

**The Tax Trap**  
**Mark 12:13-17**

Well, there is no doubt that the concepts of government and politics are not favorable or warm topics to the American people. Each day that passes finds more and more hatred for the political leaders and governing authorities in our country. People don't even hesitate to demonstrate their displeasure with the current system leading our country. It seems like every passing moment the average American's faith in government depresses to an even lower all-time low. Additionally, there's also no doubt that average American Christians are disappointed in the political landscape as well. It's not surprising in and of itself, but there's an astonishing parallel between how your average unbeliever views government, and American Christians and how they view government. Both have found common ground in the acceptance and encouragement of grumbling and complaining about politics. As one feels fully justified to bad mouth the weather on a nasty day, so too do both Christian Americans and unbelieving Americans feel fully justified to grumble and complain about the government of the United States.

To be candid, the majority of American Christians have fallen into a trap. It's a trap that expects the government to cater to the needs and wants of Christians. It's a trap that expects the government to uphold Biblical moral values. It's a trap that hopes the blind leadership of mankind will somehow lead the United States to glorify God. It's a trap that leads to grumbling and complaining when unbelievers fail to glorify God in leading the country. It's a trap that really takes those that are lost and need the gospel from unbelieving lost souls to the enemy. And this trap has led many American Christians to sin in their grumbling and complaining. It's also revealed the poor understanding so many Christians have when it comes to politics and government. In short, this trap has revealed that Christians have failed to accept that God has established all governing authorities that exist, and it's this trap that resembles the very trap that we have before us with the Jewish leaders in Jesus' day.

As I remind you in returning to Mark's gospel, we're in the midst of controversy. We're in the midst of Jesus and the Jewish leadership going back and forth, having an exchange, heated exchanges, over various topics. And we've begun those controversies, and we continue that this morning.

And as you can tell this morning, controversy surrounds government. Let's look at our text in Mark 12:13-17 to see this unfold; "And they sent to him some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians, to trap him in his talk. And they came and said to him, 'Teacher, we know that you are true and do not care about anyone's opinion. For you are not swayed by appearances, but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?' But, knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, 'Why put me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me look at it.' And they brought one. And he said to them, 'Whose likeness and inscription is this?' They said to him, 'Caesar's.' Jesus said to them, 'Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.' And they marveled at him."

This is just another controversy that continues to build up and mount up in the midst of where we are. Where are we exactly in the life of Christ? We're at the end. We're at the final week of Christ's life, this Passion Week, this final momentous occasion where He and several other Jews have made their way to Jerusalem. Jerusalem is packed and overflowing with Jews as they're there for Passover. They're there to celebrate this annual festival that even the Old Testament Law required them to celebrate, the Festival of Passover, and so it's in these occasions and in this kind of constant crowding and interactions that these controversies are starting to unfold. What kicked them off? As we saw when Jesus came down, not just because they were there for Passover, but the way that Jesus was welcomed into the city, you recall, He was welcomed like a king. The people were excited to announce that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God, and to kind of lay out the red carpet as we said and to continually show their expectation and hope of Jesus being the Messiah.

Obviously, that got the attention of all the people, including the religious leaders there in Jerusalem. But to take things another step further, the next day after Jesus was welcomed, He came back into the temple, and He took control of the temple. He pronounced judgment on what was taking place there. He attacked the temple, essentially, in this cleansing of the temple as we call it. Again, another moment, another occasion that would obviously seize the attention of the religious leaders. Because of these things, they finally come up to Jesus, and they challenge Him, essentially saying, who do you think you are Jesus? How dare you walk in here and act like you own the place. Who gives you this authority to do these things? What have you

done that actually allows you to be able to come in here and act this way? And, obviously, that was a bad call on their part because Jesus turned the tables on them and showed how foolish and really ill-equipped they were to lead God's people because they hadn't even made up their mind about John the Baptist who'd been preaching for some time and obviously got the attention of the people. And the Jewish leaders chose not to take a stance on this. They showed their ignorance when they said "...we do not know..."

