

Matthew 21-12-12a

Good morning. Welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 12th day of December 2021.

We're continuing our study in the Gospel of Matthew. We've come to a very fascinating section here in the latter half of chapter 22. We will be resuming this morning with the Pharisees attempting to trap Jesus in His talk in verse 15, Matthew 22, 15 and following.

We'll take a moment as is our custom to pause and go before the Lord together in prayer, ask His blessing on our fellowship and our study, our conversation, and our retention and application of the things that we will find together in His word. Shall we pray? Father, how grateful we are for another day, another opportunity to learn and to grow and to prepare ourselves for service and function in what remains of this life and in the infinite time that is to come. We pray that as we look together at the words of the Lord Jesus and the closing days of His life on this earth, that Your Holy Spirit will impress the truths on our hearts that will be pertinent and will pertain and come to the surface in our thoughts and in our hearts as we seek to reflect Your glory in the present day and in all of the days to come.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. You will remember that the first part of Matthew chapter 22 gave us the parable of the wedding feast.

We have looked at that fairly exhaustively just in closing and by way of summary. When we look at verse 14, after looking at those who were invited, after seeing the apathy, the indifference, the light and superficial way that the invitation was treated by some, the active hostility and rebellion that was expressed by others, and the fate of those who were not able to enjoy the providence of the banquet because they thought their own business was more important, those who were destroyed and their city burned with fire because of their hatred and rejection of the king and his son and the entire proceeding, Jesus closes by saying, many are called but few are chosen. We're not going to dwell on this.

We have looked at the nature of God's calling and election, many times in the past. I don't think any of us are seriously scratching our heads about whether God predestinates us to salvation and issues an effectual call and efficacious grace that makes us believe and that he withholds that grace and that call from others, leaving them no choice but to perish in eternal condemnation and punishment. This is essentially the doctrine of Reformed theology.

They would not couch it in that way. They would say, we shouldn't ask, why doesn't God save everyone or give everyone a chance? We should just be thankful that he saves anyone. And we're particularly thankful that he saved us for some inscrutable reason.

Evidently, he foreloved me and therefore chose me for salvation. They take foreknow as forelove, which is demonstrably fallacious. There are other places where progenosco is used and you cannot translate know as love just because you want to change its meaning.

And because genosco is sometimes used, as in the Septuagint version, Adam knew his wife Eve and she's pregnant and has a child. Let me just say in summary that anyone with a seeking heart that reads this parable is going to understand that the call is issued to many, but those who wind up being chosen to enjoy the light and the glory and the provision and the presence of God and his son pictured in this banquet, those are the few. What separates the many who are called from the few who are chosen? Their choice.

It is a free choice. You can't read this parable any other way. Having said that, let's continue on now in verse 15 and following.

Well, there's a strange come to pass. Look at that. I can't.

It is stuck fast. I don't know. Well, I don't want to destroy my bookmark.

This is the Bible I rebound. Yeah, there. Sorry about that.

This is how you know it's live and not Memorex. Let's pick up now in verse 15 of Matthew chapter 22. Then the Pharisees went and plotted how they might entangle him in his talk.

And they sent to him their disciples with the Herodians saying, Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God in truth. Nor do you care about anyone, for you do not regard the person of men. Tell us, therefore, what do you think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not? But Jesus perceived their wickedness and said, Why do you test me, hypocrites? Show me the tax money.

So they brought him a denarius. And he said to them, whose image and inscription is this? They said to him, Caesar's. And he said to them, render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's.

When they had heard these words, they marveled and left him and went their way. This is the first of four challenges that we find in the latter half of chapter 22. This is the first, the tax question.

The second is the resurrection question from the Sadducees. The third is the greatest commandment question from the scribes, the lawyers. And the fourth is from the Pharisees.

The fourth, Jesus anticipates them and asks them a question. The Pharisees had

gathered together and Jesus just preempts them in verse 41 through 46. So we have four interactions, four question and answer sessions from these groups.

It begins and ends with the Pharisees. In between you have the Sadducees and the lawyers, the law experts, the scribes. So let's begin here by looking at the motivation here.

We have just seen the preceding three parables that have indicted the religious leadership that was then prevailing in Israel. The parable of the two sons, the parable of the wicked vine dressers and the parable of the wedding feast all pretty much expose the hypocrisy and the self-interest that is exemplified in the religious leadership of that day. So now the Pharisees have realized that these things were against them.

And so they want to try to redeem themselves. They want to try to discredit the Lord Jesus. And this is always the way.

