

Parables & Questions: The Hardness of the Jewish Leaders Exposed

Matthew 21:23 - 22:46

Contents

- [Christ's Authority Questioned by the Jewish Leaders \(21:23-27\)](#)
 - [The Sanhedrin Question the Lord's Authority to Cleanse the Temple \(21:23\)](#)
 - [The Lord Asks them To Define the Source of John's Baptism \(21:24-27\)](#)
- [Three Parables that Expose the Hardness of the Jewish Leaders \(21:28 - 22:14\)](#)
 - [The Parable of the Two Sons: Man Cloaks His Rebellion in Religious Hypocrisy \(21:28-32\)](#)
 - [The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen: Man Usurps the Son's Inheritance \(21:33-46\)](#)
 - [The Parable of the Wedding Feast: Man Refuses to Honor the Son \(22:1-14\)](#)
- [Three Attempts to Ensnare the Lord in His Words \(22:15-46\)](#)
 - [By the Pharisees and Herodians: Paying Taxes to Caesar \(22:15-22\)](#)
 - [By the Sadducees: Marriage at the Resurrection \(22:23-33\)](#)
 - [By the Pharisees: The Greatest Commandment \(22:34-40\)](#)
 - [Jesus Questions the Pharisees: Whose Son is the Christ? \(22:41-46\)](#)

Christ's Authority Questioned by the Jewish Leaders (21:23-27)

The Sanhedrin Question the Lord's Authority to Cleanse the Temple (21:23)

¶ **23** And when he came into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him *as he was* teaching, saying, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority? **v.23** On the previous day, when Jesus has come into the city and cleansed the temple, the Sanhedrin could not dispute the righteousness of His actions, but now having had a day to scheme, they question His authority. In their estimation, He was a

rogue agent trespassing on “their turf”. They would not recognize any authority that did not originate from themselves. What they were hoping for is that the Lord would answer “my authority is from God”. Then they would have arrested Him immediately on charges of blasphemy (see Matt. 26:63-66).

The Lord Asks them To Define the Source of John’s Baptism (21:24-27)

24 And Jesus answering said to them, “I” also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, “I” also will tell you by what authority I do these things: **25a** The baptism of John, whence was it? of heaven or of men? **vv.24-25a** The Lord could have immediately demonstrated His authority by performing a miracle or by reciting all the prophecies that He had fulfilled. But instead He addressed their conscience. This was always the Lord’s way; to get to the root. They had refused to acknowledge the authority of John the Baptist’s ministry when he had come according to prophecy but without any miracle (John 10:41). Now Christ was here with both the fulfillment of prophecy and accompanying signs... but they would not receive Him. The root was this; pride had hardened their unbelief. No amount of evidence would convince them. If they were not even honest enough to accept John’s credentials, why should He recite His own credentials to them? *“If ye tell me, I also will tell you”*.

25b And they reasoned among themselves, saying, If we should say, Of heaven, he will say to us, Why then have ye not believed him? **26** but if we should say, Of men, we fear the crowd, for all hold John for a prophet. **27** *And answering Jesus they said, We do not know.* *“He” also said to them, Neither do “I” tell you by what authority I do these things.* **vv.25b-27** The Sanhedrin had come to catch the Lord in a trap, but now *they* were caught. They were caught between the fear of man and hatred for Christ. What an awful place to be! On one hand the people esteemed John (in an outward way) on account of his prophetic ministry. It was obvious to all that his ministry was from God! On the other hand, they had refused to acknowledge the heavenly origin of John’s ministry (John 1:6; 3:27), and their sin would be exposed if they admitted this fact. Nowhere in their reasoning are the claims of God considered! Caught in a trap, they tell a lie; *“we do not know”*. They were being dishonest. All the people knew He was a prophet, and in v.38 the husbandmen say *“this is the heir”*. They knew who He was, but they were being political. They chose to appear incompetent rather than state the truth. The Lord, who cannot lie, does not say “I do not know” but rather *“neither do I tell you”*. The Lord knew by what authority He cleansed the temple, for He was always conscious of the place from which He came (John 8:14). His response did far more than avoid the trap set for Him; it exposed the Jews’ continued

pattern of rejecting God's testimony and God's authority.

