



The Gospel of Matthew - Chapter Twenty Two

XII. [Matthew 21:1-23:39 - The Messiah Asserts His Authority over Jerusalem \(continues\)](#)

XII.d [Matthew 21:23-22:46 - Controversies in the temple court over Jesus' authority \(continues/concludes\)](#)

Summary of Chapter Twenty Two

It was still Tuesday of Passion Week and Jesus continued his teaching in the temple. The Parable of the Wedding Banquet concludes three consecutive illustrations of how the Jews in general and the religious leadership in particular were failing to enter into the Kingdom of God. Here, Jesus recounted a tale of a king who invited all his subjects to the wedding banquet of his son but most of those initially invited failed to attend at the last moment. Therefore, the king had to send out his servants to others who would attend, and would do so in the right manner.

Some Pharisees tried to trap Jesus with a question on the legitimacy of paying the imperial taxes. Had Jesus advocated paying the unpopular taxes he would have distanced himself from his messianic claims, for it would be seen as going against God. Had he opposed paying the taxes he could have been arrested by the Romans for opposing Cæsar, a capital crime. Jesus was able to see through their trap and came up with an answer that would both fulfil the will of God and bring honour to him, without any political fallout.

Next, a group of Sadducees tried to trap Jesus over his theology and teaching on the resurrection, something the Sadducees denied. Their account of a woman who had been widowed seven times would seem to refute teaching on the resurrection of the dead, but Jesus was able to demonstrate it was their flawed understanding of Scripture and God's power that was the cause of their erroneous perception.

A further trap was then set when a Pharisaic lawyer asked Jesus to state which law was the greatest. Jesus combined two laws that would encompass all the

teachings of Moses and the prophets - to love God above all else and to demonstrate a genuine love of one's neighbour.

Jesus concluded the chapter with a delightful rendering of one of David's messianic psalms to show that the Christ was both the son and Lord of David, with the emphasis being on the latter role. This teaching astounded the other leaders, leaving them speechless.

XII.d.iv Matthew 22:1-14 - The Parable of the Wedding Banquet

The parable of the wedding feast describes the consequences that will befall the unrepentant and unbelieving Jews. Whether the parable emphasises judgment on all Israel, on Israel as a whole but not individual Jews, or on the Judæan leadership in particular, is the source of much debate. However, the burning of the city probably refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD70, which many blamed on the failure of the leadership generally and their participation in the execution of Jesus in particular.

¹ Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: ² 'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son.

Matthew 22:1-2

Once more Jesus spoke to them. Jesus knew from their thoughts that they wanted to arrest him: <<*When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realised that he was speaking about them. They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet*>> (Matthew 21:45-46), for he had divine power: <<*But he knew what they were thinking and said to them, 'Every kingdom divided against itself becomes a desert, and house falls on house*>> (Luke 11:17), so he went on to tell them yet a third parable to reinforce what he was saying about the leadership in particular. Again, it compares the Kingdom of Heaven.

Wedding banquet here refers most likely to an analogy of a countrywide celebration that would have continued for several days. Culturally, a wedding banquet for a king's son would be an event that no one would refuse to attend, for to do so would be both social and political suicide.

This banquet represents enjoying fellowship with God in his Kingdom, and coming to the banquet thus represents entering the Kingdom through faith in his son.

³ He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come.

Matthew 22:3

He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited reflects the common cultural practice of a double invitation. The first would have been issued weeks or months in advance so the guest could be prepared and available for the event. The second would be issued much closer to the day in order to confirm the final details

of the time, which may have been difficult to determine at the time of the first invitation.

For those originally invited, the Hebrew nation of Israel, they had been called since the time of Abraham right through captivity in Egypt and exile in Babylon to the time of Malachi. The second invitation went out with John the Baptist: <<*In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judæa, proclaiming, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near’>> (Matthew 3:1-2); a call later confirmed by Jesus, refer to v.8.*

But they would not come. To refuse a direct invitation from the king would be an extreme insult and a dangerous affront to his authority. For all the invited guests to refuse to come would greatly shame the host; the unanimous refusal barely disguises what must be a concerted plan to deliberately insult the host. The insult is turned on its head when the King that is calling is God and the son is Jesus, for the guests forfeit all hope of life eternal: <<*Yet you refuse to come to me to have life*>> (John 5:40).

⁴ Again he sent other slaves, saying, “Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.”

Matthew 21:4

Again he sent other slaves. To have to send out a third invite would have been demeaning for the host. Yet for the Kingdom banquet God repeatedly sent his prophets and then his apostles to invite the people in.

