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Isaiah chapter 45 **English Standard Version**

1 Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him and to loose the belts of kings, to open doors before him that gates may not be closed: **2** "I will go before you and level the exalted places, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut through the bars of iron, **3** I will give you the treasures of darkness and the hoards in secret places, that you may know that it is I, the LORD, the God of Israel, who call you by your name. **4** For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I name you, though you do not know me. **5** I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me, **6** that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the LORD, and there is no other. **7** I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity; I am the LORD, who does all these things.

Psalms chapter 96 **English Standard Version**

1 Oh sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth! **2** Sing to the LORD, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. **3** Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! **4** For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods. **5** For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the LORD made the heavens. **6** Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.

7Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength! **8**Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts! **9**Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth!

1 Thessalonians chapter 1

English Standard Version

1Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.

2We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, **3**remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. **4**For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, **5**because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. **6**And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, **7**so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. **8**For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. **9**For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, **10**and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

1 Thessalonians 1:1

ESV

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.

What does 1 Thessalonians 1:1 mean? As was customary in the first century, Paul identifies himself at the beginning of his letter. At one time Paul had tried to destroy Christianity, but the Lord converted him on the road to Damascus and commissioned him to be an apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:1–19; Galatians 1:11–23). His faithfulness to that commission had taken him to Thessalonica, where he preached the gospel and a number of people believed. Silvanus—also known as Silas—and Timothy were with Paul when he preached in Thessalonica (Acts 17:4, 10, 14) and were with him as he wrote 1 Thessalonians. Silas, Paul's

missionary companion, had been imprisoned with Paul at Philippi (Acts 16:19–40). Timothy, also Paul's missionary companion, was from Lystra. His mother was Jewish, but his father was a Gentile. He joined Paul in missions after Paul circumcised him (Acts 16:1–3).

Paul addresses his letter to the church of the Thessalonians, believers who were joined by faith to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. The term "Lord" indicates that Jesus is as much God as the Father is. The name "Jesus" is from the Greek version of the Hebrew name *Joshua*, meaning "God is salvation." The title "Christ" translates the Old Testament term, "Messiah." Meaning "Anointed One."

Paul greets the Thessalonian church with a combination of Greek and Hebrew salutations. "Grace" conveys a sense of God's favor, and "peace" conveys a sense of well-being. Well-being results from God's grace at work in a person's heart.

1 Thessalonians 1:2

ESV

We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers,

What does 1 Thessalonians 1:2 mean? In this verse Paul assures his readers that he, Silvanus, and Timothy were praying for them. They were praying for all the Thessalonian Christians with thanksgiving as they mentioned them constantly in their prayers. They were a source of joy to Paul and his team members. In 1 Thessalonians 2:19–20 he asks, "For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming?" He answers his question by citing the Thessalonian believers: "Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy." The apostle John, too, was filled with joy upon hearing that believers, whom he called "his children," were "walking in the truth" (3 John 1:4).

Paul's New Testament letters reveal that he prayed for believers consistently, with thanksgiving. He specifically asked God to empower them to know and do His will. Paul thanked God for the Corinthians because they had received the grace of God (1 Corinthians 1:4). He gave thanks constantly for the Ephesians because of their faith and love for all their fellow Christians (Ephesians 1:15–16). He gave thanks for the Philippians because of their ongoing partnership in the gospel (Philippians 1:3–5). And he gave thanks for the Colossians because of their faith and love for all their fellow believers (Colossians 1:3–4).

1 Thessalonians 1:3

ESV

remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

What does 1 Thessalonians 1:3 mean? Paul remembered the Thessalonian believers as he prayed to God the Father. Jesus taught us to address God as "Father" (Luke 11:2). The name "Father" reflects God's love and care, and encourages us to trust Him. Paul remembered three supreme qualities his readers exhibited. They were faith, love, and hope, and are cited in 1 Corinthians 13:13 as enduring and highly commendable. The Christians at Thessalonica demonstrated faith that worked. It had resulted in repentance (see 1 Thessalonians 1:9). Their love for Jesus had caused them to toil for Him. Their hope in Christ's return had produced steadfast endurance of persecution.