Jesus then went on the attack in the beginning of chapter 12 where we were last time and told the story of the parable, a parable that wasn't so hidden that only certain people got it, a parable that was actually very telling and very revealing. Even the very people He told it against, the blind Jewish leaders, understood. He's telling the story about us. That's how the story ends in 12:12. They recognize, they realize, they perceive that he told the parable against them. Who are the "they?" Just as a reminder, the "they" are the ones who are the religious leaders. They are specifically given for us in Mark 11:27; "...the chief priests and the scribes [the experts in the Law] and the elders..." that are really composed of this Jewish ruling council called the Sanhedrin, the Sanhedrin who rules over all the affairs of the Jewish people and especially in this region of Judea where Jerusalem and the temple was. These are the ones that Jesus is telling the story against when He describes them as the tenants of the vineyard who are so violent and hateful towards the owner. They kill all the prophets that God sends to them, and then eventually, Jesus predicts His death again by saying even the very son of the owner, referring to Jesus Himself, they will, in fact, kill Him. They will reject Him like a builder rejecting the cornerstone, the most necessary part of any building project. In doing this, they are obviously taken aback once again. Jesus knows how to defend Himself, and He knows how to clearly lay out what is going to take place, in that He is in complete control while pronouncing judgment on them.

Obviously, as we see from our text today, that's not enough to make them give up. They stay at it. They have to. They can't give up. They can't relinquish their authority this quickly. They have to stay at this Jesus character, and they cannot let Him have control, and so that's what they do. They stay at Him, and that's what we find in the beginning of our passages. They come back at Him with a test, another controversy, another attempt, another way for them to try and bring Jesus down, to humble Him, to humiliate Him, to make Him look silly in front of the people. And before we

even get into the content of the test itself, in verse 13 we're introduced to the exact team, the exact team involved, who are the exact people who are involved in this particular controversy this morning. Look at verse 13 again; "And they sent to him some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians, to trap him in his talk." We're introduced, start off with just the beginning of verse 13; "And they sent to him..." Remind yourselves who are the "they?" The "they," we have already established as the ones that Jesus was telling His parable against in all of 12:1-12, and they're the very ones who challenged Jesus authority at the end of chapter 11. They're the chief priests. They're the scribes. They're the elders. They're the Sanhedrin. They're the ruling authorities of the Jewish people in Judea. They stay after Jesus, not by coming after Him themselves, they recruit. They now recruit other people who are not happy with Jesus. They recruit other people that would like to have greater authority than what Jesus is now taking from them, and whom do they recruit? We learn in verse 13; "... some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians..." So, the Sanhedrin recruits "... some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians..." to move towards Jesus and to trap Him in something He might say.

It's kind of interesting when you think of this team. You kind of can picture certain teammates working well together, and you can understand why they complement each other's strengths and what abilities they have. You think of the Pharisees and the Herodians, and right away you start to realize this is odd. This is a very strange scene. These are not typical teammates. These aren't the people, the groups, that you would imagine coming together for any particular cause, ever. Why is that? Well, we just have to remind ourselves a little bit about who these two groups are. Right? Remember the Pharisees? We've seen them over and over again in the life of Christ and in Mark's gospel. They're the ones that really prided themselves in being the separatists. They were the puritans. They were the ones that had decided we will carve out for ourselves a true and pure Jewish nation that is committed to the Law, not just the observance and knowledge of the Law, but the ability to live it out. And so, they really became the people's heroes. The Jewish people loved the Pharisees. And they really dominated the region of Galilee and the synagogues that were up there, not so much in Jerusalem and Judea where the Sanhedrin was.

Nonetheless, these Pharisees, they really had not just the authority and the ability to move the people, but they had this commitment, this commitment

to the purified kind of Zionistic even, you could say, this purified group of Jewish people getting back to the way that it should've been and ought to have been in the Old Testament, upholding the Law. And then you have the Herodians. What do we know about the Herodians? Well, the Herodians - let's just say if the Pharisees were a religious group, the Herodians were a political group, not very connected at all, very different. In fact, the Herodians were completely political. It was a family dynasty, a family name, only there for a particular purpose and that is of just trying to have power, political power, ability, and authority over the people. And how did they get this power? Not because of their piety or religious zeal and knowledge, but simply because Rome gave it to them. We're reminded of the climate of the times, that this was not a time when Israel enjoyed their own peace, their own land all under their own control. This was a time when Rome was in control, and the Roman Empire did not want to meddle in their affairs any more than they needed to because they could care less at this moment about Israel and what's taking place; thus, they established these different Herodian rulers to rule over different parts of Israel and the Jewish people.