Come to the wedding banquet. This is to be a feast not to missed, far exceeding even the most lavish of earthly celebrations: <<*in the third year of his reign, he gave a banquet for all his officials and ministers. The army of Persia and Media and the nobles and governors of the provinces were present, while he displayed the great wealth of his kingdom and the splendour and pomp of his majesty for many days, one hundred and eighty days in all*>> (Esther 1:3-4). Those invited to the Kingdom feast are most blessed: <<*And the angel said to me, ‘Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.’ And he said to me, ‘These are true words of God’>> (Revelation 19:9).*

⁵ But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, ⁶ while the rest seized his slaves, maltreated them, and killed them.

Matthew 21:5-6

They made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business reflects the absurd excuses given in a parallel account: <<*But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, “I have bought a piece of land, and I must go out and see it; please accept my apologies.” Another said, “I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please accept my*

apologies.” Another said, “I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come”>> (Luke 14:18-20).

The literal translation for made light of, the Greek *amelesantes*, is ‘they were careless’. How many millions of people have perished eternally through mere carelessness, who have no direct aversion to God, but a prevailing indifference to and lack of concern for the matters of their souls.

While the rest seized his slaves, maltreated them, and killed them. This outrageous behaviour is reminiscent of the actions in the foregoing Parable of the Wicked Tenants in Matthew 21:33-46, which was also against the religious leaders. These men were the bearers of good news and it should have been received with joy and great honour: *<<Look! On the mountains the feet of one who brings good tidings, who proclaims peace! Celebrate your festivals, O Judah, fulfil your vows, for never again shall the wicked invade you; they are utterly cut off>> (Nahum 1:15).* God’s prophets and apostles were rarely greeted in an appropriate manner: *<<When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we speak kindly. We have become like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things, to this very day>> (1 Corinthians 4:12b-13).*

⁷ The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city.

Matthew 22:7

Destroyed those murderers. God’s wrath, the king was enraged, was against those who killed and abused his prophets and apostles, not against those who rejected his invitation, for that remains open throughout life on earth and can be accepted at any time by repenting and turning back to God through Jesus. God will not tolerate the shedding of innocent blood forever. Sometimes he deals with it immediately: *<<Surely this came upon Judah at the command of the Lord, to remove them out of his sight, for the sins of Manasseh, for all that he had committed, and also for the innocent blood that he had shed; for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, and the Lord was not willing to pardon>> (2 Kings 24:3-4).* Others, indeed all who oppose God, will be punished on the Day of Judgement.

Burned their city represents an extreme punishment reserved for serious treason and revolt against the king. Here, it seems most likely an allusion to the forthcoming destruction of Jerusalem in AD70: *<<How the faithful city has become a whore! She that was full of justice, righteousness lodged in her – but now murderers!>> (Isaiah 1:21).* The Jewish nation had once again brought the wrath of God upon itself for its apostasy: *<<Thus they have constantly been filling up the measure of their sins; but God’s wrath has overtaken them at last>> (1 Thessalonians 2:16b).*

Therefore, he sent his troops could refer to the Roman army on that occasion just as God had used the Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks and many other armies in the past when it had been necessary to do so. God reigns supreme throughout the world and in all history, using governments for his purposes and according to his will. He raises them up and he destroys them all.

⁸ Then he said to his slaves, “The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy.

Matthew 22:8

The wedding is ready. Jesus’ message was clear from the outset of his ministry: <<*From that time Jesus began to proclaim, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near’*>> (Matthew 4:17). God had issued a general invitation to the whole Jewish nation but many had rebuffed his gracious offer for those invited were not worthy.

⁹ Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.”

Matthew 22:9

The wedding invitation to those not previously invited anticipates the spread of the Gospel to the Gentiles: <<*And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age’*>> (Matthew 28:18-20), <<*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judæa and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth*>> (Acts 1:8), and: <<*For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek*>> (Romans 1:16). Jesus personal mission was to the Jewish nation: <<*He answered, ‘I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel’*>> (Matthew 15:24). However, his intention was to give the Jews every opportunity to come into his Kingdom before he then called all nations.

¹⁰ Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

Matthew 22:10

Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found. Many commentators believe this to refer to the Gentiles but Luke differentiates between the calling of the Jews from a lower social status as well as Gentiles: <<*The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.’ ‘Sir,’ the servant said, ‘what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.’ Then the master told his servant, ‘Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full*>> (Luke 14:21-23 NIV), where those in the town are the Jews and those in the country the Gentiles. That they were gathered shows that they were not looking for God but that he came looking for them; not that he needed them but they certainly needed him and should be eternally grateful for his mercy in doing so.

