

God's patient graciousness and the beginning of His punitive justice.

4. By using the recognized authority of ancient Scripture against those opponents who questioned His personal authority, Jesus defended His own. That is, His story, even while not directly re-evoking Isaiah's, assumes as true the evidences of God's original creation of Israel's nation and religion. A true prophet must speak within the "prophetic context" of already well-authenticated divine revelations. (Cf. "How to Avoid Becoming a Pharisee" in my Vol. III, 375ff.) While Jesus does give a new twist to Isaiah's old parable, He does not contradict it. Rather, He extends it and grounds His own appearance in all that had preceded Him in the history of Jewish religion.

Jesus had already used a *householder* to represent God (20:1). There, as here, His purpose is to portray the goodness and patience of God toward self-righteous, highly privileged ingrates. Israel had forgotten that GOD OWNED THE VINEYARD. To appreciate the abundance of attentive effort God had expended upon the nation, note each specific step the vineyard's owner took to insure the success of his operation and guarantee fruit production. (Cf. Paul's list of Jewish distinctives: Rom. 3:2; 9:4f.) However, all these preparations produced the additional result of freeing the owner from blame in the event of controversy with the sharecroppers.

1. He *planted a vineyard* is tantamount to saying, "God created His people on earth, Israel." (Cf. Deut. 32:12-14; Ezek. 16:9-14; Isa. 27:2-6.)
  - a. And yet, since the *vineyard* is what is stripped from the unworthy tenants and given to others, it represents "the Kingdom of God" operative in Israel's national existence (21:43). It is that element that is common to both Jews and Christians, all that is involved in being God's private, personal, covenant people with the precious religious advantages and unique opportunities each is offered as a result of their election by God and because of His revelations to them.
  - b. Nevertheless, because the Kingdom of God must be subjectively realized in real people, if it is not to remain a purely theoretical idea on God's drawing board, Jesus is talking primarily about its historical actualization among the Jewish people. (See below on *husbandmen*.)

2. He *set a hedge around it* for its protection from being trampled or destroyed by stray animals (cf. Num. 22:24; S. of Sol. 2:15; Ps. 80:12f.; Isa. 5:5), not unlikely made of thorns (cf. Hos. 2:6) surrounding a stone wall (cf. Prov. 24:30f.). God had furnished every safeguard to assure Israel's national security. (Cf. Zech. 2:5; Isa. 4:5f.; 26:1; 60:18.) God had provided good laws, leaders and institutions to guarantee internal order and maintain Israel's separation from the paganizing influences of other nations (Num. 23:9; cf. Eph. 2:14).
3. He *dug a wine press in it*, i.e. carved out of natural rock a large vat-like hollow where fresh-picked clusters of grapes are stomped by workers. (Cf. Neh. 13:15; Isa. 16:8-10; 63:2f.; Jer. 25:30; 48:33; Lam. 1:15; Judg. 9:27.) because the winevat is the place where the true value and maturity of the vintage is expressed, allusion may be made here to God's provision to use the fruits of the nation: justice and righteousness, love, mercy and faithfulness. Not merely the altar of sacrifice in the temple is meant, but that service to God in every point in life where the strength and life-blood of God's people is poured out as an offering to Him.
4. He *built a tower*, probably a flat-topped farmhouse or farm building of any kind which could serve the double purpose of dwelling for the sharecroppers as well as a watchtower from which to guard the winery against theft or trespassing. (Cf. Job 27:18; Isa. 1:8.) Jerusalem with its temple was established in Israel as God's dwelling-place from which He could superintend and protect His vineyard. Its immediate care and control was in the hands of the priesthood and national leaders.
5. He *let it out to husbandmen*, i.e. farmers (*georgoi*), in this case "vinedressers" to cultivate and prune the grapevines, enriching the vines' production. (Cf. S. of Sol. 8:11f.; Isa. 7:23.) These were only tenant farmers, because the householder remains "owner of the vineyard" (v. 40) and merely *let it out to vinedressers* in exchange for "his part of the fruit" (v. 34; Mark 12:2; Luke 20:10) and because the sharecroppers later made their play to seize the only heir's inheritance to make it their own (v. 38). God did not leave Israel to its own devices, but established a clear chain of command for national leadership (Ezek. 34:2; Mal. 2:7). The *husbandmen* represent also the nation to the extent that it blindly followed its leaders (Jer. 5:31).

Maclaren (*P.H.C.*, XXIV, 521) preached that, although the Sanhedrin was doubtless the principle target of Jesus' story,

it merely reflected the national spirit. After all, who acquiesced to the influence of these leaders and conceded them freedom to rule? Further, if the share-croppers to be dispossessed are only the leaders of the nation, then those who replace them would naturally be only the leaders of the Christian church, a conclusion that would militate against the better view that both Jews and Gentiles, irrespective of their official ecclesiastical position, will be united in one new nation, a new Israel in the new theocracy.

6. Even the fact that he *went into another country* reveals that God intended to follow a "hands-off policy" with Israel, not constantly intervening in the everyday affairs of the nation, as if He were personally directing them (cf. Matt. 25:14f.; Luke 19:12). Rather, He chose to send prophets, agents through whom He would act. By so doing, He left Israel and its leaders relatively free to act, responding freely to His gracious love and blessing. Their choices, therefore, were their own. Historically, God had not communicated directly with Israel by speaking from heaven since the giving of the law during the birth of the nation. In fact, His establishing of the prophetic office grew out of that incident (Deut. 18:16f.).

### B. Mercy's Rights (21:34)

21:34 **The season of the fruits** would occur during the fifth vintage, since Mosaic legislation (Lev. 19:23ff.) forbade its use any sooner. In Palestine the big grape harvest usually occurs in late summer or early fall, although grapes in favored localities ripen also much earlier (*I.S.B.E.*, 3086b). Reasonably, the owner did not expect fruit nor demand payment before *the season of the fruits drew near*. This season does not refer to any definite period in Jewish history, because the very nature of the *fruits* involved required that Israel always be fruitful by sincere holiness and glad obedience, loving sacrifice and righteousness. (Study Mic. 6:8; Deut. 10:12-22; Ps. 40:6-8; 50:7-23; 51:16-19; 69:30f.; Isa. 1:11-17; Jer. 7:21ff.; Hos. 4:1; 6:6; Amos 5:21-24; I Sam. 15:22f.) If Jesus intends some specific deadline, He might mean that **EACH TIME** the vintage came round, the owner of the vineyard sent servants. The repeated missions of the servants is harmonious with this theory, in which case reference is made to the numerous, special missions of the prophets, special calls to repentance, new or particular guidance for Israel's moral development.

In Isaiah's parable, the owner "looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit . . . he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress" (Isa. 5:2, 7). Although in both Jesus' and Isaiah's parables the owner expected the good fruit for which the vineyard had been created, the reason he is frustrated differs only superficially. In fact, if Isaiah pictures his receiving bad grapes and Jesus implies he received none at all, the cause is essentially the same: the vineyard had become what the caretakers had made it (Isa. 3:14; 1:23). But God's concept of authority delegated to men requires that all superiors be responsible for creating the conditions in which their inferiors can succeed at the God-given tasks for which they were created. At every point the leadership of Israel is pictured as *husbandmen*: they have no inherent right or title to the nation. They are simply stewards under God, just caretakers, not lords. (Study Isa. 44:28; 56:10-12; Jer. 23:1-4; 6:3; 25:34-38; Ezek. 34; Mic. 5:4f.; Nah. 3:18; Zech. 10:3; 11:3-17.) Their acting the part of absolute owners accurately measures the depth and heinousness of their rebellion against God. So, the result is the same in both parables: the owner was not adequately repaid for his investment of time, effort and expense.

He rightly expected fruit, so *he sent his servants*, the last of whom was John the Baptist demanding the fruit of repentance and righteousness (Matt. 3:1-12). The various intervals between their missions are clearly indicated by Mark and Luke. This transparent reference to the prophets has apologetic significance, as Maclaren (*P.H.C.*, XXII, 504) shows. On a purely naturalistic basis there is no explaining why a people, so uniformly hostile towards the prophets, should have had prophets in almost continuous succession in every part of their long history. Courageous spokesmen such as these could not have been produced by this people nor by their sociological habitat, as their persecution and death at the hands of these very people proved. There can be no philosophy of Hebrew religion to account for this phenomenon, except Jesus' word: *he sent his servants*.

### C. Mercy Outraged (21:35)

**21:35 And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another.** Perhaps they took this gentleman for just another absentee landlord too occupied with pursuits elsewhere to be seriously concerned with the affairs of the vineyard.

God too is treated with the same nonchalance, as a Supreme Being "out there somewhere," too busy with cosmic business to disturb Himself greatly about what occurs on this infinitesimal speck of dust lost in space, leaving its occupants free to act in any way their caprice suggests.

These sharecroppers were motivated to commit these bloody atrocities by the desire to keep all the vineyard's production and advantages for themselves. They apparently had no intention of ever paying the owner his part, that practical purpose for which the vineyard had originally been created and committed to their keeping. In the hands of the spiritual leaders of the nation had been placed a priceless heritage: a nation specially chosen by God and outfitted with excellent legislation, and destined to bring God praise through loving service. And yet these moral masters of Israel yielded to the upper-class temptation to consider only their private privileges and to trifle with duty. They commonly ignored the true, final purpose of Israel's high vocation and made little effort to prepare the nation to achieve it. They were habitually preoccupied with feathering their own nest, augmenting their own prestige and influence and their ability to manipulate others. No wonder the prophets, who goaded them to personal repentance and social justice, were considered trouble-makers, tolerated where possible or ruthlessly eliminated.

Although the nation reacted to God and His messengers in a manner consonant with its training by the leaders, the brutality characteristic of the treatment accorded God's prophets came from the leadership, especially from the sacerdotal aristocracy that claimed a monopoly on God's flock. (Study Matt. 5:12; Jer. 20:1f.; 26:11, 20-23; 37:15; Matt. 23:29-37 and parallels; Luke 13:33f.; I Thess. 2:15.)

*Is killed another and stoned another* a needless redundancy?

1. No, because not all stoning succeed in killing the victim. (Cf. Acts 14:19f.; II Cor. 11:25.)
2. No, by *killed* Jesus may have meant "assassinated"; by *stoned*, judicially murdered. (Cf. II Chron. 24:20f.)
3. No, by *killed* Jesus may mean "with a sword" (cf. I Kings 19:10) or some other weapon; by *stoned* He indicates the means in the verb.

Here is further explanation why the righteous suffer apparently endless torment by the wicked: it is in God's mercifully patient planning

to furnish the wicked apparently endless opportunities to repent before the final crisis.

#### D. Increased Guilt Vs. Incredible Patience (21:36)

21:36 **Again, he sent other servants more than the first.** (Jer. 25:4; 44:4-6; I Kings 22:24-28; II Kings 6:31; II Chron. 36:15f.; Neh. 9:26-34; Acts 7:51f.) Because each successive generation of Jewish leadership similarly outraged God's messengers, Jesus is justified in picturing the same group of sharecroppers as uniformly hostile. (See Jesus' argumentation in Matt. 23:29-32.) But a long-suffering God was patiently pleading with Israel to repent. God had no intention to indulge the nation's irresponsibility. His requirements were just, so they must meet them. Rather than close an eye to their slackness, their ignoring contracts, their claiming what belonged to Him and shedding innocent blood so as to retain their control, He constantly reminded them of a day of reckoning. They imagined they were getting away with their reprehensible behavior. But they had no sooner assassinated one of the prophets than another stood before them to warn that Israel would be answerable to the living God for it. Judgment would come: let the wicked forsake his way!

*ff* Incredibly, God sent prophet after prophet, but the wicked ran Elijah out of the country. One story has it that they sawed Isaiah in two. They dropped Jeremiah down into a muddy cistern. They murdered Zechariah in the temple near the altar. They chopped off the head of John the Baptist. Unquestionably, the patience shown by the parabolic landowner is practically unequalled in all human history. (If some of us had been God, we would have finished those wicked men the day they laid bloody hands on any one of these great and holy men!) So, in order to picture the Almighty's unbelievable long-suffering toward Israel, Jesus had to make up an incredible story to do it!

#### E. Mercy Resolute (21:37)

21:37 **But afterward** emphasizes the owner's last great attempt to bring the tenant farmers around to reason. This same point is vividly expressed by Luke's version: "Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do?' because it depicts the final decision as the well-pondered, deliberate choice of the owner. Mark brings this into relief

by noting: "He had *still* one other, a beloved son; *finally* he sent him. . . ." This all serves to underscore the finality of Jesus' revelation of the Father who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all (Heb. 1:1ff.; Rom. 8:32). *He sent unto them his son*, not merely one more in a long line of faithful servants (Heb. 3:1-6; 1:1f.).

1. The readers of this Gospel would instantly recognize in Jesus Himself the allusion intended by "the beloved son" of the vineyard's owner, as the same language is used both at Jesus' baptism (Matt. 3:17 = Mark 1:11 = Luke 3:22) and at His transfiguration (Matt. 17:5 = Mark 9:7).
2. For those who remember Jesus' claims to unique Sonship and can see God's prophets pictured in the owner's servants, Jesus is setting Himself above all of God's greatest spokesmen. He is claiming in the name of His Father the authority and title of Owner of everything in God's Kingdom! What an answer to the clergy's opening challenge to His authority! If they could but see it, they now have their answer: He is God's Son, empowered with all the authority of the Almighty.
3. And yet what better way could God plead with Israel's administrators than by picturing Himself as this father whose loving mercy reached an unbeatable high, when he placed his own beloved son at those who had brutalized his other agents?

The son stood in the place of the father, represented his authority and rights of ownership like no lesser servant could do. It should have been unthinkable not to give him the honor due his position (John 5:23). This touching but climactic move should have brought the vineyard's administrators back to their senses.

**They will reverence my son**, at first glance, would appear to be a gross blunder on the part of any human owner who had already lost many good men to the malice of his sharecroppers. He seemingly foresees only these two possible reactions: either they would actually submit to the Son's authority and produce the goods, or, if not personally submitting, they might at least hesitate to abuse him as they had the previous servants. But how could anyone in his right mind expect preferential treatment from such proven criminals? Some would conclude that, because this detail seems to deny the foreknowledge of God, we must not interpret it at all, leaving it as merely part of the vivid scenery of the story, picturing what a human landowner would do. But what landowner in real life would have

shown such resolute mercy? It just may be that this fact, precisely because it is so strikingly **UNLIKE** "normal" human conduct, is intended to draw attention to itself. In fact, Jesus is not talking about what men normally do, but about what **GOD** does. Parabolically, He pictures the history of God's dealings with an ungrateful people. **They will reverence my son**, then, expresses the last, longing hope of a longsuffering God. God is not ignorant of the final results of His plan to redeem man, yet He can still sincerely hope that everyone come to repentance toward Christ who would die for everyone, whether many of them appreciate it or not (II Peter 3:9; I Tim. 2:4; Rom. 11:32).

#### F. Mercy Mistaken for Weakness (21:38)

21:38 **But the husbandmen, when they saw the son, said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and take his inheritance.** Because the *heir* would be the future owner, the present owner would have no one to whom to confer the vineyard as an *inheritance*. So the husbandmen assume that to kill the heir would open the way for the owner to consider simply abandoning to them that vineyard which had caused him so much grief. Their supposition is grossly unfounded for these reasons:

1. They suppose that the owner has no one else to whom to give the inheritance, no brother, no distant, long-lost kinsman whom he should prefer over them. *This is the heir*: they are confident there is no other who could arise to vindicate the son's death or question their seizure of the inheritance. *The heir* is therefore the owner's "only begotten son." Again, Jesus' uniqueness and finality receives emphasis in His teaching.
2. They suppose the owner cannot see through their duplicity or cannot know of their treachery. If only one of his servants returned to the owner bearing news of the treatment he suffered from them, they should have had every reason to fear and none for the confident talk they show here.
3. If they supposed they could merely *take his inheritance* by force, would they not have to reckon with the owner himself? Do they presume to think that HE could ignore that final affront, however patient he had shown himself previously with regard to his servants? Would he, too, simply and meekly lie down and die without ever once acting against them? They mistake his incredible patience for ineptness and indifference.



4. They suppose that if the present owner died heirless, their remaining in possession of the vineyard would guarantee their permanent ownership. "Possession is 9/10 of the law!"
5. They not unlikely suppose that the vineyard had already been deeded to the heir long before the father's death (cf. Luke 15:12). Since the owner had not appeared in a long time, perhaps he was dead too!

**Come let us kill him and take his inheritance.** For citizens of western countries endowed with excellent laws, good court systems and law enforcement, that anyone should dream by such monstrous rapacity to grab this choice real estate, would appear unthinkable. But this harsh reality is the status quo for any country plagued by bad rulers, greedy judges, apathetic citizenry and ineffective law enforcement. **Come let us kill him** is the decision already taken by the Sanhedrin (John 11:47-53, 57). Even if this murderous intent had not been widely advertised, it was indisputably an "open secret." (Cf. John 5:18; 7:1, 19, 25; 10:31-33.) His death is to be judicial murder, not the result of enflamed passions run amok. **His inheritance** is the Kingdom of God (see on "vineyard," v. 33, 43). By killing God's Son, the theologians and clergy hoped to make permanent their possession and control of God's Kingdom with its attendant privileges. Ironically, *the inheritance* already belonged to them, but by murdering God's Son, they lost it forever! They could have had a heavenly inheritance, had they but properly honored the Son (John 5:23). But the deadly influence of this earth's power, wealth and show appeared far more real and desirable. So they forfeited God's wealth by haughtily disdaining and savagely despising God's last, best offer, His Son. Whereas the Sanhedrists themselves would never have admitted Jesus were the true *heir*, hence, Son of God, because they denied His claims, they certainly plotted to silence Him, precisely because they saw Him as a prime menace to their political acquisitions (John 11:47-53).

Worse, they were so engrossed in a national religious system of externals that, when Jesus came insisting on a religion of the heart potentially open to every man willing to pay this price, they correctly understood that, if He won, they lost. Their stupidity lay in supposing that they could remain in power forever over God's people, even after the Mosaic system found its perfection and consequent end in the Messiah and His rule. Somehow, this was an option they had never considered. Sadly, they had no taste for what they could not control, nor for any system in which they commanded no special

privileges. Jesus menaced their monopoly on God. In this very parable He preached a faith for all men (v. 43) and in so doing, strips them of that national monopoly on which their religious, political and economic power was based.

One can be an enemy of God, while being in charge of the very heritage of God! (Cf. Ezek. 34:1-10; Zech. 11:3-17.) Their murderous conspiracy in the name of God (cf. John 16:1ff.) was animated, in the final analysis, by hatred for God (John 15:23). But the sin of the crucifixion began by refusal to pay God what they owed Him, it was cultivated by abusing His prophets and was matured in the murder of His Son.

Are the commentaries right in deciding that Jesus hereby implies that the rulers really knew His true nature and official dignity? Does their condemnation lie in the fact that, though they knew Him to be the Christ, they crucified Him anyway?

1. They may have only had a haunting suspicion that He merited more courteous treatment than they were giving Him, but simply would not let this doubt take root and blossom into fuller recognition of Him as God's Son. To what extent these hidden misgivings existed and persisted, creating inner self-contradictions, none but God knows.
2. But is it credible that these representatives of God CONSCIOUSLY fought against God? While resisting evidence that Jesus truly came from God, they still maintained their facade of shallow excuses they considered to be wisdom and sound policy.
3. To what extent did Nicodemus speak for himself or for his colleagues in the Sanhedrin (John 3:2, "we know")? Undoubtedly, as on every other issue, that council was divided, so a latent consciousness of Jesus' true identity as *the heir of God* may have nagged the conscience of some, but not necessarily all.

### G. Mercy Rejected (21:39)

**21:39 And they took him, and cast him forth out of the vineyard, and killed him.** Commentators, noting that Mark reverses the order: "They took him and killed him and cast him out of the vineyard," whereas Matthew and Luke place the killing outside the vineyard, conclude that the latter two have rewritten Jesus' original version of the story (Mark's) to suit their editorial needs. Accordingly, Luke, because of his "theology of Jerusalem," and Matthew, because he

remembered where the crucifixion actually occurred, supposedly re-arranged Jesus' words. To this two answers are possible:

1. This detail has no significance beyond the general fact that the heir was murdered. Whether in or out of the vineyard is immaterial.
2. Hendriksen (*Matthew*, 784, note 742) suggested a better treatment of Mark's "reversed" order, by arguing that Matthew and Luke provide the proper historical sequence, whereas the second Gospel editorializes to show the climax: "They killed him, and this in the most shameful manner, casting him out of the vineyard as an accursed one." He rightly affirms that the difference of treatment could not easily have been produced by posterior theological treatment, because each Gospel writer testifies to the Lord's crucifixion on Calvary outside the Jerusalem city wall. (Matt. 27:31ff.; = Mark 15:20ff.; = Luke 23:26ff.)

If the authorities have been following Jesus' story up to this point, applying it to Israel and its leadership, they can discern His implication that God would send His Son. They could also remember Jesus' claims to be that Son (cf. John 5:17f.; 10:22-39). In effect, Jesus' illustration serves notice to the clergy that He understands their conspiracy to eliminate Him. Even while addressing the very men whose vote in the Hebrew Senate would seal His death warrant, He strangely declines any interest in resisting them to save Himself. Rather, He presents the case before the crowds whose common sense pronounces the condemnation of the Passover plotters. No pathetic fool or hesitant martyr Jesus! He fully understood what He was getting into when He deliberately walked into the clutches of these lawyers. Better than anyone else, He sensed that there could be only one conclusion to His final showdown in the final inquisition: DEATH.

**They cast him forth out of the vineyard and killed him** is said to prove that *the vineyard* could not be Israel, since this would mean that Jesus was pictured as being crucified outside Israel. However, the picture is theologically correct, since, when Israel in the Old Testament was encamped together, to slay someone or something "outside the camp" was equal to slaying them "outside of Israel." This is the sense of Paul's language in Hebrews 13:12 "outside the gate" and Hebrews 13:13 "outside the camp" where the two phrases are rendered practically equivalent. If *the vineyard* stands for "the Kingdom" (v. 43), Jesus' rejection and His crucifixion as a common criminal is in line

with the clergy's authorized view of Israel and the Kingdom. So, from their point of view, He should have been excommunicated from Israel and the Kingdom.

If it be objected that the behavior affirmed of the vinedressers is highly improbable or contrary to all probability, is it any less natural or more unreasonable than the unbelief it is intended to depict?

#### H. Mercy Finally Ended (21:40)

**21:40 When therefore the lord of the vineyard shall come, what will he do unto those husbandmen?** In Isaiah's parable, too, God called Israel to judge whether the vineyard owner's efforts were adequately compensated by the results obtained therefrom (Isa. 5:3f.). But Jesus' emphasis is not now on the merciful provision for the vineyard's successful production, as in Isaiah. He assumes that **ANYONE COULD KNOW** that *the lord of the vineyard* must do something about *the husbandmen*. There can be no question whether he should, because common justice would require that he act decisively in this deteriorated situation. And when this moment of truth occurs, he who comes will not be another servant, but *the lord of the vineyard*. (Cf. 20:8 where the same high title is used.) The only question for His audience is *what will he do?* Now the erudite scholars of the nation are under double pressure both from the battering of Jesus' questions and logic as well as from the common judgment of ordinary people. They had avoided Jesus' first question, claiming not to be able to return an answer (21:27). They could not continue to affirm: "We do not know."

As in 21:31, so also here is another situation where the listeners unconsciously indict themselves by giving their verdict on the conduct of a story's characters. (Cf. I Kings 20:39ff.; II Sam. 12:1ff.; Isa. 5:3.) With quiet mastery the Lord drew them into judgment and led them unwittingly to confess their guilt and state their punishment by an angry God. Man's own sense of justice amply establishes the rightness of God's procedure and sentence. It is one of the ironies of our mind that we can easily and accurately foresee the horrible end of others' maliciousness, without, at the same time, discerning the terrible punishment deserved by our own identical sins.

If the leadership followed Jesus' story closely up to this point, as it parallels Isaiah's famous song, they could begin to feel the smashing

impact of this question. However, it is also true that precise identification of every element in His illustration may have been much easier in retrospect than at the moment of His punch-line question.

### I. Mercy Offered to Others (21:41)

21:41 **They say unto him:** just who answered is not clear, whether crowd or leaders. (Cf. Luke 20:9.) Mark and Luke bypass Jesus' waiting for an answer and quote these words at His own. In fact, the Lord may have solemnly repeated their words, syllable, for maximum moral and emotional impact on the leaders. Even if they foresaw His point, there was no escape, because, unless they were to be deliberately capricious and risk losing further credibility with the crowds, they must now answer according to justice in the vain hope that Jesus' application would not damage their cause further. Either way, by a brilliant story He had led them personally to declare that conclusion to which He wanted them to arrive: their own self-condemnation.

**He will miserably destroy those miserable men, and let out the vineyard unto other husbandmen, who shall render him the fruits in their seasons.** Conscious or not, their sentence not only damns themselves, but becomes a completely unintended, but true, prophecy of the wrath of God rained upon Jerusalem, a prediction of the beginning of Gentile Christianity and of the satisfying effectiveness of the church of Christ. For all their pretended right to rule Israel, these sham overlords stood weaponless before a justly angry God whose infinite patience had guaranteed them every fair opportunity for self-condemnation and atonement. In fact, the very multiplicity of their opportunities to know and do better rendered absolute the certainty of this death sentence they pronounce. (Cf. Luke 12:47f.) None can complain that he was not provided sufficient motive or occasion for repentance. In fact, their innate sense of justice, evident in the tone of certainty with which they pronounce judgment, compels them to confess their verdict of punishment perfectly just.

Because Jesus accepted this answer, we learn that the coming of the **Lord of the vineyard** would mean the destruction of the wicked tenants. His coming would also signal the beginning of a new lease on the vineyard by other husbandmen. This parable does not picture the end of the world, because it refers to a striking turning point in the affairs of the vineyard, hence the (then) future affairs of the Kingdom the vineyard represents. If so, then, we must search in the

history of Israel for that tragic turning point in the affairs of the Jewish people when their unique possession of the oracles of God and their unique place as the people of God came to an abrupt, horrible end. It must also be a period of history when it becomes abundantly clear that another group of people has inherited that responsibility that had belonged to the Jews, i.e. the task of representing and revealing God to the world, the responsibility of being a people for God in the world. (Cf. fuller notes on "The Coming of the Son of Man" in my Vol. II, pp. 439-441.)

**He will . . . let out the vineyard unto other husbandmen, who shall render him the fruits.** Barclay (*Matthew*, II, 291) notes eloquently that

God's sternest judgment is when He takes out of our hands the task which He meant us to do. A man has sunk to his lowest level when he has become useless to God.

Gentile Christianity, however, has now become a distinct possibility, if Jesus pursues this to its logical conclusion. (See special study at the end of this volume: "The Participation of Gentiles in the Messianic Kingdom.) Even if each arrives thereat by slightly differing routes, Jesus' point is essentially the same as Isaiah's: those unique privileges enjoyed by Israel pre-eminently above all other people, God would strip from them, leaving Israel at the level of their neighbors, the Gentiles (Isa. 5:5f.).

### J. Mercy's Victory (21:42)

To the shocked listeners, stunned by the inevitable but equally inconceivable conclusion (v. 41), Jesus now addresses Himself directly, looking them square in the eye (Luke 20:17). Was it a look of compassion and grief at their stupidity? Or was He searching for some evidence that they were softening? Or was He simply facing them down? Now they must have not only the inexorable logic of their own righteous sentence just pronounced by themselves, but also the Biblical justification of its rightness. *Did you never read in the Scriptures?* Jesus intends to demonstrate not only that the nation's chiefs were guilty of obstinacy toward God by turning a deaf ear to John the Baptist, but also that they were inexplicably insensitive to the very Bible of which they were the official expositors and which they claimed to protect by opposing Him.

Why, however, did Jesus quote Psalm 118:22f. as support? Any or all of the following suggestions may explain His intention. (Study how Peter made use of this same Psalm before the gathered council of Israel, Acts 4:11, and in his own writing, I Peter 2:7.)

1. He used this Psalm because it was fresh in people's mind, since the crowds had sung its "Hosannas" in His honor just two days before. (21:9 = Mark 11:9f.; Matt. 21:15.) Further, this Psalm's cryptic passage about the "Rejected Cornerstone" required an explanation that pointed out its fulfillment. In fact, the nation's leadership's proud refusal of God's Anointed and the common people's praise for Him is strikingly described in five CONSECUTIVE verses (Ps. 118:22-26).
2. Jesus cited this Psalm because it emphasizes once again God's flair for utilizing despised, unimpressive instruments to produce the most marvelous results. (See notes on 21:16.) Is Jesus despicable and unimpressive in the hierarchy's judgment? And yet can anyone do the miracles He does, unless God be with Him? Is His message spectacularly unmilitaristic and unsupportive of nationalistic Zealotism? Is His love for children, social outcasts and others without prestige in the social pyramid reminiscent of God's tenderness toward them? Are there ANY Messianic prophecies that point to this kind of Christ, even if other predictions seem to justify militaristic or materialistic expectations? If so, reconsider His claims!
3. He cited this Psalm to answer whatever mental reservations anyone entertained about the unquestionable rightness of the punitive justice meted out upon the vineyard's former caretakers. His citation completely refutes the astonished "May it never happen!" of those who considered it inconceivable (Luke 20:16). The Psalm endorsed the just sentence handed down by Jesus' listeners.
4. He cited this Psalm to show that God had known all along about Messiah's rejection by Israel's rabbinate, and that human blindness and perversity could not sidetrack God's program. Rather, by citing it, Jesus furnished a basis for unshaken confidence in Him even at the critical hours of His passion, since God's Word had foretold it and Jesus proved He personally foresaw and approved it. His suffering would be no accidental martyrdom, but a deliberate act carefully orchestrated by God.
5. He cited this Psalm, because, if the situation was as He described it, they had no suitable alternative interpretation of its words

(Luke 20:17). "What then is this that is written?" He could and must say.

6. He cited this Psalm in order to change the figure of the vineyard and the murdered son of the owner, because this figure does not tell the whole story. Admittedly, He might have narrated the son's resurrection, but it would have perhaps seemed to do violence to the story. However, a "Rejected Cornerstone" can be exalted to a glorious position. So, in essence, Jesus desired to imply the permanent victory of the slain son. In fact, how could *the stone which the builders rejected* (the slain son) *be made head of the corner*, if its function in the divine plan could somehow be thwarted by the permanent defeat of death? So, resurrection is implied.

Although this Psalm changes the figure from the responsible care of a vineyard to the constructing of a building, the central thought is the same: those responsible for the leadership of Israel would reject God's Messiah. (Paul, too, used both metaphors together: I Cor. 3:9.) Further, the Psalm has the added advantage of being parabolic:

1. *The stone . . . rejected* is the suffering Servant of Jahweh, the Messiah. Even if the Psalm's early singers could not discern all this, meditation on its meaning should have caused them to reflect on their sensitivity to ANYTHING God would do that would be missed or rejected through dullness, insensitivity or neglect. They had better have unassailable reasons for refusing anything or anyone claiming to be sent by God! They might commit the unpardonable mistake of rejecting the Stone laid by the Lord! *The stone rejected* finds its parallel in the rejected Son.
2. *The builders* are Israel's leaders, responsible to build up God's true Temple, God's Kingdom. Their rejecting the cornerstone implies that they were ignoring the architect's masterplan. Otherwise, would they not have seen its proper place in the blueprint? Consequently, the Psalmist foresaw that Israel's administrators would be attempting to build God's Kingdom according to their own concepts which had no place for that one odd-shaped stone, so they rejected it. The construction crew in this second figure is as unskilled as the tenants were short-sighted and wicked in that, even though the constructors claim to know how to build, they are nonetheless unable to discern the proper place for the most important Stone in this edifice! The hierarchy's blundering theories about how God's temple and Kingdom had to be, showed no place



for God's Son! These incompetents did not recognize the very Stone essential to their construction when they were standing there looking at it! So far were they from God's plans (Matt. 15:3-9 = Mark 7:6-9, 13).

3. *The stone . . . was made the head of the corner* where two major parts of the construction came together and to which the cornerstone, or keystone, gives solidity and permanence. Thus, what had seemed an odd, badly-cut, untrued stone was discovered to be not only most properly fitted but unquestionably essential to give stability, permanence and glory to the structure, to the embarrassment of the "expert" builders who had so confidently excluded it. Its importance and place in the building was gloriously vindicated. In fact, a *cornerstone*, to be one, must possess characteristics different from those common stones used elsewhere. And should not the Messiah, the Keystone in God's edifice, be different from the run-of-the-mill, politico-military chiefs at the head of the world's typical governments (Eph. 2:19-22)? The total vindication of the Stone's importance by its elevation to a position of honor finds its parallel in the swift and complete vindication of the vineyard owner's claims by his eviction and execution of the share-croppers, and by their replacement by more trustworthy tenants. In both cases this surprising reversal brings shame to those who refused the owner's plans. Jesus' death and dismissal by the nation's governors did not get rid of Him. Ironically, it fashioned Him for the very function He was to serve in God's plan, as perfect sacrifice and self-sacrificing High Priest. (Cf. Heb. 4:14—5:10; 7:15-28; 9:11-28.)
4. *This was from the Lord* after all. Who else but the Lord God could turn human rejection into the very means to arrive at His stated goals?! The Almighty God will not be hindered by apparent defeat due to the dullness of the human instruments with which He has chosen to work. In fact, when God would later succeed in elevating the Rejected Stone to its proper place in the construction, it would prove that He was still on His throne. *This was from the Lord* God who "exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name" (Phil. 2:9f.).
5. *And it is marvelous in our eyes.* Here is the stupendous surprise and pleasure of the godly observers who exult over the unexpected, but nevertheless magnificent, final result of the Lord's course of action and workmanship, and they glorify Him for it. To the redeemed. . . .

