

Part 40: The Lord of the Kingdom

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We are back in the gospel of Matthew after a number of weeks away from it. And for those who haven't been with us this book is Matthew's account of the life of Jesus Christ. We are nearing the end of this book, and where the first 20 chapters of Matthew covered 30 plus years of Jesus' life, the last seven chapters cover the last seven days of his life.

But before we dive back into this narrative I want to start with a story from the Old Testament. In a book called 1 Kings, read about King David's son, King Solomon. God told Solomon that he would grant him one request and Solomon asked for wisdom. So God not only made Solomon into the wisest man to ever live, but he expanded his wealth and his power to a point which has never been recreated in history.

And the nations who were around Solomon hear rumor of his success and they decided that they needed to see it for themselves. They needed to test Solomon to see if he was as good as he said he was. So 1 Kings 10:1 says, "Now when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord, she came to test him with hard questions."

And it says that Solomon answered all her questions; there was nothing hidden from the king that he could not explain to her, his wisdom and his palace was so impressive that the Bible says, "there was no more breath in her." And look at her response in **1 Kings 10:6-10**. The King of Israel passed a test with such flying colors that the one who tested couldn't help but give him great rewards.

Well today we are going to read of another King of Israel who is going to be tested by hard questions. And just like Solomon, Jesus is going to easily solve every riddle thrown his way. However these test aren't going to come from the Queen of a foreign country. They are going to come from the religious leaders of Israel itself.

The passages we are going to look at for the next few weeks are unique in the scope of Matthew because it is the largest block of Jesus' teaching not directed at his disciples or at the crowds. Jesus is speaking and interacting at length not with those who are genuinely following, or genuinely interested in Jesus. He is speaking to the religious officials who have already made up their minds about Jesus.

Perhaps that is you today. Maybe you already have your mind made up regarding what it means to be a Christian, who Jesus is, and the implications of that decision on your life? Instead of going to Jesus to be shaped by him, we go to Jesus and expect him to be shaped by our opinions on him. This happens very subtly in our hearts today, but will be more explicit in our text.

You see, for some time now, Jesus has been making claims, the crowds have been whispering about the fame of Jesus, and these religious men didn't like the implications of those rumors. For some time now the religious leaders have been plotting for a way to discredit and disprove Jesus so that they no longer would have to put up with him. And now, as Jesus has entered into Jerusalem all the major players know it's time to make a move. As you heard read for us already, Jesus is going to be asked three different

questions from three different groups of people. Each of them bringing their own impossible questions to Jesus to try and trip him up.

Each group is going to approach Jesus from a different perspective hoping to find success, but in the end this is what we are going to see today: **We will never follow Jesus rightly until we see him as Lord.**

When it comes to how we approach or understand Jesus, the idea of Jesus as Lord must be central to all of our thoughts. Today in our text we are going to see four questions which prove this and these will be our main points today: The Political trap, The Theological Dilemma, The Religious Test and the Jesus Proof.

So let's look at our first scene today: **The Political Trap. Matthew 22:15-22.**

Some quick context first of all. At this time the Jewish people were under the rule of Rome. And Rome had established a sort of puppet line of Jewish rulers who were really just Roman babysitters. Those rulers were the Herods, and those Jews who were partial to this set up were called the Herodians.

For the most part Jews, especially the Pharisees, loathed the idea of being subjected to Rome. They were God's people not Rome's people. And what made matters worse was that Rome levied a tax specifically on Jews. This was often called a poll tax or a census tax, but the gist of it was that Rome would tax Jews for being under Roman rule. The Roman citizens didn't have to pay this tax, only the Jews.

So we see the deviousness of this trap when the Pharisees send some of their disciples along with the Herodians to ask Jesus this question. In the Pharisees mind if Jesus said "yes, pay the tax," he would be affirming the worship of the Roman Emperor who saw himself as god. Therefore Jesus would be forsaking the worship of the God of the Bible. And if Jesus said, "No, don't pay the tax," well then the Herodians would go and tell the Roman officials who would have the ability to put Jesus to death.

