

Matthew 22:15-40

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[0 : 00] You may want to pick your Bible up again and turn to page 827, the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 22, beginning at the 15th verse, because two weeks ago we began a sermon series called The Great Wisdom of God.

You'll see that on the front of your bulletin. And the first week we saw Jesus kind of raise the roof, as it were, as he made this triumphal entry into Jerusalem, where he cleansed the temple, and also when he left, he terminated the life of a fig tree.

The key verse in that, not to lose sight of that, though it was very small, one occasion some of the people said, who is this? And I think that this sermon series sets out to answer that question as we kind of run all the way through Epiphany and through Lent up to Easter.

Who is this? Who is this man? And Jesus Christ that does these sorts of things, says these kinds of things. The second week, last week, when Willie was here, he shared with us about the chief priests and the elders, this people, this group of leaders that were challenging Jesus, saying things like, by what authority are you doing these things?

And who gave you this authority? And so the religious leaders questioned Jesus' action and authority. And with wisdom and grace, Jesus rebutted their attitude of entitlement by telling three parables.

[1 : 26] Now this third week, we see some religious authorities again challenging Jesus, the Pharisees and the Sadducees. They're kind of like, I don't know, the clergy of the Anglican Network of Canada, and on the other hand, the clergy of the Anglican Church of Canada.

I have the Pharisees and you actually have the Sadducees. Kind of. Just to get you thinking, make sure you're paying attention this morning. Three times, they address him as teacher.

They want to know actually what he thinks. You see, they couldn't get Jesus on his actions, so now they're going to try to take him to task on what he thinks. And by that, they'll out him, as it were.

So let's take a look at these kind of three scenarios in this text today. Let me ask you this question. What makes you marvel these days? This past week, I marveled at calling the snowfall in Vancouver, compared to that in Newfoundland, a blizzard.

You may think the comic book characters turn cinema screen stars when you hear the word marvel. I wonder if we like the Pharisees marvel when we come up against Jesus.

[2 : 38] Marvel in verse 22 is the effect of Jesus, the one that he has actually upon the Pharisees when he untangles their dilemma. And this is the first of three scenarios concocted to find out, in the Pharisees' words, what you think.

Verse 17, they're asking Jesus, what do you think? And since they can't get Jesus on his works, they figure they'll trap him in his words. In this situation, it's about what Jesus thinks of Caesar and God with the mechanism of a denarii and a tax.

In this situation, it's about what Jesus thinks. The Pharisees, in verse 16, address him as teacher. And Jesus is a teacher like no other teacher, unique in content and in delivery.

And this teacher is not one they respect. And the dilemma they pose is full of, in verse 18, malice. And this makes their marvel at the end all the more mysterious and miraculous.

The dilemma posed by the Bible teachers, conservative as they are, is not even a little bit sincere. Jesus knows they're hypocrites and who show up with the Herodians to out Jesus with the Roman Empire.

[3 : 57] And Jesus is given a closed-ended question with an either-or answer. Look with me at verse 17. They say, tell us then what you think.

Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Well, who said that you had to answer a question the way that it's put to you? Jesus takes the question and gives an object lesson.

He asks for a coin with Caesar's likeness and inscription on it. That's in verse 19. He proceeds to demonstrate his wisdom, not unlike, we must admit, Solomon. I mean, does this answer just a little bit strike you like the one that he gives when the two mothers come to him claiming possession of a living baby?

You see the great wisdom of God coming through here in Jesus' response. And in actual fact, Caesar can lay claim to the coin and tax, but the earth is the Lord and the fullness therein. Jesus says, give to Caesar what is Caesar or rendered him unto God what is God's. Later, Jesus will stand before Pilate at his sentencing, and he makes very clear then that Pilate would have no power if God had not given it to him.

[5 : 18] And the same too is Caesar. So give to Caesar what is Caesar and give to God what is God. And whatever Caesar has is actually given to him by God.

And what Caesar does with this, though, is actually another thing. Not necessarily what God wants him to do, but God loses no opportunity to use whatever we do, whatever choices we make, to bring about the glory for himself.

And this is true in our governments. Our political leaders are in positions by the grace of God. What they do with their position and privilege is another matter. But no matter what God, God will use the decisions of leaders for his purpose, whether good or evil, when you think about what happened on the cross, the evil that men did to Jesus and how God glorified himself through Jesus' death on the cross in our place.

And that is a great marvel, and no less one than the answer that Jesus gave to the Pharisees in this first scenario. So what marvels you? Next then, though, what astonishes you?

You might be asking, what's the difference between marvel and astonish? Well, both are at least respectful responses. Where the Pharisees marveled, the crowds are now astonished at Jesus' teaching.

[6 : 42] That's what it says at the end of this section. As with the Pharisees, the Sadducees in this next scene is of the same day, so there's a connection being made here.

And they, too, actually come away much differently than they expected. And so I wonder, when you encounter Jesus, do you ever find it this way?

Are you moved from adversity to astonishment? Maybe you're not as antagonistic towards Jesus as the Sadducees were, but you just can't believe what happened when you encountered him.

Now, maybe it was an expectation related to a medical diagnosis or a broken relationship or maybe some kind of professional project.