- a. It is *marvelous* that the Father should have singled out His only Son to be crushed in the incarnation, or that He should give Him victory out of death, or that He should establish His Kingdom on this basis so as to include former pagans and Hebrews, or that He should bless us with marvelous progress throughout human society everywhere by world evangelism.
- b. It is *marvelous* that the manger-born, crucified Nazarene, whom men despised, should, in reality, turn out to be none other than the reflection of the Father's brilliance, the Owner of the worlds, the Lord of angels, Maker of men and adored by kings (cf. Isa. 52:14f.).
- c. It is *marvelous* that our Lord should choose such unlikely methods to reach His goals and that ONLY THESE achieve them! Who would have thought that, by ordinary, patient teaching of concepts foreign to people's habitual tendencies, political methods and social doctrines, He could have accomplished so much?
- d. Our marveling is no less great when, by contrast to God's glorious results, we must also marvel at human stupidity that would have so long rejected the Stone or that should continue to be so biased against its own highest good.

But the degree of marveling by the saints is the degree of shock and embarrassment these theologians must have felt when, at the final siege of Jerusalem, it became abundantly clear that God had abandoned them. It measures the depth of their ignorance of the will and ways of God and underscores their gross lack of qualification to represent Him. (Cf. Acts 13:27; I Cor. 2:6-8.)

### K. The Reading of the Sentence (21:43)

**21:43 Therefore I say unto you:** Jesus hurled their own sentence back in their face with terrific force. It must be asked in what sense the Israelites possessed the Kingdom of God, and in what sense *it shall be taken away from (them) and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof*.

1. *The kingdom of God* is the vineyard of Jesus' story, God's provision for carrying out His will on earth through a well-defined group of people, in the first case, Israel. All His revelations and providence were calculated to prepare this people for the climax

of His great self-revelation in Christ, the King who would establish *the Kingdom of God* (cf. Col. 1:13f.). The Lord means *kingdom of God* in the sense of "the privilege to be the unique people of God on earth, acknowledging His dominion and enjoying His special revelations, protection and care." This privilege, with the first Pentecost after Jesus' resurrection and ascension, was offered to "you and your children and to all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call" (Acts 2:39). Later Peter documented the fulfilment of Jesus' prediction by depicting Israel's former rights and obligations as now the possession and responsibility of Christ's Church (I Peter 2:4-10, cf. Rev. 5:9, 10).

2. *The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you.* Nevertheless, Jesus does not mean that no Jew could be saved. Rather, their exclusive, national right to God's privileged blessings has ended and now they must enter into God's Kingdom just as anyone else would through trusting obedience to Christ. They never had an automatic right to permanence in God's Kingdom merely because they were born in Abraham's family (Matt. 3:8-10; cf. John 8:33, 37, 39; Rom. 2:28f.; 4:12, 16). But, because they thought otherwise, they suffer the natural result, the intellectual blindness and emotional hardness toward the Gospel, which, as a people, they continue to harbor yet today. (Cf. Rom. 11:8-10, 25; I Thess. 2:15f.) While this is a judgment against the nation as a whole, it can never be valid for single individuals who, like all the early Christians prior to Cornelius' conversion, are Hebrews who believe in God's Messiah and so are saved. (Cf. Rom. 11:1; Acts 21:20.)
3. *The kingdom of God . . . shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.* Even if stated in a minor key, that Israel should lose its privileged position means that the good tidings will be addressed to everyone! (Acts 13:46; 28:28; Gal. 3:26ff.; Eph. 2:11-22).

This total destruction of the Jewish monopoly on God, at which time the period of special grace for the Hebrews as a people would come to an end, and in which a new people of God would be clearly distinguished from that nation, could be no other moment than the disastrous Jewish war which ended in the massacre of thousands of Jews, the destruction of Jerusalem and the permanent devastation of the temple, the end of the Levitical worship as formerly known. At this same time it became increasingly apparent to the world that, whereas the Church of Christ had inherited the true foundations of Old Testament religion and grown up within the national framework

of the Israelitish people, it was nevertheless a quite different spiritual force to be dealt with. But this new *nation* of which Jesus here speaks was not merely a new political entity, a new world government, similar to the Roman empire (cf. Rev. 13), but an international community, a Kingdom made up of spiritual Israel, Jewish and Gentile Christians all dedicated to the will of God and each other, producing the results God had always longed for: love for God and man, faithful obedience and sincere righteousness. (Cf. I Peter 2:9f.; contrast Exod. 19:5f.; Cf. Gal. 3:26ff.; Eph. 2:11-22; Col. 3:10f.)

No darker heresy could be imagined than Jesus' shocking assertion that Israel as such could no longer be considered the sole depository of divine truth nor the prime (if not unique) object of divine attention, or that any other nation could satisfy God's requirements quite as well as that people He had always considered His private jewel. But if Jesus can deal such a deadly body-blow to Jewish provincialism, what would He say to American civil religion that claims to see in American national history the embodiment of God's unique blessing, but fails to recognize American blindness to many of God's most fundamental claims on life? Or what if the new people of God, the Church, fail to *bring forth the fruits thereof*? Is God obligated to maintain dead timber (Matt. 3:10)? Has not His procedure always been to remove an unbelieving generation and raise up a people that would obey (Exod. 32:9f., 14; Num. 20:12; 14:11-35; Rev. 2:4f.)?

### L. Double Punishment Inflicted (21:44)

Although important manuscripts of Matthew do not contain this verse and even if the Apostle did not record it, still Jesus made this threat (Luke 20:18). While it appears to have been inserted by a scribe from Luke, three reasons suggest that Matthew actually could have written it, as the other manuscripts testify:

1. Two words are changed: Luke adds "Everyone" and has "that stone" instead of "this stone." Were this verse a direct transcription from Luke, these variations at least indict the scribe of carelessness. The simpler hypothesis is that Matthew himself simply recorded the words differently.
2. Had a scribe inserted it from Luke, the better place to insert it would have been immediately after verse 42, i.e. after Jesus' citation of Psalm 118:22 where the allusion to "the rejected cornerstone" would have been clearer because more direct, as Luke actually has it (Luke 20:17f.).

3. The textual tradition is significantly divided, i.e. not all the best manuscripts are against considering verse 44 as belonging to Matthew. However, the United Bible Societies' Editorial Committee enclose the verse in double square brackets to indicate their opinion that it is an accretion to the text, "yet because of the antiquity of the reading and its importance in the textual tradition, the Committee decided to retain it in the text" (*A Textual Commentary*, 58).

**21:44 And he that falleth on this stone shall be broken to pieces: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will scatter him as dust.** Is Jesus talking about two kinds of punishment for the wicked, i.e. remedial and final? Or is He referring to two distinct time factors, i.e. an early stumbling and a later judgment? In what sense are we to interpret what seems to be a mixed metaphor, i.e., how can a stone lying in the path of the incautious over which they stumble become something that, in turn, falls upon them?

The answer to these queries may be found, not in the attempt to decipher Jesus' metaphors, but in asking a better question: where did He get His language? In fact, both Isaiah and Daniel had used similar expressions. Did Jesus borrow from them?

JESUS (Matt. 21:44; Luke 20:18)

He that falls on this stone shall be broken to pieces.

ISAIAH 8:13-15

The Lord Almighty . . . will be a sanctuary; but for both houses of Israel he will be a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. And for the people of Jerusalem he will be a trap and a snare. Many of them will stumble; they will fall and be broken they will be snared and captured.

DANIEL 2:44, 34f.

but on whomsoever it shall fall,

it will scatter him as dust.

In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. . . . a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were broken to pieces at the same time and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth.

This impression is even more convincing when seen in combination with Jesus' citation of the other "Rejected Stone" passage, Psalm 118:22f. Since the Lord was already quoting Scripture, it should not be thought strange that, after casting Isaiah's Vineyard Song in a new form, He continue to weave these three great Messianic texts together into one great revelation. (Study Peter's combination of Ps. 118:22 and Isa. 8:14f. adding Isa. 28:16 in I Peter 2:4-8.) If the Lord is indeed combining these great prophecies, the final effect of the combination is breathtaking!

1. *He that falleth on this stone shall be broken to pieces*; interpreted in the Isaianic context, means that Israel in general would break itself on the Lord Almighty. However, hope was held out for anyone who would regard Him as holy and fear Him. While the nation would break itself, He would be a sanctuary for individuals. If Isaiah's later revelation (28:15f.) bears on our understanding, we see that God placed this precious stone on man's path so he could build upon it as upon a solid foundation. Consequently, *he who falls upon this stone* has deliberately tried to ignore its presence in his path and so suffers the consequence by breaking himself upon its solid reality. But Jesus applies to Himself this Old Testament language! He does so with propriety, because He is God in the flesh. This means that, after our contact with Christ, it is quite impossible to swagger on as if His massive presence had not staggered us, or as if He were not the only basis upon which our lives must finally be grounded. Christ, in the days of His humiliation, had none of the world's usual attributes to qualify Him for prestige, position and power (Isa. 52:14; 53:2f.). Rather, He was a cause of stumbling (Matt. 11:6), a great Stone set in place to cause the fall of many in Israel (Luke 2:34). Consequently, there was nothing remedial in this punishment, since *he that falls on this stone shall be broken to pieces*. Even if this fall is wholly accidental, it is nonetheless real and fatal.
2. *On whomsoever it shall fall, it will scatter him as dust*. This vigorous language expresses Jesus' view of the sweeping, inexorable omnipotence of His Kingdom. If we have correctly surmised that our Lord is utilizing catch phrases from Daniel, then His words glow with new splendor. In fact, in Daniel 2:44 the great Stone that smashed four mighty ancient empires into oblivion and became itself a perpetual power on earth is the Kingdom of the Son of

Man. (Cf. Dan. 2 with Dan. 7.) Originally, Jewish readers would have assumed that Daniel's revelations described Messiah's total victory over Gentile nations only. But, as they were to learn at Jerusalem in 70 A.D., even the unbelievers in Israel were also meant. God had revealed His Son's total victory over ALL unbelieving nations (Rev. 13:7f., 12ff., 16; 19:18)! Even if *whomsoever* may well include "every tribe, people, tongue and nation, even all who dwell on the earth" that stumble over Christ, it is also intensely individual. This theme of individual responsibility will be developed further in the following parable (Matt. 22:11-14). Although God had worked with nations before, His present dealings regard individuals far more than before, even if they were never excluded from His earlier concerns. (Cf. Ezra 8:18; Jer. 31:30; Deut. 24:16.) Nothing—no nation nor individual—can stop God's Son from completing His appointed mission.

Upon reflection, then, we see that the great Stone of stumbling in Isaiah 8:14f. and the mighty Crushing Stone unhewn by human hands of Daniel 2:34f., 44 both stand behind Jesus' terminology. Further, in synopsis with Psalm 118:22f. and by His insistent repetition of the key word "Stone," the Lord shows that the Rejected Stone, the Crushing Stone and the Stumbling Stone are to be identified with God and His Kingdom. If so, then because these figures are to be thought of as literary parallels of the Rejected Son of the Vineyard Owner, He means that this Rejected Son is somehow deity and ruler of God's Kingdom!

In this way Jesus has accomplished two ends:

1. He conclusively answered the authorities' original test of His right to teach: He is Himself the Rejected Son, the Rejected Stone, the Stone of Stumbling and the Crushing Stone, i.e. the Ruler of God's Kingdom, therefore God incarnate and fully possessed of all necessary authority. But He had not answered their challenge in such a way as to furnish them merely more material to criticize. His method left them unable instantly to debate His terms. Rather, —and this explains why His connections may seem less clear to the logic of westerners less familiar with that Old Testament language in which His original audience was steeped—He gave them an answer to ponder. By using familiar Biblical language, He led these exponents of Old Testament studies to reflect on His meaning and perhaps to be induced to grasp the hope expressed in Isaiah

28:16: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who trusts will never be dismayed."

2. His illuminating combination of Old Testament prophecies should open the eyes of all His enemies to the awful consequences of attempting to eliminate Him. God's Word, in short, had already vividly pictured their destruction. Sadly, however, history has now completely vindicated Jesus' applications of these texts, since the Jewish nation was *broken in pieces* precisely because of its lack of cohesive unity behind the Messiah of God, its misunderstanding of its own role in God's plan and its materialistic nationalism and its consequent failure to appreciate the spiritual character of the Kingdom. These led it to disaster in the Jewish War and the destruction of Jerusalem. Thus, Jesus winnowed this chaff (Matt. 3:12; see my "Coming of the Son of Man," *Matthew*, II after Matt. 10). Nevertheless, His meaning does not deadend here, since ALL His enemies must fail and all forms of opposition shall taste defeat! (I Cor. 15:24f.; Matt. 22:44 = Ps. 110:1; Luke 19:27; II Thess. 1:5-10 and the total message of Revelation.)

So, double punishment awaits those who presume to reject Jesus: they break themselves upon Him and He gives them their just deserts both now and in eternity. No empire however great can withstand the power of our Lord Jesus Christ! What a gloriously comforting word for embattled saints!

### M. Jesus' Story Hit Home (21:45)

21:45 For **chief priests and Pharisees** see notes on 21:23. **When (they) heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them.** It is not impossible that they had already begun to feel the impact of His stories earlier. In fact, when the justice of terrible vengeance upon the tenant farmers came to light, someone had recoiled in horror, "May it never happen!" (Luke 20:16). By this time, says Matthew, the blast waves of *his parables* had begun to hit home with terrific force, convincing them that, psychologically, at least, they had been unseated. Because particularly they had sneered at John the Baptist, by the Parable of the Two Sons they stood accused of flagrant disobedience toward God (21:28-32). Further, since they had inherited the "duly authorized" leadership of Israel, unquestionably they were



responsible for the care of God's vineyard, Israel, so they now saw themselves depicted as the murderous husbandmen of Jesus' story (21:33-41). The collective message of His illustrations, therefore, had just indicted them of stubborn, continued rebellion against God. How could they be anything but infuriated?

**They perceived that he spake of them.** How much of what we understand of Jesus' meaning did they grasp? Was their perception prompted by the accusations of a guilty conscience? Was it not rather born of a wily, political instinct of self-preservation? Anyone so thoroughly skewered by so clear a story alluding to the well-known history of their own people could not but get the point. But since they rejected the premises on which His argument was based, i.e. that He is God's Son and final revelation, what would His scarcely veiled warnings have meant to them? Would they have admitted to rebelling against Him whom they considered to be their own God? We too must beware lest we assume that understanding the Lord's words is equal to submission to His instruction.

#### N. The Clergy Fumbles Its Responsibility (21:46)

**21:46 And when they sought to lay hold on him, they feared the multitudes, because they took him for a prophet.** Despite their fury, they struggle helplessly with fear. The same indecisiveness that blocked any firm commitment regarding the ministry of John the Baptist also frustrates any determined, open action against Jesus now (cf. 14:5). Here is written their intellectual and moral damnation. In fact, if they grieved for the perversion of true religion, if they burned within for the scattering of Israel's flock, if they were angered at the deep injustice of the deception they were convinced Jesus practiced upon innocent followers, there could be no halting, no hesitation; only decisive action, regardless of immediate, personal consequences.

Ironically, they began instantly to feel the truth of His prediction! (Luke 20:18). They could not even touch Him right then without serious self-damage. Foolishly, they postponed their daylight attack in favor of a secret night arrest in the vain hope to avoid stumbling over the Stone in His story.

**They took him for a prophet.** (See notes on 21:11.) This, then, is the measure of the crowd's responsibility to trust Jesus totally and render Him joyful obedience and loyalty. While this is a good opinion of Christ and one that could induce them to confess His true Messiahship, and while it held His enemies at bay for awhile, thus stalling

## 21:33-46 JESUS MEETS CHALLENGES TO HIS AUTHORITY

any opposition until His purpose was served, this opinion would not lead to salvation unless Israel surrendered to Him. In fact, for far too many the phrase, *they took him for a prophet*, meant nothing more than "Jesus was a popular preacher." Once against Matthew closes a major event by underlining Jesus' prophetic office. (Cf. 13:57 notes; 21:11.)

Bested at their own game of "Hard Questions," hemmed in by their own ineptness and embarrassed by Jesus' precise scoring, they see no exit where they may gracefully bow out. Purple with rage but completely helpless, they must endure another of His fascinating, but lethal, stories.

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. In what general context is the parable of the wicked vine-growers told? Tell the immediate background or circumstance in which Jesus told this story. Indicate:
  - a. the facts that took place just before this parable; then tell
  - b. the broad historical background which furnished Jesus material for His story.
2. According to Luke, to whom did Jesus address this parable?
3. List the five things the vineyard's owner did to assure himself that everything would go well for his vineyard. Tell why each detail was important.
4. Who in the Old Testament had already used these same symbols adapted here by Jesus? To what did the original author(s) of these symbols refer? Where may a closely similar version of this parable be found? In what respects does Jesus' version differ from it?
5. What did the owner of the vineyard do after doing everything he could for the positive development of his vineyard? How is this significant for the parable's meaning?
6. Everything in the parable leads us to believe that the owner of the vineyard expected only one thing from his vineyard. What is it?
7. When was it that the owner began to send his representatives to the vineyard? That is, in what season?
8. How many agents were sent by the owner to the vine-growers?
9. How were the owner's agents treated once they arrived at the vineyard?
10. Who was the last agent sent by the owner?

11. What was the owner's hope that caused him to send this latter agent?
12. What was the reaction of the vine-growers when they became aware of the arrival of the owner's last agent? (a) What was their reasoning? (b) What did they do?
13. With what question does Jesus terminate the parable and point to its moral?
14. What was the answer Jesus' listeners gave?
  - a. What would happen to the murderous vine-growers?
  - b. What would happen to the vineyard?
  - c. What would happen in regard to the fruit of the vineyard?
15. What Psalm is cited by Jesus in support of His position? When had this same Psalm been cited earlier in this same Last Week of Jesus?
16. What is the correct application of the Psalm quoted by Jesus?
  - a. What is "the stone rejected"?
  - b. Who are the builders who rejected it?
  - c. What does it mean to become "the head of the corner"?
  - d. What importance does this expression have: "this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes"?
  - e. In what way is Jesus' resurrection implied by His citing this Psalm?
17. What terrible prophecies does Jesus make at the conclusion of this parable? Have they been fulfilled yet? If so, when and where?
18. Where in the Old Testament had these prophecies already been suggested, if not stated outright?
19. Explain the remark about the great stone of stumbling and crushing.
20. How did the authorities react to Jesus' words?
21. What was the people's attitude toward Jesus? How did this attitude block the rulers?
22. Show how this parable is further amplified and explained by the parable of the slighted wedding invitation, which follows it. Show what features are common to both parables.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

### CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO OUTLINES

Section 57. (continued) Jesus Meets Challenges of Authority  
D. The Parable of the Slighted Marriage Invitations (22:1-14)

Section 58. Jesus Answers Captious Questions (22:15-46)  
A. The Question of Tribute to Caesar (22:15-22)  
B. The Question of the Resurrection (22:23-33)  
C. The Question of the Great Commandment (22:34-40)  
D. The Question Regarding the Son of David (22:41-46)

### STUDY OUTLINES

#### AN INVITATION TO JOY (22:1-14)

- I. GOD'S DEALINGS WITH ISRAEL (22:1-7) "To the Jew first" (Rom. 1:16; 2:9)
  - A. God's gracious provision for Israel's blessing (22:1-4) "The goodness and long-suffering of God" (Cf. Rom. 11:22)
  - B. Israel's ingratitude and rejection (22:5, 6)
    1. Crass indifference (22:5)
    2. Outright brutality toward the king's messengers (22:6)
  - C. God's punishment of the Jews (22:7) "the well-deserved severity of the punishment"
- II. GOD'S DEALINGS WITH THE GENTILES (22:8-10) "And also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16; 2:9)
  - A. The undeserved goodness of the invitation (22:8)
  - B. God's graciousness to the Gentiles (22:9f.)
- III. GOD'S DEALINGS WITH INDIVIDUALS AT JUDGMENT (22:11-13) "To each according to his deeds"
  - A. The presumptuous gall of the hypocrite (22:11)
  - B. The gentle request for an explanation unanswered (22:12)
  - C. The ultimate damnation of hypocrites (22:13)
- IV. THE BOTTOM LINE IN GOD'S DEALINGS (22:14)

#### THE RELIGIO-POLITICAL QUESTION:

##### IS JESUS A REBEL? (22:15-22)

- I. A QUESTION TO TRAP THE TEACHER (22:15-17)
  - A. The Plot (22:15, 16a)

- B. The Flattery (22:16)
- C. The Crucial Question
- II. A COUNTER-TRAP (22:18-20)
  - A. The Trappers Unmasked (22:18)
  - B. The Counter-Trap Executed (22:19, 20)
- III. THE THEOLOGY OF DOUBLE TAXATION (22:21)
  - Jesus' Masterful Solution: Dual Citizenship
- IV. THE TRAPPERS GIVE UP (22:22)

### THE DOCTRINAL-EXEGETICAL QUESTION: IS THERE LIFE AFTER DEATH? (22:23-33)

- I. THE PROBLEM: Sadducees affirm: "There is no resurrection, no life after death." (22:23-28)
  - A. The legal basis: the brother-in-law code (22:24)
  - B. The hypothetical case (22:25-27)
  - C. The resulting conundrum (22:28)
- II. THE SOLUTION: Jesus exposes the cause of these materialists' ignorance (22:29-32)
  - A. Proposition: "You are wrong because of fundamental ignorance (22:29a)
  - B. Explanation of His accusation (22:29b)
    - 1. Ignorance of Scripture that reveals life after death as true
    - 2. Ignorance of God's power to make resurrection possible
  - C. Proofs:
    - 1. Your ignorance of God's power blinds you to the possibility that the resurrection world shall be different from this one: heaven is not earth. (22:30)
    - 2. Your ignorance of God's Scripture blinds you to that text of all texts that reveals that God is still worshipped by LIVING men! (22:31f.)
- III. THE RESULT: Jesus' masterful rebuttal inspires praise. (22:33)

### THE SPECULATIVE QUESTION: THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT (22:34-40)

- I. SITUATION: Pharisees test Jesus' rabbinical credentials with the problem: What kind of commandment is great in the law? (22:34-36)

II. JESUS' RESPONSE: (22:37-40)

- A. First table of the Law:
  - 1. What we are to do: "Love"
  - 2. Whom we are to love: "the Lord our God"
  - 3. How we are to love Him: "wholeheartedly"
- B. Second table of the Law:
  - 1. What we are to do: "Love"
  - 2. Whom we are to love: "our neighbor"
  - 3. How we are to love him: "as ourselves."

THE QUESTION TO CONTEMPLATE:

THE MESSIAH'S TRUE NATURE (22:41-46)

- I. A COMMON CONVICTION: "Son of David" (22:41, 42)
- II. A CORRECTING QUOTATION: Psalm 110:1 (22:43-44)
- III. A CRUCIAL QUESTION: "If David's Lord, how then his Son?" (22:45)
- IV. ALL QUESTIONING CANCELLED (22:46)

SECTION 57

JESUS MEETS CHALLENGES OF AUTHORITY:

THREE PARABLES OF WARNING

D. THE PARABLE OF THE SLIGHTED  
MARRIAGE INVITATIONS

TEXT: 22:1-14

22:1 And Jesus answered and spake again in parables unto them, saying, 2 The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a certain king, who made a marriage feast for his son, 3 and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the marriage feast: and they would not come. 4 Again he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them that are bidden, Behold, I have made ready my dinner; my oxen and my fatlings are killed, -and all things are ready: come to the marriage feast. 5 But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his merchandise; 6 and the rest laid hold on his servants, and treated them shamefully, and killed them. 7 But the

king was wroth; and he sent his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. 8 Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they that were bidden were not worthy. 9 Go ye therefore unto the partings of the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage feast. 10 And those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was filled with guests. 11 But when the king came in to behold the guests, he saw there a man who had not on a wedding-garment: 12 and he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding-garment? And he was speechless. 13 Then the king said to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and cast him out into the outer darkness; there shall be the weeping and gnashing of teeth. 14 For many are called, but few chosen.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Is this story a “parable” in the modern, accepted sense of the word or an allegory? What other parables of Jesus help you to decide this?
- b. How does this parable carry forward concepts expressed in other parables Jesus told on this occasion?
- c. How does this parable answer the original question of the authorities “By what authority do you do these things, and who gave you this authority?”
- d. How do you account for the fact that God’s messengers gathered “all whom they found, both bad and good”? Is not God interested in gaining only good people?
- e. Why was the king perfectly within his rights to react with anger toward those citizens who rejected his invitation to a wedding feast?
- f. Again, how would you respond to someone who believes that the king’s punishment of the man without the wedding garment was too severe in relation to his offense?
- g. When Jesus concluded the story with “Many are called, but few are chosen,” do you think He meant this as a simple observation about facts in the story itself, or as a final warning, or what?
- h. In contrast to the king’s apparent harshness, how is his patience and mercy everywhere evident in this story?
- i. Do you see any historical allusion(s) in this parable? If so, what are they?

- j. Identify the critical moment in the king's dealings with his subjects first invited. How is this crisis similar to that in the parable of the wicked husbandmen? How is the crisis resolved in a similar way in both cases?
- k. How does this parable reveal the overall plan of God for the government of His Kingdom?

### PARAPHRASE

Jesus began again to teach them using illustrations: "The way God runs His Kingdom may be illustrated by the story of a king who prepared a wedding feast for his son. He sent his servants out to summon those who had been invited to the marriage feast, but they did not want to come. So he sent some more servants the second time, urging, 'Tell those who have been invited, Look here! I have prepared my dinner: my cattle and fattened livestock are butchered. Everything is ready, so come on to the wedding banquet!' The rest grabbed the king's servants, brutally mistreated them and finally assassinated them. This infuriated the king, so he dispatched his army to destroy those assassins and set their city on fire. Then he turned to his servants, 'The wedding is quite ready, but those invited did not deserve the honor. So go to the street corners and invite to the marriage feast everyone you encounter there.' So those servants went out into the streets and brought together everyone they could find, bad and good alike. Finally, the wedding hall was packed with dinner guests.

"However, when the king came in to inspect his guests at the table, he noticed a man who had not dressed himself in a wedding garment. He addressed him, 'Friend, how is it that you came in here without proper wedding attire?' But the man could say nothing. Therefore the king ordered his attendants, 'Tie up his hands and feet and throw him outside where it is dark and where people weep in hopeless regret and grit their teeth in futile anger!' You see, even though many are invited, few are selected."

### SUMMARY

By means of the prophets God had invited Israel to enjoy the festal joy of the Messianic Kingdom. However, by indifference and positive hostility, the nation forfeited its privileged position. Worse, they would finally be severely punished by a patient and justly angry God.



At this juncture, God would enlarge the Kingdom's outreach, offering its privileges to all people alike. And yet, none may presume to ignore the conditions upon which their participation in His grace is permitted. Otherwise, these too will be rejected. Final selection is not based upon God's invitation alone, but upon every person's submission to the will of the King!

## NOTES

### I. GOD'S DEALINGS WITH ISRAEL (22:1-7)

22:1 **And Jesus answered and spake again in parables unto them, saying.** Because our present chapter divisions may not represent Matthew's intended subject division at all, it is not unlikely that he intended to connect the Parable of the King's Feast with the hierarchy's malevolent intentions stated by our author in 21:45f. If so, the Lord addressed this parable to an enraged hierarchy to warn them of the destiny their malice deserved. So, Matthew's expression, *spake again*, points to a new start in Jesus' teaching, as if an interruption had stopped the flow of His instruction. This break may have been nothing more than the increasing agitation among the leaders because their attempt to arrest Him had aborted. Seeing their design entirely frustrated by Jesus' popularity, they lapse into a sullen silence, which permitted Him to *speak again in parables to them*. *In parables* does not necessarily point to more than one story forthcoming, as if we should chop the present parable in two or three parts, or accuse Matthew of inaccuracy, since he reports only one story. It just indicates the rhetorical category He chose as He began again after the interruption, i.e. "parables," not some other form of teaching. With Lenski (*Matthew*, 848) we must sense the unity of thought that flows through every part of the parable, making it one cohesive picture not to be thought of as a pasting together of several unrelated stories. This story consists of three distinct parts, but each one presents one important phase of God's dealings with the human race:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. God's dealings with Israel                 | Study how this parable carries                                    |
| 2. God's period of mercy to the Gentiles      | forward ideas expressed in the stories that precede it. (Notes on |
| 3. God's treatment of individuals at judgment | 21:33)  |

Jesus had already used an illustration closely parallel to this story here, i.e. the Parable of the Great Supper (Luke 14:15-24). Details differ, but the main thrust is the same.

Although Jesus' language is decidedly parabolic, His thrust is not at all unlike the Revelation He gave in apocalyptic form to John (Rev. 1:1). In fact, Revelation uses apocalyptic imagery in almost parabolic ways to illustrate old, familiar truths, one of which is the precious joy promised to "those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Rev. 19:9), an event sadly missed by those who in our story flouted the king's invitation.

**22:2 The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a certain king.** (See notes on 18:23.) By comparing God's Kingdom to a certain king, the Lord drew immediate attention to God's procedures. God's government is broadly parallel to the policy followed by the king in our story.

**Who made a marriage feast.** In oriental practice the engagement ceremony usually occurred many months before the actual wedding. Although the couple are considered married, they do not, however, live together as husband and wife until after the rite of marriage is celebrated by bringing the bride to the groom's home. This happy occasion is celebrated by a *marriage feast* to which his friends are invited. (See notes on 1:18; cf. 25:1-10; Judg. 14:10-20; Gen. 29:22-30.)

**For his son.** At first glance *his son* appears to be a minor figure in Jesus' story, because he is not mentioned again. But the slighting of the feast insults and embarrasses *the son* as much as the king. But that *his son* is no mere secondary figure is understood contextually: both parables touch on people's treatment of God's Son (21:33-46; 22:1-14). In the previous story He was pictured as nothing less than the Son of the Owner of Israel (the vineyard owner's son). Here He is the Son of the King!

**22:3 And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the marriage feast.** Before our story opens, the people in question have already been invited to the feast, since the perfect passive participle (*toš keklēménous*) indicates that the present announcement was to be given to those who already had a standing invitation to the feast. Two invitations were considered normal custom: the first, general call that announced the forthcoming wedding banquet, and the second, special call to attend the banquet itself. The former apparently preceded the latter by time sufficient for both host and guests to make appropriate preparations. Food must be procured and

prepared, accommodations for the banquet itself must be readied, servants must be organized for serving it. Guests must attire themselves suitably for the occasion. Perhaps gifts were purchased for the celebrations (Esth. 2:17f.). Then, when the allotted time for everyone's preparations had concluded, a second call was sounded to assemble the guests. (Cf. Esth. 6:14.) Not only was it an appropriate reminder, but it signalled the festival's proper beginning, so there would be no embarrassing badly-timed arrivals marring the expected joy.

In saying *his servants*, does Jesus mean the Old Testament prophets, as in His previous parable? (Cf. 21:34, 36.) Since this parable's main point centers around immediate entrance into the Kingdom, and not the long-range preparation for it illustrated in the previous story, it would not seem that Jesus had the ministry of the ancient prophets in view. Theirs was a ministry which would have more to do with the original announcements of the coming Kingdom in what for them would have been yet distant future. Contrarily, for John the Baptist, Jesus and the Apostles, "the Kingdom is at hand!" (Matt. 3:2; Mark 1:14f.; Matt. 10:7) is the ringing challenge whereby these called the nation to prepare for and participate in the Kingdom immediately to begin.

The king sent forth his servants to call, not just anyone but **them that were bidden to the marriage feast**. Evidently the king had invited only those citizens of attainment suitable to be considered worthy guests at a royal wedding. This is to be a feast offered by their king in which they, as loyal citizens, should feel highly honored to take part. This was the social event of a lifetime, the chance to attend a princely wedding feast, a time of national celebration! But more critical is the fact that this is the invitation of a KING, not merely that of a friend that can be taken less seriously. He is a host not to be snubbed.

To the Hebrews listening to Jesus this imagery spoke volumes, because Israel had a standing invitation (or "call") to participate in the great Messianic banquet of God. Instructive is the number of times (6) some form of the word "call" (*kaléo, klētoi*) appears in this episode, a fact that underlines Jesus' concept of "the calling of God" and the responsibilities attendant upon those who are "called." The entire history of Israel was the outworking of God's call of Abraham (Heb. 11:8) and the conquered national calling (*the klēsis tou theou*, Rom. 11:29). So it is not surprising that Jesus should speak to a "called people" in these terms. In any other story involving

invitations to a party “call” is but a normal word for “summoning or inviting.” But here it is a pointed reference to the previously-established spiritual relationship Israel enjoyed with God. Further, for Israel, participation at the great banquet of God would have commanded the highest claim on their time (cf. Isa. 25:6ff.). It was a feast to which they undoubtedly supposed themselves to have most right. It should have been a foregone conclusion that they should have longed to participate.