It was a win/win situation until they lost. Jesus refuses to provide a yes or no answer. Instead he asks for a coin and makes the case of ownership. The word rendered here in the ESV as "render to Caesar," and "render to God" actually carries the tone not just of giving, but of giving back. It is a return. It was a natural obligation.

Even if the Jews loathed Rome, Rome was providing some social benefit to them even if it was just social systems and the mere currency they used. Because of that, it is not wrong to pay the tax, it is natural to give back. The answer was so simple yet its effects were astounding. These men came with maliciousness and left marveling.

You see Jesus does something absolutely astounding when he says give to Caesar and give to God. He is elevating Christian worship above the realm of politics. That is not to say that our beliefs have no say in our politics, that's ridiculous to think. But Jesus is saying is that if our Christianity ends in our politics, we will forever miss the point. If our primary expression of our faith is our political influence or standing we will always be frustrated.

But when Jesus simultaneously affirms secular governments and divine worship he is saying that the two are not the same. It is ok to give taxes to secular officials and it's ok to give worship to a divine God because Christianity is not a political system.

Christianity is political in that, just like any worldview, it demands to be played out in the public square. But the politics of Christianity are shaped first and foremost by the worship of God not a specific political identity. While most of us never seek to confront Jesus with devious malice in our hearts, we often approach Jesus with the confines of our pre-existing political structure.

Democrats love democratic Jesus. Republicans love republican Jesus. Libertarians love libertarian Jesus. But what's important to realize here is that if we approach Jesus with the confines of a voting record and not the idea to give to God what he is due, then we are thinking just like these men.

Let me make one small point of application here. If your political party or agenda were to disappear, would your worship disappear too? If your Twitter feed, or water cooler conversations were stripped of politics, would people still know you to be a believer?

Maybe we need to examine our hearts in this. Jesus is able to sidestep this political trap because he is so much bigger than politics.

And with this simple equation Jesus destroys the false confidence of the first group of individuals. But right on his heels here comes more. **Matthew 22:23-28**. And here is our second point today: **The Theological Dilemma**

And we are introduced to our second group of challengers: The Sadducees. The power structure of Jewish worship at this time consisted of the Sadducees and the Pharisees. They were the two political parties when it came to interpreting scripture.

Now there were two key points of difference between the Sadducees and the Pharisees. The first was that the Sadducees were strict literalists when it came to interpreting the Old Testament. They claimed to be the experts when it came to understanding Scripture. The Pharisees claimed to be the experts in discussing the theology of scripture, but the Sadducees took pride in not needing these abstract categories because they knew Scripture.

The second difference was that the Sadducees didn't believe in the eternity of the soul. They believed that when you died, everything died. Your soul ceased to exist and because of that there was no resurrection from the dead. Once you died, you're dead. So this sets the stage when the Sadducees approach Jesus with this question on the complications of the resurrection.

And you can assume that this was not a little illustration they just came up with. This was the question that they constantly would torment the Pharisees with, one which presumably the Pharisees couldn't answer. The Scriptures say that if a man died and leaves a wife without children, that her brother is to marry her and care for her. It might seem weird to us, but it was actually an extremely loving thing to do in this time.

But the Sadducees see a loophole which might prove the idea of the resurrection from the dead to be a theological impossibility: What happens when this one woman is married seven times to seven brothers? Whose wife will she be in heaven? In other words this whole crazy theological hypothetical exists to show how belief in an eternal resurrected life is incompatible with the logic of our world. It is silliness.

We too live in a world where the idea of life after death seems completely ridiculous, but look at how Jesus answers them: **Matthew 22:29-33**.

Jesus does three things in his response to the Sadducees. First he insults them by saying, "You who think you know the scriptures better than anyone else, you don't really know them, and neither do you know the power of God." Then he says that in the resurrection there will be no giving or taking in marriage. Then thirdly he says that he is the God who keeps his covenant not for a little bit, but forever. He is the eternal covenant keeping God.