Three Parables that Expose the Hardness of the Jewish Leaders (21:28 - 22:14)

Three Parables that have to do with the rejection of Christ's authority:

1. The Parable of the Two Sons (21:28-32)
2. The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen (21:33-46)
3. The Parable of the Wedding Feast (22:1-14)

The Parable of the Two Sons: Man Cloaks His Rebellion in Religious Hypocrisy (21:28-32)

28 But what think ye? A man had two children, and coming to the first he said, Child, go to-day, work in *my* vineyard. **29** And he answering said, I will not; but afterwards repenting himself he went. **30** And coming to the second he said likewise; and he answering said, "I" *go*, sir, and went not. **31** Which of the two did the will of the father? They say *to him*, The first. Jesus says to them, Verily I say unto you that the tax-gatherers and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. **32** For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not; but the tax-gatherers and the harlots believed him; but "ye" when ye saw *it* repented not yourselves afterwards to believe him. **vv.28-32** This parable reveals the state of the religious leaders. It is better to repent and obey from an honest heart than to profess fidelity to God and never obey. The Sanhedrin saw themselves as the closest to God of the nation, and thought of the publicans and sinners as beyond God's reach; "I thank thee than I am not... as this publican" (Luke 18:9-14). In reality, the opposite was true. The Jewish leaders had a form of Godliness, outward religious forms, but underneath was rebellion. The publicans and harlots had no facade, but were stirred to repentance by the preaching of John the Baptist. How this must have enraged the Pharisees! To be told that tax-gatherers and harlots would go into the kingdom of God before them. The [kingdom of God](#) is a moral kingdom, in which God is reigning in the hearts of all those who have divine life. In John 3:5 we find that one must "be born of water and of Spirit" in order for him to "*enter into the kingdom of God*".

The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen: Man Usurps the Son's Inheritance (21:33-46)

The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen (21:33-41)

Isaiah 5. This parable told by our Lord is a clear allusion to the song of the well-beloved and his vineyard in Isa. 5. The Old Testament account of the vineyard has been called “the key to the Old Testament” because it encapsulates the entire history of Israel in the dispensational ways of God. As always, a vineyard in scripture speaks of man under responsibility to produce fruit for God. The figure is often applied directly to the nation of Israel, as a sample of man under responsibility. It is in contrast to “the true vine” (John 15:1), which is the Lord Jesus Christ; the key to fruit-bearing is to abide in the True Vine. In Isaiah 5 we read that Jehovah had a vineyard. He brought that vine out of Egypt and planted it in Canaan (Psa. 80:8). He went to great lengths to make it successful:

1. He planted it in a “*very fruitful hill*”, called Canaan.
2. He “*fenced*” it, or separated it from the nations by giving them the ordinances (Eph. 2:14-15).
3. He removed the “*stones*”, or Canaanite nations.
4. He built a “*tower*”, which might be the defensible hill of Jerusalem, or it might refer to the light of prophecy, which allows one to see a great distance.
5. He build a “*winepress*”, which represents Judaistic worship.

After all His efforts to give the vine the optimal environment, the vineyard produced “wild grapes”... sin and rebellion. Jehovah exclaims, “What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it?” Israel was but a sample of the first man. Given the perfect geographical environment, the perfect political climate, the perfect religion... the first man can produce nothing for God. He pronounces therefore the judgments on the vineyard:

1. *Removal of the hedge and wall.* This speaks of the removal of divine protection from Israel. This results in the enemies desolating the land, which happened beginning slowly, then increasing until Israel was taken captive and the temple destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar.
2. *Stopping of the vineyard's cultivation.* This speaks of the cessation of prophets and priests, the workers in the vineyard to “stir up” the conscience of the people.
3. *Stopping the rain.* This speaks of cutting off the flow of divine blessing to Israel.

Here in Matthew 21 the Lord expands on the parable of Isa. 5. After Israel was taken captive, the Lord allowed a remnant to return to the land and rebuild. Once again, Jehovah had a vineyard in Canaan. The key difference between Isa. 5 and Matt. 21 is that here the vineyard is committed to the husbandmen.

In Isaiah 5 the problem is *the vine* itself... the first man is incapable of producing fruit for God. In Matthew 21 the problem is *the husbandmen*... the wicked leaders of Israel suppressed the fruit.

¶ **33** Hear another parable: There was a householder who planted a vineyard, and made a fence round it, and dug a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and left the country. **v.33 Israel established.** In the parable of the wicked husbandmen ([compare](#)) the “householder” is Jehovah, and more specifically, the Father. The “fence” speaks of protection, the “winepress” of religious order, the “tower” of the foresight of prophecy. He then committed the management of the vineyard to “husbandmen” (leaders of the nation) and departed the country, stepping away to test the first man under law.

34 But when the time of fruit drew near, he sent his bondmen to the husbandmen to receive his fruits. **35** And the husbandmen took his bondmen, and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. **36** Again he sent other bondmen more than the first, and they did to them in like manner. **vv.34-36 The Prophets Sent and Rejected.** When the time of the fruit drew near (last 600 years before Christ) God sent prophets to stir up the conscience of His people, to “receive” Jehovah’s fruits. How were the prophets received? They were mistreated, persecuted, and martyred. “Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?” (Acts 7:52). But Jehovah had patience and raised up another class of prophets. Their reception was no different. Notice that it is the leaders (false-shepherds) that rejected the prophets (Matt. 23:31-32; Ezek. 34).

