

Sermon for the Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost

“Whose likeness and inscription is this?”

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The Pharisees and the Herodians speak rightly even as they attempt to *entrap* our Lord, saying that He is not *swayed by appearances*, for so does the Scripture tell us that *God is no respecter of persons, for He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and the rich he has sent empty away; even as he shall break the nations with a rod of iron, and dash them to pieces like a potters vessel.*

Indeed, He commands His people to not *give preference to rich because of their riches, nor the poor out of pity for their poverty.*

The Lord seems peculiarly uncaring, for in ancient times the wealthy and powerful were considered blessed, as seemed proven by their wealth. In our own time we prefer the poor against the one percent, on account of their suffering. But God cares not for the poor for their poverty, nor the powerful for their power, for both money and influence are fallen things, that fallen people care for, for they do not know how to value a person as a person, they only value him for what he has, or what he lacks. In this, we prove that we are evil.

Now evil people, these politicians and teachers of the Law, seek to force the Christ to incriminate Himself by asking what belongs to whom. *Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or is it not?*

Christ is *aware of their malice*, and demands to see the coin. *Whose likeness and inscription is upon it?*

They said, “Caesar’s.” Then he said to them, “Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s.

For Caesar has required his image upon every coin, upon all mammon, all

material gain, for Caesar is the ruler of this world, and this world cares for things; what people own, what people lack; what belongs to whom, for this world is fallen, and in putting the image of the ruler of men on the symbol of wealth, of influence, of power, we prove what it is that man cares for; he cares for worldly things, and in so doing, we prove that we are evil.

God cares not for money; He cares not for power or influence; for every such thing that we value in this earthly life He will destroy; for none of it matters. It is all passing. For *heaven and earth will pass away, but my word shall never pass away.*

Where man has chosen to put his image on money, God has chosen to place his image elsewhere. Even as He took counsel within Himself, in the beginning, the Lord of Angels chose to put His likeness and inscription not in the brilliance of silver or the incorruption of gold, but in the soul of every frail human; to place the image of God within every person, so that it may be fulfilled that *the dwelling place of God is with men*, and it could not be otherwise, for God Himself commands that we *love thy neighbor as thyself*. This He fulfills, that His will might be made complete in us.

'Render unto the Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.'

To the rulers of this world give every worldly thing, be it money or labor or secular obedience. But to God give one thing, and indeed the only thing that matters; the only thing that Adam and Eve had from the moment of their creation. Give to God yourself; for His image is engraved in your very being.

We value many meaningless things, our wealth, our education, our success, our pride. All these things will be rolled up like a scroll and hidden away forever on the Last Day. What shall remain? Not you, but God's image within you, for only God is eternal; and we shall live for eternity because of God's likeness in us.

The Lord Jesus does not speak any profound thing. It is, in fact, quite obvious. Ask anyone if anything is more important than our own life, here in time, and into eternity, all will say 'nothing.' Yet we are fallen, and so in our day to day life, everything seems more important than the innocence of our souls. For we may profess a truth, but we all live a lie. This lie that we have all devoted ourselves to the Church calls 'sin.'

But now God Himself has taken on flesh, and the image and likeness of God have been inscribed into human nature in the person of Jesus; for the time of the lie has come to an end, and with it the rule of the Father of Lies, Satan. The truth is made flesh, and those who follow the truth shall inherit eternal life.

The Pharisees and Herodians *marveled greatly*, and this is proof that we are evil, for they marvel at the most obvious of truths: that beside God, there is nothing of value, for He alone is good.

So they leave Jesus, and walk away; that Jesus might continue onto Zion, there to abolish all that is worthless, all that is worldly, so that God alone who is worthy may be glorified, and with Him all that bear His image, as a coin bears the likeness of a great king. To destroy the ambition of carnal men, and exalt the nature of weak mankind is the Gospel He has come to announce unto all nations, by His cross, and by His resurrection. For it is written:

'I form light and create darkness. I make wellbeing and create calamity.'

'I am the Lord, who does all these things.'

'And beside me, there is no God.'

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon Texts: Isaiah 45:1-7, 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10; Matthew 22:15-22.