God had always said he would call the Gentile nations: <<I was ready to be sought out by those who did not ask, to be found by those who did not seek me. I said, 'Here I am, here I am', to a nation that did not call on my name>> (Isaiah 65:1-2). Let those called not miss out on the opportunity as others had done so often: <<Now who were they who heard and yet were rebellious? Was it not all those who left Egypt under the leadership of Moses? But with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, if not to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief. Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest is still open, let us take care that none of you should seem to have failed to reach it>> (Hebrews 3:16-4:1).

The welcoming of both good and bad echoes Jesus' own mission to sinners: <<When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with tax-collectors and sinners?' But when he heard this, he said, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners'>> (Matthew 9:11-13). It is also a reminder that grace not only forgives but also transforms. All are welcome, but no one should dare to remain the way he or she entered, in view of the final separation: <<So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous>> (Matthew 13:49). Such echoes of earlier passages in the Gospel prepare the reader for the parable that follows (vv.11-14); salvation is not simply a matter of those who begin the race, it has to be completed: <<I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith>> (2 Timothy 4:7).

There are some who view the good to be the Diaspora Jews called from the nations: <<He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God>> (John 11:51-52). Therefore, the bad represents the Gentile sinners: <<I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd>> (John 10:16). However, elsewhere Jesus said that no one is good: <<Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone>> (Mark 10:18), something that Paul would later reiterate: <<All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one>> (Romans 3:12 NIV).

So the wedding hall was filled with guests indicates that the new covenant church had been established and could be grown from that. It will be similar to when Christ returns, at which time his house will be full, i.e. all those selected for salvation will have come to faith: <<After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands>> (Revelation 7:9).

¹¹ 'But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe,

Matthew 22:11

A man who was not wearing a wedding robe. Everyone is invited, but proper wedding attire is still expected. There are two possibilities for what this means:

1. There is some evidence in the ancient world for a king supplying garments for his guests: *<<To each one of them he gave a set of garments; but to Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver and five sets of garments>>* (Genesis 45:22), and: *<<let royal robes be brought, which the king has worn, and a horse that the king has ridden, with a royal crown on its head. Let the robes and the horse be handed over to one of the king's most noble officials; let him robe the man whom the king wishes to honour, and let him conduct the man on horseback through the open square of the city, proclaiming before him: "Thus shall it be done for the man whom the king wishes to honour">>* (Esther 6:8-9), and, more broadly, there is the story of God clothing his unworthy people in beautiful garments: *<<I clothed you with embroidered cloth and with sandals of fine leather; I bound you in fine linen and covered you with rich fabric. I adorned you with ornaments: I put bracelets on your arms, a chain on your neck, a ring on your nose, ear-rings in your ears, and a beautiful crown upon your head. You were adorned with gold and silver, while your clothing was of fine linen, rich fabric, and embroidered cloth. You had choice flour and honey and oil for food. You grew exceedingly beautiful, fit to be a queen>>* (Ezekiel 16:10-13). Jesus could thus be alluding to imputed righteousness, which Paul elaborates later: *<<But now, irrespective of law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus. Then what becomes of boasting? It is excluded. By what law? By that of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one; and he will justify the circumcised on the ground of faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law>>* (Romans 3:21-31), and: *<<Therefore his faith 'was reckoned to him as righteousness.' Now the words, 'it was reckoned to him', were written not for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification>>* (Romans 4:22-25). Thus by not wearing the garments provided, this guest has highly insulted the host.

2. The wedding garment may refer to a clean garment, symbolising evidence of righteous works; refer to comments made on Matthew 5:20. To attend the wedding in soiled garments would be an insult in the face of grace. This could again allude to the final separation as noted in v.10.

In either case, the man lacks something that is essential for being acceptable at the wedding feast. This verse illustrates the danger to the individual of hypocrisy in the church; to those who profess the faith but are not genuine disciples.

¹² and he said to him, “Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?” And he was speechless.

Matthew 22:12

Jesus has used the term friend before in similar circumstances to show unwelcome responses to his call or inappropriate action in his service, as with the dissatisfied vineyard worker: <<*But he replied to one of them, “Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage?”*>> (Matthew 20:13), and especially his faithless apostle Judas: <<*Jesus said to him, ‘Friend, do what you are here to do.’ Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and arrested him*>> (Matthew 26:40). Through the prophet, God had spoken even more bluntly: <<*When you come to appear before me, who asked this from your hand? Trample my courts no more*>> (Isaiah 1:12).