37 And at last he sent to them his son, saying, They will have respect for my son. **38** But the husbandmen, seeing the son, said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him and possess his inheritance. **39** And they took him, and cast him forth out of the vineyard, and killed him. **vv.37-39 The Son Sent and Killed.** The very last resort, after all prophetic efforts had failed, Jehovah sends the Son. “They will have respect for my son.” If there is any moral continuity in the universe, it ought to be for man to reverence God’s Son. On the contrary, the greatest display of the loving heart of God instead gave fresh opportunity for the evil heart of man to imagine a higher mountain peak of wickedness; “this is the heir... let us kill Him and seize on His inheritance!” Who would have guessed that man’s heart was so wicked? This shows that Israel recognized that Jesus was the Messiah; “this is the heir”. But it was not the recognition of faith. What is the Son’s inheritance? Eph. 1:9-11 tell us that

the Son's inheritance is "all things"; i.e. the material universe! Man would seize it and use it for his own pleasure. We have a beautiful contrast in the Church. Those today who receive Christ by faith will "obtain" a share in Christ's inheritance (Eph. 1:11)! The heir is taken and cast out of the vineyard, and killed. This would remind us of how "Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered *without the gate*" (Heb. 13:12).

The final test of the first man. This parable would show that the sending of the Son was the final test of the first man. It was a greater test even than the Garden of Eden, when man was in an innocent condition. The Son was the full display of love and grace to man... but He was rejected. The cross ended the probation of the First Man, proving (to faith) the utter ruin of the flesh, and the futility of improving it (Rom. 8:3). "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin" (John 15:22).

40 When therefore the lord of the vineyard comes, what shall he do to those husbandmen? **41** They say to him, He will miserably destroy those evil *men*, and let out the vineyard to other husbandmen, who shall render him the fruits in their seasons. **vv.40-41**
The judgment of the evil husbandmen. From their own lips the Lord extracts the fitting judgment that ought to follow this wicked behavior and mistreatment of the heir. Two governmental consequences would fall on the false shepherds of Israel:

1. **Destroyed.** He will "*miserably destroy those evil men*". This occurred in A.D. 70 when Jerusalem was sacked and the Temple destroyed. Many of the Jewish leaders were brutally killed at the hands of the Romans.
2. **Dispossessed.** He will "*let out the vineyard to other husbandmen, who shall render him the fruits in their seasons*". The management of the vineyard would be given to the despised faithful remnant, who would render the fruit of Israel in the Millennial day. This cannot refer to the Church because the "vineyard" is always Israel!

The Application of the Parable to the Pharisees (21:42-46)

42 Jesus says to them, Have ye never read in the scriptures, "*The stone which they that builded rejected, this has become the corner-stone: this is of *the* Lord, and it is wonderful in our eyes?*" [Psa 118:22-23] **v.42** This scripture refers to the Millennial day, when Christ, who was rejected by the Jewish leaders at His first coming, is made head of Millennial blessing at His second coming. The illustration is of a construction site. The builders saw a stone that didn't appeal to them, and they rejected it. But the builders were out of tune with the mind of the architect, who had other plans for that stone, and to the surprise of the onlookers, it was made the headstone of the corner (a prominent, exalted place). Note

that Ephesians 2:20 refers to Christ as the corner-stone of the Church, but here in Matthew it is Christ's place over the Millennial nation of Israel that is in view.

43 Therefore I say to you, that the kingdom of God shall be taken from you and shall be given to a nation producing the fruits of it. **v.43** The Lord lays the blame squarely at the feet of the Jewish leaders. The "kingdom of God" had been officially among the nation of Israel ever since Moses had led them out of Egypt. Yet the prophetic scriptures foretold the setting aside of Israel on account of their unfaithfulness, and the bringing in of "a nation" that had no natural claim to God or the promises (Deut. 32:21; Isaiah 65:1-2; read Rom. 10); i.e. the Gentiles brought into blessing. But the point here is that God would *turn away* from those who do not produce the fruits of the kingdom of God; i.e. practical righteousness. Currently the Gentiles are in this place of responsibility, but Rom. 11:22-27 makes it clear that when the Gentiles begin to suppress the fruit, they too will be "cut off", and the Jews "grafted in" again. The point is, the rejection of Christ would result in the leaders of Israel losing out on the privilege of a public identification with God. "Therefore"... on account of their despising and rejecting Christ.

44 And he that falls on this stone shall be broken, but on whomsoever it shall fall, it shall grind him to powder. **v.44** The Lord gives the connection between the Stone and two different groups:

1. Those who rejected Him at His first coming; they "*shall be broken*", referring to the judgment of the nation in A.D. 70.
2. Those who would be judged at His second coming; "*it shall grind him to powder*", referring to the appearing (Dan. 2:34, 35).

