

THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

Lesson 73, Chapter 22 Continued

Matthew chapter 22 records a series of hard-hitting verbal reprimands and instruction that Jesus had with some representatives of the Temple organization and others from the Synagogue organization. Generally speaking, these two organizations were populated and led by members of two different religious/political/social sects. The Temple was led by the Sadducees, and the Synagogue by the Pharisees. They had quite different doctrines that they each abided by, and so the two groups remained in constant tension with one another. Except here we find them teaming up to try to trip up Christ in order to discredit Him, or even to do away with Him if they could find a way.

As we saw last time, chapter 22 kicks off with a Parable that leads us to a principle about what the Kingdom of Heaven is like. It involved a king holding a wedding banquet for his son; but the invited guests brazenly refused to come. It is understood that these guests were the wealthy, the influential, the aristocrats; those highest on the social ladder. The reason for their refusals are several, none of which lists any particular animosity towards the king or his son; it was simply their indifference. Their excuses all revolved around things these various groups of invited guests either held as more important in their lives or they preferred to attend to something else that pleased them more. The Parable is shocking to the Jewish listeners because there is little more socially important than a wedding. An invite to a wedding is more than a suggestion; it is an obligation. Since the shame and honor system was still embedded in Jewish society, then to not attend was a great slap in the face, and damaged the king's honor, while at the same time exposing those tardy guests as having poor character.

The king was not about to have his son's wedding banquet to go unattended, so

he sent servants out to invite common folks in at random, and their moral or ethical condition was not to be examined or used as a determining factor in who was invited. As the king inspected this unusual mixed bag of guests, one in particular stood out because he was not wearing the required wedding garment that everyone knew was to be worn for such an important occasion. The man was bound and thrown out of the wedding banquet into an evil darkness. The moral of the story is "for many are invited, but few are chosen". Let me expand upon that. Since the Parable is meant to explain one aspect of what the Kingdom of Heaven is like, then we are to understand that in the Kingdom of Heaven virtually ALL are invited to enter (so far, the "all" are only Jews). Sinners, the righteous, the rich, the poor, criminals and those who abide by the Law. However, there are entrance requirements, and that is symbolized by the need to wear the proper garment in preparation to be admitted. All who are invited are called the "many", but the "few that are chosen" are those that show up properly prepared for the occasion. So there is a definite sorting process.

Let us remember the scene. Yeshua is still on the Temple grounds jousting with the head priest (which may or may not mean the High Priest), and with some Pharisees who are not approaching Him in a sincere way, but rather are only trying to find a means to discredit or kill Him. This Parable was aimed at them and they were depicted as those indifferent guests who were invited but didn't show up for the wedding banquet. The religious leadership was infuriated at this blatant attack upon their integrity. So they stomped off and met together to formulate yet another attempt to trap Yeshua. That attempt results in the famous "Give unto Caesar that which is Caesar's" proverb. Let's read about it.

Open your Bibles to Matthew 22 verse 15.

READ MATTHEW 22:15 - 22

This same story is told in Mark chapter 12. So, turn your Bibles just a few pages to the Book of Mark.

READ MARK 12:13 - 17

There are some minor differences in the two accounts, but that can be reconciled when we factor in that Matthew's Gospel was meant for a Jewish audience and Mark's a gentile one. Otherwise, they begin with, and arrive at, the same conclusion.

Apparently, the Sadducees and the Pharisees went their separate ways because it is the Pharisees who come back with yet another attempt to trap Yeshua. This time they bring with them another identifiable group of folks that our New Testaments call "the Herodians". History is vague as to just who this people were. Scholars have guessed that these were Hellenistic Jews (that probably lived in the Jewish Diaspora but had come to Jerusalem for the Passover festival). That is, these were Jews that had assimilated into Greco-Roman culture, and so were Jewish supporters of the rather hated Herod dynasty. Clearly this group also had a problem with Jesus. Yet I emphasize that who they were is only a guess since there is no recorded evidence to prove it.

