

Matthew 22:15-40

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[0 : 00] Hello everybody, my name is Aaron and I look after the service. It's really nice to see you all. If you're brand new, I'd love to meet you. Come and say hi afterwards.

So we are in Matthew 22 and it's really dense. You heard it read. It's very dense. So I need you to focus. So get all your jiggles out. We're going to have at this.

All right. If you were here last week, you remember Jesus told all these stories last week. So he told these parables and there was the one about the disobedient son and there was one about a terrible tenants.

And there's some folks who refused to go to his royal wedding. And the religious leaders knew that these stories were directed at them and they were out for revenge.

They wanted to retaliate and their plan was to embarrass Jesus. So their plan was to try and get them to say something really unpopular that they could tell everyone.

[1 : 09] It's a bit like, you know, Elizabeth Warren releasing the rumor that Bernie Sanders said that a woman couldn't win against Trump. Right. Last week, if you remember this, just before the debate.

Sort of a bit like that. They figured, let's get this out there. It will undermine his support. Either way, they wanted Jesus to lose support. He was very popular. He was messing with this, their religious leaders gig.

And so we have three stories. Cunning plans to discredit Jesus. Let's see how that pans out.

So first, the Pharisees and the Herodians come to Jesus, which is an unusual combination, actually. The Pharisees were a religious group. The Herodians were sort of more political Jews, but a political group.

Very friendly with Rome. And these two were coming at Jesus. It's sort of like if planned parenthood and focus on the family kind of joined forces and hated the same person and tried to take them down.

[2 : 12] It's a bit like that. It's an unusual combination. So they go after Jesus and they start by sort of trying to grease the wheels a little bit. And they're saying, you're a really great guy, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, you know.

And then they drop this bombshell political question on him. Verse 17. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not? And it was a very explosive question at the time.

You know this, right? The Jews at this time were an occupied people and they had to pay, individually had to pay tax to Rome. And they hated it.

I mean, they hated it. Very divisive question. In fact, when Jesus was a boy, there was this big violent Jewish revolt about this very issue of paying taxes.

And the Romans crushed the revolt and then crucified everyone involved along the main street.

This was what happened when Jesus was a boy. So a brutal thing.

[3 : 08] I think this kind of question would be in North America like asking somebody, you know, like a Thanksgiving dinner or something. And you bring up abortion or Black Lives Matter or climate change, right?

Whatever you say, whatever your response to that is, you're going to alienate somebody. You're going to alienate a chunk of the population. So they asked Jesus this very divisive question.

Do you think Jews should pay taxes to Rome? Clever question. Because if he says yes, the Pharisees can say, ah, he supports Rome.

And if he says no, then the Herodians consider, go, ah, lock him up. He's an insurrectionist. So how does Jesus respond? He responds like this, paraphrase. He says, show me a coin.

Whose face is on it? It's Caesar's face, right? Well, then give to Caesar what's Caesar's. And then he adds this line. And give to God what is God's.

[4 : 07] So that's his answer. And the passage says they marvel at this. They thought this was an incredible, incredible answer. And they left. You know, he just sort of shuts it down. So tell me. So here's the question, right?

What was so great about this answer? What were they astonished about? Well, let's have a look at it. At the heart of the issue for the Pharisees was, who are you loyal to?

Are you going to be loyal to God or are you going to be loyal to Rome? And Jesus is saying, you can be loyal to the government and to God. Jesus is saying, you can actually be loyal to both.

In the Greek, which is, this is originally written in Greek and translated for us. In the Greek, the render to Caesar line, it actually means pay back Caesar, which is helpful to us to know that.

It's pay back Caesar. It's not just pay Caesar. It's pay back Caesar. So the implication is here, is paying back for what? Paying back for peace, for roads, for aqueducts.

[5 : 09] Pay your part. Now, if you want a fuller treatment on kind of the relationship between church and state, Romans 13 is great. Have a look at that. But you might ask at this point, okay, so loyalty to government.

But what if government does stupid things? What, you know, Rome was, you know, providing phenomenal infrastructure, but they also deified their leaders.

So what if people start to look to Rome to solve all their problems? What if they start trusting in Rome more than they trust in God? What if people start to think in idolatrous terms and they start thinking, you know, the great hope of the world is just getting the right government in place?

These are, of course, temptations for us. And this is why Jesus adds the qualifier, and you give to God what is God's. What's he saying here?

See, the coin is stamped with Caesar's image. And we are stamped with God's image. Jesus is saying, give your full self to God.

[6 : 15] So, and he adds that as a safeguard so that you can fulfill your indebtedness to Caesar without putting all your hope in Caesar.