And he was speechless uses the Greek *ephimothē*, which can also be translated as muzzled, i.e. prevented from answering because he was convicted of his guilt and shame in his heart. Paul uses the same word in a different context: <<*For it is written in the law of Moses, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain.’ Is it for oxen that God is concerned?*>> (1 Corinthians 9:9).

¹³ Then the king said to the attendants, “Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Matthew 22:13

Then the king said to the attendants. It will be the job of the angels to come to collect those not acceptable at the final feast in the Kingdom: <<*The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers*>> (Matthew 13:41).

God dwells in perfect light but in hell, the outer darkness, there will be no light: <<*the land of gloom and chaos, where light is like darkness*>> (Job 10:22).

Weeping and gnashing of teeth is a common description of eternal judgment and is used on five further occasions in this Gospel. Refer to Matthew 8:12, 13:42, 13:50, 24:51, and 25:30.

¹⁴ For many are called, but few are chosen.’

Matthew 22:14

Many, Greek *polloi*, are called means that many have been invited to the wedding banquet. But not all those invited are actually the ones who are supposed to be there, because few are chosen. This has been described as the doctrine of a 'general calling'; the Gospel is proclaimed to all people everywhere, both those who will believe and those who will not.

However, Paul also mentions another kind of calling, an effective calling from God that comes powerfully to individuals and brings a positive response. When the Gospel is proclaimed, only some are effectively called; that is, those who are the elect, who respond with true faith: *<<For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength. Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are>> (1 Corinthians 1:25-28).*

This is consistent with Jesus' statement that few are chosen, for the ones chosen, Greek *eklektos*, which also means selected, are 'the elect', a term used by Jesus to refer to his true disciples: *<<All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him>> (Matthew 11:27), <<And if those days had not been cut short, no one would be saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short>> (Matthew 24:22), <<And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other>> (Matthew 24:31).* On the theme of election refer to comments made on Romans 9:11.

XII.d.v Matthew 22:15-22 - The Question about Paying Taxes

The Pharisees hatched a plot to attempt to trap Jesus with a question regarding the legitimacy of paying taxes to Rome. Paying taxes was a thorny issue in Judæa and if Jesus sided with the Romans he would have become unpopular with the ordinary people. Had he opposed the paying of taxes to Cæsar, he would have been liable for arrest on the capital charge of sedition.

Devotion to God demands a higher allegiance to him than to anything else, but it is not an excuse to avoid other responsibilities that do not conflict with it. Since God requires good governance to create order in the world, he expects his people to respect the requirements of legitimate government, obeying the rules of the land providing they do not compromise one's relationship with God. Also, to oppose legitimate government would harm the reputation of the church and the God whom it represents.

¹⁵ Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him in what he said.

Matthew 22:15

Plotted. This was not a genuine attempt to understand Jesus' teaching but a counsel set up for the sole purpose of entrapment. Such action had been prophesied by King David: <<*The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and his anointed, saying, 'Let us burst their bonds asunder, and cast their cords from us'*>> (Psalm 2:2-3). This was nothing new: <<*Then they said, 'Come, let us make plots against Jeremiah – for instruction shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet. Come, let us bring charges against him, and let us not heed any of his words'*>> (Jeremiah 18:18). Such people will have a price to pay at the judgement for they are under God's curse: <<*Woe to those who plan iniquity, to those who plot evil on their beds! At morning's light they carry it out because it is in their power to do it*>> (Micah 2:1 NIV).

Entrap him in what he said. The Pharisees hope that Jesus will say something to incriminate himself, which they can use to bring him before the Romans for execution.

¹⁶ So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, 'Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality.'

Matthew 22:16

Their disciples are probably those in training to become full members of the brotherhood of the Pharisees, and perhaps deceptively **sent** to appear as less of a threat than their masters.

The Herodians were a loosely organised group that sought to advance the political and economic influence of the Herodian family between circa 37BC-AD93. Although **the Herodians** and the Pharisees were adversaries with regard to many political and religious issues, they joined forces here to combat the perceived threat to their power and status. The two groups had joined in opposition to Jesus in Galilee as well: <<*The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him*>> (Mark 3:6).

Teach the way of God in accordance with truth. These men refer to Jesus as **teacher** and speak words of truth about him but they do so in an attempt to flatter him; an attempt that was intended to put him off his guard. However, Jesus would see through their duplicity quite easily. Another Pharisee had used similar words in a genuine context and was treated with respect: <<*Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God'*>> (John 3:1-2). Nicodemus was at Jesus' burial in John 19:39, which indicates he probably had come to saving faith. These men could so easily have done the same.

¹⁷ Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?'