At any length, the Pharisees and the Herodians come to Yeshua with a question that involved the paying of taxes to the Roman Emperor. They open their dialogue with "we know that you tell the truth" and conclude with "you are not concerned with what other people think about you". In other words, they are saying that Jesus can openly speak His mind and are encouraging Him to be totally frank. Christ isn't anyone's fool and knows that these snakes are trying to get Him to say something against the Emperor or to incite His followers to not pay the required tax, which could be taken as sedition. Either way, the penalty is crucifixion.

The question as far as the Herodians and Pharisees are concerned is tricky and clever. When they say "is it lawful" or as in the CJB, "does Torah permit" paying taxes to Caesar, it means "does it disobey God to pay that tax?" That is, as a religious matter should Jews be monetarily supporting a pagan Roman government, even against their will? So, the motive of the religious leaders isn't so much to get Christ to cite what the Law of Moses says on the matter as it is to draw Him out so that He states His personal opinion on the issue.

This is a good time to pause and make a point about reading the Bible... and it applies to both Testaments. Whenever Jews (or Israelites in general) are discussing the law, or what is legal, law means one of two things: the Law of Moses or Jewish Law (***Halakhah***, Tradition). By Christ's era those two meanings had become conflated such that it is only by context that we can discern which is intended (and much of the time, Jews no longer made a distinction between the two). Here it means the Law of Moses. The point being that whenever the Bible discusses "the Law" or legality it always means God's laws and not secular laws or the laws of gentile nations. There are a couple of exceptions to this, but when those exceptions occur, they are specifically and clearly stated as being

something other than Tradition or the Law of Moses. Such a distinction is not spoken but it is implied here. According to the Pharisees there is a Jewish law that says that Jews should not pay the tax, but there is also a Roman law that says they should. So; what should a good Torah observant Jew do? What would Jesus do?

A little history. As it applied to the Jews, the Romans had 2 types of taxes they imposed. The first was called ***tributum soli*** that was a tax on produce from the field. The second was called ***tributum capitis*** and was a tax on personal property that everyone paid. This second tax was usually taken by means of a census and seems to have been a standard amount of one denarius per year (not a very large tax). As small as the tax was, many Jews begrudged paying it because the Pharisees had declared it against God's will and thus was a sin to do so. This taxation was rather old news in Yeshua's day; it had actually begun in the 60's B.C., or some 70 or so years earlier. About 25 years before the event we're reading about in Matthew, there was actually a Jewish revolt that began in the Galilee against paying it and no doubt it remained a major issue that precipitated the Jewish revolt that resulted in the sacking of Jerusalem and destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. So, for 1st century Jews this taxation was a huge and divisive unsettled issue and not at all hypothetical, unlike another question about Levirate marriage that would shortly be put before Jesus.

We should notice that in response to their question Yeshua asks them to supply a coin meaning He didn't have one. Why not? Since a denarius was not a large denomination of coinage, then it was either because Christ and His disciples didn't have any money with them or because He didn't want to carry a coin with pagan imagery on it (which was as much the issue for the Jews as it was the paying of it as a tax). Since the Caesar was considered as divine (at this time the Caesar was Tiberius), and also as the High Priest of the Roman Sun God religion, the words ***pontifex maximus*** were also inscribed on the denarius. His image was imprinted on the coin with words that explained that he was the son of the divine Augustus. Thus the more pious Jews were deeply concerned about even touching what they considered a graven image. Yet notice that Yeshua seems to have had no pause about handling the coin Himself.

Yeshua lets the Pharisees and Herodians know in no uncertain terms that He sees through their ploy and calls them malicious hypocrites. Holding up the coin He says: "Whose name and picture is on this coin?" They of course answer "the Emperor's". So, Yeshua replies with the famous: "Give unto Caesar that which is

Caesars, and give to God what belongs to God!" Just how are we to take His meaning (it certainly caught his opponents by surprise)? What would it have meant to the Jews that were listening? Since this isn't a Parable but rather a kind of proverb, there are a number of things we can take from it that applies to our own time and circumstances.

