

## **Matthew 22:15-22**

Driving along Highway 30 in Indiana, if your windows are down, you have to put them up at one place: the rendering plant near Plymouth. This is where animal carcasses are processed. The stench is unbearable even with the windows up.

Now I realize that the word *render* has different definitions. When Jesus said, “*Render to Caesar...*” He didn’t mean the Jews were to bring roadkill to the tax office. Nonetheless, for the Jewish people, because they hated Caesar and those who collected taxes for him, they would have held their nose when going to the tax booth to render to Caesar as if the place was a stinking rendering plant.

Maybe that’s how some see the church...as a rendering plant. Jesus does say, “*Render to God the things that are God’s.*” We hate to render to Caesar. We hate paying taxes. Isn’t it possible that rendering to God can also be hated? And so how many drive by the church, especially on Sunday mornings, with their windows up? Perhaps they even hold their nose.

But we have to pay taxes once a year. That’s when we render to Caesar. So even though it stinks, we can do God one better. We’ll render to Him twice a year: Christmas and Easter. Unless, of course, there’s a funeral, or a baptism or confirmation. Then we have to hold our nose and enter God’s rendering plant at these times as well.

We don’t like to render to Caesar, but we have to admit that we need to do so. Without our tax money, Caesar is helpless. He cannot defend our shores. He cannot build roads and bridges for us. Oh sure, Caesar wastes a lot of what we render to him, but without our tax revenue, we are the ones who suffer.

Do we see God the way we see Caesar...that He needs what we give Him? Unless we give God our time, our treasures, and our talents, He will not be able to do much for us. Is this how we think? If so, then a congregation can hold itself hostage. The members can refuse to render to God. They can refuse to give their offerings. They can refuse to run for offices in the congregation. They can refuse to even come at all. Unless they get their way, they simply will not render to God.

And yes, the congregation does suffer. But that’s what the church is called to do. To suffer. To endure persecution even from its own members. God will preserve His elect through whatever suffering and hostage-taking they must endure. God’s elect do suffer...now...here. But not in heaven. And heaven’s joy is not worth comparing to what we have to suffer here.

So in the final analysis those who refuse to render to God their time, treasures, and talents are only hurting themselves. They are like the Pharisees who approached Jesus in our text. They had planned to hurt Jesus with their trick question, but they were the ones who walked away wounded.

God loves what we render to Him, but He doesn’t need it. He uses it, but if one member over here refuses to render his time, treasures, and talents, the member over there will. It’s how God

works. He goes out to the highways and byways, and He brings into His church those who will render to Him.

But we must be careful about our attitude. If we think that what we render to God is really something, we need to remember what the prophet Isaiah writes...that all our righteous deeds are nothing but filthy rags. In essence, all that we render to God is nothing but roadkill. But God accepts it. In fact, to Him it is a sweet-smelling aroma. Yet not because of us; because of Jesus.

Jesus became roadkill for you and me. He was the stinking carcass hanging from a cross. Calvary is the true rendering plant. Those who passed by shook their heads. They shielded their eyes and held their noses. It was an abomination for the Son of God to hang as a carcass on a cross for those He created. But for us, it was our salvation. Had our Lord not endured that awful rendering plant, we would be thrown into the stinking and eternal rendering plant of hell.

It's what we deserve, for we are poor, miserable sinners. Everyone of us. But the Son of God carried your sins to the cross. That's why He stunk like roadkill. Our sins He bore. That's why He was punished. That's why He died.

But He rose again. He left the rendering plant and He stands before His Father, and your Father, in heaven. He shows Him the scars of the nails, and God accepts you. He receives you in Christ, for into Him you are baptized. He declares that you are forgiven of all your sins against Him.

And this also...He loves what you render to Him. It is a fragrant aroma to Him. Whether you render a little or a lot, God accepts it with joy, for Jesus has made it a beautiful fragrance. God doesn't need what you and I render to Him. He did just fine before He made us. He can get along just fine without us. But we should see it as a privilege that God allows us to render to Him our time, treasures, and talents. If we have life and breath; if we have treasures, great or small; if we have abilities to do little or big things; we have all these from a loving, gracious God.

If we do not render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, Caesar will come looking for us, and it will not go well. God is not like Caesar. Jesus already rendered to God everything for you. What you render, therefore, is not because God demands it...or else! It's out of love for God. Those who love God render to Him their time, treasures, and talents. It's that simple. We do it not to make God love us and accept us. We render to God because He already does love and accept us in Jesus. Amen.