This generation of Jews would stumble and fall upon the Stone, and perish in their unbelief. But that would not end this class of apostate Jews. Instead, in a future day, when Israel is back in their land, an apostate nation under the leadership of Antichrist will fall to an even more solemn judgment.

45 And the chief priests and the Pharisees, having heard his parables, knew that he spoke about them. **46** And seeking to lay hold of him, they were afraid of the crowds, because they held him for a prophet. **vv.45-46** The leaders knew that the Lord was speaking directly about them. There was no denying it. They had even pronounced their own sentence unwittingly (v.41)! When man's moral state is exposed, his reaction is to silence the voice of truth; they sought to lay hold of Him. Yet their violent tendencies are still overruled by a still deeper motive; popular opinion.

The Parable of the Wedding Feast: Man Refuses to Honor the Son (22:1-14)

The Wedding Feast. This is the *ninth* of the [ten similitudes of the kingdom of heaven](#), which describe this time when Jesus is rejected. Why does the Lord give this as a similitude of the kingdom of heaven? He is teaching that God's priority is the Honor of His Son, and He won't stop until heaven is full of worshipers. If the Jews refuse the Gospel, the invitation will go to the Gentiles, and they will believe it, but judgment will fall on those who reject it. It teaches us that the servants of the Kingdom are to *be occupied with evangelism*. It is possible that this is the same parable spoken by the Lord in Luke 14:16 with different details included.

God's sovereignty is emphasized in the parable of the wedding feast, whereas man's responsibility is emphasized in the parable of the wicked husbandmen. The vineyard is a picture of man under responsibility to produce fruit for God, but the king in the wedding parable is not looking for fruit, but merely for man to accept the invitation. Not only is man unable to produce fruit for God, he is incapable of accepting God's grace. In both parables we see the evil heart of man, but in the earlier parable, the final outcome is judgment because of man's failure in responsibility. In the parable of the wedding feast we see the sovereign purpose of God super-abounding man's rejection of Christ, and the final outcome is blessing in spite of man's failure.

God's Purpose to Honor His Son (vv.1-2)

CHAPTER 22

¶ And Jesus answering spoke to them again in parables, saying, **2** The kingdom of the heavens has become like a king who made a wedding feast for his son, vv.1-2 In this parable we have God's heart told out, inviting guests to come to honor His Son. The king is God Himself, the king's son is God's Son. The king made a wedding feast for his son, but no mention is made of the bride or her portion. This is because the mystery of Christ and the Church (Eph. 5:25) had not been revealed yet. God's focus is on His Son. He wants to share that delight and joy with others. The Son is not active in this parable; He is sitting perfectly, patiently on the right hand of God, awaiting His marriage supper!

Successive Appeals to Israel Rejected (vv.3-7)

vv.3-6 The "bondmen" are the carriers of the gospel, be it the gospel of the kingdom, or the gospel of the grace of God. In Luke 14:23 the servant (singular) is a picture of the Spirit of

God. In Matthew 22:2 *"his bondmen"* (plural) are a picture of the carriers of the gospel. The bondmen *"call"* and *"invite"*. But in Luke it says *"compel them to come in"* because that is the Spirit's work, not ours. We can't compel, but we can invite. Bondmen are sent by the king three times:

1. To the invitees before preparations were complete - offer rejected.
2. To the invitees after all things were ready - offer violently rejected.
3. To those previously not invited - offer accepted with mixed reality.

This parable is quite different than that of the wicked husbandmen in ch.21. There it was a summary of Israel's history; demonstrating that God could not trust man. But here we have God coming forth in grace: a question if man would trust God and share in the honor of His Son.

3 and sent his bondmen to call the persons invited to the wedding feast, and they would not come. v.3 We have pictured here the ministry of John the Baptist and the Lord's disciples. They went to the "invited persons" which of course were the Jews. They preached "the kingdom of heaven is at hand". But the Jews rejected the gospel of the kingdom as preached by John the Baptist, and also as preached by the Lord's disciples (Matt. 11-12). Notice that this first call was before the preparation (work of the cross) was complete.

4 Again he sent other bondmen, saying, Say to the persons invited, Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fatted beasts are killed, and all things ready; come to the wedding feast. **5** But they made light of it, and went, one to his own land, and another to his commerce. **6** And the rest, laying hold of his bondmen, ill-treated and slew them. **vv.4-6** We might put the cross in between v.3 and v.4, because the king's "oxen and fatted beasts" are now killed; a picture of the finished work of the cross. It is amazing that even the cross would not deter God from His purpose to have a people in honor of His Son. Now "all things are ready"; Christ had died, risen, ascended, and received the kingdom. In v.4 we see the fresh but final offer made to Israel after the outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2 - 4). The gospel went out "to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16). In v.5 we see that offer largely rejected by the nation of Israel in spite of the Spirit's witness. Much of the nation was too distracted by earthly and natural things ("land and commerce") to heed the gospel message. But the religious class, here called "the rest" (v.6), became violently opposed to the Spirit's witness, and began to persecute and martyr the servants of God. We can see that the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7), the martyrdom of James, and the imprisonment of Peter (Acts 12) are contemplated in v.6. Doesn't it seem a little extreme for things to escalate into violence over a wedding invitation? Clearly this parable is teaching

something much deeper. God is serious about honoring His Son, and man is serious about rejecting His Son.

