

Sent: Wednesday, March 25, 2020 2:01 PM

Subject: Last Nite's Socially (But Not Spiritually!) Distanced MOB Study of Matthew 22

"Then He (Jesus) said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's" (and that would be everything)! (Matthew 22:21)

As Matthew 22 opens, Jesus and His disciples are in the temple area of Jerusalem, where He had earlier "overturned the tables and driven out the money-changers"! It's Passover Week--the proverbial "week that was"--and Jerusalem is surging with Jews from all over Israel (and beyond!) for a national celebration, to remember again how God had rescued their fathers from bondage in Egypt, and brought "salvation" (physical deliverance) through the "blood of a lamb" (the "paschal," or sacrificial, lamb). But this particular week is the very one planned (destined) by God Himself "before the foundation of the world, and eternity past"! And Jesus (the "King") was there, not to be crowned but to be crucified, and to "give His life as a ransom for many" (just as He had foretold His disciples as they were approaching Jerusalem a few days before)! The setting couldn't be better! The timing is perfect! The drama is overpowering!

In this setting, we see Jesus giving the third of three parables directed specifically at the religious leaders, and the nation of Israel, all clearly picturing the rejection of their long-promised, and long-awaited, Messiah! This third parable, compares the kingdom of heaven to a "king" throwing a "wedding feast" for his "son," and sending out his servants to call "those who have (already) been invited," to a "great feast" already prepared for them, but (can you believe it?) finding them disinterested and unwilling to come! He even sends his servants out a second time (in his incomparable grace and mercy!) but found them "paying no attention" and "going their own way" and some "mistreating" and even "killing" his servants! Judgment for them would surely come! But then the "king" sent other servants out again into the "highways and by-ways" to invite all people, "both evil and good," so that the "wedding hall could be filled with guests"!

The meaning and implications of the parable couldn't be clearer for all who heard it back then and, even more clearly, in retrospect, for all who hear, and are "called," today! The invitation and free offer of salvation is for all who will receive it by faith! (Matthew, the formerly hated "tax collector" must have loved reporting this story!) MacArthur notes that this call represents the great "whosoever will" of the Gospel! John 1:11-12 says, "He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him! But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name!"

(As believers, we can now view it all in proper context! The gospel message is for all! Rejection of Jesus by the Jews, in the providence of God, opened up salvation for all! The prophets predicted that Gentiles would participate in the "kingdom of God"! God had promised Abraham from the start that, "through his seed all the world would be blessed," so we see how God worked out His divine plan of salvation for all to have opportunity! The promised "kingdom" would be postponed, and a new age of the "church" would be part of the plan! And, interestingly, Revelation 19:9 tells us that there will actually one day be a "marriage supper of the Lamb" and "blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb"! It all fits together so beautifully! But, of course, there is judgment for those who reject God's invitation to be part of it all, just as the parable of Jesus affirms! (The judgment slated for Israel apparently included the horrible destruction of Jerusalem, in A.D. 70 by the Roman emperor Titus, but

unfortunately, there's a much greater judgment to come! And this should be a great motivation for sharing the good news of salvation!)

Well, back to Matthew 22, and Passover Week! We read how Jesus is confronted again by three distinct groups of unbelieving religious or political groups, who though having greatly differing "worldviews" between them were able to coalesce to raise controversial questions, with answers that were bound to cause division and strife among the people, some of whom might otherwise follow Jesus! Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians!

The Pharisees and Herodians got together first to ask whether Jesus thought it's lawful to pay a "poll-tax" to Caesar! Thinking that, if Jesus said "no," the Herodians (who favored cooperation with Herod and Roman authority over Israel) could charge Him with treason! And, if "yes," the Pharisees (who wanted separation from Rome and despised the poll-tax) would accuse Him of disloyalty to Israel! Well, you know the story! How Jesus, perceiving their "malice," asked them to show Him the coin used specifically for the poll-tax, and after noting the image of the emperor, spoke the memorable words: "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's"! Drawing a sharp distinction between the "kingdom of the world," where Caesar holds power, and the "kingdom of God," where Jesus is King! And establishing, for all-time sake, the obligation we, particularly as followers of Jesus, have to both kingdoms! (And knowing that, in the final analysis, as Christians, that it all belongs to Him! And that we're to "seek first the kingdom of God!")

Next, come the Sadducees! And they thought they could confound Jesus with a hypothetical question about whose wife a woman would be "in the resurrection" (which they didn't believe in!) if she was married to a sequence of seven brothers in this life? Jesus, instead, used the story to first give a little insight into what heaven will be like but then to establish, from Deuteronomy 25:4-6 (part of the Torah, which they did claim to believe, and supposedly knew all about!), that there really was life after death: The "God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob...is not a God of the dead but of the living"! How encouraging (for us, if not for them!) to hear Jesus affirm that there is, in fact, a resurrection and an afterlife for people in this world!

And so, after hearing that Jesus had "silenced the Sadducees," the Pharisees sent one of their lawyers, who was considered an expert in interpreting the Law, to ask Jesus about what was the greatest commandment (in an apparent attempt to cause Him to stumble or hedge)! Jesus answered: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment! The second is like it, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself! On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets!" Enough said! No response recorded!

Shepherd's Notes notes that Jesus' point was that a person could not love God without also loving his neighbor; neither could he really love his neighbor unless he first loved God! And Constable notes that if it were possible for someone to truly love God with all his being and his fellowman as he loves himself, he would in essence keep all of God's commandments and be "righteous" before Him and merit salvation and heaven and eternal life by His own righteousness! Which, we know, is not possible and why Jesus came to die on the cross! All of which sets the scene for what's ahead, in this Passion Week!

2 Corinthians 5:21 says it best: "For He (God) has made Him (Jesus) to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him!"

Well, Matthew 22 is not done! In verses 41-46, Jesus turns the tables and confronts the Pharisees with His own question, a question about the identify of "the Christ," speaking of Himself! "What do you think of the Christ? Whose son is He?" And He uses Psalm 110:1 to establish that He, as the Messiah, is not only the "son of David" (a commonly accepted title for the Messiah in Jesus' day), but also David's "Lord," and thus the Son of God! And so, the inescapable implication that He was declaring His deity! And thus, grounds for either the truth! Or heresy! At Jesus' upcoming trial before the Sanhedrin, He would answer "yes" to the question posed to Him as to whether He was indeed the "Son of God"! And grounds for crucifixion, according to them!

Well, this is how Matthew 22 end! The "best" is yet to come!

Meanwhile, men, have a great week during this time of national upheaval and render unto God that which is God's!

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