

Teachings of Jesus

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

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Jesus' Teaching in the Gospel of Matthew (Part XII)

22:1-14, The Parable of the Wedding Feast

The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son: A wedding was (and often still is today) the most significant social event in a man or woman's life. The image Jesus evokes here, the wedding of a prince, is akin to a British royal wedding in our world - a spectacular event, with all the media coverage, pomp, glitz, and *glamour* (see what I did there?) An invitation to such an event would be not just prized, but treasured, even coveted!

This parable is similar to one recorded in Luke 14:15-24, but there are significant differences, too. Is it reasonable to think that Jesus would use a similar parable "setup" in different contexts? Sure! Most pastors/priests/preachers (and comedians, for what it's worth) will use a good story more than once, and in different forms to suit different contexts, or sermon series, seasons of the church year, etc.

[He] sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come: So this seems very odd; who would refuse an invitation to a royal wedding? Jesus is drawing a parallel to the principle that there is no logical reason that God's invitation to eternal life should be rejected.

Commentator Barclay says that in the Jewish culture of that time, when a great social event happened, people were invited, but without a set time. On the day of the event, when the host was ready to receive the guests, messengers -- family members, children, or servants if there were any -- were sent out to announce the news.

"Everything is ready" is the message of the gospel! You don't need to prepare your own meal when you come to God's feast. He has made it ready for you; you come to receive. Our "posture of receiving" tradition during the benediction here at GDLC is a beautiful picture of that.

But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them.: The reaction makes no sense, but it *does* give an accurate description of the reaction of far too many to the Gospel of Jesus Christ! From indifference to umbrage to outright hostility in response.

The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city: Tragically, this could be read as a prophecy of what would literally happen to Jerusalem in 68-70 AD, this city to which Jesus had come, but whose religious leaders had so fervently and violently rejected Him and His Gospel.

Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find: The king in the parable is determined that he would not have an empty banquet hall, so an invitation is given to all who would not reject it.

Here we see that this is a parable about grace. All were invited, but those who ultimately came were utterly undeserving of the invitation, much less the glory of the wedding feast itself!

For many are called, but few are chosen: These few verses about the man with no wedding garment can be a bit confusing. First, note that the king “looked at” (examined, perhaps?) his guests to see if they were all properly dressed for the occasion.

The man without a customary robe was conspicuous by his difference. He came inappropriately dressed and the king noticed; this man was out of place. What might it mean that he failed to adorn himself properly?

Commentator Charles Spurgeon offers this thought:

“He came because he was invited, but he came only in appearance. The banquet was intended to honor the King’s Son, but this man meant nothing of the kind; he was willing to eat the good things set before him, but in his heart there was no love either for the King or his well-beloved Son.”

“He had, by his action, if not in words, said, ‘I am a free man, and will do as I like.’ So the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him.’ Pinion him; let him never be free again. He had made too free with holy things; he had actively insulted the King.”

Perhaps Jesus is teaching us that those who are indifferent to the gospel are effectively in the same spiritual condition as those who are outwardly antagonistic towards it. In other words, all who are unchanged by the gospel (the Love of God) share the same fate.

So Jesus “buttons up” this teaching with the hard truth that many are called, but few are chosen. This parable illustrates the lengths to which God goes to call all men unto Himself, and yet, perhaps in ways that are beyond our full comprehension, only a small number were “chosen before the foundation of the world” (Ephesians 1:4)

22:15-22 A Taxing Question

Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle him in his words: The Pharisees have not had a successful track record when it comes to their attempts to trip up Jesus with their questions and verbal assaults. So now they’re plotting with the Herodians, hoping for a better result if they work together, apparently. What’s interesting about this is that these two groups were not allies; quite the opposite! The Herodians were aligned with the civil power structure of the Herods, and more interested in secular power than spiritual matters. That the two groups would work together is probably evidence of their growing fear and perhaps even hatred of Jesus.

Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone's opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances: This approach – unfettered flattery – may have been the Herodians’ idea, something they had used successfully to maneuver into favorable posture with the likes of Herod the Great. They hoped Jesus was similarly insecure enough (or foolish enough!) to be impressed by their insincere praise.

Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?: The dilemma these men though they were presenting to Jesus with this question was fairly simple. If He said that taxes should be paid, He could be accused of denying the sovereignty of God alone over Israel, which would be unpopular with the Jewish people. If, however, He answered that taxes should not be paid, He made Himself an enemy of Rome, and they could use that to go after Him as a traitor and enemy of the Emperor.

“Lawful” here does not refer to Roman law, but to the law of God; effectively they’re asking if it is God-pleasing for the people of God to “honor” to a pagan emperor with their taxes.

Commentators note that there were three regular taxes imposed by the Romans (as opposed to the Temple Tax we read about in Chapter 17):

- The ground tax was a 10% tax on grain production, and a 20% tax on oil and wine.
- The income tax was a flat 1% of a man’s income.
- The poll tax, paid by every man from 14 to 65 years old, and every woman from 12 to 65 years of age; this tax was a flat tax of one denarius a year.

The Pharisees and Herodians here are no doubt referring to the poll tax. Commentator D. A. Carson says:

“Paying the poll tax was the most obvious sign of submission to Rome... Zealots claimed the poll tax was a God-dishonoring badge of slavery to the pagans.”

Whose likeness and inscription is this?: Later in the New Testament Peter and Paul have much to say about our “dual citizenship” as Christians, and here Jesus sets the tone for much of that teaching. Note that, once again, Jesus does not respond directly to the trap-door question, but instead turns the trap into yet another teachable moment.

Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's: “Render” here (ἀπόδοτε, “apOdoteh”) is an interesting word; it is not “give” or “pay”, but rather more along the lines of “give back”. It is the verb used for paying a bill or settling a debt. We honor God in all things, and we also honor civil authorities that God has put in place.

Peter summed it up: Fear God. Honor the king. (1 Peter 2:17)

F. F. Bruce:

“By treating them as distinct Jesus said in effect: The kingdom of God is not of this world, it is possible to be a true citizen of the kingdom and yet quietly submit to the civil rule of a foreign potentate.”

22:23-33 The Sadducees Ask about Resurrection.

The Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection: You could think of the Sadducees as being the first-century version of modern liberal scholars. They opposed most supernatural teachings, looked for natural explanations or “spiritual truth” to the exclusion of divine action outside of observed experience. They accepted only the Torah, the first five “books of Moses” as being authentic, and disregarded some of what was written even in those books when they failed to align with their teachings and preconceptions. They were a wealthy, aristocratic bunch, were well-represented on the Sanhedrin, and possessed a lot of civil power as members of the governing class.

Now there were with us seven brothers: The Sadducees asked Jesus a hypothetical – and candidly, ridiculous – question, hoping to show that the idea of the resurrection is nonsense. In Deuteronomy 25:5-10, if a married man died without having had children, it was his brother’s responsibility to impregnate his brother’s widow, and then count the child as the deceased husband’s descendant. This is known as “levirate marriage” from the Latin “lavir” (brother-in-law).

So the Sadducees concocted an elaborate circumstance along these lines and raised the question, “Therefore, in the resurrection, whose wife of the seven will she be?”

You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God: The Sadducees connected their thoughts to a Biblical passage, but did not think through the meaning of the passage correctly. They might be highly-trained, but were completely mistaken in their basic understanding of Biblical truth.

It is possible for a person to have a lot of Bible knowledge, yet not fundamentally know or understand the Scriptures. In 2 Timothy 1 Paul tells Timothy to “hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me”. Biblical truth truly has a “pattern” to it, a pattern that can be detected by the discerning heart. We routinely encourage those studying the Bible to “let Scripture interpret Scripture” (internal confirmation), to “watch who’s running the verbs” (understand God’s action vs. man’s action), etc.

The Sadducees denial of supernatural truths such as the existence of angels and the resurrection of the body would make them very much at home in our modern world. They had fundamental doubts regarding the power of God to do anything beyond what they could measure and understand in the material world. Sound familiar?