7 And when the king heard of it he was wroth, and having sent his forces, destroyed those murderers and burned their city. v.7 The destruction of “their city” is no doubt a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. (Dan. 9:26 refers to this). Clearly, from this verse we see that the rejection of the Pentecostal witness of the Spirit is what sealed the doom of Judaism. It answers to the additional year that was granted to the fig tree in Luke 13. “And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down” (Luke 13:8-9). The end of the year having come, it was time for that tree to be cut down. Notice that the king didn’t send his servants, but “his forces” to destroy the murderers, etc. God providentially used the Roman Army for this purpose, not the messengers of the gospel.

Is there a prophetic significance beyond 70 A.D.? As far as I know, v.7 applies primarily to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. However, a common theme with prophetic scriptures is *multiple applications* within the scheme of prophecy. To demonstrate this, review the pattern: the city of Jerusalem is destroyed by the Romans after Israel rejects the gospel of the grace of God. Following the same pattern, the King of the North will sweep down (1260 days) and destroy Jerusalem after Israel rejects the gospel of the kingdom in the Great Tribulation! This is followed by a great harvest of Gentiles who believe the gospel of the kingdom and are ushered into Millennial blessing (vv.8-10). It is at least possible that *both* applications were in the mind of the Spirit.

The Gentiles Invited (vv.8-10)

8 Then he says to his bondmen, The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy; **9** go therefore into the thoroughfares of the highways, and as many as ye shall find invite to the wedding feast. **10** And those bondmen went out into the highways, and brought together all as many as they found, both evil and good; and the wedding feast was furnished with guests. vv.8-10 We see God’s heart turning to the Gentiles. Even the rejection of the Pentecostal witness – a slap in the face – would not deter God from His purpose. Israel’s rejection of the gospel has opened up a door of blessing to the Gentiles! For “by [Israel’s] fall there is salvation to the nations” (Rom. 11:11). The king is not willing for one seat to be empty at the wedding feast for his son. God’s heart is not the problem, the issue lies in the hearts of those invited; “those invited were not worthy”. And so the gospel went out to the Gentiles in a remarkable way, largely through the Apostle Paul, and many were brought from poor and humble backgrounds to fill the place forfeited by the Jews. All were welcome,

both “evil and good”. It didn’t matter if they had been a thief or a rabbi. It isn’t a question of whether they were fit for the wedding, because we find in vv.11-13 that the king had provided garments for all to wear.

The Guest without a Wedding Garment (vv.11-14)

11 And the king, having gone in to see the guests, beheld there a man not clothed with a wedding garment. **12** And he says to him, *My friend, how camest thou in here not having on a wedding garment? But he was speechless.* vv.11-12 The king immediately spied one who did not have on a wedding garment. He is one who partially accepted the invitation. He agreed to come to dinner, but did not put on the provided garment. It would be like saying, “I want to go the heaven, but on the basis of my own works.” It stems from either self-righteousness or carelessness with regard to God’s holiness. But it is really saying, “Christ has died for nothing” (Gal. 2:21). In v.4 we read that “all things” were ready; including wedding garments for all invited guests. It was the cross that provided the wedding garments, and it is the cross that puts an end to man in the flesh and his works-system (Rom. 10:3-4). The probationary period was over at the cross, and now that wedding garments are readily available, God demands that you avail yourself of one. God is not looking for anything in you, instead He is providing you with something: Christ Himself for your wedding garment (1 Cor. 1:30), and He just wants you to accept it. “He was speechless” (see Rom 3:19), because there is no excuse, all was provided “freely by His grace” (Rom. 3:24).

13 Then said the king to the servants, *Bind him feet and hands, and take him away, and cast him out into the outer darkness: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.* **v.13** God won’t have any there in heaven professedly in attendance for the honor of His Son who have spurned the wedding garment. It is open dishonor to the Lord Jesus Christ. But in that eternal “moment” of judgment, all men will “*honor the Son*” for they will acknowledge that He as the Son has the divine prerogative to judge men (John 5:22). Notice that there is a difference between the “*bondmen* or slaves” [G1401] who call the guests to the feast and the “*servants*” [G1249] who bind the Christ-despiser. The angels will do that service, not the disciples of the kingdom. For those who despise the light of Christ’s presence, their portion will be “*outer darkness*”; i.e. eternal damnation in the lake of fire. Note: it is clear that, while the marriage of the king’s son refers to the marriage of the Lamb, that it is not a literal description. There will be no false professors allowed temporarily into heaven, nor will a scene like vv.11-13 unfold to mar the joy of that glorious day!