Presumably the expected guests had already committed themselves to attend the banquet. Otherwise, the king would not have wasted time on preparations for them. Now, right at banquet time *they would not come*. Literally, they willed not to come (*ouk éthelon eltheîn*)! Because they were the elite, they had been summoned, while others were not. Although they were the nobles of his realm and, of all people, should have been most ready for the feast, ironically, they are the least ready, because their will is dead—set against going!

Israel had been invited for centuries and had declared its intention to honor God’s Christ, but now that He had arrived, they deliberately and defiantly refused Him. (An old story: Rom. 10:21.) *They would not* echo the disobedience of the polite son and the willful reaction of the unruly son (*ou thélo*, 21:28-32). The unrepentant, uncomplaining spirit of the hierarchy is lurking just below the surface of this image (Matt. 23:37: *ouk ethelésate*). For Jesus, therefore, the cause of moral evil lies in the human will, in man’s lack of desire for God and goodness. (Cf. John 5:40; 7:17.)

**22:4 Again he sent forth other servants.** *Again* now means for the third time: they had already been invited, then called and now called again. Whereas a normal monarch would have boiled with indignation at this affront and unleashed his fury instantly, THIS sovereign surprises us with incredibly patient mercy. Israel had heard repeated calls from God (Rom. 10:18-21). Here again, as in the preceding parable, God’s long-suffering is depicted, especially in the many servants sent by the Owner of the vineyard (21:34-36). Numerous *other servants* would be commissioned and sent to call Israel into the Kingdom before the fatal deadline would pass. Does the Lord have in mind here the ministry of the Twelve?

There is an intense urgency in the king’s latest message: **I have made ready my dinner; my oxen and my fatlings are killed**, because meat, once dressed, begins to deteriorate without refrigeration. *My oxen and fatlings* speaks of the magnitude of his preparations for

the vast crowd anticipated. *Fatlings* are not some special kind of animal, but those animals, like sheep or goats, that have fed a special diet to be butchered for food. *All things are ready* conjures up loaded tables of food and drink just waiting for the guests' arrival. All the guests had to do was *come to the feast*. Matthew Henry (V, 312) caught the true spirit of this *marriage feast*. In effect, God was offering Israel:

All the privileges of church-membership, and all the blessings of the new covenant, pardon of sin, the favour of God, peace of conscience, the promises of the gospel, and all the riches contained in them, access to the throne of grace, the comforts of the Spirit, and a well-grounded hope of eternal life. These are the preparations for this feast, a heaven upon earth now, and a heaven in heaven shortly. God has prepared it in his counsel, in his covenant. It is a dinner. . . .

### ISRAEL'S INGRATITUDE AND REJECTION (22:5, 6)

**22:5 But they made light of it (*amelésantes*):** literally, "they neglected it, did not care about it, did not think about it, were negligent"). Here is the peril of simple neglect and not putting first what must be supreme. (Cf. Heb. 2:3.) They simply acted as if nothing had happened, as if the highest royal invitation were not the opportunity of a lifetime to be seized instantly with pleasure and joyous excitement. **They went their ways, one to his own farm, and another to his merchandise.** There is a proper time to consider partying clearly secondary to business responsibilities. But THIS was no common party. These self-centered people put their own personal interests and concerns, their own enrichment and comfort ahead of the happiness and honor of their KING!

The trifles that keep people from properly hearing God's call are often not in themselves evil. This farmer went out to his fields, while the shop-keeper felt the pull of his store, ledgers and sales. Neither one disappeared for a lost week-end in self-indulgence or immoral affairs. Rather, each hurried off to the commendable job of diligent administration of their respective businesses. The unseen treasures of eternity have little appeal for the person who is thoroughly pre-occupied with the trifles and trinkets of time that so insistently claim his attention. Life's tragedy consists in letting the attraction of other trifling things, however good and justifiable in themselves, pull one

away from the one supreme opportunity God holds out to man. Because they openly preferred their own possessions and occupations to the King's royal hospitality, they were showing a contemptuous neglect and indifference to the King's invitation. (Cf. Luke 14:17-20.) This is why they will suffer appropriately. Even before anyone goes to the length of murdering God's messengers, the majority of God's people had already grievously offended Him by making light of His gracious invitation.

**22:6 And the rest laid hold on his servants, and treated them shamefully and killed them.** This is not merely murder, but also high treason against their King! Because these messengers came not in their own name, but in that of their King, this cowardly violence must be considered as directed against him who sent them. (Cf. Matt. 10:40ff.; 23:34f.; Luke 10:16; John 12:48; 13:20; 15:18-21.) In the previous parable the ecclesiastical authorities in Israel were represented as bullying and brutalizing God's messengers (21:35). Perhaps here too we should see these barbarous butchers as standing for the same hostile authorities. While the farmers and tradesmen merely ignored God's men, the persecuting spirit of self-righteous religionists and those who used them for a smokescreen mercilessly slew them. Is this an impossible scene? Critics who doubt that God's representatives would ever have been so ill-treated must be led to see how common this deep-rooted tendency is. Which of God's faithful servants has NOT the human race mistreated (Acts 7:52)?

Here Jesus does not indicate His own imminent death as clearly as He did in the previous story (21:37-39). This emphasis on the fate of the latter messengers warns His followers that those who participate in giving men God's message will suffer for their faithfulness to Him. (Cf. Rev. 11:3-10; Phil. 1:27-29; II Thess. 1:5; Acts 14:22.) This prediction was amply fulfilled in the persecutions of the early Church incited by the Jews. (Cf. Acts 4:1ff.; 5:18ff., 40; 6:11ff.; 7:54ff.; 8:1-3; 12:1-4; 13:50; 14:2-5, 19; 20:19-23; 21:27ff.) Nor was this unparalleled in Jewish history. (II Chron. 30:1-11; see notes on 21:35-39.)

**22:7 But the king was wroth:** on the wrath of God pictured by Jesus, see Luke 14:21; 21:23; John 3:36; Matt. 18:34. This representation mirrors the preaching of John the Baptist (Matt. 3:7; Luke 3:7). This theme receives fuller development in the Epistles (Rom. 1:18; 2:5, 8; 3:5; 4:15; 5:9; 9:22; 13:4f.; Eph. 2:3; 5:6; Col. 3:6; I Thess. 1:10; 2:16; 5:9; Heb. 3:11; Rev. 6:16f.; 11:18, etc.) Such wrath is

perfectly just, because no one can turn down the Sovereign Lord of heaven and earth with impunity!

**He sent his armies and destroyed those murderers, and burned their city.** Some consider this phrase to be evidence that Jesus or Matthew departed from the illustration to insert a literal picture of the reality, because what monarch preoccupied with feverish wedding preparations would launch a war? But such a comment misses the grandeur of **THIS** king. Rather, what truly great king, even in the midst of ordering wedding preparations, organizing hundreds of servants, listing exquisite menus and redecorating banquet halls, could not merely pronounce that one royal order which would mobilize his battle-ready troops and start them instantly marching against the offenders? It is too small a view of the earthly king in Jesus' story to believe he had not already determined and prepared to deal effectively with *those murderers*. Thus, the glory, omniscience and grandeur of God radiate through this king's efficiency.

This is a clear prediction of the Roman Legions under Vespasian and Titus as God's instruments whereby those guilty of murdering God's messengers would finally be brought to justice and whereby *their city*, Jerusalem, would be *burned*, the very thing feared by Israel's government. (See notes on Matt. 24; cf. Josephus, *Wars*, V,VI; John 11:48.)

In retrospect, the historical reality alluded to here reveals the magnanimous patience of God the King! In fact, He gave these Jewish leaders 40 more years' respite after they murdered His Son and began to persecute His Church. Some priests did repent (Acts 6:7) and some Pharisees believed (Acts 15:5), but tragically few in contrast to the majority. Finally, in 70 A.D. He punished *those murderers and burned their city*.

In what sense could it be said of God that the Roman legions were *his armies*? Undoubtedly it is correct to argue that our God is the Lord of hosts, both heavenly and earthly, and that He can mobilize human troops in the field as easily as He does His heavenly angels, whether men think they are serving God by so doing or not. (Cf. Isa. 10:5-15; 13:5, 17; 44:28—45:13; esp. v. 4; Jer. 51:11, 20-24, 29.) And yet there are intriguing passages in Josephus where even Titus the Roman general is led to appreciate his instrumental role in the hand of God who punished Jerusalem for its wickedness. (*Wars*, VI, 1,5; 9,1; V, 12,4.) Josephus himself fully believed this (*Wars* VI, 2,1; VI,4,5; IV,5,3): "I cannot but think that it was because God

had doomed this city to destruction, as a polluted city, and was resolved to purge his sanctuary by fire, that he cut off these its great defenders. . . ."

## II. GOD'S DEALINGS WITH THE GENTILES (22:8-10)

22:8 **Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready.** God has completed all necessary preparations and furnished all necessary inducements to participate. Shall only man be unready? There could be no doubt that all were welcome to share in His bounty, **but they that were bidden were not worthy.** (Cf. Luke 14:21, 24.)

1. The people invited *were not worthy*, not because they lacked a certain rare quality, but because they haughtily disregarded their lord's generous offers. His rule interfered with their own self-interest.
2. They are judged as they had judged (cf. 7:2). Did they consider the king's invitation not worth their time and interest? Now their own sentence is handed down: they had proved themselves not worthy by the judgment they pronounced upon the king's graciousness.
3. The irony of the situation is that they probably considered themselves highly worthy, so worthy, in fact, that they could arrogantly permit themselves the liberty of trifling with the invitation of him who was altogether worthy of their fellowship, praise and joyous sharing, their king. Many today cannot conceive that God can do without them and yet achieve His goals.
4. This judgment, *not worthy*, concerns highly religious people. Religious forms without a heart of love for God prove to be deadly hardening to a person's sensitivity to God. In fact, the formalist wrongly assumes his own indispensability to God just because he performs the required ritual.
5. This judgment by the Lord of all the earth should become the working philosophy of all prophecy students. Modern Israel, i.e. the unbelieving, unrepentant nation, is too often exalted in prophecy schemes, as if she were the precious jewel of God or as if nothing had ever been revealed that would compromise her privileged position in the determinate counsel of God. But how can men continue to argue, by implication if not overtly, that "Israel is worthy" when the King gives this sentence: "They that were bidden were NOT WORTHY!"?



But if *they were not worthy*, why had the king invited them in the first place? Could he not have foreseen this refusal?

1. The king wanted to invite them irrespective of their worthiness or merit, because they were his people. In the story they proved *not worthy* later, not necessarily at the time of the invitation. In the reality, however, they never were worthy (Deut. 9:4-24).
2. The king invited them because of the worthiness of his son. It was appropriate that they honor the son even as they honored the father. Not to honor the son is to dishonor the father.
3. The king invited them because of his own worthiness shown in his love for his people prior to this moment (cf. Deut. 7:7ff.) and especially in his concern that they be permitted to share in his joy upon the marriage of his son.

Paul's explanation eloquently comments on this verse: "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it from you, and JUDGE YOURSELVES UNWORTHY OF ETERNAL LIFE, behold we turn to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46).

**22:9 Go ye therefore unto the partings of the highways**, that is, at street-corners, or where the streets cross city boundaries to go out into open country (cf. Arndt-Gingrich, 193). In walled cities these would be at the gates; in unwalled, at town boundaries where people leave for their farms or other towns. These would be the most frequented places as people go and come from a given city, hence an excellent place to seek potential guests for the feast. The generous king wisely seeks people where they are to be found.

**As many as ye shall find**: what the king missed in the rank and attainments of his guests, he compensated for in the quantity. Since "the people and quality" had so definitely proved themselves unworthy, they proved in effect to be inferior to all who would appreciate the high honor offered them and would seize the opportunity. Anyone who loves and respects the king is WORTHY, whatever his previous lack of qualification might be, while those who spurn and neglect their good king's bounty are UNWORTHY, whatever their previous attainments!

**Bid to the marriage feast**. The raging and bobtail of society, previously uninvited, now become "the called" (*kalésate eis tous gàmous*). Here is Christ's theology of calling for the Gentiles. (Cf. I Cor. 1:26; 7:20; Eph. 1:8; 4:1, 4; Phil. 3:14; II Thess. 1:11; II Tim. 1:9; Heb. 3:1; II Peter 1:10; Rev. 17:14.) This moment is paralleled in the

previous parable in that “the Kingdom of God will be taken away from (Israel) and given to a nation producing the fruits of it” (21:41, 43). The Great Commission (28:19f.) is now a foregone conclusion, because the Lord of missions has clearly foreseen the Jewish rejection and now proclaims the future world-wide invitation to the Gentiles to share in the Kingdom of God. But it would be wrong to conclude that He originally planned to save only the Jews and, perceiving their rejection barely in time He radically changed His course so as to avoid a total failure. Matthew has already intimated that God’s original planning included the salvation of Gentiles and Jews on the same basis: faith in Jesus (cf. 8:10-12; 12:18-21). While our text is not the birthplace of the Great Commission, it is made of the same stuff and breathes the same spirit. *Go ye therefore* will be echoed again (28:19)!

22:10 **And those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together, all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was filled with guests.** Why are the king’s agents always termed “*servants*”? Because, however, great and influential were the prophets serving under the Old Testament era or Christian apostles and evangelists functioning under the new, they are ever *servants* of God and co-workers with each other. (See note on 18:23.) The results of the king’s servants ring true to the reality represented: among all the people they found willing to come were *both bad and good*. By implication, then, Jesus’ messengers will collect an appallingly mixed bag of guests for God too. Now why would the Lord say that?

1. He may have intended to deflate all purists’ hope that the Messianic Kingdom on earth would be a utopian congregation of only “the pure and holy, the perfect.” He clearly foresees a period prior to final judgment (v. 11) when the mixture of *both bad and good* would exist simultaneously. This harmonizes neatly with His revelation about the continued presence of evil in the world until the judgment (13:24-30, 36-43). Thus, He explodes the myth of perfection obtainable in this life by the elimination of all those who are *bad*.
2. As in His previous parable where the servants brought in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame (Luke 14:21), those who needed help, so also here Jesus disarms all pride in human goodness and men’s notions about what constitutes qualification for God’s help. In this sense, then, *both good and bad* means those people,

who in other men's judgment are relatively decent, high-minded people (like Cornelius and other God-fearing, respectable people, Acts 10:1f., 4; 17:4) and the frankly sinful (like the publicans and prostitutes and the Corinthians, I Cor. 6:10f.; I Peter 4:3f.). *Good and bad* would perhaps also be seen from the Jewish standpoint: the *good* would be the self-righteous and orthodox; the *bad* are the Gentiles and the scum of Jewish society (cf. Acts 10:14, 28). Either way, they are all called without regard to their previous moral or religious condition or prior preparation before their call. Jesus obviously does not call the *bad* to remain what they are, but to repent.

3. Jesus' purpose may have been to push His listeners to re-evaluate their judgments about what constitutes goodness and badness. Those who are finally termed *good* are those who trust God's grace and obey Him by faith and, by *bad* He would mean those who did not, even though these too had considered themselves "church members in good standing." This definition and distinction arises out of Jesus' story itself, since those who were finally admitted to the king's feast were only those who (1) heard the gracious invitation specifically addressed to them, (2) accepted it by making the requisite preparation, the wedding garment, and (3) presented themselves at the wedding hall. The *bad* are those who resisted submission to the king's requirements by not making the expected preparation.

So, while they may have been *both bad and good* before they accepted the great invitation, they must all be uniformly garbed when admitted to the festal joy of their lord.

**And the wedding was filled with guests!** Despite the indifference and cruelty of those previously invited, despite the initial insuccesses of the king's servants, this great-hearted king was not thwarted in his determination to share his festal joy with anyone who would accept it. God's divine program to share indescribable eternal happiness with His people cannot be defeated either. Even if the despicable manners and savage brutality of the people previously invited pulled down destruction on their own heads, they did not succeed in undermining the plan of God (Rev. 7:9)!

### III. GOD'S DEALING WITH INDIVIDUALS AT JUDGMENT (22:11-13)

22:11 **But when the king came in to behold the guests:** this is the true climax of the entire drama, because every other element prepared

for this moment and everything that comes after it results from it. The guests, even those who had been invited first, were invited to share in this moment. Jesus' illustration is not a conglomerate of two or more parables, but one plot steadily progressing toward this critical moment of truth.

It can hardly be doubted that *the king came in to behold the guests*, not with an eye to catching some of them unprepared, i.e. without the required garment, but, rather, to rejoice with those who had proved themselves his loyal subjects by accepting his royal invitation. God, too, has no taste for condemning anyone (Ezek. 18:23-32; 33:11; Lam. 3:31-33). Nevertheless, as the sequel proves beyond all doubt, although He finds condemnation distasteful, His sense of justice demands it and He does not hesitate to sentence and punish the guilty.

When the king came in to behold the guests, he gazed over a sea of happy faces around his tables. Yet in the midst of the merriment he could still discern *a man who had not on a wedding-garment*. His race, sex, social condition and bank account are completely irrelevant in the light of this serious disqualification: *no wedding-garment!* Although the question of where he should have procured this garment is left quite out of the story, the assumption is that the king's invitation had implied that all guests must respond appropriately by wearing one. In distinguishing this man from the others, it is also assumed that these guests had made this provision, thereby proving that the great-hearted king's demand was neither unknowable, unreasonable nor impossible. In what the *wedding-garment* consisted the Lord did not explain. Local custom would decide this. Certainly it was attire suitable for the occasion, as opposed to soiled, everyday work clothes. Some commentators, following Genesis 45:22; Judges 14:12, 19; II Kings 5:5, 22; 10:22; Revelation 19:8f., suggest that the king himself even furnished it for all guests alike, in which case their only responsibility was that of accepting to wear it (cf. Isa. 61:10).

The reality Jesus here visualized in the *wedding-garment* is not difficult to interpret, since His Revelation used a similar symbol (Rev. 19:7f., perhaps also v. 14). It may be simply "the righteous deeds of the saints." Such clothing is not more self-righteousness, since these robes are "washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb." (Rev. 7:9, 13f.; cf. 3:4, 5, 18; 6:11; Heb. 9:14.) Such garments are no fabrication of this world, but the pure gift of divine grace, since even the "righteous deeds of God's people" are really the work

of God Himself graciously working in and through them (Isa. 26:12; Phil. 2:12f.). So, in the end, it is the King Himself who furnishes our wedding garments. And yet we would be without them unless we accepted them and dressed in them, making ourselves fit for His feast on His terms. (Study Heb. 12:14; Col. 3:5-17; Phil. 3:7-11; I Peter 1:22; II Peter 1:3-11.) So God's invitation is conditional.

What, then, is this "gate-crasher's" damning fault? Several factors surface:

1. If the king furnished a costly garment for each guest, not to put it on immediately to join in the spirit and add luster to the feast, would be to show contempt for the gift and despise the giver. It is clearly a self-willed rejection of the king's gracious provision.
2. He had no reverence for his king. The man's damning sin was insensitivity regarding that to which he had been invited. He showed no understanding of the honor one should show to his king or of what would be appropriate dress for participation in a royal banquet. This insensitivity is tantamount to dishonor (Mal. 1:6).
3. He did not understand his king's merciful hospitality. All guests were present, not because they wore wedding apparel, but because this open-hearted king was so intent upon sharing his happiness with them that he ordered the wedding-hall doors thrown open to everyone. The king owed them nothing. They could never have deserved his generosity. They were all present by the king's grace. This ingrate wanted to have the benefits of the feast while rewriting the conditions of participation to suit himself. To the Jew this banquet represented the highest privilege to the Kingdom of God (Luke 14:15; Matt. 8:11f.). But to take part in God's Kingdom means to be ruled by the will of God. Many want the blessings of the Kingdom without the submission this entails. But grace means that we surrender to the terms demanded by Him who extends us that grace.
4. Here is also a self-complacency that could be satisfied with its own garments. Here is the arrogant person who, while claiming to be on God's side, considers his own character good enough to save him. Can anyone be so proud of himself or his accomplishments or so disrespectful of His holiness that he will not change even for God?!
5. If the king required a garment that even the poorest guest could easily obtain for himself at a moment's notice, then this contemptible guest who profaned the wedding feast of the crown prince is lazy, unwilling to sacrifice his own convenience to please the king.

This story, therefore, is a lesson on receiving the grace of God. We do not have to prepare the feast, but we must submit to the spirit of His kind offer and be fitted for participation by His grace. We do not pretend to be worthy of the gift by our wearing the prescribed garments, but we must enter into His feast outfitted according to His expectations. This illustrates the place of commandments in grace: they are a part of the gift of grace, not a series of deeds whereby we earn our place at His table.

Wearing the required garment clearly stands for our effort to respond to the King's goodness (Rom. 8:1-17;). Many New Testaments texts speak of that in which the Christian saint is to be clothed:

1. By faith he begins by putting on Christ at baptism (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3; I Peter 3:20, 21) and so is justified (Rom. 5:1; 8:1).
2. He matures in Christ by deliberately imitating His character (Phil. 2:5):
  - a. This involves putting off the sinful deeds (Rom. 13:12f.; Col. 3:5-9; Eph. 4:22, 25ff.)
  - b. It involves putting on Christ's character (Rom. 13:14; Col. 3:10, 12ff.; Eph. 4:23f.)
3. This all produces a righteousness, not based on personal merit, but one which comes from God and depends on faith (Phil. 3:9; Rom. 5:1; 8:1).

None of this is personal merit, because God mercifully revealed this way to be clothed. This kind of righteousness is God's gift to His people, because He covers them with the robe of His righteousness, taking their sins away (cf. II Cor. 5:21; I John 2:1, 2). They must accept His covering. While ALL are invited—the imperfect, the weak and sinful—nobody is admitted without change. We are not saved by the invitation only or by entering along with the masses only, but by personal preparation. We must respect the King and accept His terms without presuming to tell Him what we shall wear or what He must condone!

22:12 **And he saith unto him, Friend.** *Friend (heteîre)* is an interesting form of address meaning, "comrade, friend or associate." Its generalness says, "I do not know or call you by name," while its warmth says, "I want to treat you kindly anyway." But the generalness of the king's approach is ominous, because the king does not call the man by name, as if he did not care to recognize that most intimate, individualizing part of the man, his name (cf. 7:23; 25:12; II Tim. 2:19).

In each of the three occurrences of *hetefre* in Matthew (20:13; 22:12; 26:50) there is a reciprocal relationship assumed between the user of this word and the one so addressed. Further, in all three cases, the person thus addressed has not lived up to the commitment involved in that relationship. There is a resultant nuance not to miss: the goodness of the speaker and the guilt of the one addressed.

**How camest thou in hither not having a wedding-garment?** This question tacitly assumes that either the king furnished the festal robe to each guest or that the most destitute could have instantly obtained it for himself on slight notice. Either way, the guest's responsibility is clear: he should have had that robe on. The king may mean:

1. "How did you manage to slip in past those who should have stopped you at the door because of your obvious indifference to my regulation?" But in the reality, would Jesus refer to security slip-ups at the final Marriage Supper of the Lamb, any more than such a provident king could have forgotten security arrangements at his son's wedding feast? On the other hand, if only the king himself could recognize that wedding garment, the man may have passed muster for all others, only to be unmasked for what he really was in front of his king whose infallible eye alone could detect the difference.
2. "How could you have persuaded yourself to crowd in without the required garment? In what frame of mind did you come in here? What arguments could you have adduced so impelling as to scorn your king's expectations?" This is perhaps the better interpretation, because it stands in stark contrast to the man's reaction: *he was speechless*.
3. Some see Jesus' question as asking, "By what entrance did you come in here without the wedding garment? Certainly not by the proper door where all would be granted recognition and entrance" (cf. John 10:1, 9).

**And he was speechless**, not only without excuses, but without prayers. There is no confession of unworthiness, no seeking mercy, no pleas for forgiveness. He stands there brazen and insolent, made mute (Greek: "muzzled") by his own inability to answer his king according to his true inner feelings. What answer could he offer for his gross violation of his sovereign's hospitality? Like so many, he could have said:

1. "My own garments are just fine like they are! Why should I have to change them?"
2. "My other interests were more important than frantic preparations for a feast really intended for others and only lately thrown open to just anybody."
3. "Your requirement is a just expectation for everyone in general, but I'm an exception."

Had the man originally attempted to deceive the king by hoping he could get by with no festal robe as if the king would not notice? In the reality represented here, no more awful sin could be imagined than the bold attempt to outwit God. No wonder this faker deserves such severe punishment!

By adding this ending to an otherwise good, complete story (cf. Luke 14:15-24), Jesus surprisingly reversed the authorities' demand for His credentials (21:23), turning it into a heart-searching demand for THEIRS. In His story the king suddenly appeared to demand of this man his credentials, that proof by which he presumed to intrude. Jesus, then, warns His inquisitors that each one of them personally must one day face this painfully individual inquest and that each will find himself as excuseless as this man was speechless. They had shown self-complacency, ingratitude toward God's merciful invitations and no reverence for His Son, their true King.

**22:13 Then the king said to the servants.** These *servants* (*diakònis*) are not to be identified with the other "servants" (*doùloi*) who had served as the king's heralds. The latter are apostles and prophets, the former are angels who at this feast are appropriately termed "attendants or table waiters" (*diàkonoì*). (Cf. other texts that describe the function of angels as ministers of divine justice: 13:39, 41f., 49f.; their presence at judgment: 16:27; 25:31; II Thess. 1:7f.; Rev. 14:10, 19.)

**Bind him hand and foot.** Why? Would not the shame of this public exposure and forcible removal from the wedding feast have sufficed to guarantee that this unwanted intruder would not return?

1. Apparently not, because the man could perhaps have attempted to make the necessary preparation after the deadline, whereas being bound *hand and foot*, he must see that such tardy reformation is hereby categorically excluded.
2. Jesus intended to exclude all hope that anyone could hope to sneak into the Kingdom and then, when exposed, have a second chance to be readmitted. There is to be no purgatory, either Catholic,



Protestant or Universalist, that somehow saves those who died without having made the required provision God expects.

3. The Lord hereby implies that the possibility of evading God's condemnation is totally out of reach. The damned are hopelessly bound by an irreversible sentence they cannot resist.

**Cast him out into the outer darkness; there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.** Jesus' language slides easily from the parable to the reality, because *the outer darkness* would be especially blinding to this wretch who had grown accustomed to the bright lights of the wedding supper, and he would be *weeping* at his great loss and *gnashing his teeth* in anguish at the realization that his failure is completely his own. On *the outer darkness* and *weeping and gnashing of teeth*, see 8:12; 13:42, 50; 24:51; 25:30; cf. Ps. 112:10; Acts 7:54. (Cf. one interesting ancient Jewish opinion about the wicked's punishment in a dark place barred from light and hope: Wisdom 17.)

Who can complain that the king excluded everyone he found unfit for HIS feast, even if it meant bouncing them out the door right from the table where the unfit sat ready to partake? But the man's sentence is equal to his crime. By his bold unwillingness to show appropriate appreciation for his king's generosity and failing to enter into the spirit of the feast, he showed himself fully equal to those unhumbled, unsanctified citizens who despised the king's bounty from the very beginning. So he must share their judgment: they were ALL BARRED from access to the king's royal reception.

#### IV. THE BOTTOM LINE (22:14)

21:14 **For many are called, but few chosen.** On another occasion someone asked Jesus, "Lord, will those who are saved be few?" (Luke 13:22-30). Rather than answer directly what could be but an idle question, He redirected their attention to the real problem: "You must make your own personal calling and election sure, without worrying about the relative number of elect who eventually make it!" In that context Jesus overturned Jewish nationalistic expectations, while predicting Gentile participation in the Messianic banquet in the Kingdom of God. Here, however, the Lord actually spells out how many will be saved; *few*. (Cf. 7:13f. and other similar reversals of popular estimates: 19:30; 20:16.)

It makes little difference whether, in His story, Jesus put these words in the mouth of the just king or not, since the latter had done

everything humanly possible to call the *many*, but due to the well-known circumstances, *few* were finally *chosen*. How *many are called*? In Jesus' context it must mean not only the hundreds of thousands of Hebrews over the centuries who were called to ready themselves according to the requirements announced by the prophets, but also the thousand million Gentiles who *are called* now by the Gospel (I Thess. 2:14). Also among the many called are the hypocrites in the Church who appear to have accepted the Gospel invitation but refuse to make the sacrifice of time, effort and expense to please God. Here too are those who pretend to believe and those who, secretly or openly, drop off the Vine (John 15:1ff.) by not trusting Jesus to supply them their life. Perhaps they substitute their own source of life or try to appropriate Jesus according to their own terms. But they are all called. Christ illustrated why God called the many, but chose to save the few who chose to accept His invitation. Being *chosen* depends entirely on the answer we give to the *call*. But this is no fresh revelation, because God had always been calling many, but choosing few in every part of Old Testament history. (8 people in the ark, only Joshua and Caleb entered the Promised Land, Gideon's 300, the concept of the remnant, etc.)

Why are so *few chosen*? In Jesus' story it is completely related to each man's free choice to make himself ready to meet the king's requirements. This principle explains Peter's exhortation to make our CALLING AND ELECTION sure (II Peter 1:10). So *few are chosen*, because most folks do not want what God has to offer. They are either indifferent to it or are outright hostile, while others who think they want it suppose they can get it cheaper. The rejects eliminate themselves in droves! So, ironically, they are not chosen, because they chose not to be chosen! The elect of God, therefore, are always those who choose to meet His requirements for election.

With Jesus there is no easy optimism about human moral perfectability. While God's invitation is indiscriminate, His final selection is not. He is no indulgent Heavenly Grandfather whose only program is that, after all is said and done, it might be written: "A good time was had by all" (C. S. Lewis). Rather, He is a God of high holiness who will not tolerate iniquity even in the outcasts, the underprivileged and the scorned! They too must respond to His demands for a change of commitment, submitting to life within His will.

## FACT QUESTIONS

1. List the points of similarity between this parable and the one preceding it.
2. Show how this parable differs from the one preceding it.
3. Of what expression or phase or section of the Kingdom of heaven is this story illustrative?
4. How does this parable fit in the train of thought expressed by Jesus in His answer to the challenge of His authority, the parable of the two sons and the parable of the wicked husbandmen? What new thoughts does it bring out?
5. How many invitations did the king make to his subjects? Why was more than one necessary?
6. What is the picture involved in the expression: "My oxen and my fat calves are killed"?
7. What varying kinds of reactions did the king's messengers find among those invited to the feast?
8. What was the king's emotional reaction to his citizens' treatment of his invitation?
9. What did the king do about his subjects' treatment of his invitation and his messengers?
10. When the prepared wedding feast lacked banqueters, what did the king order his servants to do about this shortage?
11. In what two significant ways had those originally invited to the feast proved themselves "unworthy" of it?
12. Where were the king's servants to find banqueters to share in the feast?
13. What kinds of people did they find and bring back?
14. What is the implied responsibility of the guest "who had no wedding garment"? What had he done wrong?
15. What was the king's attitude toward this man?
16. What is Jesus' conclusion to the parable? What did He mean by it?
17. Identify the various details in Jesus' story:
  - a. The king and his son
  - b. The wedding feast
  - c. Those who were invited first
  - d. The messengers sent to call them
  - e. Their reaction toward the king's messengers
  - f. The king's treatment of his unworthy subjects
  - g. Those who were invited second
  - h. The king's servants who issued the second invitation
  - i. The wedding garment
  - j. The unprepared wedding guest
  - k. The king's arrival to see his guests

18. What is the meaning of the allusion to "outer darkness"? Where is this place?
19. What is the meaning of "the weeping and gnashing of teeth," that is, who has the eyes to weep and the teeth to gnash, and what sentiment are they expressing when they do this?
20. According to Jesus' story, why is it that *many are called, but few chosen*? Indicate the specific failures Jesus pointed out that caused the rejection of the many.

## SECTION 58

### JESUS ANSWERS CAPTIOUS QUESTIONS

#### A. QUESTION OF TRIBUTE TO CAESAR

(Parallels: Mark 12:13-22; Luke 20:20-26)

TEXT: 22:15-22

15 Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might ensnare him in *his* talk. 16 And they sent to him their disciples, with the Herodians, saying, Teacher, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, and carest not for any one: for thou regardest not the person of men. 17 Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar or not? 18 But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why make ye trial of me, ye hypocrites? 19 Show me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a denarius. 20 And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? 21 They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's. 22 And when they heard it, they marvelled, and left him, and went away.

#### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. In the splendid compliments the Pharisees' disciples gave Jesus, are they telling the truth? Is there any statement in their estimate of His ministry and personal life that is false? If you think their words are their honest evaluation of our Lord, how do you account for Jesus' unhesitatingly negative reaction to them? Do you think it possible to hide hatred and malice in such apparently generous praise? If so, how does this work?

