

Putting Politics in Its Place: Rome / Jesus (Week 6)

Discussion Guide



You can use this discussion guide on your own, with your family, or with your discipleship community (virtually or in-person). To watch or listen to this week's sermon, visit bellevuechristian.church/sermons, subscribe to the Bellevue Christian Church podcast on your preferred provider, or watch our weekly service at youtube.com/bellevuechristian.

Introduction

We're in an 8-week series called *Putting Politics in its Place* that will take us all the way to week of the election. In a time where it feels like politics has forgotten its place, we want to be a church where we put politics back in its place. And, we believe that the best way to do that is by exploring political life in specific places throughout the Bible—places like Eden, Egypt, Israel, Babylon, Rome, & New Jerusalem.

This week we're exploring the political implications of life in the Roman Empire—specifically looking at what Jesus had to say about putting politics in its place. We'll be learning from both what Jesus said and the way that he said it.

Since political conversations tend to be particularly volatile in our cultural moment, we want to go over a few guidelines every single week that can shape we talk with one another:

1. **Seek to understand before you're understood.** This means that we're practicing active listening, not just thinking about how we'll respond. Before you counter what someone is saying, try your best to repeat back what the person is saying—to *their satisfaction* ("Yes, that's exactly what I'm saying").
2. **Hold the Bible tightly and your political opinions loosely.** Instead of trying to forcefit the Bible into our preconceived political opinions, we want to approach the Bible with humility that says, "God, I give you permission to reshape any of my opinions in light of your Word." If we're not careful, it's easy to let our political opinions shape how we read the Bible—instead of the other way around. This also means we want to keep our discussion centered around the text we're actually studying.
3. **Love the person even when you don't love their idea.** And, just because someone doesn't love your idea doesn't mean they don't love you. In the end, Jesus says that people will know we are his followers not by "the uniformity of our political opinions" but by our "love for one another" (Jn. 13:35).

Questions

It's okay if you don't get through all the questions. These questions are nothing more than a launching point for moving toward everyday life like Jesus. Feel free to add additional questions of your own.

- One of the best ways to break political polarization is getting to know people who hold different views than you—so every week we'll have a get-to-know-each-other-better question. **If you could add anyone to Mount Rushmore, who would it be and why?**
- This week's text is Matthew 22:15-22. **Can someone read through the text? Listen for some things that strike you about the text. What are some things that stood out to you from a first reading of the text?**
- In the first-century world, the moment that forced people to confront questions about the relationship between religion and politics was the imperial tax. **What are some things in our own cultural moment that force us to think about the relationship between religion and politics?**
- One thing Jesus seems to be addressing is the relationship between the "kingdom of God," which he's been preaching about since day one, and the political kingdoms of this world (like Caesar's empire).
 - One view that's popular is the view that wants to see God's kingdom completely overlap with the political kingdoms of this world, which is what the zealots wanted. **How do you see this view show up in our own cultural moment? What are some problems with this way of viewing the relationship between the two kingdoms?**
 - Another view that's popular is that God's kingdom and the kingdoms of this world should be completely separate with no overlap at all—usually meaning that religion and politics should have nothing to do with each other. (That's what some people think Jesus is saying here.) **How do you see this view show up in our own cultural moment? What are some problems with this way of viewing the relationship between the two kingdoms?**
- The word *image* is our clue to what Jesus is really saying here. Jesus said that the coin has Caesar's *image* on it so it belongs to Caesar. But, if we remember Genesis, we know that all humans (including Caesar) are made in God's *image*. Here's what Jonathan Leeman writes, "Jesus looked at a coin and asked whose image was on it. Answer: Caesar's. Okay, but in whose image is Caesar? Answer: God's. Which would mean: giving to God what is God's includes Caesar. Jesus was not pushing God into the private domain, concluded New Testament scholar Don Carson. Rather, 'Jesus' famous utterance means that God always trumps Caesar.'" **How might that fact change how we understand this passage and the relationship between the kingdom of God and the political kingdoms of this world?**
- **What do you think it means to give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and give back to God what is God's—in our own time?**

- We can also learn from the *way* Jesus engages in this political conversation, not just from *what* he says about politics. **What are some lessons we can learn from Jesus about how to engage in political conversations?**
- **What was your biggest takeaway from the sermon or discussion this week?**

Prayer

Spend some time responding to this week's discussion in prayer—especially for this political season. Pray that we would be able to engage in political conversations like Jesus.