There are Christians today that see paying taxes to our governments as a religious matter and thus refuse to do so. Legally, in civil law in the West, such a claim has long ago been settled in court and it dismisses religious belief as a valid reason to avoid paying taxes. There are others in the several Western Democracies, especially in the 21st century, that harbor views on the matter of paying taxes that mixes politics with faith, and so they are deeply troubled that we would be forced to give ANY money to a government that imposes laws, regulations and policies that are starkly against our religious beliefs. But here, in my opinion, Yeshua is making the entire matter trivial and unimportant. That is, He is demonstrating that there is simply no Godly reason to think that if your government imposes taxes on you that you shouldn't pay it. This proves that at the least Jesus was no Zealot or rebel. Nor did He seem to oppose being governed from Rome. When we back away and look at it from the 30,000 ft. view, we never hear of Christ criticizing the Roman government or involving politics in His teachings. Therefore, in His eyes there is no conflict between being loyal to God on the one hand, and submitting to a secular or pagan government on the other.

For those that have followed Torah Class in the past, you are aware that I have made it clear in several lessons that as much as we might like to make it so, the Bible is not an encyclopedia with a Table of Contents or Index that leads us to answers for every question we might have. And, as with the issue of God worshippers paying taxes to a pagan government, every difficult topic that is addressed is not so simple as "yes" or "no"; the answers can at times be complex and highly nuanced. That is the case here with paying taxes with Roman coins to a Roman government. Even by the Apostle Paul's day, the matter was still not agreed upon within Jewish society. So, Paul explained his position at length on it that no doubt is meant as a reflection of Yeshua's proverb.

^{CJB} Romans 13:1 *Everyone is to obey the governing authorities. For there is no authority that is not from God, and the existing authorities have been placed where they are by God.* ² *Therefore, whoever resists the authorities is resisting what God has instituted; and those who resist will bring*

judgment on themselves. ³ For rulers are no terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you like to be unafraid of the person in authority? Then simply do what is good, and you will win his approval; ⁴ for he is God's servant, there for your benefit. But if you do what is wrong, be afraid! Because it is not for nothing that he holds the power of the sword; for he is God's servant, there as an avenger to punish wrongdoers. ⁵ Another reason to obey, besides fear of punishment, is for the sake of conscience. ⁶ This is also why you pay taxes; for the authorities are God's public officials, constantly attending to these duties. ⁷ Pay everyone what he is owed: if you owe the tax-collector, pay your taxes; if you owe the revenue-collector, pay revenue; if you owe someone respect, pay him respect; if you owe someone honor, pay him honor. ⁸ Don't owe anyone anything- except to love one another; for whoever loves his fellow human being has fulfilled Torah.

What this boils down to is that God allows preferences, but demands obedience to moral issues (although out of our morals ought to flow most of our personal preferences). Taxes definitely fall into the preferences category and not into the moral one. Some try to make taxation a moral issue but only if they disagree with the current policy. No doubt taxation can be intentionally destructive and feel completely unfair and unjust. Yet as Jesus states in Matthew 22, and Paul in Romans 13, we can be deeply unhappy about taxation, but we are to suck it up and pay it and not misconstrue it as a spiritual or faith issue. In the West, we can choose through our voting who governs over us and thus who makes taxation policies. But as we all know, in a Democracy our voting does not ensure that our preferred candidates will win and thus become the ones who rule. So whoever rules and makes the taxation laws, once made, as Believers we are obligated to abide by them. This is not opinion; Jesus said so and Paul expanded upon it to make it crystal clear.

