoid personal confrontation at all costs as it reduces the risk of embarrassment, reduces the risk of them losing face before the people and them diminishing their credibility before the people.

It's interesting, here, how we can see in the chief priests, the scribes, the elders, the Pharisees, leaders of the people, we can see how these guys are political animals. I mean, they would have fit in very well in Washington D.C. or any other political context. These guys are adept politically, from a strictly political point of view, in the fleshly way that they think. They think Jesus thinks like they think. They assume that Jesus sees his own advantage as his popularity with the people. He's the people's man. He's a man of the people. He's got popular appeal, and in the ranks of the crowd, in the ranks of the people, he's got protection. He's got their protection because he's got their favor. That's how they think. They assume that's how Jesus thinks as well.

So they calculate that, and then this kind of maneuver of a political judo or political jiu jitsu, they're going to turn,

plan to turn his advantage, popularity with the people, to their own favor. They want to use his popular appeal, the weight that he has, and use his weight against him, use it as a pivot point, gain leverage over Jesus, and use the momentum of popular appeal to cause Jesus to go too far, too far, so he can't over correct, get him to say what will please the people, which is "Don't pay the tribute to Rome." That would lead to his arrest and conviction and death. Well, we're going to see how the tactical shift works out in just a moment as we look at our second point.

But I want to mention something quickly that Luke passes over in our text. He, he doesn't mention something that Matthew and Mark point out. And that's this: that behind the spies and their, this pretension of sincerity here, behind them is those who acted as coaches and sent these men to confront them. Our translation uses a pronoun to talk about them: "They." Refers back to the scribes, the chief priests of verse 19. It's "they" who sought to lay hands on him at that very hour. It's "they" who perceived that he told the parable and told it against them. And it's "they" who feared the people. So the "they" refers to the Jewish leaders, the chief priests, the scribes.

But Matthew and Mark add another element, another component. They tell us about the involvement of the Pharisees behind this tactical change. And not only that, but in Matthew 22:16 and Mark 12:13, we discover another party at work with the Pharisees. There's this unlikely coalition joining together of competing political parties coming together to engage in this subterfuge.

We've got the Pharisees, and we understand that they are staunch Jewish nationalists. They are anti-Roman to the core. They hate paying the tribute tax to Rome because they hate having the, just the duty to acknowledge Rome's authority over their land. They are nationalists who want to return the rule of the land back to the Jewish people. And so they have a relationship with the populace, a relationship with the people, which is what burns them so much, that Jesus has kind of stolen the affections of the crowd. They want him dead because of it.

But these Pharisees, nationalists, they have forged this unlikely alliance with this party called the Herodians. And that's what Matthew 22:16, Mark 12:13, tell us about. The Herodians. Who are the Herodians? The Herodians are Jews and

probably other Idumeans, you know, a mixture between Edomites and Jews, and they are in league with Rome. The Herodians are those who are willing to play ball with Rome. They courted the favor of Rome.

In fact, that was the strategy of Herod the Great from the very beginning. He came to power by courting favor with Rome. He was a pragmatist. He played for the favor both of Rome and then in the land played, played for the favor of the Jewish nationalists as well. But when push came to shove, Herod always capitulated to the power of Rome. He knew who kept him in power, and it wasn't the people, it was Rome. But he tried to play both sides. He was a pragmatist. He tried to ingratiate himself through his building projects and all those kinds of things, tried to ingratiate himself with the people of the land because he's right there in their presence. He understands that just one assassin can take him out. And so he was a thoroughly suspicious man. We all understand that about Herod the Great.