14 For many are called ones, but few chosen ones. v.14 The Lord concludes the 9th

Similitude with the same words that He used to conclude the 8th Similitude. In the parable only one man was found without a wedding garment, but it is not a rare occurrence in the kingdom of heaven. Many are “called” by the gospel, but relatively few are “chosen” or elect. All blessing for time and eternity is owed to the sovereign grace of God.

Three Attempts to Ensnare the Lord in His Words (22:15-46)

Proof of their Rejection. The Lord had come into Jerusalem as the King of Israel for a final witness to the nation. He came in the fulfillment of prophecy, with all the proofs of His messianic authority. Then He proceeded to unfold three parables describing the evil heart of the Jewish leaders. Now, in this section, these very leaders will manifest that evil heart in a series of three attempts to ensnare the Lord. It is possible that these three leading groups of opponents in Judaism, the Herodians, the Pharisees, and the Sadducees are what the Lord refers to as “three shepherds” in Zech 11:8. *“And I destroyed three shepherds in one month; and my soul was vexed with them, and their soul also loathed me.”*

By the Pharisees and Herodians: Paying Taxes to Caesar (22:15-22)

¶ **15** Then went the Pharisees and held a council how they might ensnare him in speaking. **16a** And they send out to him their disciples with the Herodians, **vv.15-16a The group.** The first group to come against the Lord is an unlikely combination of [Pharisees](#) and [Herodians](#). These two groups were not fond of one another. The Pharisees were very strict and religious, the Herodians were worldly and political. But both had a vested interest in getting rid of the Lord. How sad that *hatred* for Christ can draw the worst of enemies together (Luke 23:12)!

16b 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 men’s person; **17** tell us therefore what thou thinkest: Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not? **vv.16b-17 The trap.** The snare was a clever two-sided invention designed to catch the Lord either way He answered. The Pharisees were present supporting one side of this trap, the Herodians supporting the other. They preface the question with a flattering statement that presented a fact, meanwhile

grossly misrepresenting our Lord's character. Jesus was *"true"* and He did teach *"the way of God in truth"*... but this was said tongue-in-cheek. If they really believed it, they would have become Jesus' disciples! It was also true that Jesus was not a man-pleaser. He did not treat important people better than common people. He was not a *"respector of persons"*. But how wrong the statement that He did not care for anyone! The question they asked was about tribute (taxes) for Caesar. If the Lord answered *"No"*, then the Herodians would have Him arrested for insurrection against the Roman government. But if He answered *"Yes"*, the Pharisees would say, *"how can you be the Messiah if you are unable to free us from bondage to Rome?"*. Either way, they thought they had Jesus trapped.

18 But Jesus, knowing their wickedness, said, Why tempt ye me, hypocrites? **19** Shew me the money of the tribute. And they presented to him a denarius. **20** And he says to them, Whose is this image and superscription? **21** They say to him, Caesar's. Then he says to them, Pay then what is Caesar's to Caesar, and what is God's to God. **vv.18-21 Jesus' Response.** Even though they used flattering words, Jesus knew their evil intentions, and exposed them. How lowly was this Perfect One... He didn't have a denarius to His name. He had to say, *"show me the tribute money"*. The Lord reasoned from the image imprint on the face of the coin; whose image (bust) and superscription (name) is on the coin? The obvious answer: it was Caesar's face and name on the coin, and therefore the money belonged to Caesar. The Lord's answer is simple yet profound:

1. *Step 1: Render to Caesar what is Caesar's.* We must first submit to the authorities over us, including the government of God. The Lord was not here to free the Jews from the Romans. Even the Jew's money didn't belong to them. Why? Because of their sin and failure. They were unwilling to own that the times of the Gentiles was a direct governmental consequence of Israel's rebellion. We too live in a world where things aren't right. Corrupt governments are in power now as then. We must live and trade with *"what is Caesar's"* and be willing to submit to the government, seeing it as an extension of the government of God.
2. *Step 2: Render to God what is God's.* Put God's interests before our own. The Jews had an outward profession, but they had evil hearts, and defiled consciences. Caesar owns the currency, but God owns everything. God wants what Caesar can never take away; our soul. We must yield to God what is His due. Once the faithful remnant of Israel bows to the government of God (step 1) and commits themselves to God's will (step 2) then God will change the circumstances... but not until then.



An application. A nice connection can be found between Gen. 1:26 and Matt. 20:21. Caesar's image was on the coin, and it belonged to him. Every human being is like that coin. Whose image is on us? We are made in the image and likeness of God... and we belong to Him. The only fitting response is to render ourselves to Him as our Creator and Redeemer.