In the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage: First, Jesus reminded them that life in the resurrection is quite different from this life. It does not merely continue this world and its patterns of life, but it is an existence of a completely different order; a different dimension of reality, if you will.

...But are like the angels of God in heaven: Jesus here tells the Sadducees that angels are real, but it doesn't mean that we will **be** angels; that is an all-too-common, and completely unbiblical notion!

And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: Jesus demonstrated the reality of the resurrection by citing only the Torah, since those were the only books the Sadducees accepted as authoritative. If Abraham, Isaac and Jacob did not live on in resurrection, then God would have said that He **was** the God of Abraham, instead of saying "I **am** the God of Abraham."

22:34-40 The Greatest Commandment

When the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered: Matthew describes for us the rather fascinating tenacity of the various opponents of Jesus working hard to embarrass Him – and failing consistently!

And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him: This question was planned to trap Jesus, of course. By asking Jesus to choose just one great commandment, this lawyer hoped to make Jesus appear to disrespect or neglect some other area of the law. The rabbinical canon of law had codified 613 commandments of the law; and stratified them into the greater and the lesser laws, so this lawyer had lots of material to work with, depending on what answer Jesus gave.

On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets:

Perfectly understanding both the substance and importance of the law, Jesus

responds perfectly. There is no promoting of one commandment or nuance over another, no greater this or lesser that. Instead, Jesus as author of the law defines the law succinctly: love the LORD with everything you've got, and love your neighbor as yourself. Commentator Matthew Poole:

“Moses summed up all in the ten commandments, to which, truly interpreted, all the precepts of Scripture are reducible. Christ here brings the ten to two.”

22:41-45, Jesus' Turn to Ask a Question

While the Pharisees were gathered together: Before they could think of another (probably dumb) question to test Him, perhaps? Actually, this is a deeply probing question:

What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?: This is similar to the question Jesus asked His disciples in Matthew 16:13-15 (“Who do you say that I am?”) Jesus now confronts His opponents with the need to decide who He was. Note how He very specifically connects Himself to the Old Testament understanding of the Messiah (the Christ).

The Son of David: This is one of the great Old Testament titles of the Messiah, founded on the covenant that God made with King David in 2 Samuel 7. It identifies the Messiah as the chosen descendant of King David's royal line (other references: Jeremiah 23:5-6, Isaiah 9:6-7, and Luke 1:31-33).

It's possible that the Pharisees did not know or had forgotten that Jesus was actually of the line of King David, and was even born in Bethlehem, the “city of David”. You'll recall that upon Jesus' triumphal entry to Jerusalem (Matthew 21:11), it was noted that He was from Nazareth (where he was raised), and perhaps His connection to King David had been unknown or forgotten.

How then does David in the Spirit call Him “Lord”: Jesus quotes Psalm 110 to point out that the Pharisees were right in saying that the Messiah is the Son of David, but that they didn't yet have a complete understanding of who the Messiah is. He is not only David's Son (a reference to His humanity), but He is also David's Lord (a reference to Jesus' deity).

This teaching to both Jews and Gentiles continues all the way to the end of the New Testament! In Revelation 22:16 Jesus says: “I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.” He is the root. He is the descendant. He is truly man and truly God, and can be our Savior only because He is both.

Jesus’ brilliantly simple explanation of the Scriptures puts the Pharisees back on their heels. They don’t want to admit that the Messiah was also the LORD God, but...

No one was able to answer Him a word: So these learned, powerful religious leaders who had hoped to trap Jesus and embarrass Him in front of the people crowded into Jerusalem for Passover instead got to hear Him teach. It was probably uncomfortable recognizing that this man who “never studied” (John 7:15) had just confounded the greatest theologians in town.

Although we *might* speculate that there *might* have been one young Pharisee in town who *might* have been able to answer Jesus’ question completely and correctly... eventually (Romans 1:1-4 et al). But certainly not on this particular day!