So, you have these two groups - the Herodians, the ones who are merely political, having no desire really to uphold the Law of Moses in the Old Testament, just a political party - and then the puritanical, the zealous religious group of the Pharisees. And if you think of this, the Pharisees wanted more than anything to get independence and autonomy away from Rome, and here the Herodians are depending completely upon Rome. So, you think these people are not on the same team as far as their ability and authority. They're kind of against each other. They're not really teammates. They're enemies, but here they are forming a coalition, joining together against who? Clearly the one that was still in authority from both of them, Jesus. This isn't just new here. Right? You can go all the way back to Mark 3, if you remember, back in Mark 3, we had Sabbath controversies that were taking place and how that all ended in Mark 3:6 was "The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him" and it's at that moment that we realize just how deep the hatred was, how much hatred and how threatened the Pharisees felt at the presence of Jesus, that they would be willing to go and try to associate with the Herodians and try and join up with them to now attack Jesus.

In fact, it's very possible, as the Sanhedrin is recruiting the Pharisees and the Herodians, that what we have before us today is the outcome of their

plotting and planning all the way back from chapter 3. It's very possible that this was a plan that was set a while ago, that they would wait for that moment when Jesus would be in Jerusalem, and He would be in Judea, and it would be the Passover, and there'd be a lot of people there, and they're close by to Pontius Pilot and the governing authorities of Rome even, there for this opportunity to ask Jesus this question. It's pretty clear that they have no intention of getting to know Jesus more. They have no intention of trying to understand Him and get an idea of where He's coming from. They're not giving Jesus the benefit of the doubt at all. They're malicious. It's a complete set-up. They're in this as our text says, "...to trap him..." They came "...to trap him in his talk," trying to publicly humiliate Jesus, to have the concrete words and evidence now spoken by all, with many eyes to see and witness and many ears to hear and thus condemn Him once for all.

You know that they're up to no good, not just because they're working together, but even the very tone that they approach Him with. Look at verse 14, and we find the tribute, this really false tribute that they're bringing to Jesus, how they're coming to Him and bringing these words that really are hollow and empty. Verse 14; "And they came and said to him, 'Teacher, we know that you are true and do not care about anyone's opinion. For you are not swayed by appearances, but truly teach the way of God.'" You can almost just hear it when you read it. You can just picture the scene. Was there any sincerity in these words at all? Absolutely not. They didn't feel this way. If they actually did feel this way, what kind of people would they be? They'd be following Him. They'd be bowing down before Him. They'd be worshipping Him. They don't mean any of this. You can tell just from the first word, "teacher." They give Him this respected title, rabbi. You're a teacher, you don't tell that to people if you don't think they're legitimately a teacher. Yet, they start off with this word. And we knew really from all of Jesus' life up until now and how things have been going between them and Jesus in the gospel of Mark, they did not have this respect for Him, not this kind of respect to call Him "teacher." So, you know something fishy is happening. Something odd is taking place, and they give this ridiculous four-fold complement, "...you are true and do not care about anyone's opinion. For you are not swayed by appearances, but truly teach the way of God." And all of it is empty; they don't mean any of it. They're setting Him up. They're trying to set Him up, trying to make sure all the people get and understand, hey, this is the true teacher, and He's going to uphold what God

demands and God says, and He doesn't care what people think of Him. That's the kind of leader He is.