Matthew 22:17

Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not? Taxes were a volatile issue in Israel. All of Rome's subjects, including the people of Israel, laboured under the empire's heavy taxation. Some Jews believed that paying any tax to pagan rulers contradicted God's lordship over his people. Although under subjection to Rome, those descended from Abraham were free in God; free to oppose foreign rule and its taxation system: <<*They answered him, 'We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, "You will be made free"?'>> (John 8:33). However, freedom in God is to do his will, which is to live in harmony with all those in the community: <<If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all>> (Romans 12:18); unless it conflicts with God's will.*

Just as the religious leaders required the support of the common people to maintain their power base under Roman rule, the Herodians required the rule of Rome, whom they supported, in order to maintain their own social status. By joining forces, there would clearly be an objection to one of the two answers they expected from Jesus.

¹⁸ But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, 'Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites?

Matthew 22:18

Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? Jesus' questioners reasoned that if he answered that it was right to pay taxes, he would lose favour with the tax-burdened people, but if he answered that it was wrong, they could accuse him of insurrection.

Hypocrites. Jesus had accused the religious leaders of hypocrisy on several occasions, including: <<*So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward>> (Matthew 6:2).*

¹⁹ Show me the coin used for the tax.' And they brought him a denarius.

Matthew 22:19

On one side of the silver denarius was a profile of Tiberius Cæsar, with the Latin inscription 'Tiberius Cæsar, son of the divine Augustus' around the coin's perimeter. On the opposite side was a picture of the Roman goddess of peace, Pax, with the Latin inscription 'High Priest'. Thus the coin itself represented the Roman pagan religions.



A denarius similar to that described

A denarius was equal to the value of the standard day's wages for a labourer: <<*He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard*>> (Matthew 20:2 NIV).

There were locally minted copper coins of lower value that did not bear any inscriptions but only the imperial mint could legally produce silver and gold coins. By accepting to use such coins for commerce, and making use of the good aspects of Roman administration, the Jews were morally obliged to pay the Roman taxes, even if they were burdensome.

²⁰ Then he said to them, 'Whose head is this, and whose title?'

²¹ They answered, 'The emperor's.' Then he said to them, 'Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.' ²² When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

Matthew 22:20-22

Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's. Jesus was not establishing a political kingdom in opposition to Cæsar, so his followers should pay taxes and obey civil laws. The coin was Cæsar's and should be returned to him: <<*For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, busy with this very thing. Pay to all what is due to them – taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honour to whom honour is due*>> (Romans 13:6-7), <<*For the Lord's sake accept the authority of every human institution, whether of the emperor as supreme, or of governors, as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right*>> (1 Peter 2:13-14).

Many Jews opposed the carrying or displaying of Cæsar's image on banners in the city of Jerusalem to the point of being arrested and even killed, yet they carried his image on their coins. Jesus was perhaps alluding to them making a decision between money and God: <<*No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth*>> (Matthew 6:24).

And to God the things that are God's. All worship should go to God alone and the whole being is his anyway. There are matters that belong to the realm of civil government, and there are other matters that belong to God's realm. Jesus does not here specify which matters belong in which realm, but many Christian ethicists today teach that, in general, civil government should allow freedom in matters of religious doctrine, worship, and beliefs about God, and the church should not attempt to use the power of government to enforce allegiance to any specific religious viewpoint.

All forms of the Christian church throughout the world today support some kind of separation between matters of church and matters of state. By contrast, totalitarian governments usually try to suppress the church and subsume everything under the realm of the state. And some extreme Islamic movements have tried to abolish independent civil government and subsume everything under the control of Islamic religious leaders. Historically, when the church and

state have become too closely aligned, the result most often has been the compromise of the church or if not its influence then its values at least.

When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away, and yet some would later lie about what Jesus had said in a further attempt, this time successful, to have him found guilty: <<***They began to accuse him, saying, ‘We found this man perverting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king’***>> (Luke 23:2).

XII.d.vi Matthew 22:23-33 - The Question about the Resurrection

In order to trap Jesus in his own theology, a group of Sadducees, the most influential of all the religious groups, who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, came to Jesus with a well crafted story about a woman who was widowed seven times, all her husbands were brothers, asking whose wife she would be at the resurrection of the dead. Jesus response was to show them that they neither understood the Scriptures nor the awesome power of God.

²³ The same day some Sadducees came to him, saying there is no resurrection; and they asked him a question, saying,

Matthew 22:23

The same day. It was still Tuesday of Passion week, which was one of Jesus’ last teaching opportunities; opposition was growing, becoming more intense. It was another hour of temptation for Jesus: <<***Because you have kept my word of patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth***>> (Revelation 3:10).