- b. Do you think that Jewish nationalism versus Roman domination was the only motive behind the Jews' question to tribute to Caesar, even if it were the one most obvious? To what extent would covetousness and greed be involved? Do you think the Jews wanted to keep their tribute money only for political reasons, and not also for personal use?
- c. Do you think that the Old Testament Law covered the problem these Pharisees present Jesus here? If so, what texts lead you to this conclusion?
- d. How was Jesus' request to be shown a denarius an integral part of His answer to their challenging question? What did their possession of (or easy access to) a denarius have to do with their own politically compromised position that in turn validated the truth of His final answer?
- e. How did Jesus' principle not only answer their questions but actually defuse the explosive political implications of their dilemma?
- f. What is the difference between their formulation of the question and Jesus' answer? They said, "Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar?" He answered, "Pay Caesar what is Caesar's." Or do you see any difference between what each said? If so, what is it?
- g. Since the Pharisees are normally a religious sect, why should they here resort to political questions, when they could have brought up religious ones? Do you think they felt themselves at a disadvantage in the religious field trying to combat with Jesus? What possible advantage could they hope for in a political approach such as this?
- h. What do you see was particularly effective about the method Jesus used in this story? Instead of answering their question directly, He requested a denarius. In what way did He render His own answer so far more memorable to His original listeners by doing this? What may we learn from His way of handling this situation?
- i. What criteria would you list that help us to distinguish what is God's from what is Caesar's?
- j. To what extent is Jesus' answer binding on Christian consciences today? What must a Christian do when his own government is bad, i.e. follows anti-Christian policies by creating laws that violate the Christian conscience? Should we then continue to render Caesar what Caesar claims? What Biblical teachings are specifically given to cover this particular case?

## PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Then the Pharisees went out and plotted together how to trap Jesus in the course of conversation. So they kept Him under surveillance and sent their secret agents to Him, some of them disciples of the Pharisees themselves and some of them supporters of Herod's party. These pretended to be men devoted to righteousness. They hoped to lead Him to say something that might be useful to them so they could deliver Him up to the jurisdiction and authority of the Roman governor.

So they approached Him and asked, "Rabbi, we are convinced that you are a man of integrity, and that you speak and teach God's way sincerely and correctly. You are not afraid of anyone and you show no partiality for anyone. You honestly and truly teach what God wants men to know. So, give us your ruling on the following question: according to God's Law is it right to give taxes or tribute to the Roman Emperor or not? Should we do it or not? Yes or no?"

Jesus, however, aware of their malice, detected their hidden motives and challenged them, "Why do you hypocrites set this trap for me? Hand me a denarius—the money for the tax. Let me look at it!"

When they handed Him a denarius, Jesus quizzed them, "Whose image and inscription are on this coin?"

"Caesar's" was their answer.

"That's fine," the Lord went on, "So pay Caesar what belongs to him and pay God what belongs to Him!"

So they were unable to trap Him in any of His public utterances. Rather, when they heard His reply, they were taken by surprise. Disoriented by His answer, they held their tongues and simply left Him and retreated.

## SUMMARY

Determined opposition attempted to trap Jesus by remote control, using their own disciples posing as sincere seekers after truth, a deliberately mixed group composed of political conservatives and liberals. They attempted to blind Him with flattery as a smokescreen for their politically explosive question, "Should the control of Caesar over our lives be admitted by free men under God?" He parried their thrust by showing how thoroughly they already accepted the Emperor's influence, then brought balance to the question by specifying the proper sphere of influence rightly occupied by God and the State respectively.

## NOTES

## I. A QUESTION TO TRAP THE TEACHER (22:15-17)

**22:15 Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might ensnare him in this talk.** Bested at their own game of "Embarrassing Questions," they beat a hasty retreat (Mark 12:12) to seek advice from fellow Sanhedrinists on further strategy against the Galilean. Although Matthew's account appears at first glance to blame only the Pharisees for the plotting that hatched the political attack, the Synoptists all agree that "the chief priests" (= Sadducees) are as surely involved as the Traditionalists (Matt. 21:45; Luke 20:19f.; cf. Mark 11:27; 12:1, 12f., where "they" seems always to refer to the "chief priests, scribes and elders"). Even though the Pharisees may have taken counsel among their own at first, as the sequel proves, it was essential that they bring together representatives of politically contrasting views in order to make their trap work.

That the Pharisees should have been so keenly involved in a politically oriented ambush makes sense, if it be remembered that they were not merely or only concerned with "specifically religious matters (so far as they can ever be detached), but for the proper ordering of the whole of society" (Bowker, *Jesus and the Pharisees*, 21). Their hope of making holiness possible for all Israel would necessarily affect their understanding of the political football involved in the tribute questions they direct to Jesus. In fact, if Israel is to function as a holy people under God, must it not be free from foreign hindrance? In the popular mind this must exclude Rome's domination. Therefore, the Pharisees' popular, sympathetic contact with the people with whom they enjoyed extensive influence and from whom they received considerable support (cf. *Ant.* XVIII, 1,3,4; XIII,10,6), would appear to guarantee these sectaries' power to punish Jesus unmercifully, if He made the politically suicidal choice of espousing the unpopular Roman tribute.

**22:16 And they send to him their disciples.** Desperately struggling to recover the initiative, the ringleaders remained in the background. They ran in a team of understudies, perhaps hoping that Jesus would not recognize these younger men as their henchmen. Luke's word for these Pharisean henchmen is "spies who pretended to be sincere" that is, men paid to set up the ambush. Their cover consisted in their pretense to be sincere.

The second essential component in this ambush was the Herodians, supporters of the Roman puppet government of Herod Antipas.

Because the Herods enjoyed their right to rule by the grace of Rome, the Herodians were essentially a pro-Roman political position. These would naturally favor the Roman tribute.

Some commentators see this combination of politicians as strange and ironic. This, because the Pharisees pretended high piety and endeavored to sidestep every contact with the ceremonial contamination of others, and because the Herodians were not at all concerned about keeping God's holy law. The common virulent hatred for Jesus, felt by Herodians and Pharisees alike, had now reached such a white-hot intensity that they temporarily forgot their mutual enmities and formed this temporary unholy alliance to stop Him.

However, it is not at all ironic that Pharisees should have willingly set this political trap. It is a historical misjudgment to perceive of the Pharisees as being TOTALLY uninterested in political questions, because, earlier, they had defied widely held public opinion by not swearing their goodwill to Caesar and his government (*Ant.*, XVII,2,4). And they suffered for it.

So, the Herodians belonged in this plot, because Jesus' denunciations undeniably targeted their purely materialistic concerns too (22:5; 21:38). Further, these supporters of Herodian political rule could see nothing but trouble in the Messianic royalty implied in Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. He had seriously disturbed the status quo whereby these fawning sycophants of Herodian rulers retained their position and influence. So, all the vested interests in the nation stand to lose, if the Galilean Prophet is not stopped and soon! This seemingly "unlikely alliance" is perfectly explicable in terms of sheer political expediency and dovetails neatly with the secret, devious ways the Pharisees and Herodians had shown in cooperating earlier (Mark 3:6) and against which Jesus warned (Mark 8:15). Both recognized that in this situation He could harm them worse than either of them could harm the other. Their only unity here is their common hatred and fear of the rabbi from Nazareth.

**Teacher, we know that thou art true.** Because they were about to place Jesus in the position of judge, it was important to affirm the judge's personal character as qualification for that function. Because teachers in Israel knew God's Law best, they naturally qualified as judges over all questions that concerned Israel's duty either personal or collective. **Thou teachest the way of God in truth.** Although among



other nations this would not be a judge's qualification, in Israel this was a prime consideration, because the Law of God was the supreme standard of judgment. He dare not teach his own dream or vision, but the way God prescribes for men in truth! **Thou carest not for any one** does not mean He is indifferent or unconcerned about others. Rather, they mean that a magistrate cannot take into consideration whether the person judged is wealthy or destitute, influential or a nobody. (Cf. I Sam. 16:7; Lev. 19:15; Exod. 23:3, 6.) Nor may he fear personal consequences from the verdict he renders against one side or the other. Truth and impartiality must be his primary concern (Deut. 1:16, 17; 10:17; Prov. 24:23ff.). He must not care who is opposed to his final ruling, be it even the Emperor himself (Lev. 19:15; Deut. 16:18-20; 1:17; Mal. 2:9)! **Thou regardest not the person of men.** While a judge must take into consideration a man's character, he must not be influenced by his money, influence or position. (Study Acts 10:34; Gal. 2:6; James 2:1-12; I Peter 1:17 where "respector of persons" means "partial.") In short, this high praise intends to describe a great and godly teacher. They picture a rabbi of unassailable integrity and honesty, one who is immune to blackmail, the precise opposite of an opportunist.

This new strategy stands in contrast with the authorities' earlier attack. There they had challenged His authority from their position of official dignity. Here they pretend to bow humbly to His authority, trusting His integrity. But this is escalation, not retreat, because few are the men who, while courageously and ably defending their position against all assailants, can withstand the subtler danger of warm praise. But these apparently earnest, courteous compliments were triply treacherous:

1. The common people standing there listening, unaware of any sinister motive, could not have guessed that the apparently sincere people who make these positive public declarations of confidence in Jesus, would ever mean Him harm. This disarmed any popular resistance to the attack.
2. They hoped to disarm Jesus Himself in the process. They calculated His hard, countable results to be few and far between (discounting, of course, the mob enthusiasm of the triumphal entry), so He NEEDED public recognition by someone like these friendly, potential disciples. So, if they could just say a few kind words that anyone in His shoes would be straining to hear, hopefully they would succeed in setting the fatal trap while He suspected nothing.

3. By laying particular emphasis on Jesus' courageous stand taken in the past without fear or favor against the rich and influential by His bold denunciations of their corruption and sins, these "hit-men" hope to push Jesus into taking the fatal dare to come out fearlessly either against Rome or against His own nation.

22:17 **Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou?** On the basis of His claim to speak God's message, they freely expect Him to act in character as a typical rabbi accustomed to resolving difficult questions of conscience and duty. He could not now refuse their question without discrediting Himself as a Teacher.

When Matthew states that the questioners are Pharisees and Herodians, does he imply that this fact was revealed as part of their approach and question? Farrar (*Life*, 522) says yes: "They evidently designed to raise the impression that a dispute had occurred between them and the Herodians, and that they desired to settle it by referring the decision of the question at issue to the final and higher authority of the Great Prophet." However, if their purpose was to keep their relative positions and interest in the question unknown to Him, so as to make their trap function better, these men probably presented themselves as strangers to Jesus. Matthew only informs his readers what he learned later about their true political colors.

In order to execute Jesus, His enemies must secure the consent of the local Roman authorities (John 18:31). However, they yet have no legal basis to accuse Him, unless some compromising statement of His could enflame the Romans. The Jewish authorities are not averse to stoning Him themselves, even without prior authorization, were the conditions right (cf. John 5:18; 7:1, 19, 25; 8:59; 10:31; 11:8). What prompts their hesitation here is His powerful public image and extraordinary popularity. The Jewish authorities must deflect from themselves all responsibility for His removal, so they could survive the furor that might erupt over His elimination.

**Is it lawful?** (*éxestin*) asks: "Is it permitted, possible or proper?" (Arndt-Gingrich, 274), but the basis of judgment for God's people is ever the Law and will of God. Because these men's pretended interest in Jesus' teaching the way of God truthfully, this question means: "According to you, what does God's Law require of us on this subject?" They care not whether other peoples should pay it, but *is it lawful* for GOD'S PEOPLE to pay it? **Is it lawful?** in

this context, intends to force Jesus into a three-way bind, because He may not answer according to some political expedient forged for a given period but which might conceivably be altered as conditions change. Not only must He avoid offending the Romans while satisfying the Jewish nationalists. He must answer to God, truth and righteousness.

The **tribute to Caesar** in question was a poll-tax to be paid to the imperial treasury, instituted in Judea when Archelaus, son of Herod the Great, was deposed in A.D. 6 (*Ant.* XVIII,1,1; 2:1; cf. Matt. 2:22). Because the tax was not one denarius, it was not excessive, being equivalent to one day's work of a common day-laborer. Rather, it was galling because it was Roman, the tangible expression of foreign domination of God's people. More than one Jew who paid this tribute was unsure of the basis on which supporting a pagan government could be defended. Several factors contributed to this confusion:

1. In the Mosaic legislation God had not spelled out His will for His people when they became subjects of foreign powers, so no Old Testament text could be cited. True, various prophets had addressed themselves to specific situations, but what should Israel do in Jesus' day? THAT was the issue. The whole debate revolved around the contradiction between ideal Israel (under God alone) and actual Israel (under Caesar too), or between what seemed to be prophesied for Israel and what Israel suffered under Rome at the time. Although Mosaic legislation had decreed that Israel must establish as king over them only men of Hebrew descent, the choice must be God's appointment (Deut. 17:14f.). Since the close of the Old Testament no genuine prophet had arisen to indicate the Lord's choice and anoint His appointee (cf. I Macc. 14:41; 4:46).
2. Before Christ's coming the Jewish people had been conquered various times by pagan peoples and had been forced to pay them tribute. Naturally, this subjugation bred its deeply-felt bitterness and fiercely proud resentment toward the occupying powers, be they Assyrian, Babylonian, Greek or Roman. As a result of these invariably heathen influences in the national life, there arose religious patriots at various intervals who fomented political revolution. They preached holy war against the pagans as God's will. Engaging in terrorist activities, they sowed terror in the land. Their war-cry was "No King but Jahvé! No Law but the Torah!" (Cf. *Ant.* XVIII,1,1,6; *Wars*, II,8,1.)

3. One of the great ironies of Jewish history especially in this context is that around 4 B.C. the Jews sent their best ambassadors to plead with Caesar to establish ROMAN government over them in decided preference to semi-Jewish Herodian rule! (*Ant.* XVII,11, 1-2; and again in 6 A.D., *Ant.* XVII,13,1-2,5; XVIII,1,1) And, if they had requested it, should they not also pay for it?

So, the Pharisees' baited trap was a vexed question at the center of furious debate in Israel. (Cf. Judas the Galilean's bloody revolt over this issue.) So, it is misguided to refer to this issue as a purely political question and not a religious issue, because in the ideal theocracy of Israel, what is political can very well be a highly religious issue too. The tragedy here is that the question is legitimate, but the questioners do not really care about His answer. They only intend to push Jesus to make a fatal commitment.

The trap is now set and the designated victim incited to walk into it. The instigators add further pressure by demanding a straightforward yes or no answer (Mark 12:15). In their repeated question there is the urgency of spiritual anxiety: "Shall we pay or not?" to push Him into the deadly two-way trap of positive self-commitment either way.

1. Should He opt for paying Roman taxes, the Pharisean contingent could shout to the four winds that the Galilean prophet had given the nod to paying the hated pagan tax. Thus He would be black-balled as impious toward God and unpatriotic, a traitor to Israel, the people of God. Any hope that He might be the great Messianic King must then be laughed off as absurd. He would instantly alienate many of His Galilean disciples and infuriate the Zealots whose violent nationalism would explode. These would perhaps destroy Him themselves, leaving the national leaders unscathed to run the country in relative calm.
2. If He chose the popular, nationalistic position that tax-paying to the oppressor was tantamount to unfaithfulness to God—the option they hoped He would choose (Luke 20:20)—the pro-Roman Herodian group could carry His pronouncement directly to the Roman governor, Pilate. The pragmatic Romans did not concern themselves with the religious questions of a subject people so long as that nation behaved itself and paid its taxes. (Cf. Acts 18:15f.) But to declare in favor of non-payment of Roman tribute is an audacious declaration of independence, hence a treasonable offense against Rome. The Jewish leadership was so confident that this

accusation would move Pilate that they falsely accused Jesus of declaiming against the tax (Luke 23:1f.). They well knew that Pilate's policy of reckless tyranny had a low combustion point, especially toward dangerous subversives or those who might be suspected of being revolutionaries (cf. Luke 13:1).

Their formulation of the dilemma is clear: either one must be a rebel against Rome and a true, Jewish patriot, or else a traitor to Israel and a Roman puppet. They were certain that there could be no acceptable third alternative. Their dilemma, however, is badly formed, because it wrongly assumes that one cannot have both Israel and Rome, both God and Caesar. Essentially, Jesus' debating tactic will consist in nothing more complicated than disposing of their false dichotomy by showing that a reasonable third alternative exists which embraces the best parts of both extremes.

## II. A COUNTER-TRAP (22:18-20)

22:18 **But Jesus perceived their wickedness.** Does *wickedness* here mean their motives, which only God can know, or their result, which anyone could perceive? That is, did He *perceive their wickedness* by omniscience or by normal godly insight? This latter is the more interesting choice for us, because it reveals that evil is self-defeating! Jesus *perceived their wickedness*, not only or merely by His power of supernatural insight to expose their clever plotting (cf. Acts 5:1-11), but because of the unintended truth spoken by these very hypocrites. He really was all that they said!

1. Because He was a man of integrity, i.e. "true." His genuine humility would instantly sense how sharply the grotesqueness and absurdity of their high-sounding compliments lavished on Him contrasted with His own view of Himself. The fact that they were, in His eyes, unqualified to judge Him even favorably, disqualified their praise and warned Him.
2. Because He taught the way of God in truth, He breathed the same air as Jeremiah and John the Baptist and all the other great prophets whose clear vision of Israel's uniqueness in the world always included appropriate disclaimers of any Jewish spiritual superiority and exclusive privilege. For all of these prophets, including the Nazarene, the timely use of evil foreign powers to chasten Israel and prepare her to accomplish her Messianic mission was not at

all beyond God's range of options (II Chron. 12:8; Habakkuk). From this perspective, Roman government, Roman taxes and Jewish submission are not the mutually exclusive options implied in the text question now before Jesus. His knowledge of God's will expressed in Hebrew history saved Him.

3. Because He really did not show partiality to anyone or pay attention to a person's rank, He could actually look past their great show of respect and discern their need for correction. They ranked themselves among His would-be disciples, as sincere seekers after truth. But, unbeknown to them, Jesus did not even show partiality for His own followers! He could challenge their basic presuppositions with as much equanimity as that with which He battled those of His opponents. (Cf. John 3:1-12; Matt. 15:12f.; 16:5-12, 21-23; 17:16-21; chapter 18; 19:10-15, 23—20:16, 20-28, etc.) So, His dispassionate impartiality saved Him.

His pure spirit recoiled from this fumbling appeal to His pride. He thirsted, not for the paltry praise of ignorant men, but for that approval that comes from GOD ALONE (John 5:44).

**Why make ye trial of me, ye hypocrites?** In their question our Master could sense something more than the latent nationalism burning in the people who usually pondered this problem. These questioners, rather, exposed their lack of integrity by demanding that He commit Himself first on an obviously loaded and politically dangerous question that could not fail to call down wrath upon Him regardless of which option He selected. This is no free, academic discussion about the meaning of God's Law. It is a frame-up pure and simple! So Jesus called their hand, shattering their carefully constructed illusion. *You hypocrites* is a just sentence, because there was no correlation between what they were thinking or planning and what they were saying publicly. So, by unmasking them instantly, He proved to the gullible bystanders that His enemies' cleverness had not deceived Him. By suddenly attacking as *hypocrites* those whom the unsuspecting might judge to be friends and potential disciples, the Lord surprised everyone, causing them to give far more attention to the reasons behind this unexpected move. So doing, He demonstrated personally what it means to be "wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (10:16).

**22:19 Show me the tribute money** means: "Bring me the legal coin with which the tax is paid." Mark adds: "Let me look at it." There is a flicker of humor here, because, although the dilemma was already

resolved by the coin's common circulation in Palestine, Jesus called for the coin as if He must carefully ponder the question. The point is really that **THEY TOO** must look at it, because it contained irrefutable proof of His conclusion. To ask for the legal coin they knew meant, "Bring me a denarius" (Mark 12:15; Luke 20:24). Hendriksen (*Matthew*, 802) affirms that the denarius was minted specifically for this tax. While Jewish and even Greek coins might be used in everyday business, all knew that the Roman tribute must be paid with Roman money. But, by demanding Roman money, Jesus asked for a coin bearing the image and inscription of Caesar, and consequently, representing his authority. Thus, He cocked His counter-trap.

**And they brought unto him a denarius**, apparently having no trouble finding the right coin. Its commonness in the Palestine of Jesus' day is well illustrated. (Cf. Matt. 18:28; 20:2, 9f., 13; Mark 6:37; 14:5; Luke 7:41; 10:35; John 6:7; 12:5.) The Jews' relation to Caesar and his institutions, including the current monetary system, was not so tenuous and distant as they would believe after all. Rather, whether or not they were carrying in their own purses the very coin of the realm, the damning proof that they themselves had tacitly accepted the reality, if not also the benefits of Caesar's rule, is that the coin was current in their country. The fact that **they brought him a denarius** need not be construed to mean that they necessarily had to go some distance (e.g. to the money-changers) to find and return with the requested coin, as if they would not have carried heathen money with him. After all, the Herodians are present, and they reek of paganism: this is why they are there! In fact, all attention is focused on what the Prophet would do with the coin, rather than on the fact that they were caught using Caesar's money in Israel.

**22:20 And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription?** What an exciting piece of showmanship! His request for the coin already attracted everyone's attention, but this question now raises their level of curiosity about how He would handle this tense situation. But what keen-witted diplomacy! He began by asking them to identify the coin's image and inscription. His approach was neither due to ignorance on His part nor merely to gain time, but because He could thereby better expose the illogic of their stance. The coin bore stamped on it the answer to their own question.

**Whose is this image and superscription?** Because the Law had forbidden the making of images, most Jewish coins bore no human picture, just a design with an inscription.

After the time of Christ, Herod Agrippa (47-44 A.D.) struck coins bearing the head of the emperor with the title of Augustus in Greek. Also Agrippa II (48-100 A.D.) issued coins with Nero's head as well as that of Agrippa (*I.S.B.E.*, III,2079b). After Jerusalem's fall this same ruler even issued coins with a DEITY on the reverse side! (*ibid.*, 2080b)

Even Roman coins intended for circulation in Palestine were coined without the emperor's image by concession to this Jewish scruple (Farrar, *Life*, 524). But as Providence would have it, the very coin they brought to Jesus that day was a completely Gentile piece, in that it bore both the *image and superscription* (Edersheim, *Life*, II,386). So, right in Jerusalem, God's holy City, the considerations of business pressures and personal convenience had quietly brushed aside scruples against using these "ungodly, pagan coins."

Whether they saw it immediately or not, His question implied a recognized principle: the power to define legal money belongs to the State. Consequently, that government which can declare what constitutes legal tender for the payment of all debts, public and private, is the government which is commonly recognized as legitimate and having the right to rule. The making and financial backing of coins is one of the areas wherein the State most obviously represents the interest of the citizens. They must see that they could not consistently refuse to pay the tax that enabled the government to guarantee their own economic system, while at the same time making use of Tiberius' coins as a medium of exchange. *This image and superscription* implied not only Caesar's right to coin money, but his right to organize the economic world, a right that the circulation of his money involved and implied. Although belonging to Caesar, the coin Jesus held up was employed as a medium of exchange by people all over the empire without any relationship to their religious or political leanings. Their use of it as legal tender implied their concession to Rome's political claim to organize Mediterranean world economics.

It is not a side issue to notice that the inscription on that denarius read": TI[berius] CAESAR DIVI AUG[usti] F[ilius] AUGUSTUS" or "Tiberius Caesar Augustus, son of the deified Augustus," virtually ascribing godhood to the emperor in violation of Jewish religious convictions that no human being could pretend to be a god. Jesus' final dictum (v. 21), while not implying any criticism of their using coins bearing images of the emperor and his blasphemous titles, definitely condemns the idolatry involved in worship of the images



themselves or in confessing the content of the inscriptions. The reverse side of the denarius portrayed a seated figure with the inscription: PONTIF[ex] MAXIM[us], or "Highest Priest" or religious head of the State.

### III. THE THEOLOGY OF DOUBLE TAXATION (22:21)

22:21 **They say unto him, Caesar's.** Whether or not they could have surmised where He would go with their answer, evasion and denial were impossible. Plainly visible on the coin was the image and inscription of Tiberius, the then-reigning Caesar (A.D. 14-37; cf. Luke 3:1). Jesus' point is not so much that this particular coin is Caesar's as the right to coin is his. He does not mean Ceasar personally, but his office and function.

Jesus went straight to the heart of the reality and stripped away perplexities from this perennial problem that had troubled many conscientious Jews for centuries and had sparked controversy as useless as it was endless. In one simple, concise sentence He clarified the issue so logically and so universally that His questioners appear foolish for not having seen it first.

#### A. Man's Relationship to the State

1. *Render unto Caesar.* Jesus' attackers had asked, "Shall we give tribute unto Caesar (*doûnai kênson Kaisari*)?" Although *didômi*, when used in contexts involving taxes, tribute, rent and the like, should be rendered "pay," its usual meaning is "give." (Cf. Arndt-Gingrich, 191ff.) Nevertheless, because Jesus Himself does not use their term in His answer, but rather the intensified form, *apodidômi*, He implies a subtle verbal contrast between their word and His. Accordingly, their question means, "Is it right to GIVE taxes to Caesar?" and He retorts, PAY BACK Caesar and God what is their right." Your tribute is no voluntary gift as your question implies. You are paying back the Roman government money you legally and morally owe for every benefit and advantage that this regime provides its subjects.
2. *The things that are Caesar's.* What does this involve?
  - a. Both Jesus and Paul explain that *what is Caesar's* has been delegated to him by God in the first place. (Rom. 13:1; John 19:11; Study Ps. 82:1, 6 in connections with Exod. 21:6; 22:8f., 28 and

John 10:34f. Had the Jews forgotten Dan. 2:21, 37f.; 4:17, 24-32; 5:21, 23?) The political irony of the historical situation in which the first century Hebrew nation found itself was the fact that God had not intervened to free them from Roman domination. It could be argued, therefore, that it was at least His permissive will that this domination continue to exist. Even king Agrippa argued similarly (*Wars*, II,16,4).

Could any Jew seriously affirm that Rome's liberal policy toward the Jewish faith interfered with its free exercise? Had not Rome rectified the controversy over the images? (*Ant.* XVIII,3,1; *Wars*, II,10) Had not Rome recalled and banished Archelaus? (*Ant.* XVII,13,1-5) Was not even Jewish religion solicitous of the Emperor's good health and government by virtue of the sacrifices offered on his behalf? (*Wars*, II,10,4; 17:2) Did not even the Jewish authorities themselves distinctly admit that the acceptance and use of a sovereign's coin was tantamount to recognizing his sovereignty? (Edersheim, *Life*, II,385, cites Babha K.113a and Jer.Sanh. 20b) This was not unlikely based on earlier practice (I Macc. 15:6). In fact, Jewish independence from Rome was celebrated by coins blatantly celebrating the first Jewish revolt (66-70 A.D.) Later, Bar-Cochba's revolt spawned a new series of Jewish shekels around 132-135 A.D. (*Davis Dictionary of the Bible*, 512) Jesus too had expressed the common understanding that taxes were leveled upon subject people (Matt. 17:25f.). For Jews, therefore, to pay Caesar's head-tax meant that they thereby admitted his political lordship, an admission they later shouted to Pilate (John 19:15).

Insofar as the political government does not interfere with the activities and adoration of God and His people, there is no violation of religious liberty in the paying of revenue to the State to pay for goods and services on behalf of the taxed. Money must come from somewhere to pay for law and order, to build highways for ready access to the entire empire, to construct harbors and public buildings. God expects His people to help pay for the whole realm of governmental activity whereby the State benefits all its citizens by good laws, the protection of civil and religious rights and the general administration of justice. This is

- no gift to Caesar, but a legal and moral obligation. Can it be right to accept the advantages of orderly government and yet be unwilling to pay the cost of them?
- b. Jesus' word is the State's charter that guarantees its right to function. It also condemns every conniving attempt of tyrannous churchmen to usurp the State's authority. Duty to God recognizes the sphere of obedience to State law too (Rom. 13:1-10; I Tim. 2:1f.; I Peter 2:13-17).
  - c. But we must *render ONLY the things that are Caesar's* to him, nothing more. Jesus' second dictum demands this limitation. (Cf. the position taken by Daniel and his three friends: Dan. 1:3-16; 3:16-18, 28; 6:1-27.)

### B. Man's Relationship to God

1. But the first is that we must be religious about paying our taxes! Obedience to God means to respond conscientiously and positively to His ministers who are attending to this very thing (Rom. 13:5-7). There is a direct chain of command running from God down to the common citizen, a chain which runs right through the hands of the governing authorities of the land. Recognition of this reality should take all the sting out of paying "all of them their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due." From this point of view, to *render unto Caesar* IS to *render unto God what is God's*! There is no necessary conflict of responsibility between God and the State.
2. The crisis of conscience arises for the believer only when Caesar thinks that he is god and begins to require that we render unto Caesar the things that are God's. Despite Jehovah's Witnesses' protestations to the contrary, Christ has not established a theocracy wherein we must render unto God what is Caesar's. The Kingdom of God and the State are not essentially in competition.

At this juncture we must face the dilemma of Acts 4:19 and 5:29. The Lord does not suggest that no situations would ever arise where the choice would be the State over against God. In fact, many such occasions have arisen in Church history when wicked rulers have persecuted and slaughtered God's people for refusal to render to Caesar what belongs to God, their highest loyalty and worship. (Study Revelation 13.) Such times call for resolute refusal

to submit to this pagan worship and the choice of death to compromise. God has already demonstrated His sovereign might against rulers who claimed His rights (Acts 12:10-23; Dan. 4, 5; Isa. 36, 37). And He will do so again (Rev. 16:6; 19:11-21; 20:7-15)!

3. The doctrine of separation of Church and State is solidly rooted in Jesus' declaration. Our Lord did not demand unquestioning submission to all tyrants whatever their requirements, because this would render it absolutely impossible to *render unto God the things that are God's*. His latter demand places the freedom of conscience and the Church above every secular claim. But only bad, wrong-headed exegesis could ever justify the conclusion that our Lord left the respective spheres of influence of God and of Caesar as so separate that God's will cannot interfere with the Christian citizen's relationship and duty to the State. ("Religion and politics do not mix!") Rather, the State could not exist or function without God's permission and it is responsible to Him for the exercise of its proper functions. The child of God must always act in harmony with God's will therefore, even when he serves as a citizen of the State. God is ABOVE the State, not sharing equal time with it!
4. Jesus' sharp distinction between God and Caesar denounces all forms of Caesar—worship. Any godless political philosophy that would deify the State must reckon with Jesus' spiritual demand: *and to God!* Although His questioners could object that His reply evades what they considered the real issue, His word was clear and definite enough to uphold the principle of the State and civil government. His view of the abuses of the Roman state is more clearly and concretely expressed elsewhere. (See notes on 20:20-28.) For Jesus, the ruthless exercise of raw power, or power for power's sake, is Satanic. In His eyes, all ambition to become great and to maintain power by arbitrary and oppressive rule is to be decisively rejected and steadfastly resisted by His disciples. Only humble, useful service is the path to true greatness and proper dominion. (See notes on Matt. 18.)

#### IV. THE TRAPPERS GIVE UP (22:22)

**22:22 And when they heard it, they marvelled, and left him and went away.** Despite their hostility, His attackers could not miss the fact that, not only had He deftly eluded their clever trap, but, more importantly, He had brilliantly resolved a hotly-debated issue with

one clear pithy pronouncement that, because of its profoundness and simplicity, really left no phase of the issue untouched. With unimpeachable wisdom He had adroitly outmaneuvered them, avoiding political entanglements and, in the same stroke, He left them responsible to both God and Caesar!

To those multitudes who yearned for a political Messiah who would establish an earthly Kingdom of God and launch a violent revolt against Rome, this answer of Jesus was highly disappointing. He did not denounce Rome outright nor repudiate the tribute. This is a tacit admission of Rome's continued right to demand it, a confession of Rome's right to rule over Israel. In this, He stood on the side of the Herodians. This compromise would have damned Him in the eyes of the Zealots and tarnished His image in the mind of all partisans longing for independence.

*They marvelled.* True, Jesus had refused to bow before the worldly-minded ambitions of wrong-headed patriots months before (John 6:14f.). Among His own disciples He had found and denounced political ambition (Matt. 20:20-28) and exposed its misguided principles (18:1-35). But it was precisely this immunity to flattery that left His attackers open-mouthed. They could not imagine a man who, in their view, so desperately needed hard, countable results and eager supporters (as they pretended to be), but who, at the same time, could be so immune to their flattery! Did not every man have his price? Further, they just could not fathom how anyone could propose to establish his own kingdom while demanding loyalty to the existing State. This completely baffled these materialists. He was clearly not their kind of Messiah. (Praise God!)

But why did they leave Jesus? A Teacher who had so quickly avoided their trap and who taught eternal truth with such finesse could perhaps teach them more. Perhaps He who so dexteriously solved this long-standing puzzle, could lead them into the secrets of life's other problems. But they have no interest in learning; only in destroying Him. Rather than stay to grow in His light, they simply *left him and went away.*

## FACT QUESTIONS

1. What religious group led in this attack?
2. Why was another party brought into this question, even though

they were the political enemies of the others? How could their presence create significant trouble for Jesus?

3. Matthew informs us that they sent their “disciples” to present Jesus this question. How does Luke explain this particular choice? How would sending “disciples” help them achieve their goal?
4. Quote the fine introduction these disciples made to Jesus. Show how these words, in and of themselves, accurately picture our Lord.
5. Now explain why such true words could hide the malice that Jesus exposed in His reaction to them.
6. Explain the background of the question posed to Jesus, showing how there could ever have arisen such a problem. What is the tribute involved here?
7. In what did their trap consist? Show the ingenuity of their plot.
8. What was Jesus’ first reaction to their approach?
9. What was the first answer He gave to their question? How did this pave the way for His second, final answer?
10. What is a “denarius”? How did their having one in common use help Jesus’ argument?
11. What basic principle did Jesus appeal to in answer to their original question?
12. Show how the Jews were unable to evade the truth of His answer.
13. What was the effect of Jesus’ answer on His questioners?
14. What did the questioners do next?