1 Thessalonians 1:4

ESV

For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you,

What does 1 Thessalonians 1:4 mean? Paul refers to the believers at Thessalonica as "brothers." He and his readers had believed in Jesus as Savior and thereby had become members of God's family. God was their Father, and they were brothers. God loved the Thessalonian Christians and had selected them to belong to Him.

In the New Testament, the term "brothers" is a common designation for believers. When Jesus was teaching a crowd, a man told Him His mother and brothers wanted to speak to Him. He asked: "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" (Matthew 12:48). Then He gestured toward His disciples and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Matthew 12:49–50).

When the Twelve addressed their fellow believers to elect seven administrators of the daily distribution, they called the believers "brothers" (Acts 6:3). The believers in Judea who were recipients of a relief offering are called "brothers" (Acts 11:29). Paul addressed the believers at Rome as "brothers" (Romans 1:13; 7:1; 8:12; 10:1; 12:1; 15:30; 16:17). He called the Corinthian believers, Galatian believers, Ephesian believers, and Colossian

believers "brothers" (1 Corinthians 1:26; Galatians 4:12; Ephesians 6:23; Colossians 1:2).

1 Thessalonians 1:5

ESV

because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

What does 1 Thessalonians 1:6 mean? After receiving the gospel, the Thessalonian believers patterned their lives after the lives of Paul and his fellow missionaries. They also patterned their lives after the life of the Lord. Just as Paul, his companions, and the Lord knew firsthand what suffering was, so the believers at Thessalonica experienced firsthand what it meant to suffer at the hands of unbelievers.

When Jesus called His disciples to follow Him, He did not hide from them the fact that they would suffer trials and persecution. He told them: "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you" (John 15:18). Later, He told them: "... In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit imparted His supernatural joy to them.

After being stoned at Lystra and left for dead there, Paul revived and later returned to the city, where he strengthened the believers and told them that "through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). The Thessalonians believers were suffering persecution, but maintained a resolute hope for a better time when Jesus would return.

1 Thessalonians 1:7

ESV

so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.

What does 1 Thessalonians 1:8 mean? In this verse, Paul writes further about the example set by the Thessalonian Christians. They had become missionaries by sharing with others the good news they had received. Likely, they shared the good news with sailors at the seaport and with travelers on the major land route that passed alongside their city. As they traveled throughout Macedonia, Achaia,

and beyond, they spread the gospel so effectively that their reputation as effective believers was known widely, so much so that Paul did not have to inform anyone about what had transpired at Thessalonica.

As shown in prior verses, this refers to a pattern, to which we're called by Christ. His final instructions before ascending into heaven were to make disciples throughout the world (Matthew 28:18–20). Even on a personal level, believers are expected to live in such a way that others see the influence of God in us (Matthew 5:16). The Thessalonian Christians were taking these ideas seriously, and their efforts were being rewarded with great success.

1 Thessalonians 1:9

ESV

For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,

What does 1 Thessalonians 1:9 mean? Paul has been hearing good news about the Thessalonian Christians from many people. Perhaps the Thessalonian Christians had visited their seaport and shared the gospel with sailors. Likely they had also shared the gospel with travelers on the highway that ran through their city. As a result of their faithful sharing the good news about Christ, a number of sailors and travelers had trusted in Christ and had subsequently spread the gospel to near and far destinations. In doing so they must have spoken about the faith of the Thessalonians.

After their conversion to Christ, these Thessalonians abandoned their pagan ways. They no longer worshiped idols. Now they worshiped and served the true God who lives eternally. The practice of idolatry stands in stark contrast to the worship of the living and true God, but was prevalent in the first century. The apostle John issued a clear warning to Christians: "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21).

