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August 22nd, 2021

Matthew 22:15-46

If we were to round up thousands of parents of small children, and give them a one-question survey - "What is your toddler's favorite word?" - my guess is that one of the top answers given would be: "Why." (If you've ever spent much time around you children, then you of course know that most children *love* to ask, "why?")

But that simple question can have very different meanings, can't it? On one level, it can be the simple, innocent expression of childish ignorance and curiosity, just trying to understand the world around them. "Why is the sky blue?" "Why do we eat green vegetables but not green crayons?" , "Why do you have to go to work?" These are innocent, genuine questions, seeking real answers.

But there's also a very different way to ask, "Why?" isn't there? When you tell your child to do something, and instead of obeying, they say, "why?" - well we all know this isn't coming from a place of innocent curiosity or intellectual interest. No, most often, it's a form of rebellion and disobedience. "Pick up your toys" is met with, "Why?" "Don't throw your food." "Why?" "Don't eat the crayons" - "Why?"

The question is simply a smokescreen, a distraction from what's really being said: *why should I listen to you? Why should I obey you?*

This isn't just something children do - we can be tempted to do the exact same thing with GOD. Some people claim not to believe, or to have intellectual doubts about God or the claims of the Bible; but while they hide behind questions about Scientific accuracy or historicity, they're real problem is that they don't want to believe in God, or else they would have to give up their sinful lifestyle. But we Christians can do it, too. We can hide behind theological questions to try and mask our ignorance, pride, or failure; it's possible to ask a question of the Bible, not because we want to understand it better, but because we have already decided we don't want to obey it - or at least, unless it's on our own terms.

That's exactly what we see going on in Matthew 22:15-46. At first glance, the difference passages of this section don't really seem to fit together, do they? We see a passage about politics, then the resurrection, then the Law of God, and then finally, a proclamation of who Christ is. But if we look closely, we can see how the whole passage is tied together: each section

is based around a question. The first three questions are given to stump Jesus: first, we see a question about whether or not it's right to pay taxes to an ungodly government. Next, we see a question about whether or not there's life after death. Then, we see a question about how we're supposed to obey God. These are all very important questions, and Jesus answers them; for that reason, we'll cover each one of these in our first three points this morning. But the main point of this whole passage is not ultimately about any of these three questions: it's about the last one. You see, none of these three questions are asked from a place of genuinely seeking the truth; each of these questions is given in order to try and trap or stump Jesus; to trick him into getting himself in trouble politically or theologically, or to make Him look foolish. But none of them succeed; Jesus astounds them all with how He answers them. But then Jesus flips the tables and asks *them* a question - one they cannot answer - about *who He is*. And that drive us to the real question: *who do we really believe Jesus is?*

So let's look at each of these four questions together. First, we see that...

I. We Must Obey our Governing Authorities, But Must Always Obey God's Greater Authority (22:15-22)

The first question posed to Jesus in this section comes in verses 15-22, brought by the Pharisees (religious leaders) and Herodians (rulers under the authority of Rome). Matthew makes very clear for us that the question they pose doesn't come from a genuine desire to know the right answer: it's a trap (v.15). So they begin by buttering him up with flattery, then ask a question that they think will stump him, in v.17:: "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. Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" Now, their flattery is false; they don't truly believe Jesus is a great and truthful teacher of God's ways, and Jesus sees through their malicious trap, responding, "Why put me to the test, you hypocrites?"

So they pressure him to answer the question that they pose as a trap: "Is it lawful or not to pay taxes to Caesar?" By "lawful," they mean morally, theologically lawful, underneath the Law of God. Now here's why it would have been a tricky question to answer: on the one hand, most Jews of the day would have considered the Roman tax as supporting an ungodly, blasphemous regime -- the Roman Empire, their oppressors - and therefore, unlawful. After all, the Roman

Empire was not secular - it was explicitly pagan and idolatrous, even claiming that the Caesar - the Emperor - was a god. In fact, that was even inscribed on the coin, the Denarius, used to pay taxes. But at this point in history, Israel was part of that Roman Empire. They had not been an independent nation for hundreds of years. Cesaere, the Roman Empire, was the ruling, governing authority. Rome would not take kindly to a religious zealot in backwater Israel telling their citizens not to pay taxes to the government. And neither would the Herodians, who worked for Rome - some of whom were part of the group asking this question to Jesus. So, on the one hand: if he says, "yes, pay taxes," the crowds will get angry and accuse him of unlawful idolatry; on the other hand, if he says, "no, don't pay taxes," he will be reported to the Roman authorities by the Herodians, accused of treason.