You come away astonished at what Jesus thinks, what he's been able to pull off, how he's actually moved in your life. Well, the Sadducees thought they'd put Jesus in a dilemma of their own making.

[7 : 45] And the subject was the resurrection, even though they didn't even believe in the resurrection. The Sadducees didn't even believe in an afterlife. They didn't believe in angels.

But they thought that they would try to trap Jesus in this dilemma. And so they posed the question, okay, after seven husbands, whose wife will she be at the resurrection?

And Jesus calls this elite and wealthy group of men on three fronts, which I could really go into it, but the three are this. In verse 29, it's about biblical knowledge.

And then also in the same verse, he says it's about the power of God. And then finally, three verses down, he talks about the living God. Just briefly, the Sadducees come angry and agitated to Jesus, maybe because he just actually exposed them in the temple a few scenes earlier.

You remember when Jesus cleared the temple from those collecting temple taxes? Well, it was largely the Sadducees that benefited from the temple taxes and tithes.

[8 : 49] Now Jesus uses the subject of resurrection to get to the heart and hope of worship. Jesus fixes the resolution of this dilemma and all dilemmas on the knowledge of Scripture.

Remember this from the book that was just read before the sermon text.

In the letter of Paul to the Romans, Paul actually claims this in chapter 1, verse 16. The gospel, he says, is the power of God for salvation to anyone who believes.

The power of God, Jesus speaks of, is entirely different than any other kind of power in the world. And this is which Paul is unashamed.

That's how he prefaces this comment about the gospel. And then finally, Jesus fixes the resolution of the dilemma on life in God. When he says to the Sadducees, God is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living, of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

[10:17] This is all about life and life in Christ. And of all people, the Sadducees should have known this when Jesus quotes this. This comes from Exodus chapter 3.

And not just once, but three times in verse 6 and 15 and 16. God reveals this to Moses at the burning bush. This is for the Jews what John 3.16 is for evangelicals.

The Sadducees of all people should have known this. And by this then, the crowds are astonished. Like the end of the Sermon on the Mount.

The word astonished is used four times in Matthew. But the first time, when Jesus actually finishes this great teaching that we know of the Sermon on the Mount, the people come away astonished. Not at all how they came. An antagonism. So, what astonishes us? But let me say that it's not enough to marvel or be astonished by Jesus.

[11:19] And so that takes us to the third scene. The Sadducees astonished, though the Pharisees were not. So they gathered together.

The ones who Jesus once credited with kind of extreme righteousness wanted to come back for a final round with him. We've had questions about a kind of a social, political life.

The taxes. A supernatural life. The resurrection and the hereafter. They're addressed. And now comes the question about the essentials of life. Scripture now.

The Pharisees were all about the Bible. So now comes this final question of theirs. And we know this by heart, don't we?

What Jesus says in response to the question. Teacher, what is the great commandment in the law? And as I could say this now, you could say it too, even though I'm the one who says it here every Sunday morning.

[12:19] This is the summary of the law. To love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength. And to love your neighbor as yourself. This great summary and synthesis of the Ten Commandments.

It captures, doesn't it, the vertical relationship with God and the horizontal relationship with creation and your neighbor. It really pictures the whole essence of life.

This is our life on purpose. Calvin believed that the law served three purposes. And these three purposes all come together in our liturgy.

After beginning with the collect of purity, which is like a really good bath and cleansing, the very next act in the liturgy is the summary of the law. And Calvin said that the law served these three purposes.

One, to convict us of our sin. Two, to restrict evil in the world. Just if you think all hell is broken loose in the world, it hasn't because of the law. It restricts that from happening.

[13:16] Even though I know it seems like hell sometimes. But it's not. And finally, it gives to us a rule of life. And in that order, the summary of the law works as a pattern of spiritual discipline.

It's purposely placed where it is in the liturgy, the summary of the law. And Jesus wasn't making up this great commandment in two parts, though. The Sadducees, the Pharisees knew this.

It comes right out of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. Deuteronomy 6.5 is the first half of the summary of the law. And Leviticus 19.18 is the second half. The Pharisees and Sadducees would have agreed on this, though they differed hugely on other matter.

And this is not only the sum of biblical teaching, but it is the sum of our life. And as we love the Lord our God, then we can love others. If we do neither, then we resort to idolatry and immorality.

But as we love the Lord our God, then we can truly love our neighbor. Because as we love the Lord, then we recognize the image of God in our neighbor and ourselves for love.

[14:28] Well, Jesus is really gracious in his answer. No name-calling like hypocrites earlier. In this one, they just don't know the scriptures.

And Jesus knew the answer. And to love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength is the aim of our life. I don't know if you ever think about epitaphs, what someone might actually put on your tombstone, but I can't think of one that would be any better than this one.

He or she loved the Lord his God, her God, with all of his heart, mind, soul, and strength. And he loved his neighbors. She loved her neighbors as herself.

I turned back with me just for a minute to Romans then. The sweet being read before our sermon text. Page 948.

But good application. Right on point for what it means actually to love. The section began and ended in the same way. Let love be genuine and abhor what is evil.

[15 : 44] Hold fast to what is good. Verse 21. Do not overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. And in that same, that next chapter, 13, beginning with verse 8, you see this.

That the filling of the law is through love. Friends, let's love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength and love our neighbors as ourselves.

I speak to you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.