1 Thessalonians 1:10

ESV

and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

What does 1 Thessalonians 2:1 mean? Paul reflects on his missionary venture in Thessalonica. It was not unproductive. As 1 Thessalonians 1:9 reports, Paul's readers had become his brothers. They had turned away from idolatry and had become servants of God, and they were anticipating Jesus' return from heaven. When God's Word is sent out, it always accomplishes the purpose God had in sending it. That message may fall on some hearts that are like rocky ground and become scorched by the sun; or it may fall on some hearts that are like a path on which birds devour the seed; or it may fall on some hearts that are like thorny ground that chokes the seed (Mark 4:1–9).

However, God's Word will surely fall—eventually—on good soil and produce an abundant harvest. Isaiah 55:10–11 relates a similar message about God's Word. He promises, "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."

Matthew chapter 22

15 Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle him in his words. **16** And they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone's opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances. **17** Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" **18** But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? **19** Show me the coin for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. **20** And Jesus said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" **21** They said, "Caesar's." Then he said to them, "Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." **22** When they heard it, they marveled. And they left him and went away.

Matthew 22:15

ESV

Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle him in his words.

What does Matthew 22:15 mean? Given the three parables Jesus has just delivered (Matthew 21:28, 33; 22:1), this verse should come as no surprise. Jesus told those stories in the temple to a group of religious authorities. In the

parables, Jesus first pictured Israel's spiritual leaders as a son who says "yes" to his father but does not actually obey. He pictured them as tenants who kill the landowner's servants and son, rather than paying their rent. Finally, He pictured them as people chosen by a king to attend the wedding feast of his son, yet who refuse to the point of violence and are declared unworthy. All of these depict groups like the Pharisees, scribes, and Sadducees as hypocritical and rebellious against God, despite their lofty reputations with the people.

The Pharisees want Jesus out of the picture. They conspire looking for a way to trick Jesus into making a public gaffe. Ideally, they'd like to fool Jesus into saying something which will upset His crowd of followers: those who think He is the Messiah, and who hope He will soon overthrow the Romans and return Israel to glory. If they cannot do that, their next best option is getting Jesus to say something which sounds like rebellion against the Romans. Then, the Romans will arrest and execute Him.

Ironically, the Pharisees plotting against Jesus only confirms what He has said about them in the previous parables. They are actively—even violently—rejecting the Son of God as the Messiah (Matthew 21:38–39). The following verses show these men are willing to be deceptive to accomplish their goal.

Matthew 22:16

ESV

And they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone’s opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances.

What does Matthew 22:16 mean? The Pharisees want Jesus out of the picture one way or another. Despite His indirect—and, according to them, blasphemous—claims to be the Messiah and the Son of God, they can't arrest Him directly. Jesus is just too popular with the people for the moment. Earlier encounters showed that these religious leaders are more interested in political power than in honesty (Matthew 21:25–27). If they can get Him to say anything that sounds like rebellion against Rome, however, the Romans might remove Jesus for them. The Roman Empire was more than willing to execute Jewish rebels attempting to start an uprising.

Jesus, of course, was not trying to cause an uprising (John 18:36). That's one reason this plot by the Pharisees will not work. Still, they take a shot. They send some of their disciples to Jesus, along with representative from a group known as the Herodians. These Jews were loyal to the Herods and wanted Rome to

give the kingship of Israel back to them. To that end, they did not want to do anything that would make Rome feel threatened by the Jewish people.

This mixed group approaches Jesus and begins with flattery. They respectfully call him "Rabbi," meaning "Teacher." They flatter His teachings and wisdom, as well as His independence and bravery. The setup makes it seem as if they are asking Him to settle a dispute between them and the Herodians. In political arenas, this kind of trickery is common; the group is trying to lower Jesus' guard by saying He is so smart and truthful and unworried about what others think that He is the perfect arbiter for the question they are about to pose.