The Sadducees were a small group who derived their authority from the activities of the temple. They were removed from the common people by aristocratic and priestly influence as well as by their cooperation with Rome’s rule. They did not view God as the Almighty source of power behind all things, did not believe in the spiritual realm including the existence of angels or demons, and they did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. They formed the majority group in the ruling council, the Sanhedrin, and the High Priest Caiaphas was a Sadducee. Josephus wrote: ‘The Sadducees have their support only among the rich, and the people do not follow them, while the Pharisees have the people for their ally’. Jewish Antiquities 13.298.

The Sadducees drew mainly or exclusively on the Pentateuch for doctrine, so they did not believe in the resurrection which is not directly referenced. It is a theme developed more clearly in later OT books: <<***Your dead shall live, their corpses shall rise. O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a radiant dew, and the earth will give birth to those long dead***>> (Isaiah 26:19), and: <<***Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt***>> (Daniel 12:2).

They asked him a question in order to trap him theologically. They assumed that those who believe in a resurrection life think it is like the present life, suggesting that a woman who has been married more than once will be found guilty of incest

or adultery after the resurrection. They hope hereby to show that the idea of resurrection is really absurd.

²⁴ ‘Teacher, Moses said, “If a man dies childless, his brother shall marry the widow, and raise up children for his brother.”

Matthew 22:24

Moses said. The Sadducees cite the OT law of what is later called ‘levirate marriage’, taken from the Latin *levir* which means brother-in-law, whereby the surviving brother of a childless, deceased man was obligated to marry his sister-in-law in order to provide for her needs and to preserve the deceased brother’s family line: <<*When brothers reside together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband’s brother shall go in to her, taking her in marriage, and performing the duty of a husband’s brother to her, and the firstborn whom she bears shall succeed to the name of the deceased brother, so that his name may not be blotted out of Israel*>> (Deuteronomy 25:5-6). An example of this was seen long before the law was given: <<*Then Judah said to Onan, ‘Go in to your brother’s wife and perform the duty of a brother-in-law to her; raise up offspring for your brother’*>> (Genesis 38:8), then after they had received the law with Boaz marrying Ruth, although a closer relative should have done so: <<*Then Boaz said, ‘The day you acquire the field from the hand of Naomi, you are also acquiring Ruth the Moabite, the widow of the dead man, to maintain the dead man’s name on his inheritance’*>> (Ruth 4:5).

²⁵ Now there were seven brothers among us; the first married, and died childless, leaving the widow to his brother. ²⁶ The second did the same, so also the third, down to the seventh. ²⁷ Last of all, the woman herself died. ²⁸ In the resurrection, then, whose wife of the seven will she be? For all of them had married her.’

Matthew 22:25-28

Now there were seven brothers among us. The Sadducees borrowed the story line of a woman with seven husbands from the popular Jewish folktale in Tobit 3:8; they wanted to illustrate the impossible dilemmas they believe the doctrine of resurrection creates.

Down to the seventh. This may well have been a mythical story but it does show how that which is built up by man is so dependent of God’s grace and mercy if it is to survive and flourish: <<*Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain. Unless the Lord guards the city, the guard keeps watch in vain*>> (Psalm 127:1).

Whose wife of the seven will she be? Should it be the first; should it be the last? Should it be the one she loved the most or the one she was married to longest? Since there is no clear resolution to this conundrum, the Sadducees conclude there can be no resurrection; otherwise God would have made provision for it in the law.

²⁹ Jesus answered them, ‘You are wrong, because you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God. ³⁰ For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.

Matthew 22:29-30

The Sadducees are making two errors:

1. They do not know the Scriptures well enough to know that Scripture teaches the reality of the resurrection.
2. They do not know the power of God to create a much more wonderful world than anyone can now imagine.

There are still those today who oppose the idea of cremation after death as they fear it would leave no human body for God to resurrect. One commentator has even suggested that God has kept track of all the carbon atoms and other elements released during cremation in order to resurrect the original body. Such ideas show the limits of human understanding and just how badly we underestimate the true power of God or the fact that nothing is impossible for him. No human knows what a resurrection body will really be like. They just need to trust God that it will be as glorious as his Word states and know that it will be everlasting.

They neither marry nor are given in marriage implies that the present institution of marriage will not continue in heaven. Since there is no death in heaven: *<<he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away>>* (Revelation 21:4). Therefore, there will be no need for future births to replace the dead, removing one of the primary reasons for marriage.

