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**Sunday 18 October to Sunday 25 October**

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Sunday 18 October 2020

# Whose image is on you?

by Pastor Joshua Pfeiffer

**Then Jesus said to them, ‘Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s’ (Matthew 22:21).**

Read Matthew 22:15–22

Often the first question we ask someone doesn’t get to the heart of the matter we’re trying to address. We need to have a follow-up question that can further clarify and uncover the truth.

Concerning this interaction with Jesus in today's text, a person once observed that there should have been a follow-up question. There wasn’t, of course, because the Pharisees and Herodians weren’t sincerely seeking the truth from Jesus, but were out to entrap him. But for us disciples, Jesus’ teaching on giving to the emperor what belongs to him, and God what belongs to him, invites the obvious next question: ‘What belongs to God?’ Then perhaps Jesus would have answered that question with another question: ‘Whose image is on you?’

Jesus’ mission was not to overthrow the secular government of his time, although they were essentially foreign occupiers of his homeland. The implication of his words here is that disciples of Jesus Christ should acknowledge and respect their governing authorities. One of the practical ways of doing this is to pay one’s taxes. The image of the emperor is on the coin. The government has minted this money as part of their role to keep good order in society. So, respect and support them. Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s.

But when it comes to what belongs to God, remember whose image is on you! You are made in the image of God, and so you belong to him. As Jesus has this discussion, he is on the way to the cross to give his life to redeem you; that is, to buy you back. The price was not gold, silver, or any other coin, but his holy, precious blood and his innocent suffering and death. In Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, the kingdom of heaven, in which we are now citizens, has drawn near. Thus, Christians live in a unique relationship to the government, both respecting them and obeying their laws, while also acknowledging an authority far greater to which they, too, are subject.

**Heavenly Father, thank you for creating us in your image and for sending your son, our Lord Jesus, to redeem us. Please help us, by your Holy Spirit, to live in a well-ordered relationship to our governing authorities. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

Monday 19 October 2020

# The spiritual significance of where you live

by Pastor Joshua Pfeiffer

**‘But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare’ (Jeremiah 29:7).**

Read Jeremiah 29:1,4–7

In addition to the normal three monastic vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, St Benedict added a fourth to his order: the vow of stability. Essentially this is a vow not to move from community to community or place to place, but to stay put. It recognises there is something spiritually significant about finding oneself in a specific location. Similarly, some famous missionaries have devoted their entire lives to one very specific area of the world. As someone who has moved around and loves to travel and embark on new adventures, I find this a challenging thought to consider.

Something similar is going on in the text from the prophet Jeremiah as God’s people were finding their way during a time of exile. God did not call them to be there forever, but he expected them to settle in and take their current location seriously. God encouraged them to build houses, cultivate gardens, and flourish in their family life. Even though they had been forcibly taken away to a foreign city, they weren’t to sabotage or overthrow it, but to seek its welfare, and especially to pray for the community they were in.

As Christian people, there is a sense in which we ‘have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come’ (Hebrews 13:14). Through Jesus and his death and resurrection, we have come to the heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22). At the same time, Jesus does not take us out of the world, but sends us into it, where he calls us to be ‘salt and light’. St Paul teaches that this means praying for our leaders and for the whole civic life of the cities and towns where we live, just as God instructed the exiles of old.

How seriously have you taken the particular location in which you live right now? What may it look like to seek the welfare of your town, city, or community, and pray for it?

***Heavenly Father, thank you that in Christ, our citizenship is in heaven. We pray for our leaders and the cities, towns, and communities in which we live. Lead us by your Spirit to seek their welfare and to find our welfare, therein. In Jesus’ name, Amen.***

Tuesday 20 October 2020

# The Lord brings together

by Pastor Joshua Pfeiffer

**‘I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king over them all’ (Ezekiel 37:22a).**

Read Ezekiel 37:15–28

One of the very first things we hear of the Lord doing in the Bible after he created the world is bringing the woman to the man so they could be together and complete (Genesis 2:22). In contrast, one of the very first things we hear of the serpent doing (later identified in the Bible as the devil) is driving people apart from God and each other (Genesis 3:12ff). God is in the business of bringing together, while evil separates and fractures.

In this text from Ezekiel, we have a similar dynamic. The nation of Israel had split into two between north and south. They were the weaker for it, as a house divided against itself always is. But God promised to make them into one nation again with one king. They would be saved from their idolatry and walk according to God’s ways, with his presence dwelling among them. Ultimately, for Christians, we see this prophecy fulfilled in Christ Jesus and his church, where through his blood, he has brought peace and ‘has broken down the dividing wall of hostility’ (Ephesians 2:14), first between Jews and Gentiles and ultimately between all people.