They say that they know He is true, but do they actually believe this? Absolutely not. It's kind of interesting. It seems like they're very obviously flattering Jesus for not expecting flattery. Well, that's kind of ironic. The Pharisees and how they operated was totally built on this platform of getting the approval of mankind and caring so much about what people think. Listen to John 12:42-43; "Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God." What a description. Here they are upholding it and kind of representing it as a noble attribute that Jesus doesn't care about what man thinks. And turning around (and this is exactly what their authority is based upon, simply the glory of man, trying to build their authority on what people think of them), they affirm that Jesus is "...not swayed by appearances..." of man, He doesn't care about their opinions and that He actually teaches God's way in truth. It's all a statement that's just riddled with suspicion and deception. They don't mean any of it. They didn't actually believe this. If they did, they'd be living quite differently. We know it's a trap.

One commentator states it this way, "The statement by Jesus' interlocutors is doubly ironic. First, they praise Jesus for His integrity while they themselves are being hypocritical and insincere. Second, with this false flattery they end up making a profoundly true statement about His teaching and character. He is in fact everything they say He is." There they come to Him, not meaning any of it. The irony is it's all true. Even though it's insincere coming from them, it's actually very true of who Jesus is. This is the whole set-up. This is the team coming towards Him. And then in verse 14, the end of it, we see the trap. The trap that they set comes down to this simple question, "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?" ... "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" This is their trap. This is what their plotting and planning came up with. A time when they're in Judea, a time when they're there in Jerusalem, a time with many people hearing, listening, and watching, a time where you would have even Roman authorities nearby, a time when they could ask Him about Roman rule. They could ask Him about Caesar and taxes. They say "Is it lawful...?", essentially asking the question, is this in accordance with God's rule? Is this

what the Law of Moses teaches? Is this what the Old Testament affirms? That's how this word has often been used in Mark's gospel. This was how Jesus was approached. What is lawful to do? What does God's Word approve of when it comes to the Sabbath? What does God's Word approve of when it comes to marriage and sexual morality? What does God's Word approve of when it comes to divorce? What is lawful? ... What is lawful? What is in line with the Law of Moses? And so they pick this question, "Is it lawful [is it in accordance with God's Word] to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" Why? Why pick this question? I've already alluded to the occasion, the fact that they're there with Roman authorities nearby, no doubt, but why? Why pick this?

There's a little history here that helps us out, and that is, as Rome had set it up, that different members of the Herodian family and dynasty would be ruling over different parts of Israel, and so, as long as those Herodian rulers were doing their job and ruling well over those parts of Israel whether it was Galilee in the north or Judea in the south, then Rome had no problems. You do a good job. You make sure there's no rebellion. You take care of things, and we'll let you have your time there. But this wasn't always the case. After Herod the Great, things were turned over to Herod Archelaus who was there ruling in the south in Judea, and he did a terrible job. It was so bad that the Romans had to step in, and so, what they did was, rather than removing Herod Archelaus and putting a new Herod into power, they removed Herod Archelaus, and they instituted a new system of Roman governors, and that led to the Roman governor that we're aware of, Pontius Pilot. Pontius Pilot being here, the one ruling at this time. There's a unique situation here where Jesus is at this moment in Judea, not where a Herod is ruling over Judea, but Roman Governors are, and when that was set up, when the Roman governors were instituted, they took a census, and they counted all the people of Judea, and in this census there was, as you can guess, the very purpose, not just counting people to know, but then taxing, a poll tax that was added because of all the members and all the people that were there in Judea. This becomes the background.

As this then is foisted upon the people that live there, you can imagine there was probably grumbling and complaining, a lot of this taking place among the Jewish people as they have endured to live in this region, not just under Roman rule, but under Roman taxation. This is what they come with. What do we do with this? The question that's asked of Jesus is loaded because it

raises the issue of fidelity to the God of Israel. This is their question in paying taxes to Caesar, are we somehow committing treason and rebelling against Yahweh? Are these things against one another? One commentator states the questions in this way, “Can one pay taxes to Caesar and still give allegiance to God? Are people traitors to God for supporting Caesar in paying taxes?” Are these things against each other? Is the question not knowing that this question was actually a trap that they set for themselves in thinking this way, so they brought this before Jesus? Did paying taxes to Caesar potentially indicate serving another god and another king? This was really their hope.