You can fulfill your indebtedness to government for the infrastructure without putting all your hope in it. Now, we have to move on. So let me summarize this. You could say it like this.

The Bible, if you look at the whole thing, including Romans 13 and this here, we are called to have a conditional loyalty to the government, but an absolute loyalty to God.

And Jesus says here, in order to fulfill your indebtedness to government in a way that is spiritually healthy, you must be first fully committed to God.

Because if you don't do this, one of the things can happen is this, is you sort of get this weird mushing together of nationalism and right-wing conservative religion, right?

[7 : 23] And you kind of mush those things together in a really weird way, and we see it happening in North America. It's really ugly. Okay, there's so much to say about this, but we've got to move on.

We've got two more stories here. Okay, so that was the first attempt to discredit Jesus, a political one. Moving on to verses 23 to 33. This time it's the Sadducees.

So the Sadducees were another religious power group. They were sort of, if they're around today, we would call them theological liberals. They only believed in the first five books of the Bible.

They didn't believe in life after death. And they said that you only really live on in your reputation and through your children, etc. So make the most of life now. That was one of their things.

They would collaborate with Rome, and Rome would give them sort of cushy religious positions. And I think it's a truism to say that when churches become too closely aligned with big power structures, the theology tends to weaken there.

[8 : 23] So that's them. They hated Jesus. The Pharisees try to discredit Jesus politically. The Sadducees here are trying to do it theologically. So here's the scenario.

They come to him with this story, like a scenario. A woman's husband dies, and there's this Old Testament idea that the brother of the dead husband can marry her.

And why is that? To produce children that can legally inherit the family land. So it was actually, it sounds kind of weird to us, but it was a protection for the widow. So the Sadducees come up with this scenario for Jesus.

They say a husband dies, brother steps in. He dies, another brother steps in. He dies, another brother steps in. And, you know, like, you'd think after a while there'd be some investigation.

But anyway, they sort of keep, they keep dying. At the end of the story, we run out of brothers, and the woman dies. That's the situation. And then the Sadducees say, so who's she married to in heaven?

[9 : 23] So remember, they don't believe in the resurrection. They don't believe in the afterlife. So they tell the story because they want to say, they're trying to say the whole idea of resurrection and afterlife is completely ridiculous.

How about this story? How does Jesus respond? Verse 29. You are wrong. Which I think is a solid start. And then he says, because you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God.

And then he goes to unpack that. And he says this in verse 30. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. So in their scenario, they assume that heaven is just kind of like a really, like a fancier version than now.

But the problem is, they misunderstand the nature of the resurrected life. Jesus says, it's not going to be like now. The resurrected life is not going to be like now.

And for example, he says, there is no marriage. Now let's stop for a moment there. Because that can be slightly unsettling for some of us.

[10 : 37] There is no marriage in the resurrection, Jesus says. Okay. Okay. That does not mean there is no intimacy.

That does not mean that intimacy will end. I am married. I like it. But my brokenness and my selfishness and all my inner nonsense, right, in there, it harms the relationship.

It hurts my marriage. In heaven, I won't be married. But I will be closer to my wife than I am now.

Because my heart will be remade. All our relationships will be taken to another level. And you might think, but marriage is like the best thing I've got going now, for those of you who are married.

It is the best thing I've got going. Well, that intimacy and that trust that you enjoy on your marriage, that will be universal across all relationships in the resurrection.

[11 : 51] So in the resurrected life, you know, there's no one on the margins. There is no one excluded. There are no masks. There's no selfishness. There's no self-protection.

There's none of these things that hurt our relationships. Now, again, you might be thinking, does that mean there's no sex in heaven? Look, I don't know. Like, is there going to be frisbee golf? Right? Is there going to be hip hop? Like, I don't know. But whatever there is, it's better than what we've got going on right now.

See, remember the promise. And the Bible talks about it. It uses a technical via negativa. It's like telling you what's not going to be in there because our heads can't work out what it's going to be like.

So it says what's not going to be. Remember, it says there's no tears, no grief, no loss, no sense of being ripped off by life, no estrangement.

[12 : 56] And it's beyond us to comprehend it. But here we get this little clue, this tiny little clue. Okay, back to the passage. So where are we? So Jesus' first response to the weird multiple husband story is, well, it doesn't make sense because there's actually no marriage in heaven.

So your question, Sadducees, is moot. And then he continues. He says, I know you don't believe in the resurrected life, but it's what the Bible teaches.

And then he shows them it's what the Bible teaches. In quite a different way, actually, an unexpected way. He goes to Exodus, which, I mean, if you thought about it, it makes sense because the Sadducees loved Exodus, loved this book.