22 And when they heard *him*, they wondered, and left him, and went away. **v.22 The aftermath.** The disciples of the Pharisees and Herodians never saw that response coming. They "wondered", not only in mental amazement, but because Jesus had brought their consciences into the presence of God.

By the Sadducees: Marriage at the Resurrection (22:23-33)

¶ **23** On that day came to him Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection; and they demanded of him, **v.23 The Group.** The next group to approach the Lord with a snare is the [Sadducees](#)... a ruling class sect that was opposed to the Pharisees. They prided themselves on keeping the scripture only, as opposed to the Pharisees who kept the scriptures and the traditions of the elders. This verse shows that the distinguishing feature of the sect of the Sadducees was the denial of the resurrection, although they denied other truths such as the existence of angels, and the possibility of the spirit to subsist outside the body (Acts 23:8). All these beliefs are in open contradiction to the Word of God, but the most serious is the denial of the resurrection, because the resurrection is foundational to the gospel (1 Cor. 15:19).

24 saying, Teacher, Moses said, "If any one die, not having children, his brother shall marry his wife and shall raise up seed to his brother." [Deut. 25:5] **25** Now there were with us seven brethren; and the first having married died, and not having seed, left his wife to his

brother. **26** In like manner also the second and the third, unto the seven. **27** And last of all the woman also died. **28** In the resurrection therefore of which of the seven shall she be wife, for all had her? **vv.24-28 The trap.** The Sadducees intended to trap the Lord by making Him appear foolish, and at the same time mock the truth of resurrection. Similar to the Pharisees, the Sadducees start with something that is true; in this case scripture. They take the words of Moses in Deut. 25:5 and, along with a hypothetical story, attempt to mock the resurrection. But they reasoned from their own ignorance of heaven. Reasoning from ignorance can only result in greater ignorance. The rationalist takes the position of, "if I can't understand it, it doesn't exist." Such is the modern argument for atheism. Read carefully the rational objection to resurrection answered by Paul in 1 Cor. 15:35-41.

29 And Jesus answering said to them, Ye 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 of God in heaven. **31** But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, **32** *"I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?"* [Exodus 3:15] God is not God of *the* dead, but of *the* living. **vv.29-32 Jesus' response.** The Sadducees, who boasted in their understanding of the scriptures alone, had erred in not really knowing the scriptures, nor the greatness of God's power. God is both too wise and too powerful for man to comprehend. The two errors of the skeptic are; (1) not knowing God's Word, and (2) not believing He has the power to perform His Word.

1. **They erred not knowing the scriptures** in that:

- Their hypothetical scenario was moot! They did not understand that *marriage has to do with this earth*. They rejected the prophets, which, if they had heeded Malachi 2:15, would have shown that one purpose of the institution of marriage is to continue "a godly seed". In the state of resurrection, beyond death, there is not longer a need to continue a godly seed, etc. and therefore no more marriage.
- The law of Moses proves the resurrection! The Old Testament explicitly speaks of resurrection, but not in the first five books (see 1 Samuel 2:6; Job 19:25-27; Psalm 16:9,10; Psalm 17:15; and Daniel 12:2). The Sadducees denied the inspiration of the Psalms and the Prophets. Here the Lord, the Author of the scriptures, reveals from the very Pentateuch (their "strong point") the truth of resurrection! When God first revealed Himself to Moses in the burning bush, He declared Himself as; "Jehovah, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Exodus

3:15). At this time Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had been in the grave for nearly 400 years. Every Jew knew that God was God of the living (the “living God”, Deut. 5:26), not the God of the dead. Therefore, the patriarchs must not be annihilated, and certainly God intended to raise them again!

2. **They erred not knowing God’s power** in that their thoughts did not rise up to the truth of resurrection. Resurrection is a glory which belongs only to God (John 5:21). It means - terrifying thought to man - that nothing is hid from His power. Rather than compliment man’s pride, it strikes fear in his heart. [read more...](#)

33 And when the crowds heard *it* they were astonished at his doctrine. **v.33 The aftermath.** The crowds were astonished at the teaching of our Lord. Who was this one that not only knew the scriptures so well, but could completely destroy the arguments of the most educated proponents of Judaism? He was none other than the very Author of that book.

By the Pharisees: The Greatest Commandment (22:34-40)

¶ **34** But the Pharisees, having heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, were gathered together. **v.34 The Group.** The Pharisees were amazed that the Lord had silenced the Sadducees, something they had been trying to do unsuccessfully for years. They gathered themselves together to come up with another attempt to trap the Lord.

35 And one of them, a lawyer, demanded, tempting him, and saying, **36** Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law? **vv.35-36 The Trap.** A lawyer was one who was an expert in the principles and nuances of the law. He tempted the Lord by trying to bring Him into an ancient debate over the ten commandments. There were one-hundred and one different arguments why each one of the ten commandments was the greatest. No matter which of the ten commandments Jesus chose, they would find some fault.