In various ways, though, this one family of God is always threatened with division and fracture. This is due to our frailty and sinfulness and the temptations of the evil one. Whether it’s in our local congregation or the bigger picture of the wider church, we face conflicts that can seem insurmountable, and we find our unity hangs by a thread. This text encourages us to see that the power for unity is never in us but in the Lord and his promises. Let us look to him, trust in him, pray to him, and let his word shape our life together. He is in the business of bringing together rather than driving apart.

**Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your Son, our Lord Jesus, as the one shepherd of your one flock, and for calling us into it. Please always send us your Holy Spirit to maintain our unity as your people. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

Wednesday 21 October 2020

# In, but not of, the world

by Pastor Joshua Pfeiffer

**‘But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the royal rations of food and wine; so he asked the palace master to allow him not to defile himself’ (Daniel 1:8).**

Read Daniel 1:3–21

Often, it’s a big struggle for Christians to know how to live as faithful people in the world. The values of the culture around us can come into conflict with our Christian beliefs. We know we are sent into the world to be salt and light, but we also know God calls us to be faithful to him and his word. Situations then arise when it’s not always clear what the right path is through some difficult scenarios. St Paul speaks to a situation like this when it comes to food offered to idols (1 Corinthians 8).

Daniel was also in a similar predicament. He and his friends had been taken away to Babylon and then summoned to the pagan king’s court to serve there. At first, this would appear to be a providential opportunity! But it also meant eating food that would spiritually defile him before God, and so he had to navigate a tricky position. Notice Daniel’s wisdom and humility as he does this. He carefully chooses his words and strategy, to remain faithful to the Lord and avoid defilement, while also not giving unnecessary offence and squandering the opportunity to be an influence in the king’s palace. In the end, God blesses this path.

In John 17, we hear Jesus say he does not want us to be taken out of the world, even though we do not belong to the world. Instead, he wants us to be sanctified – made clean and holy – in the truth, which is his word. As cleansed and holy people in Christ and his word, he then sends us out into the world, so others too may come to believe. Don’t ever compromise your faithfulness to God, and don’t ever give up on the world and those in it.

**Heavenly Father, thank you for cleansing us and making us holy people. As you send us into the world, help us by your Spirit to live wisely, faithfully, and in love when it comes to our interactions with others. In Jesus' name, Amen.**

Thursday 22 October 2020

# Attitude to authority

by Pastor Joshua Pfeiffer

**‘Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God’ (Romans 13:1).**

Read Romans 13:1–7

Sometimes Christians who claim to surrender to Christ as the Lord of their life are at the same time quite dismissive and even rebellious in their attitude toward other authorities, such as parents, bosses, teachers, or governments. Sadly, I know this from my own life (Psalm 25:7)! We learn from the Scriptures, however, that our attitude to authority is a spiritual issue. Luther picks up on this in his explanation to the fourth commandment, where we are called to honour our father and mother. He says, ‘we should fear and love God so that we should not despise or anger our parents and other authorities’. Notice the connection between our life before God and our life before others whom God sets over us.

In our text, St Paul focuses on our attitude toward the governing authorities wherever we live. He says that when we consider how we act toward those in our governments, we do well to remember that all true authority finds its source in God and that the government, and those in authority, have been instituted by God for our good. We are to be subject to them as a fundamental attitude, and this means specific things, too, like paying our taxes. There are, of course, limits to this. For example, if we are asked by the government to engage in something that is an offense to God (Acts 5:29). But it’s quite likely St Paul was writing to Christians who lived under governments far less friendly to them than most of us do.

God is rich in his goodness toward this world. Are we able to recognise that even our governing authorities are, in fact, a gift from God? Through them, he has provided a well-ordered society and protection for the weak and vulnerable. No government will ever do this flawlessly, of course. Still, we owe them our honour as those who exercise authority in this world on God’s behalf.

**Heavenly Father, thank you for our government. Please give wisdom to our leaders as they navigate the many complex issues facing our community. Lead us by your Spirit to subject ourselves to them and honour them. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

Friday 23 October 2020

# Holy siblings

by Pastor Joshua Pfeiffer

**'Therefore, brothers and sisters, holy partners in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus’ (Hebrews 3:1).**

Read Hebrews 3:1–6

Who are you? What is your identity? What is your purpose? On what should you focus? These are deep questions that are central to most peoples’ lives. They are the sorts of questions consistently addressed in the Scriptures, and this one verse gives us some helpful insights.