## B. THE QUESTION OF THE RESURRECTION

(Parallels: Mark 12:18-27; Luke 20:27-39)

TEXT: 22:23-33

23 On that day there came to him Sadducees, they that say that there is no resurrection: and they asked him, 24 saying, Teacher, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. 25 Now there were with us seven brethren: and the first married and deceased, and having no seed left his wife unto his brother; 26 in like manner the second also, and the third, unto the seventh. 27 And after them all, the woman died. 28 In the resurrection therefore whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her. 29 But Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. 30 For

in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as angels in heaven. 31 But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, 32 I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not *the God* of the dead, but of the living. 33 And when the multitudes heard it, they were astonished at his teaching.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why do you suppose that these Sadducees, whose normal interest is politics, should pose Jesus a religious question? What advantage could they hope for in such an attempt?
- b. Do you think this story about the wife and seven husbands had been used before this, or was it freshly invented to make Jesus and His doctrine look ridiculous?
- c. If you believe this story to be a stock Sadducean argument used with success against the Pharisees, how would you account for Pharisean failure to answer it once and for all?
- d. Is it ever a good idea to tell people frankly that they are wrong? Jesus did so here. And yet, does it not close people's minds to any further dialogue to make such a statement?
- e. Was it literally true that the Sadducees did not know the Scriptures? In what sense does Jesus mean His accusation of their ignorance? Were they (1) unlearned, (2) ignoring obvious truth, or (3) what? What did the Sadducees' theological position have to do with their ignorance?
- f. How does "the power of God" resolve the question posed by the Sadducees?
- g. What had the Old Testament indicated about the resurrection from the dead? Did the Old Testament furnish any reasons to believe in resurrection? If so, what are they? And, if so, what does this fact reveal about the Sadducees' attitude toward the Old Testament?
- h. What does the fact that "in the resurrection marriage does not exist" tell us about this present world, if anything?
- i. Since the text Jesus cited merely refers to God as "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob," and never mentions resurrection, how can Jesus correctly conclude that the passage teaches resurrection from the dead? Is this a legitimate use of Scripture texts?

On what basis can He affirm that God "is not a God of the dead, but of the living," since the text cited does not say so? What is Jesus' thrust behind His quotation of Exodus 3:2-6? Is it (1) the verb? "I am" (present tense, see Luke), or (2) the predicate nominative: "the God of Abraham, etc."? How does Luke's addition, "For all live to him" furnish additional explanation that clarifies Jesus' point?

- j. Since the actual text in question is a quotation of words God directed to Moses, how can Jesus affirm: "... have you not read what was said TO YOU by God . . ."? There were nearly 1500 years of history intervening between the voice of God in the burning bush and Jesus' Sadducean listeners! In what sense did God say this expressly for these hearers?
- k. What do you think Jesus was trying to teach those Sadducees by affirming that it was God who was the author of the words cited from the pen of Moses? How does this revelation of Jesus resolve some modern doubts and "scholarly" uncertainties about Exodus' authorship?
- l. Since the Sadducees disbelieved in angels, how can Jesus safely allude to angels as He does, without fear that the Sadducees would reject His argument? Why do you think they dropped the subject of angels without debating it with Him? (What evidence could He have used from the Pentateuch to defend the truth they rejected?)
- m. What does it mean to be "like the angels in heaven"? What characteristics are to be shared with them? What information does Luke (20:36) provide to answer this?
- n. Why did not Jesus simply say, "Have you not read Exodus 3:6"? Why did He have to identify the desired passage by calling it "the passage about the bush"? (Cf. Mark 12:26; Luke 20:37.)
- o. What does this incident teach us about the importance of understanding the Bible correctly?
- p. How does this incident describe the life beyond the grave? Explain why, according to Luke 20:36, the resurrected dead can die no more. In what sense are the redeemed "the sons of God"? In what sense are they "sons of the resurrection"?

## PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

That same day there came to Him some Sadducees. These people were saying they did not believe in life after death. They put the following



question to Him, "Teacher, Moses gave us a law: 'If a man dies, leaving a wife, but no heir, his brother must marry the widow and raise up a legal posterity for his dead brother.' Now there was a case in our community involving seven brothers. The first brother married a wife, but died, having no heir, thus leaving his wife to his brother. The same thing happened to the second brother. He married her, but died childless too. This was also the case with the third. Eventually all seven died leaving no posterity. Last of all, the woman herself died. In the resurrection—when the dead come back to life—to which of the seven brothers will she be wife? For they all had been married to her!"

"If not this why you are mistaken?" answered Jesus. "You do not understand either the Scriptures nor what God can do! Marriage is an institution limited to this world. But the men and women who are judged worthy to live in the next world (which implies their rising from the dead) will not marry but are like the angels in heaven. In fact, they cannot die anymore, because they are like heaven's angels. Reborn in the resurrection, they are God's sons!

"On the other hand, even Moses himself indicated that there is life after death. Have you never read in the book of Moses in that passage about the burning bush what God said to you when He spoke to Moses, saying, 'I am the GOD of Abraham, the GOD of Isaac and the GOD of Jacob'? This means that He is not the GOD of corpses but the GOD of living people! So, as far as God is concerned, they are all alive. You are quite mistaken!"

Even some of the theologians admitted, "Well said, Rabbi!" The common people who heard His teaching were deeply impressed by it.

## SUMMARY

The materialistic Sadducees who deny the world of the spirit and life after death approached Jesus with their stock catch-question seemingly based on Mosaic authority. Jesus revealed the fallacy of their presupposition that the after-life must simply continue this one in all respects, then expounded the meaning of Exodus 3:6 to show the reality of the spirit-world and man's intimate participation in it.

## NOTES

## I. THE PROBLEM: IS THERE LIFE AFTER DEATH?

(22:23-28)

**22:23** On that day there came to him Sadducees. On that day definitely connect this Sadducean assault with the foregoing attack. In contrast to the previous Pharisean strategy, the Sadducees now approach Jesus by themselves, since they alone denied the resurrection. The company of other sectarian groups would only frustrate their intention to subdue Jesus on a point He shared with the others.

**Sadducees, they that say that there is no resurrection.** On the views of these sectarians, see notes in Vol. III, 430-440; cf. Acts 23:6-8; especially Josephus, *Ant.* XIII,10,6; XVIII,1,4; XX,9,1; *Wars* II, 8,14. The Sadducees were a priestly party (cf. Acts 4:1, 2, 6; 5:17) that demanded that everything be understood rationally and not based on hearsay oral tradition. (Cf. Sepher Yosippon, Aboth de Rabbi Nathan, Bab. Talmud Pes. 57a; Meg.Taan. Tebeth 28, cited by Bowker, *Jesus and the Pharisees*.) The basic attitude of this small but powerful faction was what might be termed "ecclesiastical opportunism," using religion for private gain. They apparently prided themselves on being no-nonsense, realistic people who based their philosophy on the common-sense view of this material world while considering anything metaphysical as a hypothetical superstition. They ended up with a religion without the supernatural.

But why would Matthew need to explain the particular belief of the Sadducees especially to his Jewish readers? Merely to clarify the point of the following contest of wits? Or had the Sadducees' aristocracy as a theological force in Israel disappeared by the time of the writing of Matthew's Gospel, a hypothesis calling for this historical note? Would not this, then, argue for a date after Jerusalem's fall for the compilation of Matthew's Gospel? This deduction is not necessary, if the following considerations be thought important:

1. The theological tenets of the less numerous Sadducees may not have been well-known among the common people in Israel, due to the superior hold on the popular mind enjoyed by the more orthodox Pharisees.
2. Further, if the Sadducees were interested in political power and the personal wealth that came with it far more than in

influencing the people through teaching their personal views, their skeptical views may have been only vaguely known by those outside political and academic circles.

So, Matthew reviewed their position briefly, in order to make the following conversation clear to the common reader, and this fact need not decide the question as to when it was written or argue for dating the book late in the first century after 70 A.D., or even later.

Their affirmation that *there is no resurrection* does not begin to exhaust Sadducean theology, as if they believed nothing more. In fact, this emphasis on the one point appears badly one-sided, since their fundamental problem was not only denial of resurrection *per se*, but also denial of every phase of the world of the spirit. Apparently, they reasoned that to deny resurrection is to be rid of the entire question of the spirit world, since resurrection is conceivably the door into that world. "Deny the door and you deny what is on the other side." Jesus' answer, then, consisted essentially in showing that those living people who are on the other side of death's barrier really exist, and that those involved in that life must have gotten there somehow, a fact that argues for the existence of the door. That is, once one admits the world of the spirit, resurrection is no longer impossible, because an Omnipotent God can work it all out with ease. So, the Sadducean belief that *there is no resurrection* is so much an intermediate issue that it is practically a side issue in contrast to the more fundamental question, the world of the spirit. But where did the Sadducees (and their modern counterparts) go wrong?

1. As with most controversies, not all the opposition is raised by plain fools. Sadducean debaters could have cited texts that seem to deny life after the grave, like Psalms 6:5; 88:10f.; 115:17; Ecclesiastes 9:4-10; Isaiah 38:18f. These seem to counterbalance other texts in its favor. However,—and more central to this discussion—the Sadducees held seriously defective view of much of the Old Testament. On Sadducean principles, only what was clearly stated in the written Law was held to be of binding authority, hence nothing could be cited outside the Pentateuch. Two reasons for this may be suggested:
  - a. The Mosaic code confirmed the authority of the priesthood. So the Law would be especially dear to the Sadducean priesthood. Because the prophets exposed the perversion of the hierarchical

aristocracy and preached the uselessness of ritual without righteousness, their writings would be particularly unwelcome.

- b. A concomitant reason may be that Pharisean glorification of hearsay evidence for doctrine had so elevated oral tradition to the level of divine law (cf. Matt. 15:6) that even men like the Sadducees instinctively felt they must be stopped. But how? The Sadducean reactionaries wrongly opted for strict adherence to Moses at the expense of the prophets. Their blunder consisted, then, in rejecting those divine messengers who revealed more of God's will than Moses included in the Law. Thus, all prophetic revelations after Moses were demoted to merely sanctified opinion and their information ignored.
2. Although many texts suggest resurrection or express the hope of life after death, it is not explicitly at the center of Judaism as a clearly defined doctrine until late in the prophets. But the erudite presumption often repeated that the concept of resurrection was "not known in Israel until just a century or so prior to the appearance of Jesus" must be abandoned. It simply ignores Abraham's bold faith, who steadfastly confided in the power of God to raise Isaac from the dead, rather than disbelieve God's promise of descendents through this his only son (Gen. 21:12; 22:1-18 interpreted by Heb. 11:19). Where did Abraham get that option? Does not this argue that resurrection was not only conceivable in Abraham's time but the very content of his hope nearly 2000 years before Christ? Let the scholars argue with Abraham!
3. It may also be that the Sadducees conceived of this theological development in Israel as wrong-headed because of the Pharisees' gross literalism which obscured the true glory of a resurrection concept. The Liberals went wrong by failing to recognize divine authority behind the prophets who revealed resurrection and by letting the Traditionalists' misunderstandings blind them to its truth.

So, because the resurrection doctrine was not explicitly stated in the Pentateuch and because the prophets' writings were abased to the level of questionable oral tradition, the Sadducees felt safe in declaring life after death to be without final authority. For them it was but a bad hypothesis not to be taken seriously.

Were these inquirers before Jesus simply ignorant, however sincere, men seeking to know truth from him? No, the spirit of their story is one of scoffing and their intent is to make the resurrection doctrine laughable and Jesus ridiculous with it. Why were they so embittered

by Jesus' ministry that they too should now commit their forces to attack Him?

1. Being largely priests and responsible for the Temple, the Sadducees' association was a sacerdotal aristocracy. They lost prestige when Jesus purified the Temple and felt personally flayed by His exposure of their corruption.
2. Similarly, their hostility was aroused because He had disturbed their profitable monopoly over the temple market. He had touched their purse!
3. These skeptics, whose one claim to fame was their denial of the world of spirits, supernatural messengers and life after death, were galled that the Galilean Prophet resurrected people from the dead in support of His claim to supernatural authority. (Study John 11:45-53, the ironic sequel to Jesus' resurrection of Lazarus: John 11:1-44; then note 12:9-11!)
4. The embarrassment and apparent incompetence of the Pharisees may have spurred the Sadducees to try their hand at stopping Jesus. Edersheim (*Life*, II,397) analyzes their motives:

Their object was certainly not serious argument, but to use the much more dangerous weapon of ridicule. Persecution the populace might have resented; for open opposition all would have been prepared; but to come with icy politeness and philosophic calm, and by a well-turned question to reduce the renowned Galilean Teacher to silence, and show the absurdity of His teaching, would have been to inflict on His cause the most damaging blow.

**22:24 Saying, Teacher, they mock respect.** By addressing Him thus, they exalt Him to a level of superiority, but they really intend to expose Him as sadly deficient, as an incompetent, a teller of tales and unworthy of Israel's following.

**Moses said:** they intend to establish their diabolical doctrine of no less a basis than the universally acknowledged law-giver himself. So doing, they state Israel's nation-wide acknowledgment of the Mosaic paternity of the passages involved. Although the Sadducees' quotation loosely follows the LXX of Deuteronomy 25:5f., it freely borrows wording from Genesis 38:8, which shows that they clearly had the case of Onan definitely in mind.

**If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife and raise up seed unto his brother.** (Cf. application in Ruth 4.) The

law of levirate (or "brother-in-law") marriage was designed to preserve the family line and heritage by continuing the principle of family lineage and by blocking the dispersion of the family patrimony. The children received the dead brother's property and in the genealogical record carried on his name rather than that of their physical parent.

By citing Moses, the Sadducees attempt to reinforce their argument, because, granted that the so-called future world is but the extension of this life's relationships, it is man's obedience to this Mosaic (= divine) ordinance that creates a situation that must necessarily lead to the absurdity of heavenly polygamy. Because the Sadducees cited not only Moses but also the language of Jacob himself, they doubly reinforce the implication that the Law and the patriarchs hold a view which must render absurd the resurrection concept, because of the heavenly conflict ensuing from its observance. Obviously, in their view; God would have to make an arbitrary choice, pleasing only one brother and turning heaven into hell for the rest!

**22:25 Now there were with us seven brethren.** Although this hypothetical case may sound fictitious, real life provides some most remarkable and highly exceptional cases, so who can successfully deny that the Sadducees had a real case in mind? Although debate had arisen in Judaism whether to apply the law in question beyond the third marriage (see Edersheim, *Life*, II,400 note 2), some stricter (Pharisean?) family may have actually carried out the law to its logical conclusion, even though some strange twist of fate doomed each of the woman's husbands, leaving her alone to live. *Seven brethren:* the problem would have been real with even fewer brothers, but *seven* serves to underline the problem more vividly. **The first married and deceased, and having no seed left his wife unto his brother.** Their *having no seed* is critical for the law, since the difficulty would have instantly been removed at any one of the levirate marriages to which a legal heir were born to continue the lineage of the first brother who died, leaving his wife and house without continuance. It also forestalls the possible answer that she would have been considered wife of the man to whom she had borne an heir.

**22:26 in like manner the second also, and the third, unto the seventh. 27 And after them all, the woman died,** Her death and consequent entrance into the realm of the dead is essential to the Sadducean argument, to create the domestic confusion they foresee as a necessary consequence of the resurrection doctrine.

**22:28 In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife shall she be of the**

seven? for they all had her. Their rationale behind this resulting conundrum is simple: how could a belief that produces so ridiculous a result be pronounced true? Because the Sadducees derided the resurrection doctrine, they were not really concerned whose wife the woman would be. But because Jesus believed in the resurrection, they pose Him a problem that would expose the disgusting extreme to which His position must lead, force Him to face it and declare them right.

What could the Sadducees have foreseen as Jesus' possible options?

1. "In the resurrection she would be the wife of all seven." In this case they could point out that this response teaches polyandry and creates confusion in God's original design for man, as Moses wrote in Genesis 2:16f. and 2:23f. Further, it contradicted His own teaching (Matt. 19:3-9).
2. "She would be the wife of the first brother alone for whom she raised up children." But they could answer, "But all the others had married her, therefore, she was wife also of each of them and they would have equal rights."
3. "There is no resurrection, so the difficulty does not exist." They would cheer, because He would have abandoned His own position and declared theirs valid.
4. Nor could He repudiate the law of levirate marriages, for it was the decree of God. To put it in doubt would cost Him His following among Bible-believing Israelites.
5. He could not reject the continuation of individual personality and personal relationships either, because these were an integral part of the commonly accepted resurrection doctrine.

Because they, like the Pharisees, could not envision a world to come different from the mere extension of this life and its relationships, they were arguing from wrong premises and expected Him to do the same. Their surprise came when He simply exploded their commonly accepted "world of tomorrow" concept. The Jews had imagined resurrection life in its crudest form, a caricature of the true. Jesus now explains it in a superior form, commending it for their reevaluation.

## II. THE SOLUTION: JESUS EXPOSES MATERIALISTS' IGNORANCE (22:29-32)

**22:29 But Jesus answered and said unto them.** The marvel is that He should condescend to respond to these perverse, frivolous triflers. It never escaped Him, however, that within learning distance there were open, sincere disciples. So He meekly taught these shallow theologians and furnished His students another model of excellence under fire. But Jesus did not answer their immediate question as formulated. Looking beyond that, He perceived a deeper condition of heart, an unrecognized, underlying need that could not be met simply by stopping with the answer to their specific test question. Their fundamental problem did not consist in learning whose wife the lady would be. It was rather their thinking it strange that God should raise the dead (cf. Acts 26:8).

He did not answer their question exactly as formulated, further, because had He done so, they would not have been one step closer to faith in the resurrection than they were before. Although their attack was open, without the flattering preliminaries others had used (22:16), the Sadducees' dishonesty and cunning really attempts to discredit Him. They came not to learn the truth by seeking honestly to remove what seemed to them an insurmountable objection to faith. In fact, when Jesus later arose from the dead, forever and personally proving the falsity of their reasoning, they not only did not repent, but proceeded to murder the fearless, unimpeachable witnesses to that fact, while totally discounting the evidence of the empty tomb (Acts 4:1f., 5f.; 5:17-40; 7:1, 54—8:1; 9:1f.)!

Their theological rationalism was not a matter of indifference that could safely be ignored. Their rejection of penalties and rewards in an afterlife and their disbelief in the continuance of the spirit after death (cf. *Wars*, II, 8, 14) WIPED OUT GOD'S JUDGMENT ON MEN'S SINS AND OFFERED NO REAL INCENTIVE TO BE RIGHTEOUS BY GOD'S STANDARDS. These materialists' anti-resurrection stance is deeply serious, because no one can form a proper judgment about his relationships and responsibilities in this life, unless he takes into serious account the life to come. It makes a big difference whether we think the grave ends it all or not. Belief in a fuller life after death cannot fail to influence character in every way, every decision, every thought. (Study Matt. 10:26-33.) This antisupernaturalism was no



unimportant heresy for it is a belief that weakens man's fear of God and His judgment, destroys his character, undermines his sense of honor and truth and freezes his warmth and humanity. If the grave ends all, people no longer really matter and can be manipulated to achieve one's own ends.

Jesus well knew His opponents also denied the doctrine of an all-ruling Providence. Josephus (*Wars*, II,8,14) reports that the Sadducees "suppose that God is not concerned in our doing or not doing what is evil" in contrast to the Pharisees who "ascribe all to fate and to God, and yet allow that to act what is right, or the contrary, is principally in the power of men, although fate does cooperate in every action." The Sadducean view of God's disinterest in human behavior would definitely affect their view of God's power to transform human nature's body after death.

Is it any wonder, then, that Jesus countered instantly with *Ye do err!* Those who feel that Jesus' answer only offers quiet, patient instruction to sincere, but ignorant, men, must remember Jesus' understanding of their malignant purpose. Even if His total answer seems less severe, nothing can soften His blunt judgment: "YOU ARE WRONG . . . QUITE WRONG!" (Mark 12:27; Matt. 22:29). How could Sadducean priests, charged with the high duty of knowing and teaching God's Word in Israel, be anything but shaken and deeply humiliated by this charge of fundamental ignorance of GOD?

He incriminates them on two counts: *Ye do err . . .*

1. *Not knowing the Scriptures* which you pride yourselves on knowing so well! The Sadducees whose severest, unrelenting critics were the sharp-eyed, hard-nosed Pharisees, HAD to be ready to debate a Scriptural point at any moment. So how could it be truly asserted that they did not know them?
  - a. They did not know their true meaning, because they wrongly interpreted them.
  - b. They did not accept the Scriptures which they could correctly decipher, because they did not welcome them as the royal decree of an Almighty God who could command and expect their loyal submission.
  - c. In opposition to the plain meaning of Scripture, they set up their own mistaken philosophy, refusing to believe anything they held to be irrational, intangible or unempirical.

The Sadducees' position was that no text of Scripture demanded belief in life after death. Beyond the text cited by Jesus, the Sadducees showed ignorance of texts like Genesis 21:12; 22:1-18 (= Heb. 11:19, 35); Job 19:25f.; Ps. 16:9-11 (= Acts 2:27-31); 17:15; 23:4, 6; 49:13-15; 73:23-28; Eccl. 12:5-14; Isa. 26:19; 53:10-12; Dan. 12:2, 3; II Sam. 12:20-23. True, scholars differ on whether they considered all the Old Testament to be God's Word or only the Pentateuch. So, if these Jewish liberals did not consider the historical and poetic writings of authority equal to that of Moses' Law, then they would not have been persuaded by citations from these texts.

In fact, they show amazing ignorance of the translation of Enoch (Gen. 5:24; Heb. 11:5), because Moses' record of this mystifying experience raises the possibility of a deathless life with God in another realm. They also ignored Elijah's marvelous rapture (II Kings 2:11). Was this not true history? And what of the other actual cases of literal resurrection from the dead (I Kings 17:22; II Kings 4:35; 13:21)? Was this fiction or unbelievable legend? What of the unyielding hope for the future life affirmed of other Old Testament heroes? (Cf. Heb. 11:13-16, 35.) Were these all misguided dupes? Perhaps the Sadducean rebuttal would argue that the former were but cases of resuscitation, in that the resurrected died again later, whereas real resurrection at the Last Day must be to immortality and incorruption. It could be argued, further, that because Enoch and Elijah did not die, they constitute no evidence for resurrection from the dead.

2. *Not knowing the power of God.* But in what sense were they expected to know it? Could they have known what Jesus reveals here? How does a correct estimate of *the power of God* resolve the question about the resurrection life? God's unlimited ability to create a universe in which neither death nor marriage are necessary components is ignored by men whose entire worldview is too small and whose appreciation of God reduces His true power's potential to the creation of what is. They have no sanctified imagination to believe He could create a world somehow different from the present age. This severely limits their concept of God's power. They ignore His power to conquer and eliminate death from human existence. Even if no Bible text ever implied it, they should have seen that an adequate concept of God's power to effect it could also foresee it.

Even if Sadducean proponents rejected great texts like Isaiah 25:6-8; 26:18f.; Ezekiel 37:1-14; Hosea 6:1f. and others, arguing that physical resurrection to permanent life is not unequivocally taught in them; on the other hand, these texts should have led them to recognize that the same mighty, creative, life-giving power of God who had been able to redeem Israel from Egyptian slavery and Babylonian exile, should be more than ample to bring about the total, physical resurrection of His people. If God is truly Giver of life, breath and all things, can He be thought to be unable to grant His children to share in His own life eternal through resurrection.

But the Sadducees had such a low view of God, because their denial of life after death was consistent with and bolstered by their rejection of the existence of angels and spirits (Acts 23:8). In fact, if spirits do not exist, how could there be a God who is Spirit (John 4:24; they must have dismissed Isa. 57:15; Zech. 12:1)? And could not such a Spirit really reveal Himself by supernatural messengers such as angels? Rationalists all, these shallow, dogmatic men simply took for granted that what to them was inconceivable or incomprehensible must also be dismissed as incredible. Nevertheless, THEIR ABILITY TO CONCEIVE IT DOES NOT DIMINISH GOD'S POWER TO EFFECT IT! Their view is typical of modern rationalists who would deny the resurrection's truth because they cannot conceive how it could occur: "To presuppose a resurrection is to involve incredible or impossible conditions." The plain answer of Jesus meets all these objections: "God's power is sufficient!" The Jewish materialists had surrendered the clearly Bible doctrine of the omnipotence of God for whom nothing is impossible! Could they have so easily forgotten Deuteronomy 3:24; I Chronicles 29:11f.; II Chronicles 20:6; Psalm 66:7; Jeremiah 32:17? These had not the faith of Abraham! (Cf. Rom. 4:18-22.) Cannot the Creator of Adam, who originally gathered the scattered, unliving dust and made man live, regather all the particles of all the dead and raise them to eternal life? What kind of a god do these unbelieving priests have anyway?!

Jesus' debating tactic involved two steps: He first refuted the Sadducees' objection by showing the fallacy upon which it was founded, i.e. their underestimating God's power to transform everything in the new world (22:30). He then furnished positive proof of the resurrection

by citing Scripture (22:31f.). In so doing, He showed how their citation does not prove what they supposed it did, and demonstrated that Moses' doctrine, given elsewhere, completely and truly disproved their notion. They had constructed an invalid argument, because it was established on false assumptions foreign to Moses.

1. The Sadducees' presupposition that gave meaning to their question is this: If there is a world beyond this life, it must necessarily resume or extend common characteristics, categories and elements typical of the good life here, including this life's relationships, especially marriage. As with other uniformitarians who assert that the past is the measure of the present, these argued that the past and the present is the measure also of the future for all time and eternity.
2. They further assumed that our present, natural body, with all its present, fleshly, earth-life needs and appetites, must be identical to that glorious, future, spiritual body with which we will be raised. (Study 2 Baruch 49-51; contrast I Cor. 15:35-38.) They undoubtedly eliminated some of the negative features, but the basic assumption remained.

Worse yet, apparently the Pharisees too shared this view, even perpetuating it. This would explain why they had been so spectacularly unsuccessful in refuting the Sadducees. Only someone who knows infallibly that marriage is not to be continued in the future world could definitively confute it. And yet their presupposition is clearly not taught by Moses, but merely added to their understanding of the Bible, as if it too were undoubted truth. The absurdity lay, therefore, not in what the Bible actually affirmed, but in this false assumption. No Bible text ever asserted that ALL relations and categories of this present age must extend over into the future world. Jews of Jesus' day argued that full recognition of the resurrected dead depended on their being in every respect like themselves in this life, including every physical trait and every social relation they bore before death. "The same old warts and the same old wife for ever and ever!" (Cf. Edersheim, *Life*, II,399 However, 2 Baruch 49-51 sees a transformation to glory after the resurrection.)

## MORMONS TOO ARE IGNORANT OF GOD'S POWER

The basic presupposition behind the Mormon "temple marriages for time and eternity" is essentially the same as that of

the Sadducees. They too see eternal life as continuing the marriage relation contracted in this life, and the multiplication of the human race exalted by the special LDS formulas. Hence their invention of "temple marriages" wherein earthly relationships are solemnized for eternity either with the same earthly marriage partner or with a number of others with whom earthly marriages was not possible because of civil legislation against polygamy. (Cf. *Doctrine and Covenants*, § 132. See also *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* 455ff.; 475, on the temple ceremonies involved.) This simply discounts God's ability to create an entirely new and better reality where marriage and present earthly family has no significance.

To the Mormons and the Sadducees and anyone else like them, Jesus answered as follows:

**22:30 For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as angels in heaven.** These materialists had imagined a situation that cannot exist, so their illustration collapsed because inapplicable. Their use of Scripture was mistaken on the ground that they had quoted a text that addressed a problem limited to this life, but were attempting to use it to establish conclusions concerning life after death in which marriage and reproduction have no meaning. Their proof-text did not even contemplate, much less deny, the possibility of a future change in human mortality effected by a resurrection to eternal life and immortality. So, quite different rules would govern that entirely new, transformed life, not the old regulations concerning succession and inheritance intended to regulate affairs in this mortal, corruptible existence. In fact, as Luke put Jesus' words: "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage" (Luke 20:34ff.). Evidently God instituted marriage for the multiplication and consequent preservation of a human race cursed by death. Rather than create a fully populated earth, He created only two human beings. Sexual multiplication by the marriage of these two and by that of their children was His design for populating it (Gen. 1:28, cf. 9:1, 7). Foreseeing that man would sin and bring death upon himself, God was thus providing for the preservation of the race beyond the death of its individuals. Thus, children are born of marriage to outlive their parents and so continue humankind, providing a plan for succession through inheritance, as contemplated by the Mosaic text cited by the Sadducees. So far, this is our state of being.

But what does that affirm about a DEATHLESS society already fully developed numerically to the full extent God desires. In fact, the redeemed who rise again, never to die again, are already a fully developed society where the need for numerical growth and primitive replenishing would not necessarily exist. Hence, there would be no need for that earthly institution that guaranteed these two results. This is why Jesus reveals that marriage is a foundational institution of this world, but not of the eternal world.

Although Jesus did not touch other questions specifically, like: "In the next world do we expect to hunger and thirst?" (cf. John 6:35, 39, 51-58, 63-68f.), His reply provides a clue to other things that puzzle us about eternity, such as our fleshly kinships. If some of our loved ones die without Christ, would not our joy in God's presence be marred? To deal with this, Jesus refers us to two glorious realities (Luke 20:34-36):

1. The power of God to create a world of reality so new and different from this earth's present reality and relationships (marriage, birth or other) is such that we can scarcely conceive of it any more than we can imagine a world where marriage is not necessary because death will be no more. And yet it is His projected plan. He can also make us forget earthly ties in the blinding glory of greater ones. Earthly families are not eternal; only their individuals.
2. The other reality is God's great family: "They cannot die anymore because they . . . are sons of God" (Luke 20:36). This new family must so overpower our present vision that we do all in our power to bring our loved ones into it by faith. But we may rejoice in that vision, knowing that God's will shall have reunited into His house all those who love Him. Who would WANT to spend eternity with those who know not God nor love our Lord Jesus Christ?! Whatever else it means to be "sons of God," this glorious relationship shall so supersede and so transform all other kinships as to remove all sorrow or sense of loss when our ungodly, earthly kin shall not have been saved. HOWEVER, in no way must this comfort compromise our concern for their salvation any more than it compromise the stability of our earthly marriages. The present rightness and permanence of our earthly

marriages must be as real as our deep concern for the salvation of our loved ones. But once this earth's testing is over and death has come, resurrection (and all that it entails) is next! The revelation of the sons of God at last and the chance to be at home with our Father forever will more than compensate any sense of loss of the temporary things of the past earth-life.

**They . . . are as angels in heaven.** Two preliminary observations must be made:

1. He does not say, "They are in heaven, as the angels," nor "as angels: in heaven." This would have required a different construction in Greek. (Alford suggests: *en tô ouranô eisin, hōs àngeloi.*) Punctuated differently, Matthew's text could be ambiguous (*all'hōs àngeloi, en tô ouranô eisin*: note the comma: "but as angels, in heaven they are."): Luke, however, removes the ambiguity by reducing the longer expression to one word, *isàngeloi*, "equal to angels," thus eliminating "in heaven." So, being *in heaven* is not the major consideration, but similarity to angels. Rather, *in heaven* describes the angels, not the place where the saints dwell. But so saying, Jesus points to an entirely different manner of life in that reality which even now exists *in heaven*, just as real as, if not more so than, that which materialists insist is the only true one here on earth.
2. In the face of Sadducean disbelief Jesus dares affirm the true existence of *the angels in heaven*. He knew He stood on unassailable ground because this truth can be sustained even on Sadducean principles. Angels appear constantly in writings of unquestionably Mosaic authorship. (Gen. 16:7-11; 18:1-19:1, 15; 21:17; 22:11, 15; 24:7, 40; 28:12; 31:11; 32:1; 48:15f.; Exod. 3:2; 14:19; 23:20, 23; 32:34; 33:2; Num. 20:16; 22:22ff.) *Angels* appeared at great signal events in Hebrew history which reflected the very reason for the nation's existence, its call from God, its blessing and protection during its wilderness pilgrimage. Could they doubt this?

But what is Jesus' basic thrust in saying *they . . . are as angels in heaven*? This state of being is, according to Jesus, the antithesis of marriage. But this question is complicated by the fact that, while Matthew and Mark contrast earthly marriage and our future likeness to angels, Luke contrasts our equality with angels and earthly mortality: "they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are

sons of God, being sons of the resurrection" (Luke 20:36). Both are unquestionably true, but is there something to learn here about angels and our future nature as well as about our selves even now? If so, what? Jesus affirms that . . .

