

01/14/18 @ BUCYRUS UMC

TITLE: DAD DOESN'T LIKE YOU BEST!

TEXT: MATTHEW 22:15-22

GOD'S WORD: MATTHEW 5:43-48

I – FAVORITES:

My two children take great pleasure in telling one another that they are my favorite. When they come to the house and visit or do something they will call the other one to tell them they are there or what they did and finish by saying, “that’s why I’m his favorite.” My siblings and I used to play the same game by telling each other that “mom always liked you best.”

This is funny most of the time but I shudder when I realize this simple child’s game is played out on the national scene. When I see the alternate right clashing with the liberals to the point people get run over and die...then the game has gone too far. When I see people murdered in the name of justice because of the color of their skin or the color of their uniform then the game has gone too far. When I see medical practices that change based on socio-economic lines or tax rates that benefit one segment of society over others...then it is no longer a game. It shows that favoritism is alive and well and is played out every day.

Even the church of Jesus Christ plays favoritism. Sunday morning is the most segregated hour in the country. Some denominations have the belief God loves them best and all the rest are going to hell. Then we get into different faiths and see religious wars being waged even as we speak as they blow people up and cut their heads off all in the name of God!

Somebody please explain to me how that fits in with the teachings of God, through his Son Jesus Christ when I read passages such as this morning’s telling me that I am to love everyone and that God has no favorites...he treats all his children the same...the good and the bad.

II – TEXT:

There is a Scripture in the Gospel of Matthew that gets quoted a lot. But there are two important lessons embedded in it that we sometimes miss. The Words are found in...

Matthew 22:15-22 (NLT)

¹⁵Then the Pharisees met together to plot how to trap Jesus into saying something for which he could be arrested. ¹⁶They sent some of their disciples, along with the supporters of Herod, to meet with him. “Teacher,” they said, “we know how honest you are. You teach the way of God truthfully. You are impartial and don’t play favorites. ¹⁷Now tell us what you think about this: Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?”

¹⁸But Jesus knew their evil motives. “You hypocrites!” he said. “Why are you trying to trap me? ¹⁹Here, show me the coin used for the tax.” When they handed him a Roman coin, ²⁰he asked, “Whose picture and title are stamped on it?” ²¹“Caesar’s,” they replied. “Well, then,” he said, “give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God.”

²²His reply amazed them, and they went away.

This encounter with the religious rulers takes place after Jesus had entered the Temple earlier and thrown out the money changers who were there. Then just before this he told three parables that were a warning to the Pharisees about their way of life and behavior all in the name of God.

They then met together and it says they plotted how they would trap Jesus. This entire encounter wasn’t about learning about God or his Kingdom. They thought they already knew everything. They were the religious snobs of the day who thought they were God’s chosen people and the only ones that he loved. This whole plot was to “trap” Jesus into saying anything that could be used to justify his removal from existence. Their motive, out and out, was to figure out how to kill him. Remember this takes place during what we call Holy Week. The last week of Jesus’ earthly life.

So they approach him with all kinds of flattery and then spring the trap. They ask him the question about paying taxes. This was a no win situation for Jesus. If he said that they should pay the taxes to the Roman overlords then he would alienate the majority of the Jews who considered it a sin to pay money to the pagan Roman Empire. But if he said no, don't pay your taxes, then he would be guilty of insurrection against the Romans. Either way Jesus lost.

They had asked him a yes or no question but in Jesus fashion he turned the answer into a question back on them. He asked to see the coin that was used to pay the Roman taxes and he asked them to identify the image and the markings on the coin. They rightfully identified that the picture on the coin was of the current Caesar and the markings identified him as the supreme ruler of the Roman government.

He then told them they should give to Caesar what was Caesar's and give to God what was God's.

Jesus established the fact that there is a difference between civil and religious obligations. The Messianic Kingdom he had come to start building realized the people must obey the civil authority and do what they require (Yes Christians...you must pay your taxes) but at the same time they must never turn away from their obligations to God.