Who are you as a Christian person? You are a brother or sister of Jesus himself (Hebrews 2:11) and so a member of the household of God. As with most imagery in the Bible, it’s not that God’s family is a little bit like our human families, but the comparison works the other way around. God’s family is the most real and truest thing, and human families faintly reflect that perfect community (Ephesians 3:15). Jesus is the true big brother, and our sibling relationships in this world are a distant shadow of that relationship. Because of all this, you are holy, sharing already in the life of God himself by virtue of your status in his family. That is your identity, anchored in what God has done for you in Christ Jesus.

So then, what is your purpose? You have a ‘heavenly calling’ even as you live your life on earth. Your Lord Jesus calls you beyond the cares and concerns of this world to the priorities of heaven. He draws you through the sufferings and trials of this life to the glories of the life to come.  That doesn’t mean you give up on this world and the people in it. On the contrary, you are of more service to them because you know they, too, have been created for life with God eternally. As you live out this calling, there is one simple focus point: ‘consider Jesus’. Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, on what he has done for you in his death and resurrection, and on how he calls you to live as his holy brother or sister.

**Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your Son, our Lord Jesus, as the faithful Son over your household, and thank you for inviting us into this holy family. Please help us by your Spirit to hear and follow our heavenly calling. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

Saturday 24 October 2020

# Stability and strength

by Pastor Joshua Pfeiffer

**‘They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper’ (Psalm 1:3).**

Read Psalm 1

This year has brought many changes to our lives due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many people have had a sense of instability and flux, not knowing what will come next and how long the situation will last. Often, though, we experience all of life like this. We don’t feel as if we are grounded on a sure and solid footing, but rather, as if we are vulnerable and easily blown back and forth by the circumstances of life.

Psalm 1 pictures something like this and the alternative the Lord brings about. On the one hand are the wicked, who are like chaff that the wind drives away. There is nothing substantial enough in them and their path of life to give security when the winds of this world blow. On the other hand are the righteous, who are like trees planted by streams of water. They have deep roots, and a source outside of themselves continually gives nourishment. They are not only healthy and strong, but they yield fruit for the blessing of others too.

But notice carefully that the contrast between the wicked and the righteous. It is not to do with our behaviour, but the object of our listening and meditation. We are called not to follow the advice and listen to the scoffing of those who do not acknowledge God. Instead, we are to meditate on the law of the Lord – his word – day and night. God’s word is the life-giving underground stream of spiritual irrigation, which energises our lives and gives us the strength and security we need.

The Lord watches over your way in life, and he knows the path you’re on, even when it feels insecure and in flux. Your Lord Jesus has gone ahead of you, even through death. He has opened the way to true blessedness and happiness in life with God. Meditate on his word day and night, and discover the deep roots of security in him that aren’t threatened by the winds of this world.

**Heavenly Father, thank you that you watch over our way and that your life-giving word irrigates our life. Please help us to listen to you by meditating on your word and make us a blessing to others. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

Sunday 25 October 2020

# Above all things

by Chelsea Pietsch

**‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind’ (Matthew 22:37).**

Read Matthew 22:34–46

What does it mean to love God with all my heart, soul, and mind? What does this look like? I certainly want to love God in this way, but I also find myself incapable of doing so. Am I easily distracted, or is this command just impossible?

In the search for an answer to these questions, I think about some of the things I love. If we reflect on the things we treasure here on earth, perhaps this will provide insight into what it means to love God wholeheartedly.

It strikes me that when we love something, we want to look at it, encounter it, and soak it in. We want to be in its presence.

I love flowers, especially fragrant ones. I love to look at them and smell them. Sometimes I even take the time to draw them. I love to bring them into my home and let the fragrance fill the house.

I also love my children. I love to look at their faces and observe how they react to different people or situations. I love to hear what they are thinking and see what they are doing. It is a joy to be in their presence, contemplating the mystery of who God has made them to be.

God invites us to love him more deeply than we love our earthly treasures. He invites us to meditate on him, to acknowledge his realness, and to speak to him. He invites us to encounter him in his word and to drink him in communion. He wants us to do this first and foremost.

This is not so much an instruction about what we have to do. It is an invitation to encounter God and to be in relationship with him.

When God draws us into his presence, we receive the one who is love. This experience of divine love transforms us. Only then can we start to practice what it means to love God above all things and to love our neighbour as ourselves.

**Dear Lord, I long to be in your presence and to see you face-to-face. Call me to be in right relationship with you, to think of you, and long for you more than anything in this world. Amen.**