If someone seems to have scored a point or advanced their cause, been effective in some way, there is often a reaction from opponents. And if they cannot meet you on the issues, if they cannot answer valid observations, arguments, and statements, they have to try to shoot the messenger. So this begins with the Pharisees.

And we have a, an outline here. The Pharisees are going to attempt to entrap Jesus. It says it from the beginning, the Pharisees went and plotted in verse 15, how they might entangle him in his talk.

Right away. We know they are not seekers of truth. They aren't trying to improve their understanding or ask Jesus to flesh out his views and his teaching and his understanding of the law.

Their purpose is to trip him up, to publicly expose, embarrass, humiliate, and discredit him. That's their goal in coming to him. This has application for us.

It is important when we interact, when we engage in conversation with others to discern when possible, what is behind this question? It will change the way we answer in the same way that it changed the way Jesus answered. When Nicodemus came to Jesus by night in John chapter three, Jesus answered his questions, challenged his understanding, expanded on the truth, called upon him to invoke and leverage his old Testament knowledge, and brought Nicodemus along to an understanding of what it meant and what it means to be born again. The role of the Holy Spirit, the love of God in sending his son, not to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved.

We have the wonderful exposition of salvation in John three because Nicodemus came with sincere and legitimate questions. This is different, and we're told at the outset, these are not seekers of truth. These are seekers of power.

They feel their power is threatened. The popularity of Jesus with the masses undermines their position, their authority, their enjoyment of position, and so on. So they plotted how they might entangle him in talk.

Notice his *is* is in italics. They want to use any kind of rhetorical trick or any sort of catch-22 question to discredit him. So they said to him, they're disciples with the Herodians.

Interestingly, this is the only place in the entire Gospel of Matthew where disciples are ascribed to the Pharisees. Usually they are just ascribed as Pharisees, but here the Pharisees, perhaps based on past experience, did not appear in person. They sent their disciples, probably well coached, prepared with this question, but they themselves have not got the guts to put themselves on the line, as it were.

So they sent their disciples with the Herodians. The Herodians were the loyalist Jews who supported the party of Herod, and for that support were rewarded with favor, with special treatment, and they felt like we go along to get along. They were viewed by many as collaborators with the occupying and oppressing Roman government and the sort of puppet king Herod that was in the pocket of the Romans.

These were allies of Herod and the family of Herods. So they came and they give a fourfold statement. It's got a double initial statement and a double final statement.

It's fourfold. Teacher, we know that you are true. We know you teach the way of God in truth.

You are true. You teach the way of God in truth. The second half, you do not care about anyone in terms of their opinion or their reaction or their response.

You do not regard the person of men. Two things that you do, two things that you don't do. You are true and you teach the way of truth.

You do not respect persons. You do not care what they think. Why would they say these things? Do you suppose they actually believe it? Unlike Nicodemus, who uses these same words to say, we know that you are from God.

No one could do the things you do and teach the way you teach unless he were from God. That was a genuine expression of conviction on the part of Nicodemus and produces the wonderful response we reviewed earlier. Here, this is an attempt, a bare face, visible, undisguised attempt to goad Jesus and embolden him to maybe go a little further, to prove that these things which sound great, and they figure, well, he will be flattered.

And when he is labeled as being unafraid to speak truth to power, that's exactly what he will do. And they're hoping that that's what he will do. So this is by way of encouragement and goading to not temper or in any way mitigate the answer to the

question they're about to ask.

They're basically saying, since you're a speaker of the truth and you don't regard anyone's opinion when you express your teaching, answer this question. They want him to convict himself as much as possible. They try to do it with flattery.

Tell us therefore, verse 17, what do you think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not? This is specifically a head tax. Every adult had to pay this tax. There was the temple tax, which we've seen before where Jesus is challenged to pay it.

And Peter comes to him and says they're asking for the temple tax. And he says, go catch a fish. You'll find the didrachma and that will pay the tax for you and for me.

That was the Jewish tax. This is the head tax for the Romans. And it was onerous.

The tax collectors who collected this were considered to be the lowest dregs of humanity and somewhat in the same camp with the Herodians for loyal Jews. What do you think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Jesus perceived their evil. This is another unique expression in Matthew.

This is the only time that poneros, P-O-N-E-R-O-S, is used as a noun, as a substantive. Every other place you find wicked or evil in Matthew, it is the adjective form, poneria. But Jesus perceived their evil.

It is substantive and it belongs to them. This testing that we saw in earlier times is a pattern. The Pharisees have come to Jesus before.