But are like angels in heaven means living without an exclusive lifelong marriage commitment to one person. This teaching might at first seem discouraging to married couples who are deeply in love with each other in this life. It is surely enough for people to know their loved ones are in heaven: *<<I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven>>* (Matthew 8:11), and: *<<Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, ‘Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah’ – not knowing what he said>>* (Luke 9:30-33), and the joy and love of close relationships in heaven will be more rather than less than it is here on earth.

Jesus’ reference to the power of God suggests that God is able to establish relationships of even deeper friendship, joy, and love in the life to come. God has not revealed anything more about this, although Scripture does indicate that the eternal glories awaiting the redeemed will be more splendid than anyone can begin to ask, think, imagine or comprehend: *<<But, as it is written, ‘What no*

eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him’>> (1 Corinthians 2:9), and: <<Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine>> (Ephesians 3:20).

³¹ And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God, ³² “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”? He is God not of the dead, but of the living.’ ³³ And when the crowd heard it, they were astounded at his teaching.

Matthew 22:31-33

I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. The present tense in the quotation from Exodus 3:6 logically implies that when God spoke these words to Moses, God was still in covenant relationship with the patriarchs, even though they had been dead for centuries. If the Pentateuch thus implies that the patriarchs are still alive, and if the rest of the OT points to the resurrection, as it does, then the Sadducees should recognise God’s power to raise the patriarchs and all of God’s people to enjoy his eternal covenant in a life beyond this one.

XII.d.vii Matthew 22:34-40 - The Greatest Commandment

Although the Jews accepted that some laws were of greater importance than others, and rabbis had to distinguish between light and heavy commandments in practice, to actually claim there was one law above all may have placed a teacher in a position of being accused of denigrating the other laws. Therefore, a Pharisaic lawyer came to trap Jesus in this way.

Testing scholars with riddles and God’s vindication of the divine wisdom given to his servant is at least as old as King Solomon: <<*When the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon, (fame due to the name of the Lord), she came to test him with hard questions*>> (1 Kings 10:1). In this context, however, the intent was more malicious, and was related to that of the supreme tempter.

³⁴ When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, ³⁵ and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him.

Matthew 22:34-35

He had silenced the Sadducees. Jesus’ argument over the resurrection was so conclusive that these well educated men had no counter argument to make. Yet they were so entrenched in their tradition that they could not bring themselves to accept the reality of the argument given by Jesus. Thus their own resurrection would not be to glory.

A lawyer is an expert in the law; this is another expression for the scribes of the Pharisees: <<*When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax-collectors, they said to his disciples, ‘Why does he eat with tax-collectors and sinners?’>> (Mark 2:16), and: <<Then a great clamour arose,*

and certain scribes of the Pharisees' group stood up and contended, 'We find nothing wrong with this man. What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?''>> (Acts 23:9).

Some commentators do differentiate between the groups believing the scribes to be responsible for theological interpretation of Scripture and the lawyers for the practical application of the law.

³⁶ 'Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?'

Matthew 22:36

Which commandment in the law is the greatest? The rabbis engaged in an ongoing debate to determine which commandments were 'light' and which were 'weighty' <<Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practised without neglecting the others>> (Matthew 23:23). Refer also to comments made on Matthew 5:19.

The law refers here to the entire OT and not just the Law of Moses.

³⁷ He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." ³⁸ This is the greatest and first commandment.

Matthew 22:37-38

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This command from Deuteronomy 6:5, the *Shema*, was repeated twice daily by faithful Jews and encapsulates the idea of total devotion to God and includes the duty to obey the rest of God's commandments: <<Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfil. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven>> (Matthew 5:17-20).

To love the Lord your God involves having faith in him and also delighting in him above all else. All the Synoptic Gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke, include the words heart, i.e. emotions, will and deepest convictions; soul, i.e. the immaterial part of a person's being; and mind, i.e. reason.

Mind is lacking in Deuteronomy 6:5 <<You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might>>. Matthew alone lacks the term strength, i.e. how a person uses the abilities and powers that one has as an indication of the total devotion of one's entire being that is required.

This is the greatest and first commandment. The command in essence is a simple one. There is only one creator God and each person is to love him, even more than they might care for themselves or their loved ones; for God is above all. Next, each person is to love all others as they would love themselves, for everyone was created in the image of God and are therefore of equal nature to each other, and yet that is so rarely achieved: <<*Do we not all have one Father? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our ancestors by being unfaithful to one another?*>> (Malachi 2:10).

³⁹ And a second is like it: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.”

Matthew 22:39

You shall love your neighbour as yourself is taken from: <<*You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the Lord*>> (Leviticus 19:18). Love signifies a concrete responsibility to seek the greatest good of one’s neighbours, both Jew and Gentile: <<*The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God*>> (Leviticus 19:34).