On the other hand, will there be instances of clear conflict between government edicts and what God requires of us? Absolutely; and we live with this reality every day. We can begin to resolve the conflict by giving to our government what belongs to our government, and giving to God what is God's. Thus money that is issued by our government would, in Christ's eyes, fall into the category of what belongs to the government. Civil contract law, even criminal law, in most cases belongs to the government. However, our highest allegiance, and obedience to our highest authority... the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob... may at times call for us to defy our government on clear moral issues. How we go about that

defiance is not entirely explained. I'll give you one such example that is front and center in America today: the very serious issue of gender and sexuality.

The government law that makes legal the marriage of two people of the same sex is patently immoral by everything biblically taught. That much of our society has accepted it is as good and desired is one thing; that many of our Christian denominations have (or some segments of those denominations have) is another. To try to put a Godly stamp of approval on gay marriage is wrong and immoral in every sense. I have had numerous emails from folks about a person in their family who is gay and getting married to a same sex partner and some of the family is terribly conflicted on whether to go the wedding to show love to the family member or to boycott it as a matter of faith in God. My answer is always the same: as a Believer you cannot be involved in such a thing. Your involvement implies your ascent to what is immoral and an abomination before the Lord. This sort of stance will win few friends, perhaps even cause a rift in the family; but it is a price we pay for being a devoted follower of Jesus Christ. Yet that doesn't mean that we have to now completely shun or to hate that gay person. Yeshua sought out some of the worst sinners among the Jews (at that time the worst were considered as the tax collectors and prostitutes) because they too must hear about God's love that so much wants them to repent, obey Him and thus to have peace with Him.

In any case, Christ's answer to the Pharisees and Herodians set them back on their heels. They were amazed at it, and had no rebuttal. So, they left Him and walked away... no doubt wounded and humiliated.

Beginning in verse 23 we read of yet another encounter that Yeshua had with one of the spheres of Jewish religious authority. Open your Bibles again and we'll read it together.

READ MATTHEW 22:23 - 32

The next group of Jewish religious leaders to confront Jesus were representatives of the Sadducees. These were the Temple associated Jews, and were for the most part aristocratic and very well off. The core subject isn't hypothetical, but the circumstances they put forward to present it are highly hypothetical and the core subject is about something they don't believe in: resurrection from the dead. So from the get-go this is nothing but another fancy and malicious attempt to try to make Jesus stumble. Their question very nearly

approaches the age-old, but silly: how many angels can dance on the head of a pin? However this short section offers us a great deal of insight into a matter that we all wonder about: our afterlife, our own resurrection from the dead and into what state of being? Perhaps even when will it happen?

What Christ is going to expose is that *this* batch of Sadducees not only don't know Scripture, or how to properly interpret it, they also don't understand the power of God. I'll tell you up front that this subject and what Yeshua says about it is as deep as it is wide. Mark's Gospel also contains this encounter so let's read it as well.

READ MARK 12:18 - 27

These accounts are very nearly identical, yet by reading Mark's, it gave us the opportunity to essentially read this complex passage twice. First off, the Sadducees don't believe in resurrection from the dead. Therefore it will make it nearly impossible for them to accept Yeshua's resurrection that is but days away. Yet the subject isn't about Yeshua's resurrection per se but rather about the belief among most non-Sadducees that there someday would be a general resurrection of the dead (of Jews). So when this passage talks about "the resurrection" it is actually referring more to the resurrected group than to the event itself.

What did the Sadducees believe about death and what happens afterward? The Jews as a culture didn't really have a universal doctrine about death and afterlife. They certainly didn't believe that after a person died their soul went to Heaven to be with God. Rather, the Sadducees (as did most other Jews) thought that there was some kind of shadowy existence after death, but what it amounted to and where it happened was mostly earthbound. That is, whatever social status that one went into the grave with, this shadowy existence more or less was lived out on the same status level. We have to be careful not to equate the Jews' thoughts about life after death with the resurrection; they were separate issues.

The precise circumstance the Sadducees presented was Levirate marriage and how that would tie to resurrection. Levirate marriage is a Law of Moses. The Levirate marriage law is that if in a marriage the husband dies before his wife produces an offspring (and really it meant a son), then the husband's brother (the oldest one if he has several) **MUST** marry the widow. Then he also must have a male child with her. This male child will be considered the son of the deceased

man for the purposes of inheritance and continuing on with his family line.