But complicity with Rome is what characterized this entire Herodian dynasty. Complicity with Rome is what kept them in favor, kept them in power. And they had learned, this Herodian

party had learned the art of compromise. They shrewdly played the politics to stand firmly in the middle of the Jews in the land and the Roman power in Rome, doing the bidding of Caesar. So their penchant for compromise, their comfort level of complicity with Rome, this is why the Pharisees and the scribes despised the Herodians. They hated these people, and the Herodians returned the favor. They did not much like these petty nationalists either. The Pharisees, they thought of them as foolish and unsophisticated because they didn't understand the art of compromise. They're committed, the Herodians were committed to playing the political long game, to retain their power, and that meant staying in good standing with Rome.

And so it is truly a wonder, isn't it, that these two competing opposite, but thoroughly evil forces align and they join together. And we see that no matter how polar opposite people are, if they're unbelievers, they will be susceptible to compromising and joining together. We've seen this in American politics, Canadian politics, as even conservatives vote on the side of bills that disfavor conservative causes.

Why is that? It's because they don't have a renewed heart. They don't have a regenerate heart that keeps them fixed to unchanging, an unchanging God and unchanging principles taught by an unchanging Spirit of God. Without regeneration, people are susceptible to breathing in and out the "spirit of the power of the air," and they will compromise and let you down every time.

And so even these Pharisees, die-hard nationalists, will compromise when it comes to, when push comes to shove, they will compromise with their political enemies, aligning these two evil forces. And that old adage comes into play yet again, "The enemy of my enemy is my friend." They conspire together, both parties watching Jesus, both parties waiting to see if they can catch Jesus in something that he says, use his words against him so that they can hand Jesus over to the authority and the power of the governor; by the way, the only power and authority in Jerusalem who can do their bidding, who can accomplish their will by putting Jesus to death.

And so that's the setup; that's the setup. As we come to verse 21, we see the spies get to work setting their snare. They're laying their trap, and they fully expect Jesus to step

right into it. And so here's a second point, number two, the trap. First, the setup; number two, the trap. "So they asked him, 'Teacher, we know that you speak and teach rightly, and you show no partiality, but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar or not?'" Try to hide their true intentions behind a mask of sincerity. In fact, the word for "pretend" there, *hypokrinomai*, is, is the word for "hypocrite." This is, this is the word that means, really, "to wear a mask." It came from playing a role on a stage as an actor.

And so what's the role that they're playing? Here, they're playing the role of the sincere, literally, as I said, the word is righteous *dikaios*. They, they come to him as righteous men, only having the cause of justice and equity, equity in mind. They pretend to have questions for him having to do with righteousness, because their conscience is really bothered by this, by this persnickety issue, this abiding issue in the land. "What do we do about this?"

How could any righteous teacher, how could any righteous teacher like Jesus resist the sincerity of such righteous

students who are asking such righteous questions about matters of conscience and righteousness, right? Especially when they ask so nicely? "Teacher, we know that you speak and teach rightly." They're buttering him up. "You show no partiality. You truly speak the way of, teach the way of God." Such polite boys, right?

And no doubt when I say "boys," I'm not being just disparaging. No doubt these spies are young, bright, eager theological students under the tutelage of the scribes. They know that their handlers are watching not only for what Jesus does, but watching them, how they perform, watching from the shadows, seeing how their students do, how their young protégés fare. And so they're eager to please their, their masters. They're eager to please their, their mentors. They're exhilarated by this opportunity, thrown into the big stage, into the arena with this popular Galilean teacher.

"Speak and teach rightly," the word "rightly" is the word *orthos*, which means "straight" or "in a straight line." From the word *orthos* we get the English words "orthodontics" and "orthopedics." So, "straight dontics" and "straight pedics," I



guess. Straight teeth, straight bones, orthodoxy, orthopraxy; that is, in a straight line with God's revealed glory, *doxo*, and a response, a right response of obedient practice in *praxi*.

Jesus always spoke the straight truth, didn't he? He always taught the straight practice of the truth. They're not wrong about this. They're saying something true about him. True, but with false intent. Jesus speaks the truth and he teaches the truth literally. "Not receiving the face" is the next expression. That's an idiom that means Jesus is no respecter of persons. He doesn't regard people's faces. He, he pays no attention to his audience. He doesn't try to read the room before he speaks. He shows no partiality. He just lays the truth out there and lets the chips fall where they may.