1. We will be marriageless. The future life is not just a repetition of this age. He urges us to rethink, because there CAN be something richer and fuller, more deeply satisfying to the soul than even marriage and family as we now know it. Marriage is an institution of this cursed earth populated with mortals. But where a redeemed society is already numerically complete and lives deathlessly with God, the primitive needs of a mortal race would also become obsolete along with their solution, marriage. Marriage's joy of close, intimate and lasting fellowship will not be replaced by solitude. Rather, it will be replaced by fellowship far closer, more intimate and longer lasting than anything we can now imagine. The Lord's point is that we will have no more need to reproduce our kind in the future world, than the angels to reproduce theirs. Succession is not needed where death is no more.

Some Jews believed that 200 angels, by marriages with human women, brought on the flood. (Cf. Enoch 6:1ff.; 12:4ff.; 15:3-7; 19:1f.; 2 Baruch 56:12; Jubilees 5:1, traditions attempting to interpret Genesis 6:1-4.) However, Jesus' affirmation that angels do not marry corrects this mistaken concept, and leaves viable the interpretation that sees "the sons of God" as descendants of Seth and "the daughters of men" as Cainites, in any case fully human. (For other arguments against that theory, see Keil & Delitzsch, *Pentateuch*, I, 127ff.)

2. We will be deathless. This eliminates the need to perpetuate the race through marriage and procreation, since the resurrected saints cannot die anymore (Luke 20:36). Angels furnish, therefore, an appropriate model by which to understand human nature after the resurrection, i.e. after death's effects shall have been removed. Jesus refers not to the absence of passions or sensitivity to earth's pleasures, but to angels' immortality to illustrate our own after the resurrection.
3. We will be sons of God (Luke 20:36). Even this trait explains man's deathlessness:
  - a. As creatures of God, angels too are called "sons of God" (Job 1:6; 38:7; Ps. 89:6f.). The redeemed too are properly called



- “sons of God” being created, like the angels, to share in the glorious happiness of the direct presence of their common Creator. So, created deathless to live in God’s presence, redeemed mankind also will rise immortal, dependent on God, enjoying the fellowship of His presence. (Cf. 1 Enoch 69:4f., 11.) So, redeemed man will be restored to his original immortality, lofty glory and divine fellowship in God’s family which he enjoyed before the fall into sin in Eden. But his new creation will occur at the resurrection: “they are . . . sons of God, being sons of the resurrection,” (Luke 20:36), i.e. produced by the resurrection, finding their new life or origin in it.
- b. Further, they are “sons of God,” because, having risen, they share the immortal divine nature, made like the Lord Himself (I John 3:1-3; II Peter 1:3, 4; Phil. 3:20f.; Rom. 8:28ff.). They will have been made partakers of the divine nature more fully than ever before in this life, because they will then be finally and fully in possession of the full privileges of their adoption, their inheritance and their final liberation from all of sin’s effects on their spirit (Rom. 8:21ff.).
  - c. People take part in this age by natural birth. In that age, by resurrection. In this world babies are born as “sons of men.” In that world each will receive his new spiritual body directly from God Himself by the stupendous transformation that will occur at the resurrection. All, like the angels, will be considered “sons of God,” a fact already reflected in the new birth (James 1:18; John 1:12f.; I John 3:1ff.).

#### MORMONS ARE IGNORANT ALSO OF SCRIPTURE

*They . . . are as angels in heaven* (Matthew and Mark) and “they are equal to angels and are sons of God” (Luke) are Scriptural affirmations contradicted by Mormons’ affirmation that Mormons who are eternally married by the proper solemnities in their temples are SUPERIOR to angels and gods (*Doctrine and Covenants*, 136:16ff.) whereas those married only for this life are “appointed [to be?] angels.” The eternally married Mormons become “gods, because they have no end” (*ibid.*, v. 20). In saying “They neither marry nor are given in marriage. . . . They cannot die anymore,” Jesus contradicts Mormon theology, because He implies that deathlessness eliminates the need for marriage since immortals have no need to multiply themselves in marriage.

But Mormons teach that polygamous Mormon priests eternally married "in the eternal worlds" are to "bear the souls of men" (*Doctrine and Covenants*, 132:63; cf. Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, VI,275; VIII,208).

From the standpoint of these materialists, Jesus' revelation of the power of God does not answer the Sadducees' doubt. True, it conclusively replied to their false presupposition by furnishing a reasonable alternative to their grossly materialistic view of the question. Now, however, He must answer their doubt by furnishing positive proof that they would be compelled to admit: the authoritative Word of God through Moses! Not satisfied to win a debate against His enemies, He remembers that error entangles their mind. So He seeks to free them by teaching what they had not yet learned. Now He must say, "Your ignorance of God's Scripture blinds you to that text of all texts that reveals that God is still worshipped by living men."

**22:31 But as touching the resurrection of the dead**, i.e. "that the dead do rise" (Mark and Luke), is to be proved by their own Bible of which they were sadly ignorant. Jesus knew His Bible and understood its implications better than they did. He depends not only upon His own authoritative revelation or personal understanding of the after-life, but leads them to the already well-attested revelation of God in the Old Testament, the source whence any ordinary Jew could have argued the greatness of God and His power to eliminate death and bless man with an eternal life different from this one in all significant respects.

**Have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God?** This one question alone hammers home three massive truths useful in our defense of the faith:

1. Jesus emphatically vindicated the Mosaic authorship of Exodus 3:6 furnishing solid proof that rings like iron: "Moses showed" (Luke 20:37) "in the book of Moses" (Mark 12:26). Clearly, the Sadducees themselves accepted this fact. Otherwise, they could have objected that no doctrine was to be accepted as final or authoritative except what was of undoubted Mosaic authorship. The Sadducees rejected the Pharisees' position that the oral law was also binding. Both, however, agreed that Moses' Law was the definitive voice of God. So Jesus quoted Moses, and by so doing, confirmed his authorship in the presence of Jewish authorities dedicated to destroy Him, should anything He said prove vulnerable.

22:31

Obviously, then, for the rulers of Judaism, the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, especially Exodus, was a long-settled issue.

2. Moses' writing was the Word of God: *that which was spoken unto you by God* (Matt. 22:31). As such, it commands attention and obedience by all men under its authority. What the Old Testament Scripture says is the voice of God speaking to us. Man does not need a mystical illumination or special inspiration to receive God's message. Jesus proves conclusively here that empathetic study of the written text of the Bible will communicate God's message to the reader as truly as if God Himself were addressing directly from heaven. That such truth was first revealed to an ancient people living thousands of years ago, does not lessen any of its force for us. In fact, Jesus expected the Sadducees to have learned from what God said to Moses! For Him, the Old Testament was no dead letter, but the living voice of God.
3. The Sadducees had cited Moses as their supreme authority (22:24). So, rather than quote the Psalms, Isaiah or Daniel, Jesus goes all the way back to Moses, the source of the supposed refutation of the resurrection. From this two more points are gained for our instruction:
  - a. He began on common ground with His opponents: their shared belief in the Pentateuch. He proceeded to demonstrate that His own position was both implicit in and demonstrated by what they accepted, but that their position was disproved by that same source.
  - b. Contrary to modern critics who see Israel's concept of resurrection or of life after death as gradually learned from Egypt, Mesopotamia or Greece, Jesus leaves no room for a late discovery of the resurrection idea. Rather, He traces its origin to GOD and in *that which was spoken unto you by God!* In so doing, our Lord exploded the hypothesis of the evolutionary development of this concept, citing one of the earliest writings of the Old Testament. While Israel's understanding of it certainly developed over the centuries, the objective concept itself had already been revealed by God.

So, by tracing the resurrection's truth to God, Jesus appealed to every wavering bit of faith in God that each Sadducee present could muster to be persuaded by the truth.

How could it be truly affirmed that God addressed the Sadducees of Jesus' day, when Exodus 3:6, 16 is God's conversation with Moses?

God's statement to Moses contained a true principle that held implications not merely for Moses and his age, but for every age. It was a truth about God and man just as true in Jesus' day as when God first said it to Moses, and especially in this case, will be true and significant until the judgment.

CAUTION should be used, however, in seeking to apply to Christians the message of the Old Testament. Christians are not subject to the old covenant made with Israel, hence may not properly claim every promise or consider themselves obligated to obey every statute of the Old Covenant Scriptures. What was required of old Israel is NOT NECESSARILY required of the new "Israel of God," the Church. (Cf. Rom. 6:14, a summary of Romans, Galatians and Hebrews, the major epistles that discuss and clarify this important hermeneutical distinction.) But with this caution clearly in view, we must scan the Old Testament as well as the New Testament for truth that God intends men of every age to learn, regardless of the particular covenant under which they serve Him.

**22:32 I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob** (Exod. 3:6, 16). Our Lord could not have selected a more familiar text. There was no phrase dearer to the heart of all Judaism, no language more expressive of the old covenant. This is no "text taken out of context for a pretext," but one of the highest revelations of God! According to Jesus, this most famous title for God, this name that expresses His covenant with Israel through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, fairly SINGS the necessary truth of the resurrection.

And yet, there is no reason to doubt that Jesus would have laid before these enemies the most convincing passage possible. Surprisingly, however, His choice falls upon a passage that merely implies life after death from which the resurrection could only be inferred. In fact, without penetrating beneath this text's surface, the whole point that Jesus sees there would be missed entirely. Most readers who pass over this Bible statement would conclude that the only message conveyed there is the fact that the God who appeared to Moses is to be identified with the God who was worshipped by the patriarchs. This much it does say. But Jesus sees something else in this text as yet unrecognized by all its usual interpreters in Israel.

According to the Son of God, to say *I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob* must lead irresistably to the conclusion that *God is not the God of the dead, but of the living*. How did Jesus arrive at this conclusion? What does He mean?

1. Is Jesus arguing, as would any rabbi, that the verb in Exodus 3:6 must be interpreted in the present tense? No, because Mark and Luke both reflect the Hebrew original by omitting this verb. It is highly unlikely that any argument can be established on a verb that can be omitted. The point then, is the title "God of Abraham," not so much the verb "I am." It is pointless, therefore, to argue that God would have had to say, "I *used* to be the God of your forefathers back when they were alive." It is not a question of tense but of title. To base the true conclusion on the present tense is coming at the question the wrong way.
2. The main question is: what does it mean to be *the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob*?
  - a. Consider Who said this: *God*. Jesus is arguing on the basis of the very nature of God. But "God is Spirit" (John 4:24), the central figure of the very spiritual world these materialists deny. But if you Sadducees dare admit this one Spirit, your wholly materialistic world-view is already compromised, because where there is one undeniable spirit, there can be more than just one, in fact, a whole spiritual universe inhabited by spirits of just men made perfect (Heb. 12:23).
  - b. This God is Abraham's *God*. This is not the same as "Creator" or "Owner." Although these words correctly describe what may once have been true, they are nonetheless irrelevant to prove the present existence of the creature after death. On the other hand, if in some true sense God is still the covenant-keeping *God of Abraham*, then Abraham is still worshipping Him, still experiencing a covenantal communion with God in a way that is intimate and abiding, hence a LIVING being. If, on Sadducean principles, the patriarchs died and were consequently annihilated, this would mean the termination of God's association with them as their *God*. In fact, the relationship of worshipper to worshipped is one that is chosen by the worshipper. But, if God can describe Himself meaningfully as *the God of Abraham*, then, Abraham must be alive in the time of Moses, long after the patriarch had been gone from his body for centuries.

- c. To ask what it means to say *the God of Abraham* in its highest, truest, richest significance is to recall what God had been to Abraham. If He had been Abraham's highest shield and greatest reward for a life of faithful obedience (cf. Gen. 15:1), what special happiness, dignity or distinctions marked the lives of these patriarchs, that would justify such high promises God Almighty made to them? Were these limited only to this life, and not rather something projected beyond it? (Contrast Gen. 47:9; see also Heb. 11:13ff.) If God had provided them nothing more than the usual miseries attendant upon this life, He should have been ashamed to be called their *God*. But He was not ashamed (Heb. 11:16). Rather, His faithfulness and lovingkindness demand that He actually do for them the very thing that fully justifies His highest promises to them. But without another life after death, how could He fulfill the true purpose and full measure of His obligations sworn to them? But, if God really blessed Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in harmony with the highest intent of His word to them, there must be a state of rewards, and its corollary, a state of punishments. Since it is incredible that all of God's rewards or punishments are meted out upon their recipients in this life, it would logically follow that there must be another life after this one. In short, *The God of Abraham* needs more time, time beyond this life, to fulfill all His good promises to Abraham, to the full extent of their intended meaning.
- d. Jesus' argument implies that, if the patriarchs are forever to remain lifeless handfuls of crumbling dust in the Macpelah cave, then the Sadducean uniformitarian argument must conclude that ALL qualities of this earth must continue forever, even death itself. But is annihilation greater than GOD?! Must the Almighty continue to surrender to extinction hence lose, His godly children who trust him? Will death never be conquered? *Is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob*, that name upon which Israel's covenant with God hinged by virtue of their physical connection with these very patriarchs, at last discovered to be meaningless phrase? No, cries Jesus, this glorious title of *God* means something! *God is not the (losing) God of the dead, but the (victorious) God of the living!* Is it thinkable that the great God Almighty should deign to entitle Himself: "The God of molding bones, dust and ashes"?! Worse, for the Sadducees,

the dead no longer existed. Accordingly, from their point of view, to say, "I am the God of the long-dead patriarchs," is equivalent to: "I am the God of non-existent things, the God of nothing"—an obvious absurdity. (The Lord is using *dead* in the sense intended by the Sadducees.) But put this way, not even these liberals themselves would accept the logical conclusion of their argument and must agree with Jesus that God is the continuing object of worship of really existing people, even if these have already passed through death's door into the realm of the spirit.

In fact, if God meant no more than "I am the God of dead, senseless ashes," when calling Moses to the herculean enterprise of Israel's liberation from Egyptian bondage, how could such an ill-chosen reference have inspired Moses to rise to the challenge with the necessary trust and courage? For, if death ends all, to what purpose had the patriarchs themselves trusted God? Indeed, the hope of life after death is guaranteed not merely for the ancient fathers with whom God's covenant had originally been sealed, but really extended to all the people who respected that covenant. The proclamation at the head of the Ten Commandments reads: "I am the Lord YOUR GOD" (Exod. 20:2). Is He to be Israel's God for only so long as each Israelite shall live, and not, rather, forever? Only this latter, high view does justice to God and gives sense to the Old Testament which, without victory over death, would be like so many other ancient texts: just the dusty chronicle of the past struggles, victories and defeats of an ancient people and their god, but not the history of genuine redemption from all the losses of Eden, including death!

- e. To be *the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob* is not something that can be affirmed of now-extinct historical figures, except by historical allusion or wistful memory. How could these names in any meaningful sense refer to dead, senseless ashes? These are the names of people who are alive somewhere. And by repeating each single name, linking each man to God, Jesus is not reverting to a mere "archaic form of speech." Rather, He intends to underline the personal relationship enjoyed by God with each individual patriarch.

But how does Jesus' citation of Moses prove something about resurrection? Since the quotation does not mention it directly, and

since He argues by inference, is He not arguing, rather, for an intermediate state of existence between death and resurrection, rather than for resurrection directly, as He claimed in 22:31? To answer this question correctly, it must be understood by approaching it from the Sadducees' standpoint.

1. The Sadducees taught "that souls die with the bodies" (Josephus, *Ant.* XVIII,1,4). With this Jehovah's Witnesses agree (*Harp of God*, 41-48; *Let God Be True*, 66-75). A Sadducee could have written, "Death is the loss of life, the end of existence, the complete cessation of conscious physical or intellectual activity . . ." although a Jehovah's Witness authored this definition (*Make Sure of All Things*, 86). The fundamental confusion shared by the ancient Sadducees and their modern counterpart is their confusion of "soul" with "spirit," so that all that may be affirmed of the one must also be true in all respects of the other. It is not impossible that Sadducean thought, like that of the Watchtower, was influenced by texts that affirm the similarity of human souls with those of animals (Ps. 49:12; Eccl. 3:18f.), by texts that affirm the mortality of souls (Ezek. 18:4; Josh. 10:28-39 ASV; Ps. 22:20, 29; 89:48 ASV; Isa. 53:10-12) or by texts that speak of the unconsciousness of the dead (Ps. 13:3; 146:4 ASV; Eccl. 8:5f., 10). Bible statements that rightly describe a mortal living on earth they mistook for information that must only be understood of the state of the spirit of man after this life. Hence, they discounted texts that teach that every person shall really survive death. True, death dissolves that unique combination of body and spirit called "soul" in most texts. In this sense, of course, the "soul" dies, the body "sleeps in the dust." But THE SPIRIT neither dies nor sleeps, but, rather, returns to its Maker and is alive unto God and returns with Him at the resurrection (Eccl. 12:7; Luke 20:38; I Thess. 4:14). The popular confusion of "soul" and "spirit" for "all that there is to man" makes the interpretation of many texts difficult. This is not so much because the texts are unclear, but because the interpreter unconsciously brings his own understanding of "soul" or "spirit" to the text, then tries to fit it into his preconceived scheme of reality.
2. Further, it is also apparent from Jesus' mode of reasoning that the Sadducees shared the general Hebrew idea that God's love and concern for man involves His interest in the whole man, body and soul. Rather than consider the body the prison of the soul, as



did Romans and Greeks, the Hebrews were taught to conceive of the human spirit as originally formed to express itself through a body.

While it may be argued that nothing can be concluded about the resurrection body by comparing it with our first creation (Adam's body), it should be noted that there is no Scriptural evidence that there has been or will be a change in our spirit's mode of expressing itself, i.e. in some form of expression other than in a body. Rather, our long-awaited perfection through transformation at the resurrection will complete our redemption by furnishing us a glorious, immortal BODY (Rom. 8:23; I Cor. 15:44, 49, 53; Phil. 3:21). So this divine choice evidences His desire that our spirits continue to express themselves by means of a new body like that of Jesus.

I Thessalonians 5:23 turns out not to be a new revelation so much as the confirmation of this ancient view. (Cf. also *psuchè* in Acts 2:27, an Old Testament concept where "soul" = "the entire person" is the parallel.)

The Sadducees apparently turned this concept against resurrection by questioning "the immortal duration of the soul" (cf. *Wars*, II,8,14), since, if the body apart from the spirit is dead, the spirit apart from the body must be dead too! The one has no independent existence without the other. There could be no life after death, except that life realized in some kind of a body, since there could be no life but that in a body. Implicit in their argument, then, is the practical equation of resurrection and life after death. Thus, to prove the truth of the one is to establish the other also.

To refute their position, all Jesus had to demonstrate was that spirits have an existence separate from the body. This He did by proving from Scripture that the great patriarchs of the Hebrew faith are still alive centuries after leaving their bodies, that they returned to their Maker and God, hence are not totally extinct at all. Death did not extinguish their spirits. They were even then living in the sphere of God. (Cf. the New Testament doctrine; II Cor. 4:16—5:9; Rev. 6:9; Matt. 17:3; I Thess. 4:13-18, esp. v. 14.) Jesus did not affirm the resurrection of these Old Testament worthies; only their survival after the death of their bodies. But given the Sadducees' (Hebrew) view of man's wholeness of soul and body, the soul and body, the resurrection of the body was no longer impossible, but must necessarily follow.

### III. THE RESULT: JESUS' MASTERFUL REBUTTAL INSPIRES PRAISE (22:33)

**22:33 And when the multitudes heard it, they were astonished at his teaching.** Not only were the crowds deeply impressed by the penetrating insight of Jesus' wisdom and instruction, but even some of the theologians in that group had to admit, "Teacher, you have spoken well" (Luke 20:39). Rather than beat Him, the Sadducees' attempt had only succeeded in establishing Him more securely in the crowds' admiration. Should not the crowd be astonished that only this young preacher could with such marvelous ease unravel the ancient problem with so indisputable a text?

Undoubtedly some Pharisees too had seen the crowd and joined in to listen. They had been crushed endlessly by their personal failure to answer that old Sadducean trick question many times before. Could they do anything but rejoice to have this thorn in their side removed by the sound defence of the resurrection now completed by Jesus? Even in this moment charged with tense emotion, it must have required no little courage so quickly and so publicly to announce their concurrence with Jesus' deeply satisfying spiritual victory over the unbelief which their own best answers could not eradicate. He had used their own familiar weapons with a mastery they could not equal! One of these Pharisees could hardly wait to inform his cohorts of the Sadducean debacle (cf. 22:34).

### THE EFFECTS OF JESUS' DOCTRINE

1. **THE DOCTRINE OF MATERIALISM IS PROVEN FALSE.** Jesus' principles establish the reality of the human spirit, because it survives the death of the material body. Therefore, man is more than matter. At death his spirit survives alive in the spiritual realm of the living God and must answer to Him!
2. **THE PROPHETIC DIGNITY OF JESUS RECEIVES FURTHER CONFIRMATION.** How could Jesus answer with such certainty that marriage does not exist in the spirit world? While some might suppose this statement to result from His careful meditation, He simply stated the truth the way He who came from heaven knew it to be.
3. **THE RESURRECTION WILL NOT MERELY RESUME THIS LIFE, BUT INTRODUCE A NEW LIFE FAR BETTER.** There will be no

death in the new family of God. The frontiers of this new life are limited only by the unlimited creative power of God who makes it possible.

4. **THE AUTHORITY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES IS FURTHER VINDICATED.** What a tremendous impact the Old Testament had on Israel, particularly that section of the Scriptures the scholars of today question as non-Mosaic! Is it not instructive that these rankst unbelievers in Israel (the Sadducees) wholeheartedly embraced precisely this part of the Scriptures, and that our Lord, while informing their ignorance, founded His argument exclusively on it? Can theologians escape the Lord's condemnation, if they deny what Jesus affirms concerning the validity of the Old Testament's witness as specifically from Moses?
5. **THE GREATNESS OF GOD'S POWER TO PERFORM ALL HE PROMISED AND MORE** (Rom. 4:21; Heb. 11:19). All is well with those who trust God. Death holds no terrors for His people.
6. **GOD'S JUDGMENT IS A DECIDED CERTAINTY!** Hitting hard at Sadducean denial of God's judgment (cf. *Wars*, II,8,14), Jesus proved that God's menace to destroy the wicked and unbelieving in eternal punishment is no idle threat. If no one had survived physical death, it might have been assumed that death were but a freak accident of human evolution, not a divine judgment. It might have been assumed, further, that the ancient story of God's punishment of Adam and his descendants with bodily death were but an ancient legend attempting to explain a natural phenomenon. But, because Jesus conclusively proved that men really do survive death to live in another world, He proved thereby that the ancient record was no myth. Rather death meted out to Adam and his children is really a divine judgment. So, if men really survive their personal punishment for Adam's sin (= death), they must answer for their own personal conduct before God in that immortal world. So, by punishing men with death for Adam's transgression, God gave assurance of His future justice to be faced by a race entirely resurrected. Death is God's assurance to all that He means business. Resurrection is His assurance that divine justice has not been totally satisfied by the physical death of each individual child of Adam. Rather, judgment must yet be faced, because there is life after death!
8. **THE COMMUNION OF THE SAINTS IS REAL.** If Abraham, Isaac and Jacob live, what of the rest of the Old and New Testament

saints, yes, and all those who have died since? Duckworth (*P.H.C.*, XXIII,445) reminds us of . . .

. . . the indestructible bond that knits in holy communion and fellowship the whole redeemed family of God. We talk and act as though we on this side of the veil constituted the whole Catholic Church; we forget that the majority is elsewhere, that we are but a fraction of it: we forget the great cloud of witnesses gathered during the ages growing day by day, the unseen multitude which no man can number; we think but seldom of that paradise of God, that land of the living, where loyal hearts and true stand ever in the light. Ah brethren, it is we who are in the shadows and the darkness, not they. . . .

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. Who were the Sadducees? What did they believe? Describe their position in the religio-political spectrum in Israel. What else does the New Testament say about them? In what major points did they differ from the Pharisees?
2. What was the law they cited? What practical problem in Israel was this law intended to solve? Why underline the childlessness of each marriage?
3. Show how the Sadducees' practical case seemed to them to enjoy Mosaic sanction for their position regarding the resurrection.
4. What is the importance of Jesus' remark about their ignorance? Show how this is no mere jab to hurt them but an integral part of His answer.
5. Show in what way the Sadducees were signally ignorant of the power of God.
6. Why is Jesus' allusion to angels particularly significant in this conversation with Sadducees?
7. In what way are resurrected humans like angels in heaven? What additional light does Luke throw on this question?
8. In what way does marriage have only to do with this life?
9. In what way were the Sadducees tragically ignorant of the Scriptures, according to Jesus?
10. What Bible text did He cite in proof of the resurrection? What other Old Testament texts COULD He have cited with equal force?
11. Show how the text cited actually proves the truth of the resurrection. Show how the same text could be used to deal with other Sadducean disbelief.

12. Why did Jesus choose to cite a text out of the Pentateuch for the Sadducees?
13. Show how Jesus defended the divine and human authorship of the text cited. (Cf. Mark and Luke.)
14. What was the crowds' reaction to Jesus' answer?
15. According to Luke, what was the reaction of the theologians present?

### C. THE QUESTION OF THE GREAT COMMANDMENT IN THE LAW

(Parallel: Mark 12:28-34; cf. Luke 10:25-28 not parallel)

TEXT: 22:34-40

34 But the Pharisees, when they heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, gathered themselves together. 35 And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, trying him: 36 Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law? 37 And he said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second like *unto it* is this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. 40 On these two commandments the whole law hangeth, and the prophets.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Where do you think the Pharisees had been before this (cf. 22:15, 22)?
- b. What do you think is the motive behind this lawyer's desire to "try Jesus"? If he really had the proper understanding of God's revelations as Mark shows him to have, from what point of view would he have formed this question so as to "try Him"?
- c. In your opinion why did he choose precisely this question from among the many he could have brought before Jesus? Was this a question commonly discussed among the Jews? What, if anything, does this choice of questions reveal about the lawyer himself?
- d. What could the Pharisean party hope to gain by submitting specifically this question?
- e. In what sense is love for God rightly the first and greatest commandment?

- f. In what sense is love for one's neighbor rightly the second commandment? Why should it be second? In what sense does it depend upon the first commandment?
- g. In what sense is it true that "all the law and the prophets depend upon these two commandments"? If they are themselves part of the Mosaic Law, in what sense can the Law itself *depend* upon them? Even if everyone in our texts call these "commandments," are they really legal requirements? How would you describe them, if you think they are not legal requirements?
- h. In what sense should we understand the various terms listed with which we should love God: "heart," "soul," "mind" and "strength" (added from Mark)? Do you think these refer to different parts of man's makeup? If so, how would you define each one?
- i. If Jesus did not furnish the scribe unique or original information in answer to his question, but rather cited him some texts out of his own Bible,
  - (1) what should we conclude about the texts cited and about the Bible that included them?
  - (2) what should we conclude about Jesus? Is He a true prophet or not? Are not prophets supposed to reveal fresh, new material? How do we know Jesus is God's true Prophet precisely because He cited that ancient material?
  - (3) what may we learn about the psychological advantage to be gained by an appropriate use of appeals to sources held to be authoritative by people whom we seek to persuade? Did the Apostles ever cite pagan sources for the same purpose?
- j. How would you describe the character of the lawyer as this character appears in the man's final answer to Jesus given by Mark?
- k. According to Mark, the scribe's reaction was: "You are right, Teacher, you have truly said that . . ." Do you think he was standing up for Jesus in the midst of the fiery opposition the Lord had encountered in the previous skirmishes? Since he was a Pharisee (Matthew), what does this tell you about (1) this man, and (2) about Pharisees in general?
- l. Mark reports Jesus' reaction to the lawyer's approval: "You are not far from the Kingdom of God." To what phase or expression of the Kingdom does Jesus refer?
- m. If Jesus' answer could have been known through appropriate study of the Old Testament, why is it that, according to Mark and Luke, "after that no one dared to ask Him any question"?

- n. What steps should one take to apply Jesus' teaching given in this section to his own life? What questions should we ask about every issue or problem we face in order correctly to practice what Jesus requires here?
- o. Do I really love God with the reality and fervency Jesus is talking about?
- p. Do I really care about my neighbor the way I care about my own needs, problems, interests and desires?
- q. According to Jesus, all of God's religion is based on these two commands. Go through the New Testament listing all its commands and prohibitions. Do you find any that cannot be subsumed under one or the other of these two heads?
- r. What do you think would happen if everyone were to practice these two commandments as Jesus means them?
- s. What would the pragmatic success of practicing these two rules prove about the validity of the Christian faith?

### PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had reduced the Sadducees to silence, they got together. One of them, an expert in Mosaic Law, who had been listening to the debate between Jesus and the Sadducees, approached Him. Recognizing how well He had answered His opponents, this Mosaic jurist proposed the following question to put Jesus to the test: "Teacher, what sort of command qualifies as the most important in the Law?"

Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Listen, Israel: the Lord our God is the only God there is! So, you must love Him with your whole heart, your whole soul, your whole mind and with all the strength you have!'" This is the great, foremost precept. There is a second one similar to it and here it is: 'You must love your neighbor as you do yourself.' The commandment does not exist that is more important than these two. In fact, these two commandments are the ultimate principles behind the entire Law and everything the prophets taught, their very essence."

"Exactly, Teacher!" the theologian said to Him. "You are so right to say that the Lord is the only God there is. Furthermore, to love Him with all one's heart, all one's understanding and all one's strength, and to love one's neighbor as one loves himself, this is of far greater importance than the whole sacrificial system."

Recognizing the intellectual freedom with which the man answered, Jesus said to him, "You are not far from God's Kingdom."

After this, no one risked asking Him any more questions.

## SUMMARY

One Pharisean legal expert, impressed by Jesus' debating skill, tested Him with a question concerning the most important commandment in all Mosaic legislation. Jesus pointed to those commands which required whole-souled concern for God and one's neighbor. These, according to Jesus, summarize the Old Testament's message. To this the theologian could but echo his assent that this morality really surpassed mere ritual without it. Jesus openly praised this Pharisee's discernment. However, no one else signed up for the debate: they did not dare!

## NOTES

### I. SITUATION

**22:34 But the Pharisees, when they heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, gathered themselves together.** Unexpectedly, someone broke away from the circle around Jesus to carry the exciting news that the Nazarene had just now muzzled their old foes, the Sadducees. So Sadducean wit too had dried up: their thrashing attempt to expose the Galilean rabbi as an unprincipled incompetent had back-fired too! The Pharisees convened all their forces at the same place (*sunéchthēsan epì tō epì autō*) to discuss the next step. But, if but recently they had been blistered by Jesus' intelligent answers, why should they desire to get burnt again?

1. Jesus' victory over the rationalistic Sadducees on the great question of the resurrection brought mixed reactions: let's try to imagine their frame of mind in this situation.
  - a. The Pharisees were in an expansive mood because someone had finally answered the skepticism and doubts that had so long frustrated their own efforts to settle the crucial doctrine of the resurrection.
  - b. But their rejoicing soured because it was not a Pharisee that had soundly disposed of the Sadducees. Rather it had been that upstart rabbi from Galilee! So they could not rejoice even if He had confirmed this truth so dear to their party.



- c. Rather than assemble to communicate to Him their party's gratitude for devastating that skeptical position so effectively, they regroup to attack Him! They do not care about the victory of truth, because they cannot rejoice that Jesus had overcome. In their malicious envy and party spirit they seek to crush Him who had caused truth to triumph. (Contrast Paul's attitude: Phil. 1:15-18.)
2. The Sadducees had proved their incompetence as guardians of the nation. But their liberalism could not be expected to hold the line against someone who genuinely respected the Scriptures but rejected traditional orthodoxy. Surely a shrewd Pharisean mind could be trusted to state truth correctly where the best of Sadducean scholarship wilted before the Galilean prophet.
3. But if Jesus could be tempted to commit Himself on another question that would also embarrass the Sadducean hierarchy sufficiently to goad them into disposing of Jesus, the Pharisees' hands would be clean, the Sadducees would do the dirty work, and Jesus would be gone. If He damned ceremonial law and Levitical ritual with the same vehemence He attacked rabbinical decisions (Matt. 15:1ff.), the embittered Sadducean hierarchy would have ample cause to indict Him, because their political power depended upon the prestige and importance of the Temple and their monopoly of its liturgy.

Perhaps one or all of these considerations prodded the Traditionalists to renew their earlier, ill-starred assault. This time duplicity must be excluded: He could unmask it too quickly! (Cf. 22:18; Luke 20:20, 23.) Now Jesus must be examined with sincerity and fairness to determine the breadth and depth of His real mastery of God's revelation and human nature.

**22:35 One of them, a lawyer:** The Pharisee chosen to represent these highly agitated, frustrated heads of orthodox religion was an expert in theological law (*nomikòs*, Mark calls him a "scribe" *grammateùs*), hopefully well-qualified to present the test question and judge the correctness of its answer.

### WHAT IS WRONG WITH MATTHEW'S ACCOUNT?

Some commentators, seeing that Matthew omitted to present this lawyer in a favorable light by not mentioning his positive reaction to Jesus' answer and the Lord's commendation of the man, consider Mark's version "preferable" because it presents

the good side of the world of the Pharisees. (Cf. Bruce, *Expositor's Greek Testament*, I,276). Again,

The accounts vary in regard to the motive of the questioner. In Matthew he comes to tempt, in Mark in hope of getting confirmation in a new way of thinking on the subject, similar to that of the man in quest of eternal life—that which put the ethical above the ritual. No anxious attempt should be made to remove the discrepancy (*ibid.*, 424).