Now of these three points, I know just about every one of us is stuck on point two. What does it mean that we won't be married in heaven? That we will be like angels? Well it means this: that in heaven we will not identify with each other as husbands and wives, but like the angels we will relate to each other in a different way.

But now we have the 21st Century form of this dilemma. Where the first century people thought he resurrection to be a silly place in general. The idea of the dissolving of the marriage relationship causes us to think of the resurrection as silly and perhaps even unattractive place to be. It almost leaves our hearts empty.

And you're not weird if it strikes you that way. God is the one who invented marriage. He gave it to us because it is deeply intimate and desirable. But there is a reason why believers throughout the centuries end their wedding vows at "till death do us part."

Why is this such a hard thing for us to wrap our minds around? Well one Pulitzer Prize winner named Ernest Becker says it is because we as modern humanity have been forced to invent what he calls, "The Romantic Solution."

The romantic solution goes like this: in earlier eras of our existence humanity always had some sort of divine entity. That being provided for us a sense of cosmic heroism, it made sense of our life, brought value to us, made up for our faults, and brought us a sense of complete belonging from outside of ourselves. But in our modern world we have killed off the idea of any divine being. The result is that we have come up with a romantic solution, we now look to personal love to provide for us cosmic heroism.

And our culture has turned to this solution and taken it hook, line and sinker. Just listen to the songs we sing on the radio. Our partners do not simply add to our lives, they complete it, they justify it, they satisfy our whole existence. To not have love is to be empty, pointless, without direction, it is to be defiled. And this idea has silently taken over our hearts inside the church.

But here is the problem Becker says: **"We want redemption—nothing less. We want to be rid of our faults, of our feeling of nothingness. We want to be justified, to know that our creation has not been in vain. We turn to the love partner for the experience of the heroic, for perfect validation; we expect them to "make us good": through love...[But] Redemption can only come from outside the individual, from beyond, from our conceptualization of the ultimate source of things, the perfection of creation. It can only come...when we...lay down our individuality, give it up, admit our creatureliness and helplessness."**

But this is why we must look at the point Jesus makes following this statement on marriage: **Matthew 22:31-32**. God has promised to keep his covenantal love towards his believers for eternity. We look to

sex, we look to relationships, we look so many things to provide for us a total and complete sense of redemption but here Jesus offers it to us eternally.

When we enter into our resurrected state we get awarded with the eternal promises of God himself. In Ephesians 5 Paul says marriage refers to Christ and the church, so in that day when the sun of that relationship is all round us, the shadow of it will fall away.

That is not to say love and knowledge of relationships go away, but in a way which we will only describe as miraculous we will receive something more than marriage in heaven. In other words it is not something less than love which we will have in eternity, but something more than love. The Sadducees wanted to prove how incompatible eternity is in light of the idea of this life. But what Jesus is showing here is that it is only in light of this eternal relationship that this life is compatible with anything.

We were made to live in light of this eternity. How many of us are secretly Sadducees, claiming to believe in eternity, but living our lives in such a way where it would appear that this world is all there is? But following Jesus is not as matter only for this life, but for all eternity to come. And if we fail to see this all-encompassing hope, we are blind to the power and mercy of God.

And with that the Sadducees were put down. But look at what happens next: **Matthew 22:34-40**. This then forms the final test of Jesus today: **The Religious Test**.

Seeing that the Sadducees were put to open shame, the Pharisees saw this as their chance to establish themselves as the king of the temple. The Pharisees were experts at law keeping. And what they did is they looked at the hundreds of laws given in the Law and they categorized them into light laws and heavy laws.

Laws which were easy to keep and laws which were hard to keep. However they also came up with numerical values for these laws and it came out that light laws were worth the same amount of points as heavy laws. This allowed the Pharisees to ignore some of the harder commands and instead do the easy ones to get by.

This is where the question comes of, "Which is the greatest?" What is the one thing I must do to be considered a good person? But did you notice what Jesus does? He doesn't provide a task he provides a posture of the heart. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your mind, love your neighbor as yourself. Upon these two things depend all the Law and the Prophets.