Their hope was in coming and having Jesus already being a leader of the people that the people loved, and every time Jesus spoke and as He was teaching and putting people to shame, they recognized His authority more and more, and people were amazed at Jesus’ teaching. They thought, well, what a wonderful moment for us to have Him say something that might get Him into some big trouble. In fact, Luke 20:20, in a parallel passage, helps us a little bit in understanding this in that we read; “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.” This was their hope. Their hope was, man, if there was a time for Jesus to sound out the rally cry and get all the people on His side, this would be it because what do people hate more than taxes? Right? A great time for Jesus to say forget Caesar. I don’t care what he’s telling you to do. I don’t care what kind of taxation is coming upon you. You don’t do it. Follow Me. I’m your leader. Forget Rome. Let’s take them over. This was a great time for Him to do this, and in their minds, these Herodians, these Pharisees, when Jesus makes such a statement (as surely He would because He wants the approval of the people; He wants the people to continue to support Him), when Jesus makes this statement against Rome and against Caesar and against taxation, who’s going to be there? Pontius Pilot, the Roman rulers, and they will clearly deal with Jesus like He’s a rebel. They will deal with Him like He’s an insurrectionist and someone trying to cause a revolution, and they will put Him to death.

That was their hope. That was their expectation upon this challenge and trap that they brought to Him. One commentator puts it this way. “The questioners think that they have caught Jesus in a trap. If He says yes, He loses favor with many Jews who resent Roman occupation. If He says no,

He's exposed as a rebel against Rome." Not just this, but even more at stake, too, is the reality that Jesus could represent that He is in fact the Messiah. In this moment, He could say forget about paying taxes to Caesar and Rome. Follow Me, and I will destroy Rome because I'm your leader, and I'm the Messiah, and I'm going to set up this kingdom, and I'm going to rule over the nations of earth "...with a rod of iron..." as your Old Testament (Psalm 2:9) has prophesized. So furthermore, a yes answer would also throw into question whether or not He really is the Messiah. People will think, why would He respond that way if He is in fact the Messiah? Isn't the Messiah supposed to be strong, powerful? Isn't He supposed to be ruler and King? This is a great time for Him to rebel, rebel against these other nations, rebel against Rome and enforce God's justice as Messiah and King over Israel. This is the trap that they feel they have set for Him. He's in a terrible situation; lose the full support of the people because you endorse taxation, or become a rebel and get crucified by the Romans because you rebel against taxation. This is the trap that they feel they have set.

But of course, Jesus has a response, and that's what we find in verses 15-17, the truth - the truth in verses 15-17. No surprise here, but in verse 15, we find that Jesus knows exactly what they're doing. This is so common, and so often the occurrence in the gospels, Jesus' ability, His knowledge. In verse 15, it's the transparency. He sees right through them. He knows exactly what they're doing. Verse 15 reads, "But, knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, 'Why put me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me look at it.'" He's well aware of their hypocrisy. He's not thinking of an answer. He's not trying to formulate His response and what He will say. He knows exactly what they're doing. He knows their hearts; "...for he himself knew what was in man." And He was not entrusting Himself to man as John's gospel (John 2:24) would say. When Jesus spoke of their hypocrisy in Matthew 23:28, He said, "So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness." And this is the case. As they come to Jesus, there is no sincerity at all in these Pharisees or Herodians. They are coming with full-on hypocrisy. He calls them out for testing Him rather than actually asking Him an honest question, as they appear to be demonstrating with everyone watching.

He reveals their true motives and even though He reveals that they're completely trying to deceive not just Him but all the people in the way that they're approaching Him, Jesus still entertains the question. He still goes