Love is seen as the essence of God, for: <<*Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love*>> (1 John 4:8). Love is a commandment of Jesus: <<*I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another*>> (John 13:34-35), and was picked up by Paul: <<*And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love*>> (1 Corinthians 13:13), and: <<*But the aim of such instruction is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith*>> (1 Timothy 1:5).

⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.’

Matthew 22:40

The Kingdom life that Jesus initiated, summarised in these two commandments, fulfils the deepest longings of human beings created in the image of God to display his glory.

The law and the prophets are a recurrent theme in the NT: <<*In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets*>> (Matthew 7:12), <<*For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John came*>> (Matthew 11:13), and: <<*But now, irrespective of law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets*>> (Romans 3:21). They were at the heart of Jewish life.

It is from this teaching that the Christian ‘law of love’ is derived: <<*Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet’; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’*>>

Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law>> (Romans 13:8-10), <<For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself’>> (Galatians 5:14), <<You do well if you really fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself’>> (James 2:8), and: <<But now, dear lady, I ask you, not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but one we have had from the beginning, let us love one another>> (2 John 5).

XII.d.viii Matthew 22:41-46 - The Question about David’s Son

To the dismay of the leaders, but the delight of the gathered crowd, Jesus used the words of King David to show that the Messiah is both son and Lord of David, with the emphasis on the latter role. Jesus was becoming more emphatic in his messianic claims of divinity to aid understanding of who he really is.

⁴¹ Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this question: ⁴² ‘What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?’ They said to him, ‘The son of David.’ ⁴³ He said to them, ‘How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying,

⁴⁴ “The Lord said to my Lord,
‘Sit at my right hand,
until I put your enemies under your feet’”?

⁴⁵ If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?’ ⁴⁶ No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

Matthew 22:41-46

Having dealt with malicious questions from his adversaries, Jesus now asked them, concerning the long-awaited Messiah, the Christ, whose son is he?

Their reply, the son of David, reflected the common understanding that the Messiah would be a royal descendant of David: <<*When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. When he commits iniquity, I will punish him with a rod such as mortals use, with blows inflicted by human beings*>> (2 Samuel 7:12-14), <<*I will establish your descendants for ever, and build your throne for all generations*>> (Psalm 89:4), <<*A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots*>> (Isaiah 11:1), <<*On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious*>> (Isaiah 11:10), and: <<*The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land*>> (Jeremiah 23:5).

Jesus then quoted from Psalm 110:1, one of the most important messianic texts in the OT and the one most quoted in the NT. The Pharisees would have recognised this psalm of David as a divinely inspired messianic prophecy. In the psalm, David said that the coming Messiah, i.e. David's son, will not be just a special human descended from David; he will be David's Lord, i.e. David by the Spirit calls him Lord.

Jesus, in his fully human state was David's son, i.e. a direct descendant. Jesus is also fully God and therefore David's Lord. He did not state that here specifically, although he would do so later on to John: <<*It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star*>> (Revelation 22:16).

Because the Pharisees acknowledged the messianic import of the psalm, they did not dare to ask Jesus any more questions. The fact that David's descendant Jesus would have a more prominent role and title than the ancestor David further indicates the uniqueness of the Messiah and the greater honour that is due him as the Son of God.

Matthew does not say how exalted a person Jesus was claiming to be in his use of Psalm 110:1; but the psalm itself may well imply the deity of the Messiah, i.e. that the Messiah is to be Yahweh incarnate: <<*And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth*>> (John 1:14).

Overall, the key issue from Psalm 110 is that there is no mention of the Messiah being the son of David; rather, the Messiah is here the Lord of David. Jesus affirmed the divine inspiration of the Psalm through the Holy Spirit. The Lord, Hebrew *Yahweh*, said to my Lord, i.e. he grants to David's Lord, Hebrew 'Adonay, an exclusive place of honour at his right hand and helps David's Lord overcome his enemies, that is, put your enemies under your feet. Jesus anticipated being exalted to the right hand of God, and thus he far transcends any expectation of a merely political, Davidic Messiah.

Ask him any more questions. This is quite a remarkable turn of events. The Jews, especially the religious leaders, prided themselves in their ability to debate especially difficult topics and were renowned for their mastery of language in such debates. For Jesus to have silenced them in this way would have astounded the ordinary people: <<*Look at the nations, and see! Be astonished! Be astounded! For a work is being done in your days that you would not believe if you were told*>> (Habakkuk 1:5), and: <<*Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching*>> (Matthew 7:28).