



Links Players

Render to Caesar

Teacher, we know that you speak and teach rightly, and show no partiality, but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar, or not?" But he perceived their craftiness and said to them, "Show me a denarius. Whose likeness and inscription does it have?" They said, "Caesar's." He said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. (Luke 20:2-25)

I'm frequently struck by the way golf is a great metaphor for real life. It's a march, a trek, a journey. There is a beginning and an end. You typically feel more optimistic/energetic at the beginning than at the end. There are relationships along the way. There are ups and downs - good breaks, bad breaks.

There are even injuries, although the injuries in real life are generally more significant - more potentially lethal - than in golf. Death is rare on a golf course unless you continue walking around open fairways carrying a bag full of lightning rods after they've blown the horn to warn of storms in the area.

Golf and Life are, in this sense, parallel realities. Two analogous realms. The (my paraphrase) "Give Caesar what belongs to him" advice from Jesus points to similar parallel realities.

The Christian tradition (Lutheran) that has been my spiritual home since childhood holds that Jesus, a self-described king, rules two parallel realms. These are the Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of the World. He rules both arenas, but each in very different ways.

When He arrived on the scene, He repeatedly announced that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand and that it was not "of this world." As the gospel accounts unfold, it becomes clear that the people of His day erroneously assumed He would be a worldly king, and they were greatly disappointed when that proved not to be the case—at least not in the way they envisioned it.

In "Kingdom of this World" terms, if the enforcers sent by the Jewish leaders to the Garden of Gethsemane had shown up to arrest Him, Jesus ought to have gone full Jedi Knight on them. Peter tried.

But proof that Jesus is king of the earthly realm as well as of the heavenly realm is that His submission to the treachery of the Sanhedrin and the cowardice of Pilate were both, in fact, His using them for His own purpose - the purpose of having the High Priest offer the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, the sacrifice that would take away the sin of the world.

Jesus' present rule in the Kingdom of the World is powerful yet essentially invisible. Not so when He walked among us. When the disciples needed to pay taxes, He found them in the mouth of a fish.

Caesar wants coins? Give him coins. Earthly power and money are the currency of the Kingdom of the World. But the currency of the Kingdom of Heaven is righteousness. None of us - Caesar included - has any of that unless Jesus gives His to us.

Which He does. (And He clues us in elsewhere that the earthly power and money are all His, as well. Who, after all, created the physical elements that constituted Caesar and his coins?) Disclaimer: Note that this is in no way a recommendation to go fishing when you need a few extra denarii.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for ruling all things in all ways and for bringing us to your Kingdom.

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Pete Muller

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