And then to seal off this perfect Eddie Haskell level of flattery, these spies, "Pay Jesus," the very highest compliment they can muster, "you truly teach the way of God." Now it's not just the truth of God, not just revealed truth. They're not just disseminating facts from God, but this is the way of God. And so they're acknowledging that Jesus has not just the, the true facts coming from God, but he actually understands, he has a

sense of God. Jesus is very familiar with who God is, who he really is, what he's actually like. He not only knows the truth, but he lives out the truth. He demonstrates truthfulness in how he lives. He, he's got a perfect orientation of life and mind and habit. He's consistent. He's constant.

Well, this is what makes this flattery so despicable, isn't it? Because these spies, they really, truly in their hearts, regard none of what they commend. They say true things about him, but they have no respect for him, no honor for him, no regard because they're simply buttering him up in order that they, hope they can cook him in an oven. They use the truth like a weapon. Proverbs 29:5 says, "A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his feet." That's what they're trying to do. They intend to see Jesus decline in popularity, fall before the people. They intend to find something that their masters can use and deliver Jesus up to the governor.

One commentator says the Sanhedrin knew that Pilate would have to condemn Jesus if he were to put to death, if he were to be put to death. So then all their plans focus on this point as

this, as the single goal, one goal, Jesus' death. "That's what we want, that's what we're after."

So after buttering him up with flattery, after laying a net for his feet, they pose to him a seemingly straightforward question, which is really like bait for the trap. "Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar or not?" Now, this is not the broad question about the lawfulness of taxes. The Jews paid taxes. They paid temple taxes. They paid all kinds of taxes: customs taxes, poll tax. They paid all kinds of taxes. This isn't just about the principle of taxation. The Jews accepted the principle of taxation, practiced taxation in their own land, paid it to their, their Maccabean rulers back in the intertestamental times. They had no problem paying taxes.

The question here is more specific. "Is it permissible according to Moses?" is what they're asking. "Is it a permissible, lawful, acceptable to Moses who made us free people to pay taxes to these overlords? Not just overlords. Pagan overlords. Those who violate idolatry laws. Should we be paying taxes to them?" Mark 12:14 records, "Should we pay tribute to

Caesar or should we," that is, we the Jews, "should we not?"  
Simple question, right? Straightforward question.

Now with Luke's preparation, we know it's a trap, and when we investigate the historical background a little bit further, we discern what's at play here. Back in Luke chapter 2 we read about the historical background which, by the providence of God, remember, sent Joseph back to Nazareth with his pregnant wife Mary to really to fulfill prophecy. And that situation, that historical background continues to play a very significant role in the region, not only in our text, but beyond, leading all the way to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and beyond.

But Luke 2:1, you remember that referred to a, referred to a census that was decreed by Caesar Augustus that all the world should go to be registered. That's the first census, overseen personally by Caesar Augustus, so it makes it stand out among others. And he decreed that in the year 8 B.C. Took a few years for this decree of registration to be implemented in Judea when, and it was when Quirinius was governing, not the governor. Tech, and this is a technical point, but I won't go into it all right

now, but it's when he was governing or leading in Syria, Luke, 2:2 says, and that was around 4 B.C.

So Luke is very specific, helping us narrow down the date. Quirinius, in what you can call political wisdom and expediency, he worked with Herod the Great. He took Herod's advice to kind of work through the customs of the Jews so as not to anger them and cause revolt or rioting. And that custom of the Jews was to allow the Jews to return to the towns of their birth for registration according to family, clan and tribe. And that is what set up the events leading to Jesus' birth, as we know. We know the story; we're coming into the Christmas season, we're all reminded of that story.

