

What Do We Owe the Imperial Powers?

Sermon Notes for Oct 22, 2017 at Brentwood

Ps 99 (491) & Matthew 22:15-22 (902)



**They answered, “The Emperor’s.”
Then he said to them,
“Give therefore to the emperor
the things that are the emperor’s,
and to God the things that are God’s.”
(Matt 22:21)**

Provocative Ponderings that Call Forth Our Potential in Christ

- Most of you know that I have gone back to take classes at the school where I once taught – this fall, it’s a class with Harry O Maier, the New Testament prof, on how to take seriously the context of empire in which the writers, listeners, and readers of the various books of the New Testament were living – their daily lives were infused with the propaganda of the Roman empire – in statues, public buildings, temples, and coins – the emperor as a benevolent god – superior to any other force on earth and in the heavens
- surprisingly, this has become a focus for New Testament scholars only recently – from doctrinal emphases, especially on individual salvation, to Jesus and Paul in his Jewish context, as a prophetic reformer of Judaism, and now to Jesus and Paul in the context of the political/economic/military/religious culture that was the Roman imperium over all the known world in their times – a regime that the Roman authorities believed provided justice and peace, but their means of maintaining those social benefits relied on violence, exploitation, and repression – an example of imperial regimes in every age – in more recent memory, the last 150 years say, the British, the Germans, the Japanese, the Russians, the Americans, the Chinese, to name only a few – all rooted in a sense of superiority and in a sense of being divinely destined to rule the world
- this community of New Testament scholars focusing on empire are proposed that we best understand Jesus and Paul when we see them as leaders of a resistance movement to the Roman imperium – they witness to a different power with a different agenda – that power is the God of Abraham and the Exodus, of the prophets of Israel in the times of the Assyrian and Babylonian empires – you owe your ultimate loyalty, the Jesus movement is declaring, to God, Creator of the heavens and the earth – that God has created and cultivated you to be a blessing to all creation – treat people as equals – share the bounty of God’s creation fairly – Micah puts it into the bumper sticker – ‘do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God’ – Jesus and Paul are calling together alternative communities that live those values in all that they do

So, what are we going to do with this ...

There are many who consider a simplistic question, but I’m not one of them – it’s a simple question, simple on the other side of complexity – and imperialism in our day is incomprehensibly complex – but I think what we do with this is constantly ask ourselves the question, “What would Jesus do?” – one way of answering that question is to go back to the Bible and the words of the book of the prophet Micah – do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God – pay attention to that this week, in all your circles of influence, one conversation after another

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