In Judaism this is called **Yibbum**. What makes the Sadducees' question all the more hypothetical and insincere is that this practice of Levirate marriage was nearly extinct in Jewish society by Yeshua's day. So the circumstance they present is that a man gets married but dies before a male child is produced. His brother marries the widow, he too dies before a male child is produced, the same thing happens to a third brother and continues all the way until the seventh brother marries the 6-time widow and he, too, dies before the woman produces a son. And so the question is: in the resurrection, whose wife will she be?

Now the idea is to poke fun at the entire concept of resurrection by showing that there is no way it can work and still abide with the Law of Moses; so it would be absurd to believe in it. Yeshua aims for the throat. He says the reason these Sadducees believe this way is because they are ignorant of what the Scriptures say and what it means when properly interpreted. He says that in the resurrection there won't be marrying so the example they give is pointless. And the reason there won't be marrying is because upon being resurrected, the resurrected group will become like angels (who don't marry). This opens a huge can of theological worms that the Rabbis and Christian scholars have debated for centuries. Let's jump in.

To begin with, Christ unequivocally says that there will be a resurrection. As Believers we have no reason to doubt it and every reason to rejoice over it. While we can debate exactly what our afterlife will be like, and then what the resurrection will be like (2 different things), the fact that both exist is confirmed by Yeshua. Now about this issue of angels and what resurrected humans will be like. I want you to carefully notice that this does NOT say that resurrected humans will **become** angels. It says that in respect to marriage, we will be like angels. When the New Testament uses an analogy or Parable to show how one thing will be LIKE another thing, it does not mean that the one thing becomes the other thing. Perhaps a better phrase in modern English would be that when it comes to marriage, for resurrected humans it will be AS IF we were angels.

The Bible is frustratingly short on information about angels. Clearly they seem to have some ability to procreate because we read about fallen angels procreating with human females to produce what in Hebrew is the **Nephillim**. The legendary offspring from their illicit mating were called giants and it is believed that the line that Goliath came from were **Nephillim** giants. We know a few things about

them; but most of what Christianity teaches as angel doctrine has come down from Jewish Tradition. Because the original purpose of marriage was to procreate and to form a social unit called a family in which to raise those children, then it would be logical that once the resurrection occurs and we become immortal, the purpose of marriage evaporates. There's no need to marry and produce children because now people never die.

But what about the immense value of relationship and love within a marriage? Do the angels not enjoy that, or is there something even greater to be enjoyed? In fact, are angels sexless, so we become beings without gender? Or does the way that God created the differences in humans, not just physically but emotionally and also in gifts and abilities and roles between male and female... come to an end? Big questions, important questions, but the Bible is silent on them. Some Christian commentators that are obviously unsatisfied with that lack of information, and who (like me) probably place huge value in a good marriage... commentators like Ben Witherington III... say that although Christ said that there would be no marrying after the resurrection, it's what He didn't say that we should notice. He didn't say that there would be no marriage. And he means that in the sense that if one is married prior to the resurrection and both spouses are Believers, then the marriage bond would continue AFTER the resurrection and for eternity. But, if a person had never been married or had been married and was divorced, or had been married to a non-Believer (who of course wouldn't have been resurrected... or at least not into the same condition and status as a Believer...) then that resurrected person was stuck being single forever. I think that's reading way more into Christ's statement than what is there. Further, if what he suggests were true, then it would indeed make the Sadducees' example of the Levirate marriage of one woman to seven brothers a legitimate possibility and a dilemma that had to be solved upon the resurrection. But Christ discounts it.