What does God want out of his followers? Most of us just like the Pharisees want a list of observable commands that we can knock out and kick our feet up once we are done. So often we just want to do the least amount possible to qualify as Christian. But Jesus provides a continual and ongoing posture of loving God and loving others. Look at what Paul says in **Romans 13:8**. Love is an ongoing obligation.

You want to be perfect? Love God perfectly and love others sufficiently. The problem is that we can't even with these two simple commands, we are overwhelmingly outmatched. Our hearts run from God and our hearts hoard for our own good.

This is why we need Jesus. Our sin inhibits us from ever fulfilling God's law, but Jesus perfectly loves God by keeping his law to the fullest. Not just two commands, but the whole of it. Jesus perfectly loves

others in giving up his life to die for their sins. We can't do any of these things until we see Jesus as perfectly glorifying God and loving us.

And actually it is Jesus who stands at the center of all these tests: Jesus is God's true king and the one to whom all our lives are due. It is Jesus who is going to be the firstfruit of the resurrection of the dead. He is the one who is going to die as a single person so that he can resurrect all of his church to be his eternal bride. He is the one who fulfills to the fullest the commands of God.

And it's because he is all of these things that he now turns and asks a question of his own. This is our final point this morning: **The Jesus Proof. Matthew 22:41-46.**

The Herodians ask a question about taxes, the Sadducees about marriage, the Pharisees about the law, but Jesus asks a question about a savior. This is the same question Jesus now asks each and every one of you. Disciple, Pharisee, or observer. Who do you think the Christ is?

Is he just another addition who helps make sense of your life? Another guru to be modeled? Or is he different? Jesus is making a point here that he is not like any other man.

Yes he is going to come from the line of David, but then Jesus quotes Psalm 110 where David refers to two Lords. David writing God's inspired scripture gets glimpse of God the Father speaking to God the Son. The Lord says to my Lord.

Jesus is not another son of David like Solomon. Jesus is a son of David, who is the Lord. God himself. And the men fell silent before Jesus after this point. In light of all the testing that we have seen in this text isn't this the most amazing part?

We live in a world where the argument is never over. There's always another tweet to be sent. Another comment to be made. Another side to be given. Another option to be considered. But if Jesus is the Messiah who is the Lord, then there is no other option but silence.

You see each group of men came to Jesus with a sort of intermediary: they came with their politics, their theology, their own works, but there is no intermediary when you stand before a Lord like Jesus. We can fill the airway with whatever noise we want to distract us from this truth but there is a man who brings everything to silence before him.

When you approach Jesus, you are not approaching another option. You are not approaching another thesis to be tested, another product to be sampled. You are approaching the Lord. The creator of heaven and earth. The one who will not be boxed in, but the one who can easily place you under his feet.

When we come to church, we come to encounter something which is present in this world, but is like nothing else in this world. What does this Lordship look like for you? Does it shape the way you interact in the public square? Does it bath all of your actions in the waters of eternity? Does it compel every action with the idea of worship and brotherly love?

Just like these three tests, unless we see Jesus as our Lord we will always be fractured. He will have relevance in one area, but not others. This is not the fault of Jesus. It is the fault of our own broken

hearts. Jesus passed the test that we fail. Solomon was a son of David who passed the test of inspection and was rewarded with 120 talents of gold. But look at what Jesus said back in **Matthew 12:42**.

Jesus is the greater son of David. The King who is fully God and fully man. A King who would pass the test of examination but would not be rewarded with 120 talents of gold, but sold for 30 pieces of silver. But in those 30 pieces was an offering that none had ever seen before. In passing these tests, Jesus is going to drive these men to kill him, but it is in his death that he proves once and for all his kingship, his resurrection hope, and his infinite love for us.

Do you see Jesus as this kind of savior? Because if you do we no longer need to put him to the test. Instead we put ourselves to the task of honoring him in every area of our lives. Giving back to God out of the great gift he has given us in Jesus. So today I want you to leave in considering the question Jesus asks the Pharisees: "What do you think about the Christ?" Because it is only in him that we find the answer to our questions and the center of our whole life.