You remember chapter 16, verse 1, the Pharisees and Sadducees came and testing asked him that he would show them a sign from heaven. Testing. This is perazo.

They also tested him in chapter 19, verse 3. The Pharisees came to him, testing him, saying to him, is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason? In this chapter, just a bit ahead of us here, Jesus perceived their wickedness and said, why do you test me? Why do you perazo me? This is the word that was used of Satan for the 40 days in the wilderness testing. We're going to see it again in our chapter in verse 35, flip over. And when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together and one of them, a lawyer, this is going to be a, he is a scribe and a Pharisee, asked him a question, testing him and saying, they want to entrap him.

They want to get some words, have him say something that they can use against him. They have been plotting against Jesus for a long time. We saw this far earlier in the in the, in the gospel.

They do not call him rabbi. They certainly do not call him Lord when they address him. And they say, teacher in verse 16, teacher, we know, and this is the common way that

non-disciples tend to address Jesus.

And you see it throughout the gospel of Matthew. We know that we've already talked about, but they figured that they've got Jesus on the horns of a dilemma because either way that he answers, they can get him in trouble. He would be unpopular with the people.

If he says, yes, submit to Caesar and they can bring him up to the Romans as a danger and a nefarious type. If he says, don't pay taxes to Caesar. So they, they think he's stuck.

He, and it's, it's pretty obvious what their intention is here. So throughout Matthew, this testing is only applied to Jesus. Jesus is the only one in the entire gospel who is the object of this peraza two times.

It is Satan. This is back in chapter four, as I mentioned, the sign from heaven passage in chapter 16, verse one. In five of these seven instances, the two that are not Satan, it's the Pharisees who are putting him to the test.

If Satan does it twice and the Pharisees do it five times, you get the idea that essentially Matthew's quiet comment is the Pharisees are actually in league with Satan rather than representing God. So Jesus asks to see the coin with which the tax is paid. Show me the tax money.

So they brought him a denarius. He said to them, whose icon and whose epigraph, this is E-I-K-O-N. We get the computer word icon for a small picture from this Greek word, E-I-K-O-N, icon and whose epigraph, E-P-I-G-R-A-P-H.

There's an E on it in Greek, Greek epigraph. These again are unique words in Matthew. If you haven't seen it before, won't see them again.

Image and inscription. So the Pharisees and Herodians are happy to point out that the picture and name are of Caesar, Caesaros, the German Kaiser, the Russian Tsar. All of these derive from Kaiser in Greek, Caesar.

The argument of course that Jesus brilliantly brings forth here is if Caesar's picture is on it and Caesar's name is on it, it must belong to him. Keep in mind also, what does the Mosaic law say about making graven images? Why is it that there are no human figures in Jewish art? It's always abstractions and patterns and you don't see faces. It's not until the Christian era that you have depictions of Bible scenes with figures and faces and so on.

The Jews took what God said literally and did not make images of people. So for a Jew to have a Roman coin that's got an inscription on it, you would think a faithful Jew would be only too happy to get rid of that coin that bears an image of someone who claims to be

God. Caesar of course in Roman mythology is himself a God.

So Jesus very efficiently and very brilliantly turns the tables on them because are they going to argue, well no we should keep this image of a false god and not give it back to the guy whose name is on it. And again in contrast to the temple tax we saw back in chapter 17 verse 4, actually I don't think it was verse 4, but you remember when Peter goes and catches the fish. When Jesus says, render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's, what are these things that are God's? Is he referring back to that temple tax? What is it that bears God's image biblically? The coin bears Caesar's image and his name, render that to Caesar.

What is it that bears God's image and is called by God's name? The people of God themselves should yield themselves, should give themselves. Old Testament and new, how many times have we quoted Romans 12, 1 and 2? Present yourselves holy and acceptable. Render to God the things that are God's.

And with a beautiful sense of parallelism, Jesus leaves that second truth for them to figure out what is that which bears God's image and carries God's name. Right back to the tables of the law, do not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. Do not make graven images.

You bear the image, you carry the name. Well, this is in keeping with the later New Testament in terms of our obligation from God to respect secular authority. Romans 13, 7, render therefore to all their due, taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs are due, fear to whom fear is due, honor to whom honor is due.

This is impossible without humility. It is impossible without the objectivity and the strength that God provides, the discernment to know when this exhortation applies and when it does not. Some could argue that custom or tax or fear or honor are due, and perhaps they are not.

We rely on the Word of God and the Spirit of God to give us that discernment. 1 Peter 2, 17, give honor to all, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the King. Remember to whom Peter is writing there in his first epistle.