The Sadducees, all current information on them seems to say, didn't believe in angels. So when all the evidence is laid down side by side, as Tradition bound as were the Pharisees, yet they seemed to have a more sound and biblically based doctrine than the Sadducees who were supposedly experts in the Torah and went by nothing else. This is why it stung them so deeply that Yeshua told them how ignorant they were of the Torah. As a proof text, Yeshua quotes Deuteronomy 25:5 - 6. "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob". And then He follows that up with: "He is the God of the living and not of the dead". Sounds great; but that is a very tough statement to decipher. So does it mean that the

minute we die, God is no longer our God? Does it mean that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob didn't really die? Or is Yeshua saying that they are already in a resurrected state and thus alive in that sense? Or something else?

Here's one way to unpack what Yeshua just said. The Deuteronomy passage that speaks of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, does NOT say that "I WAS the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" but rather that "I AM the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob". Thus since God is not the God of the dead (I WAS), He is the God of the living (I AM), then in that sense Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are alive. And yet in no way does Jesus imply that the resurrection has already happened; so in what sense are Abraham, Isaac and Jacob alive? And how are they proof of the resurrection? The context can only be in the afterlife sense and not in the resurrection sense. And at that moment, the "alive" Patriarchs were residing in Abraham's Bosom waiting for Yeshua to die and be resurrected as the firstfruits of the resurrection so that they along with myriads of other captive souls could be freed from their pleasant and safe captivity and allowed to go to Heaven.

Despite my disagreement with Witherington over the issue of marrying not continuing but marriage does, he does make an insightful comment that I'd like to quote to you. He says:

"In Matthew 19 we have seen that Jesus grounded normal marriage in the Creation order, not in the order of the Fall, which is the case with Levirate marriage (instituted because of death and childlessness and the need to preserve the family name and line)"

I'm sure you don't have Matthew 19 memorized so here is what he is talking about.

CJB Matthew 19:3-8 ³ Some P'rushim came and tried to trap him by asking, "Is it permitted for a man to divorce his wife on any ground whatever?" ⁴ He replied, "Haven't you read that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female, ⁵ and that he said, 'For this reason a man should leave his father and mother and be united with his wife, and the two are to become one flesh'? ⁶ Thus they are no longer two, but one. So then, no one should split apart what God has joined together." ⁷ They said to him, "Then why did Moshe give the commandment that a man should hand his wife a get and divorce her?" ⁸ He answered, "Moshe allowed you to divorce your wives because your hearts are so hardened. But this is not how it was at the

beginning.

So even though the circumstance in Matthew 19 is about dissolving a marriage, Yeshua explains the rationale for marriage and how due to mankind's hard hearts, things weren't like they were in the beginning (in the Garden of Eden). Upon the Fall, death entered the world, and child bearing became a necessity because the intended immortality of humans evaporated. Humanity had not only the duty of populating the earth, but also re-populating as replacements for the dead ones. Upon the resurrection, then that entire issue is resolved and no longer relevant because death has ended and the number of humans begins becomes fixed: no increase or decrease... forever.

While I cannot say so with absolute certainty, I think that the final chapters of Revelation teach us that upon the re-creation, with the destruction of the current heavens and earth and the formation of a new heavens and earth, the boundaries that currently exist between spiritual Heaven and material Earth disappear. The two habitats morph and come together as one. Those seemingly impassible boundaries between the two spheres of existence... Heaven and Earth... are there to keep impure and sinful man from polluting the purest holiness of God. Heaven and Earth will someday merge and there will no longer be a distinction between the two. As it stands today Heaven is the angels' habitat and the earth the human habitat; but this is only a temporary condition.

^{CJB} ***Revelation 21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had passed away, and the sea was no longer there. ² Also I saw the holy city, New Yerushalayim, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ I heard a loud voice from the throne say, "See! God's Sh'khinah is with mankind, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and he himself, God-with-them, will be their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will no longer be any death; and there will no longer be any mourning, crying or pain; because the old order has passed away." ⁵ Then the One sitting on the throne said, "Look! I am making everything new!" Also he said, "Write, 'These words are true and trustworthy!'"***

We'll finish up Matthew chapter 22 next time.