along with this question. He's still willing to interact and to respond to their question. He proceeds to answer their trick question, or so they think, the trap that they've set Him in, and He does it by using an object lesson. He requests, "...Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." A denarius being a very common silver coin, stamped with the image of the emperor, and it was worth about one day of labor, the wage for one day of working in the field. So, Jesus asks, "...Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." And sure enough, we find that the token, the denarius, is found in verse 16 and brought to Him for Jesus to make this simple point, this object lesson for all the people. Verse 16 reads, "And they brought one. And he said to them, 'Whose likeness and inscription is this?' They said to him, 'Caesar's.' " Pretty simple, a very simple scene. Jesus asks, and someone has to pull one out of their pocket or go fetch one for a second. They bring it back to Him, and Jesus asks a very simple question. It wasn't like Jesus needed the coin to be reminded of who was on it or what it said, but He used it for everyone to realize you all have one of these in your pocket. You are all operating and living under such an economic system that you have these. So, the obvious answer to His question, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" It's Caesar, the Emperor, the ruler of the Roman Empire. At this time, it was Tiberius, and that's what the coin inscription would say, Tiberius Caesar Augustus, the son of the divine Augustus, and on the reverse side, it would say chief priest - obviously some unsettling things for the Jesus people.

But nonetheless, Jesus' point is very simple. You're dwelling in this land, but how're you doing that? How are you carrying out your activities? How are you going about your day? How are you actually functioning under the very rule of the Roman Empire? Clearly, you're utilizing their economic system. You don't have your own coins. You don't have your own currency. You're utilizing what they have. You are under their authority. It's a matter of fact. It's not a surprise. You don't need to argue this. You don't need to convince them of this. They know this. They don't own the land, Rome does. And Rome could squash them at any moment if they wanted to. Jesus establishes this fundamental and obvious truth; the Jewish people are living under the authority of Roman Empire, and they're operating within the economic system of the Romans. Once again, this object lesson kind of makes it a very clear fact that cannot be opposed.

It's from this that He then comes to the takeaway in verse 17 - the takeaway in verse 17; His conclusion, and thus His answer to their question that they

thought was a great trick question, a trap for Him that He would not be able to get out of. In verse 17, we have the authoritative teaching of Jesus again; “Jesus said to them, ‘Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.’ And they marveled at him.” ... “And they marveled at him.” He responds in a way that they were not ready to hear. They weren’t ready for this. They thought they gave a perfect question. They thought they had Him cornered. They thought there was no way He could respond. It was either/or. You got to pick one. Jesus, do we pay the taxes or do we not? Either/or - make up Your mind. What’s it going to be? Because whatever answer You give, it’s not going to be very popular. It’s not going to go over well. But Jesus responds with a very simple both/and - both/and. They thought they’d painted Him into a corner. It’s either/or. And He said, no, it’s both/and. It’s both/and. He totally avoided their trap that they thought they had Him in, and Jesus makes it clear, you don’t have to pick between God or Caesar. It’s not a matter of who do I honor God or Caesar? You don’t pick one or the other. It’s both because obviously it’s established in the Word of God, and it’s established for the people of God, that they must honor the King of all kings. They must honor Yahweh the God who sits in the heavens and created all that they have.

But it also stands that a part of that process is Yahweh God’s common grace in giving government to mankind, a common grace of government to rule over generally what is good and what is evil in society. And so, a part of that is that you are subject and obedient to that governing authority, and in your being subject and in your obedience to the governing authority, you are being subject and obedient to a greater authority, God Himself. Submission and obedience to God includes submission and obedience to one’s own government. It’s simple. You don’t put them side by side and pit them against each other, and say, which one wins out? Jesus totally rearranges it, and says, no, it’s clearly God, Yahweh, over all, who has established His obviously fallible but nonetheless governing authorities overall, including Rome at this time. For them, it’s both/and. It’s both/and. I mean, Jesus is simply alluding to the teaching of Scripture already. He’s referring to how in the Old Testament. The Jewish people should know who was in fact responsible for the kingdoms and the kings. Right? The nations and the rulers that would come to power and then fall, who’s responsible for that? The Old Testament makes it clear time and time again, it was God. This wasn’t man accomplishing it. The book of Daniel talks about the whole progression of how it can go from a nation like Assyria, to be in control, to

then fall, and then through Babylon coming into control and then falling, and then the Persians coming and controlling. It's God. In fact, the very hearts of these kings and their desires, they're like water in God's hands. He can direct it wherever He wants. He can push it where ever He wants.