To describe Mark's as the "strictly accurate account" (so Alford, 401) is to disparage Matthew's less detailed report and declass it for weak believers as "less strictly accurate." These scholars fail to observe that it is Mark who is less circumstantial in creating the setting, because, without Matthew's information, we would surmise that the scribe simply wandered up and, hearing how well Jesus handled His antagonists, asked a question of his own. Further, it is Mark who omits the true relation of this scribe to his party's intention to "try" Jesus. Thank God, we can have BOTH Matthew and Mark to get the larger picture! Even so, we need not suppose that both Gospels record all that happened that day.

A cursory reading of Matthew alone would lead to the conclusion that the lawyer was an enemy like the party he represented. HOWEVER MATTHEW DID NOT AFFIRM THE LAWYER'S PERSONAL HOSTILITY. This is merely a surmise based on his being a Pharisee (a group of bad repute elsewhere in Matthew). But with Mark's information, we can arrive at what even Matthew knew but did not state: the scribe was actually personally open to Jesus. So, Matthew's information is correct so far as it goes and does not contradict Mark when interpreted in light of ALL the available facts. By what right does the modern scholar demand that Matthew register all he knew about this or any other event? But that Matthew correctly represents this event as a "trial" is evident from the consideration of what Mark's scribe's reaction would have been, had Jesus NOT answered his question as well as He did! Those commentators that downgrade Matthew are simply unwilling to let all the witnesses testify to what happened that day. Is this true objectivity?

Do the following points include all the facts to form a good hypothesis?

1. Jesus beat the Sadducees fairly in debate and at least one Pharisee heard Him and reported His victory to his party (cf. Luke 20:39).
2. The Pharisees gathered to discuss this event but could not decide the best course of action.
3. Another Pharisee, a lawyer, who too had heard Jesus, because he had a personal desire to talk to Him, volunteered to propound the test question. Because of his intellectual stature, he is chosen to represent the party in this next attack.
4. The lawyer then honestly presented Jesus his test question to which he had given much personal thought and really sought confirmation of his own conclusions. This explains his sincere admiration of Jesus' ability.
5. Jesus, accordingly, dealt with the man as an individual, ignoring his party interests and connections. This explains His commendation.
6. In the process Jesus really and definitively passed the Pharisees' examination.

In the lawyer's question, therefore, there could well have been the confluence of two separate sets of motives: his own, apparently good (as pictured by Mark) and those of his party, apparently bad (as Matthew depicts them). Trying him (*peirázōn autōn*), then is Matthew's wise selection of a word whose meaning-potential covers both motivations: "to try, make trial of, put to the test, to discover what kind of a person someone is, either in a good sense, to put men to the test so that they may prove themselves true [or in this case, competent, HEF], or in a bad sense, to bring out something to be used against the one who is being 'tried,' or to entice to sin." (Cf. Arndt-Gingrich, 646.)

1. *Trying him*, on the part of the Pharisees, must be interpreted as their endeavor to expose and destroy Him. From their party's standpoint the question was but an intellectual exercise, not a spiritual quest for truth.
2. *Trying him*, for the lawyer, meant something else. He was one of the crowd who saw Jesus best His adversaries (Mark 12:28). Notice this incidental result of Jesus' debating tactics: not only were His answers good, but His spirit inspired confidence and invited further investigation of the truth He taught. With no sinister motive, the scribe is *trying him* with a seriously intended question

to see if He, who could so brilliantly muzzle the willfully treacherous; would be just as prepared with an appropriate response for an honest, sincere questioner. *Trying him*, his intention is to use this vexed question to test the depth of this rabbi's understanding, if we may discern this intention from his reaction to Jesus' answer and the Lord's commendation (Mark 12:32ff.).

**22:36 Teacher.** His opening words do not drip with honeyed sarcasm (cf. 22:16). This address is spoken in the quiet reserve of a dignified scholar intent on getting to the bottom of this entire question once and for all. In fact, if his goal is to sound Jesus' depth, he could not have selected a more appropriate question! The choice of questions reveals his own breadth and depth. He does not choose some obscure, trifling issue, but goes to the heart of true religion: *What is the great commandment in the law?*

To appreciate this theologian's question, we must understand something of the current debate in Judaism out of which it comes, as well as the practical problem behind the debate: are all of God's commands equally important?

1. The scribes were agreed that the Law contained "heavy" and "light" precepts. (Cf. Pal. Talmud, Ber. 1:4; Yeb. 1:6.) But they differed on which commandments belonged to each category. Some considered circumcision as conferring the most merit; others held for tithing, fasting, sacrifices, washings or phylacteries as pre-eminent. Edersheim (*Life*, II,404 cites Ab. 2:1; 4:2; Sanh. 11:3; Deb. 4:6) doubts that these rabbinic distinctions between light and heavy commands were in the lawyer's mind, since rabbinism had decreed them of equal merit and equal validity.
2. But is this question appropriate? Is not anything God commands of importance equal to anything else He commands, just because HE says it?
  - a. Jesus did not reject the lawyer's question as inappropriate. He answered it as it stood. To ask for the most important command of God does not necessarily imply that the questioned intends to dismiss those of lesser importance. Such a question may only intend to establish right priorities, especially in the presence of a conflict of duty where, of course, the more important duty must have priority.
  - b. Even Jesus speaks of "the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness" (Matt. 23:23) in contrast to the law of tithing. (See Matt. 5:19 notes.) Our Lord is in perfect

harmony with many marvelous Old Testament texts that summarize basic religion. Check them out for your own enrichment: Deut. 10:12-22; I Sam. 15:22f.; Ps. 15; 40:6-8; 50:7-23; 51:16-19; 69:30f.; Isa. 1:11-17; 33:14-16; Jer. 7:21-23; Hos. 4:1; 6:6; Amos 5:14f., 21-24; Mic. 6:6-8; Hab. 2:4.

3. But this debate over most important commandments is productive of two widely differing points of view:
  - a. One position seeks to find the one law which may be kept in place of observing the whole law. This is a bare minimum approach that seeks one supreme command that excludes the others. This view misses the fundamental principle that the intentional omission, or ignoring of even one commandment is tantamount to violation of the entire law (James 2:10), whereas the purpose of God's whole system was to create a spirit of willing submission to God its giver and of readiness to do the whole thing.
  - b. The other seeks to find the one law that gives sense, direction, purpose and strength for keeping the whole system. This view seeks to understand the heart of the question in order to obey the whole law cheerfully, completely and intelligently. This seeks the one law which is great because it includes the others. This is probably the lawyer's intent.

The lawyer's question would be better translated: "What kind of command is great in the law?" (*poia entolè megàlè en tō nòmō*). Plummer (*Matthew*, 308) expands this question thus:

What sort of characteristics must a commandment have in order to be accounted great? Or is there any commandment which has these characteristics in a very marked degree? . . . What principle ought to guide one in making such distinctions?

He wisely seeks that fundamental principle necessary to measure the greatness of any commandment. He is not distinguishing moral and ceremonial laws as such, nor "light" from "heavy" precepts. He asks the right question: which of the 613 laws stands at the heart and foundation of God's will?

How could the lawyer's Pharisean brethren have permitted such a question? What could they have hoped to have gained by his proposing specifically this test? If this represents the peak of their ingenuity in this crisis, how did they suppose it could have helped their cause?

1. It was a real, debated issue. It could be asked sincerely as for information, hopefully without raising the suspicion of its intended

Victim. Let Him expose himself on this hotly contested issue where they felt they had room to argue. "With 613 commandments to choose from, in a battlefield already scarred with positions previously taken and abandoned, regardless of what he picks, we can always argue the relative importance of others in that bewilderingly wide field of laws both religious and civil, moral and ritual, home and foreign, public and private! At any rate, we can discredit his wisdom."

2. By focusing the issue on the Law, perhaps Jesus might be drawn into some misguided or otherwise objectionable declaration of His own authority in contradiction to the Law. Perhaps He would even abolish certain parts of the legislation in favor of others, inciting the Pharisees to scream for the high holiness and validity of the whole Law.
3. They could sound the depth of His knowledge and grasp of the Law. Anyone well-versed in legal questions could easily expose another who had not done his homework. So, it was a Pharisean expert in theological law who was chosen to launch this test-question.

In this setting it becomes clearer why this question would satisfy both the evil-intentioned legalists and their more fair-minded spokesman: it tested Jesus' rabbinical credentials to the core. He had pushed them into an uncomfortable but just compromise regarding Roman legislation (22:17), but this time He must answer concerning the holy law of God! How little these Pharisees understood the truly *great commandment in the law* is measured by their hatred of this Nazarene, their Neighbor, and consequently, by their rejection of the God whose message Jesus bore. However, God makes even men's malice to praise Him, for although it was Pharisean envy that posed Him this question, we too needed to know what principles lie at the heart of fundamental religion. So, what was intended as a dangerous trap for Jesus, God made to be a good thing for us: now we have His answer! Further, when asked about a point of law, Jesus turned everyone's attention upon GOD, the Author of the Law, and upon OTHERS for whose benefit the Law was made.

## II. JESUS' RESPONSE

### A. The First Table of Law: Duty to God (Deut. 6:4, 5)

22:37 **And he said unto him.** Although Mark (12:29f.) accurately remembers that Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:4, 5, thus prefacing the

first great commandment with that solemn declaration of the unity of God, Matthew focuses on the second verse which presupposes it and proceeds at once to the only answer universally recognizable for the Pharisee's question.

### 1. What we must do: Love

*You shall love (agapéseis: future used as an imperative).* This is an order! (Cf. note on *agapàō* on Matt. 5:44, Vol. I, 312ff.) The kind of love commanded here is that intelligent good-will toward God that always seeks to do what He considers to be in His best interest, to please Him. This is, however, more than a sentiment however deeply felt. It is a motive to action, fundamental to everything God's people are to do. Israel was taught to love God. (Study Deut. 10:12f.; 11:1, 13, 22; 13:3f.; 30:6, 16, 20.) He orders this love, because, where love is the governing attitude of the individual, the readiness to do anything He requires will be there too. Where this high motive is missing, a person will not do what is right. If he tries to do the right without this love, he will do it for the wrong motives, and it will not be accepted by God. Or if he attempts to do the right without love, his initial enthusiasm will have no staying power and he will not do what is right for very long. Israel's historic failures illustrate the failure to love God.

To *love God* means to long for His fellowship, to delight in Him, to appreciate *all* His attributes, His justice, love, patience, mercy, power and plans, to show zeal for His honor. It is an unlimited, constant readiness to obey anything He says and to imitate His character. To *love God* completely means to love what He loves, to love what is His, especially to love the man God made in His own image (cf. I John 4:20). To *love God* truly means to fear Him above all else, trust Him no matter what, esteem Him for all that He does, adore Him and depend upon Him.

### 2. Whom we are to love: God

*The Lord your God* is not an Infinite Number or a mere Supreme Being, but *the Lord*, or the great *Jahvè*, the self-existent, unchanging, eternal One whose very names assure us of His reality in contrast to all other objective non-existent deities men may choose. He is ever able to affirm: "I am He who IS!" (Ex. 3:14f. LXX: *egō eimi ho*

ὁν . . . *Kùrios ho theòs*; Hebrew: *ehyeh asher ehyeh* . . . *yehovah elohey*.) No one needs ever to fear that this Lord will go out of business! Although *kùrios* ("Lord") is but a Septuagint substitution for the Divine Name (JHVH), Jesus did not retranslate the text as He quoted it (much to the chagrin of Jehovah's Witnesses who would wish He had inserted the Divine Name in Hebrew). This leaves God's Lordship ever as one of the nuances involved in His Name. So He is *the Lord* whose sovereignty rightfully commands your love. He is *your God*, the object of your worship, service and praise, your Creator, Owner and Ruler whose covenant relation to you guarantees His faithful mercies and nearness to you. By signing His full Name to this command, God gently reminds His people who it is that earned the right to demand this unselfish, limitless love.

### 3. How we are to love Him: Whole-heartedly

What does it mean to *love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, with all your mind*? Are these phases of our being to be thought of as distinct areas?

1. *Heart* (*kardia* = Heb. *leb*). The Biblical concept of *heart* concerns the basis and center of our personality. (Cf. Ps. 104:15; Acts 14:17; I Sam. 16:7; I Peter 3:4; 1:22; Eph. 4:18; Matt. 13:15; I Cor. 4:5; 7:37; Heb. 8:10; I John 3:20f.; Rom. 1:24; Eph. 6:22; Matt. 11:29.) These texts use the word *heart* to refer to what we really are spiritually, sometimes even physically. It is the center of our thoughts, feelings, conscience, will and disposition. If deep-rooted sentiment is meant here, we must love God supremely, ardently, with all we have and are.
2. *Soul* (*psuchè* = Heb. *nephesh*). Usually, but not always, *soul* in Scripture refers to that combination of spirit and body that we call "life." (Cf. Matt. 20:28; John 10:11, 15, 17.) But because we see life wholistically, we speak of our soul in the way we speak of our whole being. (Cf. John 12:27; Acts 2:43; 14:22; 4:32; John 10:24 in Greek; Matt. 10:28, 39; 16:25f.) *Soul*, then, emphasizes our readiness to surrender our life to Him, living it out in devoted service and being ready to die for Him, if faithfulness to Him requires it.
3. *Mind* (*dianoia*). No Hebrew equivalent here, because Jesus added this concept. Loving God with our intellect or reason, or our understanding involves various things:



- a. Deep sincere beliefs held about God, not blind, unthinking devotion nor unreasoning, mystic contemplation. Our faith must be intelligent, based on evidence reasonably evaluated.
- b. Dedicating all our intellectual abilities and efforts to Him. In God's Kingdom there are no prizes for intellectual shoddiness or lack of preparation. We are to use our critical faculties to study to learn everything we can about God and His will. This dedication of mind to God's service is the only justifiable reason for Christian scholarship. But where pride in one's own intellectual accomplishments becomes supreme, one no longer uses his mind to love God.
- c. Intelligent understanding of all we do, whether in worship or service, not mindless "religious" motion. A mind disconnected whether in prayer or praise supposedly prompted by the Spirit, is condemned by this great commandment to love God with the mind. (Cf. I Cor. 14:14-19 in the context of I Cor. 13.)
4. *Strength* (*ischus* = Heb. *me'od*, Mark 12:29). This refers to both our physical strength and the spiritual vitality of our inner man, in short, to all the energy of our being, our force of character, the command we have over our circumstances and environment, our will and purpose.

None of these concepts are very far apart. In fact, it may be that there is deliberate overlapping in the meaning of the four words used, so that, by piling up these inextricably linked spheres of human personality, God could lead us to grasp the totality of our commitment to Him. (Note the cumulative force in the threefold repetition of the phrase "with all your. . .") This leaves no room for divided loyalties or partial affections. This entire, intricate inter-relation of our emotions, understanding, reasoning and will must participate together in our service to God. (Cf. Ps. 103:1.)

Lenski (*Matthew*, 880) is right to recognize this commandment, coming as it does from God Himself, as speaking to the subject of human psychology: If our Creator, who unquestionably understands us better than we could ever know ourselves, used every term He knew we would grasp to indicate our complex, spiritual and physical nature, one must pronounce false and misleading all simplistic theories of man that see him as a mere animal, a mere machine or a mere anything. What a high view of man God holds! We are not computer cards deterministically

programmed nor mere numbers, but MEN “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Ps. 139:14).

This commandment is God’s demand that we give Him everything we have and are—the whole thing!

**22:38 This is the great and first commandment**, because it underlies the first table of the Decalogue, forbidding all sins against God, such as polytheism, atheism and idolatry. Because it underlies God’s unity and absolute uniqueness, it also bans syncretism which reduces the unique, living God to a local deity of Jews and Christians, but not of the whole world. It further damns every type of philosophic concept that functions as a god in the mind of its adherents. It is also *first*, even indirectly suggested in the Second Commandment: “showing love to thousands who love me and keep my commandments” (Exod. 20:6; Deut. 5:10). It is unquestionably *first and great*, because out of it will flow everything else, even the second great commandment.

In the final analysis, however, we cannot serve God directly. He has no necessities we could supply. We could never increase His glory nor confer on Him something He had not already given us. But He does have needy human beings here on earth to whom we may offer useful service in His name. So He recommends these in His place:

## B. The Second Table of Law: Duty to One’s Neighbor (Lev. 19:18)

**22:39 And a second like unto it is this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.** (See notes on 5:43-48; 7:12 and 19:16-20.) The legal expert had requested that Jesus select that single law which was greatest. The Lord, however, must indicate also *a second* which is a necessary companion to the first.

1. It is *a second like unto* the first in that loving one’s neighbor refers to the same category of moral law. He selects no third commandment. Only these two, taken together, form the ethical foundation for all the rest. It is this shared function that exhibits their similarity.
2. Both command *love* that motivates one to do what the law directs (Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:14; James 2:8ff.)
3. This precept follows naturally as the corollary to the first, because love for one’s fellows is the only concrete way any of us can demonstrate the reality and depth of his love for God in whose image all men are created (Matt. 25:31-46; I John 3:10, 17f.; 4:20; Heb. 6:10; Prov. 19:17).

In fact, our love for God must be the precondition and inspiration for love for our fellows. It is only when we love God's view of man that we can learn to love man too. Only when we see in man what God sees in him can we begin to love him. Thus, the definitive foundation of true humanity (humanness and humaneness) is our appreciation of God. Remove this, and our idealism degenerates into cynicism because man's resistance to change will frustrate us. Human ingratitude will make us pessimistic about man's perfectibility and quench the enthusiasm of our ideals. So, the true foundation of a broad, unrelenting, indomitable love for man must be deeply rooted in the staying power we derive from a loving God who renews our vision of what man can become and furnishes us the power of His Spirit through the Gospel to effect this.

### 1. What we are to do: Love

*You shall love (agapéseis*, future used as an imperative, the same form used to order us to love God). This love can be ordered. It is no sweet sentiment touching only the affections or simply a question of tastes or inclinations, likes or dislikes. Rather, it is an intelligent concern for our fellows that puts us at the service of their true welfare to seek their highest good. Sin is impossible for the person who loves another the way God means it, because love prompts him to want to bless, not injure, the other (Rom. 13:8-10). Stealing, killing, committing adultery and exploiting others become unthinkable. Such love prompts us, not simply to "feel right" about our neighbor, but to do right with him and for him, according to God's ethical standard. This love causes us to teach him, correct, reprove and exhort him. Not to do so becomes, by definition, evidence of lack of love.

### 2. Whom we are to love: Our neighbor

That this love for one's neighbor must include more than one's own fellow citizens, his private family circle or coreligionists, is amply proven by the chapter from which this text is taken, Leviticus 19, esp. 19:34. (Cf. Deut. 10:18f.: God loves the aliens, so you love them too!) Jesus chose a Samaritan to display the meaning potential of the word, *neighbor* (Luke 10:25-37). Study also Jesus' rejection of "love limited to local associations" (Matt. 5:43-48). Such love requires us to act benevolently toward our enemies even to the point of helping them in their distress, by acting neighborly toward them (Rom. 12:14-21).

### 3. How we are to love Him: As we love ourselves

*As thyself:* Jesus assumes that normal people rightly love themselves. So, He appropriates this psychological reality to serve as the standard for determining the depth and warmth of our love for others.

1. There is a proper self-love that is at the same time Scripturally correct and psychologically sound. (Study Eph. 5:28f., 33.) He did not say, "Love your neighbor *instead of* yourself," but "Love him *as you do yourself*." What is this appropriate self-love? It is that genuine appreciation of our own dignity and worth as human beings, based on what the Bible considers man to be.

The opposite of this kind of self-love is self-hate, a despising of what one is or has. This self-depreciation leaves a person insecure about his worth and struggling for some other identity he hopes will make him confident and someone he himself can look up to. It is this self-hate that arrogantly exalts self at the expense of others and tramples on them to get ahead.

But if a person could just accept himself, he would have inside information on how to accept others. In fact, the degree to which we genuinely accept ourselves—our abilities, our limitations, our economic situation, our parents, our age, health and sex—in short, our true identity—is the measure of our ability to love and accept others. But it is also useless to tell a sinner to accept and love himself when he hates himself. His bad conscience relentlessly pursues and accuses him.

2. Therefore, this proper kind of self-acceptance must be acquired. Unrepentant sinners cannot really love themselves, unless they can arrive at a satisfactory solution of the very problems that make them hate their own self-image. Only God has that kind of a solution: He loves them. When sinners find out that the God who made them also loved them enough to send Jesus to die for them, and believe it, then this realization that they are loved gives them a dignity, a sense of worth and a concern for their own self-preservation. And the sinner will not rest satisfied to remain as he is, because he has hated what he is and was. Rather, he can let Jesus make him over in His own likeness, and in this new self he can rejoice (Rom. 6:1-11; II Cor. 3:18; 5:17-21; Eph. 4:22-24; Phil. 3:20f.; Col. 3:10-17). So, this proper love for ourselves must originate in

in our embracing God's love for us: "If He loves me despite all He knows about me, surely I can accept myself. Thus it becomes much easier to love my neighbor."

The new creature in Christ can now view his gifts and limitations, his wealth or poverty, his slavery or freedom, his nationality, sex, age or health, with unaccustomed equanimity (I Cor. 7:17-24; Gal. 3:28). Whereas before he was an outsider, now he belongs (I Peter 2:9f.), now he is important (I Cor. 12:12-27), now he is secure (John 10:28f.). This kind of person knows and accepts his own worth and does not have to prove himself by trampling the rights of others. Rather, his new-found self-respect gives him insight into what it means to have appropriate respect for others. But God taught him to love himself, live with himself and gave him courage to face himself in the mirror. Sensing what this means to himself, he can now appreciate what it means to bring others to this same joy. He can now love others as himself.

3. This self-love does not contradict other divine demands that we deny ourselves, crucify our pride or otherwise mortify what is earthly in us. (Cf. Matt. 16:24; Rom. 6:6; Col. 3:5.) In fact, the very inducement to sacrifice ourselves in order to be all that God desires so we can bask in the glory of His blessing, is the fact that WE WANT IT FOR OURSELVES. (Paradoxically, self-denial is robbed of its priceless, sacrificial character, if the self we sacrifice was not loved anyway. Therefore, even self-denial presupposes self-acceptance without pride, self-love without smugness.) And because His blessing is offered to those who look not only to their own interests, but also to the interests of others, in humility considering others better than themselves, doing nothing from selfishness or conceit (cf. Phil. 2:3f.), He is really rewarding the unselfish, the uncalculating, the generous. His rewards are nothing that would even interest self-seeking, pushy people. Rather, the rewards of self-denial and self-sacrifice are so deeply satisfying, so highly desirable and so perennially refreshing, that the person who really loves himself will seek these above all else. This is the only individual who, in his own best interest, really loves and serves others (II Cor. 12:15; I John 3:16). For Jesus there is no *necessary* conflict between serving one's own interests and that of others: one can have both (Phil. 2:4).

**22:40 On these two commandments the whole law hangeth, and the prophets.** *Law and prophets* is a circumlocution for "the entire Old

Testament'' (cf. notes on 5:17f.; 7:12), i.e. whatever God revealed of His will, whether by law or prophet, is suspended from these two nails. Take away this love for God and man, and *the law and prophets* fall to the ground, meaningless. In so saying, Jesus underscores these truths:

1. No mere formalism or external ritual has any value apart from the spirit in which it is done, or divorced from the great, underlying principle which it is intended to exalt and exemplify. The Law has not obeyed nor the prophets respected, unless obedience be prompted by whole-hearted love. Jesus condemns the heresy of elevating ceremonies over morality and principles.
2. Everything God commands is important, however seemingly external or ceremonial, because even the apparently insignificant duties are not properly done without reference to the high purpose of God for requiring them. What God has revealed is not a series of unconnected commandments, but one united, all-embracing design for a life-style that has a solid basis in love for God and man.
3. These two commandments hang together in combination. Contrary to moderns who would put the accent on the second commandment and glorify humanistic philanthropy or some other religionless love for one's fellows, while at the same time forgetting love for God and His will, Jesus associates these two concepts and actually gives priority to the first! Human life is shallow and incomplete without both. Neither mere social action nor passive piety can be enough. Brotherly love and philanthropy cannot be substituted for true religion, but should be produced by it.
4. However, it is simply not true that if a man truly loves God with all his being and his fellowman as himself, he will not need any further commandments. Jesus implies that *the law and the prophets* are those revelations God considered NECESSARY TO RENDER EXPLICIT WHAT IT MEANS IN PRACTICE TO LOVE PROPERLY. Otherwise, why did not God simply dictate these two ordinances from Sinai and skip the rest? To paraphrase McGarvey (*Fourfold Gospel*, 604), Love without guidance is insufficient: the whole law and the prophets were given to furnish this leadership for love to follow. "Love without law is power without direction, and law without love is machinery without a motor." (Study I Cor. 9:21; John 14:15, 21; James 1:25; 2:8, 12.)

So, even though these commandments are written into the Law as individual precepts in it and are explained by the prophets, nevertheless

these two regulations are the basic theory behind the entire Mosaic system. They are the moral principles which, in the given moment of Hebrew history called for the Pentateuchal legislation and comments thereon by the prophets. Although an integral part of that now antiquated Law, they rise above it and are permanent, because eternally right. They are the goal to which the Law was conducting people (cf. I Tim. 1:5). This explains why the Gospel era will glorify and expand them.

Nor is it true that Jesus replaced *the law and the prophets* with love. Rather, He fulfilled them by love. *The law and the prophets* dictated the right actions, but love furnished the right motive for doing them. Now, under Jesus' program, we are not required to observe the externals of Mosaic Law, not even the Ten Commandments as such. But we are required to observe the principles and spirit that inspired the Old Testament system: love for God and neighbor. These unchanging rules had as their purpose that we learn to glorify God and do good to our fellows. Jesus has altered the details considerably, but He holds us responsible for faithful obedience to these same ethical principles that were the foundation of *the law and the prophets*. To put it another way, we are essentially under the same system of religion and ethics known to the Jews. The great differences—and they are tremendous—are a question of specifics, not principles.

These are the two principles which will give us light and direction not merely in all our life here on earth, but will also prove to be excellent guidance forever! Can we ever outgrow our need to love God or the saints? This is the permanent element in religion and morals. Baptism, the Lord's supper, even evangelism will all pass away at the Lord's return. But not these two commandments. With them we are onto something eternal!

These two rules are the key to understanding not only all God was saying in *the law and the prophets*, but also everything He has now said in the Gospel too. Any New Testament precept that seems dark or difficult will find its explanation and motivation in one of these two master-principles of true religion and morality. Our concept of duty to the Lord must not consist in blind obedience to a series of segmented, isolated rules. Everything we do for Him must find its ultimate origin in, or be reducible to, one or the other of these two rules.

## WAS THERE NOTHING UNIQUE ABOUT THIS ANSWER?

Scholars are fond of pointing out that this was not the first time a Jew ever selected these two commandments for candidacy for expressing the Law's essence. (Cf. Luke 10:27 which is a separate event.) Nor would it necessarily have been original with that other lawyer who recited them together for Jesus then.

The conjunction of these two commandments in one unitary concept has been noticed in *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, ed. Charles, *Pseudepigrapha*, 326,328,334): Dan. 5:3: "Love the Lord through all your life, and one another with a true heart." Issachar 5:2: "But love the Lord and your neighbor, have compassion on the poor and weak." Issachar 7:6: "I loved the Lord; likewise also every man with all my heart." Another version of this text: "The Lord I loved with all my strength: likewise also every man I loved more than my own children." (Cf. Zebulon 5:1.) However, the Jewish author of that book, as also Philo (*De Septen* quoted by Plummer, *Matthew*, 309) was just as dependent upon Moses and the Pentateuch as was Jesus who was quoting Deuteronomy and Leviticus. So they were not really unique wisdom either. HOWEVER, THESE JEWISH WRITINGS DO NOT EXPLICITLY AFFIRM THAT THESE TWO COMMANDS TAKEN TOGETHER ARE THE LAW'S GREATEST.

But must we suppose that Jesus always tried for originality in His teaching and answers? Why SHOULD He attempt to be original, when asked to cite the Mosaic Law's greatest commandment? He had been asked to comment on the Torah, drawing forth its essential element expressed in a single commandment. This He did. His originality does not depend on this. There are times when one must NOT be an "innovative theologian," as some moderns love to be considered. This was a time when Jesus must be the faithful ambassador of the One who sent Him, loyally delivering the message intrusted to Him. If Moses had already revealed these commandments, we should not expect Jesus to hope for absolute originality in this case.

But was there nothing original in His answer?

1. Could it be that the uniqueness of Jesus' answer lies in His refusal to annihilate human personality? Many religionists have promoted



self-hatred as their only solution, demanding various forms of self-punishment and endless penance. Jesus, on the other hand, launches His ethic from a solid base of each individual's self-respect defined by God's estimate of man's true worth. However, Moses had said it first.

2. Would it be that the unique feature of this answer lies in the perception that true religion and ethics do not arise out of mere conformity to some external code? The man who is righteous merely because he fears not to be, is not really good by Jesus' definition. But so say also the Old Testament prophets.
3. Could it be that Jesus alone expressly underscored the profound connection and similarity between these two commandments, summing up in these two alone the entire meaning of religion and ethics, and by so doing, placed them over against every other rule or precept? Who else did this?

### WHAT DOES THIS INCIDENT REVEAL ABOUT JESUS?

1. He knew His Bible well and trusted its teaching. The Pharisean test intended to probe His grasp of Mosaic Law. But He reached confidently into that vast library of legal prescriptions and quickly returned with the two concepts that furnish the basis of everything else.
2. Jesus was not prejudiced against the Pharisees per se, as a cursory reading of chapter 23 would perhaps lead one to think. When even a Pharisee asked a worthwhile question, regardless of his party's motives, Jesus could answer him civilly and helpfully and commend his insight and encourage his progress toward the Kingdom.
3. Jesus' perfect balance is also obvious: rather than reject ritual in favor of moral law, He pointed to those principles that made both necessary and gave sense to both. He saw no false dichotomy between the moral and ceremonial laws, because both grew out of the same principles.

Let it not be thought that, because Jesus reduces all of religion and morality to these two simple rules, this simplicity means that our practice of His teaching is going to be easy. Nothing could be more difficult than responding consistently to the far-reaching demands these principles make upon our entire being. To surrender unconditionally to God the sovereignty of our will, to accord Him unlimited

command over our mind, and to fix our attention and affection solely on Him is to accept a life-long, life-changing mission. And to accept our neighbor as Jesus loved him, sympathetically prepared to lift and bear his load, to place ourselves in his place so completely as to consider his success our own responsibility, thus renouncing our own rights so we can promote his well-being, is not going to be easy. Anyone who thinks Jesus has somehow made things easy has simply not begun to ponder His meaning nor practice His answer!

### MUTUAL ADMIRATION RESULTED

Characteristically, Matthew did not record the lawyer's response. Sometimes after penning Jesus' final punchline, the Apostle simply drops any further narration, to let the reader meditate on Jesus' words, be challenged or corrected by them, rather than distract him with further details about what others did. (Cf. 8:4, 12f., 22; 12:8, 50; 15:20; 16:4, 12, 28; 17:21, 27, etc.) To Matthew it seems to matter, not so much how others reacted, as how his readers would. Mark, however, documented the lawyer's admiring rejoinder and Jesus' commendation of his grasp. (See the PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY for details.)

How considerably this lawyer differs from the scribe in Luke 10! The other, upon facing this same self-evidently true answer, wanted to justify himself and, not unlikely, limit the scope of his love. This man, instead, willingly dismissed his purpose for being there to ensnare Jesus and unashamedly embraced His truth. The man's voice rings with genuine conviction as he spontaneously rephrases the Scriptures in Jesus' answer, independently thinking it through and daringly concluding, "The ethical principles of love for God and man are superior to the entire Levitical sacrificial system." His instant enthusiasm for Jesus' answer is psychologically predictable, if we see his language as that of a man who had already pondered this question, reached a sounder conclusion than most of his peers, even if not generally accepted by them, but who finally heard his views confirmed by Jesus.

"You are not far from the Kingdom of God," is Jesus' assessment. "Not far," because he understood the high, ethical character of the Kingdom, and because he shared its spirit as a serious inquirer. Here is one Pharisee who can see that external forms and empty rituals amount to nothing unless motivated by a real love for God and man!

Here is one unprejudiced Pharisee open to truth wherever he finds it, able to think for himself, independently of party lines and approval. Jesus saw that he had a mind of his own (Mark 12:34: *nounechôs*, "having a mind"). No wonder this man arrested Jesus' attention! His approval of this Pharisee's progress is founded on the man's critical discernment blended with a meek, devout spirit, especially since this man was the Pharisean Head Inquisitor sent to test Jesus.

However, "not far from the Kingdom" does not mean "in it."

1. Jesus warns us indirectly that there can be non-Christians within the influence of true religion, who are able to give the right answers and even understand the spirit of Christianity better than legalists within the Church itself. But nearness is not possession. One is not in God's Kingdom merely because he is a diligent seeker or sensible enough to recognize truth when faced with it or because of his orthodox views. One must LOVE enough to pay the price of entrance and go on in!
2. Jesus encourages us to believe that a correct grasp of the message of the Old Testament really does fit the mind for understanding Christianity and readies one to grasp it when proclaimed. This man was "not far from the Kingdom," because to understand these two commands could lead to self-evaluation and recognition of his need to repent and seek God's forgiveness. To grasp this could lead him to ask Jesus the way, and to do this would open the Kingdom to him.
3. By saying, "not far," Jesus invited all such people to come all the rest of the way.