But once again, we see that Jesus cannot be stumped. He goes on to answer the question in a masterful way, amazing the religious leaders, Herodians, and crowds with his teaching. He said, in verse 19, "'Show me the coin for the tax.' And they brought him a denarius." Now, we've already noted that this coin was viewed as idolatrous. It had a picture of Cesare on both sides, each with an inscription; on one side, it claimed Cesaere was a high priest (in a pagan religion), and on the other, claimed Cesaere was, in fact, a divine being - a god. This is a clear breaking of the first two commandments God gave in the Ten Commandments, the Law of Moses.

In verses 21-22, "Jesus said to them, 'Whose likeness and inscription is this?' They said, 'Caesar's.' Then he said to them, 'Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.' When they heard it, they marveled. And they left him and went away."

Jesus is answering the question in such a way that it addresses *both arguments*: those for and against the tax. And much more than this: it gives us broad Christian principles for how we are to relate to the government, even today, and in many other matters besides just paying taxes.

So what is Jesus saying here?

First, he's saying that "obeying the government" and "obeying God" are not fundamentally at odds with each other; it's not typically an either-or situation. The government has legitimate authority, so long as it falls underneath God's rightful authority over all things. Jesus is saying here: the coin belongs to Caesar, so you should pay the taxes he tells you to pay. But he also says, and give "to God the things that are God's." It recognizes that the government

has a legitimate sense of authority over us that we are called to submit to and obey - but only so far as it does not conflict with rightly submitting to and obeying *God's authority* - for everything belongs to the Lord.

The Bible consistently shows us that God gave humanity the institution of government as a common grace to us all. God raises up governments and gives them legitimate spheres of authority. Governments have a role and purpose that is genuinely ordained by God. As Paul fleshes out in Rom. 13, for example, human governments are meant to restrain and punish evil, enforce justice, establish and maintain peace, and promote human flourishing. Now, we may not agree with every decision any given government makes, even when it comes to trying to do those very things - such as bring about justice, keep the peace, restrain evil, or promote good. But how we feel about their decisions does not change the fact that God has given human governments legitimate authority over us.

Therefore, God commands us, as Christians, to obey God *by* obeying the government - as much as we can, unless to do so would be to disobey God. So this has many applications for us today, as American citizens, doesn't it? First off, just like Jesus's original audience, we too have to pay taxes. None of us like taxes. We might not agree with how much we're taxed, what we're taxed for, or how that tax money is used. Your average Christian in the time of Jesus or Paul wouldn't have liked Roman taxes, how much they were for, or what they were used for either! But we're not told to agree with it; we're just told to submit and obey, recognizing the government's authority to tax us. If they tax us unjustly or use it for evil purposes, rest assured: they will have to answer to God for that one day. But for now, you and I must simply try to submit and obey as much as we can.

And this goes beyond taxes. Our country has many laws; we might not agree with them all, but the vast majority of them do not require us to disobey God, do they? So we should try to submit and obey as much as we can. So, for example, we should stop at stop signs and obey traffic laws; we should follow the speed limit and not go over it. Indeed, we could look at that posted speed limit and say: I don't agree with that number for this road; but I didn't make this road - the governing authorities did; they made it, they maintain it, and they legally enforce it. Therefore, we should obey the law and drive the speed limit - whether anyone is around or you get caught or not.

But since I'm preaching this sermon in the context of the Covid pandemic, I think I need to apply this in another way as well: this means that if, for example, the government requires us to wear masks and social distance, then that's what we have to do. It doesn't matter if we don't agree with it. We must obey. There have been many Christians refusing to do so because they don't agree with wearing masks - but let's call that what it is: sinful rebellion against God by refusing to obey the governing authorities. There are many Christians right now who are still supposed to wear masks but openly refuse to - that is rebellion. I don't want to see any member of Bread of Life behaving that way. But I'm so thankful that I haven't! In fact, I'm so thankful that I've seen the exact opposite - there are several of you that are shining examples of faithfulness and humble obedience to the Lord as you wear masks - even when you might disagree! I praise the Lord for your example of humble faithfulness to us all.

But there's a flip-side to this as well: we must not only give to Caesar what is Caesar's, but above all, we must *give to God what is God's*. This means that if the government tells us to do something that directly contradicts the commands of God, we must obey God rather than Man. They do not have the authority to tell us to disobey God. So we should strive to obey as much as we can - unless we come to a point where to do so would be to disobey the Lord. So if a law requires you to bow down and worship the emperor, because you're a Roman citizen, you have to refuse and worship God alone. If the government tries to coerce you to sin, by lying or murdering or promoting evil (such as abortion or ungodly views of sexuality) we must refuse and honor God. And now I'll say something that might be controversial, but that I think is crucial for us to grasp and be willing to act upon in our current cultural climate: if the government commands us as Christians to stop gathering as the church, even though God has commanded us to gather regularly as His church, then there comes a point where we must obey God rather than men. We of course want to do what we can and what's reasonable, safe, and loving to our neighbors; but we must live by faith, not fear. And even if the government doesn't consider church "essential," *God does*. And so must we. There are obviously times where it is wise and loving to take temporary precautions, and every circumstance is different- I get that. But we need to recognize that, at the end of the day, the government doesn't have the authority to tell us whether or not we can gather as the Church: *God does*. And he's commanded us to not forsake the assembly of the saints. And we must give to God what is God's.

But I praise the Lord and give Him thanks that we live in a land where we have much religious liberty, and that vast majority of the time, we are able to obey the government and God at the same time. Let us pray for our nation to always be that way, and let us strive to obey the government, as much as we can, as part of our lifelong goal of obeying God in all things.

II. The Resurrection to Eternal Life is Certain because God is Faithful (22:23-33)

After the Pharisees leave, the Sadducees come and pose a different question to Jesus, also trying to stump Jesus with their own question. Verse 23 reminds us who the Sadducees are: they were also religious leaders, but they were a different party than the Pharisees; and of the biggest differences between the two groups is that the Sadducees *denied the resurrection from the dead* - they didn't believe in life after death. But the Pharisees, and most of the common Jewish folk, *did*. So this, too, is a malicious question; they aren't trying to have a real question answered, they are trying to entangle Jesus in a controversial theological debate.

They pose the question in vv. 24-28, and it goes like this: according to Moses, if a man dies without children, his brother should marry her and "raise up offspring for her brother." There were seven brothers, and they all ended up, one after another, marrying the same woman, not having children, and then dying, so that, after all is said and done, the same woman married all seven brothers. Not at the same time, of course; one by one, after the previous husband died. But, they ask, "In the resurrection, therefore, of the seven, whose wife will she be?"

Now, it's important to keep in mind, the Sadducees asked this question because they wanted to show that the idea of life after death and resurrection is ridiculous. But it's not; they just brought into the question their faulty assumptions. They categorically denied the existence of all spirits - they didn't believe in angels, and they didn't believe that the soul could go on living after death, let alone be raised. They also wrongly assumed that the resurrection would simply be exactly like how life in this world is.

Jesus confronts all of these wrong assumptions, rebuking them in vv.29-30: "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven." Eternal life surely exists; but it isn't the same as this world. When we are raised from the dead, we will be raised to a life very different than this one! For starters, it will be a world free from the stain of sin! We can't assume that life in eternity, for believers, will work the same way life works here. So, for

example, we have marriage here, but it will not be that way in the New Heavens and New Earth. We don't know exactly how it will look - but we will be "like angels" in this regard. Now, I will say: this does not say we *become* angels - there is a clear distinction between believers raised from the grave and angels. I think the point is, there is *mystery* involved here, and we just need to be content with not having all the answers; let us not speculate about what has not been revealed.

But we *can* be certain about what *has* been revealed to us by God: namely, that *the resurrection is real*, that our souls go on existing after death, and that all who believe in Christ will be *raised to eternal life with Him!* Jesus grounds this in scripture: "And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not God of the dead, but of the living." (vv.31-32). Jesus is quoting Ex. 3:6, when God reveals Himself to Moses. He doesn't say, "I *was* the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," but "I *am*." Hundreds of years after their deaths, God relates to them as though they are still alive - because to him, they were, their souls still alive after death. God is eternal, and His covenantal faithfulness and blessings to His people does not cease when we die!

No, on the contrary, this is at the very heart of why Christ came! The New Testament makes it explicitly clear: our souls go on living after we physically die; we will either go to eternal punishment in Hell, experiencing God's wrath against our sin forever; or we will be raised to eternal life, living in the glorious Kingdom of Christ forever! And this is a *certain* promise for *anyone* who truly believes in Christ Jesus, trusting that His perfect life, sacrificial death, and resurrection are more than enough to take away our sin, justify us, and raise us to eternal life! As Jesus says in **John 3:16**, whoever "believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." Or **John 6:40**: that "everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."

We have no reason to doubt. Our eternal life is sure, because it is rooted in God's faithfulness. God's Word and promises do not fail.

Next, we see that...

