

QUESTIONS OF ETERNAL SIGNIFICANCE

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Let's Begin

Someone wrote, "The young soul learns to trust by asking questions." Anyone who is a parent knows that children reach an age where questions become non-stop! The truth is that in just about any area of life, asking the right question is the difference between success and failure.

Our Christian walk is no different. In many ways, our spiritual growth and maturity in Christ rests on questions that God asks us. Matthew chapter 22 focuses on five questions in particular. Each question is significant and must be considered carefully.

Let's follow the format below as we glean God's truth from Matthew 22:

- I. There is a Preparation Question (vv. 1-14)**
- II. There is a Political Question (vv. 15-22)**
- III. There is a Doctrinal Question (vv. 23-33)**
- IV. There is a Spiritual Question (vv. 34-40)**
- V. There is an Eternal Question (vv. 41-46)**

I. There is a Preparation Question (vv. 1-14)

The preparation question is found in verse 12: "How camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?" The question Jesus focuses on here pertains to being prepared for eternity. However, there are several things to consider in this parable before we get there.

The theme of this parable actually is about Israel's rejection of God. How did they reject God? *Israel rejected their God when they rejected their King.* Consequently, as a nation, Israel was being set aside.

Let's first observe the national invitation given (vv. 1-7). Jesus says that the Kingdom of Heaven is "like unto a certain King, which made a marriage for his son" (v. 2). To that end, he sent his servants out to invite the prepared guest list. However, we're informed concerning the disappointment of the King, "they would not come" (v. 3).

It's important to get a few things fixed in our minds as we consider this text. In the parable, the King is God, the son obviously is Jesus, and the servants who went out were the prophets who spoke the invitation in God's name. The invitation itself was initially given to the nation of Israel. The order in the Bible is always the same: "to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (cp. Romans 1:16).

Note also that when those invited responded, it was not that they *could* not come but that they *would* not come. If Israel did not respond to God's invitation to be a blessing to the world and receive their Messiah, it was because they refused to do so. It is the same with us. *If you do not come to Christ to be saved from your sin, it is because you will not come, not because you cannot come.*

Furthermore, the invitation said, "Tell them which are bidden, Behold I have prepared my dinner... all things are ready" (v. 4). God takes the full initiative. *Israel did not choose God: God chose Israel.* We can only respond to God's invitation to us. He calls us; we do not call Him.

The tragedy of Israel's failure to come cannot be overemphasized. They actually, "made light" of God's call to them and went as far as to beat the messengers and even slay some (vv. 5-6). Neither their indifferent *attitude* (v. 5) nor their *actions* (v. 6) set well with the King (v. 7). When Israel rejected God's Son, God's supply of patience ran out. Armies were to be

Reflection Connection

The Bible over and over again insists we are saved by grace. Yet we find in our text today the need to prepare. Explain how "preparing" is not considered earning one's salvation compared with receiving salvation based on grace. Share with the group.



Reflection Connection

When Israel refused their Messiah, did that mean their calling from God as His own people became null and void? Is the modern nation of Israel still God's chosen people?

sent to destroy those who were indifferent. In these tragic but holy words, Jesus was speaking predictive prophecy. In 70 AD, the Roman general, Titus, sacked Jerusalem and razed both the city and the temple to the ground.

This seems such a harsh reaction on God's part. However, it must be remembered that God's judgment on Jerusalem was preceded by several centuries of warnings and patient pleas by God Himself. Also, Jerusalem had the distinct privilege of seeing God's greatest revelation of Himself in His Son, Jesus. Finally, it must be remembered that God still offers a hopeful future to Israel even after He judged them.

Jesus moves to another dimension in this parable. *He shifts from a specific focus on Israel to a general focus on all* (vv. 8-9). Though those who first were bidden to come to the wedding refused, the servants were told to, "Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find bid to the marriage" (v. 9). The invitation was now expanded. No expense was spared to provide for the feast nor was any effort lost to invite every person who would come. The message of Jesus is a global message. Our commission today is to reach every corner of the planet with the Good News of the Gospel (cp. 28:19; Acts 1:8). The invitation today is "whosoever will."

Observe the personal application which contains the key question: "And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?" (v. 12). From this question, we can easily conclude that salvation is a personal matter. Each person must respond properly to the invitation.