Likely, the Pharisees assumed Jesus would not believe any flattery they might use. So, they sent their students, rather than approach Jesus directly. In their minds, Jesus was more likely to fall to flattery from younger people. Of course, He does not, and would not (Matthew 22:18).

Matthew 22:17

ESV

Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?"

What does Matthew 22:17 mean? Some Pharisees who want to get rid of Jesus have sent their disciples to spring a trap. They plan to soften Jesus up with flattery (Matthew 22:16), then pose a hard question. They hope His answer will offend His Jewish followers or get Him in trouble with the Romans. To further disguise their intent, they have recruited people from a group known as the Herodians to approach Jesus along with their own students. This setup attempts to give the illusion that a young group is asking Jesus to arbitrate a dispute. Jesus, however, is not fooled at all (Matthew 22:18).

Now they pop this dangerous question: Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?

The tax in question is apparently the Roman "head tax," demanded from every Jewish citizen. The Pharisees, as cultural and religious purists, despised even the idea of paying taxes to a foreign, godless government. Those loyal to Jesus who hoped He was the Messiah may have wanted Him to signal the time for revolt by announcing that they should not pay the tax any longer. The Pharisees hope if Jesus says it is lawful to pay this tax, He will lose a sizeable number of followers. That will create an opening for them to have Jesus killed.

On the other hand, the Herodians wanted the Romans to trust them enough to make a Herod king over all of Israel once more. Because of that, they would not want to cause any unrest in Israel. If Jesus said not to pay the tax, the Herodians might be able to have Jesus arrested as a rebel and executed by the Romans.

The trap was set. Would Jesus risk offending His followers, suffering under a huge tax burden, by saying the law demanded they pay the tax? Or would He risk losing His freedom and life by saying they should defy Roman control and stop paying the tax? His answer, as usual, is brilliant and completely diffuses their attack.

Matthew 22:18

ESV

But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why put me to the test, you hypocrites?"

What does Matthew 22:18 mean? The Pharisees were trying to set Jesus up. They have sent their own disciples, along with some from a group known as the Herodians, to spring a trap. The attempt began with flattery, then sprang what was meant to look like a dispute between those two groups. Their assumption is that Jesus will either claim paying taxes to Rome is part of the law, alienating His followers, or that it should not be paid, subjecting Him to prosecution as a rebel (Matthew 22:15–17).

Jesus, though, is never fooled, not even by a question this loaded. He knows they have approached Him with insincerity; in fact, this question is being asked out of "malice," translated from the Greek root term *poneros*, which can also mean "wickedness or evil." They pretend to be believers; in truth, they are trying to hurt Him. The English term "malice" implies a prejudicial intent to cause another person harm.

Jesus calls them out for the attempted deception, rightly calling them hypocrites. This is an especially apt term in this case, since the Greek term *hypokritēs* literally refers to an "actor." These challengers are only pretending to respect Christ's teaching. Their pretense is an outright lie for the purpose of getting Him arrested and killed.

And yet, Jesus does not neglect to give some answer to the issue. His response (Matthew 22:19–21) distinguishes between the secular and spiritual worlds and implies a deeper need for believers to commit themselves to God.

Matthew 22:19**ESV**

Show me the coin for the tax.” And they brought him a denarius.

What does Matthew 22:19 mean? A group of Pharisees, along with some Herodians, have set a trap for Jesus. Through flattery and deception, they pretend to seek arbitration for a dispute (Matthew 22:15–16). Their loaded question is whether it is "lawful" for a faithful follower of God to pay taxes to the pagan, oppressive Roman government. This tax—like those who helped Romans collect it (Matthew 9:11)—was deeply despised by the Jewish people. Some Israelites suggested they should defy the Roman government, believing they should trust God to send the Messiah to free them from Rome and return them to the glory days of Israel. The Pharisees hope these people will be offended if Jesus declares that Old Testament law requires them to pay this tax.

On the other hand, the Herodians wanted to keep the trust of Rome by keeping order in Israel. They wanted everyone to behave and to keep paying their taxes. If Jesus said not to pay the tax, the Herodians might have Him arrested and turned over to Rome as a rebel. Either outcome would suit the desires of Jesus' enemies.