37 And he said to him, “Thou shalt love *the* Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy understanding.” [Deut. 6:5] **38** This is *the* great and first commandment. **39** And *the* second is like it, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” [Lev. 19:18] **40** On these two commandments the whole law and the prophets hang. **vv.37-40 Jesus’ Response.** Instead of choosing one of the ten commandments, Jesus gave two commandments that were not in [the Decalog](#), but that did summarize the whole. The first four commandments have to do with fidelity toward God, summarized here by the Lord

with *“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy understanding”* (Deut. 6:5). The last six commandments have to do with conduct toward our fellow man, and the Lord summarized them as *“Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself”* (Lev. 19:18). Both these “summaries” are a form of love... Paul says *“therefore love is the fulfilling of the law”* (Rom. 13:10; Gal. 5:14). The command to love one’s neighbor is “second” to the command to love God because man’s responsibility toward God is greater than his responsibility toward his fellow man; a principle very backwards today. For this reason the second group of six commands was called “these *least* commandments” (Matt. 5:19). Not only did Jesus foil their attempt to ensnare Him, but He delivers a perfect summary of the righteousness of the law.

Jesus Questions the Pharisees: Whose Son is the Christ? (22:41-46)

¶ **41** And the Pharisees being gathered together, Jesus demanded of them, **v.41 The examinee becomes the examiner.** Jesus had silenced the Herodians, the Sadducees, and the Pharisees, but now He who was examined of them becomes the examiner. He asks the Pharisees a “question of questions”, which they needed to answer, and which every soul must answer. The Jewish leaders had been looking for some theological fault with Jesus, and finding none, Jesus now reveals from the scriptures the truth of His Person, and brings it before their minds and consciences.

42 saying, What think ye concerning the Christ? whose son is he? They say to him, David’s. **v.42 David’s Son.** The question Jesus now asks is the crux of the whole matter... the question that determines our eternal destiny. What is our opinion of the Son? How high do our thoughts rise of Him? Was He merely a good man? Do we believe what God says about Him? It is a matter of life and death (John 3:18). The Lord asks them concerning the identity of the Messiah. Whose son is the Christ? They rightly answer that the promised Messiah was the Son of David, according to the Davidic covenant (2 Samuel 7:12-13), and descending from David in the royal lineage (Matt. 1:1). The prophetic scriptures speak of Him; “And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots” (Isa. 11:1). This fact was widely accepted by every honest Jew (Matt. 9:27; Matt. 12:23; Matt. 15:22; Matt. 20:30-31; Matt. 21:9, 15). The title “son of David” is used of Christ more in Matthew than in any other gospel. [Read more...](#)

43 He says to them, How then does David in Spirit call him Lord, saying, **44** “The Lord said to my Lord, Sit on my right hand until I put thine enemies under thy feet?” [**Psa. 110:1**] **45** If

therefore David call him Lord, how is he his son? **vv.43-45 David's Lord.** Jesus then quoted Psa. 110:1, where David (the psalmist), speaking by inspiration ("*in Spirit*"), called the Messiah by the title of "my Lord". This is the most quoted Old Testament passage in the New Testament. Everyone knows that a human son is not greater than his human father. For David, the father, to refer to his son as "Lord", meant that *Christ had to be Divine as well as human!* He quotes the rest of the verse as well; the scene being the return of an ascended Christ into heaven. The Father (Jehovah) instructs the ascended Christ, who had accomplished the work of the cross, to sit on His right hand, waiting until Jehovah would put all Christ's enemies under His feet. The answer to our Lord's question in v.45 is this; the Messiah is not only David's son (human), but God's Son as well (Divine); read Romans 1:1-4. Woven throughout even Old Testament scriptures is this truth of the Personal identity of Christ; that He is not only the promised king of Israel, but God Himself (Micah 5:2). It is this all-important key that is "the way, the truth, the life" without which "no man can come unto the Father, but by *me*" (John 14:6).

46 And no one was able to answer him a word, nor did any one dare from that day to question him any more. **v.46 The aftermath.** The Pharisees had nothing to say. The truth was before them, and they were blind to it. Not only were they silenced, but this exchange caused every adversary to cease from questioning Him from this moment on to His trial.

What think ye of Christ?

by John Newton

What think ye of Christ? is the test
 To try both your state and your scheme;
 You cannot be right in the rest,
 Unless you think rightly *of him*;
 As Jesus appears in your view,
 As he is beloved or not,
 So God is disposed to you,
 And mercy, or wrath are your lot. Some take him a creature to be,
 A man, or an angel at most:
 Sure these have not feelings like me,
 Nor know themselves wretched, and lost;
 So guilty, so helpless, am I,
 I durst not confide in his blood;
 Nor on his protection rely,

Unless I were sure *he is God*.