Jesus spoke of a man among the guests who was a sinner (v. 11). He came to the party but only with presumption, not preparation. He assumed that his personal wardrobe bore garments as good as the wedding garments the king provided at the front door. Unfortunately for him, that was not the case. The king announced his full provision for the wedding, and that included the proper attire for the guests to wear (vv. 4, 8). They were to come as they were. The robes the man possessed were unfit for the feast the king prepared. The king provided the acceptable wedding garment, but this man evidently refused it. Therefore, the king had the man removed from the feast and banished into darkness (v. 13).

How tragic so many believe their own way of meeting God and entering His kingdom is just as good as anybody else's. Some say that all religions lead to the same God. But religions will not assure one's entrance into heaven anymore than the man's garment assured him a seat at the table. *Our garments are not sufficient; God prepares it all.* The only wedding garment the man needed was the one God provided. Our garment is Jesus' provision for our sin on the cross. We cannot come on our own terms. We must come on His.

Thus the speechless man was severely sentenced to a place where there was "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (v. 13). Why would anyone go to his death unprepared? That's the preparation question.

II. There is a Political Question (vv. 15-22)

The Pharisees came to Jesus to entrap Him in his words (v. 15). After flattering Him—today, we call it "baiting"—they entered the political realm (v. 16). They



figured that if they could get Him to speak against the emperor, Rome would likely intervene.

The political question followed: “Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?” (v. 17). They were looking for a simple “yes” or “no” from Jesus. It was an obvious set up. If He said yes, the Jewish masses would be angry and He’d be discredited; but if He said no, the Pharisees would have something to take to Rome as evidence that Jesus was a threat to the emperor.

Jesus saw through their thin veneer (vv. 18-22). He requested a coin and then asked them a question about it: “Whose is this image and superscription?” (v. 20). On the coin, which was equal to an average Roman’s wage for a day’s work, was a picture of Tiberius Caesar. By using Rome’s coin, they were accepting the benefits of the Roman government. They were also acknowledging Rome’s rights in certain realms.

Reflection Connection

Are Christians exempt from the political process because they believe in the separation of church and state? Why or why not? Do you think it is a good idea for politicians to speak in church assemblies? Explain.

When the Pharisees conceded the coin’s image was of the emperor, Jesus concluded by simply saying that they were to render to Caesar what belongs to him and to God what belongs to Him. While Jesus was not making government the final authority—God alone is our ultimate authority—He was implying that government has a legitimate realm of authority under God.

God is concerned about every area of our lives.

Jesus’ answer was brilliant. By leaving Caesar on his earthy throne, He avoided the charge of insurrection; and by making sure God’s authority stayed supreme, He avoided offending the Jews. The Pharisees “left Him, and went their way,” obviously shamed (v. 22).

Some say God and politics don’t mix. In one sense they are incorrect. God is concerned about every area of our lives and politics is an important area in every person’s life. Unless you’re a hermit, politics affect you. Therefore, God and politics must mix. On the other hand, those who say God and politics don’t mix are correct. For whenever there is a conflict between God and politics, God always trumps Caesar (cp. Acts 5:29).

III. There is a Doctrinal Question (vv. 23-33)

Since the Pharisees fouled out in left field, the Sadducees took their turn to bat. In fact, it was no surprise to them that the Pharisees could not succeed with Jesus. To Sadducees, the Pharisees were simply too naïve. Pharisees depended excessively on the supernatural—which the Sadducees denied—and not enough on reason. Indeed, the Sadducees brought the entire Old Testament under the judgment bar of human reason, rejecting a substantial portion of it. They would be considered, in today’s terms, Liberals.

The example the Sadducees manufactured was little more than a silly trick (vv. 23-28). They’d probably been using this very question successfully against the Pharisees for years. It was based on what is called the “Law of Levirate Marriage” (Deuteronomy 25:5). Basically, the “Law of Levirate Marriage” accommodated a childless widow by allowing marriage to the brother of her late husband so



that the family name could continue. It possessed the added benefit of keeping the property in the family. Observe, however, the way the Sadducees framed the question, exploiting this law in an attempt to make the resurrection—which they outright denied—appear totally ridiculous.

According to the Sadducees, there were seven brothers who lived among them. The first of them died, having no children. The next oldest brother married his brother's widow. He likewise died childless and the next brother married the widow. This happened continually through the seventh brother who also died childless with his wife dying soon afterward (vv. 25-27). Their question was, whose wife shall the woman be in the resurrection since all seven brothers were her husband? Here is a practical lesson we can all learn: *unbelievers typically create tension within the Bible not for the purpose of genuine inquiry, but to cast doubt on the Christian faith.*

Reflection Connection

What is the difference between doctrine and practice? How do the two overlap? Or, if they do not overlap, explain why. Why is doctrine, many times, considered "boring"?

Jesus offered a simple explanation to the Sadducees; something the Pharisees apparently had never accomplished (vv. 29-33). *First of all, the Sadducees erred because they did not know what the scriptures actually taught (v. 29).* Jesus quoted from Exodus 3:6 and concluded that the text revealed that God is the God of the living, not the dead (v. 32). The context of the verse Jesus quoted clearly was several hundred years after Abraham lived. Since the Exodus passage was one the Sadducees accepted as being from God, they were taken off guard with Jesus' response.

Second, the Sadducees erred because they didn't know the power of God (v. 29). In heaven, there is no such relationship as marriage. The marital bonds, while ordained by God, are only a *temporal* institution. Whatever relationship husband and wife now enjoy, the heavenly relationship will exceed it immeasurably. Once again defeat was delivered to Jesus' accusers. As the Pharisees were shamed, so were the Sadducees.

IV. There is a Spiritual Question (vv. 34-40)

Not giving up, and perhaps boosted with a bit of self-confidence since the Sadducees struck out against Jesus too, the Pharisees sent another batter to the plate, trying once more to score against the Son of God (v. 34). One of their lawyers—most of whom were highly skilled in rhetoric—posed the question to Jesus (v. 35). Confidently looking into the eyes of the "unlearned" Galilean, he inquired which among the commandments of God stood as the greatest of all (v. 36).

One estimate states that there are 613 commandments in the Pentateuch alone. For the common person, that was similar to wading through the entire IRS code! Here Jesus' mastery of God's Word becomes evident. To the lawyer's deviant request Jesus offered a definite reply. Rather than wading through a litany of various laws unclear to any but the skilled scribes, He chose a passage so well known, that even children possessed a fundamental familiarity with it—*The Shema*: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (vv. 37-40; cp. Deuteronomy 6:4-9).



Reflection Connection

The Old Testament contains 39 different books. How is it not oversimplifying to reduce such a large body of writings to two commands? Yet that is exactly what Jesus did. Explain what Jesus meant when He concluded “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

Golden Greek Nugget

Sometimes in the Greek language, one word is so rich with meaning that it takes several English words to translate the term. A good illustration is found in verse six. The phrase translated “entreated them spitefully” with which Jesus described how the king’s messengers were treated when they offered an invitation to the wedding, is only a single word in the Greek—“*hybrisan*”. It basically means “to insult”, “to outrage”, or “to mistreat”. In the Old English, which, of course, the KJV is, “entreated” meant something similar to our “mistreated”. However, in our modern usage, “entreat” is more often used as “asking” or “requesting.”

In an unanticipated fashion, Jesus summed up the entire Old Testament revelation in two commandments: *loving God ultimately and loving people unequivocally was the twin hinge upon which the law’s door hung*. Even in the New Testament, the theme Jesus revealed here carries over. The law of love becomes the barometer of a person’s life. This includes whether or not we are Christians (1 John 4:19-20). Total love for God determines our actions, dominates our emotions, and directs our thoughts. Once again, the Pharisees struck out.

V. There is an Eternal Question (vv. 41-46)

Recall earlier that Jesus pressed a similar question upon his disciples (16:13-19). Now it was the Pharisees’ turn. Before they could regroup to plan another play, He asked: “What think ye of Christ?” (v. 42). The answer to that question exposes every false religion imaginable. If one is wrong here, one might as well be wrong everywhere else. For it really doesn’t matter. *If one answers this question wrongly, one is wed to a false religion.*

The Pharisees actually answered the first question right! (v. 42). But it was Jesus’ follow up question that exposed their ignorance. Messiah was indeed David’s son (Psalm 110:1). But how can the Messiah be David’s son while David still called him Lord? To that, the Pharisees could only breathe silence (v. 46). There was an answer but one they had already refused. *The Messiah was not only David’s son—that is, the son of man—He was also God’s Son. The answer is the Deity of Jesus.* Jesus was a man, but He was more than a mere man. He was God in human flesh.

Wrap Up

Since Jesus summed up the law in God’s love for us, our duty to God is summed up in our love toward Him. We’re to love the Lord our God with our entire being (v. 37). Furthermore, since our lives will reflect our love for God, that in turn reflects our love for what God loves, namely other people which becomes the second greatest command (v. 39).

How we answer questions not only determine whether we fail or succeed in life, but also whether we fail or succeed in eternity. How do you answer the claim Jesus makes on your life today? Do you love Him with all your heart, soul, life, and being? Can it be said by those who know you that love characterizes your life?