These scattered Jews of the Diaspora, the scattering out into the Roman Empire, honor the King. Don't be insurrectionists. Don't be rabble rousers.

Do not foment civil disobedience, violence against law and order as it is imposed by the hated Romans. Peter and Paul both follow Jesus' exhortation, and the people to whom Jesus gives this answer, when they had heard, they marveled. Most of the time when people marvel, it is because of what Jesus did.

This same word is used in Matthew 8, 27. When Jesus calms the winds and the waves on the Sea of Galilee, His disciples marveled, saying, Who can this be that even the winds

and the sea obey Him? This is the level of impression that was made by Jesus' words on these disciples. And you have to hope, because this is not the hard-hearted, hard-headed Pharisees themselves, but their disciples, you have to hope that perhaps this marvelous impression that Jesus makes on them will free them from the influence and the traditional teaching, the hypocrisy and the hard-heartedness of the Pharisees whom they have subjected themselves to for training.

They marveled at Jesus' words. You wonder if they ever marveled at the words of the Pharisees, but the Word of God is alive and powerful. When in doubt, Scripture is always a good answer.

Let people be impressed. Let people marvel if they will, if they're not hard-hearted, if they have not blinded themselves, if their ear has not grown dull, if their heart has not grown calloused. Nothing is more effective than God's unadorned, undecorated Word.

Preach the Word, Paul told Timothy, in season, out of season, rebuke, correct, exhort with authority. They marveled and left Him and went their way. It doesn't say they returned to the Pharisees.

It doesn't say they went and gave a report. We could not trip Him. We could not confound Him.

They went their way. And you wonder if maybe some of these young disciples may have ended up in the first generation of the church. You just have to think that the impressiveness of Jesus' knowledge would make that difference.

We ask ourselves the question, do we still marvel at the Word of God, at the words of the Lord Jesus, at His actions, such as when He stilled the sea, such as in chapter 9, verse 33, when the mute man who was bound by a demon, and when Jesus cast the demon out, the mute man spoke, the multitudes marveled saying it was never seen like this in Israel. No one like the Lord Jesus in His presence, in His power, in His representation of God the Father, in His expression of God's love in coming to save us. There is no more powerful testimony.

We saw it in chapter 15, verse 31. Once again, Jesus healing the multitudes. The multitude marveled when they saw the mute speaking, the maimed made whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing.

And they glorified the God of Israel. If we are living and speaking God's truth, God's Word, others will see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven. They saw the Lord Jesus and they glorified the God of Israel.

We saw it in the last chapter, chapter 21, verse 20, at the withering of the fig tree, the one perhaps destructive miracle that we see in the three dozen or so that Jesus specifically performed. When the disciples saw that the tree died so quickly, they

marveled. How did this happen so soon? And Jesus took that impression and said, let me make a teaching point out of this.

It's a matter of faith. It's a matter of understanding. You will see and do greater things than these.

So Jesus actually proved the truth of their flattering, buttery words because he embodied the truth and he spoke the truth and he didn't need to duck the opinion of anyone. His truth transcended the need to avoid controversy, to avoid hostility, to avoid opposition, to avoid arrest. He proved the truth of their words.

Leaving him, they departed. So the trap fails, as Peter will go on to say, having observed this firsthand in 1 Peter 2, 13 through 17, and something that we close our first session with here in terms of our personal application. Therefore, submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme or to governors as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good.

Notice there is a description of the kind of government that we are encouraged and exhorted and commanded to support. Submit yourselves to ordinance of man for the Lord's sake to the king as supreme and the governors that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. It is a different question when the government starts doing the opposite.

Hence, the American First War for Independence in the 1770s and 1780s. Verse 15 of 1 Peter 2, for this is the will of God that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. As free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice.

Look around our country today, how many people are using the freedom blood-bought in this country as a cloak for crime, for vice, for self-interest, for stealing and trying to crush their opponents, perceived opponents. As free, yet not using freedom, liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bond servants of God, slaves of God. Honor all, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.

Well, this is going to become very pertinent when we get to the next chapter. Just look quickly at chapter 23, verse 2. Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to his disciples saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Therefore, whatever they tell you to observe, observe and do.

Wow. The scribes and Pharisees, whatever they tell you to do, do. This is why we're emphasizing our context now so that when we get to this amazing claim, we can understand it and properly apply it.

But let's pause here and take our break. We have some wonderful special music coming up and some very interesting things to see in these challenges to Jesus' authority, the

attempts to trip him up, and the beauty and the value of his responses.