Jesus seems especially disgusted with this feeble attempt to trip Him up (Matthew 22:18). In somewhat dramatic fashion, He asks to see a coin that could be used to pay the tax, planning to use it as a visual aid (Matthew 22:20–21). More than one currency was in use in Israel at this time. The Jewish people did not like to use money with foreign gods on it and some had rebelled over the issue in AD 6. They lost that battle, so the Roman tax could now be paid only with the silver Roman denarius.

Matthew 22:20**ESV**

And Jesus said to them, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?”

What does Matthew 22:20 mean? Jesus is answering a question from some Pharisees and Herodians even though He knows it is a trap (Matthew 22:17–18). The Pharisees assume they will win no matter what Jesus says. If He says it is unlawful to pay the tax, the Herodians may have Him arrested and handed over to the Romans as a rebel. If He tells oppressed Jewish people that paying the

despised Roman tax is "lawful," hopeful followers who believe Messiah will overthrow Rome may abandon Him.

Jesus has asked for the only currency that can be used to pay the tax, a Roman silver denarius (Matthew 22:19). He is given one and asks about the image imprinted into it. Everyone there would have been very familiar with this. One side of the denarius had a profile of Tiberius Caesar, with a Latin inscription that read "Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus." On the other side of the coin was the image of Pax, the Roman goddess of peace with the words "High Priest."

The Jewish people found it offensive that they were made to carry the image of a foreign god around with them everywhere they needed money. An uprising over the issue in AD 6 had been severely crushed by the Romans.

Jesus will use one of the offensive aspects of the coin to make his point in the following verse (Matthew 22:21).

Matthew 22:21

ESV

They said, "Caesar's." Then he said to them, "Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

What does Matthew 22:21 mean? Though Jesus knows the challenge is a feeble attempt by the Pharisees to trap Him, He is answering a supposedly no-win question: Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar (Matthew 22:15–20)? He has asked for a denarius, the coin required to pay the tax, and has asked whose image and inscription are on the coin. Everyone present would have known this, even without looking at the coin. The denarius was a required currency in Israel. Some quickly answered that Caesar's name and inscription were on the coin. Specifically, the image was of "Tiberius Caesar, son of the Divine Augustus." By this time, though, the word Caesar had become a title, meaning emperor of Rome and its occupied territories throughout the world.

Jesus now gives a masterful reply to a trick question: Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and give to God what is God's.

In other words, that which bears the image of Caesar ultimately belongs to him. Why not give it to him? In this way, Jesus essentially shrugs off the challenge as a false dilemma. One can honor the requirements of a secular government

(Romans 13:1) without embracing all it stands for. Paying the tax to Rome, then, is a separate question from the issues of the Old Testament law.

Interestingly, Jesus' remark also begs an important question: if we owe Caesar that which bears his image, what then do we owe God? The assumed answer is that we owe God that which bears the image of God. This profound implication points to the creation account, where God created humanity in His own image (Genesis 1:27). Every human being bears the image of God. In that way, all of humanity belongs to Him, including ourselves. Jesus' answer makes clear that human beings are responsible not just to give their money to whatever government issues it, but also to give ourselves to the God who made us.

Matthew 22:22

ESV

When they heard it, they marveled. And they left him and went away.

What does Matthew 22:22 mean? Jesus' profound and brilliant answer to a challenge about paying taxes (Matthew 22:15–21) left His questioners speechless. They marveled. They started out lying about how impressed they were with Him, attempting to use flattery to manipulate Jesus. Their actual intent was to trick Him into making a statement they could use against Him. They ended up truly being impressed with Jesus and marveling at His wise and profound answer to their mean-spirited question.

Normally, an exchange between potential debaters would have seen back-and-forth responses go on for a while. Instead, Jesus' testers recognize they lost this skirmish and simply walk away.