Even Mark did not finish the story: did this prospective convert go on in earnest conversation to ask Jesus those questions that would have taken him all the way into the Kingdom? To know that does not matter. What are YOU going to do?

## FACT QUESTIONS

1. In what general context did this event occur? In what week of Jesus' ministry?
2. What had taken place not long before this event? What is the local context? Had the Pharisees attacked Jesus before this? When? With what approach?
3. What had the Pharisees heard of the conversation between Jesus and the Sadducees?

4. According to Mark, what had a certain Pharisee noticed about the discussion between Jesus and the Sadducees?
5. What question is posed to Jesus?
6. Who is the questioner who asked it? What was his professional qualification?
7. What is stated about the man's motives?
8. Was Jesus' answer unique in the sense of being new revelation never before heard on earth? If not, who had given this answer before? Where, fundamentally, did the answer come from? Where are these two precepts found?
9. What, according to Jesus, is the first commandment? What text did Jesus cite to establish His point? (Give book, chapter and verse.)
10. What is the second commandment? What is the textual origin of this answer? (Give book, chapter and verse.) In what sense is the second commandment like the first?
11. To what is allusion made in the expression: "all the law and the prophets"? Discuss various ways love fulfills all that the Law and prophets intended to convey.
12. Explain how "on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."
13. In what terms does Mark describe the Pharisees' reaction to Jesus' answer? What did he say?
14. According to Mark, what judgment did Jesus pronounce upon the Pharisee?

#### D. JESUS' QUESTION ON THE SON OF DAVID

(Parallels: Mark 12:35-37; Luke 20:41-44)

TEXT: 22:41-46

41 Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, 42 saying, What think ye of the Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, *The son* of David. 43 He saith unto them, How then doth David in the Spirit call him Lord, saying, 44 The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Till I put thine enemies underneath thy feet? 45 If David then calleth him Lord, how is he his son? 46 And no one was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions.

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. How can you reconcile the fact that Matthew says Jesus' question was addressed to the Pharisees gathered together, whereas Mark pictures Jesus as teaching throngs in the Temple and addresses this question *about* the scribes to *others*?
- b. How would you explain Jesus' bringing up the question about the Son of David here in this day of controversies in the Temple? By presenting them this theological puzzle, is He doing it to show these critics that they were not so learned after all? Why must the Pharisees understand the correct answer to this vital question, before they can be saved?
- c. How does His question and its correct answer really lead them to the answer to their original challenge: "By what authority do you do these things and who gave you such authority?" (21:23)?
- d. How does His question and its correct answer really promote our understanding of the relationship between the Father and the Son? Do you think the Trinity doctrine is involved here?
- e. Why do you think Jesus brought up this particular Psalm to teach these Pharisees? What is its meaning, according to Jesus? Do you think He does it to deny that the Christ is to be the Son of David? If not, what is He driving at?
- f. What kept the Pharisees from being able to answer Jesus' question? Do you think it was their inability to accept Jesus as Son of God? Or was it their inability to conceive of a divine-human Messiah who was both "Son of God" and "Son of David"? Or is there some other reason?
- g. Why do you think they did not dare question Him any further after this?
- h. What is the peculiar value of Jesus' use of questions like this as a teaching method? What may we learn from His method of dealing with men?
- i. If Jesus did not reveal to these Pharisees unique or original information, but rather cited them a significant text out of their own Bible, indicating (1) the book in which the text is found, (2) the author of the text and (3) the inspiration of the author, what should we conclude about the text cited and about the Bible that included it? Do you think Jesus' word may be trusted on this subject, even if much of modern scholarship were to doubt the reliability of Jesus' conclusions?

- j. What is the effect of this text on you? If the Jews proved it humanly possible not to grasp the inner harmony between two apparently contradictory concepts well-grounded in Scripture, what of our weaknesses? Cannot human ignorance and bias blind me too as I write this study of Matthew? What should we do about this problem?

## PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

As Jesus taught in the temple courts, He turned to the Pharisees still assembled and put this question to them, "What is your opinion about the Messiah? Whose son is He to be?"

They answered, "He is David's son."

"How can the theologians maintain that the Messiah is to be the SON of David? In fact, in the Book of Psalms David himself, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, refers to him as LORD, declaring: Jahvè said to my LORD, 'Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.' So, if David himself can call him 'LORD,' in what sense is he his 'SON'?"

No one was able to reply to His question. From that day on no one presumed to ask Him any further trick questions. The great throng enjoyed listening to Him.

## SUMMARY

To give His adversaries a clue to His real identity and a means whereby they could save themselves, Jesus drew their attention to Scriptures that clearly pictured the Messiah as not merely the SON of David, but unquestionably his LORD. They were baffled to explain this apparent incongruity in their understanding of what the Christ must be. He had revealed their incompetence on a key issue, so they abandoned all attempts to out-manuever Him in open debate. Common people, however, relished listening to His teaching.

## NOTES

### I. A COMMON CONVICTION (22:41, 42)

**22:41** Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question. (Cf. v. 34: "They came together" upon hearing

He had muzzled the Sadducees.) Now, blocked by the great throng (Mark 12:37) and stunned into inaction by the indisputable correctness of His answer to their question, the Pharisees become the captive audience for Jesus' penetrating analysis. Inflexible, unthinking monotheism might rightly affirm: "You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that He is one, and there is no other but He . . ." (Mark 12:32), and still remain blind to the Scriptural doctrine of the Messiah's deity. The Legalists had queried Jesus about the Law. Now He must lead them to understand the Messiah. They would be but condemned by the Law's demand to love perfectly. They needed a divine-human Savior who could make them perfect and empower them to love. But they must understand who it is that will help them so they can recognize Him when He comes.

**22:42 saying, What think ye of Christ, whose son is he?** Still the question facing the world, why did Jesus ask it?

1. To bring everyone—disciples, crowds, even the Pharisees themselves—to see the blindness of the supposed learning to these teachers of the Law whose leadership so many revered. If rabbinic scholasticism could not answer a question concerning the basic concept of Messiahship, could their guidance be depended upon, if they refused to admit Jesus as Messiah? Jesus intends to open the eyes of those who followed blind guides (cf. 15:14).
2. To save the leaders themselves. His is no base attempt to embarrass them in debate or only to confuse them. His question clearly aims to lead them to clarify their own concepts by revealing the confusion that already reigns in their mind. The low-key approach even in His final question proves He wanted to lead them to see the truth and believe Him. To accomplish this, He used a sound pedagogic procedure:
  - a. He set truth in as neutral a setting as possible. Rather than direct attention to Himself, which would have only served to arouse their prejudice, He formulated a question in an objective form. Unlike the question asked the disciples (Matt. 16:13, 15), He was not asking them what they thought of Him as a potential candidate for Messiahship. Rather, He requested them to lay their own concept of Messiah out on the table for examination. This stimulated, rather than blocked, some real, deep thinking about this issue.

However, Lenski (*Matthew*, 884) believes this question was objective merely in form, because the events of the Last Week

with Jesus' Messianic Entry into Jerusalem surrounded by people glorifying Him as *the Son of David* and the children shouting in the temple, had raised the burning question: can this Nazarene be all that is claimed for Him? So the Pharisees "know that it was not an academic or a theoretical inquiry but the supreme question concerning his own person" (*ibid.*).

So we must not over-emphasize the objectivity of this question, as if Jesus' only purpose were to push the Jewish leaders to revise their entire theory of the Messiah. He did this much, but Jesus is not playing academic games with people who are "not far from the kingdom." He could save some of them. Others would mull over His meaning and perhaps accept it and Him. So, He was really hinting at a real application of this doctrine, even if at first glance it would seem to be purely theoretical. So, because they knew His claims and rejected them, He mercifully stated His question in as unprejudicial a manner as He could.

- b. He formulated two appropriate questions that went right to the heart of their problem. Because they would instinctively veto as heresy anyone's allegation to be both divine and human, He must make them see that they had misunderstood the prophets who had predicted a divine-human Messiah. These two questions, taken in their proper order, brought out the true prophetic message and contemporaneously showed the contradiction of the Jews' belief. But it was a well-tested didactic method for proceeding from the known and believed to the unknown and questioned.
- c. He needed to save these leaders from their own pride, especially since they prided themselves on being the cream of Jewish scholarship (John 7:47ff.). Nothing could be more devastating to their theological arrogance than to be caught unprepared to answer a question so basic on an issue so fundamental as this.
3. To lead all to understand the Messiah's true identity. His question could not but have recalled to their mind the countless times He had been publicly acclaimed as *the Son of David* (Matt. 21:9; cf. 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30). However, they answered without hedging: *they say unto him, The son of David*. II Samuel 7:13f.; 23:5; Psalms 78:68-72; 89:3f., 20-37; 132:11; Jeremiah 23:5f., are texts they could have cited in support of their answer. Jewish



scholars had already cited Micah 5:2 (Matt. 2:4-6; cf. John 7:42). Jesus too believed this—so far as it went. However, they occupied a grossly oversimplified, therefore mistaken, position, because they conceived of the Messiah as ONLY the son of David. What they believed was not totally untrue, just pitifully inadequate. While it is true that the Messiah is David's descendant, this was but a partial definition that stopped short of the whole picture the Old Testament draws of the promised Christ. Further, their grossly secular mental image of *the son of David* envisioned a restored, nationalistic Israel ruled in Jerusalem by the re-established government of David's line on a political throne. Although not without exceptions, the popular view of Messiahship involved national glory, political and military power and material wealth. (Cf. John 6:14f.; Matt. 20:20-28, Acts 1:6; cf. Edersheim, *Life*, II, Appendix IX; Psalms of Solomon 17:23-51.) Now, however, the moment has come to clear the air of these faulty notions however widely held they might be.

4. Another purpose (or was it result?) of Jesus' question was to teach that the revelation of God is not to be treated as a fallible textbook composed of contradictory statements. Edersheim, (*Life*, II, 406) summarized this:

As in the proof which He gave for the Resurrection and in the view which He presented of the Great Commandment, the Lord would point to the grand harmonious unity of Revelation. Viewed separately, the two statements [i.e. David's Son or David's Lord?] would seem incompatible. But in their combination in the Person of the Christ, how harmonious and how full of teaching . . . concerning the nature of Christ's Kingdom and of His work!

5. In the previous incident Jesus had underlined the unity of God (Mark 12:29, see notes on 22:37). In our present text His quotation of Psalm 110 pictures the Messiah as reigning together with God. So doing, Jesus demonstrated that God's oneness does not contradict the divine nature and authority of Christ.

## -II. A CORRECTING QUOTATION (22:43, 44)

**22:43 He saith unto them, How then doeth David in the Spirit call him Lord?** Combining the three Gospels, notice the deliberateness

of Jesus' affirmation: (1) *David*, (2) *inspired by the Holy Spirit*, (3) "in the book of Psalms": what a powerful declaration of the authority of this text!

1. *David* himself, an authority higher than the scribes, should know what these theologians could but guess at! The astonishing fact is that the great king David, at the top of the Hebrew social pyramid, refers to Someone as his superior. Speaking as one of the people, he lays down his crown at the feet of another, a great King at God's right hand! And yet, this Psalm is messianic, concerning the Son of David, a fact that creates the puzzle: how can anyone at the same time be both inferior to another as his descendant and on a par with God as his Lord, i.e. both king and subject?
2. *inspired by the Holy Spirit*: Jesus alludes to a fact well-known, even claimed by David himself (II Sam. 23:1f.) and later repeated by Peter (Acts 2:30).
3. "in the book of Psalms" (Luke 20:42). This is not Luke's accommodation to aid non-Jewish readers, because Jesus actually said it. Otherwise, if Luke can adjust His words at will, how can we rely on his accuracy?

That the ancient Hebrews recognized both the inspired, Davidic authorship and Messianic nature of this Psalm is evidenced in the Jews' tacit acceptance of Jesus' statement of the case here. Otherwise, with the self-assurance of modern critics, they could have retorted, "But that Psalm is neither Messianic nor Davidic."

### WHAT IS JESUS' VIEW OF PSALM 110?

Plummer (*Matthew*, 311) feels that modern criticism's serious objections to the Davidic authorship of Psalm 110 may be fatal. (However, see Delitzsch, *Psalms*, III, 183f. for good defense of its Davidic setting. Cf. also Young, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 313ff.) Abandoning hope of certainty, Plummer tries to come to terms with Christ's argument by attempting three possible explanations of what might have happened here:

1. Our Lord is arguing from His opponents' own premises, expressing no opinion as to their correctness. . . . This is one of those "sayings in which He takes up ideas and expressions current at the time and uses without really endorsing them."

This argument is based on the ignorance of the Pharisees who wrongly thought David wrote the Psalm. Jesus knew better, but capitalized on their ignorance for His own purpose. We are left thus with an unethical Christ who established His holy identity by demonstrating the contrary, His lack of scruples.

2. In the limitations of knowledge to which our Lord submitted in becoming man, He Himself shared the belief, current among all the teachers of that age, that the Psalm was written by David.

This argument is based on Jesus' ignorance: He knew no better, so repeated the common mistake which only modern scholarship has "corrected." We are left with an ignorant and mistaken Messiah who by the use of an erroneous view, tried to convince others who shared the same error, of the truth of an erroneous conclusion!

3. The Psalmist lets David quote an utterance of Jehovah, . . . The argument of Jesus is based on David being the speaker of the words quoted; and this argument is "justified if the author of the Psalm lets David appear as spokesman. It does not require the Davidic authorship of the Psalm."

But in quoting this Psalm, Jesus presents an argument that turns on David's personally having spoken these words (*autòs David*, Mark and Luke). Jesus' argument against popular misuse of the "son of David" prophecies urges that David's own words be considered proof against a merely earthly Messiah. The argument is fallacious, if his authorship is not a fact. If the person who uttered the words were but a mere "literary personification of David," and not the great king of Israel in person, then Jesus' contention fails to prove His point. If a merely literary David said this *by the Holy Spirit* (Mark 12:36), perhaps the inspiration was purely literary too, i.e. not real.

Peter, inspired by the same Spirit, sets forth an argument based on David's personally having said this (Acts 2:30). His case is weakened, if David is not the writer. Because David did not personally ascend to God's right hand, he could not refer to himself when speaking these words. But it was a physical David, not a "literary personification" that spoke this, because Peter's argument depends for its force on its being the same David who did not go into heaven as the one who spoke Psalm 110:1.

It is mistaken to affirm, with Plummer (*ibid.*) that the question of Davidic authorship was not raised, assuming that, since the Pharisees did not raise it, no one else did. But JESUS raised it, by laying before His questioners what David himself said on the subject of his son the Messiah, in contrast to their own inadequate notions.

Our faith in Jesus as Revealer of the Father and complete Fulfiller of the Law and the Prophets must distinguish us from those who follow a fallible Jesus who is limited by the dubious intellectual climate of His age, and from those who, in the name of "modern scientific scholarship" oppose Jesus' evidence to the authorship of this text. Our love for Him disposes us to prefer His solid information to others' guesses. We respect His position to know (Matt. 11:27). We know what Spirit inspired Him to say this (Acts 10:38).

**22:44 The Lord said unto my Lord.** (Ps. 110:1; also cited in Acts 2:34f.; Heb. 1:13; alluded to in I Cor. 15:25; Heb. 10:12f. Study *Hebrews* as a virtual exposition of this Psalm.) The double use of *Lord* (both in Greek and English) might confuse the English reader, but the Hebrew is unmistakable: *Jahvè said to my Lord*, i.e. the Covenant God of Israel addressed a message to Him whom David describes as *my Lord*. It is not usual for a man to call his son his "lord" in the sense of "master, superior, benefactor." But if he does, it requires explanation, especially when the person who does it is someone as important for the salvation and glory of Israel as this ancestor of the Messiah. *Lord* not merely superiority of rank and ownership in this context, but also deity, since *Lord* (*adon* = *kùrios*) is used for God in Psalm 110:5.

*Sit at my right hand* pictures the glorious, heavenly reign of the Messiah sharing God's throne. (Cf. Heb. 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; Acts 5:31; 7:55f.; Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; I Peter 3:22; Rev. 3:21.) This also harmonizes with the "Son of man" prophecy of Daniel 7:9-14. *At the right hand* is the highest place of honor (cf. Matt. 20:21) and to be invited to sit there by the King of heaven implies that the Messiah shares in His favor, His sovereignty and His power. Here especially it implies God's satisfaction with the Messiah will have completed His mission. (Study this Psalm as a virtual interpretative parallel of Psalm 2.) Now He is invited to occupy a throne which no mere mortal would dare accept. This hits hard at the Pharisees' grossly materialistic view of Messiah's Kingdom. His preeminent glory and power cannot be debased by restriction to a small, nationalistic throne on earth in some ancient city, be it even Jerusalem in

Palestine. Millennialists take note: David's throne is now occupied by its rightful Claimant. That throne is heavenly, *at God's right hand*, not material or earthly. The Jews misunderstood its spiritual character; can we do better? His rule involves the earth insofar as His armies now go forth in His name to conquer (Ps. 110:2). His Church began at Jerusalem (Luke 24:47-49; Acts 1:4, 8) and continues to extend His mighty scepter in the midst of His enemies. "The day of His wrath" (Ps. 110:5f.) will conclude this era. So, the Messiah is not merely superior, but essentially similar, to David. Rather, He enjoys a nearness to God that is unique, absolutely unshared by any other son of David, including David himself who sat on a literal throne in Jerusalem.

*Sit* does not imply His entering into a period of inactivity and idleness. His enthronement is to Kingship, a fact shown by New Testament use of this Psalm. His sitting at God's right involves a ruling on earth "among His enemies" (Ps. 110:2) by means of His volunteer troops (Ps. 110:3; cf. David's own method, II Sam. 11:1), while He exercises the office of priest-king, like Melchizedek (Ps. 110:4). What mere human being, what Pharisean "son of David," could rightly accept this invitation to be elevated to such a relationship with God and wield all authority in heaven and on earth? (Cf. 11:27; 28:18.)

*Till I put your enemies under your feet.* God intends to defeat all Christ's enemies, subjecting them to His control (Heb. 10:13; I Cor. 15:24ff.; Eph. 1:21f.; but remember II Cor. 10:3-5!) This too harmonizes with Psalm 2. *Under your feet* pictures His opponents' public, humiliating subjection (cf. Joshua 10:24; I Kings 5:3) that leaves Him undisputed, universal Ruler. *Till* tells what God is doing during the epoch beginning from Jesus' exaltation and glorification until His coming again in judgment at the Last Day. The heavenly regency of the Messiah here described will not continue forever; just so long as it is necessary to triumph. The defeat of His enemies is the turning point at which another stage of God's rule shall begin. (Cf. Acts 3:21; I Cor. 15:24ff.) Who are the *enemies* of this heavenly King? The Psalmist's vision would suggest that the true enemies of the Messiah are not merely or even primarily those of the nationalistic Israel, but those of all men: sin, Satan and death. (Cf. I Cor. 15:26; Heb. 2:14f.; I John 3:8.) Unquestionably, however, among them are all those who oppose or even refuse to love the Lord (I Cor. 16:22; Ps. 2:12)!

## III. A CRUCIAL QUESTION (22:45)

**22:45 If David then calls him Lord, how is he his son?** Their view involved a difficulty: the two lines of prophecy are contradictory unless, in some way unguessed by these Pharisees, the Messiah could be both Son of David (human) and Lord of David (divine). Some have mistakenly supposed that Jesus' question intended to deny Davidic sonship. So far from denying it, He casts doubt on the worldly political sense usually attributed to it. The rabbis had chosen the wrong starting point and gone no further. Starting with earthly royal dignity in a restored kingdom, they concluded only in the temporal, the material and mundane. Had they used Messiah's heavenly Lordship as their point of departure, their minds might have been open to Someone superior to David on a spiritual level, even without the usual trappings of earthly royalty. Jesus' question not only exposed their theological disarray, but also generously indicated the road back to the truth. In fact, if the Holy Spirit who is the Author of both prophetic lines, is also a God of truth, to place both these Scriptures side by side should lead them to a broader understanding of the Messiah's nature and furnish them a better reason to accept Jesus' claim to Messiahship.

But note the form of His question. Unexpectedly, He does not say, "Now we all admit that the Messiah is to be David's Son, so how is it possible for Him also to be David's Lord?" Instead, His question, expanded, is, "We all admit the obvious implication of David's own confession that the Messiah is indisputably to be David's divine, exalted Lord. In what sense, then, must we understand that the Messiah is also David's SON?" This is by far the great question and more crucial for the Pharisees: how could a divine Being become also David's descendant?! What is the Lord implying? (See notes on 21:15f. where He dealt with the Son of David issue for the Sadducees too!)

1. "Do you realize that this Psalm means that the Christ will be a human being in whom are combined those traits that qualify Him to be David's Lord? This means that you could suddenly find yourself confronted by the great Lord of David, walking around in human flesh! It means that precisely because of His quite normal, unpretentious humanness and lack of the conventional majesty earth's nobility parades, you would mistake Him for any normal man. That is, until you heard Him speak, until you witnessed His

divine credentials, His miraculous deeds that sanction the highest claims He could ever make. Ever meet anyone like that lately?"

2. If anyone be thought to blaspheme by claiming to be both divine and human, both Son of God and Son of David, then the Old Testament itself must be rejected, because it too clearly predicted that the Christ must be both. However, since the Old Testament is Judaism's highest possible authority and rightly revered by the Pharisees themselves, then, if prophecy means anything, the true Messiah, when He appears, must necessarily claim to be both human and divine. Consequently, when ANYONE appeared on the scene making the claims that Jesus made, the Jews must objectively test his statements to determine whether this person is objectively the predicted Messiah. (See author's Vol. III, p. 377 on prophetic credentials.)
3. For Matthew's readers the correct answer need only be implied, since our author has already assembled all the data necessary to answer Jesus' question. It is now time for the reader to begin to face the issue and put the pieces together.
  - a. The genealogy placed Jesus solidly within the legal family of Davidic descendants (1:1-17).
  - b. The annunciation to Joseph unquestionably pointed to Baby Jesus' true Father, God, and His human mother, the virgin Mary (1:18-25). The Messiah's birth, then, is to be an incarnation, the process whereby David's Lord became David's Son. Eliminate the virgin birth of Jesus from the realm of true history and this quandary Jesus placed before the Pharisees becomes meaningless. The Pharisees could not deny the incarnation without surrendering the possibility of having any Christ at all! But to admit this meant that they—and anyone else—must accept Jesus as the only One qualifying to be the Christ. This, because the more fair-minded among the authorities admitted Jesus to be a "Teacher come from God, because no one could do these signs that you do, unless God be with him" (John 3:1f.; 12:42f.).
  - c. God's voice from heaven pointedly proclaimed Him God's Son (3:17).
  - d. For further materials collected by Matthew, see special study "Messiah" at the end of this volume.

So, Matthew's Gospel furnished his readers what these Pharisees had first-hand opportunity to investigate, the explanation that solved the conundrum: Christhood is founded, not exclusively on Davidic

lineage, but upon His true, divine sovereignty, precisely the way, centuries before, David had prophesied.

Why did Jesus not answer His own question? Would it not have been enlightenment for everyone—scribes, disciples and crowds alike? He chose rather to leave them intellectually stimulated to seek out the appropriate answer. By suggesting just enough to spur everyone's curiosity to want to investigate this mystery, He was leading them to imagine Messiahship in a way they had not thought of it before. Now it is up to them. Later, the same Spirit that inspired the prophets, would also inspire the Apostles to explain this mystery (Luke 1:31-35; John 1:1-18; Rom. 1:3f.; II Tim. 2:8; Rev. 22:16).

#### IV. ALL QUESTIONING CANCELLED (22:46)

**22:46 And no one was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions.** (Cf. 22:34; Mark 12:34; Luke 14:6; 20:40.) Sadly, no Gospel text reports that, following these debates, Jesus' following increased due to an unprecedented influx of converted Pharisees, Sadducees and Herodians. Unfortunately for them, their open attacks had succeeded in producing only negative results:

1. They had exposed their own moral poverty and professional incompetence by failing to discredit Him by the persuasiveness of well-reasoned theological argument. They only succeeded in revealing their own shallowness and ignorance.
2. On the other hand, they had involuntarily enhanced His stature as a teacher, His brilliance as a skillful debater and His prestige as an authoritative source of truth. He had taken positions that neither Pharisee nor Sadducee could really argue with, because based on principles to which no exception could be taken, His answers proved unanswerable.

So they retreated into expedient silence.

To His question about the Son of David, their reaction is not one of simple ignorance, but of prejudice. Jesus had unequivocally permitted Himself to be acclaimed as "Son of David" many times during His public ministry, especially during the Messianic Entry into Jerusalem (see notes on 21:1ff.) and openly claimed to be "Son of God" (cf. John 10:36; 11:27; 5:18; 1:49; Matt. 16:16). Anyone who had heard these two claims could combine them for the correct



answer: "The Messiah is both Son of God or Lord of David, and Son of David." But since these were unwilling to admit that Jesus was what He claimed to be, they refused to pronounce the answer that would support His claims and reveal their disbelief. There was no other possible answer, so they sweltered in red-faced silence.

Jesus was not merely a worker of wonders or a mover of the masses only. He was also a scholarly Teacher who could meet them on their own ground and defeat them with a simple question founded on their own beliefs, their own method of interpretation and their own Bible. His genius left them baffled, disarmed and embarrassed, and yet the calmness and power of His manners left them nothing to criticize. McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 194f.) saw that

. . . in this part of Matthew's narrative, including all from the public entry of Jesus into the city until his arrest, Jesus is presented, not as a miracle-worker and a fulfiller of prophecy, but as himself a prophet. His miracles of power were chiefly, though not exclusively, wrought in Galilee and Perea, while his miracles of knowledge were wrought chiefly in the intellectual center of the nation.

That *no one dared ask Him any question* does not mean that no disciple dared bare his own ignorance before Jesus any more, but, simply, that no opponent could find the courage to continue this battle of wits with Jesus by asking Him questions to test or trap Him.

## WHAT DOES THIS SECTION REVEAL ABOUT JESUS?

Beautifully summarizing the day's debate, verse 46 is Matthew's conclusion of his major section that began in 21:23 with the rulers' challenge to Jesus' authority. This section's unitary character will be instantly recognized when it is seen how every pronouncement of Jesus thoroughly meets their demand for His credentials. During the course of this debate, two separate evidences for Jesus' claims emerge, noted by McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 194f.):

1. The evidence of character: Jesus lived the message He promoted, while the hierarchy and national leaders of Israel betrayed their ungodliness. In each separate encounter Matthew documents the dishonesty of the religious authorities as, first with one question and then another (five in all), they maneuver to destroy His popular

image. Time after time, they refuse to recognize or submit to the truth of His answers which objectively satisfied their challenges. They dodge the force of the eleven questions He put to them. When they answered His questions, their responses proved ruinous to their own position. When they saw this about to happen, they either simply refused to respond or loftily pretended to be unready to commit themselves. Because He had successfully unmasked the hypocrisy and wickedness of these pretenders, all fair-minded people could see that the arguments their nation's leaders hurled against His claims were biased. His own evident goodness and His enemies' lack of character is presumptive evidence in Jesus' favor. While it is not the only proof of the rightness of His claims, He too will submit to His own criterion for distinguishing true from false teachers: "By their fruits you will know them" (7:15-23). His godliness and wisdom and their lack of it give us reasonable ground for believing Him and not them.

2. The evidence of His supernatural nature and prophetic office:
  - a. He saw through their hypocrisy and exposed their well-planned intrigue. This may not seem to prove much, but ask what would have been the opinion of Jesus, had He failed to reveal their hidden motives.
  - b. He prophesied His own death and subsequent victory, the destruction of Jerusalem, the crushing end of the Jewish nation and the prevalence of non-Jews in the Messianic Kingdom. We may believe Him, because only a day or two from His execution, this Messiah is totally certain that the path of suffering would lead on to the throne, a certainty born out of the eternal purpose and planning of God and documented in Scripture.
  - c. He depended on Old Testament Scripture wherever new revelation was not required. By so doing, He remained solidly within the "prophetic context" of previous, well-authenticated revelations. (See the study "How to Avoid Becoming a Pharisee," Vol. III, 375ff.)

## WHAT DOES THIS INCIDENT REVEAL ABOUT OURSELVES?

From this incident let us learn to hold lightly to our opinions and interpretations of Scripture. If some Bible statement seems to contradict another, the fault does not lie in Scripture, but in the shallow

understanding and limited information of the fallible, human interpreter. Rather than discard Scripture or hold to one verse and reject or ignore another, let us let God be true and trust Him to know what He is saying and patiently ponder the meaning of ALL He says, until our bewilderment gives way before fuller knowledge and maturer understanding of the whole revelation!

This section proves that error about Jesus Christ is fatal error. What do we think about Him? Are our views merely based on a few scraps of Scripture, or are they formed by and grounded in all that God has spoken? Is Jesus for us simply the last link in a long chain of Davidic descendants and a merely interesting topic of conversation or debate? Or is He our divine Owner, Ruler and King to whom we submit our entire life and gladly give all our love?

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. At what point in the day's activities did Jesus ask the question about the Son of David?
2. During what major week in Jesus' earthly ministry did this question arise?
3. Who or what, in Jewish jargon, is "the Son of David"?
4. On what basis could the Pharisees questioned know to respond how to Jesus' question about the Son of David? What Bible verses could they have cited for their answer?
5. Whom did Jesus quote to demonstrate that their answer was inadequate?
6. Give the correct interpretation of the passage Jesus cited. Where is it found? Who wrote it? What does it mean? How was Jesus using it in His argument?
7. What does it mean for someone to "sit at God's right hand"? What does "making one's enemies a footstool" mean?
8. What according to Mark was the reaction of the common people to Jesus' teaching?
9. What, according to the united Synoptic testimony, does Jesus teach about (1) the location of the passage cited? (2) the authorship of the passage? (3) the inspiration of its author?
10. Where else in the New Testament is the passage Jesus quoted used to develop the Christian concept of His Messiahship? What interpretation is given in those passages?

## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE OUTLINES

### SECTION 59

#### JESUS ATTACKS THE SIN OF THE "RIGHTEOUS" (23:1-39)

- I. TO THE CROWDS AND HIS DISCIPLES (23:1-12)
- II. TO THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES THEMSELVES (23:13-36)
- III. TO JERUSALEM, IDEAL OF THE NATION: (23:37-39)

#### A LIFE-SIZE PORTRAIT OF A RELIGIOUS COUNTERFEIT

- I. CONTRAST BETWEEN FALSE AND TRUE SPIRITUAL LEADERS (23:1-12)
  - A. Warning against false teachers (23:1-7)
    - 1. Whereinsofar their message is Mosaic, listen and obey (23:1-3a)
    - 2. But beware of their falsity and failure (23:3b-7)
      - a. Not practicing what they preach (23:3b)
      - b. Making religion unbearable (23:4)
      - c. Proud humility (23:5-7)
  - B. The essence of true religion and the character of its teachers (23:8-12)
    - 1. Its only, unmediated source of life, truth and direction is God (23:8-10)
    - 2. Its highest ambition is sincere, humble service to others (23:11f.)
- II. SEVEN SOLEMN DENUNCIATIONS OF HYPOCRITICAL RELIGION (23:13-29)
  - A. The Teaching of Error (23:13-15)
    - 1. Fanatic sectarianism blocks progress into the Kingdom (23:13)
    - 2. Partisan missionary zeal promotes false spirit (23:15)
  - B. The Imperceptiveness of Error (23:16-28)
    - 1. In the field of reverence toward God: no sense of awe before God (23:16-22)
    - 2. In the field of observance of duty: majoring in minors (23:23f.)
    - 3. In the field of personal holiness: (23:25-28)
      - a. Cleansing the outside
      - b. Concealing the inside (23:27, 28)

## C. The Punishment of Error (23:29-39)

1. For the multiplied guilt of murdering God's witnesses (23:29-36)
2. For contempt for His marvelously patient compassion (23:37-39)

## SECTION 59

## JESUS ATTACKS THE SIN OF THE "RIGHTEOUS"

(Parallels: Mark 12:38-40; Luke 20:45-47)

TEXT: 23:1-4

1 Then spake Jesus to the multitudes and to his disciples, 2 saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat: 3 all things therefore whatsoever they bid you, *these* do and observe: but do not ye after their works; for they say, and do not. 4 Yea, they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with their finger.

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Although much of this sermon is directed to the "scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites," Matthew affirms that the message is initially spoken to "the multitudes and to His disciples." What do you think is Jesus' purpose for this kind of approach? Do you think that there were some scribes and Pharisees present among the crowds to hear Him say this? If His purpose is largely to criticize the scribes and Pharisees, why does Jesus bring the multitudes and His disciples into a question that directly involves others?
- b. What do you think is the crucial importance of mentioning Moses in this context?
- c. After all that Jesus has suffered at the hands of the scribes and Pharisees, and in view of how He condemns them, how can He possibly recommend that the nation do and observe all things that they bid? Is not this a self-contradiction? Do you think He approves the traditions of the elders as taught by these religious leaders?
- d. What arguments do you believe the religious leaders could have used to justify their creation of their "heavy burdens, grievous to