

Matthew 22:15-22  
God's Two Kingdoms  
First Sunday after the Epiphany

January 13, 2019  
Our Redeemer Lutheran Church  
Vicar Otterman

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God, Our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

**[Introduction]**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ. This week we recognize and celebrate the two kingdoms God uses to bless us and provide for us. The Kingdom of the Right and the Kingdom of the Left.

Please hear what I'm saying correctly. The Kingdom of the Right and the Kingdom of the Left are not about political parties. It is not about left wing or right wing. It is about God's sovereignty over all creation and how He provides daily needs for His people. That includes both spiritual needs through the church and earthly needs through civil government.

The concept of God's two kingdoms comes out of the theology of Martin Luther almost five hundred years ago, and it is still necessary today to help us as Christians to understand what it means to be citizens of God's heavenly kingdom, the church, as well as citizens of the earthly nations, such as the United States.

Both Kingdoms exist to be a blessing to the people of the world, but one provides spiritual blessings and the other earthly blessings.

**[The Kingdom of the Right]**

The Kingdom of the Right gets its name because Jesus is seated at the right hand of God, reigning as the head of the church.

God established this kingdom through His Son because we were once in the darkness of sin. We were once disconnected from God, cut off from Him because of our rebellion and wickedness.

But just as the Apostle Peter writes, we have been called out of darkness into God's marvelous light. (*1 Peter 2:9*) We have become God's people through faith in Christ via His death and resurrection.

By faith we become citizens of Christ's kingdom, and by the mark of baptism the Holy Spirit draws us into the manifestation of that kingdom on earth, the one Holy Christian and Apostolic Church.

As citizens of a heavenly realm, Peter refers to us as sojourners. While we are here on Earth, we exist as temporary travelers who are simply passing through foreign nations until the day we go to our true home with Jesus.

Our allegiance is to Christ, and our lives are caught up in Him. That's why it's important for us to come to worship and to receive the forgiveness and life contained within God's Word and within the body and blood of the Lord's Supper.

That's why we can rejoice even while we are suffering. We are citizens of Christ's Kingdom. What we call the Kingdom of the Right. Our hope is not tied to this world; our hope is anchored in heaven where no earthly person or power can destroy it.

As we live out our faith and display the hope we have in Jesus through our actions and our words, people will see that there is something different about us. And when they ask us what that difference is, we can point them to our Lord, Jesus Christ, who is the reason for our hope, so that more and more people will be called to become citizens of God's Holy nation.

Now let us reflect on the blessings God gives us through His Right-Hand Kingdom while we pause for:

*["installation of officers, tithes and offerings, and the reading of the Gospel"]*

***[The Kingdom of the Left]***

While our hope is in Christ, we are still living in a world filled with sin and suffering. We turn on the news and see a planet torn apart by war. We see headlines about people who have been hurt, discriminated against, and taken advantage of. And in our hearts, we ache and cry out to God for healing and for help.

I invite Wendysue at this time to share with us a song to help us reflect on our great need for God's protection and blessings in a world that is filled with tragic pain and suffering.

[*"Torn"*]

One of the lines in the song says, "Who will stand and speak for those who do not have a voice?" We call out to God for help, and in response, he sends his us servants in the Kingdom of the Left. Ever since the humanity fell into sin and brought evil and suffering into the world, God has raised up servants to curb people's wickedness. He gave Moses the Law on Mount Sinai by which he was to lead God's people. He gave them leaders like David and Solomon to uphold the Law, blessing the people who kept it and punishing those who broke it.

God also wrote His law on the hearts of all nations, so that even the pagan peoples set up governments to maintain order and peace. Cyrus, the King of Persia, who released the Jews from exile, was one such person. Isaiah even calls Cyrus God's 'anointed one,' showing that God ordained him to be the King who would bless His people by sending them back to their homeland. (*Isaiah 45:1*)

The Bible clearly teaches that God gives us the gift of government, and that we ought to submit ourselves to its God given authority over civil matters. The Apostle Paul says, "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." (*Romans 13:1-3*)

Jesus himself told the Pharisees, "render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." (*Matthew 22:21*)

In Matthew, Jesus says that God "makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." (*Matthew 5:45*) Likewise, God gives the gift of government to the believer and the unbeliever. He did not want to leave the world in chaos.

For this we can rejoice! God has deemed it good to be gracious to us and to provide order to a world that has rejected Him and embraced the chaos of sin.

It's true that the people God places in positions of authority are still fallen sinful people, who can at times cause a great deal pain and heartache. But as Christians, it is our duty to uplift our leaders and help them do their jobs the way God intends by praying for them and living obediently to the law of the land.

**[Conclusion]**

God sent us Jesus, as his servant in the Kingdom of the Right, to save us from the power of sin, death, and the devil. He sends us leaders to provide civil order in the Kingdom of the Left, and he calls you and me to participate in that service.

Because we are citizens of Christ's kingdom, the church, our lives should be modeled around Jesus and his service to all people. Jesus tells us that when we give food, drink, and clothing to the needy, we are serving him as well as our neighbor. The two kingdoms, the Right and the Left intersect when and where we serve our neighbor and love them the way that Christ loves us.

And when we fail, we come back to the Word and to the Sacraments, where our hearts are renewed with the forgiveness and strength of Jesus. So let's go out and be the best citizens we can be, both for Christ and for our neighbor. Amen.

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“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

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