III – NO FAVORITES:

Like I said though there are two pieces I want to highlight and draw out of this passage this morning. The first thing I want you to notice is in verse 16. As they are buttering up Jesus and setting him up for the question that should be his demise they recognize a quality about him that we sometimes forget. They say:

“Teacher,” they said, “we know how honest you are. You teach the way of God truthfully. You are impartial and don’t play favorites.” So I find out that Jesus has the same character that his heavenly father has as we discovered earlier. **JESUS DOES NOT HAVE FAVORITES!**

Jesus does not look down from heaven and say O – there’s Mike. He has some issues. He has not always been the best person I ever made. He sometimes lets his mouth get ahead of his mind. But overall I like what I see. He raised his family as best as he could and takes care of his wife. He even tolerates that stupid dog I gave him. He reads his Bible and usually some of one or two other books each day. Then he spends some time with me in prayer. Talking to me and telling me he loves me and wants to follow me better. He even tells others about me, even if he does take too long on Sunday morning sometimes. He’s pretty good so I think I’ll put him in the top 10% of the people I love.

No he doesn’t say that. At the same time he’s looking down at me he’s looking down at Steve or Susan. He looks down and sees them just waking up in the cardboard box on the steam grate where they slept to keep warm. They crawled in the box after finishing that bottle of Jim Beam early this morning. That bottle has caused them a lot of troubles. They spend all their money on it instead of paying rent or utilities. They can’t stay with family because their addiction has burned all their family and friend bridges. They don’t go to church or read their Bible although they do sometimes pray for me to help get them out of their problems, but they won’t listen to the help I send them and just continue on in the way they live. What should I do with them?

I think Jesus puts them above me. I think he sees that they need more love than I do and he wants desperately to have them love him and get out of the life they are in. He doesn't write them off or cast them aside. He will never quit trying to get through to them. In reality though he doesn't put them above me...he puts them with me. He loves each and every one of us on the same level.

An old saying sums it up when it says in Heaven Jesus is #1...all the rest of us are tied for 2nd.

IV – GIVE TO GOD:

Although we are all on the same level when it comes to how much Jesus loves us, I do realize that he uses some of us to show his love to others. I may work on a different level than others because of the gifts and graces Jesus has given me so I can carry out his mission of love.

To do that I have to look at the second part of the Text passage that needs to be pulled out and explored. In verse 21 we are told to:

“Give to God what belongs to God.”

The easy answer to this one is that I have to give myself to God...give my whole heart to Him. I must love him with all of my heart, all of my mind, all of my soul, and all of my strength. In other words...my entire being.

But when I realize I must then carry out his 2nd great commandment to love others, then there is more that God gives me that I must give him back and use in carrying out his mission of love and impartiality. What about God's gifts of not only love but also of joy...peace...forgiveness...understanding...acceptance...compassion. Aren't these gifts from God and therefore supposed to be returned to God? And you can't just pray and say God I'm giving these back. No, you return them to God by using them in the service of God. These are used by God's children to model the impartiality taught to us by Jesus.

V – ALL THE SAME:

In the Bible I see passage after passage that tells me God and Jesus have no favorites. That there are no differences between:

- Black and White
- Free or slave
- Jew or Gentile
- Men or Women
- Rich or poor

And you can take this list on and on. What it boils down to is that God created us all. We are all his children and he loves us all. **DAD DOES NOT LIKE YOU BEST!** He loves me too.

To give him what he deserves, to love him means to love each other. No matter what the differences are between us. No matter how we think of them. No matter how we view their culture or their behavior we are commanded to love them anyhow. We don't have to accept their bad or evil behaviors, but we do have to help them find the same love we have.

Max Lucado said it best when he said "God meets you right where you're at, but he doesn't leave you there. We too must love them where they're at but not leave them there. We have to be impartial and tell them the story of God's love and what Jesus did for them.

AMEN