

# LIFE BIBLE STUDY

## *SESSION OBJECTIVE: MATTHEW 22:15-46*

To understand the role of government in the Christian's life and the wisdom of Jesus in answer His opponents.

## Let Me Ask You a Question

I have always found language learning fascinating. Language is a complicated and complex system that we are not only able to acquire and utilize but creatively advance. I earned my Bachelor of Arts in Linguistics from the University of Texas at Arlington, and loved every second of it. One of my favorite professors was a guy who graduated from MIT with his PhD, and studied directly under Noam Chomsky (the godfather of



linguistics). During his lectures, he would pose questions that were always so thought provoking. Fancying myself as a thinker, I would often pose questions for him that I was almost certain would trip him up (read: I was arrogant and naive). He would always bait us in by giving a pause and saying something like, “Hmm, that’s an interesting question,” while stroking his chin or rubbing the back of his head. It always seemed like maybe we had stumped him. And then, without hesitation he would perfectly answer the questions and then show why they were not well thought out questions to begin with. He was impossible to dupe.

I, of course, never intended to actually back my professor into a corner, nor did I have any ill-intentions towards him. The game of question and answer was always in good fun, and he often remarked how he enjoyed the banter. In Mark 22:15-46, however, the questions posed to Jesus were not only meant to stump Him, but to corner Him into saying something that could be held against him in a court of Jewish law, and yet, even more so than any other teacher, Jesus was impossible to stump. He was frustratingly wise, and He was always a step ahead of His opponents.

## The Question of Taxes

In verses 15 through 22, two groups try and trap Jesus regarding something called a, “poll-tax.”

### *THE PHARISEES’ DISCIPLES AND THE HERODIANS*

The groups that approach Jesus are actually quite different from one another. The first group consists of disciples of the Pharisees, and the second are simply known as, “the Herodians.” Not much is known about the Herodians, but the historical assumption is that they were a group of people who supported the Herodian

dynasty. It is a bit unusual for the Herodians to be mentioned here. The Herodians' presence would make sense in Galilee, where Herod was still in power, but they were in Judea by this point. Either way, each of these groups sought a singular goal; the removal of Jesus. They began to question Jesus regarding the poll-tax, and whether it is lawful for a Torah-observing Jew to pay it. But, what's the big deal with poll-tax?

#### **THE OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND**

There were two major issues that Jews could potentially have with the poll-tax. The poll-tax was a different kind of tax than the one we already encountered in chapter 17. In chapter 17, Jesus and Peter are questioned regarding the payment of the so-called temple tax, a tax prompted by Exodus 30:11-16. Obedience to such a tax was not controversial, because the Torah demanded it. The poll-tax, however, was different. It was not commanded by the Torah, but was a tax instituted by Rome. This raised the first concern in paying it.

Deuteronomy 17:15 forbids submission to a foreign king, and the payment of such a tax would be seen as such. The second concern came from the type of coin that was used to pay the tax. The poll-tax required a denarius, a Roman silver coin with the image of Caesar and the inscription: "Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus." Was a coin with the image Caesar and the divine description enough to be considered an idol? These were the issues these groups were hoping to trap Jesus with.

#### **A CAREFUL ANSWER**

On one hand, if Jesus were to say that it is ok for a Jew to pay this tax, then He could be accused of promoting idolatry and teaching submission to foreign kings, both of which would cause the Jewish people to be enraged. On the other hand, if He were to say that it is not ok to pay the poll-tax, He would be accused of teaching insurrection against Rome. However, Jesus' wisdom was too great for His opponents. You could summarize His answer by saying, "Honor Rome for the services they provide you, and Honor God for what God provides you." While Jesus' words seem pretty straight forward, it is helpful to understand how Paul and Peter both understood this concept as well.

#### **PAUL AND PETER'S UNDERSTANDING**

Paul understood submission to governing authorities as not idolatrous or treasonous but actually *obedient*. Paul reasoned, "For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God" (Romans 13:1). In other words, all kings and rulers are such because God has ordained them to be, and so obedience to government is obedience to God. Paul's words even echo Jesus' words as he summarizes his thoughts: "Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor" (Romans 13:7). The only time willful revolt becomes a feasible action is when rulers compel the people to sin. Christians are to recognize the higher authority in these instances. Obedience, ultimately, must always find its way to God. Peter understood submission as not only obedience but almost as a form of evangelism. For the Christian to submit to kings and governors out of their own free will, they will potentially, "silence the ignorance of foolish men" (1 Peter 2:15). In other words, the way a Christian interacts with the government he is submitted to is a witness to the outside world. Peter simplifies the command along with other commands into one statement: "Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king" (1 Peter 2:17).

The reality for all Christians is that submission and honor to kings and rulers is an act of faith. When Christians submit to worldly kings, it requires trust that God is sovereign over that ruler who will inevitably fail in more ways than one, and that He will accomplish His purposes of establishing His kingdom either through that ruler, or in spite of him or her. And when that kind of faith is exhibited, it positively impacts outside spectators.