III. The Law of God is Summarized and Obeyed by Loving God and Loving Neighbor (22:34-40)

After the Sadducees are silenced, the Pharisees come back for another round. They huddle together, then one teacher of the Law steps forward and asks, in v.36: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Pharisees spent a lot of time discussing the Law - they were legalistic, after all. But Jesus answers in a way no one could refute. He combines **Deut. 6:5** and **Lev. 19:18**, answering, “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 first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

In other words, he’s saying that all of God’s commands in the Old Testament scriptures could be summed up as *rightly loving God and other people*. The Law of Moses fleshed out specific commands for how Israel, as God’s covenant people, was supposed to do this. But if we truly have the Law of God written on our hearts - if we truly love God and other people, perfectly - then we don’t need such commandments, do we? If you love God with all your heart, mind, and soul, you will not worship false gods, blaspheme, have idols, or rebel. If you rightly love your brother, you will love your wife you will not abuse her, dishonor her, or cheat on her. If you rightly love your neighbor, you will not covet his house, steal his car, or spread lies and gossip about him or her. If you truly love your wife and kids, then no one has to tell you not to scream at them or beat them, right? You know that’s wrong. If you truly love them, no one has to tell you to work hard to protect them and provide for them; you know that’s the right thing to do.

We are not under the Law of Moses. But the Law of Moses can be summed up by loving God and neighbor - and these reflect the unchanging character and Law of God, revealed most fully in Christ Jesus. Under the New Covenant, we have new hearts, are filled with the Spirit, are dead to sin, and are alive to God in Christ by faith! We have the Law written on our hearts, more and more each day, by His grace. So let us obey God in all things by *loving God* with all that we are and *love other people* just as much as we love ourselves.

And finally, we see that...

IV. Jesus is not just the Son of David - He’s the Divine Son of God (22:41-46)

Jesus has masterfully countered each question posed at him. Now, he turns a question onto the Pharisees and the listening crowds, in v.42: “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?” They answered, “The son of David.” Now, this is absolutely true. We’ve seen

throughout Matthew that Jesus is the Messiah, the promised Son of David - God's promised King! The Christ - the "Messiah" - is the son, the king, God promised David in 2 Sam. 7; the one that the prophets speak of bringing God's Kingdom and salvation. Jesus is definitely the Son of David - David's human descendant, God's promised King.

But he's also much more than that. Jesus said to them (v.43), "How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying, 'The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet''"? If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?"

Jesus is quoting **Psalm 110:1**, where David says "the LORD," that is, God, said to "my Lord" - that is, someone greater than David and over him. He goes on to make clear this greater Lord is the Messianic king. Jesus's logic is clear: if this is no more than David's physical descendant, his son, than why would he call him Lord? WOULDn't David be greater than the Messiah?" The Pharisees couldn't answer him. They had no reply.

But here's the answer: Jesus Christ, the Messiah, is Great David's *Greater Son*. How can it be that Jesus, the Son, is greater than King David? Because He isn't just the Son of David - He is *the divine, eternal Son of God!* He's not just a man - He's God!

When the glory of who Jesus is - the very God-Man, one with the eternal Father - dawns on us, it makes all the other questions seem smaller, doesn't it? Questions about politics, doubts about eternal life, questions of morality and how to live a holy, Christian life - if we understand who *Jesus is* - well, that puts it all into perspective, doesn't it? Jesus Christ is truly man and truly God - He is the promised Messiah, God's King and Savior of all! The perfectly righteous, eternal, holy God stepped down into the world, took on flesh, perfectly kept the law of God, died in the place of ruined sinnered, and rose again from the grave! If that's true - if He's the God-King over all, then of course we must obey Him in all things, whether it means submitting to government or obeying Christ instead of the government! If he defeated death and rose from the grave, and promised the same for us if we believe in Him, then *of course* the resurrection is real; He's already proven it, and He will faithfully fulfill His promises! If He lived perfectly in our place, then *of course* we will obey God by becoming more like Jesus, learning to love God and others more, by His grace!

So maybe you're tempted to question God this morning. Maybe you're questioning God's goodness and how He could let bad things happen. Maybe you're questioning why He won't answer your prayers in the way you're asking. Maybe you're questioning whether or not it's

really all that important that you do what God says instead of what feels right to you. Brothers and Sisters, let us remember the glorious reality of who Jesus is: the God-Man who gave himself up in death that we might be saved from our sins and raised to eternal life with Him! THE righteous King over all who will bring judgment against all who rebel! As the glory of Christ sets in, let us silence our questioning hearts into faith; let our souls be still as we trust the Lord of glory.

Maybe you're not a believer this morning; I challenge you to think about this: are you genuinely unsure, or are you just hiding behind questions like a smokescreen, because you *don't want* the gospel to be real? And if that's the case - what if it is? What if you're wrong? Then your only hope, in life and death, is to turn away from unbelief and sin and turn to Christ *in faith!* Trust in Jesus, and you, too, will be saved! And then, make your faith public in baptism and join a gospel preaching church.

If you have questions about this gospel, or about baptism or church membership, I'd love to speak with you. Let us pray.