He's in complete control. The Jewish people knew this, and they should've been able to make the application to Rome as well. God is, in fact, in control of Rome, and He has established them. He has brought their rise to power. This is God's doing. Fortunately for us, we have even more teaching on the subject, not just what the Old Testament says in the book of Daniel and other places, not just what Jesus says here, but even what Paul says and what Peter says. You consider Romans 13:1-7. This passage is worth considering again in light of what we're discussing; "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed." God has established these authorities. God is the one who has instituted them.

And Jesus has to remind these people Rome is not some enemy of God that's not how it works, it's not Caesar verses God and a showdown to see who wins Rome is simple common grace a government given to mankind that God has established and God is in complete control over. It's not a matter of either/or it's both/and you subject and obey the Roman government and in doing so you are being obedient to and subjecting yourself to God who has situated them, who has established them, and instituted them, for your good for - your good when you add to that just what exactly was the government of the time like you think of the trap that we can even fall into in our day and you go hold on one second let's consider what

these people were enduring. These governments were not easy governments to be subject to and obey. There was difficulty, there was physical abuse and persecution, there was martyrdom, there was death, but here you have men like Paul, men like Peter, saying you need to subject yourselves to these governments, you need to obey, this is what pleases and honors God that you doing good works will then subject yourself to these governments. This is what Peter also says in similar wording. Peter 2:13; “Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.” This is the command of God’s Word.

This is the straightforward teaching of the Word of God, and yet, there’s this trap as these Herodians and Pharisees think. They’re setting this trap for Jesus. He reveals that they’re the ones in the trap. They’re the ones that have the wrong view of what God has established. They’re ones that have clearly made those that need God (they need relationship with God, those governing and ruling authorities) as the enemy rather than the one that is lost and needs truth. And so too, in the same way, we fall into the same trap, not just unbelievers that live in America, but American Christians. And they start to think about and they start to talk about politics, and they talk about the government that rules over us, and they start to treat them like the enemy. And the reality is these people need Christ, and they’ve been instituted by God for your good. This is not your place to grumble and complain about them. Can you have an opinion? Of course, you can have an opinion. Can you vote? Of course, you can vote. But can you grumble and complain? No, you may not grumble and complain. Paul has made that clear in Philippians 2:14; “Do all things without grumbling or disputing...”

You have no option in the matter. And potentially why people fall victim to this is because they’re seeing it the wrong way. They’re not understanding what government is. They’re not understanding the true intention and design that God had from the beginning, that government is instituted by Him for your good, not for you to complain about, not for you to grumble about. Complain about the weather, complain about the government, it’s acceptable. We allow it. This is just what we do. It’s fine. No, it’s not fine.

It's wrong. It's sin. How different it would be if actually people would not just refrain from the grumbling and complaining of government and politics, but instead, went and obeyed what Paul told us in 1 Timothy 2:2-4; "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, 2 for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. 3 This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." What a different approach to government and politics, not falling into a trap of grumbling and complaining about how terrible our government is, but thanking God that He has established the government over us, that we're in this building, that we're opening the Word of God, that we're telling coworkers about the good news, that we're able to preach this message. God is good. We don't thank Him for the governing authorities, we pray for them because God desires that all of them be saved, that they recognize there is one mediator between God and mankind, Jesus Christ, not them, but Jesus. He is the ultimate and perfect King that they need to bow down to. So, we pray for them.

We don't fall into this trap and think that Caesar or the president is against God, we pray for them, and we submit and obey knowing that our submission and obedience to any governing authority over us is a submission and obedience to the greater authority, God Himself, the King of all kings. This has to be our goal. This has to be our ambition or else, quite frankly, we become just like the nation of Israel that became so introspective and so unable to even impact the world anymore. And that's what can happen to us as believers if we fall into this trap; we get wrapped up in the wrong conversations. We sin, and it goes unaccounted for, and we realize that we're no longer on the mission that God wants for us. We're now on our own mission to reform our own society and make our own governments in place, like somehow that's going to change things. The reality, the mission, has already been set. The good news has already been declared, and we simply need to carry it on. Let us be faithful with that. And when it comes to government, thank God for government. Pray for our governing authorities. Ask that God might save them and allow them to come to the knowledge of the gospel and the truth and the faith of Jesus Christ.