At the same time, meanwhile, back at the ranch, there are two Galilean Pharisees, one by the name of Judas of Gamala, which is a town in Galilee, there were two Gamalas, and this is the one in Galilee, and then another Galilean Pharisee named Matthias. These two Galilean Pharisees vehemently opposed paying the tribute. They vehemently opposed getting registered, and they called fellow Jews to refuse to be registered. Judas of Gamala, also known as Judas of Galilee, he said that the Jewish

state was a Republic that acknowledged and recognized God alone as the king. God alone is our sovereign. His laws alone are supreme. That's what Judas said.

We read in Josephus that Judas called his fellow Jews, anyone who would capitulate to Rome and pay the tribute or be registered even, he called them "cowards," quoting Josephus, here, "cowards if they would endure to pay a tax to the Romans and would after God submit to mortal men as their Lords. End quote. So he gets very harsh with his fellow Jews, not just for paying the tribute, but even being registered.

Josephus and other historians trace the origin of the Zealot party back to these events in A.D. 4 and beyond. Also the Sicarii, which is the Jewish assassins, trace the, the Sicarii back to this time as well. These Zealots, who were aided by the Sicarii, a group of, of assassins, according to Josephus, he says this, quote, "They got together against those who were willing to submit to the Romans and treated them in all respects as if they had been their enemies, both by plundering them of what they had, by driving away their cattle and by setting fire to their houses." End quote. These guys were radical. Serious.

So Judas of Galilee, Matthias, all their Zealot disciples, the criminal gang of Sicarii, they treated their own people as they would the Romans. They terrorized them. They considered the payment of tribute as tantamount to betrayal, a betrayal that perpetuated the slave, enslavement of Israel to the pagan empire of Rome. "How could you? Could you turn your back on God?"

Well, Judas and Matthias led this group of zealous young men in open revolt against Herod the Great. They went, stormed Herod's garrison, tore down the Roman eagle that adorned the gate of Herod's temple, attacked his armory and lots of sparks, but very little came of it. Rebellion was crushed by the professional soldiers that Herod had at his disposal, and Herod had Judas and Matthias burned alive.

But that didn't end the matter. We remember Gamaliel referring to these, this uprising in Acts 5:37. He said, "Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him. He too, perished, and all who followed him were scattered." So, scattered. Yes, they were

scattered, but like dandelion seeds that blow in the wind, these who were scattered carried their resentments with them, and they infected fellow Jews with the same views. They fed resentment among the population, among the common people. They fomented anger, and the spirit of rebellion led to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, as I said, and the massacre at Masada just a few years later.

So all this is in the background; all this is kind of boiling among the population. All this is troubling. All these tensions are there. And this straightforward question from these spies, well, it's a loaded question, isn't it? After they've set a net for Jesus using this effusive flattery, they bait him with the question, "Is it lawful for us," us Jews, "is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar or not?" Again, not about paying taxes, not about the principle of taxation. It's a very specific question having to do with paying taxes to a foreign power who's ruling over them.

This question is loaded with feeling, a popular sentiment that favors Jewish nationalism, that really sees Judas the Galilean and Matthias as national heroes. And so the people



listening in, these people, the crowd has national sympathies, and they are inclined very deeply to oppose Rome.

So the spies have set their snare. They've laid their trap. They've intend, they're intending to catch Jesus on the horns of this dilemma because if Jesus goes against the people, which they don't expect, they and the Pharisees are going to eviscerate Jesus as one who's in league with Rome as no Messiah at all. If Jesus sides with the people, though, this is what they expect will happen. This is what they hope will happen. This is what all their flattery was, was calculated to ensure would happen. Is it, Jesus would tell the people, "Yeah, don't pay taxes. Don't pay your taxes to Rome, that that pagan power." Well, then they have the Herodians standing by, ready to report Jesus to the governor. And since the governor will tolerate no insubordination, it will broker no sedition, Jesus' execution will soon ensue shortly after. That's the plan.