And he says, Exodus talks about the resurrection. So I'll read it to you, 31 and 32 of our passage.

And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God?

In speech marks, I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob. He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. So what's Jesus' point? So he goes to this line in Exodus that he's quoting.

[14 : 03] And this is God speaking to Moses. God, the voice of God speaking to Moses. And he is saying, God is saying, I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, etc. He is saying, I am these people's gods.

I have a relationship with these dead people. The people that you think are dead and gone and don't exist anymore. I have a relationship with them. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. It doesn't say, I was the God of.

It says, I am their God. He is the God of the living because they are alive. So the Sadducees try to embarrass Jesus. And he just owns them.

He just owns them. Okay. How's everybody doing? You all right? Are you still with me? Shall I keep going?

Okay. That was like eight people. So, yes. All right. Last story. We'll do this quickly.

[15:01] So, Pharisees bring the political question to the side. Sadducees bring the theological question. They get owned. The last story.

The Pharisees come back again into the picture and have another crack at Jesus. Their first attempt, they use politics to undermine his popularity. This time it's theological. This time it's theological.

Which sounds like a really bad line from a terrible movie. Doesn't it? Okay. So, we're in verses 34 to 40. So, the Pharisees say to Jesus, what's the greatest commandment?

Here's the thing. It's a really loaded question. It's not just, hey, we're throwing around some ideas. What do you think is the greatest commandment? It's a loaded question because rabbis would debate this.

Rabbis gave, there were hundreds of laws. And they would talk about them as like heavy ones and sort of lighter ones. Rabbis debated this. So, it's a clever question because they believed whatever Jesus said, again, he would alienate some faction and lose support.

[16:11] So, here's Jesus' response. He says, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. The second is like it.

You should love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depends all the law and the prophets. So, Jesus says, love God and love people as yourself.

Okay. Jesus is not saying love is all you need. We don't need the law. We don't need rules. No.

He's saying that the rules, the law, this is the practical outworking of love.

It says that it hangs on it, right? It hangs on it. It's like a picture of like hanging something on a tree, like a Christmas decoration, right? He's saying the rules, the law, the commandments are what love looks like.

So, of course, that's the greatest. It's a bit like vows in a wedding. Vows, vows, vow. I'm trying to, how do you say that in Canadian? Vow, vows.

[17:13] In a wedding. In a wedding, you don't, like when you get to the vow part, I'm doing a wedding. I don't just say to the people, okay, promise to love each other.

You're really going to love them? Totally. I'll totally love them. You're going to love them? I'm totally going to love them. So much love. No. There are these vows, and they put love in very concrete terms.

I love this bit. For better, for worse. For richer, for poorer. In sickness and in health. Till death do us part, right? So, the greatest commandment, Jesus says, love God and love people as self.

Why? Because all the commandments are just working that out. What that looks like in very concrete terms.

Like wedding vows. Let's dig in a little bit more before we finish here. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.

[18:15] Okay. Let's dig in a little bit more here before we finish, which is with a bit of nuance, right? Let's start with the second commandment. Love neighbor as self. As self.

So, Jesus starts by assuming self-love. And that's because, I mean, you don't need to teach us self-love, right? You understand. You understand. I understand.

We understand self-love. And self-love is a good thing. It's a God-given thing. You know, we want food, and we want health, and we want good relationships, and we want significance. This is all right, right?

We just, we love ourselves. That's good stuff. So, Jesus says, though, this. He says, all of the longings you have for yourself, desire those for other people.

That's what he's saying. Love yourself. Love neighbor as yourself means your self-seeking should be somewhat of a measure of your self-giving.

[19:17] Your self-seeking should be a measure of your self-giving. Now, you could say, you could be thinking right now, no, that's just, yeah, that's going to cause a lot of problems for me.

It's too radical. It threatens my autonomy. It's a threat to my joy. All that self-giving is going to hurt my self-love. Yes, I understand what you're saying.

But that's why the love neighbor as self is the second commandment, not the first. The first commandment makes the second commandment doable.

The first commandment makes the second commandment doable. Love God with everything you are. With everything. He becomes, God becomes the well or the focus of your self-seeking.

So all your existential desires satisfy them in God. And when you do that, loving your neighbor will no longer feel like a threat to your own happiness.

[20 : 18] So I'm going to finish up here with five sentences. So the religious powers, these power teams come to embarrass Jesus.

And he used them to teach us some amazing things. Love God. And you should be great citizens if you love God.

You can be the best citizens when you love God. Love God. And you can love others really well.

And that love will not feel like a threat to your own happiness. And lastly, the love we're talking about here is just a shadow of we will experience in the resurrected life.

Isn't that fantastic? Amen.