## The Question of Marriage in the Resurrection

The next section, verses 23 through 33, involves the Sadducees. The Sadducees differed from the Pharisees in many ways, but notably in that they did not receive any of the Old Testament scriptures except the Torah (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy), a fact that often caused disputes with the Pharisees (Acts 23:6-9). Understanding this helps shape the passage, because the question they pose centers itself on the topic of resurrection, a topic notably missing from the Torah. The Torah doesn't really touch on the afterlife at all. The point of Jesus' answer is not to discuss marriage, but resurrection, and even more specifically, to affirm the reality of it to a group that does not believe in it.

The Old Testament develops the concept of resurrection, but not until after the Torah. The idea of corporate resurrection first appears in Hosea 6:1-3; 13:1 and Ezekiel 37:1-14. Individual resurrection begins to appear in Job 19:25-27, Isaiah 25:8 and 26:19, and especially Daniel 12:1-13. It also appears in the developing inter-testamental literature such as 1 Enoch 22:13 and 46:6, and 4 Ezra 4:41-43. Of course, none of these writings were considered authoritative by the Sadducees. Jesus' response shows how in touch He was with His audience, and how He was willing to speak to them in language that they could understand. He responds by appealing to Exodus 3:6, a passage the Sadducees would have accepted as Scripture, and says in verse 32 that the resurrection and afterlife must be true because God says that He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the present tense (rather than, "I was the God of..."). That He spoke in present tense means that, "He is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (Matt. 22:32).

## The Question of the Great Commandment

Upon hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees came to question Him as well. They asked, "which is the great commandment of the law" (Matt. 22:36). His response is shockingly simple. He quotes Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, both passages from the Old Testament. He does not hold back on emphasizing the importance of these two commands. He says, "On these two commands depends the whole Law and prophets" (Matt. 22:40). In other words, none of the other things that the law and the prophets demand, not sacrifice nor piety, can be accomplished without these two commands.

## The Question of the Messiah's Father

The chapter ends with Jesus now turning the tables and asking a question of the Pharisees. He says in verse 42, "What do you think about the Christ, whose son is He?" The Pharisees quickly respond that he is David's son. To be sure, this answer is not entirely wrong. Even Matthew began his Gospel by calling Jesus, "the son of David" (Matt. 1:1). The idea of a Davidic Messiah was well-founded in the Old Testament (2 Sam. 7:11-16; Ps. 89:4, 36-37; Is. 9:6-7; 11:1-16; Jer. 23:5; 33:15-16) as well as the inter-testamental literature (Sir. 47:11; 48:15; 4 Ezra 12:32; Pss. Sol. 17:21). However, Jesus had something deeper in mind. He quotes Psalm 110:1 in which David calls the Messiah his, "Lord." The Messiah is not only the son of David, but the Son of God, a reality that led Peter to make that exact confession to Jesus (Matt. 16:16). The question Jesus posed confounded His hearers; "No one was able to answer Him a word, nor did anyone dare from that day on to ask Him another question." (Matt. 22:46).

## Study Questions

### Day One

1. Read Matthew 22:15-22. In your own words, summarize the passage and note any questions you have.

2. How were the Pharisees' disciples and the Herodians attempting to trap Jesus? What problems would be raised if Jesus agreed with paying the tax? What problems would be raised if He recommended not paying them? How does He counter their question and how do they respond? (Hint: see above)

### Day Two

1. Read Matthew 22:23-28. What is the hypothetical scenario that the Sadducees have constructed and what is their question to Jesus regarding? Why is the topic of resurrection peculiar in this context?
2. Read Matthew 22:29-33. How does Jesus respond? What does He say the lack an understanding of? What passage does He quote, and why is this significant to His audience? What is His point?

### Day Three

1. Read Matthew 22:34-40. What is this portion of Scripture traditionally called? What do you think it means when Jesus says, "On these two commands depend the whole Law and prophets?"
2. How do these two commands practically work themselves out in your life? Write down two or three examples of how you can love God and your neighbor.

### Day Four

1. Read Matthew 22:41-46. What question does Jesus ask the Pharisees? What passage of Scripture does He quote, and why? What is the central point Jesus is making here?
2. Go back through Matthew's Gospel and circle all of the instances in which Jesus is called, "the Son of David." Now, circle how many times He is referred to as, "the Son of God."

## Week 26 Discussion: The People's Party

Matthew 22 gives one of the most well-known teachings on how the people of God are to relate to the government that rules over them. The New Testament speaks to the issue of government, and reveals that obeying these ruling bodies is an act of obedience to God, since He is the One who put them in power to begin with. Talk as a group about how you can better live this out, and the witness you'll have as a result of it.

1. Icebreaker: Have you ever voted for a leader that you did not fully agree with? Why did you vote for them? How difficult was that decision?
2. How difficult for you is it to submit to a governing figure that you dislike or did not vote for? Why?
3. It's easy to demonize some leaders we don't like and deify others we vote for, and neither are the right mindset. Think of your least favorite president, and name one positive attribute about him (without badmouthing him). Think of your favorite president, and name one negative attribute about him.
4. Do you pray for governing figures? Why or why not? Should you? (Hint: Read 1 Timothy 2:2)
5. Is it possible to stand for the right thing in the wrong manner? Give practical examples if possible.
6. Who is ultimately in control of the destiny of your country? How does this make you feel?

## Takeaways:

1. Submission to government is an act of submission to God and faith in His sovereignty.
2. The resurrection is a real event that will take place.
3. The Messiah is not only the Son of David, but the Son of God.

### PRAYER REQUESTS: